

Fisheries Economic Activities among the Malay Society at the Terengganu Coast in the early 20th century

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DOI: 10.6007/IJARBSS/v7-i12/3641 URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v7-i12/3641>

ABSTRACT

This study focus on the fisheries activities at the Terengganu coast among the Malay society in the early of 20th century. Terengganu shows fisheries industry's improvement as a result of high demind from the local and non-local people on dried fish product. This research uses qualitative method by using the primary sources such as annual reports, letters, memos and government files. Those documents come from the British Colonial, the Terengganu Secretary Office, the Terengganu Legal Advisory Office and the Terengganu Chief Minister Office that have been analysed using the historical approach. Secondary sources like journals and books are also referred to support the results. The results find out that fisherman and dried fish entrepreneurs are the main jobs of coastal Malay people in Terengganu during the early of 20th century. The involvement of Malay society at the coastal area in fisheries has raised the Terengganu's economy.

Keywords: *Economy, Fisheries, Malay people, Coast, Terengganu*

INTRODUCTION

Terengganu is located in the east of Malay Peninsula, facing the South China Sea with long wide beaches that lie from Kuala Besut up to Kuala Kemaman. The geographic features encouraged the people living at the coast to get involved in fisheries industry (J.M.B 154/1350). Economic activities in Terengganu were developed and they were monopolized by the elite. The Terengganu's total exports included the dried fish which was the primary export trading product. Other export products were black pepper, rubber, coconut, tin ore and wolfram ore (C.O 840/1 1915, p.17). Terengganu had made trade relations with Singapore, Thailand, Patani, Kedah and Pahang (Dollah, 1989, p.71). Most of coastal Malay people worked as fisherman, dried fish entrepreneurs, netter, boatman, merchant and trader. The existence of 14 river

valleys and developed ports in Terengganu had facilitated the Malay society to get involved in fishing activities (Clifford, p. 5).

FISHING ACTIVITIES AMONG THE COASTAL MALAY COMMUNITY

Fisheries were very synonym to the coastal Malay population in Terengganu. Most of them worked as fisherman and dried fish entrepreneurs since hundred years back. The community settlements more focus on the coastal area along the Kuala Besut to Kuala Kemaman coasts that facilitated the effective trade communication links that took place between the local and foreign communities (SUKTr (Gen) 818).

Figure 1:
The Fisherman in Terengganu in the early of 20th Century



Source: Terengganu State Museum

In the early of 20th century, it was predicted that 2/3 of the Malay people involved in fishing activities. The Terengganu Malays were recorded as the most expert fisherman in the Peninsula and it was proven by the Annual Report by C.N Maxwell as a British Agent of Terengganu in 1914:

The Terengganu Malay is perhaps the most expert fisherman in the Peninsula and the Chinaman has not yet been able to oust him from the fisheries, as he has the Malays of the Colony and Federated Malay States (C.O 840/1, 29 April 1915, p.8)

Every fisherman in Terengganu had a small boat known as *Perahu Peraisan Ikan* that was used to fish. The small boats facilitated the fishermen to move from the ports and it also helped the fishermen to land the fish catches easily. The fish catches were sold at daily markets like Hilir Market, Tanjung Market, Pengadang Buloh Market and Kedai Payang Market for the needs of the local community.

Figure 2
Small Boats for Fishing



Source: National Archive of Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur

The caught fresh fishes were forged to the nearby areas to be sold to the local population. Typically, the fishes that landed in the morning were still fresh and they abled to fulfil the demand of local community. Meanwhile, the fishes were not so *laku* in the evening as they were not so fresh. However, the unsold fish were not wasted because the dried fish entrepreneurs would buy them for dried fish production purposes (S.A 1422/1346). The fishermen usually started fishing as earlier as in the morning and they returned in the evening. They fished for only 7 months in a year which was from March until October with an income of \$8.00 per month. Meanwhile, the income obtained by the boatman was twice as the fishermen's. According to M.C. ff Sheppard, 1949, the fish catches were for own's, sold or being processed to dried fish. Only 1/8 of the fish catches were used by the local people, while the other 7/8 were dried along the beach to be exported to Malay Peninsula, Cochin-China, Saigon and Singapura as dried fish product (Awang, 1992, p. 208).

The high fish catches by the fishermen among the coastal Malay people of Terengganu had brought the idea of making dried fish product (Sulaiman, 2017, p.529). The Malay society's involvement in dried fish entrepreneurship was not only for their survival, but also for improving the standard of living as the entrepreneurship could help them improving their economic level as well as the economy of country (C.O 840/1, 07 April 1916, pg.6). The coastal community's versatility in fisheries was also recorded by J.L Humphreys, a British Agent of Terengganu in the Annual Report, 1915. It was as follows:

The versatility of the Terengganu fisherman, boat builder and craftsman, has been recorded on many occasions.

The Malay coastal people had various skills in fishing, drying fish, building boats and making nets. This could strengthen the record showing that the coastal community was diligent and competitive (C.O 840/1, 07 April 1916, p.6 and Hugh Clifford, 1961, p. 88). The Terengganu community's involvement in fisheries in 1921 was as in Table 1:

Table 1
Fishing Activities among the Malay Society at Terengganu Coast in 1921

No.	Occupations	Race (Gender)		Total
		Malay (L)	Malay (P)	
1	Fisherman	8803	387	9190
2	Dried fish entrepreneur	73	27	100
3	Craftsman	11	-	11
4	Boat builder	108	-	108

Source: J.M.B 270/1341, S.A 463/41 and L.A.Tr 169/37

The above table pictured the fisheries economic activities of Malay society at Terengganu coasts in 1921. There were 8,803 men and 387 women that worked as fisherman which was 9,190 in total. At the same time, those fishermen were also working as dried fish entrepreneurs. The amount of fish catches was lot and hence the fishermen would utilize them to make dried fish. The total dried fish entrepreneurs were about 100; 73 men and the rest was women. The boat builders were in total of 108 and there were 11 persons that worked as craftsman. It portrayed that most of the Malay community living at the Terengganu coasts involved in fisherman and dried fish entrepreneur jobs which meant that only few of them worked as craftsman and boat builder. According to J.L Humphreys as a British Agent in 1918:

The sea coast population that lives almost entirely by fishing and fish curing is estimated at 30,000 Malays. They work hard in the fishing season from March to October, when the coast is open, the boats go out at dawn with the land-breeze and return in the afternoon with the in-shore wind (C.O 840/1, 07 April 1919, p.6.).

The record explained that fishing and fish curing were the main jobs among the sea coast population in Terengganu. The geographical of Terengganu's beaches that elongated from Kuala Besut until Kuala Kemaman which facing the South China Sea was very suitable for fishing activities (Sheppard, 1949, p. 28). Sultan Sulaiman Badrul Alam Syah was very proud with the fisheries industry's achievement of Terengganu during his governance. The dried fish was the main export product of Terengganu as it contributed in economics' development (C.O 840/1, 25 June 1912, pg.2). The table 2 was related to total export of Terengganu in 1920:

Table 2
Types and Total of Export Products of Terengganu in 1920

No	Type	Pikul	\$
1	Dried fish	96,354	\$1,499,965
2	Tin ore	8,117	\$813,683
3	Rubber	5,097	\$426,247
4	Coconut	18,430	\$365,815
5	Black pepper	5,115	\$118,867
6	Wolfram seed	2,567	\$102,582

Source: C.O 840/1, 1919, p.4 and C.O 840/1, 1920, p.3

The Table 1 had shown the types and total export products of Terengganu in 1920 that included the dried fish, tin ore, rubber, coconut, black pepper and wolfram seed. The dried fish product got the highest total export among the export products in total of 96,354 pikul with an amount of \$1,499,965. The exported tin ore was about 8,117 pikul with the price of \$813,683 and the weight of exported rubber was 5,097 pikul with \$426,247. The coconut was also one of the Terengganu export products during the time with the total of 18,430, priced \$365,815. The total exported black pepper was 5,115 pikul (\$118,867), while the wolfram seed's total export was 2,567 pikul (\$102,582).

According to J.L Humphreys, exported dried fish to other countries especially to Singapore was the most important export activity in Terengganu as the country got high demand on dried fish. The high demand on dried fish had urged the entrepreneurs to produce the product by the demand. The increasing of total export product was the result of the cooperation that occurred between the coast population and the government (C.O 840/1, 07 April 1919, p.4).

Apart of working as fisherman and dried fish entrepreneurs, there were also some of them that worked as traders. In the early of 20th century, the trading industry in Terengganu used big boat that was known as *Perahu Bedar*. The trading activities were held at the coast pathways heading to Singapore, Patani, Senggora, Indo-China, Thailand, Indonesia, Burma, Ceylon, and India(Sulaiman & Mustapha, Okt- Dis 1996). They sailed with big boats to all over countries while bringing local products for trading. The products were dried fish, anchovies, cured fish, coconut, pinang kotai, silk, damar. The traders returned with products from other countries like salt and rice. The trading activities ran very well as the country was in peace and Terengganu also got good port as it had easy access for any boats or ships from local and foreign countries (*Sejarah Terengganu*, n.d; Ghazali, 1990, p. 53). It was shown in the picture below:

Picture 3
The Boats Went out and Entered the Terengganu's Port



Source: National Archives Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur

The record in Terengganu's history had approved that the Malay society of coast population had monopolized the fisheries industry and international trading by using the big boats to bring the products. There were hundreds of big and small boats back and forth when the confluence was opened after raining season for fisheries activities (*Sejarah Terengganu*, T.T). Based on M. C. ff Sheppard in *A Short History of Trengganu*, the community preferred to work as fisherman, fish entrepreneur and tradesman rather than being a farmer. The cultivator got involved in cultivation of paddy, coconut, sugarcane, fruits, gambier and vegetables. However, 1/3 of rice in Terengganu was imported from Thailand and Negeri Selat. The price of rice originated from Terengganu was \$2.50 per pikul, while the imported rice was \$4.00 per pikul. During the governance of Sultan Sulaiman Badrul Alam Syah, Kuala Terengganu was well known as the most important trading centre at Malay Peninsula that always attracting the local and non-local people all over the world. The business centre was located at Payang Market in the evening and the centre would be at Hilir Market in the morning (C.O 840/1, 07 April 1916, p.4). According to J.L Humphreys in 1915, the open and dynamic structure of market that was held by the government had been the strong factor that caused the increasing of Terengganu's export revenue. The support and encouragement from the government had successfully changed the economic level among the local community (C.O 840/1, 07 April 1916, p.6) Even though the Malay coastal community consists of fisherman and fish entrepreneurs, but the business and trading were the parts of the crucial things in their life (Yaacob, 1993, p.188).

CONCLUSION

The fishermen and dried fish entrepreneurs were the main contributors to fisheries activities in the early of 20th. Extra caught fishes were brought by the fishermen to the dried fish entrepreneurs. Moreover, high demand on dried fish product from the local as well as non-local community had induced the increasing of numbers of fish entrepreneurs among the coast population in Terengganu. At the time, the statistic showed that dried fish was the highest total export product in the market if compared to other export products. It pictured that the coastal community was able to release their product in large quantity for trading purposes.

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