

## **Environment Watch: Bylaw aims to save Bengkalis' iconic fish**

The Bengkalis administration in Riau wants to create a refuge to save its population of longtail shad fish, locally called terubuk. The fish, long considered the regency's mascot, has been on the verge of extinction.

The administration has proposed a bylaw prohibiting people from catching terubuk (*tenulosa macrura*) in mangrove areas on Bengkalis Island and around the Siak River estuary, during certain periods to protect terubuk roe and larva.

“Their period for laying eggs is very short, only three days during certain months of the year. Its population will be threatened if they are disturbed during the breeding period,” Bengkalis Fishery and Maritime Affairs Office head Tengku Khairuddin said recently.

According to a report compiled by the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organization (CSIRO) of the Australian Science Institute and Riau University, terubuk usually breeds in brackish water between August and October.

Fishermen should be banned from catching terubuk after the fish ends their reproductive period and return to the sea to look for plankton, according to the report.

“Fishermen are actually aware of the cycle — that's why its population has further dwindled,” Khairuddin said.

Fishermen have always hunted terubuk during their reproductive period to maximize catches.

Terubuk meat and roe command a high price at market. In some areas, terubuk fish sell for between Rp 150,000 (US\$16.95) and Rp 250,000 a kilogram, while terubuk roe is sold for up to Rp 225,000 a kilogram.

Terubuk does not have the pungent odor common to fish in general. Some believe the fish can be used cure influenza.

Overfishing during the terubuk's ovulation period, pollution and vanishing mangrove swamps have caused the population of the fish to decrease further.

“Proof of the ecosystem's degradation is in the discovery of sawdust inside the stomach of terubuk. This shows that it has been forced to search for plankton near polluted lumber mills,” Khairuddin said.

Terubuk are found in Bangladesh, the Arabian Sea, Malaysia and China. In Indonesia, the Siak River estuary is the terubuk's main habitat and nursery ground.

“The terubuk must be saved, not only for its economic value, but also for its historical value. Saving the terubuk means saving the icon of Bengkalis. Don't let our future generations look at the terubuk as a symbol of Bengkalis regency only, while never being able to see or eat it,” Khairuddin said.