



Fresh fish being sold at the Semporna Fish Market on Saturday. PIC BY MOHD ADAM ARININ

SUSTAINABLE FISHING

'MORE INPUT NEEDED ON FISHERIES PLAN'

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By defining 'bycatch', we'll know what is taken out of oceans, says WWF-Malaysia

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STAKEHOLDERS should give suggestions about the government's effort to develop a fisheries management plan, including on the definition of "bycatch".

WWF-Malaysia marine policy manager Shantini Guna Rajan said there is no universally accepted definition for bycatch.

She said based on national fisheries statistics, there is no category for bycatch, but there is a category for trash fish, including juvenile and non-target fish that are supposed to be the future fish stock for the country.

"It is an umbrella term for accidental catch, non-target (marine species), but it is important to be clear what bycatch means for area management.

"From the management perspective, if we do not define them and lump threatened species with juvenile catch, we won't be able to distinguish what is being taken

out from the ocean.

"The management should be informed by science. Science will tell us how much we can take from the ocean, so that the ocean can naturally continue to produce fish and maintain the ecosystem."

She said the Fisheries Department was expected to come up with a new fisheries management plan in the next few years.

Shantini was speaking at a panel discussion on "Out of Sight, Out of Mind" at the Sabah Shark and Ray Initiative showcase at the Tanjung Aru Marine Ecosystem Centre here yesterday.

The one-hour discussion was also joined by Marine Research Foundation conservation officer Ho Kooi Chee, Lower Kinabatangan Segama Wetland Programme coordinator Neville Yapp and Kota Kinabalu Fishing Boat Owners secretary William Chong.

On the percentage of bycatch that commercial fishermen usually catch, Chong said it ranged between 15 and 30 per cent, depending on the season.

"For our vessels, we never do any target fishing. Whatever nets

that are up, it is pointless to throw (non-target) dead fish back into the sea, which is wastage and may cause pollution.

"Bycatch such as small fish that cannot be sold at markets will go to factories for aquaculture food, such as fertiliser for chicken and fish.

"By sending trash fish to factories, it will be fair for fishermen as they cannot sell the trash fish at

markets, but can still sell to factories," he said, adding that the value of bycatch was very low.

Ho said a trawler usually catches one or two sharks or rays in its net and some were juvenile and critically endangered species.

He said when that is multiplied by the number of catches, it had significant consequences.

"In the last two years, we have been trying to collect data

on locations where bycatch happens. Now we know where sharks and rays are caught in Sabah.

"By knowing these hotspots, we can suggest to fisheries (authorities) and fishing boat owners to avoid those areas to conserve the species."

Science will tell us how much we can take from the ocean, so that the ocean can naturally continue to produce fish and maintain the ecosystem.

SHANTINI GUNA RAJAN
WWF-Malaysia marine policy manager