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For Environmental Justice

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Media Statement

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COCKLE BREEDING GROUNDS THREATENED

Sahabat Alam Malaysia (SAM) urges the government to investigate and take immediate action to address the problem of imminent threat and diminishing cockle breeding grounds.

The long-standing problem since 10 years ago, is not only affecting the livelihood of fishermen and supply for consumers but has resulted in a price increase of cockles sold in markets. A market survey by SAM found that the price of cockles has increased to RM14.00/kg in some areas.

Fishermen and cockle breeders in some states have complained that their yield has decreased to 50 percent due to the dwindling stock of cockles. Among the causes of dwindling stock are marine pollution due to chemical waste discharge, destruction of mangrove forests, use of destructive gears that damage sea bed and cockle spats smuggled out of the country.

In addition, some natural breeding grounds of cockles have been destroyed due to use of modern catching equipment and the implementation of aquaculture projects that damage and pollute the area.

In December 2017, the media reported that in Kuala Sepetang near Taiping, Perak there were previously 100 locations that were target areas for fishermen to collect cockles but now only 15 locations remain because other locations have been affected by pollution or sewage sludge leaving the cockles here unable to reproduce.

In Lekir, Sitiawan, 200 coastal fishermen in Kampung Sungai Tiram objected to the Cockle Farm Project planned in their fishing zone because the project involved the natural breeding area of cockles and could threaten their source of income if the project was to continue (Harian Metro – 5 June 2020).

Meanwhile in Melaka, about 30 coastal fishers in Kuala Sebatu, Melaka Tengah District protested a cockle culture project fearing that it would threaten natural cockle spats and their source of income (Sinar Harian – 16 November 2019). According to the fishermen here, the area thrives with cockle spats and is abundant with cockles.

The cockle culture project here was approved by the state government in 2016 but was not supported by the Fisheries Department and local fishers. SAM had supported the fishers objections and recommendations by the Melaka Fisheries Department that the state government revokes the temporary occupancy licence (TOL) that was issued to the company to ensure the natural cockle breeding area and welfare of the fishermen are protected.

SAM urges the state governments and land offices to reject any development and aquaculture projects proposed in coastal areas, particularly in natural cockle breeding areas and mangrove forests to protect these areas and address the problem of destruction to breeding areas and marine pollution.

The Department of Fisheries and Fisheries Development Authority of Malaysia (LKIM) need to pay serious attention to marine resource management. Marine pollution in recent years has also been a major concern as it is reported that the polluted waters retard the growth of cockles or caused their death.

SAM hopes that departments and agencies under the Ministry of Agriculture and Agro-based Industry, Ministry of Environment and Water including the local authorities will take integrated action to address the cause of the problem. Strict law enforcement is needed to ensure that the cockle grounds in the country's waters are conserved and sustained.

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