

## Case Study Overview – Malaysia

**Submitted by:** Marine Research Foundation

**Location:** Sabah, Malaysia

**Collaborators:** Department of Fisheries Sabah; local fishing communities

**Threat:** Local fisheries bycatch of sea turtles

**Contributing factors:** Lack of political will, frequent government turnover and organizational shifts

**Description:** In Malaysia, the fishing industry is dominated by trawl fisheries, accounting for almost 50% of its overall catch, which results in high levels of bycatch. The Marine Research Foundation (MRF) started introducing Turtle Excluder Devices (TEDs) across Malaysia in 2007 to limit bycatch and after a decade of hard work, they successfully helped TEDs become a federal legal requirement in four States. However, challenges remain in implementing TEDs in the State of Sabah as the management and development of fisheries in Sabah are viewed strictly as a state matter. Due to continuous political upheaval and frequent government turnover and structural changes, it has been a challenge to amass consistent political support from the Sabah state government, specifically the Department of Fisheries Sabah.

### **Background:**

#### **Community/Target Audience**

The MRF has been working closely with the Department of Fisheries Malaysia (DOFM) and Department of Fisheries Sabah (DOFS) for over 16 years. They have trained more than 200 fisheries officers in Sabah over the years on the development of the TED program. However, fisheries officers often transfer to different units within the Department and in a short time frame, thus leaving limited capacity to effectively hand over previous work to a new team. The MRF constantly finds itself starting from scratch with new officers.

Furthermore, regarding TED implementation, the DOFS's primary concern is that fishers are not able to cover the cost of maintaining a TED and that it will add more burden to local communities' cost of living. The DOFS is concerned that if they begin implementing TEDs without complete buy-in from local fishers, it will result in conflict between officials and the fishing communities. MRF states the TED program is designed to mitigate conflict and points to the successful implementation in the four other States where TEDs were successfully enacted. Overall, the MRF and DOFS have a positive working relationship and have built trust over their nearly 20 years working closely together and have successfully built relationships with key stakeholders within the DOFS and local communities.

MRF's overall goal is to target the behavior of at least 500 Department of Fisheries Sabah officers, and with Sabah having the largest number of shrimp trawlers in Malaysia (over 500), they aim to reach out to at least 1,000 fishers in building support for legal requirements of TEDs in Sabah.

#### **Previous Work – Successes and Failures**

MRF's TED work began in 2007 in Sabah, running trials introducing TEDs in a voluntary manner to Malaysian trawl fisheries through trial programs and building awareness. As an NGO-led project, MRF realized that a voluntary adoption of TEDs was not going to be successful in the long run. They needed the support of the Malaysian government and for the DOFS to eventually lead the program and policy

actions because without legal support TEDs would not see lasting impact. Early on MRF signed a MoU with the Department of Fisheries Sabah (DOFS) to begin the TED implementation efforts in Sabah.

By 2009 MRF secured funding to take six fishers and fishery officers to the U.S. to observe TEDs first-hand. The trip was very successful and provided a significant boost to the overall TED program. The same year, the program expanded to new fishing ports and better integrated with the Federal Department of Fisheries Malaysia (DOFM). MRF then supported a site visit to the U.S. for Malaysia policymakers. Following this trip, the Director General of DOFM made a public commitment to see Malaysian trawlers be TED-compliant in future years.

In 2014, MRF embarked on a two-year, six-State program to provide training to fishermen and fisheries officers, and continued the onboard trials and demonstrations to further TED buy-in. In 2017, the Malaysian government officially announced that all shrimp trawlers in the four Peninsular States would be required to use TEDs starting in 2017, indicating the commitment at the government level, with a view to complete National coverage in the coming 5 to 10 years. In 2018, work began to extend this program across Sabah.

Overall, MRF has built a strong working relationship with the MOFS and continues to work towards eventual legal requirements and positively influence this process until Sabah becomes a TED-compliant State.