

## Marine Stewardship Council

# Case study: Ashtamudi short-necked clam fishery, India



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### Global recognition of sustainability

Ashtamudi's clam fishery achieved certification in 2014, becoming India's first MSC-certified sustainable fishery and bringing global recognition of its efforts to fish responsibly.

Commercial fishing for short-necked clams (*Paphia malabarica*) started about 30 years ago in the Ashtamudi estuary – prior to that there had been little demand outside the immediate local area where the clams have been eaten for generations.

The growth of the commercial fishery was fuelled by demand from export markets in Vietnam, Thailand and Malaysia in the 1980s and 1990s. By 1991, the catch had reached a peak of 10,000 tonnes a year, but declined 50% in 1993 due to overfishing.

A closed season and mesh size restrictions for nets were introduced, along with a minimum export size and a prohibition on mechanical clam fishing methods. These measures showed immediate effects, and the clam fishery has sustained landings of around 10,000 tonnes a year for the past decade.

Fishers paddle dug-out canoes from nearby villages to the shellfish beds. Divers dislodge the clams from the seabed with their hands and feet or a team of two or three fishermen will use a hand-dredge from the canoe. On a good day, a fisherman can gather as much as 200kg over a period of 4 to 5 hours.



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### Local value

Up to 1,000 fishers in the area rely on the clam resource and another 4,000 people are involved in cleaning, processing and trading the clams.

Operators are licensed by the Kerala State Government and Village Clam Fishery Council, which was set up in preparation for MSC assessment.

The value of the clam fishery (for all species) in the Ashtamudi estuary has recently been estimated at 13.5 million rupees per annum (£138,000), out of total fishery landings from the estuary valued at 67 million rupees (£684,000) a year.

Studies\* indicate that fishing is the biggest direct use of the estuary and should be the focal point for economic development and sustainable management since the majority of people living around the estuary depend on fishing for their livelihood.

Joseph Silvester, a clam fisher for 30 years, says: "One big lesson we have learnt is that unless we exploit the resource in a sustainable manner, it cannot be conserved for the future."

*"One of the key drivers for engaging with the MSC and achieving certification is to sustain the resource for the long term, and the livelihoods that depend on it."*

**Vinod Malayilethu, Marine Conservation Programme, WWF India**

**MSC process:** Certified in 2014, pre-assessment completed in October 2010

**Species:** Short-necked clam (*Paphia malabarica*)

**Fishing method:** Diving and hand-dredging

**Country:** India

**Fishery tonnage:** 10,000 tonnes

**Markets:** Asia

**Potential markets:** USA & Europe

## Improving knowledge

MSC's scoring system puts the fishery in the best practice category on 29 of the 31 performance indicators, with scores of greater than 80 out of 100. The fishery has conditions for improvements to maintain certification on two performance indicators related to recording information on bycatch.

The Risk-based Framework (RBF) was used to assess some performance indicators where there was insufficient data to allow the conventional assessment process to be used. The RBF was developed by the MSC to improve access to fisheries that are data-limited and is often used for small-scale artisanal fisheries in the developing world.

The assessment team considered the low-impact method of fishing and the extent of the seabed that is fished. Due to the fishing methods, clams in the deeper parts of the entrance to the estuary cannot be fished because the water is too deep or the tidal currents are too strong to allow diving or raking of clams.

## Pioneering new markets

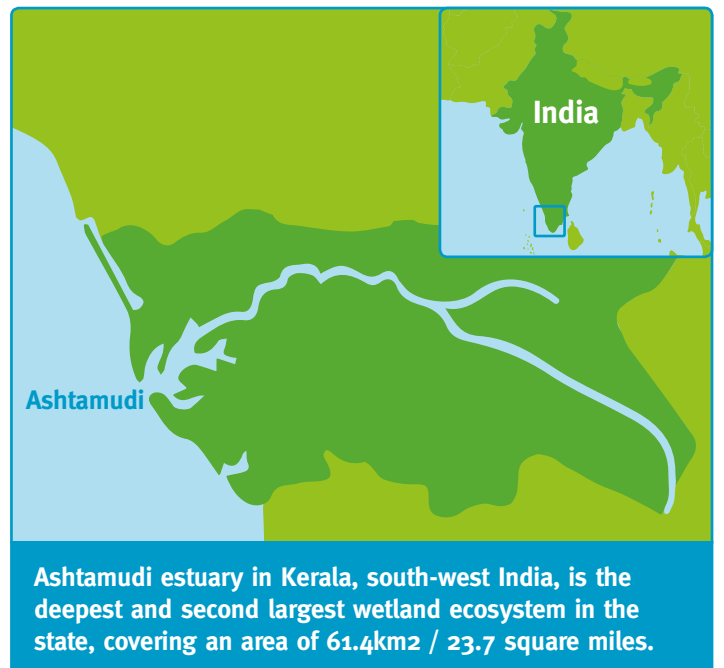
The Ashtamudi clam fishery is a pioneer for fisheries certification in India and in the developing world. MSC certification could be useful in opening access to new markets.

“MSC certification to export products to the US and Europe will soon be almost mandatory, with the main retailers committing to sourcing from sustainably certified sources,” says Vinod.

This has awakened the interest of national level policy makers such as the national body responsible for promoting fish exports, the Marine Products Export Development Authority (MPEDA) who are interested in exploring opportunities for MSC certification of fisheries in India, recognising that “sustainability is now a key thing for fisheries exports and there is a need to take action”.



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Ashtamudi estuary in Kerala, south-west India, is the deepest and second largest wetland ecosystem in the state, covering an area of 61.4km<sup>2</sup> / 23.7 square miles.

\* Anoop, P, & Suryaprakash, S., 2007.  
[www.tropentag.de/2007/abstracts/full/275.pdf](http://www.tropentag.de/2007/abstracts/full/275.pdf)

Scores		
Principle 1	Target Species	85.4 out of 100
Principle 2	Ecosystem	83.7 out of 100
Principle 3	Management System	82.3 out of 100

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