

OIL SLICK A BLOW TO FISHERMEN

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Pollution can render fishing tools useless, warns Sg Rengit association chairman

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FOR the past week, fishermen in Sungai Rengit have done something they rarely do—stay away from the sea.

Last week's oil spill at Singapore's Pasir Panjang Terminal has drifted into Malaysian waters, affecting the livelihoods of those who depend on the sea.

"Our fishing tools, such as nets,

ropes and buoys are not cheap," Sungai Rengit Fishermen's Welfare Association chairman Rosli Mohd Ali, 56, told the *New Straits Times*.

"If they are contaminated with oil they cannot be used anymore and must be discarded."

The inability to work is a massive blow to Rosli and the other 150 fishermen in the area.

"Fishermen can't fish all year round, so what we make needs to be kept aside."

Fishermen here typically sell



A cleanup crew sieving out oil slicks on a beach near Sungai Rengit, Johor Baru, last Friday. BERNAMA PIC

their catch to middlemen in Pontian, who export them to Singapore. On a good day, they can make RM1,000.

But this came to an abrupt halt after oil slicks drifted into Pengerang waters on June 18 — four days after a collision of two vessels in Singapore led to 400 tonnes of low-sulphur oil leaking into the sea.

"Our daily operations cost a lot. We need to fuel our boat, and pay our crew members," Rosli said, adding that each boat was manned by a crew of five people.

"We are losing our income daily, and that will just add to our debts."

He said representatives of the

vessels involved in the collision have met them and taken their details.

The Fisheries Department is also helping them lodge police reports to facilitate claims.

Yesterday, Minister in the Prime Minister's Department (Law and Institutional Reform) Datuk Seri Azalina Othman said the government will request United Kingdom-based insurer British Marine to compensate fishermen affected by the oil spill.

Johor Agriculture, Agro-based Industry and Rural Development Committee chairman Datuk Zahari Sarip said the state government had approved funds to help the fishermen.