

The Impacts of COVID-19 on the Aquatic Foods Supply Chain and Market in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

The aquaculture sector supports the livelihood of coastal communities in Malaysia, particularly those involved in micro- and small-scale fish farming activities. The aquatic food supply chain is a complex system that consists (1) production, (2) processing, (3) distribution, (4) retailing, and (5) consumption. The impact of COVID-19 has the knock-on effect across all stages of the supply chains. Nevertheless, the processing and distribution are excluded in mostly small-scale operations. During the MCO, aquaculture production has been slowing down due to limited workforce, decreased in demand, the struggle in following the required sanitary measures, and the likelihood of the reduction in animal feed supply due to logistics issues during this pandemic. Most of the aquaculturists especially the small-scale, faced difficulties in selling their products because of limited sales operations due to the closure of, or the limited operating hours for the morning and night markets. Consequently, many wholesalers also stopped buying or purchased fewer aquatic products because all the restaurants were ordered to remain shut except for takeaways. Furthermore, the disruptions in transportation that caused delays in transporting the products because of the road closure or reroute during the MCO. According to Department of Fisheries (DOF) Malaysia, aquaculture production for Peninsular Malaysia has declined notably, by 45% (5,261 metric tonnes valued at RM78 million) in March 2020 as compared to a month before, mainly due to limited access to inputs such as seed and fish food, labour shortage, as well as limited operations of seafood restaurants and hotels. Indeed, all

above-mentioned causes has created serious problems for small-scale aquaculturists as they commonly use these places as their platform to market or sell their products. This can be supported with a preliminary survey done by the Department of Statistics Malaysia (2020) that, it is estimated that 33% of those within the fisheries and aquaculture sectors loss their jobs, and 33 % experienced working hour reduction due to COVID-19, and to conclude, 79.1 % of farmers and fishers with discretionary income.

Keywords: aquaculture production, supply-chain, small-scale aquaculturist, covid-19

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