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## Fish stocks drying up, lament traders selling salted seafood

**PETALING JAYA:** Traders are facing a shortage of raw materials to make dried or salted seafood, despite the blessing of hot weather that shortens drying times for these raw materials.

Trader Ashari Samingon, 55, said the dried fish shipments he received has been reduced by about half due to the drop in fishermen's catch.

"For dried fish such as ikan gelama jeruk and gelama belah, it only takes about one day to dry, and as we are using a glass house

to dry our products, the weather does not impact production. It has essentially been affected by the fish stocks we received," said Ashari.

However, it seems that the demand for salted fish has also dropped after Hari Raya Aidilfitri.

"The sale of our dried fish has also dropped after the Hari Raya season by about 70% as the purchasing power has decreased a lot since then," he said, adding that he sells his dried fish to 400 shops around the Klang Valley, namely

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Kuala Langat, Klang, Shah Alam, and Bangi.

For another sea product trader in Batu Kurau, Perak, Azrie Mat Fauzi, his production of preserved seafood items have increased over time due to favourable weather, in tandem with good demand.

However, he said, most of the raw materials are currently out of stock due to the weather and other contributing factors.

He said his products were usually sold to end users, as well as

nearby traders, canteens, caterers and wet markets.

"During the hot weather, the production of dried seafood is easier as the products can be dried adequately with a shorter drying process.

"However, the incoming supply of (raw) fish and other seafood has reduced significantly," he said.

Azrie added that the variety of dried fish and seafood he sold included mullet, Sagor catfish, doublespotted queenfish (talang)

sepat, fourfinger threadfin, red snapper, mackerel, shrimp, squid and others.

"For anchovies, there are local anchovies from Pangkor, Langkawi, Tanjung Dawai, while imported fish are from Phuket, Thailand, and Vietnam, which we usually supply to a caterer in Saudi Arabia for umrah pilgrims.

"I hope the harvest from the seas will improve in the coming months so that we can increase our production," he said.

## Supply of fish at sustainable levels despite warmer climate

By **DIYANA PFORDTEN**  
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**PETALING JAYA:** Overall fisheries stock in our waters remain at sustainable levels, even if the current warmer temperatures and overfishing has resulted in lower catch in the country, says the Fisheries Department.

Its director-general Datuk Adnan Hussain said according to the department's statistics, total fish landings between February and April this year recorded an average drop of 10.3% a month compared to the same period last year.

"This has resulted in possible increases in fish prices in markets.

"The decline of fish harvest between February and April is the result of the hot weather conditions in the country, on top of other factors such as overfishing, as well as illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, along with

unsustainable marine aquaculture practices," he said.

However, he added that fish landings in May recorded a 3.2% improvement, and should the trend continue, fish stocks could be restored.

"The latest analysis by the Fisheries Department found that the overall status of pelagic and demersal fish stocks is still at a sustainable level, except for the southern area of the west coast of Peninsular Malaysia, which has been over-exploited," Adnan said.

Pelagic fish refers to those that inhabit the mid-water regions or upper layers of water, while demersal fish are usually found at the bottom layers of water or near the ocean floor.

"Demersal fish stocks in the northern west coast of Peninsular Malaysia is also experiencing excessive exploitation," he said, adding that the status of fish stocks is highly dependent on the amount

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of fishing carried out by fishermen, and control of this aspect is a key element in the management of fishery resources.

He added that fish stocks could be sustained if they were managed sustainably by fisheries management based on the latest scientific information and the use of fisheries instruments recommended by international bodies such as the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) of the United Nations.

"We also enforce the size of the fishermen's net mesh, which should not be less than 38mm.

"This larger mesh size prevents juvenile fish from being caught," he said.

He said the impact of global warming and the El Nino phenomenon was another factor that affected fish habitat and stocks.

"With the increase in sea levels due to global climate change, it directly causes changes to the shape of coastal areas," he said.

For example, areas where water used to be shallow have become deeper, and may no longer be suitable as a habitat for some species.

"These changes will also affect water quality conditions in the area with an increase in silt, less penetration of sunlight to the seabed, and increased input of nutrients from the land. It can also result in a stronger current effect.

He added that increased water temperatures could also change the migratory habits of certain fish species.

"For example, Albacore tuna, a tuna species that lives in temperate climates, which used to be found in the waters off Semporna, Sabah, in the monsoon season (when the sea water temperature is lower) is now decreasing, possibly due to the warming water temperature," Adnan said.

Other causes for the drop in harvests, he said, can be contributed by other man-made factors,

namely the uncontrolled development of coastal areas such as reclamation, sand mining and pollution from domestic and industrial waste disposal which also contribute to climate change and the destruction of marine ecosystems.

The destruction of natural habitats such as coral reefs, sea grass bed, and mangrove swamps also have a negative impact on fishery resources.

Adnan said the situation could be addressed through the continuous management of fishing capacity through the Monitoring, Control and Surveillance Programme which is done periodically, as well as fishing control such as closed areas and closed seasons.

Other efforts are through the establishment of fisheries protection areas such as Marine Parks and Refugia, as well as development of artificial habitats such as artificial reefs in coastal waters.