



Persatuan Pengguna Pulau Pinang Consumers Association of Penang

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Press Statement

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CAP: How safe are Malaysian prawns?

The Consumers Association of Penang is appalled by the statement made by the Deputy Agriculture and Agro-based Industries Minister Sim Tze Tsin that Malaysian farmed prawns are safe for consumption.

According to his Facebook “The Department of Fisheries has a stringent monitoring system against all shrimp farms across the country.” Regular checks and enforcement are done to ensure Malaysian food safety and export quality”

Sim was commenting on the news reports by The Star which claimed that the US Food and Drug Administration (USFDA) had blacklisted some Malaysian prawn exporters due to excess antibiotics - especially nitrofurans and chloramphenicol - found in samples.

However, Sim said most of the companies listed by the USFDA were mostly involved in the transshipment of prawns which originate from other countries. He pointed out that the reports by The Star cited USFDA data from 2009 to 2018.

Given the above situation the Ministry of Agriculture and Agro-based Industries should investigate why nitrofurans and chloramphenicol are still available in the country as of 2018 as it is a banned item.

In 2016, Malaysian prawns, mostly from Penang aquaculture farms, were also rejected by the US government due to the presence of nitrofurans and chloramphenicol.

It is strange that within a period of a year the prawn farms in the country have switched to using safer alternatives that rendered the prawns to be safe for consumption.

It is a known fact that chemicals are used extensively in prawns farming. Among the chemicals used include fertilizers, disinfectants, coagulants, liming materials, feed additives (e.g. steroid hormones, probiotics, feed attractants), vitamins, and antibiotics (e.g. sulfonamides, tetracyclines, quinolones, nitrofurans, and chloramphenicol). Nitrofurans, and chloramphenicol for use on farms are banned in Malaysia.

Most consumers think of prawns as coming from the sea – they are harvested by trawlers, brought to shore and then packed for distribution to restaurants, supermarkets, and other retailers. But these days, most of the prawns in the market are farmed. Many consumers are not aware that prawn farming is associated with mangrove destruction, water pollution, illegal aquaculture and unethical labour practices.

During a survey by CAP, we found that antibiotics are routinely used in the farms as prawns are vulnerable to diseases. At times it was necessary to harvest the prawns earlier to avoid losses as the medication used to treat the sick prawns had failed. In this situation consumers would be getting prawns with high chemical residues as the chemicals would not have worn out during the short period of time.

According to reports, prawn farming is a massive industry located largely in the coastal part of our

country. As the demand for farmed prawns has increased, the industry has proliferated and the use of chemicals has intensified.

Intensively-farmed prawn ponds are often abandoned after 2 to 10 years due to environmental problems caused by the accumulation of waste, reduced access to clean water resulting in lower yields and economic losses.

Prawn farming pollution takes a big toll on the environment, for example many types of pesticides are used to kill fish and molluscs before stocking the ponds, whilst other chemicals are added to pond water to control bacterial and fungal infections and parasitic worms. These pesticides and chemicals pose threats to our health and the environment.

The effects of these chemicals on the wider environment are largely unknown because their use in prawn farming is poorly-regulated and monitored. Some of the pesticides used in prawn farming are very highly toxic to fish and other aquatic organisms. This is of grave concern given the widespread discharge of untreated prawn farm effluent into surrounding waters.

It takes approximately 3-6 months to raise market-sized prawns, with many farmers practicing 2-3 harvest per year. A steady stream of organic waste, chemicals and antibiotics from these farms can pollute groundwater and coastal estuaries. Chemical residues from the ponds can also seep into the groundwater and onto agricultural land affecting fresh water supply and making lands useless for agriculture. Aquaculture destroys the hydrological system that provides the foundation of wetland ecosystems.

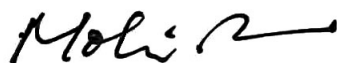
Some chemicals used in prawn farming, such as organotin compounds, copper and other compounds with a high affinity to sediments leave persistent, toxic residues, and are likely to have a negative long- term impact on the environment.

Further effects on non-target organisms may occur as a consequence of the tendency of some of these pesticides to bio-accumulate in fish and marine invertebrates, thus posing threats to organisms higher up the food chain including humans.

Prawns farms have physically blocked access of small fishermen to traditional coastal resources and, with mangrove forests cleared to create ponds for aquaculture-fish and shell-fish catches have declined.

In view of the high demand for prawns with the coming of Chinese New Year, CAP calls on the Ministry of Agriculture and Agro-based Industries to test the prawns in the market for the presence of toxic chemicals.

Meanwhile CAP advise consumers to think twice before eating prawns, they should think about the antibiotics and chemical residues that they have, also about how eating prawns may cause destruction to our mangroves and the loss of livelihood of our small fishermen. The destruction stops when the eating stops.



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