Fishmeal ‘still best’

FISHMEAL has played an important role in high performance diets during the rapid growth of global aquaculture over the last twenty years, writes ANDREW JACKSON, technical director of the International Fishmeal and Oil Organisation (IFFO).

IN RECENT years annual fishmeal production has settled at around 5 million tonnes, compared with around 6 million tonnes during most of the 90s (except in El Niño years). This, along with the sharp rise in prices over the last three years, has led many to speculate that either aquaculture must learn to live with less fishmeal or its future growth could be limited.

A number of factors have contributed to the reduced production of fishmeal in recent years. These include a move towards a more precautionary approach on setting fishing quotas and the adoption of the fishing related concepts of Maximum Sustainable Yields (MSY) and Ecosystem Management. This is particularly true in Europe and in South America where lessons have been learned from previous over-exploitation. Over time this more precautionary approach may even result in increases in production as the standing biomasses increase, allowing a concomitant rise in MSY. Another factor in the reduced production has been the growing use of pelagic fish for direct human consumption. This is most notable in South America where, for example in Chile, an increasing proportion of the jack mackerel catches (more than 50% in 2007) are being canned or frozen for the human consumption (HC) market.

An increasing HC market is also now being found for Peruvian anchovy, both locally and for export, although it still represents less than 1% of the fishery. A third factor in the decline of fishmeal production has been the overall reduction in catches in some fisheries due to over-exploitation. As aquaculture expanded in China during the 1990s its demand for fishmeal rose and domestic production of fishmeal increased from around 200,000 tonnes to over 700,000 tonnes. However, having peaked in 1999 it has now fallen to less than 200,000 and the Chinese have become more reliant on imports.

However, re-setting this reduction in some areas is increasing interest, spurred on by rising prices, in producing meal from fishery wastes. This trend is likely to continue.

To sum-up on the supply side, production of fishmeal is likely to remain tight at around 5 million tonnes of fishmeal.
Use discards for aquaculture

A SCOTTISH Member of Parliament has lashed out at the common practice of dumping unwanted but caught fish at sea after a UK trawler caused an international incident after caught dumping fish on film, reports FishNet.

The discarded fish are seldom alive after being towed in a trawl net for hours and those that are in such a weakened and stressed state that they fail prey to other fish or disease.

Susan Stevenson is reported to have said that the incident once again illustrated the "abhorrence of this disastrous practice which is still legal in EU waters and insisted upon by the European Commission".

In response to the action he claimed that fish discards could be sold to the aquaculture industry instead.

"More than 1 million tonnes of healthy fish are dumped dead back into the sea each year in EU waters under current fisheries management rules. Many fishermen in the UK’s whitefish fleet admit that discards can often account for more than half of their catch."

"A much better system of management would be to rely solely on a ‘days at sea’ policy combined with a system of maximum sustainable yields (MSY’s), where fishermen could land everything they catch in the 10 or 12 days a month they are allowed to fish," says Stevenson.

"This management system would reverse the current policy on discards. Instead of being compelled to dump fish over the side, fishermen would be compelled to land everything. It would become an offence to discard underize or out of quota fish. Such a system, similar to that currently in place in Norway, would provide two immediate advantages for the industry."

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