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KOTA KINABALU: The UMS-Sepanggar Fishing Festival 2026 has been hailed as a significant step towards reviving fishing activities while boosting the local economy of the fishing community in Kampung Bangka-Bangka.

State Agriculture, Fisheries and Food Industry Minister Datuk Jamawi Jaafar said the Ministry fully supports the initiative organised through collaboration between Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) and the local fishing community.

He said the programme marked the beginning of broader efforts to rejuvenate fishing activities in the area while creating additional income opportunities for local fishermen.

"This morning, we launched the fishing competition together with UMS and the fishing community of Kampung Bangka-Bangka. At the ministry level, we support this effort to revive fishing activities in this area," he said when officiating the UMS-Sepanggar Fishing Festival 2026, here, Sunday.

Jamawi said future plans include utilising boats owned by village fishermen to transport participants to more suitable fishing locations, enabling local fishermen to generate additional income through tourism and recreational fishing activities.

"This is only the beginning. In the future, we plan to utilise the village fishermen's boats so participants can access more suitable fishing locations, while at the same time providing additional income opportunities for local fishermen," he said.

He added that the ministry would continue working closely with UMS and the Kampung Bangka-Bangka Fishermen's Association to ensure fishing and fisheries-related activities in the area continue to grow sustainably.

Apart from benefiting the fishing community, the programme also contributed towards student welfare initiatives.

Jamawi said approximately RM10,000 was channelled to the student kitchen programme to assist underprivileged students.

"Through this competition alone, we contributed approximately RM10,000 to the student kitchen programme, particularly to assist underprivileged students," he said.

The programme received an overwhelming response, attracting around 300 participants, surpassing the initial target of 200 participants.

According to Jamawi, participants came from various locations including Brunei, Labuan and several interior districts of Sabah, with senior citizens aged over 60 also participating due to their passion for fishing.

He noted that the waters around the area were once widely recognised as a high-potential fishing location before activities slowed following the Covid-19 pandemic.

"This area is indeed famous for large fish because the Fisheries Department had previously deployed artificial reefs, making it a suitable fish conservation area for fishing activities," he said.

Jamawi added that several participants informed organisers they had previously caught red snapper and white fish weighing between four and five kilograms in the area, catches usually associated with deep-sea fishing.

He expressed hope that efforts to revitalise fishing activities in the area would continue while further strengthening Sabah's fisheries sector and recreational tourism industry.

Also present were Director of the Corporate Communications Centre Dr Rizal Zamani Idris, Senior Lecturer at the Borneo Marine Research Institute Dr Chong Wei Sheng, and Programme Coordinator as well as Sabah News Today Chief Executive Officer Zakaria Damit.