

HOW TO STOP INVASIVE FISH SPECIES

NST 04/07/24 MIS 17

AN invasive fish species, the Chao Phraya catfish, was recently released into Tasik Biru, Kundang, Selangor.

This raises concerns that the released invasive fish could cross into river systems and reach the ocean or marine ecosystems, posing a serious threat to broader environmental sustainability.

The Malaysian Fisheries Department said nets would be installed at the lake's exits after pictures of the release were circulated on social media.

In Malaysia, there are laws against the release of invasive fish into public waters, such as the Fisheries Act 1985. The Act sets heavy penalties for individuals or entities that violate these regulations.

However, violations are often not taken seriously or only incur light penalties, signalling to violators that their actions have no significant con-

sequences.

The gap between policy and society is one of the main causes of the inefficiency in policy implementation in this matter.

Often, policies are not accompanied by sufficient awareness campaigns, leading to the public not understanding the importance or implications of their actions on ecosystems.

It is essential to integrate a comprehensive educational approach with law enforcement to ensure maximum effectiveness.

Our country's rich marine resources must be protected through firm policies and coordinated actions to ensure the wellbeing of marine ecosystems and the human lives that depend on them.

Malaysian waters also hold significant economic importance. The fisheries sector contributes billions of ringgit to the economy and provides a vital source of protein for Malaysians.

It is disappointing that we still do

not have a comprehensive national plan for managing and monitoring marine resources.

This also provides more reasons to establish a dedicated ministry for the management of the country's waters, including marine and maritime issues.

Establishing a ministry to oversee our marine resources have been repeatedly recommended by experts in the country due to issues such as overlapping jurisdictions among government agencies, leading to inefficiency and confusion in policy, the absence of centralised management, and the lack of data and technical expertise.

In Indonesia and South Korea, these dedicated ministries exist and play roles in managing maritime logistics systems, sustainable ocean management, achieving maritime security, and prospering fishing communities.

The establishment of a dedicated ministry responsible for marine and maritime affairs is a critical step that

should be taken.

This ministry will ensure that all aspects related to the country's waters, including fisheries, marine biodiversity conservation, pollution management, and maritime security, are managed more systematically and comprehensively.

Apart from establishing the ministry, the government can take these steps:

ESTABLISH a comprehensive policy covering all aspects of marine management and protection, including controlling invasive species, pollution management, and conserving critical habitats such as coral reefs and mangroves;

STRENGTHEN the enforcement of existing laws by increasing the resources and capabilities of enforcement agencies, ensuring that penalties are severe enough to deter violations;

CONTINUOUSLY monitor and assess the condition of marine ecosystems,

identify new threats, and evaluate the effectiveness of measures taken;

ENHANCE cooperation among government agencies, research institutions, the private sector, and non-governmental organisation to ensure an integrated and effective approach to managing marine issues; and,

ENCOURAGE educational and research institutions to play a more active role not only in educating future generations and conducting research but also in expressing opinions on marine issues.

These institutions need to be involved in information dissemination, policy advocacy and provide policy-makers evidence-based guidance.

Firm measures must be taken before we pay a higher price for today's mistakes.

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