

PENANG FISHERMEN WARY OF PSR

Northeastern Penang fisherfolk warn peers of danger to livelihood from reclamation

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FISHERMEN in the southern part of Penang island, likely to be affected by the mega Penang South Reclamation (PSR) project, have been told by their peers in the northeastern part to fight the proposed reclamation until the very end, or risk facing the same fate as they did.

Hundreds of fisherfolk from Tanjung Bungah, Tanjung Tokong, Gurney Drive and Paramount claimed their lives had changed for the worse following the reclamation in their backyard, namely the Seri Tanjung Pinang (STP) phase 1 and 2 projects.

(STP1 is a 96ha reclamation project adjacent to STP on Penang island that is fully reclaimed while STP2 is a 304ha reclaimed island across the waters to the east of STP1.)

They also claimed their income had dropped by 80 per cent, more so in recent years, due to the decline in quantity and quality of their catch, and many of them were living in debt.

Tanjung Bungah Fishermen Unit head Ismail Din, 75, said they were "trapped" into accepting the reclamation in their backyard back then with a RM15,000 compensation for each fisherman and RM2,000 for each assisting crew, and warned their peers not to fall into the same trap.

"We are suffering now. What's more, the massive reclamation in the southern part of the island covers 1,800ha and the effects would be much greater.

"We are with the thousands of fishermen there to champion their cause — to reject the reclamation at all cost. They should learn from what happened to us and not fall into the same trap," he said at the Tanjung Tokong Fishermen Community base here.

A fisherman for more than two decades, Ismail urged the Penang government to help them rebuild their lives.

"If no help is forthcoming, my



Head of the Tanjung Bungah Area Fisheries Unit Ismail Din (striped shirt) with fishermen and NGO volunteers protesting against the Penang South Reclamation project in Tanjung Tokong yesterday. PIC BY DANIAL SAAD

fear is the children of fishermen would no longer be able to afford to go to school in future. Even if they could, the children would go to school on empty stomachs."

The project, which will see the creation of three man-made islands, is to fund the state-initiated RM46 billion Penang Transport Master Plan (PTMP), part of the initiatives to ease traffic on the island.

The fishermen have been opposing reclamation since 2015.

Environmentalists opposing the project had argued that such a project would impact the livelihood of fishermen and the marine ecosystem in the southern part of the island.

Agriculture and Agro-based Industry Minister Datuk Salahuddin Ayub told Parliament two weeks ago that the project would affect 4,996 fishermen in Penang, out of which 1,422 are traditional fishermen.

He had said it was estimated that 51,184 tonnes of catch worth RM555 million a year would be affected as well as 511 marine aquaculture farmers producing 45,742 tonnes of marine fish

worth RM1.67 billion a year would also be impacted.

He said that the Fisheries Department had clearly stated its stand that the PSR project would affect fish catch and marine life.

Sharing Ismail's sentiment was Tanjung Tokong Fishermen Unit head Mohd Ishak Abdul Rahman, 72, who said that the effects of the STP2 project were not only felt by them, but fishermen in Bagan Ajam on the mainland who recently complained that the declining fish catch, especially *ikan kembung*, after the STP reclamation started.

He said they were never consulted about the compensation and input from the Penang Fishermen Association chief was bypassed.

"The token is not a proper compensation for our loss of livelihood," he added.

A committee member of the Tanjung Bungah Fishermen Community special branch, Roland Khoo Boop Lye, said the Penang government should address their plight first, before thinking about reclamation in other parts of the island.

"We are unfortunate. No one cares about us.

"We just want a solution to our problem, in the form of high capacity boats, so that we can go further to fish. That is an appropriate request."

He chided state officials who were no longer seen in their area after the previous general election, where he claimed they previously came in droves for the fisherfolk's votes.

Tanjung Pinang Development (TPD) Sdn Bhd spokesman said they had obtained regulatory approvals for the STP2 development and was continuing to act with an emphasis on compliance.

The spokesman said all work was being carried out in adherence with the conditions of the approved Detailed Environmental Impact Assessment study as well as from all authorities, which include online monitoring of the water quality level in the project area as part of the environmental mitigation measures.

Since 2003, the spokesman said, there had been engagement with the fishermen in the project

vicinity with TPD contributing to the fishermen within the scope that it was required by law and beyond.

"These, among others, include our ex-gratia payment to 152 affected fishermen and 61 assisting crew members on July 3, 2015.

"Subsequent to the first group who received the payment, TPD took the initiative to help 40 eligible fishermen and 15 crew members who were not in the list to make an appeal to the authorities and a second ex-gratia payment took place on Oct 31, 2015.

"The ex-gratia amount and eligible fishermen were determined by state authorities and Fisheries Development Authority of Malaysia," said the spokesman.

As a safety measure, the spokesman said, TPD had been updating the fishermen through its SMS alert protocol of ongoing reclamation activities.

The spokesman said the fishermen had, on the whole, also accepted contributions, such as TPD's school assistance programme, support for festive celebrations and open houses.