

VIETNAMESE BOATS TARGET SABAH

26 cases of encroachment by foreign vessels since 2015

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THE Sabah and Labuan Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency (MMEA) has recorded 26 cases of encroachment by foreign vessels into the state's waters to fish from 2015 to date.

The majority of cases – 20 of them – involved Vietnamese boats, followed by three boats each from the Philippines and Indonesia.

Sabah and Labuan MMEA director Rear Admiral Datuk Mohd Zubil Mat Som told the New Straits Times Press that this year, 11 cases related to Vietnamese boats were taken to court, involving 132 Vietnamese nationals, with a total boat seizure valued at RM22 million.

"Some of the cases have been charged and sentenced under Section 41(1)(b) of the Fisheries Act, fined between RM15,000 and RM60,000, and the seized boats destroyed and sunk," he said.

He was responding to a question on foreign vessel encroachment on state waters that was becoming rampant and affecting the livelihoods of local fishermen.

Zubil said the boats were seized under Op Pagar Laut and Op Khas in Sabah and Labuan waters.

He said some of the boats appeared to have local licences, but the documents were dubious or had expired. The boats also used the joint trawling method, which is not allowed.

"We are always guarding the waters to prevent encroachment, but some boats have local licences.

"The foreign fishermen use false documentation," he said, adding that there were also 55 foreign-assembled vessels, mostly made in Vietnam, but legally registered as local fishing boats by domestic fishermen in the state.

Asked if there was a transfer of the catch at the nation's borders, Zubil said foreign fishermen admitted to this, based on inter-



Rear Admiral Datuk Mohd Zubil Mat Som

rogations following a special operation in July.

"The main vessel stays at the border to avoid being caught."

He said the authorities would continue to monitor this, including locally-registered Vietnamese-made vessels.

"We will conduct checks and work with other agencies.

"It takes more than maritime enforcement to overcome this issue."



Vietnamese fishermen detained by Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency (MMEA) in an operation off Tanjung Kubong, Labuan, last month. PIC COURTESY OF MMEA



Some of the 26 Vietnamese nationals, aged between 15 and 48, who claimed trial at the Kota Kinabalu Sessions Court recently to using two boats suspected of illegal fishing off Pulau Mengalum. PIC BY EDMUND SAMUNTING

QUICK FACTS

26

foreign vessel encroachment from 2015 to date

20

boats from Vietnam

3

each from Indonesia and the Philippines

7

Vietnamese boats detained involving

132

boat crews during special ops this year

RM2m

estimated value of each Vietnamese boat