Present Status of Export Trade of Endemic and Indigenous Freshwater Ornamental Fish Species in Sri Lanka

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Sri Lankan ornamental fish export industry has developed rapidly during last decade due to high demand. Recent surveys have indicated that wild collection of endemic and indigenous freshwater ornamental fish species has caused serious conservational issues. This study aims to evaluate the present status of export trade of endemic and indigenous fish species in Sri Lanka during 2016-2017. Secondary information on type of freshwater fish species which were exported as ornamental fishes and their levels of exporting were collected from Sri Lanka Customs. Pre-tested questionnaire was used to collect data from 15 ornamental fish exporters, including the details of restricted and prohibited species and current status of the export industry. Results of the study indicated that the exportation of endemic species and indigenous species have been reduced by 43.7% and 9.4% respectively in 2017 when compared to 2016. Highest export trend were recorded on *Garra ceylonensis*: endemic fish species (48.7%) and *Monodactylus argenteus*: indigenous species (69.6%). Only 20 species of restricted freshwater fish have exported in 2016 and not reported at 2017. The major export destinations of Sri Lankan endemic and indigenous fish was USA (22%) followed by Netherlands (18%) and Australia (10%). The results of the questionnaire survey indicated that a limited number of exporters (40%) tend to export endemic fish species due to legal barriers. Further, captive breeding of Sri Lankan endemic fish varieties (*Puntius titteya*) outside the island may threat to the ornamental fish trade of Sri Lanka. A high proportion of exporters (80%) are over depended on the wild collection which leads to overexploitation of demanded species. Further, natural habitats of the wild population are negatively affected by deforestation and environmental pollution. Therefore, improving the captive breeding for wild catch species is important to ensure the sustainability of ornamental fish trade.

Keywords: Freshwater ornamental fish, Endemic fish, Indigenous fish, Export trade, Overexploitation