



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

**8 Julai 2023  
19 Zulhijjah 1444H**

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# Happiness is serving the turtle community

## Justine a local shell-cebrity in guarding endangered animals

By DURIE RAINER FONG  
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**KOTA KINABALU:** What started out as an internship for Eva Vivian Justine as part of her bachelor's degree programme has now turned into a full-time job looking after turtles.

She joined the Kudat Turtle Conservation Society six years ago during her last semester in 2017, thinking only of completing her marine science course.

The NGO, which was founded in 2011, works with local coastal communities in Sabah's northern Kudat district to protect sea turtles, their nesting beach and foraging areas.

It was supposed to be a three-month stint.

"But I find myself volunteering for the society to this day," said the 29-year-old in an interview.

The society is actively involved in conservation work with residents in Kampung Bavang Jamal and Kampung Kosuhai which are located in Simpang Mengayau or popularly known as the Tip of Borneo.

Both are nesting beaches for green and Hawksbill turtles and occasionally, the Olive Ridley turtle, though very rare. It also has hatcheries there.

It would be convenient to assume that Justine fell in love with the docile sea creatures while working with the society, hence, the continued passion to be their guardian.

In fact, the community was the one that grew on her.

Their devotion to turtle conservation has left a lasting impres-



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sion on her to contribute more to the community.

"Of course I know (turtle conservation) is doing good for the environment and the turtles but what makes me stay on is more because of the community on the ground.

"I can really see their efforts and they have been doing this for quite a long time.

"Many of the villagers do not even have a background in sci-



**Turtle-y awesome effort:** Justine (left) and Roland Agansai (second left) – an active member and one of the co-founders of the Kudat Turtle Conservation Society – training volunteers from a local university on how to take a turtle measurement for monitoring purposes.

ence or have higher education but the awareness is there and they want to do it," she said.

"They have a vision that keeping turtles safe is not only beneficial for the preservation of the reptile species but also for the community, for example, in tourism.

"It's not easy to find people who are willing to go into conservation. I really admire them for this as they also are doing this for free. That's why I decided to stay on," Justine added.

Besides training the community to look after the turtles and the environment, she said, where the villagers lack in terms of skills, she will fill the gap.

"Besides my background in marine science, I have the skills to write proposals to get more funding, so we can support their activities.

"Since they have tourism activities like turtle releases, we train them to speak in English, so they can communicate with tourists.

"I am also involved in training villagers to take measurements of turtles and other data to be provided for universities in their researches," she said.

Justine also coordinates awareness and outreach programmes to educate the younger generation about turtle conservation.

Recently, she landed a permanent role as an assistant parks manager in charge of coral restoration this year with Sabah Parks, the custodian of national parks in the state.

But what makes the deal sweeter is she gets to stay in Kudat, which is part of the biodiverse Coral Triangle, as well as within the Tun Mustapha Marine Park.

"That means I can volunteer for the society after working hours and also during the weekends.

"I don't find it difficult juggling between the two roles," said Justine, who is also the present secretary of the society.

Justine said the work by conservation groups like hers have borne fruit over the years as fewer local villagers were consuming turtle eggs and meat now.

In the past, she said, the villagers caught the reptiles and ate them because turtles are just another source of food.

"Once we started our awareness programme, the number of people consuming turtle eggs and meat

have considerably gone down."

Justine said 15 people from two villages have been trained the Sabah Wildlife Department honorary wildlife wardens.

"These wardens will patrol the beaches every night. If they see turtles eggs on the beach, they have been trained to retrieve and relocate them to the hatcheries," she said.

Despite the good work of the society and others, she said, the work is far from over.

"Our mission is to increase local participation and we hope more local communities, especially coastal areas get involved in conserving and preserving the turtle population.

The ultimate aim, Justine said, is seeing the local community thriving from turtle conservation.

"When we protect turtles, we also protect their habitat which is the ocean.

"This will give a much bigger impact, not only to turtles but terms of fisheries and tourism.

"All these will contribute to the wellbeing of the surrounding people.

"Just knowing this, it keeps me going," she said.

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# M'sian prawns losing out due to biosecurity laws

## Local breeders suffering heavily as market flushed with imported shrimps

By MOHD FARHAAN SHAH  
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**JOHOR BARU:** Malaysian prawns are losing out to those brought in from Indonesia and Thailand following the implementation of stricter biosecurity laws overseas.

Malaysian Prawn Industry Association chairman Syed Omar Syed Jaafar (*pic*) said local sales of prawns from Thailand and Indonesia had affected over 3,000 prawn breeders involving 12,500ha of land throughout the country.

"The selling price of prawns in the current market is lower than the operating cost. The losses borne by breeders are now up 40% compared with two months ago.

"Two months ago, local prawns were still being sold at RM26 per kg but now, the market price has dropped to RM15 per kg.

"This is due to the influx of imported shrimps in the local market, especially from Thailand and Indonesia, which has caused the supply to exceed existing demand," he said.

Malaysia, he added, produced about



48,000 metric tonnes of prawns, with the local demand at only around 36,000 metric tonnes.

"We export the rest to the international market. However, problems arise when the biosecurity laws of these countries, including Thailand, became stricter, making it difficult and time-consuming to obtain approval for entry, thus lowering the price of our shrimps.

"At the same time, our own country's biosecurity law facilitates the entry of these imported prawns to the extent that it affects local prices, causing entrepreneurs to suffer losses" he said.

Syed Omar said before 2000, the industry did not face any problem because Malaysian prawns fulfilled around 50% of the demand for prawns in Thailand.

"However, since the stricter enforcement of the biosecurity law, the industry has started to be affected."

He urged the government to tighten the country's national biosecurity laws involving shrimps to be equivalent to those implemented by other countries.

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# Deep dive into blue economy

## Selangor plans two large-scale projects to strengthen fishery sector

SELANGOR government has announced two key projects in the Sabak Bernam region under the Sabak Bernam Development Area (Sabda) initiative, aimed at ensuring long-term food security.

Both projects, under the purview of Menteri Besar Selangor Incorporated (MBI), will see the development of large-scale fishing ports and processing facilities that will provide over 7,000 jobs while increasing fishing capacity and seafood production.

The announcement was made along with the unveiling of plans for the first downstream tuna processing and deep-sea fish processing and packaging plant in Malaysia.

Caretaker Mentri Besar Danuk Seri Amirudin Shari said Selangor was committed to a massive scale-up of investments in long-term rural development, involving public-private collaboration.

"This will enable small-scale farmers and fisheries to increase production, better adapt to climate change, build local food chains and create commercial opportunities."

"The initiatives announced as part of Sabda's focus to better manage our fishery industry will fully realise the potential of the coastal area while protecting our marine ecosystem."

"This is in line with the state government's efforts in developing a blue economy as a pillar for our food sovereignty," he said at



(Seated from left) Norita and Amirudin with Selangor state secretary Datuk Haris Kasim (standing, centre) and the team behind the state's food security initiatives

the Sabda introduction programme held within Sabak Bernam's padi fields.

Sabda is one of three new development zones identified under the comprehensive First Selangor Plan.

It aims to elevate entrepreneurship and innovation among local businesses and communities while attracting new investment opportunities to the region.

Sabda, spearheaded by MBI, will focus on building Selangor's food resilience by elevating agriculture and blue economy initiatives with new investments

and technology while leveraging local opportunities to drive ecotourism.

MBI had inked a memorandum of understanding with Alpha Ocean Resources Bhd, a company in the seafood industry, to develop the tuna and deep-sea fish processing and packaging plant.

Situated in Sungai Lang, this facility is part of a 10-year project that will include a new landing port for large vessels plying the Indian Ocean as well as a land-based fish and crab farm that will create between 2,500 and 5,000 job opportunities.

The initial investment in the landing port, which is expected to start operating within one year, is over RM100mil.

MBI chief executive officer Norita Mohd Sidek announced plans to develop Malaysia's first integrated fish landing port in Sekinchan.

It will be equipped with a comprehensive traceability system that tracks the origin, processing and distribution of fish.

The project is a collaboration between MBI, Sekinchan Fishing Industry Association and Sekinchan Fishermen's Association.

It is estimated to attract an investment of RM484mil over a 10-year period in Sabak Bernam and create over 4,000 jobs.

"The existing jetty will be expanded to double the berthing capacity to 400 boats, which will reduce waiting time and improve efficiency," said Norita.

"When completed, the project is expected to increase fishing capacity by 344% and the seafood processing industry by 20% in Sekinchan over the next 10 years.

"This means an addition of 300,000 tonnes of fish and 26,000 tonnes of seafood products processed annually, which will boost the local economy and improve our food security," she added.

The first phase, focusing on the fisheries and processing sectors, is expected to be completed in 2027.

In addition to announcing these two main projects, MBI presented three agropreneurs under the Selangor Smart Agro Park Initiative with certificates of appreciation for creating higher yields and enhancing quality crops using Internet of Things applications for precision farming through fertigation, greenhouse farming and drones for monitoring and fertilising.

Five other entrepreneurs in Sabak Bernam received certificates of appreciation for cultivating Matag coconuts that produced higher and richer yields.