

The Dried Fish Products as the Main Economy Resources in Terengganu in 20th Century

Ruhaizan bt Sulaiman@Abd Rahim

Faculty of General Studies and Advanced Education,
Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin (UniSZA), Kampus Gong Badak, 21300 Kuala Nerus, Terengganu,
Malaysia
Email: ruhaizan@unisza.edu.my

Prof. Dr Ishak bin Saat

Department of History , Faculty of Human Sciences, Sultan Idris Education University, Perak
Email: ishakhj@fsk.upsi.edu.my

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Abstract

This research was done to study on the dried fish products that were produced by the Malay community at the coastal areas that had been their main economic resources in 20th century. The dried fish products indicated economic improvement is very encouraging as a result of the high demand from other countries. The fishermen's catches, namely the dried fish entrepreneurs has groomed many coastal Malay community as their main source of income. This study objective on examining the dried fish products could strengthen the economic level in that century. In order to prove its development, primary source from the annual report by the British Adviser Terengganu, the High Commissioner's Office File, Secretary File of Terengganu's Government, The Chief Minister of Terengganu's Office File, the Land and Mineral Office File were analyzed them using qualitative research methods. In addition, the secondary sources such as journals and books are also cited to support the findings. Most of them were obtained at Malaysia National Archives, Terengganu's Museum and Terengganu's Public Library. The study found that the dried fish were the main product among coastal Malay community in 20th century based on the high demand from the local people and others. Therefore, it showed that Terengganu was rich with fishery products while the Government and the British cooperated to implement various measures to increase those local products in terms of their quality and quantity.

Keyword: Product, Dried Fish, Economy, Malay Community, Terengganu

INTRODUCTION

Terengganu has long and wide coastline with white sand. Its length from Kuala Besut up to Kemaman is about 244 km which facing the South China Sea. The capital city of Terengganu is Kuala Terengganu that is located at the estuary of Terengganu River. Kuala Terengganu got the administration, economy and trade centre due to its strategic port location that had been the

main attraction to traders from the Malay states, Malay Archipelago and Europe. Kuala Besut, Kuala Setiu, Kuala Terengganu, Kuala Marang, Kuala Dungun and Kuala Kemaman were the coastal estuary areas that were used to produce the dried fish products in 20th century. That kind of activity had brought so many profits and because of that, Terengganu had been given a name as *Favored Coast* (Embong, 2012, p.13)

The economies at coastal areas were managed systematically even though they got many trading affairs which were mostly dealt through the sea. The specialties of Malays at coastal areas were based on their perseverance and hard work as dried fish entrepreneurs since the economic activity were done for generations. The fishermen's catches had brought the idea to dried fish production. Therefore, economic projection occurred in 20th century when their dried fish products gained high demand among the Malay community as well as foreigners (Ali, 2008, p.107)

DRIED FISH PRODUCTS: THE MAIN ECONOMIC RESOURCES

Dried fish products were the one of main products in Terengganu and they had been the top economic resources among the local people at coastal areas. The fishermen's catch are usually sold fresh and the remaining fish left will be preserved as dried fish. Therefore, it had given large contribution to local community since it was not only serving various job opportunities, but also increasing the state revenue (L.O.M 77/1940). The dried fish was produced by the Malay entrepreneurs that lived in coastal areas. The areas included were Kuala Besut up to Kemaman. Usually, 1000 picul of fishes was dried along the Terengganu coast; consisting of Seberang Takir Village, Batu Rakit Village, Merchang Village, Kemasik Village and Teluk Budu Village. 7/8 of the dried fish products were exported to Singapore and the rest were sold to local people (Wan Salleh 2006, p. 9).The dried fish that was completely being processed was bought by the sellers and fish proprietors to be resold. The Malays normally involved in the whole manufacturing procedures, but then the Chinese took over the selling process (Abdullah Zakaria Ghazali, 1990, p. 56).

Figure 1
Dried Fish in Terengganu



Source: The Findings of Researcher at the Dried Fish Production in Kuala Besut, Terengganu on 1 October 2016.

According to the record from the Office of Sultan Badariah Palace in 1930, most of Seberang Takir’s population involved in dried fish production to gain family’s income. The dried fish entrepreneurs admitted that¹ the products gave them higher profits if compared to agriculture and husbandry sectors (S.T 6/1349). The dried fish products were exported to Malay Archipelagos and Singapore. It showed that Malay people were creative and diligent in order to improve their standard of living. The price of the exported dried fish was usually around \$5.00 to \$14.00 per 1 picul. The profit gained from the sales was 25 cent per 1 picul. The type and price of dried fish in 1934 was as below.

Table 1
Types and Prices of Dried Fish in 1934

No	Types of Dried Fish	Price (per 1 Picul)
1	Pomfret, Indian Salmon, Seabass, Mackerel, Grouse, Golden Snapper, Jumpol, Bagok and Selangin fish	\$14.00
2	Herring, Gutter, Common Pike Conger, Puput fish, Eel Catfish, Temberi, Shark and Sole	\$9.00
3	Silver Bar Fish, Selampai, Longhead Grunter, Mulletts, Blukang, Stingray, Catfish and Kedra	\$7.00
4.	Perch and Others	\$5.00

Source: C.L.M 97/1352, 26 th January 1934

Table 1 shows the dried fish types and their market prices in 1934. Pomfret, Indian Salmon, Seabass, Mackerel, Grouse, Golden Snapper, Jumpol, Bagok and Selangin fish were the most expensive dried fish with \$14.00 per picul (a picul equals to a load). The cheapest dried fish was with the price of \$5.00 per picul in which consisted of small fishes like Perch, Yellow Trevally Fish, Pale Trevally Fish, Sardine, Lemburu, Selar Belah and Croaker. Small-sized fishes were dried for a day while the big-sized fishes needed 2 days. In the beginning, the dried fish was only being produced individually for their own consumption.

¹ The dried fish entrepreneurs that live at Seberang Takir, Kuala Terengganu were Ismail bin Mohammad, Ali bin Mohammad, Osman bin Mohammad, Salleh bin Mohammad, Jusoh bin Abdul Latif, Abdul Latif bin Salleh, Mat Zin bin Ali, Abu Bakar bin Ali, Salleh bin Ali, Awang bin Ali, Mat Ali bin Mohd, Jusoh bin Omar, Abu Bakar bin Salleh, Mat Ali bin Mohammad, Ibrahim bin Mohammad, Ismail bin Jusoh, Omar bin Said, Taib bin Ibrahim, Omar bin Salleh, Mahmud bin Salleh, Achik bin Mahmud, Achik bin Mohammad, As Salleh bin Mohamad, Mat Jik bin Mohammad, Al Abdul Latif bin Mohammad, Jusoh bin Deris, Mat Jusoh suami Fatimah, Sew Beng, Kok Tai, Abdul Taib bin Muhammad, Encik Omar bin Mohammad, Encik Mohammad, Encik Abdul Latif bin Salleh dan Taib bin Ali.

However, increase in trading activities between Terengganu and other countries especially Singapore, Cochin China and Saigon had opened big opportunity to local people to market their products widely. It portrayed that trading activities among the Malay community in Terengganu's coastal areas was so active (Hugh Clifford, 1961, p. 91). Moreover, the two most important ports at Kuala Terengganu and Kemaman were the main trade centers that increase the number of traders in Terengganu. The Government also noticed that the dried fish products could increase the country's revenue in just few years. High market demand by the locals and others had actually changed the society's structure too.

The coastal Malay community always thinking about new ideas to produce something new in order to survive in that century which then increasing the level of productivity in dried fish production (Kim, 1974, p. 17). The first thing required in dried fish processing was a place to cut and clean the fish. Second, the process also needed a place to salt the fish and the third one was a place to dry the fishes. The cutting and cleaning process was done on wooden board in order to secure its hygiene. After the process, put the fishes into the wooden basket and wash them with clean water. The process was shown in figure 2.

Figure 2
The Cutting and Cleaning Area



Source: The findings of researcher at the Dried Fish Production in Kuala Besut, Terengganu on 1 October 2016

The tank to salt the fish required closed containers as it was important to ensure that the container was closed after placing fish in it in order to avoid any waste entering the container. Two piculs of raw fish would be only one picul after being dried. Not more than three gantang of salts was needed to marinate the one picul fish for high quality production. The fishes with salts were marinated for only 14 hours and the salt water that had been used was discharged everyday as it could only be used once and new salts were added (S.T 6/1349). Apart from that, the drying process area must be under the sun which was on rack. If the fish rack was built on the ground, the rack should be lifted at least 2 feet from the ground to avoid the fishes from touching the sand. The fish rack was as in figure 3.

Figure 3
Fish Rack for Drying Process



Source: The findings of researcher at the Dried Fish Production in Kuala Besut, Terengganu on 1 October 2016

Nevertheless, the owner would prohibit anyone to walk or even step on the fish rack except his/her workers although the fishes were dried on mat that cover the ground. The entrepreneurs needed to wash and dry their feet before walking on the fish rack to invert those fishes. It was important for their hygiene to the people who would consume them. Arrangement of those fishes should be given attention to avoid them from overlapping each other as in figure 4.

Figure 4
How to dry the fish



Source: The Findings of Researcher at the Dried Fish Production in Kuala Besut, Terengganu on 1 October 2016

Figure 4 shows the right way to dry the fishes for high quality production. When drying under the sun, those fishes must be arranged according to their types and sizes. For the fishes

with same species, they would be arranged based on their sizes. The fishes that were completely being dried during sunny day would then being placed on dried palm leaves in container. It was important to check either the fishes were fully dehydrated or not before transferring them into the closed container so that those fishes rotten (C.L.M 97/1352).

THE DRIED FISH PRODUCTS AND SALTS

Salts were the main ingredient in this production. In 20th century, salts were imported from Singapore, Thailand, Cochin-China, Saigon and Hainan and the trade was using Malay’s Sailboat and Chinese Barge. There were many big boats that brought the salts and the boats that reached earlier could sell the salts first, followed by others. Usually, the regular customers were the fish proprietors and the dried fish entrepreneurs. The salts stocks that arrived at the Terengganu Port were guarded by the boats’ men during the day and night since the salts unloading process was completed after two weeks. Normally, they unloaded those stocks in the morning (C.O 840/1, 7 April 1918, p. 3).

According to C.N Maxwell, the British Agent in Terengganu, the total import activities from Saigon using the sailboats showed a very high quantity of salts which were 40,000 piculs with the price of \$32,000. Meanwhile, the imported salts from Cochin-China using the Chinese Barge were about 400 piculs with the price of \$320 (C.O 840/1, 29 April 1915, p. 3-4). C.N Maxwell said that at least 40,000 piculs of salts needed by the dried fish entrepreneurs every year. This showed that salts were very important in making dried fish and the total imported salts were as shown in Table 2.

Table 2
Total of Imported Salts in 1922-1926

No.	Year	Quantity (Picul)	Price (\$)
1	1922	-	\$85,771
2	1923	-	\$66,640
3	1924	181,825	\$134,823
4	1925	85,449	\$61,476
5	1926	48,766	\$27,235

Source: C.O 840/1, 09 May 1923, p.3, C.O 840/1, 25 April 1924, p. 6, C.O 840/1, 20 April 1925, p. 34, C.O 840/1, 18 April 1926, p.38, C.O 840/1, 24 April 1927, p.40

Table 2 showed the total of salts being imported from Singapore, Thailand, Cochin-China, Saigon and Hainan in 1922-1926. Total import in 1922 was \$85,771 while 1923 was

about \$66,640. In 1924, the total import had a projection which was 181,825 piculs with the price of \$134,823. About 97,256 piculs (\$76,982) out of 181,825 piculs was the salts from Singapore and another 84,569 piculs 181,825 piculs was from other countries like Thailand, Cochin China and Hainan with the price of \$57,841. On the other hand, 14,742 piculs (\$17,662) of salts out of 85,449 piculs (\$61,476) in 1925 had been imported from Singapore; meanwhile other 70,707 piculs (\$43,814) was brought from Thailand. Nevertheless, 1926 showed a declination in import activity which was only 48,766 piculs with the price of \$27,235 if compared to 1925 with 85,449 piculs. The drop was actually caused by the heavy flood occurred in Terengganu that damaged so many things on land and also affecting the sea trade communication due to bad weather. However, export and import activities in 1926 were still working during good weather.

Rapid economic development in dried fish production among the Malay people in the coast in 20th century had expanded the salt production industry and it could be seen from the total amount of exported salts by the local exporters to Singapore, Thailand and Cochin China. The exportation data was shown in Table 3.

Table 3
The Total Exported Salts in 1924-1928

No.	Year	Quantity (Picul)	Price (\$)
1	1924	92,483	\$104,128
2	1925	70,461	\$62,699
3	1926	16,362	\$14,982
4	1927	25,674	\$37,330
5	1928	7,759	\$5,396

Source: C.O 840/1, 20 April 1925, p. 34, C.O 840/1, 18 April 1926, p.38, C.O 840/1, 24 April 1927, p.40, C.O 840/1, 20 April 1928, p. 18, C.O 840/1, 30 September 1929, p.18

Table 3 showed the total salts that had been exported from Terengganu to Singapore, Thailand, Cochin-China, Saigon and Hainan in 1924-1928. The total export in 1924 was about 92,483 piculs with the price of \$104,128; meanwhile the total export of salts to Singapore in 1925 was 70,461 piculs (\$62,699). On the other hand, 1926 showed a large drop than the year before with only 16,362 piculs with the value of \$14,982. In 1928, the export activity decreased to 7,759 piculs than that in 1927 with 25,674 piculs. Even though the total export of salts declined, the data still portraying that export activities were still conducted among the Malay community at the Terengganu coast. According to a record in Yearly Report 1928, the Malay traders also carried out import activities to bring in the salts from Singapore, Thailand, Cochin-

China and Hainan by using the Malay Sailboats with total of 52,567 piculs (\$27,126). It was significantly showed that salts were one of the main products involved in export and import due to high market demand on dried fish production.

DEVELOPMENT OF DRIED FISH PRODUCTION

Dried fish production was synonym to Malay community in the coastal areas because it was one of their popular foods. Most of them were working as fishermen (Figure 5) because they were close to those sources. In the beginning, they got involved in fishing only for own consumption, but then they started improving their standard of living by selling the catches as well as producing dried fish to be marketed when the economy was developing.

Figure 5
Fishermen in the Coastal Area of Terengganu



Source: National Archives Malaysia, Terengganu

The dried fish products were popular in export activities and those products had been exported to Malay Archipelago and Singapore (C.O 840/1, 31 May 1911, p. 8). Besides, they also got high demand from Saigon, Bangkok, Thailand, India Archipelago and Borneo. However, the trade of dried fish products was proven based on a record saying that 429 of sailboats left the Kuala Terengganu Port and moved towards the west, berthing at Kelantan, Thailand, Annam and Cochin-China ports. From the record, 161 of sailboats leaving the Kuala Terengganu Port sailed to Singapore (C.O 840/1, 25 June 1912, p.1). It was proven with the number of registered boats in 1910 which was 1,986 boats that were used for fishing and trade activities. In addition, the exported dried fish products were among the biggest export goods in Terengganu. A British Agent in Terengganu, Walter D. Scott said that export of Terengganu's dried fish products in 1910 were the most popular among other export products from other countries. It could be referred in Table 4.

Table 4
Terengganu’s Export Items in 1910

No	Type	Value (\$)
1	Dried fish	\$464,288
2	Tin	\$313,177
3	Coconut	\$281,813
4	Paddy	\$174,295
5	Pepper	\$152,707
6	Rattan	\$28,039
7	Rice	\$24,746
8	Rawhide	\$14,946
9	Resin	\$12,251

Source: C.O 840/1, 31 May 1911, p. 7-9

The table listed export items of Terengganu in 1910 that was obviously reflecting that dried fish products were the top export products among others. In the year, the total value of exported dried fish to Singapore had reached up to \$464,288. The achievement was the result of cooperation among the coastal Malay community, government and the British. The government started recognizing the dried fish products as one of primary export goods for the whole year. The dried fish products got highest demand from Singapore.

Table 5
The Amount of Exported Dried Fish Products from 1915 to 1920

No.	Year	Total Export Dried Fish (\$/Picul)
1	1915	\$711,897/ 79,627
2	1916	\$601,672/ 65,841
3	1917	\$763,807/ 80,017
4	1918	\$844,444/ 83,617
5	1919	\$1,044,966/ 92,474
6	1920	\$1,499,965/ 96,354

Source: C.O 840/1, 31 May 1911, p. 8, C.O 840/1, 25 June 1912, p.2, C.O 840/1, 01 March 1913, p.1, C.O 840/1, 31 July 1914, p. 2, C.O 840/1, 29 April 1915, p.7, C.O 840/1, 07 April 1916, p.17, C.O 840/1, 07 April 1917, p.5, C.O 840/1, 7 April 1918, p.3, C.O 840/1, 07 April 1919, p.4, C.O 840/1, 01 May 1920, p.4, C.O 840/1, 18 May 1922, p.3

The table 5 showed the total export of dried fish for 6 years which was from 1915 until 1920. The total exported dried fish products in 1915 was \$711,897. It was the highest if compared to rubber, wolfram ore, tin, coconut and legumes according to Yearly Report 1915. Meanwhile, the value of exported dried fish products in 1916 was \$601,672. 80,017 piculs of dried fish had been exported to Singapore in 1917 with the price of \$763,807. A little projection occurred a year after as the total weight of exported dried fish to Singapore increased in 83,617 piculs, valued as \$844,444. The total export number kept increasing in 1919 and 1920 with the weight of 92,474 (\$1,044,966) and 96,354 (\$1,499,965) piculs respectively. The capability of the state administrators in identifying the bigger market opportunities and the intensity of dried fish entrepreneurs had been the crucial factors of the high state revenue gain. So, it was clear that the dried fish products were the commodity export that was very important to Malay community and the state.

Based on the market demand, the dried fish products started showing their significant interest in 20th century. Very high demand on them had pushed the government to increase the production by providing more boats for fishing and brought the catches to the Malay States, Singapore, Thailand and Cochin-China for trade (C.O 840/1, 31 May 1911, p. 2). Furthermore, the production had successfully recorded great job opportunities to local communities, men and women which consisting of cutting and cleaning the fish, fish salting and fish drying, thus increasing the state revenue (L.A.Tr 169/37). Apart from that, the Health Institutions Terengganu ran a health control on the dried fish entrepreneurs in line with the rapid economic development at the state in the era by doing survey and giving some advice to those entrepreneurs about the importance of health and hygiene. It reflected that the government was very concerned to secure the level of cleanliness at the dried fish productions and the market areas (C.O 840/1, 25 April 1924, p. 14).

According to N.R Jarret as a British Adviser in 1933, sand had been the factor that caused the drop of dried fish price. The entrepreneurs had to make sure that no sand attached on the fishes. The rack for drying process should be lifted about 2 feet from the ground in order to avoid it. The Head Office of State Straits and the Malay States stated that the fishes that were salted in the sea were much better than those that being salted on land because fishes were perishable since they were kept for a day on the boat before being brought on land. There were some rotten fishes that also undergone saltation process and it could reduce the products' quality as well as their value (J.M.B 216/1351). The District Officer and the Chieftain Beach had a power to ask the fish proprietors and also the dried fish entrepreneurs to follow the advice given by the Head of Fish Offices State Straits and the Federated Malay States to conduct every production process thoroughly (J.M.B 216/1351).

The Municipal Officials Terengganu started taking actions by repairing the broken fish rack and the fish barn like the roof, fish tank and poles. The measures facilitated the dried fish productions (L.O.M 9/1940). The production for business purposes required a legal license issued by the Government in order to avoid repression on the low-level community. The fish proprietors must follow the rules imposed by the government. Therefore, the boats and other fishing tools should also be registered (L.A.T 54/1937). The license fee for selling and buying fishes was \$1.00 per year (L.A.T 85/39).

CORRESPONDING AUTHOR

Ruhaizan bt Sulaiman@Abd Rahim, Lecturer, Faculty of General Studies and Advance Education (FUPL), Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin (UniSZA), Kampus Gong Badak, 21300 Kuala Nerus. Tel: +609-6688888. Faks: +609-6687861. E-mail: ruhaizan@unisza.edu.my

CONCLUSION

The dried fish production among the Malay community at coastal areas was the economic activity that should be recognized as one of the most important economic resources in Terengganu. The dried fish products were early being produced individually, but then it expand to international level after getting involved in exportation in 20th century due to high demand from local community and others. This showed that the products were the main products in Terengganu since they gave lots of contribution to Terengganu's economic development. There were three main things in the dried fish production; 1) the fish barn to cut and clean the fishes, 2) the fish tank to salt the fishes and 3) the rack to dry the fishes under the sun. The dried fish entrepreneurs must pay for license's issuance in order to build the fish rack and fish barn on the government's land. There were many ways implemented by the government and the British to maintain and increase the profit among those who involved in producing the dried fish. Thus, it reflected that the state administrators always concern about the society by giving supports to increase the communities' standard of living.

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