

Tackling illegal fishing at the source



A joint Australia-Indonesia awareness campaign on the impact and consequences of fishing illegally in Australian waters is well under way, with visits already completed in Jayapura, Merauke, Rote and Sulawesi. A proposed visit to Dobo and surrounding fishing villages is planned. Following is a report from Australian Customs representative Kate Walker who joined a visit to south and south-east Sulawesi:

The aim of the campaign, in illegal-fisher source villages, is to stop the flow of illegal fishermen who are entering Australian waters fishing for shark fin and reef fish. The outreach visits involve an open discussion with the local community and local government officials.

The delegation comprised Australian officers from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the Department of Agriculture Fisheries and Forestry, the Australian Fisheries Management Authority and Indonesians from Marine Affairs and Fisheries and local government officials.

The delegation went to the regencies of Makasar, Sinjai (south Sulawesi) and Kendari and Wakatobi (south-east Sulawesi). Within these regencies we visited Bonetambun Island, Pulau Sembilan, Pulau Kalidupa, and Wanci Wangi Wangi. These villages rely largely on fishing, aquaculture, and agriculture subsistence.

A typical day began with meeting the local government officials to discuss the proposed program and events for the day. Fisheries Management provided A3-sized charts





Opposite page: After the meetings, visitors and locals met for one-on-one discussions.

Above left: One of the village meetings, in Pulau Sembilan.

Above right: The outreach program for Sulawesi ended with a music concert that about 4000 people attended.

Below: A typical Indonesian fishing village.

showing, in Bahasa Indonesia, the Australian exclusive economic zone (EEZ) and a “box” within it where traditional fishing methods are permitted. The charts clearly defined the Indonesian/Australian sea border.

Indonesian Government officials accompanied the Australians and Indonesian journalists to the fishing villages or the organised venues where the delegation met face-to-face with the local fishermen.

We were invited to a number of radio stations where one-hour segments on the awareness campaign were organised and listeners could phone in with questions.

The majority of questions centred on the charts. Typical questions were about:

- the sea border
- what fish could be caught in the “box”
- how Indonesian fishermen were treated if caught.

The locals were also seeking assistance from the Indonesian Government on alternative livelihoods to illegal fishing.

Attendance varied. In some of the smaller fishing villages, numbers were around 20 but in larger communities it was between 100 and 250.

The outreach program for Sulawesi ended with a music concert that about 4000 people attended. There was a strong message throughout the concert to stop illegal fishing. The village children were invited to participate in games on stage with the catch phrase “stop illegal fishing”. Throughout the campaign more than 1000 pieces of merchandise (with anti-illegal fishing slogans) were given to school students.

The mix of agencies in the delegation emphasised the whole-of-government approach Australia is taking to stop illegal foreign fishing in our waters.

The outreach program provides an excellent opportunity to meet fishing communities that have been involved in illegal fishing activities. It also provides a forum to discuss issues such as sustainability of fisheries resources on both sides of the border and the consequences of illegal fishing in Australian waters.

