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Prawn yields bounce back

The prawn farm on Coetivy has posted record production numbers this year, generating more than US\$5 million in foreign exchange revenue, according to the Seychelles Marketing Board.

With production figures approaching 800 tonnes so far this year, the prawn industry has already surpassed its previous best of 648 tonnes in 1998.

Although the figures appear to conflict with earlier reports of a 46 percent drop in prawn exports in the first quarter of this year, Eshantha Peiries, SMB's internal auditor and manager of the prawn farm, said that the prawn industry as a whole cannot be gauged on a quarterly basis.

Mr Peiries, addressing members of the press during SMB's recent media tour on Coetivy, said that harvesting prawns in March results in a better yield – about US\$14 per kilogram – due to the demand for large shrimp.

“During the period from which the market indicators came out, we still had not harvested 400-500 tons of shrimp that could have been exported.” Mr Peiries said. “We could have harvested in January and had an excellent first quarter, but we would have lost out on an extra six dollars for every kilo of shrimp we exported.”

According to Mr Peiries, the farm's entire volume of first-grade shrimp, which comprises at least 85 percent of the industry's total production, is being exported to primary buyers in Europe and Japan.

SMB's sudden boom in prawn production comes after a turbulent four-year period for the industry, which saw production dip to a record low 219 tonnes last year.

Mr Peiries cited hatchery contamination and problems with obtaining an adequate supply of broodstock, or mother prawns, as reasons for the decline in production from 1999-2002.

But with the recent completion of new ponds – now totalling 198 on the island – and other improvements designed to increase the stability of the operation, Mr Peiries said SMB is targeting a total of 1,000 tonnes for this year, with similar projections for 2004.