

# 'IKAN BANDARAYA' 'CLEANS OUT' LOCAL ECOSYSTEM

The aquarium "cleaner" is discarded into rivers, and its habits contribute to erosion, causes havoc for fishermen

ESTHER LANDAU  
KUALA LUMPUR  
cnews@nstp.com.my

**T**HE presence of 'ikan bandaraya' (Amazon sailfin catfish with a scientific name of *Pterygoplichtys pardalis*) in Malaysian rivers and lakes has proven to disrupt the local ecosystem.

The alien fish can burrow into the ground or riverbanks, causing erosion as well as turning the waters murky.

According to the Johor Fisheries Department, in the long haul, the erosion would get worse if the fish is dumped into the local rivers in large quantity.

The department said the increase in this alien fish population has and will negatively impact the habitat of local freshwater fish in the long run.

"No local fish can live in polluted waters or rivers," it said.

"The alien fish undoubtedly also causes damage to gillnets and other fishing nets, hence affecting the fishermen's catch or income.

"Fishermen from Sungai Skudai in Johor have complained to the department claiming that they have been losing catch of local fish. They claimed that they caught a lot of ikan bandaraya instead.

"The species is increasing due to the declining water quality or rise in organic materials (substances) in the Skudai river. There is also no competitor fish in the contaminated aquatic system," said the department in a statement.

"According to a research conducted by the state's department in 2018, some 61 per cent of the

Amazon sailfin catfish were caught in Sungai Skudai, Johor Baru.

"This species of fish has high tolerance towards uncondusive environments and adapting to different water environments."

However, the Amazon sailfin catfish does not eat fish of its own kind or other fish — it only feeds on organic stacks and polluted aquatic substances, including weeds in the rivers.

"The Amazon sailfin catfish will form its group or colony in waters that contain high organic substances because of pollution or developments in that particular area.

"However, according to the department's research, this species

offish has yet to form its colony in the Malaysian rivers. This is not a predator fish."

But the fish, somehow, could also benefit the ecosystem as it feeds on the organic piles and other substances dumped from development sites into the rivers.

The Amazon sailfin catfish was brought into the country in the 1970s

for fish hobbyists and their aquarium purposes.

The department said in the aquarium system, the fish functioned as a "cleaner" as it cleans the base of the aquarium that has living organisms (algae) and other organic materials.

"When the fish grow bigger, it will be taken out of the aquarium because it has a natural habit of burrowing, thus damaging plants, decorations and causing injury to other fish species in the aquarium.

"Thus, it is a threat to the survival of other fish in the tank," it added.

Responding to a news report over the presence of "ikan ban-

## FACT FILE

### 1. THE AMAZON SAILFIN CATFISH OR "BANDARAYA FISH"

- Scientific name: *Pterygoplichtys pardalis*

- Native to the Amazon River Basin of Brazil and Peru

- The species is kept in local aquariums as a 'cleaner' fish.

- "Ikan bandaraya" got its name as it cleans the bottom of the aquarium and river basin.

- It is believed that they are dumped into Malaysian rivers and lakes by aquarium owners when it is too big for their fish tanks

### 2. WHAT DO THEY FEED ON?

- Aquatic plants

- Algae

- Organic stacks

- Fish larvae

- Leftover food for fish

- Dead fish

### 3. RISK TO ECOSYSTEM:

- Its burrowing activity can cause erosion of the river bottom.

- It consumes fish larvae and disrupts the sustainability of native fish population/habitats.

- It reproduces throughout the year with the highest peak during monsoon seasons.

INFOGRAPHIC NST

daraya", commonly referred to as janitor or municipal fish, in Johor rivers published by a Malay daily last month, the department has stressed that fish hobbyists should not dump the fish in local lakes or rivers when it has outlived its usefulness or is too big for the aquarium.

It also called on the public to seek advice from the department if there is a need to release the fish into the river.

The 'bandaraya' fish caught from Sungai Skudai. PIC BY NSTP AND WWW.UMPAN.COM

## FISHERIES ACT

### Don't dump 'municipal fish' into rivers and lakes

**KUALA LUMPUR:** The Fisheries Development Authority of Malaysia (LKIM) has called on the public not to throw or release the "ikan bandaraya", popular as an aquarium cleaner, into the rivers and lakes.

Adding his voice is Fisheries Department chairman Muhammad Faiz Fadzil who said the massive population of the alien fish had affected the fishermen's income where catch of local fish was scarce and fishing nets damaged.

He said the alien fish disrupted the rivers' ecosystem as it fed on aquatic plants which were also a source of food for local freshwater fish.

"The 'ikan bandaraya' also feeds on fish larvae, thus affecting the sustainability of local freshwater fish population.

"However, there is no data recorded on the population of the fish.

"This alien fish is kept in the

aquariums of fish hobbyists for its natural ability to clean the tank by eating the algae, leftover food, sediment and dead fish.

"The dumping of this fish into the rivers has increased its population which will have short and long effects such as damage to the fishery habitat, aquatic surroundings and biodiversity of the freshwater fish in Malaysia.

"It also indirectly affects the fishermen's income," Muhammad Faiz told the *New Straits Times*.

He added that a study on the matter would be done soon by the Fisheries Department and LKIM.

"LKIM also supports the recommendation by Fisheries Department to amend the Fisheries Rules of 1951 to ensure sustainability of natural resources and fish are protected," he said.