

Speech by Dr Mohamad Maliki Bin Osman, Senior Parliamentary Secretary for National Development & Defence at the Opening Ceremony of Aquarama 2011 on 26 May 2011 at 9am, Suntec International Convention and Exhibition Centre

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Distinguished guests

Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. Good morning. I am delighted to be here this morning for the official opening of AQUARAMA 2011.

2. Singapore is proud to be the host of the biennial AQUARAMA since its inception in 1989. The event has grown from strength to strength over the years. This speaks volumes about Singapore's standing in the global ornamental fish industry. This year, we play host to more than 120 companies and agencies from 23 countries. Your continued support has reaffirmed Singapore's status as the ornamental fish capital of the world.

Challenges

3. The past few years have been particularly challenging, as the effects of the global economic downturn were felt worldwide¹. The ornamental fish industry was not spared either. Fortunately, we are now beginning to see signs of recovery in this industry. In Singapore, our top two importers of ornamental fish, namely, the United Kingdom and the United States of America, have registered import growth of 2.9% and 4.9%, respectively, for the first quarter of 2011.

4. As we step out of the global economic downturn, the industry should take the opportunity to focus on 3 key areas – productivity, innovation and quality assurance.

Productivity

5. First, the industry should enhance its productivity to remain resilient and competitive. I am pleased that the Singapore Aquarium Fish Exporters' Association (or SAFEA) is working with NTUC's Employment and Employability Institute (e2i) to explore ways to improve productivity. Five ornamental fish companies have so far benefited from e2i's Inclusive Growth Programme by securing more than \$260,000 to improve farm or export processes. These projects will help increase productivity through cost-saving measures and process re-engineering. In addition, companies' workers also share in their gains of growth by acquiring new skills.

6. Training and up-skilling of workers are two key ingredients to improving productivity in the ornamental fish industry. In recent years, the Agri-Food & Veterinary Authority (or AVA) and the Ornamental Fish Business Cluster have worked together to conduct basic and advanced training courses on ornamental fish culture and export. These courses offer an opportunity for farm managers and supervisors to upgrade their knowledge and skills in relevant fields. To date, 61 workers have graduated from the basic training courses, and another 46 from the advanced training courses.

Innovation

7. Second, the industry has to innovate in order to stay competitive in the global ornamental fish market. AVA has been working closely with the industry and tertiary institutions to improve production technology and fish quality through research and development. One key focus is maximising land use by going "vertical". For example, AVA has developed an experimental multi-tiered vertical farming system for ornamental fish culture at its Sembawang Research Station. This system, coupled with the latest water re-use and treatment technology, aims to increase productivity to more than four times that of traditional farming methods, which are constrained by land availability. AVA is now collaborating with Temasek Polytechnic and the industry to take this concept further, including looking into the automation of the fish culture process.

8. I am pleased that the private sector is also doing its part to innovate. Four major ornamental fish exporters have teamed up with a local environmental packaging company to develop a new, cost-effective insulation box as a replacement for the less environmentally-friendly styrofoam boxes widely used by the industry. I would like to commend such innovation, and encourage all industry players to actively look out for novel solutions to take on the challenges faced by this industry.

Quality Assurance

9. A third challenge for ornamental fish exporters is in providing quality assurance to the buyers. Over the years, AVA has worked closely with farmers and exporters to ensure that Singapore's export consignments meet the increasing demands on fish quality and health status. AVA has implemented several quality assurance programmes to provide a credible and accepted approach towards the promotion of good husbandry and sanitation practices. Such practices also place greater emphasis on bio-security measures and proper documentation.

10. This year, I am pleased to announce that AVA will be introducing a new quality assurance scheme to further facilitate the export of quality ornamental fish from Singapore. The new scheme, known as AVA Quality Assurance Scheme (or AQUAS), will focus on establishing an ordered and coordinated quality control process that will consistently meet export requirements. Most importantly, the scheme will ensure that our export consignments comply with the requirements of specific importing countries. AQUAS offers a consultative approach for the industry to work towards quality management. It allows the co-regulation of activities between AVA and the industry to achieve the common goal of quality fish for export.

Conclusion

11. Moving forward, the ornamental fish industry must stay vigilant in order to tackle these three challenges and seek out new markets. I am confident that the industry will continue to grow if all the stakeholders work collectively to boost your productivity and enhance your capabilities.

12. It gives me great pleasure now to declare AQUARAMA 2011 open. Thank you.

¹ According to the United Nations Commodity Trade Statistics Database (UN Comtrade), global export trade for ornamental fish fell from US\$339 mil in 2008 to US\$326 mil in 2009. The 2010 figures are still unavailable. In Singapore, exports fell 17% between 2008 and 2010 (Source: IE Singapore).