



Analysis of Illegal Fishing Issues in Meranti Islands Regency and Its Impact on Marine Ecosystem Sustainability

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Abstract: Indonesia, as the largest maritime nation with over 17,000 islands and vast oceanic areas covering two-thirds of its territory, possesses significant potential in the marine sector. However, practices of illegal fishing, often conducted by foreign and local fishermen in waters such as those of the Meranti Islands Regency in Sumatra, threaten the sustainability of marine ecosystems and the livelihoods of local fishermen. This research aims to examine the enforcement efforts against illegal fishing in the region, including both preventive and repressive measures implemented by the Marine and Fisheries Office and the Water Police. The research method used is observational, with data collection techniques involving direct interviews with officials from the Water Police and the Marine and Fisheries Office as respondents. The findings indicate that preventive measures include legal education and routine patrols, while repressive measures encompass the arrest and examination of lawbreakers. However, law enforcement faces various challenges, such as limited resources and facilities, low public awareness of the impacts of illegal fishing, and economic factors that drive some fishermen to engage in illegal practices. Therefore, enhancing oversight, ongoing legal education, and providing necessary resources are essential to preserving marine resources and ensuring effective law enforcement in the Meranti Islands Regency

Keywords: Ecosystem Sustainability; Illegal Fishing; Law Enforcement; Legal Education; Meranti Islands Regency

1. Introduction

Indonesia is recognized as the largest maritime country in the world, with a vast marine area covering about two-thirds of its total territory. According to the Indonesian Forum for the Environment (WALHI), Indonesia is the largest archipelago nation, with more than 17,000 islands separated by waters (Rohman & Afkarina, 2024) (Sunardi et al., 2024).

Based on the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) of 1982, Indonesia is recognized as a maritime nation, with sovereignty over its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and continental shelf, as well as rights to manage natural resources in the high seas (Darusman, 2018) (Devy & Rahmi, 2019).

Indonesia's tremendous marine potential makes it a valuable asset in the country's economic development. However, its strategic geographic location also poses security challenges, especially related to illegal fishing (Yusran & Asnelly, 2017). Fish theft frequently occurs in Indonesian waters, particularly by foreign vessels from neighboring countries. These practices include various destructive methods, such as bombing, poisoning, and trawl nets, which damage coral reef ecosystems and other marine life

The Meranti Islands Regency, located on the eastern coast of Sumatra and bordering a neighboring country, has great potential in the fisheries and tourism sectors. However, high demand for fish in the market has driven some fishermen to engage in illegal fishing (Suharto et al., 2018). Although local authorities strive to curb these illegal practices,

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cases of illegal fishing remain frequent, indicating weak law enforcement and monitoring in the area.

Based on the background above, this study aims to examine the issue of illegal fishing in the Meranti Islands Regency, particularly the increase in cases and enforcement efforts being made. Additionally, this research focuses on the impact of these practices on the sustainability of marine ecosystems and the steps needed to prevent further environmental damage in the future

2. Materials and Methods

The research method used is observational research or survey, which involves direct fieldwork at the research location, using data collection tools such as interviews. In terms of nature, this study is descriptive analysis, meaning it aims to provide a detailed, clear, and systematic description of the main research problem (Hendri et al., 2024).

The research object concerns criminal acts of illegal fishing in the waters of the Meranti Islands Regency. The population and respondents in this study include the Head of the Marine Police Unit of the Meranti Islands Regency Police, the Head of the Department or a representative from the Department of Marine and Fisheries of Meranti Islands Regency.

The data sources consist of primary data obtained through interviews directly related to the main issues discussed and secondary data obtained indirectly from respondents.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Efforts to Combat Illegal Fishing in the Waters of Meranti Islands Regency

The increasing rate of fishing activities day by day accelerates the depletion of fish resources. High fishing pressure, especially along the coast, has led to a decline in fish stock and an increase in competition among fishing equipment, which often results in conflicts among fishermen. As a consequence of declining income, fishermen have been innovating and modifying fishing tools to cover their operational costs. Violations in the use of fishing gear and methods are no longer new in fishing activities (Awaluddin, T., & Mokodompit, 2024).

The government has not ignored these violations. Measures to combat illegal fishing have been implemented, and law enforcement against perpetrators has also been carried out. However, difficulties in monitoring all fishing activities, especially in remote and border areas, have led to an increase in fishing violations (Tiaradipa & Hidayatullah, 2022).

The term "illegal fishing" is not explicitly defined in existing legislation. However, the terminology can be understood from a literal translation of the English language. In the Contemporary English-Indonesian Dictionary, "illegal" means unlawful, prohibited, or against the law. "Fish" means fish or fish meat, and "fishing" means the activity of catching fish as a livelihood or a place for catching fish. Based on this literal understanding, "illegal fishing" can be defined as fish-catching activities that are conducted unlawfully. According to Divera Wicaksono, as cited by Lambok Silalahi, illegal fishing involves using counterfeit fishing permits (SIPI), lacking an authentic SIPI, having documentation that does not match the vessel and fishing equipment, and catching prohibited types and sizes of fish (Latisha & Triadi, 2024).

A fishing permit, hereafter referred to as SIPI, is a written license that every fishing vessel must hold to conduct fishing activities, which is an integral part of the Fishing Business Permit (SIUP). The Fishing Business Permit (SIUP) is a written authorization

that a fishing company must have to conduct fishing business using the production equipment listed in the permit. A criminal offense is an act that violates the law and is thus against the law, committed intentionally by a responsible person. Fishing is the activity of catching fish in non-cultivated waters using any tool or method, including activities that use vessels for loading, transporting, storing, cooling, handling, processing, and/or preserving (Harliza & Michael, 2020).

Efforts to combat illegal fishing are activities undertaken by the State based on its sovereignty. It is no secret that the phenomenon of illegal fishing in Indonesian waters is rampant, including in the waters of Kepulauan Meranti District. Illegal fishing activities have been widespread and ongoing for years. We must acknowledge that our marine policies remain lax, allowing these fishermen to engage in illegal fishing. One of the reforms in Indonesia's legal and legislative sector is the enactment of Law No. 31 of 2004, which was then amended by Law No. 45 of 2009 concerning fisheries (MUHAMAD, 2012) (Yulia et al., 2021).

For Indonesia, this law is crucial, considering the vastness of our waters, nearly 6 million square kilometers, covering sovereign and national jurisdiction waters, which requires our collective attention and concern, especially regarding efforts to combat and enforce the law against criminal offenses and to secure our seas. The existence of Law No. 45 of 2009 is a positive step and provides a foundation or regulation for law enforcement officers in resolving legal issues related to illegal fishing, which greatly harms the State and is even suspected of undermining the nation's economy. Furthermore, illegal fishing activities in Indonesian waters cause national losses averaging 4 to 5 billion USD per year (Kussuma et al., 2024) (Siregar et al., 2024).

When examining Law No. 9 of 1985 and Law No. 45 of 2009 (an amendment to Law No. 31 of 2004 concerning fisheries) (Ikhlasunnisa Samara, 2024) (Maryani & Adawiyah Nasution, 2019), it is evident that illegal fishing activities can be punished with imprisonment and fines. Sutherland proposed two methods for crime prevention:

Reformative Method: This approach aims at reducing recidivism or repeat offenses. It includes:

Dynamic Reformative Method: This method focuses on changing the criminal's bad habits. **Clinical Reformative Method:** This method focuses on the individual, emphasizing the conditions that led to the crime, giving more attention to the criminal rather than the crime itself. **Group Relation Reform Method:** This method views behavior as influenced more by group associations than by individual traits or character. **Preventive Method:** This approach is aimed at preventing first-time offenses, involving activities that prevent crime before it occurs and rehabilitating those found guilty and sentenced to prison or correctional facilities.

In general, crime prevention efforts are carried out through two methods: **Moralistic Method:** This approach builds mental and spiritual resilience through guidance by religious leaders, educators, and others. **Abolitionist Method:** This conceptual approach to crime prevention requires planning based on criminological research to uncover the underlying causes.

The key components of crime prevention efforts in relation to criminal justice mechanisms and community participation can be summarized as follows: Strengthening law enforcement apparatus, including the organization, personnel, and facilities needed to resolve criminal cases. Legislation should be able to analyze and curb crime with a forward-looking approach. An effective criminal justice mechanism that is quick, accurate, affordable, and straightforward.

Coordination between law enforcement agencies and related authorities to enhance effectiveness in tackling crime. Community participation to support smooth crime prevention efforts. These five elements represent a general concept that should be adapted operationally to the appropriate time, place, and social conditions. To strengthen operational capacity for crime prevention, three types of willpower are needed: political will from the government, social will to support government initiatives through various media, and individual will or personal awareness to obey the law and avoid crime.

Crime prevention includes preventive and repressive actions. Preventive efforts focus on fostering, educating, and raising awareness in the community to prevent potential criminal acts. Repressive efforts, meanwhile, address ongoing criminal acts (Febriansyah & Syakur, 2023).

Positioning the police at the forefront ensures that government crime prevention efforts are successful by establishing a solid police system and organization, followed by coordinated prevention and community participation. Consequently, the efforts of the Kepulauan Meranti district government to combat illegal fishing should yield significant results.

From 2015 to 2018, the problem of illegal fishing in the waters of Kepulauan Meranti District has been rampant. Nevertheless, efforts to resolve this issue are still required. According to SATPOLAIR (Marine and Air Police) of Kepulauan Meranti District Police Chief AKBP H. Hari Sanyoto, AMK, A, the police have implemented the following measures to combat and eradicate illegal fishing crimes in the waters of Kepulauan Meranti District:

1. Preventive Efforts

Preventive efforts are one approach to deterring illegal fishing activities in the Meranti Islands District. These preventive measures are systematically and structurally conducted by law enforcement officials with the goal of minimizing illegal fishing crimes in the district. The preventive efforts include:

a. Legal Outreach

Legal outreach involves activities conducted by law enforcement and fishery-related agencies to introduce and educate the community on fisheries laws. Through these programs, the community is informed about the impacts and prohibitions regarding the use of destructive fishing tools. According to research, regular socialization or legal outreach efforts—such as via mass media, community seminars, or meetings with local leaders who then communicate with their communities—help educate the public on existing laws. The goal is to ensure that the community understands and complies with the applicable regulations. The Fisheries and Marine Department, in cooperation with the relevant agencies such as Polair (Water Police) of Kepulauan Meranti, organizes legal outreach sessions at least twice a week. If there are obstacles that reduce the frequency of outreach, the sessions are held twice a month. These outreach programs involve guiding the community in law enforcement by encouraging them to report any illegal fishing activities to the authorities. As stated by Aprita Rahmi, ST, Head of Fish Resources and Fisheries Technology Development at the Fisheries and Marine Department of Kepulauan Meranti: “The efforts include providing legal outreach to the community and fishers about applicable laws, broadening their understanding of what is prohibited under fisheries regulations.”

b. Routine Patrols

Routine patrols are conducted randomly to prevent illegal fishing at specific times. These patrols are carried out as frequently as possible each month, depending on the available resources. However, limitations in resources and occasional bad weather conditions pose challenges to patrol activities in the waters of Kepulauan Meranti. The patrols involve all relevant agencies authorized to handle these crimes, including the Marine Police and the Fisheries Department. These agencies must coordinate their roles and responsibilities to avoid conflicts in authority. As expressed by Aiptu Margono, head of the Water Police in Kepulauan Meranti, “We will conduct regular patrols in areas vulnerable to illegal fishing and monitor the entire waters of the Kepulauan Meranti District.”

c. Providing Environmentally Friendly Assistance

This social aid program is designed to provide the community with the necessary tools and equipment. The assistance includes environmentally friendly fishing gear distributed to low-income fishers or community-formed fishing groups. Aiptu Margono, from the Water Police, stated that "providing aid in the form of social assistance and other supportive resources for sustainable, legal fishing practices is appropriate and will continue." Aprita Rahmi, ST, Head of Fish Resources and Fisheries Technology Development, also noted that the assistance is given based on community needs.

2. Repressive Efforts

Repressive measures are taken by law enforcement after a crime has occurred, including the arrest and examination of perpetrators to determine appropriate sanctions, leading to sentencing by a judge. According to Aiptu Margono from SATPOLAIR Kepulauan Meranti Police, "The legal action taken by the police to tackle illegal fishing crimes involves apprehending and investigating perpetrators and enforcing strict sanctions against offenders."

Law enforcement in maritime sectors relies on strategic legislation to ensure legal certainty in fisheries. According to Aiptu Margono, "We prioritize applying Law No. 45 of 2009 on Fisheries, as this law strengthens the role of regulatory measures, including stopping, inspecting, arresting, and prosecuting illegal fishing perpetrators." By applying the appropriate legal provisions, it is expected that strict sanctions will be imposed, deterring offenders and curbing illegal fishing activities effectively.

3.2 The Reality and Challenges of Combating Illegal Fishing in the Waters of Meranti Islands Regency

Law enforcement is not solely about implementing laws; however, in Indonesia, the tendency is often to view law enforcement purely as the enactment of legislation, making "law enforcement" a popular concept. There is also a tendency to interpret law enforcement narrowly as the implementation of court rulings. This narrow view has its limitations, particularly when enforcing laws or judicial decisions disrupts social harmony (Manurung & Prasetyo, 2024).

Illegal fishing is one of the criminal acts in the fisheries sector and a global issue faced by many countries. This crime not only damages marine ecosystems and fisheries resources in the ocean or waterways but also affects the sovereignty of a region. If the local communities continually engage in such activities, it may threaten the authority and territorial integrity of a state (Fatimah et al., 2016).

Fisheries resources, as renewable resources, have specific limits aligned with their carrying capacity. When used in ways that conflict with management principles, these resources face the risk of depletion. Therefore, maintaining the sustainability of fish stocks requires definite legal frameworks and robust law enforcement. Weak law enforcement is one of the major causes of marine ecosystem degradation. Consequently, fisheries management becomes a key priority that must be carried out in an integrated and systematic manner.

The practice of open access has long created problems, including the degradation of marine biological resources, pollution, over-exploitation, and conflicts among fishers. As a valuable asset, the potential of fish resources needs to be preserved. Fishing, as an exploitative activity, involves harvesting available natural resources. Therefore, fishing activities must be regulated and limited to prevent the depletion of these resources. The use of explosives in fishing, for example, is a highly destructive and illegal practice across Indonesia.

Illegal fishing has become an alarming issue, harming communities and the nation, particularly in the waters of Kepulauan Meranti. Fishermen use explosives made of gunpowder in containers with fuses, igniting them and throwing them into the water. The explosion causes severe damage across the water, allowing fishermen to collect only

commercially valuable fish, while many other fish and marine creatures are left dead among coral fragments that may never recover.

The use of bombs for fishing poses a severe threat to the sustainability of marine resources, assets that could otherwise ensure prosperity for communities. Such damage may render these resources unrecoverable, depriving future generations of this vital resource. The explosives used for fishing are destructive tools that fall under regional jurisdiction, as mandated by Article 18 of Law No. 31 of 2004 on Fisheries and Law No. 45 of 2009 on amendments to Law No. 31, governing the exploitation, conservation, and management of marine resources (Pratiwi et al., 2023) (Yunita et al., n.d.).

Several obstacles affect law enforcement in handling illegal fishing within Kepulauan Meranti:

a. Infrastructure and Facilities

Infrastructure, both software (education) and hardware (physical resources), is essential for enforcing laws against illegal fishing. Sufficient resources like skilled personnel, organized institutions, and adequate investigative equipment are crucial. The Meranti Police's water patrol, led by officers trained in nautical skills at the Police Academy in Pondok Dayung, Jakarta, is critical for patrolling high-risk zones. However, the limited number of patrol boats has become a hindrance. According to Aiptu Margono, Head of the Water Police, only three patrol boats and four rubber boats are available, insufficient for monitoring frequent illegal fishing areas. As stated by Aprita Rahmi, the Head of Fisheries Resource Management, the shortage of patrol boats and other essential tools hampers law enforcement efforts.

b. Community Awareness and Cultural Factors

Law enforcement serves society, aiming to establish social harmony, which can be influenced by the community's legal awareness. Effective law enforcement is often hindered by the community's limited understanding of legal restrictions on fishing practices. Illegal fishing has persisted over the years, with many offenders apprehended annually. Without genuine community awareness and adherence to laws, it is challenging to stop illegal fishing activities. Raising legal awareness regarding Law No. 45 of 2009 is essential to foster compliance.

According to Rahmi, communities are instrumental in enforcing legal norms, and limited knowledge among residents contributes to violations. Collaborative legal education initiatives between the Fisheries Department and the Water Police aim to raise awareness among coastal communities.

c. Economic Constraints

Economic hardship often drives individuals to illegal fishing. Fishermen in Kepulauan Meranti resort to these practices due to limited employment opportunities and increasing economic pressures, making illegal fishing a quick means of earning. This echoes Aristotle's assertion that poverty often leads to crime. According to Aiptu Margono, low-income levels push fishermen to seek higher catches, even through illegal means, to meet their economic needs.

This sentiment is shared by Rahmi, who noted that illegal fishing in Kepulauan Meranti results from low welfare levels among fishermen, coupled with high economic needs, leading them to disregard the law for short-term financial gain. Improving infrastructure, community awareness, and economic conditions is vital for the sustainable management of fisheries and to ensure that resources remain available for future generations.

4. Conclusions

Based on the research conducted, it can be concluded that the Department of Marine Affairs and Fisheries, along with the Water Police of the Meranti Islands Regency, have implemented various efforts to address the criminal acts of illegal fishing within their waters. These efforts include both preventive and repressive measures. Preventively,

they conduct public outreach and legal education to raise community awareness about the applicable laws, perform marine security patrols to protect marine resources, and provide environmentally friendly fishing equipment to the community, particularly to those in need or fishing groups. Repressively, actions taken include the arrest, detention, and investigation of suspects; searching of fishing tools and equipment suspected of involvement in criminal acts; inspection of fishing business documents; and case file submissions to the prosecutor's office. However, there are several obstacles in enforcing laws against illegal fishing, such as limited resources or facilities, low public awareness about the negative impacts of illegal fishing, and economic hardship, which often drives some community members to engage in illegal fishing activities to meet their basic needs.

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