

How much is it worth?

By Aznir Malek

Consider the following facts regarding the US's angling industry: the US government estimated that there were 8.34 million anglers in the country in 1997. In the same year, American anglers spent around US\$8.5 billion (yes, billion!). That's a lot of money! And what is more interesting is that the average American angler spent almost a thousand dollars (over three thousand ringgit) to go fishing during 1997. Which got me to thinking: how much is the Malaysian angling industry worth?

Of course, trying to answer this question is like a blind man trying to weigh an elephant. The government has not bothered about this, yet (the angling bit, of course, not the elephant!). However, a guesstimate is better than nothing at all, and this is what I'm trying to do.

Let's lay down some facts for consideration – or conjecture. I estimate there are at least 50,000 reading anglers in the country i.e. those who purchase angling magazines and books. Let's say the circulation rate is at 5 to 1 (for one guy who buys a magazine, another four guys would read it). That makes about 250,000 regular anglers – those who say go fishing at least every month. Remember, I'm trying to make a pessimistic estimate: the actual figure is anybody's guess, but it may be much more than this.

How much does the average regular angler spend in a year? Now this is a tough one. On one end of the scale, there are those 'gila' guys who would spend several thousands on fishing tackle alone. Meanwhile, there are those who, after purchasing their basic set of fishing tackle, would spend peanuts on hardly more than hooks and swivels. Well, this is where we have to make an assumption. Let's say that the average expenditure is equivalent to that of an angler visiting a saltwater pond at least once a month: at about RM30 a shot (discounting travel, bait and tackle costs), this means that the average spending is about RM360 a year. Hence, a pessimistic guesstimate of the whole angling industry is about RM90 million!

Why bother doing all this? Well, that figure shows that recreational fishing is a financially formidable market, justifying the needed efforts to manage and control our waters, be it the lake, river, lombong or the sea. You see, if the average price of fish meat is RM10 per kg., then the angling industry is worth 9,000,000 kg. of fish a year! Of course it is actually worth more, since, as Aziz Daud has proven in a previous article, a released fish is worth much more than one culled for meat.

The government and other related bodies should seriously consider these facts. The fisheries must be properly managed. More waters should be gazetted strictly for angling only, with the attendant enforcement to control them. More research should be done so that sound fish management policies are established and updated. All these efforts are now a financial must. If the powers-that-be finally implement the licensing of anglers, then every sen of the money collected should be channeled into these said activities.

Anglers do what they do for the fishing, not the fish. Hence, the message is:
Sell the fishing, not the fish!