



SUARA LAUT

Volume 3 : Daily Reflections

Live and Apart

Vol.3 Daily Reflections: Live and Apart

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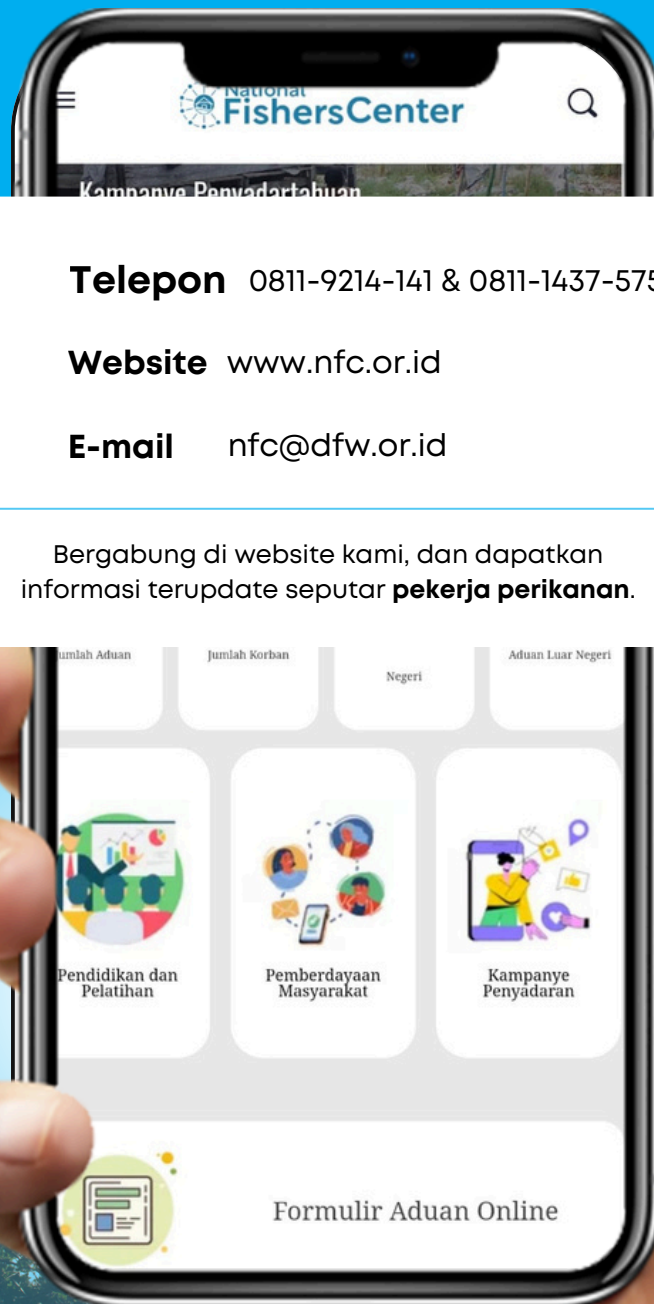
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Foreword from the Interrupter

The Sea: Sustaining and Separating

Luthfian Haekal
Human Rights Manager

“

**"How is life
for those
left at sea?"**

That simple question became one of the sparks that ignited the publication of the *Suara Laut* Zine. The sea reveals many paradoxes one of them being that it sustains life, yet also separates. The sea is not merely a landscape, but a site of production a workplace where human labor is commodified and translated into export graphs. Behind those upward-sloping export charts, the growth of Gross Domestic Product, and rows of statistical figures, lies the ceaseless labor of fishery workers. Work at sea does not only produce commodities it also produces uncertainty, which itself becomes the foundation upon which the maritime economy operates.

The bodies of workers who sustain the maritime economy form the nodes of a global circuit of surplus value.

This circuit does not end at sea or on the docks it extends to the work of care and social reproduction carried out by coastal women. In this context, the sea functions as an *offshore frontier* that drives the maritime economy forward, while the home serves as a backshore frontier for the regeneration of labor.

The *Suara Laut* Zine, published by Destructive Fishing Watch (DFW) Indonesia, seeks to capture what truly happens within Indonesia's maritime economy. It aims to write from the space between sea and home between production and reproduction. Echoing Burawoy (1985), production and social reproduction are inseparable; reproduction is not a supplement, but the very foundation that sustains labor. In sea related work, husbands leave their wives and children at home to go offshore.

In this third issue, the zine presents two essays exploring the core theme *"the sea: sustaining yet separating"*, one photo essay portraying life at the fish auction, and one reflective piece from a coastal resident on the loss of space. The first essay, by Laode Hardiani, delves into life at sea, narrating the everyday experiences of Fishers and Fishing Vessel Crew (AKP) during their voyages. Divided into two parts, Hardiani's story traces the journey of an AKP from recruitment to their eventual return home. He tells of a husband who leaves his family behind with hopes of changing his fate, only to become trapped in cycles of debt, extreme working hours, and the absence of social protection.

The second essay, by Nabiyya, tells the story of the families of AKP workers left behind while their husbands go to sea. Set in Wonokerto, women shoulder a double burden production and reproduction to meet daily needs. Nabiyya portrays families separated by distance, women aging through labor, and children "left behind" by their parents in the struggle to survive.

The photo essay by Dzul visualizes how coastal economies operate through rhythms of patronage. Fishermen, middlemen, and traders are bound by a sense of "being indebted" a feeling that keeps them moving within the same patronage cycle.

Lastly, Zidan's reflection depicts the shrinking space between sea and land. A slowly sinking village is not merely an ecological disaster but an ongoing social process. In the end, "space" itself becomes fragile and transient.

The sea is not merely a resource. Suara Laut raises the idea that the sea is a space of both life and loss. It is not only a "productive" arena that drives the national economy, but also a space of hope and separation. Through the voices from the coast, Suara Laut attempts to read Indonesia's maritime economy from the most human perspective one that both nurtures and erases.

To close, I quote a song by Bon Jovi that tells the story of working-class life...

Tommy used to work on the docks,
union's been on strike
He's down on his luck, it's tough, so tough
Gina works the diner all day, working for her man
She brings home her pay, for love, mmm, for love
She says, "We've gotta hold on to what we've got
It doesn't make a difference if we make it or not
We've got each other and that's a lot for love
We'll give it a shot"

*Lal Salam,
Penginterupsi*



Pict: Fai / DFW Indonesia

A Glimpse

From Data at Sea to Policy in the Meeting Room

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



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ESSAY

In the Beginning, a Glimmer of Hope in the Indian Ocean

(Story of the Struggle of a Tuna Fishing Boat Crew)

Laode Hardiani,
Senior Field Facilitator, DFW Indonesia

Pict: Fai/ DFW Indonesia

Putra (not his real name), a 34-year-old man from Pandeglang, Banten, had been working for more than ten months as a crew member (ABK) on a vessel owned by PT Bandar Harapan at Benoa Port, Bali. Putra decided to become a fishing vessel crew member because life in his hometown felt difficult, with limited job opportunities, uncertain income, and a bleak future. He wanted to change his fate and provide a better life for his family. While searching for work, Putra came across a job vacancy posted on Facebook. At first glance, the ad seemed appealing, offering a position as a crew member with promises of a high salary and adequate facilities. Initially hesitant, Putra was compelled by economic pressure to contact the number listed in the ad. Unfortunately, he did not realize that the job listing came from a broker.

When Putra reached out, the broker was friendly and persuasive. The explanations given about the recruitment process, the sailing journey, and potential earnings convinced Putra to trust the broker's offer. He was also promised a brief training before departure and assistance with official documents. The broker seemed to bring hope to Putra. Despite some doubts, he ultimately decided to follow the recruitment process, hoping to secure a decent job.

After agreeing with the recruitment broker, Putra was informed that travel arrangements from Banten to Benoa had been organized. All tickets and transportation were prepared, leaving him only to follow the broker's instructions. The journey from Banten to Benoa was long, but Putra kept imagining the new life awaiting him at the port, which gave him hope.

Upon arrival in Benoa, Putra and several other prospective crew members were not immediately put on the vessel. They were housed in a temporary accommodation provided by the broker. The house was modest but sufficient as a temporary stop. During the few days there, Putra began to get to know fellow crew members and shared stories and aspirations.

After waiting for several days at the broker's temporary housing, Putra was finally assigned to a vessel owned by PT Bandar Harapan. He was placed on a tuna fishing vessel. However, he soon faced a reality that did not match the broker's promises. What was promised as free accommodation turned into debt. Even the costs of training and departure documents were billed through a cash-on-account system. Putra was trapped in a debt scheme even before setting sail.

Heading to the Open Sea

The sound of the ship's engine roared as the KM Bandar Nelayan slowly departed from Benoa Port. At the stern, some of the crew managed to call their families just to let them know they were on their way to the waters of the Indian Ocean. The ship sailed south, heading toward the fishing grounds in the Indian Ocean, approximately 600–800 nautical miles from Bali a journey that could take 10 to 15 days, depending on weather and currents.

Not all crew members were accustomed to the long voyage. Some newcomers, including Putra, suffered from seasickness, their faces pale, unable to eat. During the journey, the captain often gave strict instructions. "Our target is clear: yellowfin and bluefin tuna. We work fast, efficiently, and stay focused. There's no room for mistakes. If the catch is good, you'll get a bigger share. Tuna prices are high right now. Trust me," Putra recalled, repeating the captain's words.



One by one, the crew began their duties: checking the longline gear, repairing buoys, baiting hooks, and ensuring the engine was running smoothly. This was the preparation phase before entering the actual fishing zone marked by the GPS coordinates a place where ocean currents, water temperature, and fish migration converge. At sea, Putra and his colleagues had to wrestle with waves that changed at a moment's notice. "At sea, nothing is certain. We just have to keep moving forward," Putra said.

After several days navigating the open waters from Benoa Port, the ship carrying Putra and 30 other crew members finally reached the fishing grounds in the Southern Sea, part of the vast Indian Ocean known for migrating yellowfin and bluefin tuna. There, Putra and his colleagues began their work with longline gear and fresh bait that had been prepared in advance.

At the fishing site, the captain gave a firm command: "Everyone, get ready! This is the first spot. We start operations today." The crew began lowering long lines with hundreds of hooks into the water. Each person had their own responsibilities preparing bait, managing the lines, monitoring sea and weather conditions. There was no time to think about the exhaustion from the long journey.

The first night at the fishing grounds felt endless. Amid the darkness and silence of the ocean, only the hum of the engines and the crashing of waves accompanied Putra and his colleagues. Yet, each fish hauled onto the deck carried hope for a better life. At dawn, they hauled in their lines one by one. Several times, they caught tuna weighing up to 80 kilograms. For them, every single tuna represented hard work and the promise of sustenance for families at home.

For 11 full months, Putra's life revolved entirely around the ship. Each day was nearly identical. He woke before sunrise, prepared quickly, and began fishing activities. Nights were not always for rest, as sometimes he had to work overtime, hauling lines, cleaning the deck, or moving the catch to the cold storage. There were no holidays, no fixed working hours only the captain pressing for results, the relentless waves, and a body growing increasingly fatigued.

Putra felt longing for his family amidst the vast ocean. Yet, there was no signal in the middle of the Indian Ocean. At night, when work was done, he sometimes sat at the back of the ship, staring at the stars and thinking: "Does my family know I'm still alive?" Ten months passed this way harsh, silent, and full of pressure. But they endured, driven by one thing: hope. Hope that all this effort would bring change. Hope that one day, when the ship returned to port, their lives would finally anchor somewhere better.

Work, Work, Work

Putra worked 16 to 20 hours every day. Sleep only came in brief intervals between shifts. Even when exhausted, Putra and his colleagues were forced to keep working. There was no meaningful rest. When anyone complained, the response was always the same: "If you can't handle it, go home!" These words were often shouted. Sometimes, they were also threatened with partial payment or being sent home empty handed. On the ship, Putra and his colleagues ate meager meals and slept in cramped quarters. He felt as if his life was confined in a cage. They were not free to speak, not free to stop working, and had no idea when they would return home. Those considered rebellious had their names recorded and were threatened with losing bonuses or catch incentives.



Pict : Fai/ DFW Indonesia

Onboard, Putra nearly fainted from exhaustion. He was not alone—his colleagues suffered the same. No one dared to complain. The captain's only focus was on how much fish was caught. Putra sometimes wondered to himself whether his life and the lives of his friends were valued only as tools for catching tuna. All the working conditions they endured were merely to ensure the quality of the tuna remained intact.

Even when sickness began to affect their bodies, they tried to endure. The captain would only hand them a few over-the-counter pills without any prescription. "Just take these. If you're still sick, you have to be strong. This is the sea, not a hospital," Putra recalled the captain saying. There were no further medical examinations, as there was no healthcare professional on the ship.

In addition to the lack of adequate healthcare, Putra worked without any social protection. There was no BPJS Health, BPJS Employment, or work accident insurance. Every day, the crew faced towering waves, heavy equipment, sharp hooks, and machines capable of injuring their bodies. "We are human beings with the right to work safely," Putra said.

No Signal in the Open Sea

"Our phones are just useless objects. We can't use them," Putra said. In the middle of the ocean, where not even a single bar of signal exists, Putra often wondered about the wellbeing of his child and wife back home. His child had just started elementary school, and his wife was pregnant. The lack of cellular network left him completely cut off from the mainland. The only means of communication was the ship's radio, which could only be used by the captain to report to the ship owner or communicate with other vessels in the fishing route.

The last time he checked in before departure via his phone, his wife complained that their child had a fever. But once out at sea, not even a short message could be sent. Putra was not alone in feeling this longing—everyone experienced it. At sea, the hardest part of being a crew member was not just facing storms, but also enduring the deep ache of homesickness.

Continued.....



Foto: Dzulfiusi Rafif/ DFW Indonesia



Foto: Dzulfiusi Rafif/ DFW Indonesia



Pict: Dzulfiusi Rafif/ DFW Indonesia

ESSAY

Behind Every Great Fisherman, is a Woman with Double the Burden

Nabiyya Perennia,
Coordinator Program, DFW-Indonesia

When one steps foot in any Wonokerto village between the hours of 8 AM - 4 PM, they will be hit with the distinct scent of melting malam. Malam, a substance made from a mixture of paraffin and beeswax, is an essential material in batik-making, a common living for the women of Pekalongan. Often these laborers are the wives of internal and external migrant fishers, working mothers who keep their families fed in the long absence of their husbands.

Wonokerto district is considered the nest of migrant fishermen, laborers who work on large fishing vessels capturing tuna and other prized export commodities. Working as a migrant fisher is extremely taxing. Contracts (of which are often informal) last 8 - 14 months depending on the ships, pay is meager, fishermen work up to 12 hours a day doing grueling physical labor, and abuse is rampant. All of this has been well documented by several projects involving Destructive Fishing Watch (DFW) Indonesia, with our work being stationed in the largest harbors; Muara Baru, Benoa, Bitung, and Dobo. After being well acquainted with the fishermen's workplace, we ask: what about their families back home?

Migrant fishers are recruited by high-ranking sailors, or tekong, through a recruitment process. Said process is often informal, with undefined contracts and their documents being seized. In the case of Wonokerto, with its long history of fishing culture, tekong recruit their relatives and neighbors. Fishermen are paid once, before they leave for the harbors, usually Rp8 - 10 million (500 - 600 USD), half of which is given to their families, if at all.

est case scenario, their dependents subsist on Rp3-5 million for the rest of the year. Pekalongan's minimum monthly wage in 2025 is Rp 2.486.653,59 - it goes without saying depending solely on the fishermen is not enough. With their long contracts, their wives become single mothers seasonally, shouldering both production and reproduction for their families.

Education attainment is low in Wonokerto, with an average of 7 years of schooling - or barely attending junior high school (SMP). Consequently, many people are only able to work informal jobs, usually as day laborers. Women commonly work as batik laborers or tailors. Batik laborers work for 8 hours a day, practicing the traditional art of batik tulis. This labor intensive craft is complex, requiring several phases to produce just a single sheet. Beginning with sketching, mencanting (covering the sketch with malam), and multiple stages of coloring. Laborers are tasked with the mencanting stage, many of which have practiced the craft since childhood.

It takes a total of one month for one sheet to be finished. Although these pieces are highly prized, going for up to 2 million per piece, these women are not as valued. At most, batik laborers earn Rp 40 thousand a day, or just shy of Rp 1 million monthly. Tailors earn similar wages, often taking commissions of several codes (a unit meaning 20 pieces) per week, sewing dresses or pants. They earn Rp 60 thousand per code. What these two laborers have in common, aside from working in textiles, is how they work. When asked why these women don't work in factories with potentially higher pay, they answer plainly:

“ If I'm gone, who will look after the kids?





Foto:Yani/ DFW Indonesia

Batik laborers and tailors often take commissions and work from home. They are given fabric by their bosses and produce the finished product. Sometimes, they also bear the cost of production, such as the fuel needed to melt malam or the high electricity costs of sewing machines. There are high time and financial costs to balancing caregiving duties and intense labor, often working 12 hour days. During this process, some sacrifices need to be made, and that often means the children.

Mrs. N, a female village officer, who also works as a daycare teacher, raised her concerns about her pupils. She noticed that a not insignificant amount of children experience speech delays. Due to the father's absence and the mother's occupation, children in Wonokerto lack the intense attention needed at early ages and experience developmental issues. Mrs. I brought up how her autistic nephew cannot go to school, as the local special needs school (SLB) is at full capacity,

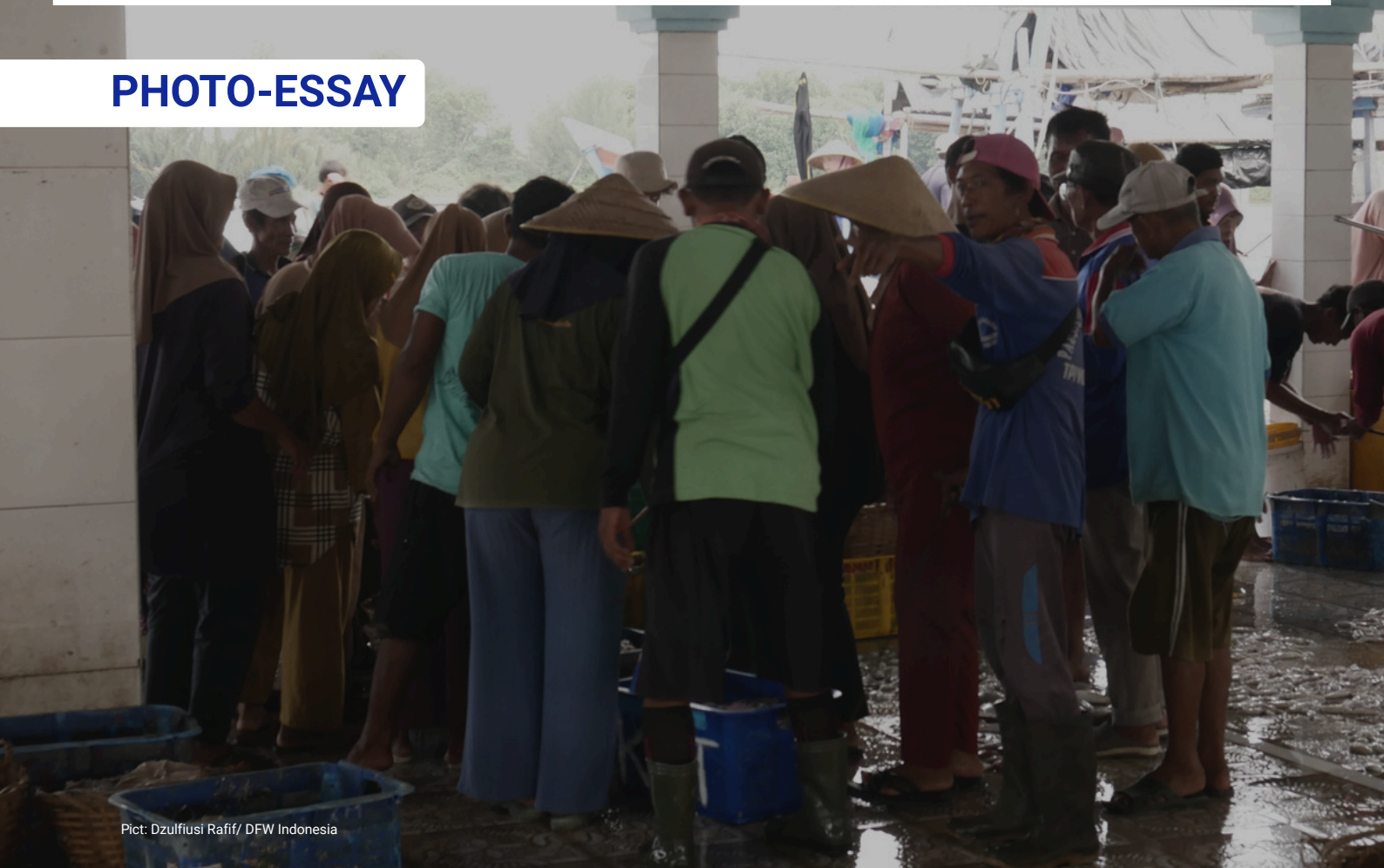
with 70 children in the waiting list. In the future of these children, this neglect plays a significant role, as dropout rates and early marriages are ubiquitous in the area. As a result, many are unable to work formal jobs, turn to fishing and batik, thus the cycle of the fishermen's families is repeated.

The women are not to blame, as they barely get support. If they are lucky, the extended family lives nearby and can support the caregiving process. However some do not have that privilege. When we invited Mrs. T to our social support community, as she was one of the neighborhood representatives, she was 7 months pregnant. Her husband works hundreds of miles away as a fisherman in Bitung, North Sulawesi; thus they have very little contact. Because of her stage of pregnancy, she had stopped working for a few months, due to the difficulties it creates at work and for concern for the unborn child. In addition to this, frequent check-ups and consultations are necessary. She goes through these trials alone, with occasional help from neighbors, while raising her adolescent child.

Migrant fishermen represent a gap in the country's support for workers. Not being the typical migrant worker who travels internationally, they are not represented by the nation's Migrant Protection Board (BP2MI), since both them and sometimes their employers are based domestically. Seeing what their families go through in their absence, it's apparent how vulnerable they also are. Support for women and families are needed in these areas, not just in the production aspect but also in reproduction. The aforementioned Mrs. N, despite holding a bachelor's degree in counseling, only gets paid Rp100.000 per month per child in the village daycare. With the people living debt to debt, even Rp100.000 is a burden on their wallets. Since these children are the supposed future of the country, with their mothers producing the supposed icon of the country, the act of care should require responsibility on behalf of the state. Until the women of Wonokerto can rest easy with fair wages for their work or a supportive childcare system, they will continue to shoulder double the burden, alone.



#LAWANUNIONBUSTING

PHOTO-ESSAY

Pict: Dzulfiusi Rafif/ DFW Indonesia

Estuary Waves at the Northern Wharf: Visualization of the Socio-Economic Conditions at Wonokerto Fish Auction Site

Dzulfiusi Rafif
Field Facilitator, DFW-Indonesia

These photographs attempt to capture a glimpse of the activities and actors at the Wonokerto Fish Auction Place (TPI) in Pekalongan Regency. The presence of TPI as a marketplace for the catches of traditional fishermen cannot be separated from the agents operating within it, such as the TPI cooperatives, middlemen, and their extended networks, all operating within a set of established rules.

Regarding all the photographs taken at Wonokerto TPI, I believe that the images alone are not yet capable of “explaining themselves,” and therefore text is necessary to adequately interpret the visual context. In this way, the combination of photographs and text in this piece aims to clarify the reader’s understanding of the conditions, relationships, and interconnections within and/or between the images.



The chill of the sea breeze still clings to the thin clothes they wear handouts from hardware stores or village events worn from early morning at home. From the river mouth to the ship dock, some are busy sorting the fish, while others steer the boat. Later, they gather to help each other sort the fish in containers once the boat is perfectly docked alongside the pier or other vessels.

At the TPI/market cooperative, the fresh anchovies and squid brought in by the fishermen are immediately received by small-scale traders from neighboring village markets, cucuk or the extended hands of large middlemen—and major distributors ready to ship goods to Semarang. Currently, Wonokerto TPI requires every trader, middleman, and distributor to pay an auction tax or purchase directly from the TPI at a rate of 2% of the total auction. This rule was newly introduced and implemented by the management of the newly formed TPI cooperative with the aim of minimizing losses caused by middlemen and distributors and to serve as a central control over the fishermen's economy in Wonokerto District.



It is not uncommon for familiar faces of long-time clients (middlemen) who previously provided money for their boat supplies to approach the boat directly and buy the fish without going through the auction. Some fishermen still tied to these clients will hand over their catch at a price lower than the market or auction value through bargaining. Many of these fishermen remain bound by a sense of "having been helped before," which creates a form of pseudo-patronage. Yet, in the end, the fishermen often say, "*tuku iwak sak penak boyoke dewek!*" (buy the fish however you like).



A basket of anchovies and a bucket of squid are carried from the boat to the dock. Each basket of anchovies is weighed one by one and then spread out on the floor from its container. The auctioneer speaks quickly into the microphone, waving his stick as he points to each catch from the fishermen. If they are lucky and the squid is bought by a major distributor from the neighboring village, the fishermen can earn around IDR 80,000 per kilogram, while the rice anchovies can sell for IDR 50,000 per kilogram. However, it seems that luck does not favor them every day.





Rows of drying nets for anchovies are spread out along the roads around Wonokerto TPI. The women mostly wives and daughters of local fishermen help each other carry baskets of anchovies and sort their drying fish. These home-based salted fish and dried anchovy processors are indeed the main source of income for women in fishing families. Their work heavily depends on the supply of anchovies and other small to medium-sized fish from the TPI, as well as the weather.

Although the husbands of the salted fish processors are fishermen targeting main catches like anchovies, the wives cannot directly receive their husbands' catch to process into salted or dried fish. The main reason is the need for quick cash flow to cover fuel costs for fishing the next day. On the other hand, the involvement of fishermen's wives as salted fish processors in the TPI's records categorizes them as traders, which means they must go through TPI intermediaries and compete with middlemen or large distributors to secure their husbands' catch.

Home-based salted fish processors will dry their purchased catch along the roadside all day before sorting and cleaning it from shrimp or other fish mixed in. Every day, local fishery and dock officers collect IDR 5,000 per basket per day from these salted fish and anchovy processors for drying their catch along public roads leading to the office, even though the roads are public facilities. The local fishery and dock officers also rent out open spaces near the TPI for fish drying to residents at a rate of IDR 500,000 per month.



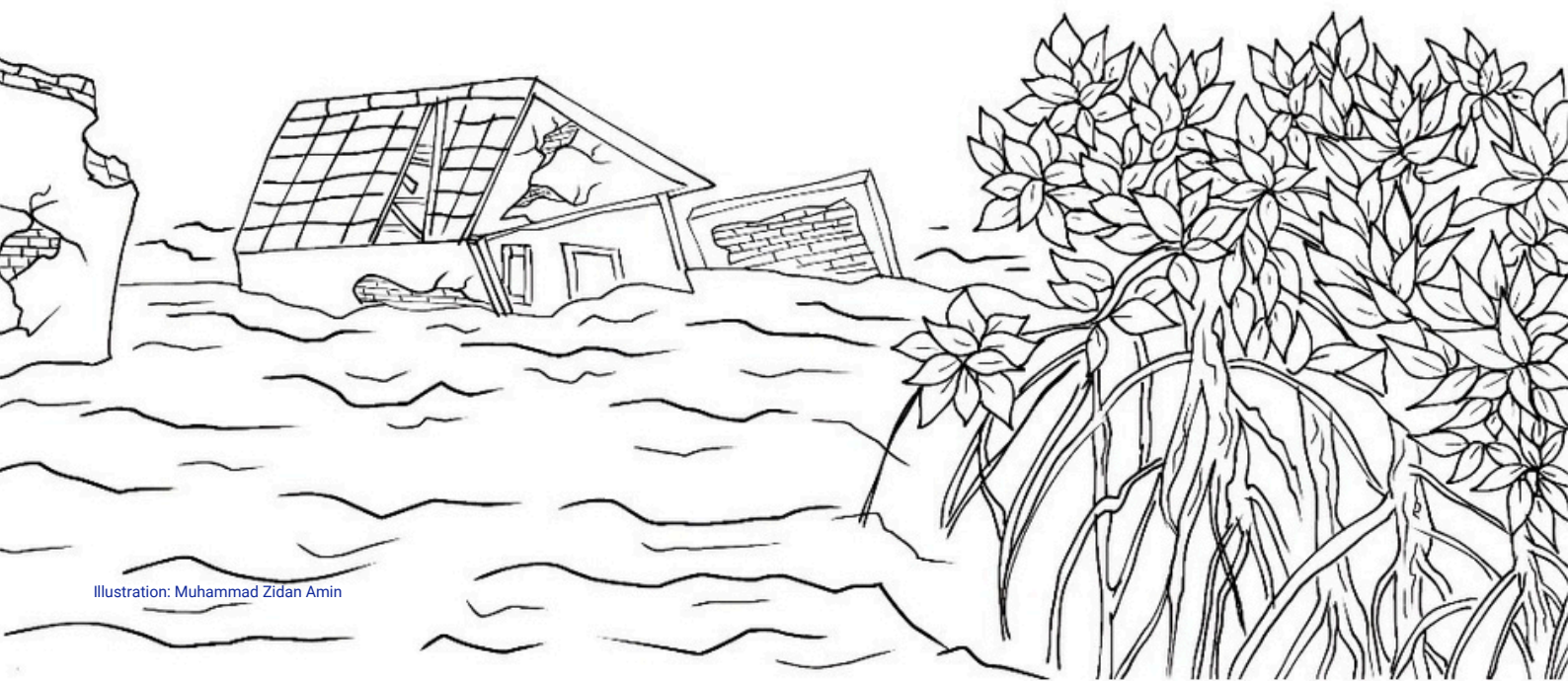
ESSAY

The Lost Village

Muhammad Zidan Amin,
Residents of Wonokerto Village, Pekalongan

In the past, across from our village stood Simonet, a village that is now abandoned due to being submerged by seawater, once lively with its residents. Simonet lived peacefully, its people familiar with the sea, with one access point being across the river and estuary from TPI Wonokerto. Its location was remote, almost standing alone like a small island embraced by water on all sides. Over time, however, the sea level continued to rise and never receded. Little by little, the houses in Simonet sank. The once-bustling place is now silent, with only the waves coming and going. Perhaps now, those houses have become a home for fish, mangroves, and marine plants to grow undisturbed.

From afar, the remaining buildings are still visible, though they fade more with each passing day. Thoughts of tomorrow creep into our minds what if the same thing happens to our village? The place where we were raised, played, and lived since childhood. Perhaps one day, future generations will only know this village through stories. Yet for us, those memories will never fade. This village will continue to live on in the hearts of those who love it.



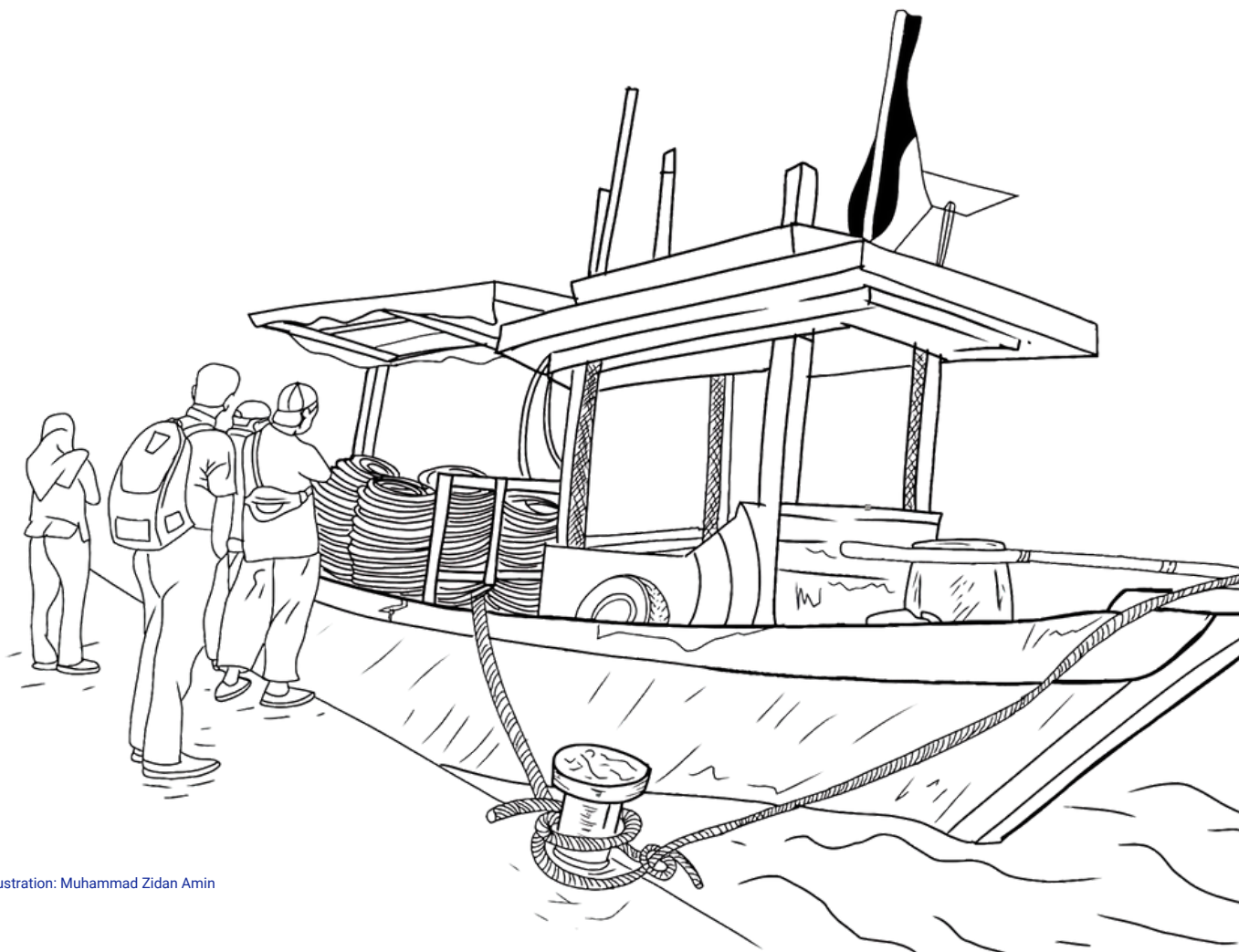


Illustration: Muhammad Zidan Amin

Careful Gratitude

Every day, the dim morning sky greets the fishermen as they set out with prayers and courage. The sea breeze carries the salty scent that clings to their skin and clothes, as if marking that their lives are always intertwined with the waves. The warmth of coastal life is colored by the laughter of children running around the fish market. The roar of returning boats often brings hope to the loved ones they leave behind at home.

Anxiety often comes uninvited. Slowly, the sea level begins to rise as the wind shifts. The sea, like fire, can be a friend when calm and an enemy when furious. We, the coastal community, have learned that every day must be lived with careful gratitude nurturing hope while remaining vigilant against the unpredictable forces of nature.



Pict:DFW Indonesia, SBMI, Greenpeace Indonesia

Marine News

DFW, SBMI, and Greenpeace Indonesia Urge Police Accountability: Report the Prolonged Handling of the TPPO Run Zeng 03 Case to Kompolnas and Itwasum

Jakarta, October 21, 2025 – Legal representatives for the victims of the Run Zeng 03 vessel from Destructive Fishing Watch (DFW) Indonesia, the Indonesian Migrant Workers Union (SBMI), and Greenpeace Indonesia have filed a complaint against investigators from the Indonesian National Police's Criminal Investigation Division (Bareskrim Polri) to the National Police Commission (Kompolnas) and the Inspectorate General of Police Oversight (Itwasum). The complaint concerns alleged violations of the Police Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct due to undue delays in the investigation and prosecution process. The legal team submitted the complaint on behalf of the victims due to concerns over prolonged investigation and prosecution of alleged human trafficking (TPPO) cases occurring on the fishing vessels KM Mitra Usaha Semesta (KM MUS) and Run Zeng (RZ) 03. The case was initially reported to Bareskrim Polri in June 2024 under Police Report Number: STTL/206/VI/2024/BARESKRIM.

The individuals reported include MOP, R, GW, AW, and others; however, the legal process has been slow. As of March 3, 2024, Bareskrim Polri transferred the handling of the case to the Maluku Regional Police (Polda Maluku), claiming that the case had already reached the investigation stage. However, upon review, the process at Polda Maluku was still at the preliminary inquiry stage. The victims' legal representatives also submitted a complaint to the National Commission on Human Rights (Komnas HAM) on September 25, urging Komnas HAM, as an independent human rights watchdog, to take action in handling this case.

This complaint was submitted to Kompolnas and Itwasum to urge both institutions to examine, supervise, and ensure internal accountability within the Indonesian National Police in responding to the law enforcement situation in this human trafficking case.

The legal representatives of the victims of the Run Zeng 03 vessel stated that Kompolnas and Itwasum have the mandate to investigate and follow up on the current situation in handling the alleged human trafficking cases involving KM MUS and the Run Zeng 03 vessel.

Dios Lumban Gaol, the legal representative of the victims of the Run Zeng 03 vessel, stated that more than 1 year and 3 months of case handling by Bareskrim Polri has shown no significant progress.

“This case is still going nowhere at the investigation stage, even though the crime and the perpetrators involved are clear. We emphasize that Bareskrim Polri is not handling this case seriously. In such a situation, the victims end up becoming victims again because the Law Enforcement Officers have failed to fulfill the rights of the victims,” he said.

This allegation is reinforced by the transfer of the case from Bareskrim Polri to the Maluku Regional Police (Polda Maluku) without a clear reason.

On the other hand, Siti Wahyatun, Legal Counsel for the victims of the Run Zeng 03 vessel, stated that the prolonged and slow investigation process constitutes a form of delay in justice.

“We must not allow justice to remain delayed, because a delay in justice is injustice itself. Itwasum and Kompolnas have the mandate to oversee the performance of the Indonesian National Police, and we hope these two institutions can truly ensure the professionalism of the investigators handling this case. Moreover, human trafficking is a serious crime against humanity; we must not let the victims become victims again due to delays in justice caused by the investigators’ lack of professionalism,” she concluded.

Greenpeace Indonesia, represented by Fildza Nabila, Marine Campaigner, emphasized that the Run Zeng 03 case illustrates how illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing comes at a very high human cost, manifesting in modern slavery and human trafficking.

“When the sea is plundered without control, humans are also exploited within its supply chain. Therefore, Greenpeace urges the Indonesian National Police, Kompolnas, and Itwasum to ensure law enforcement that is firm, transparent, and victim-centered, so that human rights abuses at sea do not continue to occur behind destructive and unjust fishing industry practices,” she emphasized.

Therefore, the Legal Counsel for the victims of the Run Zeng 03 vessel demands that Kompolnas and Itwasum conduct an examination and/or monitoring of the complaint concerning the alleged violation of the Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct, specifically regarding the prolonged (undue delay) investigation and inquiry process. This includes summoning the relevant parties to provide written statements or submit the necessary documents, carrying out a series of other examination measures, issuing notifications on the resolution of the public complaint, and monitoring the follow-up actions related to this case.



DFW Research: Seafood Processing Workers Laboring in Vulnerability

Jakarta, 19th September 2025 - In the past four years, the fisheries sector has played an important role in realizing Indonesia's blue economy vision. This is evidenced by the increase in exports of Indonesian fishery products from USD 4.56 billion in 2021 to USD 4.81 billion during the January–October 2024 period, or an average annual increase of around 1.8%. This increase in fishery product exports has also been supported by workers in seafood processing plants, who play a crucial role in the fisheries industry chain. Since 2023, Destructive Fishing Watch (DFW) Indonesia has been working with various stakeholders to implement a fisheries labor protection program in Jakarta, Bali, and North Sulawesi.

To support efforts to protect fishery workers, DFW Indonesia has collaborated with the Directorate General of Strengthening the Competitiveness of Marine and Fishery Products, Ministry of Marine Affairs and Fisheries, to conduct a rapid assessment on the conditions of tuna processing workers in Jakarta, Bali,

and North Sulawesi since May 2025. As part of the dissemination process, DFW Indonesia held a Discussion: Conditions of Tuna Processing Workers in Bitung, Benoa, and North Jakarta to gather input from various stakeholders on this issue.

"This research is one of our efforts to address the issue of fisheries labor protection, especially for workers in seafood processing plants," said Imam Trihatmadja, Program Director of DFW Indonesia.

Nabila Tauhida, Human Rights Officer at DFW Indonesia, stated that seafood processing workers work with a high level of flexibility. According to her presentation, this flexibility is reflected in the ease with which workers move from one factory to another. This pattern of flexibility is supported by short-term employment contracts (PKWT – Perjanjian Kerja Waktu Tertentu) lasting from 3 months to 1 year.

"The implementation of short-term contracts is intended to match the production model, which is based on pre-orders," she explained.

Nabila also explained that the labor-intensive tuna processing sector, which depends on order-based production, makes workers increasingly vulnerable. In the research conducted, one company was found to have laid off around 60% of its workers in response to Trump's policy changes in early 2025. "The workers we encountered are in vulnerable positions. In fact, there were workers whose 3-month PKWT contracts were repeatedly extended for 6 years," Nabila concluded. So, this research recommends strengthening labor supervision, especially in relation to the use of PKWT schemes as one of the recommendations of the research.

In addition, Nabila found that workers still have limited space for representation. She noted the presence of a "chilling effect", in which concerns over contract renewal make workers reluctant to voice their aspirations. According to her, this situation cannot be separated from production capacity, which is highly influenced by fluctuations in global market demand.

Workers are more worried about the certainty of their contracts than about issues of wages or occupational safety. They even become anxious when fish stocks decline, as this can affect the continuity of their contracts," Nabila explained.

Responding to Nabila's findings, Machmud, Secretary of the Directorate General of Strengthening the Competitiveness of Marine and Fishery Products (PDSPKP), said the ministry is currently committed to improving the capacity of processing workers through programs and technical training for both industries and workers. He stated that the workforce plays a key role in the fisheries production system because labor is the foundation of business productivity and the quality of the products produced.

The Directorate General of PDSPKP is ready to collaborate with all parties to improve the capacity of the workforce so they can contribute to strengthening the competitiveness of fishery products," said Machmud.

Additionally, Yuli Adiratna, Director of the Labor Supervision System Development, Directorate General of Labor Supervision and Occupational Safety and Health (K3), Ministry of Manpower, emphasized the importance of reviewing laws and their implementation in the field. According to him, under the UU Cipta Kerja, a worker may only be employed under a PKWT (fixed-term contract) for a maximum of five years.

"After that period, the worker must be employed under an Indefinite-Term Employment Agreement (PKWTT) or become a permanent worker," Yuli explained.

Benni Hasbiyalloh, International Relations Lecturer at Paramadina University, commented on the research by pointing out that the uncertainty faced by seafood processing workers is one way business owners cut production costs. Benni, who also conducted similar research in the seafood processing sector, found that tuna factories can operate for a full year.

The work patterns found in this study need to be explored further, as they affect the recruitment process. On the other hand, we also need to examine whether tuna is a seasonal commodity, and whether the loin and canning processes influence recruitment. To do this, we must first break down the production process, because it will relate to how labor relations are formed," Benni concluded.



Pict: Fai/ DFW Indonesia



DFW Indonesia, 2025

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