

Regional Aquaculture Highlights: Central Asian Region

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Aquaculture production in the Central Asian region continued its downward trend in the last few years. Countries like Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan showed a further decrease in an already very small sector. The combined aquaculture production of the five Central Asian republics is only adding up to some 4 000 tonnes (see Figure 1).

Species produced are silver carp, common carp, grass carp, bighead carp, crucian carp, trout and sturgeon. The countries have improved their investment climate for the aquaculture sector, which started to show some results in 2009.

Moreover, the Tajikistan aquaculture sector showed an impressive recovery after the disastrous winter in 2008; production doubled in 2009 compared to 2007. Unfortunately, in June 2010 flash floods have destroyed some small trout farms and created water quality problems at the largest trout farm in the country. As a consequence, trout production may be reduced again in 2010. The political instability in Kyrgyzstan over the period April to June 2010 caused considerable negative effects for the aquaculture sector in the country. Farmers could not import fish feeds and trout eggs (as borders were closed for some time) and the domestic market for higher priced species like farmed trout declined dramatically. The instability also reduced the availability of cultured-based fisheries produced carp from Kazakhstan in the Bishkek market.

The often high price paid for fish in the domestic markets as well as better land and water ownership and lease legislation have triggered investments in most Central Asian countries. Fish (including species like carp, catfish and snakehead) and other fisheries products are generally more expensive per kg than comparable meat products (poultry meat, lamb and beef). This high price is mainly a consequence of limited supply and high feed

prices for farmed fish. The high market price is constraining local demand in most of the Central Asian countries, but at the same time profit margins for fish farmers are relatively sound.

Although investments in hatcheries, ponds and cage construction are being made, the effects on total production will only be visible in the figures for 2010 and 2011. Inputs such as modern aquaculture equipment and commercial feeds remain unavailable for most aquaculture farmers in the region. The governments in the region continue to stress the needs for aquaculture capacity building and technology transfer from other regions. Some regional level training activities in fish feed technology and feeding management (by FAO) and sturgeon hatchery management (by FAO in collaboration with the World Bank, World Sturgeon Conservation Society and UNDP) have resulted in a better understanding among farmers and experts. However, a recent Regional Workshop to Assess the Fisheries and Aquaculture Sector Education, Training and Research Needs in Central Asia, held in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, 12-14 January 2010, showed that much more training and education in fisheries and aquaculture are required in the region.



A carp hatchery in Khudjand-Tajikistan

O. Altan, FAO

Regional training and education priorities, as determined by authorities and experts from Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkey and Uzbekistan, include the following:

1. training in fish nutrition, good hatchery practices and development and use of recirculation systems in aquaculture;
2. training in fish health, cage culture, fishery and aquaculture management;
3. establishment of regional collaborative educational programmes for fisheries and aquaculture; and
4. training in aquatic toxicology.

These priorities cannot be dealt with alone by the sector, as the number of qualified experts in the above-mentioned priority subjects in the Central Asian countries is very low and their knowledge is often outdated. It is clear that the countries will need increased support to build capacity of the private sector fish farmers, aquaculture researchers and policy makers and extensionists and access to modern technologies from elsewhere in Asia and Europe.

Completed policy and strategy development processes in Kyrgyzstan (2008) and Uzbekistan (2009) have led to major support from these governments and donors (e.g. Finland and Turkey) to the aquaculture sector. Currently the approval process of the Policy and strategy for fisheries and aquaculture development for poverty alleviation in Tajikistan

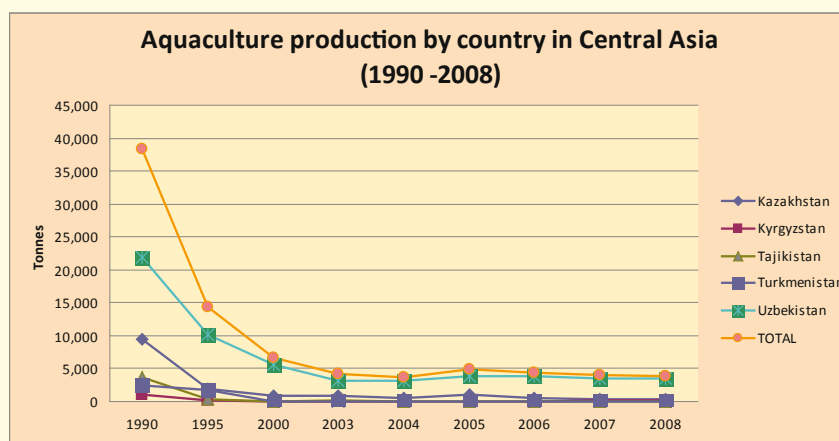


Figure 1. Aquaculture production by country in Central Asia (1990-2008).



Soviet style net cage platform in Tajikistan

(2010-2025) is in its final stages; a promising sign for the sector in that country. Progress is also made in the establishment of the Central Asian and Caucasus Fisheries and Aquaculture Commission to increase regional collaboration in support of sustainable development of the sector. It is foreseen that the Commission will become active in 2011. ■

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