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International Certification for the Quality  
and Sustainability of Marine Aquarium Organisms ...  
from Reef to Retail

## MAC News

## 4th Quarter 2002

### Director's Note

Greetings to you from all of us at MAC. The year 2002 finished up as an extremely busy and productive one for MAC. The success of achieving certification along a full chain of custody was tempered by concerns and debates over controversial aspects of the certification, especially the ability to verify that no chemicals were being used in certified collection areas. We are working on these issues and moving forward in improving the certification to address the concerns. For example, there will be significant developments on the cyanide detection issue in the next few months.

A year-end letter from the MAC Board chair summarizes the MAC response and puts these issues in the overall context of MAC Certification development. Among other things, the Dec. 18, 2002, letter notes:

*"There will be difficulties and problems as part of this process [of certification development and implementation]. Not everyone will be happy with all aspects of MAC and its efforts, and there will be strong emotions among stakeholders inside and outside the industry, hobby and conservation organizations.*

*"As the system develops and we learn, there will continue to be difficult issues that MAC must address; this includes issues such as the need to ensure verification of no cyanide use where this practice of fishing continues to be a problem; the need to expand net-training for collectors and reef management to ensure a sufficient supply of certified fish; and the need to insure that the collectors realize tangible economic benefits from certification. We recognize these as serious challenges that MAC and its partners must address as a matter of highest priority."*

The full text of the letter is on the MAC website at [www.aquariumcouncil.org](http://www.aquariumcouncil.org) under "New Items."

As we move forward, we appreciate constructive criticism and dialogue that identifies the gaps and weaknesses in MAC Certification and suggests how to address these. We look forward to working with the MAC Network and our partners to improve and strengthen the MAC Standards and Certification.

### Who Is Certified?

While there are many who are working towards becoming MAC Certified and may prematurely or inadvertently create the impression that they have achieved this already, the only valid list of MAC Certified industry operators is on the MAC website at <http://www.aquariumcouncil.org/subpage.asp?page=130&section=3>.

In 2002, the Batasan Tropical Fish Collectors Association (Bohol, Philippines) and Manila exporters Aquarium Habitat, HD Marine World and Aquascapes Philippines were the first to gain MAC Certification. In October 2002, they were joined by six North American companies that became the world's first MAC Certified retailers and importers. They are US retailers All Wet Pets (Flushing, Michigan), Aquascapes/The Reef Shop (Portage, Michigan), Living Sea Aquarium (Park Ridge, Illinois) and Preuss Animal House (Haslett, Michigan); Canadian importer Coast Mountain Aquatics (Richmond, British Columbia); and US importer A&M Aquatics (Lansing, Michigan).

### Tubigon Municipality Celebrates Having the World's First MAC Collection Area and Collectors

The 27 members of the Batasan Tropical Fish Collectors Association were publicly recognized as the world's first MAC Certified collectors during a "graduation" ceremony on Oct. 8, 2002, at Tubigon in

Philippine's Bohol Province. The collectors operate exclusively in the MAC Certified Batasan Island Collection Area, which is a part of Tubigon municipality.

National, provincial and local Philippines government officials strongly endorsed MAC's efforts through their participation in the event. The Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources director, Malcolm Sarmiento, graced the ceremony as guest speaker. His visit was the first by a national government official to Tubigon since the 1950s. He noted the profound sense of pride of the collectors and their families and reiterated his support for MAC and the collectors, expressing the intent to help ensure that Batasan had its own patrol boat.

The offices of Gov. Erico Aumentado and Tubigon Mayor Paulo Lasco ensured the success of the ceremony. The governor sent most of his senior staff members, especially those responsible for coastal resource management and law enforcement. Manolo Prado, the Philippine Tropical Fish Exporters Association representative, promised to take a more active role in promoting MAC within and outside the organization.

The leadership of Batasan Island announced their intention to request Bohol's Provincial Tourism Development Board to include Batasan Island in its eco-tourism development plan. Among other things, they want Batasan Island's inclusion in Bohol's eco-tourism map and guidebook, citing the Island's recognition by MAC as the "world's first certified collection area for marine ornamentals" as its major distinguishing feature.

Barangay, municipal and provincial officials expressed thanks for the positive developments and honor MAC has brought to Batasan Island and Bohol Province. There was a solemnity to the ceremony when the collectors, led by the chief of police, pledged their commitment to comply to the code of conduct in their Collection Area Management Plan and, accompanied by their wives, received their MAC Certification identification cards. This was followed by lighter moments when the collectors' wives and kids performed modern dance numbers. Those attending were moved by the way the collectors and the whole village demonstrated their sense of pride and commitment to their sustainable fishery and MAC Certification.

### **First MAC Certified Importers and Retailers Are Positive About MAC**

The world's first MAC Certified importers and retailers were certified in October 2002. These pioneer companies in the United States and Canada are responding favorably to the certified organisms they are receiving and their new certified status, while also recognizing that the supply of MAC Certified organisms will be limited initially.

"After retailing for over 20 years, MAC is the first opportunity we've had to be involved with a complete market distribution network; that makes me proud to be a retailer," notes owner Rick Preuss of Preuss Animal House, Lansing Michigan. "Having the assurance that these animals were caught and handled properly before they come under my care makes me a lot more comfortable when I sell them to my customers. For some more delicate organisms, I would rather wait for a MAC Certified one than have ones in stock that were not."

"I definitely like the quality of the fish," says retailer Brent Gardener, All Wet Pets, Flushing Michigan. "Everything has turned out real well, and we are really happy with the MAC fish we are getting. A lot of our customers are calling wanting MAC fish. We have some customers with tanks that have only MAC fish in them."

"Overall the quality of the MAC fish are better than non MAC fish," says importer Kyle Nelson, Coast Mountain Aquatics, Richmond, British Columbia. "Although the present supply is limited, we look forward to more supply in the future."

Mark Scheffler, owner of Aquascapes/The Reef Shop, praised the "business aspect" of MAC Certification, noting the added "professionalism" it brought to his practice of, for example, tracking and accounting of animals, personnel and equipment (e.g., maintenance).

### **Philippines Update: Working with Collectors to Increase the MAC Supply**

The majority of MAC's effort and resources continues to be focused on working with collectors and their communities to achieve MAC Certification and increase the supply of certified marine ornamentals. During 2002, Ferdinand Cruz of the International Marinelife Alliance (IMA) was temporarily assigned to MAC to lead our work with collectors and their communities to develop collection area management plans and become trained in net collecting, use of logbooks and post-harvest holding and handling techniques.

In addition to the preparation of several collectors groups and collection areas to be assessed for certification, the major output of Cruz's assignment is the group of young MAC field staff whom he trained and mentored and who has become the expanded team for MAC's field activities in the Philippines. They include MAC trainers Arnold Dano, Reginito Gador and Rito Taneo; community organizers Franklin Tinaan and Monica Piquero; and documentation and record-keeping specialist Arturo Olegario. With Cruz's one-year assignment to MAC ending in December 2002, we would like to recognize and congratulate his commitment to working with collectors and the communities and to transforming the marine aquarium trade towards sustainability.

The MAC field staff has been working intensively with collectors in Coron, Palawan Province (six collection areas); Bagac, Bataan Province; Palauig, Zambales Province; and Clarin, Bohol Province, with the target of having these areas ready for certification in the first part of 2003. In the meantime, the results of efforts in the Philippines have led to the reassessment by an independent MAC Accredited certifier of two collection areas and collectors associations whose initial audits revealed some inadequacies. Official results of these audits are expected in January 2003, along with those for the first ornamental exporter outside Metro Manila. If these groups succeed, the results will be posted online at <http://www.aquariumcouncil.org/subpage.asp?page=130&section=3>.

We are also collaborating on training programs for collectors with local governments in Lubang and Looc Islands in Mindoro and Camotes Island in Cebu and developing the potential to provide training in parts of Mindanao and the provinces of Samar and Leyte. Even with the excellent work of Cruz during his secondment and the continuing efforts of the MAC field team, the amount of work with collectors and their communities requires collaboration and we are always interested in exploring partnerships to address these needs. For example, MAC and the Coalition of Reef Lovers (CORL) are developing a partnership on collector training and reef management.

### **Pacific Region Update**

#### Fiji

In October 2002, MAC held the Regional Workshop on Certification Process and Procedures in Suva, Fiji, with representatives from export companies, government agencies, universities and conservation organizations. Following the workshop four Fiji exporters, all who have signed the MAC Statement of Commitment, worked with MAC to develop policy and procedures manuals and draft collection area management plans as part of their efforts to be certified by mid 2003. WWF Fiji also worked with one of the communities to help develop a collection area management plan.

MAC also worked to raise awareness of the responsible aquarium trade with the tourism industry---an industry that has repeatedly called for closing the trade in Fiji. MAC made a presentation to the Mamanuca Hoteliers Association that was well received, with the MAC Certification process seen as a way to help clarify and resolve conflicts in use.

#### Vanuatu

A one-day multi-stakeholder workshop followed by a one-day workshop on MAC Certification was held in Port Vila in November. The workshops brought out issues from the tourism industry concerning reef degradation as a result of bad collection practices; the need to raise awareness, especially on the concept of certification; and the need for community support on reef management. Following the workshops, MAC worked with the three marine aquarium companies in Port Vila, all of which reaffirmed their desire to become MAC Certified.

### Solomon Islands

The Solomon Islands Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources (MFMR), which is very supportive of MAC Certification, attended the Regional Workshop on Certification in Suva, Fiji in October, along with representatives of the Marau community and an environmental NGO from Solomon Islands. MAC has been working with communities participating in the aquarium trade in Marau Sound to help them become familiar with MAC Certification and the collection area management plan. The communities have requested training assistance to implement the MAC Standards.

### **Indonesia Update**

Continuing with our focus on collectors and collection areas, we are increasing MAC capacity in Indonesia by developing a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Ministry of Marine Affairs and Fisheries (DKP), Republic of Indonesia, and by hiring Gayatri Reksodihardjo-Lilley as the MAC Indonesia Country Coordinator, beginning January 2003. Gayatri worked as a long-term consultant for MAC in Indonesia in 2001, and stakeholders there welcome her return due to her extensive experience in marine conservation in the country and interaction with the marine aquarium trade.

### **Report from the Reefs: Major Progress by Reef Check on Resource Assessment**

As reported in earlier issues of the *MAC News*, Reef Check has been developing "MAQTRAC," a monitoring protocol specifically designed to assess and track the status of marine ornamental populations and the reef habitat in collection areas.

Reef Check scientists Domeng Ochavillo, PhD, and Renante Ruz have been conducting the final testing and refining of the methods by undertaking resource assessments in areas seeking MAC Certification and in "control" areas where no ornamentals fishing takes place. In 2002 they spent 136 days (4.5 months) at 82 dive sites, during which they conducted 194 dives (a total of 388 person dives with two persons in a team) and 194 transects to generate data for 776 transect segments (each 100-m transect line has four segments).

When Ochavillo and Ruz were not underwater, they were busy inputting, collating and analyzing the data. We are beginning to provide these results to the collectors and their communities to develop and improve the collection area management plans required by MAC Standards. The Reef Check team is preparing a paper on the methods and initial results that will be presented at the International Tropical Marine Ecosystem Management Symposium (ITMEMS), March 2003 in Manila.

### **Demand Side Developments Make Headway**

#### Europe

December 2002 was a busy time for MAC in Europe. Following visits by MAC Accreditation Coordinator Peter Scott, importers in Holland and Germany have committed themselves to becoming MAC Certified in 2003, and significant progress was made in discussions with importers and retailers in the UK.

The Ornamental Aquatic Trade Association (OATA) conference held in Hull, UK, was well attended by several MAC representatives, as well as MAC Board Members Marshall Meyers and Keith Davenport. The level of interest for more information about MAC was reflected in the lively Q & A session following Scott's presentation. In Germany, presentations were also given on MAC and on the Global Marine Aquarium Database (a partnership between MAC and the United Nations World Conservation Monitoring Centre) at a major conference near Stuttgart attended by more than 17,000 visitors.

#### United States

In late September and early October, MAC Certification Coordinator David Vosseler and MAC Communications Coordinator Sylvia Spalding made presentations and staffed display booths at the US Coral Reef Task Force (USCRTF) meeting in Puerto Rico and the Backer Christmas Pet Trade Show in Chicago.

At the USCRTF meeting, MAC provided an update on Certification and the role of a certified responsible aquarium trade in achieving reef conservation. MAC also met with government officials and industry in

Puerto Rico who expressed great interest in MAC Certification. The MAC booth at the Backer Trade Show was well visited, and about 50 companies joined the MAC Network. A&M Aquatics, the first MAC Certified importer, also had a booth at the event, which featured an enlarged copy of their MAC Certificate of Registration. Vosseler also made two visits to Los Angeles to work with importers interested in becoming MAC Certified in early 2003.

### **Reaching Out and Responding to Hobbyists and Retailers**

MAC Certification Coordinator David Vosseler and MAC Communications Coordinator Sylvia Spalding made presentations and staffed the booth at the Marine Aquarium Conference of North America (MACNA) in Dallas. There was strong give and take during a lively open forum that highlighted MAC Certification developments and valuable input from MAC Certified retailers Rick Preuss (Preuss Animal House) and Mark Scheffler (Aquascapes/The Reef Shop).

To help improve the flow of information about MAC and respond to concerns that had been posted on the Web, MAC Executive Director Paul Holthus presented an online talk and open forum in mid December at [www.reefs.org](http://www.reefs.org). About 40 of the questions submitted by the participants could not be addressed during the allotted time, but were answered and posted online. The responses to the questions can be found at <http://reefs.org/phpBB2/viewforum.php?f=52> and also, in a condensed version that organizes the questions by topic, in the New Items section of the MAC website at <http://www.aquariumcouncil.org/webmediainfo.asp?whatsnew=on>. Among the topics covered are verifying compliance, ensuring no cyanide use or destructive fishing practices and MAC Certification of collections areas, collectors and companies.

### **MAC Board Developments: Standards Interpretation, Complaints Process, Elections**

During the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter of 2002, the MAC Board of Directors authorized the "MAC Certification Core Standards Interpretation Document," which reflects the understanding that the first few years of implementing MAC Certification is a "development phase" that requires flexibility and practical adjustments to the MAC Standards, as warranted and authorized by the MAC Board. In response to concerns about the standards raised by stakeholders in early 2002, e.g., regarding mortality limits and traceability requirements, MAC worked with industry to address these issues and the Interpretation Document was issued by the MAC Board. The full document is available in the Aquarium Industry section of the MAC website at <http://www.aquariumcouncil.org/subpage.asp?section=3>.

The MAC Board also authorized the "MAC Certification Objections Procedure" as part of the implementation of MAC Certification. As with all certification systems, a procedure is needed for dealing with complaints about the results of certification and appeals of certification decisions. The Board authorized the complaints procedure and explanatory document, which illustrates the kinds of complaints and appeals and the process by which MAC would respond to them. This document and the MAC Objection Form are available online at [www.aquariumcouncil.org/webmediainfo.asp?whatsnew=on](http://www.aquariumcouncil.org/webmediainfo.asp?whatsnew=on)

The MAC Board of Directors met by conference call in December. Among the key issues addressed was the election of Board members and officers for the upcoming openings. Outgoing Board members Bruce Bunting (WWF), Keith Davenport (OATA), John Dawes (OFI) and Marshall Meyers (PIJAC) were elected to new three-year terms, and Bruce Bunting was re-elected as the Chair.

### **Spanish Translation of MAC Documents**

MAC is now in the process of translating many of its key documents into several different languages, beginning with Spanish. Currently, three informational sheets *Beneficios de negocios de la Certificación de MAC*, *Porqué la Certificación es Necesaria para la Industria Marina de Acuarios* and a background on the Marine Aquarium Council have been translated and can be accessed online at [www.aquariumcouncil.org/webmediainfo.asp?whatsnew=on](http://www.aquariumcouncil.org/webmediainfo.asp?whatsnew=on).

## **Upcoming Events**

### **Marine Aquarium Hobbyist Day at the Aquarium of the Pacific (Long Beach, Jan. 26, 2003)**

Julian Sprung will be the keynote speaker at an exciting event to highlight the responsible marine ornamentals hobby and the role of MAC Certification. On Jan. 26, 2003, MAC will co-host the "Marine Aquarium Hobbyist Day" at The Aquarium of the Pacific at Long Beach, Calif. Marine aquarium hobbyists will have free admission to the aquarium with a coupon being distributed through Southern California aquarium societies, *Freshwater and Marine Aquarium* magazine, *Tropical Fish Hobbyist* magazine, local live fish stores, etc. Aquarium visitors will be treated to a special series of talks and an assortment of exhibit booths featuring local marine aquarium retailers and other relevant organizations. The event is being co-sponsored by MAC and the Aquarium with assistance from Marineland's Speakers Program and SeaWeb. Plans are being developed for similar events in one or two other venues in 2003 as part of the launch of MAC Certified marine aquarium organisms in the US market.

### **MAQTRAC Training (Cebu and Bohol, Philippines, March 31–April 2, 2003)**

Reef Check has worked with MAC to develop the "Marine Aquarium Trade Coral Reef Monitoring Protocol" (MAQTRAC). It was initially field tested in the Philippines, Indonesia, Fiji, Hawaii and the Maldives from mid-2001 through mid-2002 and peer reviewed in two international workshops. MAQTRAC enables reef areas to be assessed and monitored on a consistent basis within the framework of MAC Certification, and, as reported above, it is being finalized through final testing in the Philippines.

Reef Check will conduct training in the use of MAQTRAC from March 31 to April 2, 2003, in Cebu and Bohol, Philippines. The MAQTRAC training will take place following the International Tropical Marine Ecosystem Management Symposium (Manila, March 24-27). Registration information can be obtained at the Reef Check website at [www.reefcheck.org](http://www.reefcheck.org).

## **MAC in the Scientific Literature**

Sadovy, YJ and ACJ Vincent. 2002. Ecological Issues and the Trades in Live Reef Fishes. Pages 391-420. In *Coral Reef Fishes: Dynamics and diversity in a complex ecosystem*. PF Sale, ed. San Diego: Academic Press.