



**UNIT KOMUNIKASI KORPORAT JABATAN
PERIKANAN MALAYSIA
BERITA PERIKANAN HARI INI**

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Fishers, businesses and consumers are the cornerstones of WWF-Malaysia's 'boat to bowl' conservation strategy.—Mazidi Ghani/WWF-Malaysia and Canva



Saving our seafood, from boat to bowl

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Chitra has almost 20 years of experience in environmental conservation. Her work has covered a range of areas, including community and business mobilisation, land use planning, fisheries management, engagement with government agencies and policy development. —Rahana Husin/WWF-Malaysia

By CHITRA DEVI

MALAYSIA, a nation blessed with rich marine biodiversity, has long relied on its fisheries sector as a vital source of food and livelihood. Our coastal communities depend heavily on the health of our oceans, providing over a third of the country's animal protein and supporting the livelihoods of more than 120,000 fishers and fish farmers.

Despite its importance, our fisheries face a looming challenge. Overfishing, habitat destruction, and high consumption have drastically depleted fish populations, throwing our marine ecosystems out of balance and endangering our food security. While statistics show a stable rate of fisheries production and a steady 1% contribution to gross domestic product (GDP), we face an important challenge – the decline of demersal fisheries by 88%, a crucial part of our marine resources.

Addressing this issue presents huge opportunities and allows us to create a more sustainable and prosperous future.

The state of our fisheries

Picture this: There are no more fish in our seas. That's the grim possibility we will face if we don't act now.

Under the "business-as-usual" scenario, Malaysia's fisheries production continues to

meet national targets. However, these targets are quantitative and not a reflection of the real shift in the quality and composition of fish caught. Our demersal fish biomass and densities have dropped by 88% as compared to the virgin stock levels in the 1960s.

2020 data shows Malaysians consume an average of 53kg of seafood per capita, which

is way above South-East Asia's average of 40kg and the world's average of 20kg.

With the drastic decline of wild fish stock, we must find alternative solutions. Sustainable aquaculture is now recognised as a solution to address the gap between declining wild fish stock and growing demand for seafood. In truth, non-responsible conven-



Offshore fish farming with high-density polyethylene (HDPE) cages in Kukup, Johor Baru.—Justice Khor/WWF-Malaysia

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tional aquaculture has numerous environmental challenges including a high reliance on wild fish in aquaculture feed, causing further pressure on our fisheries.

If we don't act now and proceed with "business-as-usual" practices, our fish stocks may not survive another 30 years.

Addressing this emergent food security crisis, at WWF-Malaysia, we devise a "boat to bowl" conservation approach that unites stakeholders and partners across sectors. In support of the Department of Fisheries Malaysia, this comprehensive strategy aims to promote sustainable fisheries and aquaculture, as well as responsible seafood consumption - which in turn secures seafood supply and supports the livelihoods of coastal communities.

Swimming in innovation

One exciting aspect of our "boat to bowl" strategy is the collaboration between aquaculture

industry stakeholders, including farmers, government officials, and researchers. By working together, we aim to develop the industry sustainably while protecting important habitats, using responsible aquaculture tools, and adopting climate-resilient technologies.

One such innovation is offshore farming with high-density polyethylene (HDPE) cages.

Despite relatively higher investment, these robust cages which are designed for long-term use in harsh marine environments, offer a promising solution for food security and climate change adaptation.

Another exciting initiative is our pilot project using circular economy principles to improve aquaculture practices and reduce pressure on wild fish stocks.

Through a partnership between the aquaculture and hospitality sectors, food waste from hotels is diverted from landfills into a bioconversion facility. The facility then produces protein from black soldier fly larvae, which

is used in aquaculture feed.

This reduces the dependency on wild fish protein and promotes sustainability - a true win-win, turning waste into wealth.

WWF-Malaysia continues to support the Department of Fisheries Malaysia in the implementation of the National Fisheries Development Plan 2021-2030. By collaborating with coastal communities, the fishing and aquaculture industry, and seafood buyers, we assist the Department of Fisheries Malaysia in improving sustainable fisheries practices at both regional and national levels.

This, in turn, benefits our local communities and businesses, consumers and the environment.

Catching challenges and reeling in opportunities

Despite these efforts, challenges persist. Sustainable seafood suppliers are limited in Malaysia.

Consumers can't buy sustainable seafood in part due to local businesses avoiding sustainable seafood purchases caused by higher costs and supply chain bottlenecks.

Zooming out regionally, the majority of the sustainable seafood production from the Asia-Pacific region is exported to other countries. As this scenario continues, it becomes more challenging to promote domestic uptake of sustainable seafood.

However, opportunities are abound. The local hospitality and fine dining industries, for example, are ripe for exploring sustainable seafood sourcing.

Sustainable seafood sourcing practices vary across industries in Malaysia. The hospitality industry, driven by international hotel brands aligning with global sustainability goals, is more receptive to sustainable seafood sourcing.

The retail industry too has significant room for improvement. As evidenced by a mere 25% score in WWF-Malaysia's *Sustainable Retailers Scorecard 2019* report, every two out of five assessed retailers established a seafood procurement policy that avoids sourcing endangered species.

The opportunities are ready for the retail industry to reel in and see the benefits of sustainability.

Making waves in conservation

Can you picture your favourite seafood dish disappearing from the menu?

The production, consumption, and waste of food are the single largest human pressure on nature.

Conserving marine resources requires efforts to sustain seafood production, improve seafood sourcing, make responsible seafood choices and reduce food waste. Both consumers and businesses play crucial roles in this effort.

Daily consumption habits, business operations, and event planning should all reflect a commitment to food sustainability. For example, both businesses and consumers should avoid endangered species and seafood listed in the "Avoid" category of WWF-Malaysia's *Save Our Seafood Guide*, opting instead for those in the "Best Choice" list.

However, the best form of consumption is always in moderation.

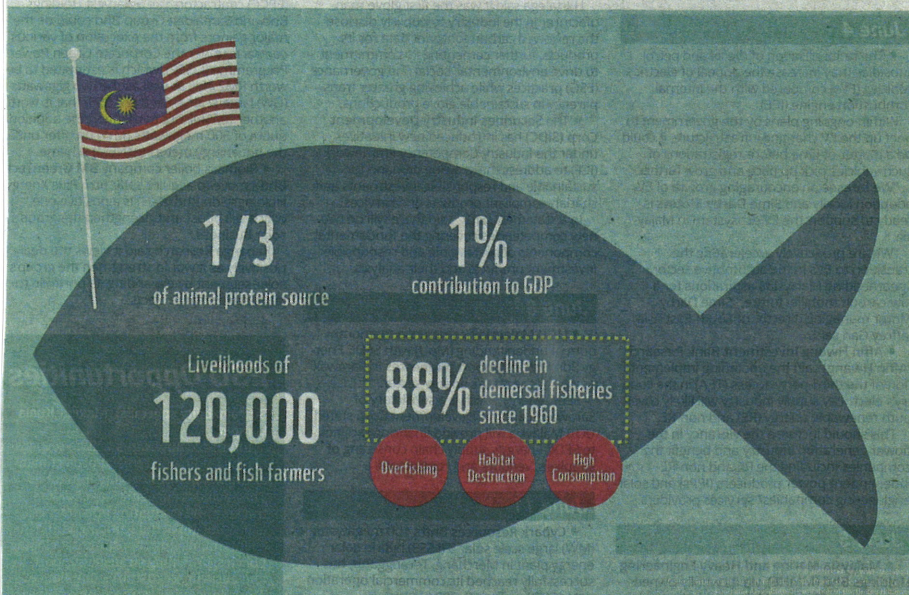
Dive into action

Our nation's future depends on the health of our oceans. Let's make responsible choices, support sustainable practices and work together to ensure our seas remain abundant for generations to come.

So, next time you enjoy a seafood meal, remember its journey from boat to bowl and the efforts to keep our oceans vibrant. Let's reel in the positive changes together. Can you imagine a world without the taste of fresh seafood? Neither can we.

So join the movement, make a difference, and let's keep our oceans teeming with life.

For more insights and ways to get involved, dive into the resources available at SaveOurSeafood.my. It's time we all become champions for our seas.



(Above) Diagram 1: The state of Malaysia's fisheries. Source: Fisheries Research Institute, Department of Fisheries Malaysia and Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations. —Justice Khor/WWF-Malaysia

(Right) Small-scale fisheries are often the main source of livelihood for coastal communities. —Mazidi Ghani/WWF-Malaysia



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Save Our Seafood



Chitra Devi is WWF-Malaysia's Marine Programme leader. The views expressed here are the writer's own.