

Cyanide fishing



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Cyanide Fishing Recently, cyanide fishing for tropical and exotic species has become more prevalent in the South Pacific, causing harm to not only the marine life that is targeted, but their habitats as well. Many people in South East Asian countries rely solely on this fishing practice for income, in which they chase these tropical marine species and spray them with a cyanide solution to stun them and aid in their capture. These fish are then put into bags and exported to places like North America and Europe where they are sold for premium prices. However, many of these fish are harmed by the cyanide solution and do not even survive the trip, making the mortality rates very high, nearly forty percent (Pflug, 66.) The process of cyanide fishing is used to capture fish and invertebrates, but is damaging to many corals and juvenile reef species. This practice is becoming much more common in the Philippines, which was the first country to use the cyanide technique, where much of the reefs are destroyed from harvesting corals and cyanide fishing. Over three thousand tropical fishermen in the Philippines expose miles of coral reefs to cyanide, killing the coral polyps and bleaching the reef. Until strict regulations are put in place to protect the reefs and their inhabitants, cyanide fishing will continue to devastate reefs and kill marine life the world over. The new trend in Hong Kong and other major Asian cities are restaurants that have large fish tanks where the customers can pick the fish they want to eat and have it prepared however they would like. The new demand for live tropicals has caused a dramatic increase in cyanide fishing, putting much more strain on South Pacific marine habitats. This profitable fish trade generates revenues in excess of one billion dollars every year, but causes considerable damage to fish populations and habitats. Far from Hong Kong's restaurants and pet stores of North America and Europe, the fisherman

<https://assignbuster.com/cyanide-fishing/>

in Southeast Asia, the Indian Ocean, and Pacific waters carry plastic bottles that containing the toxic chemical cyanide, in search of the precious fish that live within the habitats of the coral reefs. The complete cyanide fishing process is actually quite simple. First, the fisherman place a cyanide powder into provisional squirt bottles filled with seawater. The fisherman then dive down to the reef, locate their prey, and squirt the cyanide solution, stunning the fish almost instantly making them easier to capture. The divers sometimes use crowbars to pry apart coral heads to retrieve the stunned fish (Bryant, Burke, McManus, and Mark Spalding 24). The rewards in this type of business are high, with some divers making more than eighty thousand a year. The cyanide poison that they use is extremely harmful to the underwater environment. It kills corals and reef invertebrates, along with many non-target fish. Large percentages of the fish that have been captured often die during their transit due to their weakened state. This type of profession can also be particularly dangerous. The cyanide poison does not pose an immediate threat to the divers, but spending long hours at significant depths breathing through air tubes can cause sickness even death. Due to the long hours under water, divers suffer from decompression sickness (" the bends") upon their ascent to the surface. The quality of air that they breathe is not necessarily healthy either. The compressors that provide the air are usually modified paint compressors. This causes the divers to breathe in large amounts of carbon monoxide. This destructive technique of fishing was thought to have started in the Philippines during the late 1950's or 1960's. At that current time, a US researcher described how fish were stunned when exposed to low doses of sodium cyanide, and when transferred to clean water, survived without noticeable after effect. Many

Philippine aquarium fish collectors soon read this report and soon enough, the quantities of tropical fish were increasing in the shops. But many of these fish were extremely exhausted and on the verge of death. The toxic chemical cyanide was being used to capture the reef fish (Kura, Revenga, Hoshino, and Greg Mock 49). Not only were fish shops stuffed with live fish, the trade in live food fish had begun to surge throughout Hong Kong, motivated by an increasing demand mainly by wealthy Chinese consumers. This type of trade was seen to much more profitable than the aquarium fish trade, which triggered a wild rush of fishers, and the spread of this destructive fishing technique to unexplored reefs. There is no denying the fact the process of cyanide fishing is cheaper way to harvest fish, but it has many unfavorable long term effects compared to short term effects. There are currently more than forty companies exporting aquarium fish from the Philippines and at least eight firms exporting live fish. And there are at least ten companies store live fish in large holding tanks in Bali and Indonesia. Annual estimates of the Asian trade in live fish food alone range between twenty and twenty five thousand metric tons. The Philippines exported as many as six million aquarium fish in 1996. Those numbers are also very similar to those of Indonesia as well. Unfortunately, the consumers, who can most effectively influence the market of cyanide fishing, seem to care little about the how the fish they eat are captured. The health risks of eating fish that are caught with cyanide are unknown. It is likely that the fish that are sold live have little effect on human health due the rapid rate in which the fish metabolize and excrete the poison. Although those that die during transit and are sold in the local fish market could pose a threat because the cyanide is still present in the organs of fish. “ The risks of eating

such fish have not been studied but may be significant (particularly in Asia where people eat - and sometimes prefer - the internal organs of the fish)" (McManus, Reyes, and Carlos Nañola 69). The destructive technique of cyanide fishing can be stopped. The Philippines is currently the only country to take action against the problem. A Cyanide Fishing Reform Program was created and a partnership between the government and the International Marine-Life Alliance (IMA). This program has trained thousands of fishermen to use other techniques to catch the fish, and alternative to cyanide fishing. The government has also begun to make their anti-cyanide fishing laws stronger by creating a large network of cyanide detection laboratories. These labs sample fish exports at random points throughout the country. New regulations are being imposed to make testing mandatory for all live fish exports and to control the distribution of the actual cyanide substance. The Filipinos are being educated about the preciousness of the coral reefs and the harmful effects of cyanide and other destructive fishing techniques, through public awareness campaigns in the media and in public schools. The act of cyanide fishing has not stopped in the Philippines, but it has been largely reduced by the act of these efforts. Over three decades of the destructive fishing practices, most of the Philippines reefs have been devastated, which also contributed the decline of many tropical fish species. The destruction of the coral has fish habitat but such a large amount that many local Philippine fisherman have seen their daily catch drop by almost half. The use of cyanide must be stopped in order to protect what is left of nature's most stunning creation. The Fisherman and consumers need to properly educated about the dangers of cyanide fishing and how it is affecting hundreds of fish species and the life of the coral reef. Works Cited

Pflug, H. J. Marine Ornamentals Trade: Quality and Sustainability for the Pacific Region. New York: Marine Aquarium Council, 1999. McManus, Reyes Jr., and Carlos Nañola. Effects of Some Destructive Fishing Methods on Coral Cover and Potential Rates of Recovery. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994. Bryant, Burke, McManus, and Mark Spalding. Reefs at Risk: Threats to the World's Coral Reefs. Washington: World Resources Institute, 1998 Kura, Revenga, Hoshino, and Greg Mock. Fishing for Answers: Making sense of the global fish crisis. Washington: World Resources Institute, 2004 " Destructive Fishing Practices. " Conservationscienceinstitute. org. 1994. 6 November 2004 " Cyanide Fishing and Coral Reefs. " Coralreef. org 2001. International Coral Reef Information Network. 6 November 2004 " Cyanide and the Live Fish Trade" Tracc. 00server. com 2001. Tropical Research and Conservation Center. 13 November 2004