

SIDP News

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Community action for sustainable use and conservation of coral reefs

Net closing in on fish bombers

Fish bombers are still active in the Tun Sakaran Marine Park (TSMP), but the chase is on, thanks to an awareness campaign and special investigation launched by SIDP in December 2007. Determination to stamp out destructive fishing was sparked by continued evidence of this destructive activity, including direct hits on one of the permanent coral reef monitoring sites in the Park.

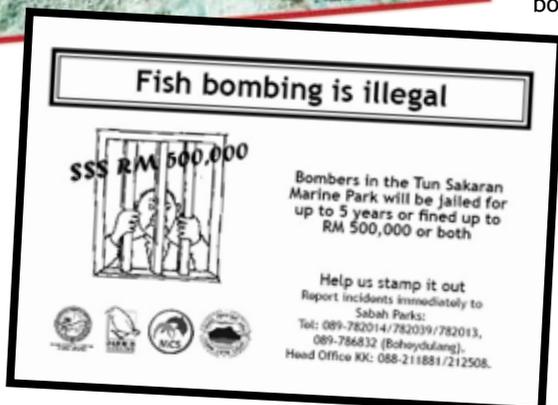


Acknowledging that providing complete surveillance on 100 km of reef by patrolling from dawn to dusk is a virtually impossible task with the limited resources available, it was decided that additional, different, tactics were needed. A two-pronged campaign was devised, consisting of an intensive awareness campaign, combined with investigations to track down the culprits.



The Fish Bombing Awareness Campaign involved the production of 2,000 postcards illustrating the disastrous impacts of fish blasting on the reef ecosystem and human lives, and the penalties imposed on people who carry out this activity in the Park. A clear message on the postcard also appealed to people to report incidents to Sabah Parks.

The postcards have been distributed to most households in the Park, and also to known fish bombing 'hotspots' elsewhere in the area. The investigative work being carried out in parallel with the postcard campaign is providing some very useful leads and a much clearer idea of where some of the fish bombers are operating from. The net is definitely beginning to close.



Helen Brunt and Irwan Mustapa from SIDP discussing the fish bombing problem with one of the Park residents



SIDP Symposium 29th - 31st January 2008

Status and Management of Coral Reefs in Sabah

Open Forum following the Session on *Biodiversity Conservation and Resource Management*.

From the left Asmizah Ismail (Universiti Malaysia Sabah), Irwanshah Mustapa (Semporna Islands Darwin Project), Dr Nick Pilcher (Marine Research Foundation), Professor Dr Ridwan Abdul Rahman (UMS), Boniface Jintony (Department of Fisheries), Dr Annadel Cabanban and Yoke Lee Lee (WWF Malaysia).



Although working primarily within the Tun Sakaran Marine Park, SIDP is committed to promoting reef conservation more widely and to raising awareness of issues that affect reef health. In order to pursue these aims, and in support of *International Year of the Reef 2008*, SIDP organised a Symposium that provided the opportunity for people from a wide range of backgrounds to come together and share information about Sabah's reefs, highlight issues of concern and discuss ways that problems could be tackled.



Meeting at the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Environment to discuss the outcomes and recommendations from the Symposium.

From the left: Paul Basintal (Director, Sabah Parks), Helen Brunt (SIDP Project Officer), Elizabeth Wood (SIDP Project Leader), Datuk Masidi Manjun (Minister), Puan Suzannah Liaw (Permanent Secretary) and Mary Malangking (Head of Research and Tourism Development Division).



International Year of the Reef 2008 is a year-long campaign of events and initiatives hosted by governments, individuals, organizations, corporations and schools around the world to promote conservation action and strengthen long-term support for coral reef conservation. <http://www.iyor.org/>

The Symposium was held over two days at the Magellan Sutera Harbour Resort in Kota Kinabalu with sponsorship from the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Environment, and the third day involved a Field Trip to Tunku Abdul Rahman Park. Around 100 delegates attended the main proceedings and there were 28 presentations covering a range of topics, such as the status and health of Sabah's reefs, use and management of reef resources, water quality and its effects on reefs, artificial reefs and reef rehabilitation, reef tourism, managing Marine Protected Areas, community initiatives and awareness programmes.

Sabah's reefs are of national and international significance because of their location within the global epicenter for marine biodiversity known as the 'Coral Triangle'. But research spanning decades shows that many of Sabah's reefs have been badly damaged by destructive fishing and that this activity is continuing despite the best efforts of the Department of Fisheries and other agencies to bring it to a halt. There was considerable discussion about the need for government, enforcement agencies and communities to work together on this problem.

Over-exploitation of fish and other reef resources is also of concern throughout Sabah. Underwater surveys at a range of sites reveal that populations of target species in reef areas open to fishing are very low and that some species have been made locally extinct. Typically, sharks and large groupers are absent and populations of even medium-sized (20cm) rock cod, snappers, sweetlips and other species of value is very low. The field surveys are backed by research both at Pulau Banggi and in the Tun Sakaran Marine Park, Semporna, where fishermen consistently indicate that fish catches have declined in recent years and that they have to go further offshore to find important commercial species.

Shark's fins, fresh shark and shark jaws for sale in Semporna. A combination of over-fishing and low reproductive rate has caused drastic declines in populations.



E. Wood MCS



But it's not all bad news. Populations of valuable reef species are high in areas protected from fishing, such as Sipadan and Lankayan and these areas are providing vitally important refuges where fish can grow to maturity and breed.



Coral trout, Sipadan

Fish populations are also quite healthy in the Tunku Abdul Rahman Marine Park off Kota Kinabalu, and are gradually building up in the no-take zone in the Bodgaya lagoon in Tun Sakaran Marine Park.



Sediment plume, Kota Kinabalu

E. Wood MCS

The other major concern is water quality. Delegates at the Symposium heard about detailed research carried out in Sabah to show how pollutants such as sediment, sewage and other organic wastes are entering coastal waters. Unfortunately, nearly all Sabah's reefs are at risk because they are on the coastal shelf and well within range of sediment plumes. There was a warning from one of the experts present that if current trends continue, levels of pollution will double in Sabah's coastal waters in the next 20 years. This could have a devastating effect on the reefs. However, if the government push for compliance to guidelines (for example retention of a 30m belt of vegetation along river banks) then pollution could be reduced by 10-50%.



Semporna, 2008



E. Wood MCS



The Symposium Field Trip

took place in the Tunku Abdul Rahman Park, where we carried out a beach and underwater clean-up at Pulau Manukan, and had a dive on the reef off the southern end of Pulau Sulug. The extent of the litter problem in Sabah's coastal waters was amply illustrated by the fact that it took only an hour or so to pile a small truck full of discarded and washed-up rubbish. Much of the litter consisted of plastic materials such as bags and water bottles, but there were also many fragmented polystyrene containers and a wide range of other items, including glass containers, aerosol cans, fishing lines, slippers (flipflops) and even nappies.

Although diversity of marine species in the Park is exceptionally good, numbers of fish and other species of value is very low because of heavy fishing pressure over many decades. The main strategy being used to promote recovery of over-exploited populations in TSMP is the establishment of 'no-take' zones in which capture of fish and other animals is prohibited. This allows stocks to build up, breed and re-populate adjacent areas.

Seaweed farming initiative for Bajau Laut

One of the main issues in establishing no-take zones is that people who previously used the area for fishing can no longer do so. They either have to find new fishing grounds or seek alternative ways of making a living.

Bajau Laut communities living in the Park are particularly reliant on marine resources in the area. Currently, they have few other job opportunities apart from fishing, and so a programme has been launched to train this community in seaweed farming.



Basir Bin Amat from SIDP explaining seaweed farming techniques to some of the workshop participants.

Seaweed farming is environmentally-friendly, low cost, ideally suited for 'sea-orientated' people such as the Bajau Laut and should provide a good income which more than compensates for the loss of fishing grounds.



The workshop was held at the Sabah Parks HQ on Boheydulang, where there was space on the beach to practice setting out lines and tying on seedlings.



H. Brunt SIDP

Concrete blocks for anchoring the seaweed lines being made with the help of the SIDP workshop team.



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