



SUARA LAUT

Volume 1: World Oceans Day

Sustaining What Sustain Us

Vol. 1 — World Oceans Day: Sustaining What Sustains Us

Editor

Luthfian Haekal

Design & Layout

Muhamad Arif
Fairuz Mahdiyyah

Author

Luthfian Haekal
Siti Wahyatun
Imam Trihatmadja

Jl. Jaha No.88 ABC, East Cilandak, Pasar
Minggu, South Jakarta City, Jakarta 12560

ABK PERIKANAN: DIJANJI KAYA, DIJEBAK UTANG & DERITA!



ABK
PERIKANAN

NAHKODA
SERAKAH

TUKONG
PELIT

KELUARGA
DIRUMAH

CALO
MENGHILANG

BERDASARKAN KISAH NYATA | TAYANG DI PELABUHAN PERIKANAN TERDEKAT |
SKENARIO | TUHAN YANG MAHA ESA | PRODUKSI | DFW INDONESIA | MEI 2025

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Foreword by the Interrupter

Separating the Sea from the People Who Depend on It for Life

"...The experience that we have of our lives from within, the story we tell ourselves about ourselves in order to account for what we are doing, is fundamentally a lie—the truth lies outside, in what we do..."

Slavoj Žižek dalam "Violence: Six Sideways Reflections" (2008:47)

Happy World Oceans Day! Every year on June 8th, we get this annual ritual with slogans like **"Save the Ocean!", "Reject Pollution!", "Support Sustainable Seas!", "Sustaining What Sustains Us!",** and more.

The sea does not die only because of plastic or chemical waste. The sea dies when sailors, fishers, vessel crew (locally known as ABK – Anak Buah Kapal), and fish processing workers are left to die slowly. Those who support marine life with their bodies and time are slowly abandoned and stripped of their rights. Until all that remains is labor that drowns. A life no longer worthy of being called life. The ocean transforms—from what was once a space full of hope, into a space full of submission, violations, and loss.

We often hear the grand statement, **"Indonesia is a maritime country."** However, behind this grand phrase lies an irony that shadows fishery workers. In mainstream media, we are frequently presented with the conditions of migrant fishers working overseas. ABK have become like a commodity—very flexible and easily exchanged between vessels. Unfortunately, mainstream media tends to overexpose the issue of migrant ABK. Do not get me wrong, it is important. But, as a result, those who work on domestic vessels are rarely discussed. Yet their fate are **the same—adrift at sea, with no social protection and no job security.**



Domestic fishing vessel crew across Indonesia's history have occupied a paradoxical position. They are laborers in their own country, working on vessels in national waters, **yet still unrecognized within the formal labor system.** Their status is neither formal workers nor migrant workers, but they remain subject to the power of vessel owners. In many cases, their personal documents are confiscated, there is no insurance, and they work without clear working hours. When it comes to wages, they are often "deceived" by brokers and end up in debt.

Domestic ABKs are the foundation of the fishery and maritime sector, yet they have long remained unseen—and deliberately made invisible. They are citizens with rights, and at the same time, the driving force of the maritime economy. Unfortunately, they are now seen merely as living tools of production. If this condition is allowed to continue, Indonesia's seas will rot—not because they are unproductive, but because these workers are left adrift in their territorial waters. "Sustaining What Sustains Us" is not only about the sea as a singular ecological system, but also about its people.

The same goes for workers in Fish Processing Units (Unit Pengolahan Ikan/UPI). Many of them are daily or pieceworkers. They are placed within informal labor schemes, filled with precarity. While ABK are mostly male, workers in UPI are predominantly female—although men also work in UPIs, depending on the type of final commodity being produced. They work with highly flexible hours, depending on the availability of fish supply. There have also been cases where workers were sent home because no fish stock entered the company.

Therefore, **Destructive Fishing Watch (DFW) Indonesia** has published a zine titled "**Suara Laut**" (Voice of the Sea). The name reflects issues surrounding the sea—ranging from workers at sea, land-based workers handling marine products, to the ocean as an ecological whole. "**Suara Laut**" will be published once every two months as a campaign platform to support DFW's ongoing advocacy for improving the welfare of fishery workers. In the future, the zine will feature works created by fishery workers themselves, including small-scale fishers, fishing vessel crews, fish processing workers, and others. In this first edition of "**Suara Laut**", DFW focuses on introducing the key issues in the fisheries and maritime sectors. The first essay, written by Siti, explores the fishery labor advocated by DFW. Meanwhile, the second essay, written by Haekal, discusses the various vulnerabilities faced by fishery workers.

Hopefully, this zine can spark the courage to say, "**We are workers, not shadows in the waves.**" **Because as long as there is no courage to speak of injustice, the sea will continue to swallow bodies without names.** The sea is a place where people work, risk their lives, and strive to make a living. We all have the responsibility to ensure that those who are the driving force of the maritime and fisheries economy no longer live in uncertainty. **The working conditions they face are not a matter of "bad luck," but part of ongoing structural injustice.** Fishery workers need protection. Not later, but now.

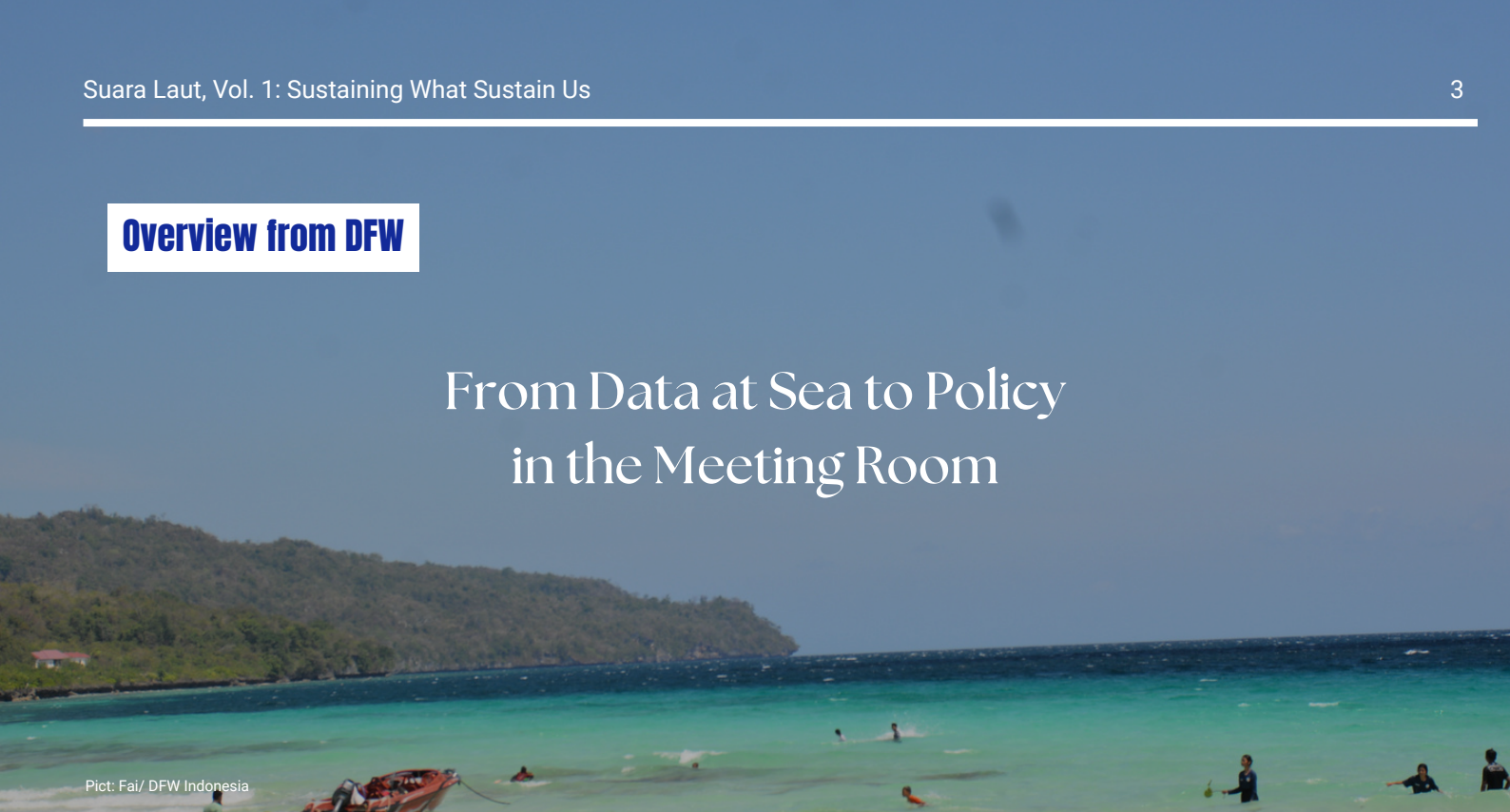
To close, I quote lyrics from Efek Rumah Kaca's song titled "Tubuhmu Membiru...Tragis":

*Kulihat engkau terkulai (I saw you collapse)
Tubuhmu membiru, tragis (Your body turns blue, tragic)
Tragis (Tragic)
Kulihat engkau terkulai (I saw you collapse)
Tubuhmu membiru, tragis (Your body turns blue, tragic)
Tragis (Tragic)*

**With regards,
The Interrupter**

Overview from DFW

From Data at Sea to Policy in the Meeting Room



Pict: Fai/ DFW Indonesia

Have you ever tried to explain the concept of “ecosystem sustainability” to someone who, that day, just wants to make sure their family can eat? That is where our work begins. As the Program Director, I often find myself caught between two worlds: the idealistic world where the ocean must be preserved, and the real world where the kitchen must keep cooking. Our mission at **Destructive Fishing Watch (DFW) Indonesia** is to serve as a bridge between the two—to ensure that protecting the ocean doesn’t mean sacrificing the stomachs of fishers, or the stomachs of workers in the fisheries industry, and vice versa. It is a delicate balancing act, sometimes frustrating, but always carried out with passion and wholehearted commitment.

We are not psychics who can guess what’s happening at sea from behind an air-conditioned desk. Every one of our programs is born from solid data, from research that sometimes requires us to endure the heat on fishing boats, sweat in the field, or stay up late analyzing numbers and findings. We map high-risk zones, investigate the socio-economic impacts of destructive fishing practices, and try to understand the mindset of every stakeholder involved. Think of it as our version of intelligence work—because without an accurate “battlefield” map, even the best strategy becomes nothing more than an expensive imagination.

Data on paper won’t change anything if it ends up in a drawer—or worse, in some digital storage forgotten over time. This is where the next chapter begins: policy advocacy. This is the stage where we knock on the doors of decision-makers, armed with thick reports and a long list of recommendations. Sometimes, the process feels like an endless marathon, requiring patience as thick as a dictionary and countless cups of coffee. We come not as enemies, but as critical partners to the government—bringing voices and realities from the ground, with a touch of sarcastic humour when needed to lighten the mood.

The best solutions often don’t come from high-rise towers in Jakarta, but from seaside coffee stalls. That’s why the cornerstone of our work is community empowerment. We sit with fishers and fishery workers—not to treat them as mere program beneficiaries, but as the true experts of the sea. From those long conversations, we develop training programs, introduce environmentally friendly fishing gear, raise awareness about occupational risks and labor rights, and strengthen local institutions. We believe that the best guardians of the ocean are those whose lives and livelihoods depend on it.

Our work is like assembling a complex racing car engine. Research is the blueprint, advocacy is the lubricant that keeps the wheels of bureaucracy turning, and community empowerment and awareness are the fuel that keeps it all running. These four elements are inseparable. Without research, our advocacy is toothless. Without advocacy, our findings evaporate. Lastly, without community involvement, all change will be temporary and superficial. Our task is to ensure all these components are properly assembled and work in harmony.

In the end, what do we dream of? It's simple: **a healthy ocean, empowered fishers and fishery workers, and a fair and sustainable fisheries industry.** A vision that might sound too grand, but every small step we take in the field brings us closer to it. We don't hold all the answers, but we always have an extra seat and a hot cup of coffee for anyone willing to think and work alongside us—because this big problem clearly can't be solved alone.



Imam Trihatmadja
Program Director of DFW Indonesia



Pict: Fai/ DFW Indonesia

"JADI ABK PERIKANAN GAJINYA BESAR YAH"

GAADA SINYAL

BERDIRI 10 JAM

GA DI DAFTARIN

BPJS

GAJI ABIS BUAT

KASBONAN

DIPUKULIN

SENIOR

DIPUKULIN

KAPTEN

MAKAN SISA

PANGINGAN

BISA PULANG KE

RUMAH TUHAN

Essay

Indonesian Fisheries Workers: The Overlooked Backbone

Siti Wahyatun

Public Interest Lawyer, DFW Indonesia

Indonesia, often referred to as a maritime nation, holds within it the heroic stories of its fishery workers. From traditional fishers to modern vessel crews, they work amidst the waves, supplying fresh fish for local consumption and exporting various seafood products like tuna and shrimp to global markets. But behind the scenes, their conditions are far from decent.

Who Are They?

Small-Scale Fishers

DFW report shows **that more than 90% of global fishery workers are small-scale fishers, and Indonesia contributes a significant portion of that number.** They use small boats, traditional technologies, and often rely solely on nets and generational knowledge. Despite being productive, they operate in the informal sector with little to no social protection at all.



Pict: Fai/ DFW Indonesia

Fishing Vessel Crew (FVC), known in Indonesia as ABK

ABKs are the frontline workers who keep fishing vessels running. Most ABKs are newcomers—people who shift from land-based jobs to working at sea due to the increasing difficulty of finding work on land, economic pressure, and promises of high wages. Even without experience or clear contracts, they still go to sea in order to survive.



Pict: Fai/ DFW Indonesia

Migrant and Large-Scale Fishing Vessel Crew

There are also workers recruited to work on foreign-flagged vessels or large-scale export-oriented fishing vessels. Despite being the backbone of the export industry, they often work under vague or unclear contract standards.

The Harsh Reality on the High Seas

Work No Longer Ends While the Sun Is Still High

According to our observations, fishing vessel crews often work **more than 10 hours a day, even when they are sick, facing high risks of accidents and working in dirty, high-pressure environments—both physically and verbally**. Just imagine: they live with no proper rest, no private space, on small boats that “breathe” amid the waves.

The recruitment system for ABKs is mostly done through brokers, with little to no transparency. **Employment contracts or Seafarer Employment Agreements (Perjanjian Kerja Laut/PKL)** are often only verbal, meaning there are no guarantees of fixed wages, working hours, rest periods, insurance, or leave. This also allows employers to evade responsibility for any negative consequences that may arise from the job in the future.

In several cases we’ve received, the elements of **human trafficking in person (TIP)** are clearly present: promises of high wages that turn into debt bondage, confiscation of personal documents, and even physical threats when they refuse to comply. All of this is done in the name of keeping “life at sea” running.



Working in the fishing industry is full of risks—even the job of catching fish is often characterized by the **“3D” nature of the work: dangerous, dirty, and difficult**. Some of the major risks include: accidents due to equipment failure on board, exposure to extreme weather and hazardous chemicals, getting trapped inside the vessel, injuries from fishing gear, the risk of forced labor and human trafficking, as well as death or permanent disability. In addition, the International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates that there are 24,000 deaths and 24 million injuries per year on commercial fishing vessels, although specific data for Indonesia remains limited.

DFW has also recorded that many ABK do not have access to the national health or employment insurance schemes (BPJS Kesehatan or BPJS Ketenagakerjaan). In fact, workers in areas like Bali and North Sulawesi often work without any protection at all. This has prompted us, together with various local organizations and government bodies, to initiate worker protection forums.

Extraordinary Contribution, Yet Marginalized

Understandably, export markets require high certification standards, as this is an effort to demonstrate sustainability and fairness for workers. However, the reality on the ground still falls short of what we hope for, such as:

- Small-scale fishers constantly face the storms of climate change, rising fuel prices, and unstable markets.
- Domestic ABK without written contracts continue to work without proper oversight, from Muara Baru to the Aru Islands.
- Migrant ABKs are vulnerable to false promises in their contracts, only to face abuse and uncertainty in wages.



Pict: Yani/ DFW Indonesia



Pict: Fai/ DFW Indonesia

Why Should We Care?

Without protection of rights and decent work guarantees, fishery workers may still be hailed as heroes of the sea – but they can also “die in isolation.” Furthermore, the fisheries industry that remains vulnerable and lacks a proper worker protection system risks becoming a site of forced labor, potentially causing our exports to be rejected by markets demanding “human rights compliance under SDG 14”. Beyond morality, fighting for workers’ welfare is also a long-term investment to ensure that the ocean and the fisheries industry remain sustainable.

World Oceans Day 2025 – may it not be just another ceremonial event. It’s time we go beyond admiring the beauty of the sea. We should start listening to the cries of workers who work from behind the nets and waves. They deserve protection not just as workers at sea, but as human beings.

Essay

From the Waves to the Cold Storage: Shrouded in Vulnerability

Luthfian Haekal

Human Rights Manager, DFW Indonesia

Fishing vessel crews (ABK) and fish processing unit workers are among **the driving forces behind Indonesia's marine and fisheries economy**. However, they take place in **the most fragile positions in the labor system**. Both groups operate under informal employment schemes that often neglect the basic principles of labor protection. It's as if they are conditioned to remain in a constant state of job insecurity – without social security and adequate legal protection. Their vulnerabilities range from unclear contract systems to harsh working conditions. Yet, they continue to endure these risks, simply to survive.

Vulnerabilities Faced by Fishing Vessel Crew (ABK)

Unclear Employment Contracts

In the recruitment process, fishing vessel crews are often recruited through informal mechanisms. This results in non-transparent employment contracts. According to the 2024 annual report of Destructive Fishing Watch (DFW) Indonesia through the National Fishers Center (NFC), **many ABKs did not receive an official Seafarers Employment Agreement (PKL)**. Even when the PKL document was provided, crews were not allowed to understand or negotiate the contents of the agreement. The NFC report also highlights that the contract process often takes place behind closed doors, leaving families of ABKs with little to no information about the sailing route, contract duration, employer identity, and the vessel information where the ABK will work.



Pict: Yanti/ DFW Indonesia

Long Working Hours & Wages

In extreme conditions, fishing vessel crews may work for excessively long hours—often **exceeding the standard 8-hour workday**. Their time at sea can range from **three to six months**, depending on the type of fish caught. During this period, they are often denied proper overtime compensation or adequate rest mechanisms. **Even worse, the wages they receive are frequently not in line with the original agreement**. The broker deducts their pay as “compensation” for accommodation in dormitories before departure and for daily meals during the pre-departure phase.

Occupational Safety and Inhumane Living Condition

According to the NFC report, **the occupational safety and health (OSH) equipment provided on board is often inadequate**. Personal protective gear—such as life jackets or gloves to reduce the risk of work-related accidents—is rarely available. Daily food consumption to support onboard activities also tends to fall short of proper nutritional standards—with instant noodles often becoming the default practical choice while at sea. **This situation is worsened by the lack of social protection for ABKs**. The NFC report notes that vessel owners frequently justify the absence of social security, insurance, or death compensation by claiming that the workers are not permanent or the insufficient budget.

According to the NFC report, **ABKs have also experienced abandonment and intimidation, including death threats**. Abandonment occurs when ABKs are not provided with the funds to return to their place of origin. Vessel owners or brokers often argue that the cost should be borne by the workers themselves. Meanwhile, those stranded at the port due to their inability to return home are often intimidated by captains.

Indications of Human Trafficking

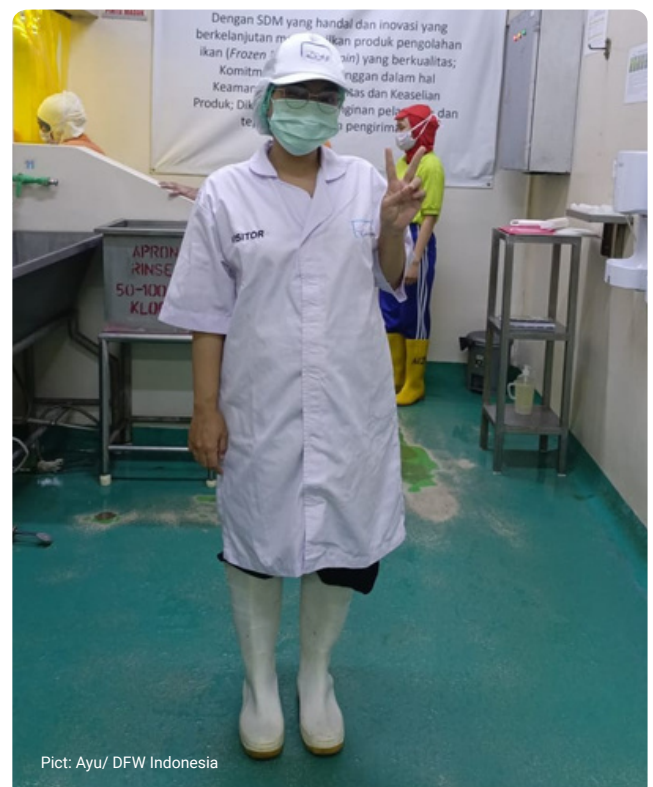
From the various vulnerabilities mentioned above, the fishing vessel crews show indications of human trafficking crimes. The NFC report outlines that these indications **start from a non-transparent recruitment process**. ABKs are not informed about which vessel they will be assigned to sail on. During recruitment, **it is not uncommon for personal identification cards, such as identity cards, to be withheld by brokers or vessel owners**. In addition, ABKs are burdened with departure fees, document fees, and daily living expenses. These costs are charged as debts. Their wages are then deducted under the pretext of repaying these debts. Ultimately, ABKs find it difficult to free themselves from the debt trap and the control of the brokers over them.

Vulnerabilities Experienced by Seafood Processing Workers

The Flexibility of Labour

Employment contracts for most seafood processing workers are **short-term contracts with daily worker status**. Some companies hire daily workers under fixed-term employment agreements (in Indonesia called “PKWT”) for periods of one year, eleven months, six months, or even three months. Depending on the company’s internal policies, they have the freedom to apply contracts for specific durations. There are also workers who have been employed at the same company for six years, with their contracts continuously renewed every three months.

These short-term contracts make workers feel like **they are working without job security**, as they can be dismissed at any time. Due to the processing companies’ reliance on fish stock availability, **workers may be laid off whenever there is no supply of fish**. They cannot resist because this is the common pattern in processing companies.



Pict: Ayu/ DFW Indonesia

Wages

Companies often claim that they pay daily workers according to the Provincial Minimum Wage (Upah Minimum Provinsi/UMP). **The UMP, as the minimum standard, is considered a decent wage by the company.** However, according to the testimony of the fish processing worker in Jakarta, many processing workers only receive around three million rupiahs per month, which is low for Jakarta's cost of living -the minimum wages in Jakarta in 2025 around 5,4 million rupiahs. This wage condition forces some workers to seek side jobs, such as becoming online motorcycle taxi (ojek) drivers. After finishing their shifts at the processing unit, they work as drivers to meet their daily needs.

Safety and Working Conditions

The Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) facilities provided by fish processing companies are generally very limited. In several companies we observed, **workers handle knives with their bare hands to manually separate meat from bones without being equipped with gloves.** Some other companies do not even provide special clothing for workers assigned to cold storage rooms. They only wear aprons, T-shirts, boots, masks, and hairnets to enter these rooms, even though the temperature inside is below zero degrees celsius.

Absence of Labor Unions

During interviews and observations, **some companies tend to close off discussions regarding labor unions.** There are even companies that openly say, "Unions are created by outsiders, provocateurs". Initiatives to form unions often end in pressure and threats. As a result, workers lack a safe space to fight for their rights. There is even fear of losing their jobs, which have been their main source of livelihood.



Pict: Fai/ DFW Indonesia

Marine News

The National Fishers Center (NFC) Indonesia and Rumah Sastra Arafura Raise Ocean Awareness Through the Film “Lambung Ikan Nestapa”

National Fishers Center Indonesia (NFC-I), together with Rumah Sastra Arafura, held a screening of the film “Lambung Ikan Nestapa” at the terrace of Rumah Sastra Arafura. This event aimed to raise critical awareness among the youth and students of Aru about issues surrounding the Aru Islands, especially marine and fisheries issues. Several worker communities also participated in this event, including Komunitas Sastra Arafura, Black Skin Arafura, Solidaritas Pemuda dan Mahasiswa Aru (SAPA ARU), SAVE ARU, and the Indonesian National Student Movement (GMNI).

The film “Lambung Ikan Nestapa,” produced by WatchDoc, tells the story of problems in the fisheries sector, ranging from unregulated fishing to the unequal distribution of fishery products. This topic sparked a discussion featuring Ari Jerfatin from NFC-Indonesia, Mika Ganobal from #SAVEARU, and Johan Djamanmona, a local youth leader and journalist. Three of them emphasized the importance of sustainability, recognition of indigenous communities, and transparency regarding national strategic projects such as the National Fish Barn (Lambung Ikan Nasional - LIN).

The National Fish Barn (LIN) program aims to make Maluku the largest fish production center in Indonesia. This program has been planned across three government leadership periods: 2009-2014, 2014-2019, and 2019-2024. Maluku was chosen as the location for developing this project because it is considered to have abundant potential in both capture fisheries and aquaculture. This potential is reflected through three main fishing areas or the Indonesian Fishermen's Fisheries Management Areas (WPPNRI), namely WPP 714 (waters of Teluk Tolo and Banda Sea), WPP 715 (waters of Tomini Bay, Maluku Sea, Halmahera Sea, Seram Sea, and Berau Bay), and WPP 718 (Aru Sea, Arafura Sea, and Timor Sea). According to data from the Maluku Provincial Marine and Fisheries Service in 2021, these three WPPs contribute 4,669,030 tons per year or about 30% of the national fishery resource potential.

“Many communities no longer feel they have control over their own marine spaces”



Pict: Hendra/ DFW Indonesia

To support LIN, the Indonesian Government also projected the construction of the New Ambon Port. This project plan sparked protests from local residents, who feared that the livelihoods of traditional fishermen would be disrupted. For the community, their protests seemed successful, as the LIN project has not been heard of again around the Arafura region.

Although the project planning was officially cancelled in 2023, indigenous communities still have concerns. This is because their land remains at risk of being forcibly taken by the state due to the absence of implementing regulations for the Aru Islands Regional Regulation No. 2 of 2022 and the ongoing lack of ratification of the Indigenous Peoples Bill by the government to this day.

In the discussion, Johan emphasized the importance of strengthening indigenous communities as the frontline defenders in the protection of marine resources.

"Indigenous peoples have existed long before the Indonesian state was formed. However, until now, the state has not formally recognized them legally. Whoever we are, we are part of indigenous communities and have the responsibility to protect, defend, and fight for their rights," he said.

Mika Ganobal from #SaveAru stated that coastal communities are increasingly losing access to the sea, which has long been their living space.

"Maritime and fisheries issues are no longer just challenges—they have developed into threats with wide-ranging economic and social impacts. Many communities no longer feel they have control over their own marine spaces. We need to continue creating spaces for discussions like this," he said.

Meanwhile, Ari Jerfatin from NFC-I emphasized the importance of open dialogue spaces so that communities can fully understand government policies concerning their areas, including the LIN project.

"Discussion forums must continue to be held in open spaces like today. The world the government is building around LIN should be made publicly accessible in detail—both its benefits and its impacts," he explained.



The Regional Forum for the Protection of Fisheries Workers and Fishers in Bali Province Has Been Inaugurated

On June 11, 2025, the Provincial Government of Bali issued Governor's Decree (SK) Number 372/03-R/HK/2025 concerning the "Regional Forum for the Protection of Fisheries Workers and Fishers of Bali Province and the Secretariat of the Regional Forum for the Protection of Fishery Workers and Fishers of Bali Province for the 2025–2028 Period." This decree was issued to ensure the existence of a legal framework that safeguards the protection of all fisheries workers in the province of Bali. In Bali, fish remains one of the most sought-after commodities, both in local and export markets. In March 2025, the export value of this commodity reached approximately US\$14.46 million, accounting for 26.94% of Bali's total exports during 2024. Despite the high production value of capture fisheries, fishery workers remain neglected and in need of real protection from multiple stakeholders—government, business actors, and the workers themselves.

Becoming a fishery worker carries high risks to occupational safety. They must endure extreme weather conditions at sea, work without standard working hours, and face other hazards—often without proper labor protections or fair wages. In 2024, the National Fishers Center (NFC) Indonesia found that wage issues, inhumane working conditions, and lack of social security were the top three complaints most frequently reported by ABKs. Therefore, we appreciate the initial step taken by the Bali Provincial Government to improve the protection of fishers' crew members in Bali through the issuance of this decree.

Imam Trihatmadja, Program Director of DFW Indonesia, also shared the next steps that can be taken together following the issuance of this decree.

"With the issuance of the Governor's Decree on the Regional Forum for the Protection of Fisheries Workers and Fishers in Bali, we appreciate the efforts of the Bali Provincial Government in improving the welfare and protection of fishery workers and fishers. This forum is expected to serve as an effective platform to strengthen coordination and synergy between the government, the public, and relevant stakeholders in protecting the rights of fishery workers and fishers, as well as in improving their quality of life."

"To ensure the successful implementation of this decree, we hope that the Regional Forum for the Protection of Fishery Workers and Fishers will promptly carry out the Regional Action Plan that has been developed. In doing so, the plan can serve as concrete action in fulfilling the obligations outlined in the decree and bring real impact to fisheries workers and fishers in Bali. We hope this decision will have a positive effect on the fisheries and fishing communities in Bali and serve as an example for other regions in Indonesia."

This Regional Forum consists of three working groups: Working Group I on Program and Regulatory Strengthening, Working Group II on Joint Monitoring, and Working Group III on Education, Reporting, and Database. With the issuance of this decree, we hope to see strong synergy between institutions and agencies in jointly creating a safe space for fisheries workers and fishers in Bali Province.



Forced Labor and Human Trafficking Haunting Fisheries Workers

Contact the National Fishers Center complaint service if you experience such issues.



Phone 0811-9214-141 & 0811-1437-575



Website www.nfc.or.id



E-mail nfc@dfw.or.id

Join our website and get the latest updates on fisheries workers.

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DFW Indonesia, 2025.

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