

Appreciation

K.S.B. Tennakoon

An expert in aquaculture he gave his best to the country

It was with great sorrow that the professionals in the fisheries and aquaculture industry learned of the demise of K.S.B. Tennakoon, one of their most dynamic colleagues on 1 September 2014 in Melbourne at the age of 67 years.

Tennakoon hailed from a respectable family that lived in the Welimada area. He graduated from the then Vidyalankara Campus of the University of Sri Lanka (currently the University of Kelaniya) in biological sciences in 1970 and his first appointment in the public service was as a science teacher in the Narammala Mayurapada Central College in the Kurunegala district. Tennakoon served there for nearly five years and was popular among his fellow teachers, students and parents.

In September 1975 he joined the Ministry of Fisheries as an aquaculturist and was detailed to work at Udawalawe Aquaculture Centre. During that period the government was implementing a programme with the objective of harnessing the potential of the inland waters – large and medium irrigation tanks, village tanks and seasonal tanks, and hydropower reservoirs to establish fisheries to provide food security and employment to rural masses. This programme needed aqua culturists for its fish breeding and culture activities, and the government recruited a few batches of young bioscience graduates as trainee aquaculturists. Tennakoon was one among them.

In 1977 together with 11 other aqua culturists, Tennakoon was sent to China with the support of a UNDP/FAO technical assistance programme to undergo a six-months training programme in fish breeding and aquaculture.

After returning to Sri Lanka, Tennakoon resumed work at Udawalawe and started working on a project to establish the technology of artificial breeding of Chinese carps, i.e. the bighead, grass-carp and silver-carp, which do not breed naturally in the Sri Lankan environmental conditions. Tennakoon worked with a team of fellow aqua culturists and technicians, and designed the physical facilities required for fish breeding – hatcheries, brood-stock ponds, nursery ponds and culture ponds; developed brood-stocks from the fish larval stocks imported from China and commenced fish breeding and culture.

Within three years of their return from China the team managed to successfully establish the Chinese carp breeding and culture technology in Sri Lanka. The Udawalawe Aquaculture Centre became a hive of activity as it had to produce Chinese carp larvae to other aqua culture stations such as Polonnaruwa, Inginiyagala, Dambulla, Padaviya, Rambodagalle, etc. to raise up to fingerling stage and stock in the reservoirs of the respective areas for inland fisheries.

In 1982 Tennakoon entered the University of the Philippines in the Visayas (UPV) to do a Masters in Aquaculture. In UPV he topped the batch and returned to work at Udawalawe, as Project Manager of a UNDP funded aquaculture development project, the objective of which was to establish the technology of

breeding and culture of Indian major carps, i.e. rohu, mrigal and catla. Juveniles of these fish species were imported from India, brood-stocks were developed from them and breeding and culture was done successfully. Indian major carp fingerlings were also periodically stocked in reservoirs with the assistance of other aquaculture stations in the country.

In 1987 Tennakoon was appointed as Project Director of ADB funded Aquaculture Development Project which was implemented with the objective of utilization of numerous village tanks located in the dry zone of the country for fish production. This time he operated from Colombo. The Project had to select suitable tanks and effect modifications required to culture fish, organize villagers in the associated areas into inland fisheries societies and train them in fish culture, produce the required fish fingerlings, etc. Tennakoon handled this work quite efficiently and the Project resulted in a significant increase of inland fish production. He served in this capacity till the then government stopped supporting inland fisheries and discontinued the inland fisheries development programme in 1991.

Thereafter Tennakoon joined the private sector as the manager of a large shrimp farm in the Puttalam district. He recruited his fellow aqua culturists who lost employment in the government sector as a result of this government policy, to work in this farm and managed it as a model shrimp farm.

However, in the late 1990s the shrimp farming industry collapsed owing to a highly destructive disease outbreak. In that situation Tennakoon had no option but to try his luck outside the country. He migrated to New Zealand in 2000 and from there to Australia in 2001. In Australia he was employed as the quarantine manager in a large aquarium company.

Tennakoon was a gentleman with principles. He was an untiring worker and always determined to contribute his best to his work. He was also a team worker. I have been working with him in the inland fisheries and aquaculture sector since the late 1970s and have never seen him losing his temper. He gave more to the country than what he took from the country.

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