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Fishermen told to land catch at local jetties

Ahmad Suffian

KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - The Agriculture Ministry today warned fishermen landing their catch in Thailand that they would be "blacklisted" and their annual deep-sea fishing permits not renewed.

Deputy Minister Tengku Datuk Mahmud Tengku Mansor said the Ministry would no longer grant reprieve to fishermen who did not use jetties in Terengganu, Kedah and Pahang.

"The Ministry views such practices seriously as many trawlers which operate in Malaysian waters are hesitant about landing their catch at our jetties.

"Instead, they proceed to Thailand to unload their catch of which a portion is imported here. This has indirectly caused an increase in our annual fish import bill which stands at about RM100 million," he said.

Tengku Mahmud said this at a Press conference to announce a fund-raising dinner for the Ministry's ongoing "Love Our Reefs" campaign at Wisma Tani.

The event will be held together with a regional diving equipment and travel exposition that is being organised by the Diving Equipment and Marketing Association at Putra World Trade Centre from Tuesday to Friday, next week.

Also present was co-organiser Malaysian Sport Diving Association's president Mukhriz Mahathir.

Tengku Mahmud said the Fisheries Department would monitor local fishermen and encourage them to land their catch at the jetties.

Malaysia imports up to one million tonnes of fish annually from neighbouring countries, especially Thailand.

"Besides undermining our economy, such practices will also increase the country's foreign exchange deficit," he said.

Tengku Mahmud said the "Love Our Reefs" campaign which was launched in December, 1995, had instilled awareness in the public on the importance of preserving marine life.

"Eco-tourism has huge potential to be developed into a money-making concern if Malaysians are made aware of the importance of preserving the country's beautiful marine life.

"Foreign countries have already begun to derive benefits from preservation efforts. Malaysians should follow suit," he said, adding that enforcement officers would also keep track of fishermen who damaged reefs by using illegal fishing methods.

Mukhriz said all Malaysians, especially schoolchildren, must be exposed to underwater marine life to appreciate nature's creation.

"They need to understand the importance of preserving it. They should also be made to realise that the unhealthy habit of throwing rubbish in the streets or in drains will have an adverse effect on marine life.

"When they throw rubbish everywhere, it ends up in drains and rivers and ultimately enters the sea where the coral reefs are located.

"They must be made aware of the consequences of their actions," he said.

He also unveiled a logo with the words "Our Sea...Our Children's Heritage" for the campaign.

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