

ENCROACHMENT BY FISHERMEN

REASONS FOR VIETNAMESE 'SURGE'

Limited security patrols, damage to Vietnamese seabed among factors

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VIETNAMESE trawlers encroach on Malaysian waters partly because it is less stringently policed compared with the sea around the Paracels and Spratlys archipelago, where Chinese forces have a strong presence.

Vietnamese fishermen are also venturing further out into the open sea after over-harvesting, dredging and the building of artificial islands had damaged 160 sq km of their country's seabed.

A fisheries industry expert said poaching had also resulted in the depletion of Vietnam's fish stock by as much as 70 per cent over the past 20 years.

Fisheries Department director-general Datuk Munir Mohd Nawi said these had caused the Viet-

namese fishermen to trespass on Malaysian waters to plunder some RM6 billion in marine resources a year.

The worst part was that the illegal fishermen used dragnets that destroy the priceless marine ecosystem including corals.

Vietnam's fishing industry employs more than 4.5 million people and is the world's fourth largest exporter of fish after China, Norway and Thailand.

The Vietnamese Association of Seafood Exporters and Producers (Vasep) reported that the country's catch amounted to US\$10 billion (RM41 billion) a year.

Former Maritime Institute of Malaysia (Mima) director-general retired First Admiral Datuk Chin Yoon Chin said there were more than 80,000 trawlers operated by Vietnamese fishermen.

"Their favourite catch are the expensive bluefin tuna and equally high-priced yellowfin tuna. Other popular ones are grouper, squid, cockles and shellfish, crabs, shrimps, snapper, lobsters, oysters and baby sharks."

A Bluefin tuna reportedly sells for US\$200 per kg, while yellowfin tuna can fetch US\$8 per kg. Earlier this year, a 277.6kg



A Malaysia Marine Parks Department diver cutting a fishing net that can cause damage to corals on the seabed in waters off Besut, Terengganu, last year. (Inset) Retired First Admiral Datuk Chin Yoon Chin. FILE PIC

bluefin tuna was sold for US\$3 million in Japan.

"The extraction of this natural resource in the South China Sea has been the cause of many international spats recently.

"The area is biologically diverse and home to 3,365 species of fish. It is also one of the five most productive fishing zones in the world with regard to total annual marine production.

"It helps the coastal economy and is crucial for the export trade

and food security of 12 countries and territories it borders."

Chin added that since 1998, Vietnam had offered US\$65 million in economic incentives and preferential loans to its offshore fishermen to upgrade their vessels with powerful engines and modern equipment.

"Private businesses and foreign-invested businesses linked to Vasep are also given tax reductions during the first three years of offshore fisheries busi-

ness," said Chin.

He said there were 31 ports from where the Vietnamese trawlers operated.

However, only seven could accommodate large vessels equipped with 400hp engines — Lach Bang and Lach Hoi in Thanh Hoa province; Cua Hoi in Nghe An province; Xuan Pho in Ha Tinh province; Song Gianh in Quang Binh province; Con Co in Quang Tri province; and Thuan Phuoc in Da Nang province.