

Polluted Rawapening threatens species

Two native fish — the hard-lipped barb, locally known as the wader, and the freshwater anchovy — are feared to be facing extinction in their habitat of Rawapening Lake, Semarang regency, in the near future due to environmental degradation.

Semarang Regency Husbandry and Fisheries Agency head Agus Purwoko Djati said that the populations of both types of fish were predicted to be no more than 10 percent of their original populations.

“Their populations have continued to decline for the last few years,” Agus said recently.

He said the swamp was no longer safe for the two types of fish due to domestic waste being poured into the rivers that connect to Rawapening. The waste has increased sulfur and ammonia concentrations in the lake, killing fish.

This excludes the impact of climate change, which causes extreme weather that influences the lake’s ecosystem. High rainfall and strong winds incite turbulence that causes the lower levels of the swamp to rise up, thus inciting differences of temperature in the water.

“This also contributes to the deaths of the fish,” Agus continued.

Furthermore, according to Agus, sporadic fishing activities using unfriendly methods such as electric shocks have further sped up the decrease of the two fish species.

He said that Regency Bylaw No. 25/2001 on Rawapening fish management banned fishing activities using such methods.

In practice, however, the methods are still used.

To help save the fish from extinction, he went on, his agency would undertake breeding and hatchery programs for the two species.

“We will also increase surveillance of the illegal fishing activities being carried out by local people in Rawapening,” Agus said.

An association of Rawapening fishermen also confirmed the decline in the area’s fish population.

Chairman of the association’s task force, Kasiyan, said that the decreased fish population in Rawapening would threaten the local economy. Fish cultivation and fishing activities in Rawapening have created livelihoods for over 2,200 fishermen in the area.

Fish is also the main ingredient for dozens of home industries that produce crackers and chips. The products are not only sold to local markets, but also to other regencies across the province such as Temanggung, Cilacap and Magelang.

Kasiyan expressed his concern that there were still many fishermen who caught fish in the lake but were not willing to help seed fish. “If you take the fish then you have to sow the seeds. That’s the right principle,” Kasiyan said.

Another fisherman, Paryanto, from Bejalen, Ambarawa, said that he and other fishermen in the region frequently caught people fishing in Rawapening using forbidden tools.

Rawapening Lake has been exploited as the location of a hydroelectric power plant (PLTA), for fishing and as the main water supply for both tap water and irrigation purposes.