



Universiti Malaysia Sabah's Borneo Marine Research Institute is carrying out breeding research on mangrove crabs at its hatchery.

UMS tackling crab stock decline

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KOTA KINABALU: Universiti Malaysia Sabah's (UMS) Borneo Marine Research Institute (BMRI) is conducting a breeding programme for mangrove crabs because the wild population is being depleted.

The institute has set up a hatchery for the highly popular *Scylla tranquebarica* species.

"It is also popular in Thailand, the Philippines, China and Singapore," said BMRI director Professor Dr Rossita Shapawi.

She said the institute decided to conduct the research because fishermen had complained about declining crab stocks.

"The industry is dependent on wild-caught crabs, but we already see a huge depletion in the supply, especially of female mangrove crabs. So, this is a significant contribution to the industry."

She said it took three years for a breakthrough in the seedling production, which was carried out by four aquaculture experts.

The normal selling price of mangrove crabs here is between RM15 and RM28 per kg at wet markets, and between RM36 and RM60 per kg at

restaurants. Soft-shell crabs are sold at RM35 to RM45 per kg in frozen seafood outlets and RM50 to RM120 per kg at restaurants.

A female crab can produce up to 1.3 million eggs at a time, but only a small number survive, due to disease and predators.

Research leader Dr Anita Yong said the hatchery had a brood stock of 10,000.

"The hatchery's production scale is considered small. We have produced millions of larvae with an average survival rate of five per cent of crab instars."

Yong said the institute was hoping to eventually release them into the wild to replenish the depleted population. She said there were also plans to supply the market once certain standards and sustainability in numbers were achieved.

A seafood restaurant worker, who wished to be known only as Gary, said the crabs were sourced from several suppliers.

"We are able to serve mangrove crabs daily because we are not dependent on just one supplier," he said.