

'REPORT DISCOVERY OF SHIPWRECKS'

Those withholding information can be fined RM2,000, says Sabah Marine Dept director

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THE people are required to report to the authorities any discovery of shipwrecks here.

Failure to do so would see them being fined RM2,000 under Section 211(b) of the Merchant Shipping Ordinance 1960, said state Marine Department director Norjipin Saidi.

He said this was to ensure that

no one, especially divers, kept the information to themselves so that they could salvage or retrieve items from the shipwrecks.

He said the department had recorded 30 shipwrecks in the state.

Seven shipwrecks lie on the seabed off Kudat and Sandakan, five off Tawau, four off Kota Kinabalu and one each off Lahad Datu, Semporna, Sipitang, Beaufort, Menumbok and Kuala Penyu.

Norjipin said the department was informed of the shipwrecks by the public.

He said the department was working with the Museum and Fisheries Departments and the Malaysia Maritime Enforcement Agency on shipwreck management.

"The Museum Department is in charge of shipwrecks that are

more than 50 years old.

"As for the Fisheries Department, it will use shipwrecks as artificial reefs (to attract fish).

"Previously, it helped MMEA in the sinking of KM *Kuraman*, off Tunku Abdul Rahman Park."

After the controversial salvaging work on World War 2 Japanese shipwrecks in Usukan, Kota Belud, last year, he said the department did not receive any work application to remove them.

"Under the same ordinance, the department can take possession and dispose of unclaimed shipwrecks if there is no response from the owners."

On the issuance of permits for wreck diving, he said it was not under the department's jurisdiction, adding that the department was responsible for ensuring the safety of navigation of vessels at sea.



Divers exploring the Rice Bowl wreck in Usukan Bay waters recently.

MMEA sinks warships to make artificial reefs

KOTA KINABALU: The Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency (MMEA) is not only tasked with maintaining law and order, but it also helps with protecting marine biodiversity.

Over the years, MMEA had decommissioned three of its vessels and sunk them off Sabah and Labuan waters to serve as artificial reefs.

On May 9, 2013, the Labuan Marine Department put two MMEA's vessels — KM *Layang-Layang* and KM *Mantanani* — to rest on the seabed off Kuraman Island near Labuan.

This was followed by the decommissioning of 52-year-old KM *Kuraman*, which was sunk at Tunku Abdul Rahman Park here on Sept 17, 2016.

In supporting the move, Sabah MMEA and Labuan Regional director First Admiral Datuk Mohd



Divers from Sabah Parks inspecting an artificial reef. PIC BY AVILA GERALDINE

Zubil Mat Som said sinking warships to make artificial reefs should continue to be implemented if it benefited the environment.

"At the same time, it helps boost marine biodiversity. This will boost tourism and promote recreational diving activities. I think it is one of the ways to respect the historical value of the agency's assets."

He said MMEA, through its asset development plan, planned to terminate the services of its obsolete assets to enable the acquisition of new ones. The plan will empower MMEA operations, as well as maintain an optimum level of operating assets."

On KM *Kuraman*, Zubil said the patrol vessel, which belonged to the navy, was the first maritime enforcement shipwreck

to be turned into a scuba diving attraction at Tunku Abdul Rahman Park.

Built by Vosper Ltd in Portsmouth, England in 1964, KM *Kuraman* was initially commissioned as KD *Rencong* when it served in the navy.

It was equipped with two 40/70mm Bofors guns and a detector radar.

Although the 31.4m-long and 7m-wide ship was not equipped with torpedoes, guided missiles and defensive launchers, the vessel used its speed to defend itself from enemies.

It was deployed to Sandakan during its service in the navy.

In 2005, Zubil said, KD *Rencong* was handed to MMEA and was renamed KM *Kuraman*.

It was used for enforcement and rescue operations in waters

off Kota Kinabalu to Kudat.

"The vessel was involved in Op Daulat to curb the aggression of a Filipino armed group under the leadership of self-proclaimed Sulu Sultan Jamalul Kiram III in 2013.

"Monitoring (of KM *Kuraman* wreck) must be conducted to ensure its structure remains intact and nothing is stolen by stakeholders.

"There is a need to promote the shipwreck and its history as it can generate income for the tourism sector in the state."

On KM *Kuraman*'s last operation before it was decommissioned, Zubil said the vessel was involved in the East Pluto Operation to assist the Eastern Sabah Security Command in enforcement within the Eastern Sabah Safety Zone.