



Divers at a coral reef in waters off Sipadan in 2019. The Semporna Professional Divers Association says increased diving activity may drive marine life away from the reefs. FILE PIC

## DISTURBING MARINE LIFE

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# Too many Sipadan dive permits, says group

**SEMPORNA:** The Semporna Professional Divers Association (SPDA) here expressed concern over the increasing number of diving permits for Sipadan issued to tour operators.

“Previously, the Sipadan permit was issued to only 12 tour operators. It has been issued to 12 more operators in the last two years, increasing the number to 24. Surprisingly on Aug 30, the Sipadan Island regulatory management committee added 13 operators,” said the association.

SPDA said having 24 operators

was detrimental to marine life in Sipadan, and it would get worse with 37 operators, resulting in 254 visitors per day to the island.

The association said with 37 boats moving around Sipadan every day, marine life would avoid its reefs and go deeper into the sea.

This would threaten Sipadan’s status as one of the top 10 dive sites in the world.

“SPDA urges the authorities and the Tourism, Culture and Environment Ministry to take action on this matter for the sake of protecting our gems.

“The uniqueness of Sipadan beneficial to the economy and provides jobs to Malaysians. It is also why Sabah, especially Semporna, has become a choice destination for foreign tourists.”

SPDA said the short notice of the new ruling, which would take effect this Saturday, also affected existing dive operators, which had been booked by divers for the next few months.

The Tourism, Culture and Environment Ministry and Sabah Parks have not responded to requests for comment.