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Ben Tre hard clams (*Meretrix lyrata*) are picked by hand using metal rakes and collected into mesh sacks. Once collected, the clams are sold to domestic markets and exported to Europe, the US, Japan, China and Taiwan.

The Ben Tre province covers a 65-kilometre coastal area and contains more than 4,800 hectares of protected mangroves. In this important region of tremendous biodiversity, the clam fishery plays a vital economic role.

The fishery is operated by local cooperatives that closely manage the broodstock and harvestable clams within their area. Support and advice are provided to the cooperatives by the Ben Tre People's Committee and the Ben Tre Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD).

Ben Tre DARD and the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) co-sponsored the MSC certification process.

"Although our clams are largely familiar to the EU market, we are still thinking of ways to better promote our business overseas," said Tran Thi Thu Nga, Vice Director of Ben Tre DARD. "MSC certification gives us the right to promote our products with the credible MSC ecolabel to customers worldwide."

"I congratulate the Ben Tre clam fishery on their MSC certification. This is an historic occasion - the first small-scale, community-based fishery in South East Asia to achieve MSC certification," said MSC Chief Executive Rupert Howes. "I am also delighted to hear that certification is already bringing benefits to the communities who depend upon this sustainable resource and very much hope other Vietnamese fisheries will soon come forward into the third-party assessment process."

MSC certifies clam fishery - Southeast Asia's first

Written by Administrator

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In 1997, provincial authorities founded the Rang Dong Fishery Cooperative, which is co-operated and managed by the fishing community. In 2007, the Cooperative's profits reached VND 40 billion (USD 2.2 million), significantly improving the income of its members. Already, ten additional clam cooperatives have now been established, forming an alliance of cooperatives that covers all clam areas in Ben Tre.

"As the first MSC-certified fishery in Southeast Asia, the Ben Tre clam fishery will play a key role in demonstrating how certification can conserve resources, preserve local communities, and positively impact the bottom line for business - all at the same time," said Meredith Lopuch, deputy director of the WWF-US Fisheries Program's Major Buyer Initiative.

The government of Vietnam and the MSC signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in May 2005 declaring their joint commitment to encourage sustainable fishing in the country by promoting and facilitating MSC certification. The initial agreement was for three years and renewed in 2008.

"Vietnam was the first nation-state to publicly commit to using MSC certification to promote sustainable fishing," said Howes. "Today, with the certification of the Vietnam Ben Tre clam fishery, we are celebrating the first successful MSC certification in South East Asia. This confirms Vietnam's pioneering role in advancing sustainable fisheries management in the region." (Fis)

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