

The Filipino fishermen and dynamite fishing activities in the marine area of Sabah, Malaysia

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Abstract Even though the usage of dynamite in fishing is banned in Malaysia, it continues to be used in the coastal areas of Sabah. Despite of many negative consequences of dynamite fishing, it is used in fishing industry by greedy and unscrupulous individuals who aims to make short-term profit. This paper attempts to illustrate the methods of dynamite fishing, the processes involved in dynamite fishing activity and also its impact on marine lives in the waters of Sabah. Even though enforcement is done continually, this phenomena is difficult to contain. The finding of this study in a way reveals that when there is a demand for dynamite fishes, there will be a supply. Dynamite fishes are made available in markets causing consumer to continue to buy these fishes. On one hand, lack of knowledge to differentiate between blasted fishes and fishes caught using ordinary methods causes the demand to prevail. On the other hand, lower prices of blasted fishes create a demand. Thus, educating the general public on the impacts of buying blasted fishes is important. At the same time, heavier punishment should be imposed and monitoring should be done persistently in order to curb this problem.

Keywords Filipino fishermen – dynamite fishing – Sabah – ecosystem

INTRODUCTION

In the early days, fishing was the way of life among the coastal communities of Southeast Asia. It was their main source of food. After the capitalist economic system was integrated into the society, fishing became a source of profit. Fish became more important than the needs of the family.

To obtain greater catch, several methods in fishing were modified. Techniques in fishing practiced in developed countries such as trawling were introduced to and accepted by fishermen in the Southeast Asian region. The introduction of modern equipment in the fishing industry enabled fishermen to catch fish in the deep sea and allowed them to work longer to catch more. However, the natural geographical character of the coastal area in Sabah, dominated by corals in some parts, limited the use of modern equipments like trawlers.

Because of the rich fish resources near the shore, independent and sponsor-dependent fishermen want to exploit it, even if the methods are dangerous and

a threat to themselves as well. One of the methods identified and banned by the government is the use of explosives in fishing.

Mati ikan kerana umpan (fish dies because of the bait) is an old saying among Malay fisherman. However this saying is not true anymore, as numerous fish die because of other methods such as fish trawl, drift trawl, pull trawl, among others. This paper explains the *matinya ikan kerana ledakan* (fish dies because of explosives) currently happening in Sabah, particularly in several fishing villages such as Kudat, Kota Marudu, Semporna, Kunak, Lahat Datu and Sandakan. This is also happening in some fishing villages in the Federal Territory of Labuan.

In the areas mentioned above, one of the methods, which is easy to use and earns more profit to fishermen, is the use of explosives known as *bombing*. According to several villagers, this method has been introduced by fishermen from the Philippines in the early 1960s. These Filipino fishermen have migrated to the coastal areas of Sabah during the administration of Tun Mustapha where majority of them came from