

SEAFOOD SHORTAGE

BAD WEATHER AFFECTING FISH SUPPLY

Lack of fish brought ashore over past week has pushed prices upward

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THE Kuala Kedah fishermen's market, usually a hub of activity and loud with the shouts of sellers and shoppers haggling for the best deals, have been unusually quiet of late.

The lack of fish brought ashore over the past week means that few are being sold at the market. The dwindling supply has also not been lost on shoppers, who have since moved on elsewhere to look for their goods.

Khadijah Ahmad, 55, is one of the few fishmongers who are still plying their trade at the market, albeit with a smaller variety of fish on offer.

"I don't have much to sell today. The supply has been dwindling for almost a week now," Khadijah said as she stared at her table, which has a handful of small *tenggiri*, *senangin* and *gelama*.

Many fishmongers at the market have been out of business for days as they have been unable to



Khadijah Ahmad selling a smaller variety of fish at her stall at the Kuala Kedah fishermen's market yesterday. (Inset) Abdul Hamid Bahari. PIC BY AHMAD MUKHSEIN MUKHTAR

get adequate seafood supply from local fishermen.

"The frequent stormy weather and strong waves have made it very hard for coastal fishermen to venture out to sea.

"When they don't go out to fish, we, as fishmongers, also take a beating as we depend on them for the supply," added Khatijah.

Muammar Norhafiz, 27, a local coastal fisherman, lamented that unpredictable and stormy weather had become more frequent in the waters off Kuala Kedah.

He said the situation had taken a toll on their livelihood as the

coastal fishermen depend on their daily fishing trips to earn a living.

"We haven't been able to make much lately. We literally have not landed any *selayang*, *kembung*, and squid due to the bad weather," he said.

Inevitably, the shortage of supply has pushed the prices of seafood upward.

Shuib Othman, 63, a seasoned fishmonger at Pasar Besar Alor Setar, said the price of squid had increased from RM20 to RM24 per kg in recent days due to the shortage.

He added that *kembung* fish usually sold at RM10 per kg was now being sold at RM14 per kg.

"The retail prices of seafood depend on the supplies we get. In this case, the supply has dropped by 30 per cent as my supplier cannot give more."

Shuib said he was depending on fish he kept in freezers to continue plying his trade.

"I hope the supply will improve soon before I run out of stock. Otherwise, I will be out of business," he said.

On Monday, the Meteorological

Department had urged people in Kedah to be on alert for the arrival of west and northwesterly winds by today.

State department director Muhammad Khalil Ab Aziz said the strong winds, followed by heavy rain and thunderstorms, were expected to last up to a week.

However, he said the wind was expected to be slightly weaker compared with the current thunderstorm incidents, which triggered strong winds up to 50kph since last Tuesday.

Meanwhile, Abdul Hamid Bahari, the chairman of the National Fishermen's Association (Nekmat) acknowledged that the supply shortage had forced the prices of seafood to soar.

"Fish and seafood supply have been affected by the unpredictable weather patterns and stormy seas.

"We expect this to subside soon and the supplies to return to normal," he told *New Straits Times*.

The inclement weather, however, was just one of the association's concerns, said Hamid.

He said increasing fuel costs had also resulted in lesser marine catches, which in turn were pushing prices up.

"Larger class C2 fishing boats are struggling to deal with rising cost of fuel.

"Their operational costs have increased significantly since the fuel price went up to RM4.50 and above per litre," he said.