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Johor agriculture, agro-based industry and rural development committee chairman Datuk Zahari Sarip (right) and Teoh (left) holding baby 'ikan siakap' released at Straits of Johor near Gelang Patah. (Photo at right) Some small-scale fish farmers are running their businesses from home.

By REMAR NORDIN
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JOHOREANS are playing their part to make the state the nation's food basket and to ensure food security.

Some have gone into breeding and hatching marine animals, not only to increase the population for consumption but to ensure the continued survival of several species.

Politician-turned-environmental activist Datuk Jason Teoh Sew Hock initiated the "Wild Release Programme" in 2021 to help protect Johor's marine resources.

"I noticed that over the years, some of the fishermen's catch in Gelang Patah began dwindling.

"My family was running a fish breeding and hatchery business for decades but it closed down.

"We decided to revive the breeding and hatchery programme three years ago, but the focus is no longer on selling the fish fry but releasing them into the wild," said the Local Basic Sdn Bhd manager.

Last year, he managed to release 46,700 fish fry in the sea around Pendas Laut, comprising

Diving into fish breeding business

Marine farmers have turned Johor into hatchery hub for Peninsular Malaysia

ikan siakap, ikan merah and ikan sengarap.

"Some of the eggs are from our breeding ponds and some are purchased from a local fish farm.

"We then hatch and release the fish into the wild when at around three months old.

"We also sell mature fish to a fish farm in Kukup, Pontian, to cover the cost of operation," he said, adding that some of the fish were given away free to farmers.

"I hope that with this, I can give back to nature and help our local fishermen survive.

"To date, we have released 117,350 fish since 2021," said Teoh.

High demand for fish

Gemilang Aqua Enterprise owner Muhammad Azimuuddin Anwar Amir Hamzah said he decided to venture into the farm business due to high demand for freshwater fish.

"I see this as one way to protect local fish varieties; breeding local fish also prevents the entry of foreign fish into our market, especially from Thailand and Indonesia.

"I believe that if we want to strengthen our food security, we should start by ensuring our fish species can thrive.

"Foreign species have the potential to carry diseases that

could affect our local varieties," he noted.

Azimuuddin started his business in 2018 in Kulai by breeding freshwater fish and selling the fry after it reaches four inches (slightly over 10cm).

"The fish can also be sold once it reaches a weight of between 400g and 1kg," he said.

He highlighted that demand was high for ikan talapia, ikan baung and ikan krai kunyit.

Azimuuddin added that he also bred ikan patin, ikan lampam, ikan sebarau, ikan terbul and ikan kelah merah.

SR Agro Farm owner Shahrizan Rosdji said there had been an increase in the number

Ensuring sustainability of marine resources

MORE than a million fish fry have been released by Johor Fisheries Department within the past two years as part of efforts to ensure food sustainability.

Its director Zainudin Abd Wahab said the department had allocated RM700,000 for the release of fish fry as well as crab and prawn fry into the open sea and rivers.

"This is to ensure local fishermen's catch and income can increase in the long run.

"This will also ensure that marine resources in coastal areas can be sustained," he said, adding that it would also help ensure the survival of spe-

cies in certain areas. Some of the species which were released included ikan baung, ikan lampam, udang galah, ikan kelah, ikan sebarau and ikan tengas, he added.

"We released 440,000 fish fry in 2022 and 720,000 fish fry last year," said Zainudin.

"It is one of the most important marine resource programmes conducted not only in freshwater but also in rivers, lakes and the ocean.

"Almost all districts in Johor have such locations, but the programme is mostly carried out in Segamat, Kluang, Muar, Kota Tinggi and Mersing," he said.

Zainudin said among the main challenges faced by fishermen were pollution as well as fish catching activities using illegal methods or equipment.

"This includes fish bombing and poisoning," he said, adding that the department would continue to carry out enforcement.

"We ensure all fishing activities in oceans, rivers and coastal areas are conducted legally," said Zainudin.

"The department is also working closely with the fishing community to prevent over-fishing."

Kukup assemblyman Datuk Jefridin Atan said a Norwegian fish breeding company was

planning to expand to Tanjung Piai.

"The company already has a presence in Singapore and is now planning to set up a base here.

"It sees Kukup as the best location due to its close proximity to Singapore," he said.

He added that the company was currently scouting for the best site to set up operations and would use modern fish farming methods.

The company is expected to present its proposal to Johor government this year.

"It has expertise in breeding saltwater fish, which can be beneficial in terms of transfer

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Kerapu is a fish species in high demand from seafood restaurants.



Shahrizan is producing between 80,000 and 100,000 siakap fry each month.



Teoh has turned a defunct family business into an opportunity to do good.



Azimuddin showing 'ikan sebarau' from his farm.

of people venturing into fish breeding for side income over the past few years. "I have been sending some of the fish I have bred to small-scale farmers running home businesses," he said. "Any business involving water comes with challenges, especially in setting water temperature and checking quality," he said. Shahrizan has been breeding three main species since he started his business in 2016, namely *ikan siakap*, *udang galah* and *udang putih*. He also breeds *ikan siakap merah* and *ikan kerapu*. "Every month, I am able to

produce between 80,000 and 100,000 *ikan siakap* fry to be sold to other fish breeders in Johor and Penang," he said, adding that each fry was sold for 80sen. Shahrizan shared that his interest in farming started with his hobby of collecting ornamental fish, and he subsequently befriended people with expertise in the trade. "I started farming *ikan siakap*, *udang galah* and *udang putih* by purchasing eggs from other hatcheries. "Then I learned how to get fish eggs and gradually grew my own hatchery business. "I find that hatching eggs is

easier and less risky compared to growing fish to maturity. "The market for fish hatcheries is actually quite big," he said, adding that his farm in Benut, Pontian, had been supplying eggs to farms throughout

Peninsular Malaysia. Fish farming presented an opportunity for fishermen to diversify their income streams and reduce their dependence on unpredictable wild catches too, Shahrizan added.



Jefridin: Norwegian fish breeding company planning to expand to Tanjung Piai.

of knowledge and technology to local fish breeders," said Jefridin. - By REMAR NORDIN



Johor agriculture, agro-based industry and rural development committee chairman Datuk Zahari Sarip (right) and Zainudin releasing prawn fry at Jeti Nelayan Kampung Tekam, Segamat.