



## **AVA TO WORK WITH FARMERS AFFECTED BY FISH DEATHS TO RECOVER AND BUILD UP RESILIENCE**

Issued on 5 March 2015

The Agri-Food and Veterinary Authority of Singapore (AVA) will provide assistance to fish farmers affected by the recent fish deaths to recover and restart their operations, as well as enhance their resilience against environmental challenges.

### **Background**

2 In late February 2015, many local fish farms at the East Johor Straits were affected by a plankton bloom situation. These farms suffered massive fish deaths as a result.

3 Prior to the incident, AVA had been actively monitoring the situation at the fish farming areas. AVA alerted fish farmers in the area on the 16 and 17 February 2015, to elevated plankton levels and to prepare to take the necessary precautions. These included deploying canvas bags to isolate the fish from its external environment, early harvest of fish to cut loss, and transferring their fish stock to unaffected areas.

### **Taking early action to mitigate impact of plankton bloom**

4 Minister of State for National Development and Defence, Dr Mohamad Maliki Bin Osman, visited two of the affected fish farms today. He sympathised with the fish farmers who are affected by the recent incident as it must have been difficult for the farmers to see all these losses. However, he learnt that one farmer who took early

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action was able to save his fish and minimise losses significantly. “Mr Gary Chang told me that he started preparing for a possible plankton bloom once he was alerted to elevated plankton levels. He lined his net-cages with canvas and installed a simple filtration system to maintain the water quality. Other farmers also took measures, but unfortunately suffered severe losses as they may not have done so early enough.”

5 “Plankton bloom occurrences are very difficult to prevent, but it is possible to reduce the impact. Whilst we provide assistance to help farmers tide over this difficult period, it is also important for farmers to do their part to take mitigating measures early. At the same time, AVA is looking into how to build up farmers’ resilience against such incidents. This includes putting in place robust contingency plans and conducting contingency exercises. We will also ask those who have taken early action to share their experience with other farmers,” Dr Maliki shared.

### **Dealing with plankton bloom in the long term**

6 AVA is also working with external agencies, companies and experts to look into possible solutions to minimise the impact of plankton bloom in the long term.

7 Following last year’s plankton bloom episode, AVA has been working with the Tropical Marine Science Institute of NUS (TMSI) on a research project to conduct studies on plankton blooms, to enable development of effective mitigating solutions. The studies are ongoing.

8 In addition, AVA called for proposals for the design and development of closed-containment aquaculture system for coastal fish farming last year. We recently awarded the tender to five companies to develop a more sustainable sea-based farming system, under the Co-Innovation Partnership Programme (CI

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Partnership)<sup>1</sup>. The companies will be working on systems that offer a sustainable option for coastal fish farms, to minimise exposure to environmental changes, such as plankton bloom.

9 AVA's CEO Ms Tan Poh Hong said, "The proposals from the companies are promising. We look forward to working with them on the projects. We hope that the projects can bring about significant improvements to boost the resilience of fish farming."

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<sup>1</sup> AVA has received \$1.25 million from the Co-Innovation Partnership (or CI Partnership) to develop a more sustainable sea-based farming system.

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Photographs



Mr Gary Chang (left in pic), explaining the canvas bagging and simple filtration system to MOS Maliki (centre), and AVA CEO Ms Tan Poh Hong (right).



Canvas lined net-cages at Mr Gary Chang's farm has helped to save most of the farm's stock.

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MOS Maliki meeting farmers who faced problems with salvaging their stock.

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