

RESPONSIBLE HOBBYISTS AND THE AQUACULTURE INDUSTRY CAN HELP A FISH ENDANGERED DUE TO UNREGULATED COLLECTING FOR THE MARINE ORNAMENTAL TRADE

Alejandro A. Vagelli

New Jersey Academy for Aquatic Sciences
1 Riverside drive, Camden NJ 08103
avagelli@njaas.org

Pterapogon kauderni, the Banggai cardinalfish, was described in 1933 on the basis of two alcohol-fixed specimens collected in 1920. It was not until 1995 when science re-discovered it and hobbyists had the first look at this beautiful fish. By the late nineties a huge demand for it grew in the international marine ornamental fish trade. By 2001 about 700,000 specimens were collected per year, and by 2007 the rate of exploitation was at least 900,000 fish/ year, and the estimated historical density in the wild was reduced by 90%. In addition, an average of 25% of specimens die during transport, about 15% are discarded due to injury or damage prior to export, and another 15% die during exportation

Pterapogon kauderni is especially susceptible to indiscriminate collecting. It has a highly restricted geographic range, low fecundity, and high post-recruitment mortality. It lacks dispersal mechanisms, which impede the re-colonization of areas from where it has been depleted, and its sedentary nature and association with shallow microhabitats greatly facilitates its capture.

A proposal to list *P. kauderni* under CITES Appendix II was defeated at the COP 14 in June 2007, where Indonesia untruthfully claimed that the listing would have an enormous economic negative impact on the local population, and that conservation efforts were underway. In September 2007 the IUCN, based on the same data that was made available to CITES, listed *P. kauderni* under the “Endangered” category of the Red List. The listing, however, does not restrict international trade or collection, so the Banggai cardinalfish is still in a very precarious situation.

The hobbyist community is urged to avoid acquiring wild captured Banggai cardinalfish until proper protective measures / trade regulations are in place. If the demand for captive bred specimens increases, it will give incentives to the aquaculture industry to increase the production of this species that currently is barely profitable. Hobbyists should realize that they have the power of deciding the future of the species, as the current rate of exploitation could easily lead to the demise of the species.

It is proposed a forum be created where all aspects of the maintenance and breeding of Banggai cardinal fish can be shared, and expert technical advice can be sought and provided. In addition, a global breeding management plan should be put in place, e. g, identify who is breeding Banggais and how those specimens can be made available to other hobbyists and to build a comprehensive data base that identifies blood lines, breeders, and advisors.