

# FISH BOMBING RAMPANT IN 36 AREAS

## Sabah Marine Police head plans to end menace

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**F**OR Assistant Commissioner Mohamad Pajeri Ali, putting an end to fish bombing in Sabah is one thing he wants to achieve in his career, which has spanned 30 years.

The Sabah Marine Police chief said the problem had existed in the state when he was posted to Sabah as a patrol vessel officer in 1986.

"I'd served the force in Johor, Terengganu and Pahang, but never had I encountered fish bombing in any of the states."

He said over the years, fish bombing had grown in Sabah, spurred by the influx of immigrants who saw the lucrative side of it.

"Making a home-made explosive is easy and cheap. One only needs to mix fertilisers with kerosene in a bottle, and ignite it with a detonator and fuse."

Pajeri said although most of the culprits were immigrants and to a certain extent, the Bajau Laut (sea gypsies), they did not work alone.

"There are certain parties exploiting this group because they are poor and uneducated. To make a living, they take the easy way out by resorting to fish bombing.

"In the past, 'bombed' fish were used to make *ikan masin* (salted fish).

"We had arrested a mastermind, who provided detonators (to non-local fishermen). This is how we know that they were exploited," he added.

He said the masterminds were usually locals, who bought fish from the fishermen and sold the catch at the wet market.

Pajeri said the culprits often conducted their activities in shallow waters, which have coral reefs and offshore oil platforms.

"The police have identified 36 fish bombing hotspots within the seven operational zones under its jurisdiction. These hotspots are in Labuan, Kota Kinabalu, Kudat, Sandakan, Lahad Datu, Semporna and Tawau."

Pajeri said tracking down fish bombers was a challenge, and for that, the marine police depended on tip-offs from the public, and at



Sabah Marine Police chief Assistant Commissioner Mohamad Pajeri Ali showing items used to make a fish bomb in Kota Kinabalu recently. PIC BY MALAI ROSMAH TUAH

times would resort to going undercover to nab the culprits.

"If we come after them on patrol boats, they will know and not carry out their activities. That's why we sometimes disguise ourselves as fishermen and catch them red-handed.

"Nabbing fish bombers can be challenging and requires courage. They are aggressive and can threaten the lives of marine police personnel," said Pajeri, adding that he had had some close calls.

During daily sea operations, Pajeri said marine police would conduct enforcement within 12 nautical miles of the coastal areas.

Anything beyond that is the jurisdiction of the Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency (MMEA) and navy, as they have assets that could move into deeper waters.

"Fish bombing is rampant in these areas, which is a concern because there are oil rigs and coral reefs, which can lead to serious loss (of marine life) and environmental damage.

"We hope through the collaboration with MMEA, navy and other enforcement agencies, we can address this problem effectively."

The marine police are working with the Fisheries Department's enforcement team to check fish sold at rural markets, as well as with Sabah Parks to deter illegal activities, including catching protected species and stealing corals in protected marine areas.



He had instructed his men to inspect lorries transporting fish as they had previously detained one loaded with bombed fish.

Fish bombing is punishable under Section 26 (1) (c) of the Fisheries Act 1985 and Section 8 of the Explosives Act 1957.

The offence, under the Fisheries Act, carries a maximum fine of RM20,000 or a jail term not exceeding two years or both, while the Explosives Act carries seven years' imprisonment or a fine of RM10,000, or both.

Pajeri is calling for more severe punishments as the current ones were not enough to act as a deterrent.

He added that those found guilty, mostly illegal immigrants, would usually be handed a RM500 fine and a month's jail, before they were handed over to the Immigration Department for deportation.

"Deporting the offenders may prevent them from carrying out the activity temporarily, but they would most likely return.

"Seeing the need for harsher punishments, the (Bukit Aman) Internal Security and Public Order Department director has given an instruction to the state marine commander to revisit all offences under these two acts and to make a recommendation (for

### FISH BOMBING HOTSPOTS

#### 1. LABUAN

- Pulau Papan
- Pulau Daat
- Pulau Tiga
- The Semarang oil rig

#### 2. KOTA KINABALU

- The St. Joseph oil rig
- Pulau Mantanani
- Pulau Mengalum
- Lok Molohom at Pulau Gaya
- Pulau Mamutik under Tunku Abdul Rahman Marine Park
- Sepanggar

#### 3. KUDAT

- Pulau Balambangan
- Pulau Tigabu
- Pulau Malawali
- Pulau Mandi Darah

#### 4. TAWAU

- Kalumpang
- Tinagal

#### 5. SANDAKAN

- Pulau Jambongan
- Pulau Tikus
- Pulau Langkayan
- Pulau Tambisan

#### 6. LAHAD DATU

- Tanjung Labian
- Laut Makuao
- Dent Heaven
- Tanjung Membatu
- Bakapit
- Silam
- Kuala Tingkay

#### 7. SEMPORNA

- Pulau Batik Kulambu
- Pulau Bum Bum
- Pulau Omadal
- Pulau Siarnil
- Rock Reef
- Pulau Manampilik
- Pulau Matakang

# Fish bombers drawn to easy profits, says state minister

**KOTA KINABALU:** Fish bombing — using homemade explosives — or other destructive methods, such as cyanide fishing, prevail in Sabah as they provide quick profits at the expense of ocean resources and people's lives.

The recent deaths of three scuba divers, who suffered internal injuries in an underwater explosion in the east coast district of Semporna, are a reminder of just how dangerous fish bombing can be.

The problem is widespread in coastal districts across Sabah, where there are concentrations of squatter colonies occupied by immigrants.

Equally destructive are fishing crews who are paid by unscrupulous owners of "mothership" vessels that would set out to sea with a mission to seek profits, regardless of the risks and damage they cause.

Fish bombing and cyanide fishing have existed in the state for decades, which is a concern for the authorities, civil society and consumers.

State Agriculture and Food Industry Minister Datuk Junz Wong said poverty and the appeal of making fast cash were the reasons behind the involvement of those behind such methods.

"A bombed fish would be soft to the touch and when cut out, internal bleeding can be seen," he said, adding that he urged the public to boycott those who supplied such fish.

Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency (MMEA) Sabah director Rear Admiral Kamaruzaman Abu Hassan said many of the culprits were immigrants and they came from settlements throughout the state.

Recently, he said MMEA, together with other agencies, intensified operations to combat fish bombings in Sabah waters, including the deep seas, where there are offshore oil rigs, and shallow waters, which contain coral reefs.

But the challenges are real and eradicating the problem is easier said than done.

Take the *ikan sulit*, arguably the most popular grilled fish on any given day in markets or open air restaurants in most coastal



Fish bombers need only fertilisers, a bottle of kerosene, a detonator and fuse to make a bomb. PIC COURTESY OF SFB MALAYSIA

districts in Sabah, for example.

The fish, known as fusiliers, is sought after when salted and dried because of its texture.

To catch the fish, which is found mainly in coral reef areas, fishermen use spears which would leave wounds — a mark often used by retailers to show that they get their supply traditionally.

But not when the amount is plenty as that would need the use of many spears. Thus, fish bombs are used.

Fusiliers, apart from being used as the most common reference point in studies related to fish bombing, also found "fame" when it became a topic during proceedings in the Royal Commission of Inquiry on immigrants in Sabah in 2013.

In his testimony, Sabah Fisheries Department Legal and Enforcement Unit chief Mohd Yusoff Anthony had said 95 per cent of fusiliers and *anjanganjang* were caught using explosives.

He had testified that those caught would usually be charged under Section 26 (C) of the Fisheries Act 1985, for having knowledge that the fish they possess were caught using explosives.

There are other types of groupers, trevally, parrot fish, snappers that are the target of fish bombers.

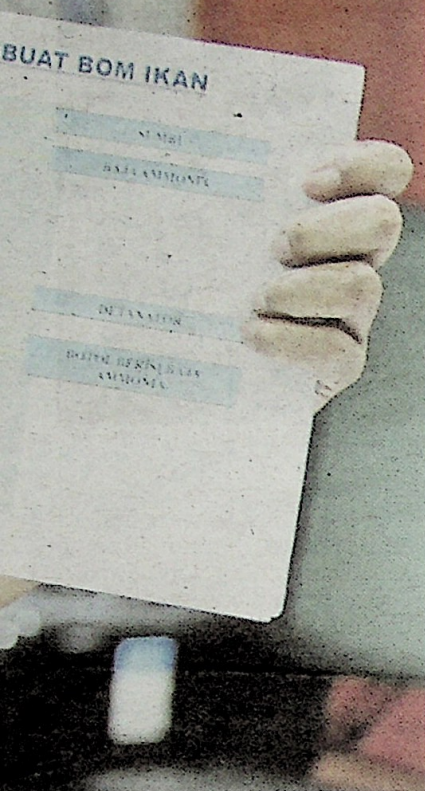
A fishmonger in Kota Kinabalu, Mohd Din Abdullah, 38, claimed he and others like him were victims of bombed fish suppliers.

There were times when they were supplied with bombed fish without their knowledge, and ended up bearing the consequences when they got caught by the authorities, he added.

"During checks, they will cut open the fish to identify whether its internal organs are damaged (by bombing)," said Din. "If they are confirmed as bombed fish, we



A bombed fish is soft to the touch and when cut out, internal bleeding can be seen. PIC COURTESY OF MARINE POLICE



Two suspected fish bombers are caught by marine police in waters off Tobo-Tobo, Semporna, last year. PIC COURTESY OF MARINE POLICE

more deterrent sentences).

"We recommend increasing the fines to between RM20,000 and RM100,000; or a jail term of between two years and 10 years, or both. We also propose giving two strokes of the cane to offenders," said Pajeri.

To combat fish bombing, he said the use of pump boats should be banned.

However, he said such a mode of transport was important for locals.

"These culprits use small boats to go to areas with coral reefs. I hope the state government will find better ways to curb (pump boats) in Sabah waters."



Mohd Din Abdullah



Terence Lim