

A Plastic-Free Event on Marine Awareness Targeting Students with a Fisheries Background

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MONDAY, 13 MAY - A one-day program with the theme “Sustaining the fisheries and protecting the marine biodiversity of Kudat” was recently held in Kudat involving a total of 50 form four and five students of Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan (SMK) Abdul Rahim II.

The suburban Kudat school was chosen as it has the highest number of students from a fisher family in the district of Kudat.

The criteria of a ‘fisher family’ are students whom are not only from a family of the coastal communities, but whose immediate family member must be a practising fisherman.

Interestingly, as a teacher from this school pointed out, the students’ ethnicity which comprise of Bajau Laut, Ubian, Suluk and Benadan are almost as diverse as their *kampung* (Malay for village; often shortened to ‘Kg.’), namely Kg. Pantai Bahagia, Kg. Pangaraban, Kg. Tanjung Kapur, Kg. Tajau Laut and Kg. Limau-Limauan.

Hence, the students are considered the best target groups for this campaign, as they not only come from families with a fishing background; but are also of the vital age group that are about to graduate high school and likely join the fishing industry in Kudat, which is one of the nation’s informal workforce.

Designed to promote marine awareness by communicating scientific research findings, particularly of sharks and rays, and other reef fishes, the program focused on the plight of these threatened fishes.

Apart from the problem of unsustainable and destructive fishing practices which are the main threat to the viability of populations of vital marine species, other issues related to anthropogenic activities such as marine water pollution, plastic and marine debris in the sea were highlighted.

Using the case of a Whale Shark – which reportedly died due to starvation caused by the ingestion of a single plastic bag, as viralled in the social media in February 2019 – as an example of how marine species are already affected by the pollutants, as happened right here in Sabah’s waters, the program organizer ensured that the event was free of any single-use plastics.

The program was organized by a team from the Endangered Marine Species Research Unit, Borneo Marine Research Institute, Universiti Malaysia Sabah, and was made possible with funding from the Save Our Seas Foundation (SOSF) awarded to Dr. Mabel Manjaji Matsumoto, Project Leader of the Sabah Elasmobranch Biodiversity project (2017-2019), and Head of UEMS.

