



## **Sea Cucumber Aquaculture Business Potential in Middle East and South-East Asia - Pathways for Ecological, Social and Economic Sustainability**

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### **Abstract:**

Sea cucumbers are delicacy and popular traditional food in South-East Asia especially China, Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia and Taiwan. They are also used in traditional Chinese medicine and regarded as a specialty product that falls within the same niche market as other high-value luxury seafood products, including shark fin, fish maw and abalone. Currently more than 50 species of these highly valued bioresources are sold as trepang or be<sup>^</sup>che-de-mer, in Asian dried seafood markets. Sea cucumbers are commercially exploited worldwide and the production have expanded in catch and value worldwide during the recent decades. In Middle East region, important sources of sea cucumber are: Egypt, Oman, Yemen, Iran, Saudi Arabia and Turkey while in South-East Asia, Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia and Vietnam are the main producers with Hong Kong and Singapore being major export countries. Due to overfishing and unsustainable harvest, the supply of sea cucumber is declining throughout the world especially in Middle East and South-East Asia. The increasing demand for the product has kept prices at attractive levels. Aquaculture of sea cucumber is much needed to offset the rapidly declining source, conserve stocks biodiversity and sustain the ecological, social, and economic benefits of these high-valued marine bioresources.

**Keywords:** Sea cucumber Aquaculture, Bêche-de-mer, Middle-East, South-East Asia