

Shrimp

Shrimp farming in India is at a crossroads: 'Dangerous' trend threatens the sector

Significant changes have been made over the course of the shrimp industry's history to spur on growth. The same must be done now in India.



Frozen shrimp, which earned INR 431.4 billion (€4.8 billion/\$5.5 billion) in the 2022/2023 financial year, retained its position as India's most significant seafood export, accounting for a share of 41 percent in quantity and 67.7 percent of earnings, according to figures from India's Marine Products Export Development Authority. (Photo: Bhavesh Bhati)

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Robins McIntosh, a shrimp farming industry veteran and executive vice president at Thai food giant CP Foods, believes India will overcome its current challenges and retain its pole position in the Asian shrimp farming industry.

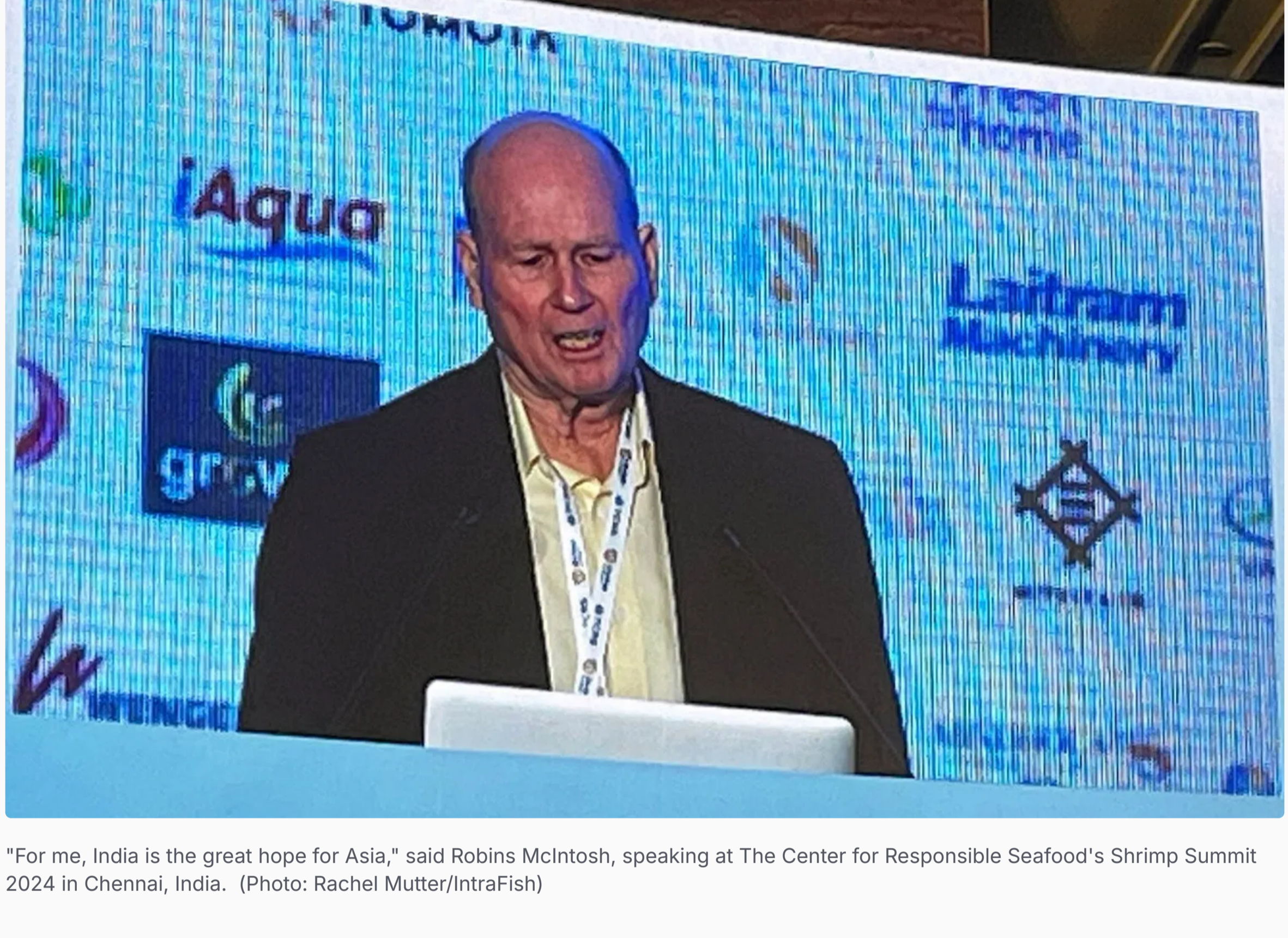
"For me, India is the great hope for Asia," he said, speaking at The Center for Responsible Seafood's Shrimp Summit 2024 in Chennai, India, last week. "It is a resilient country with huge resources."

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The overall export of frozen shrimp was pegged at 711,099 metric tons.

The United States, the largest market, imported 275,662 metric tons of India's shrimp, followed by China at 145,743 metric tons and the European Union at 95,377 metric tons.

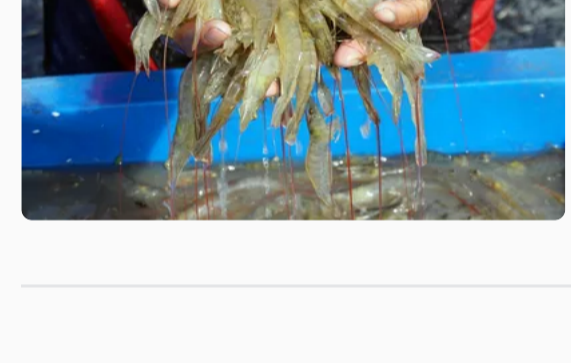
"There has been double-digit growth in both [shrimp] production and trade," said Pawan Kumar president of the Seafood Exporters Association of India, who also spoke at the conference.



"For me, India is the great hope for Asia," said Robins McIntosh, speaking at The Center for Responsible Seafood's Shrimp Summit 2024 in Chennai, India. (Photo: Rachel Mutter/IntraFish)

"Having said this, we have certain challenges, and shrimp farming in India is at a crossroads," he said, with falling volumes last year and a "dangerous" trend towards other uses for shrimp farming land.

Kumar identified several reasons for the industry's problems, including poor quality broodstock, which he said only have 50 to 60 percent survival in farms. He also referenced reduced selling prices and rising operational costs, together making "viability seriously eroded."



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The Indian shrimp farming industry has experienced a difficult two years, with Ecuador rising seemingly out of nowhere to usurp it as the world's largest producer.

Crop failures and the lowest global shrimp prices in 20 years have crushed margins and led swathes of Indian shrimp farmers to switch to other forms of income generation.

But McIntosh believes failure can be "left behind" in India if the industry takes better control of its shrimp culture.

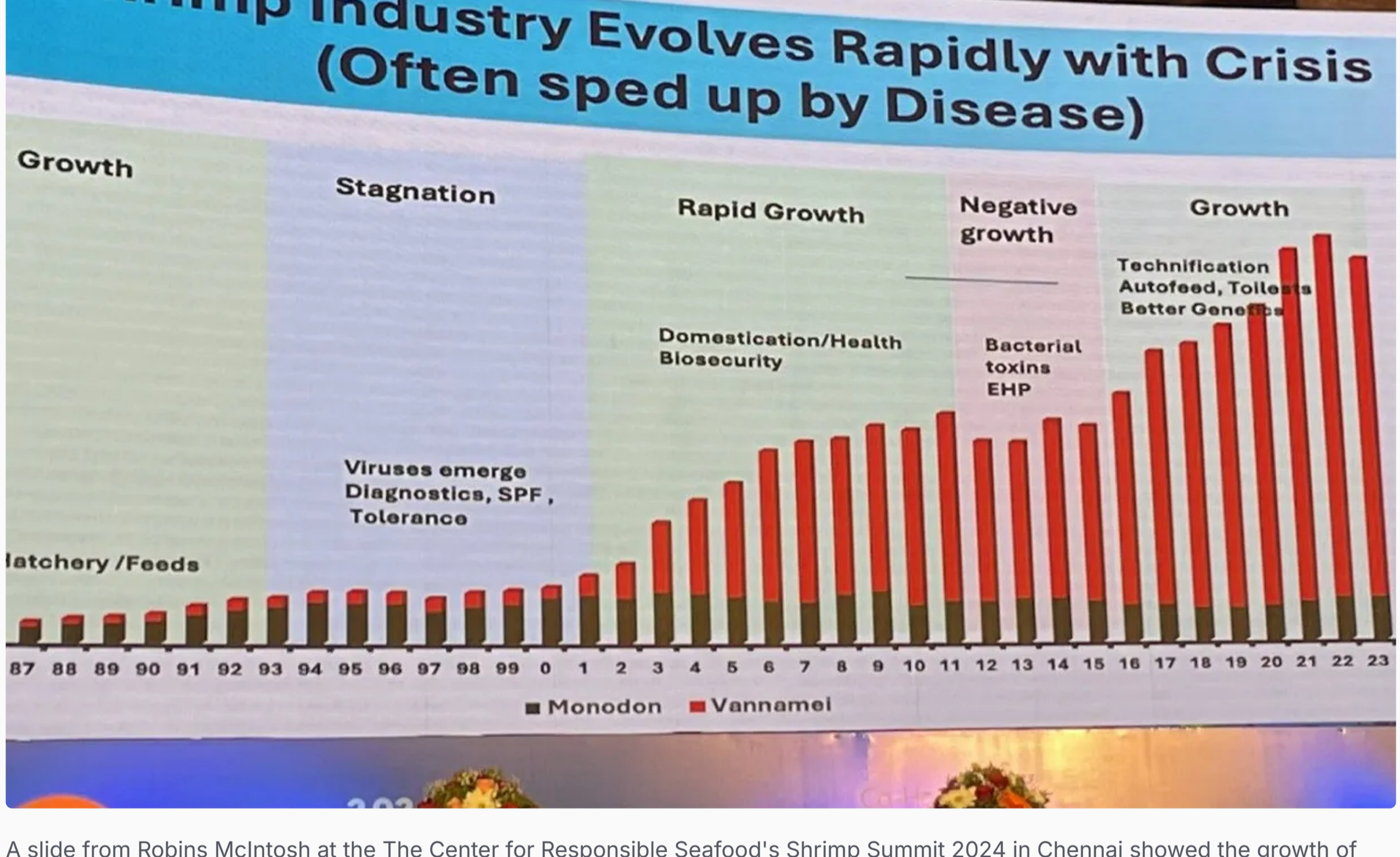
"If you are efficient, the market is not going to go away," he said.

Small improvements enable big leaps

McIntosh presented a graph to delegates highlighting the improvements that have been made in global shrimp farming since 1985, and the resulting impacts on production.

Developments in hatcheries, feeds, diagnostics, genetics, biosecurity and other technological advances have enabled a huge production surge in the global shrimp sector.

Growth has been fairly consistent, with the only substantial fall resulting from the global spread of Early Mortality Syndrome (EMS) between 2012 and 2016.



A slide from Robins McIntosh at the The Center for Responsible Seafood's Shrimp Summit 2024 in Chennai showed the growth of the farmed shrimp industry and what impacted that growth. (Photo: Rachel Mutter/IntraFish)

The issue now is that it is starting to plateau again, said McIntosh, so improvements must be made and must take the form of strict biosecurity, careful farm design, the use of better genetics and the introduction of simple technologies like automated feeders.

"The poultry industry has 95 percent consistency, and they can have smaller margins because of this," said McIntosh.

"We always have to be open to new ideas, and new crises," he said.

Unfavorable light

In March, India's shrimp industry was accused of mistreating workers and violating quality standards in three separate reports published by US-based media and nonprofit groups.

The first report, authored by the Corporate Accountability Lab (CAL), a Chicago-based nonprofit group, claims "pervasive systemic abuses" throughout the shrimp supply chain. It alleges that workers are routinely exploited and subject to forced labor by some companies.

The CAL report was followed by an investigation from the *Associated Press* news agency, which said it uncovered widespread abuse and hazardous working conditions in Andhra Pradesh state, and a report by investigative journalism group The Outlaw Ocean Project, which interviewed a whistleblower and former employee of a shrimp company in the same state.

Representatives of the Indian shrimp industry have denied the accusations in the reports.

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