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letter

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Downside to shrimp farms

SHRIMP farming has again wielded its ugly image, the latest being discharge from several shrimp farms in Kuala Selangor that has polluted nearby mangrove swatches and threatening the firefly colony and other marine life.

Over the years, objections have been raised against shrimp farms as they negatively impact the environment and socio-economy of the coastal and fishing community.

Mangroves are important because they support marine as well as terrestrial species, protect coastlines from storms and erosion and are important in the subsistence of many coastal communities. Mangroves provide nursery grounds for various young aquatic animals including commercially important fish, and their destruction can lead to substantial losses for commercial fisheries due to decline in wild stocks of fish and other marine life.

The tremendous value of mangroves to the ecosystem and commercial fisheries cannot be overlooked. In Malaysia, at least 65% of fish and shellfish harvested are associated with mangroves, over 30% of shell and finfish landed by commercial operators each year are mangrove-dependent, and in some regions the figure may be as high as 50%. An estimated 600kg each of finfish and shrimp are produced annually in Malaysia from every hectare of mangrove.

A 2006 report by the United Nations Environment Programme noted that a 400 sq km area of mangrove forest in Matang, Malaysia, supports a fishery worth US\$100 million (RM337 million) a year.

The Scripps Institution of Oceanography at the University of California at San Diego after

analysing fish landings in 13 regions in the Gulf of California, Mexico, revealed that fishing yield was directly proportional to the length of coastline with mangroves. The scientists used the findings to estimate the monetary value of mangroves at US\$37,500 (RM126,534) a hectare a year.

The destruction of mangroves is all the more deplorable if we consider that a hectare of intensive shrimp farm is profitable for just three to five years, after which it is abandoned and new areas are developed for shrimp farming.

Besides this, aquaculture effluents are also of concern as they contain a myriad of pollutants depending on the nature of inputs. If untreated, the effluents have a number of effects on waters including an increase in the level of suspended solids and nutrients accompanied by a fall in oxygen content. The effluents can also contain toxins depending on which chemicals are used to disinfect farms, control pests, control predators, antibiotics, etc.

Considering the negative impact, aquaculture should not be regarded as a conduit of fisheries development in Malaysia because it is not sustainable. We urge the government to scrap development of intensive shrimp farms including the proposed 1,000ha Integrated Shrimp Aquaculture Park (i-SHARP) in Setiu, Terengganu by Blue Archipelago Bhd, a subsidiary of Khazanah Holdings. Efforts must also be taken to rehabilitate degraded mangroves.

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