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PIC BY NIK ABDULLAH NIK OMAR



NOT ENOUGH FISH

MALAYSIA'S fishing industry is facing a grim future due to decades of unsustainable fishing practices and climate change. Fishmongers say supply is becoming scarce, forcing many of them to close shop.

» REPORTS BY AHMAD MUKHSEIN MUKHTAR ON PAGES 2 & 3



Fish seized by the marine police from people suspected of fish bombing off Pulau Gaya in Sabah. FILE PIC

OVERFISHING

'REDUCE NUMBER OF FISHING BOATS'

Expert also says subsidies should be gradually ended, coastal areas protected

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MALAYSIA'S fishing industry is facing a grim future as decades of unsustainable and irresponsible fishing practices have depleted fishery resources.

Experts believe that the cold, hard facts behind the recent marine catch supply issues are clear: Malaysia's inshore and coastal resources have been overfished.

Failure to quickly formulate new strategies, they said, could worsen the situation.

Associate Professor Dr Mohammad Zaki Ahmad, who is a lecturer at Universiti Utara Malaysia's School of International Studies, said the government

has to focus on long-term solutions such as emphasising sustainable fishing practices.

Zaki, who is an expert on Responsible Fisheries Management, said fuel subsidies for C2 Class fish vessel operators may stabilise the nation's fish supplies in the short term.

But they will not help in the long term.

"We may try to increase fishing capacity so more fish can be harvested further offshore. However, this should be considered a short-term solution.

"We need to push our fishing industry to start deep-sea fishing, an area that is still in its infancy in Malaysia.

"We have not capitalised on this, especially when it comes to lucrative tuna fisheries in the deep seas," he told the *New Straits Times*.

Zaki said there must be a holistic approach to ensuring the sustainability of the national fisheries industry, in particular pertaining to maritime law enforcement and fisheries development policies.

He said to prevent overexploitation of fish stocks, the number of fishing boats and fishermen should be reduced.

"It is crucial that we protect the marine environment and ecosystem.

"Coastal areas which are critical to fisheries need to be identified and protected from harmful activity or development projects, such as land reclamation.

"The government should gradually eliminate fishing subsidies to prevent overcapacity.

"Even the World Trade Organisation is right now conducting efforts to eliminate harmful fishing subsidies that can affect the sustainability of fishing resources."

He acknowledged that changes in weather patterns caused by climate change caused fish supply shortages.

He said the depletion of inshore



Associate Professor
Dr Mohammad
Zaki Ahmad

Fisheries dept says strategies in place to meet needs

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and coastal fishery resources in Malaysia had been forecast since the 1970s.

"Climate change is getting worse in intensity and frequency, especially in Southeast Asia.

"The monsoon season is more intense and lasts longer than before.

"We expected that this would affect local fishing operations, as fishermen cannot go out to sea. So fresh fish supplies and their incomes are affected.

"There are multiple other interrelated factors such as the destruction of marine ecosystems due to land reclamation projects, port dredging and destruction of seagrass, along with unsustainable and destructive fishing prac-

tices such as fish bombing, the use of dragon traps, push nets and encroachments by foreign fishermen.

"All these have affected our fresh fish supplies since the 1970s.

"Statistical records show we have depleted our resources due to improper coastal development and unsustainable fishing practices."

Meanwhile, deputy director-general of the Fisheries Department, Wan Muhammad Aznan Abdullah, said the request by fishing vessel operators for diesel subsidies had been forwarded to the Agriculture and Food Indus-

tries Ministry.

"The demand for marine products is expected to rise from 1.78 million metric tonnes in 2020 to 2.55 million metric tonnes in 2030.

"We have formulated several strategies in the long and short term to ensure that the needs of the aquaculture and marine sectors are met.

"The adaptation of inland fishing methods will be accelerated in each state to develop a more sustainable

aquaculture sector and effective control.

"Among the measures that are implemented is intensifying

biotechnology research programmes to produce high-quality fish breeds that are disease-resistant and have an optimal growth rate.

"This programme will increase the confidence of investors to venture into aquaculture.

"The long-term strategy is to increase the productivity of fish farms by modernising and digitalising food production systems.

"The short-term strategies include self-sustainable fish farming such as rearing catfish and tilapia in tanks," he added.



Wan Muhammad Aznan Abdullah

Page 1 pic: A fisherman sorting out his catch at the Malaysian Fisheries Development Authority jetty in Kota Baru, Kelantan, on May 24.