

## Special Report

# Ilwayab Sub-District, Dying Fishermen's 'Paradise'

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Most fishermen Ilwayab District in Merauke, Papua are having a tough time after the fish processing company was closed due to illegal fishing. (CNN Indonesia/Andry Novelino)

**Merauke, CNN Indonesia** -- Lambertus Mahose was busy counting the money he got from the sale of the fish on an afternoon last September. There were five ten thousand bank notes. The money he just got might not be as much as what he got on previous days.

"Our income has decreased for the past one year," he said when we met him in Bibikem Village.

Lambertus is just one of the fishermen in Bibikem Village, Ilwayab Sub-District, Merauke District in Papua. His skin is dark with protruded veins. He is 47. For more than 10 years, this native of Asmat tribe has earned a living as a fisherman in Bibikem Village.

It took around 45 minutes to reach Bibikem Village from Mopah Airport in Merauke District with a small aircraft from Susi Air, since there was no road access to the village. The aircraft landed in Wanam Village's airport and Bibikem Village was only 10-minute motorcycle ride from Wanam Village.

In a hurry, Lambertus took out a long bench from inside his small house. The 4X5 meter wooden house had become a shelter for him, his wife and his four children. The house had no partition and it had gaps in the roof.

The bed was only a simple mattress. They had to share the house with the chickens and dogs which sometimes slept inside.

Lambertus moved the bench to the yard in front of the house so we could chat. He began to tell me about the income that had been decreasing for the past one year.

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The income of the fishermen in Ilwayab Sub-District is declining for the past one year. (CNN Indonesia/Andry Novelino)

The decline began when the Minister of Maritime Affairs and Fisheries (MAF) revoked the Fishing Permit of PT Dwikarya Reksa Abadi in the middle of last year.

The company was suspected of violating the Minister of Maritime Affairs and Fisheries Regulation Number 56 Year 2014 and was given a Suspension of Boats Formerly Owned by a Foreign Entity issued by Susi Pudjiastuti.

The policy issued by the Minister of MAF, Susi Pudjiastuti, is considered to be one of the efforts to uphold the sovereignty of Indonesia in its maritime region. The President of Indonesia, Joko Widodo, is committed to building Indonesia into the world's maritime axis.

The Government states that the maritime axis will be enforced to ensure connectivity among the islands, the development of the shipping and fishing industry, the improvement of sea transportation, and the security of the maritime sector.

Because of the policy, the fish-processing company was forced to close its business and could no longer run its operation. The impact is felt by the fishermen in Bibikem Village, such as Lambertus.

Not only that, a few public facilities such as the health facility supported by the company were also forced to close their businesses.

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- The Minister Susi to Magically Turn Muara Baru into an Online Fish Market.
- Heading toward the maritime Axis, the Fishermen Shackled by Minister Susi's Regulation

PT Dwikarya is a company affected by the Suspension of the fishing business permit issued by the MoMAF. The company was located in Wogekel Village in Ilwayab Sub-District, an area located between Bibikem and Wanam Village.

The company, which began its operation in 2006, was caught using boats formerly owned by a foreign entity and is suspected of committing illegal fishing practices.

The People's Coalition for Fishing Justice (*Koalisi Rakyat untuk Keadilan Perikanan/Kiara*) recorded that at least four major companies are suspected of committing illegal fishing practices. They are PT Maritim Timur Jaya, PT Dwikarya Reksa Abadi, PT Pusaka Benjina Resources, and PT Mabiru Industry.

In June 2015, the MoMAF revoked the licenses of 15 companies which affiliate with the four business groups.

Lambertus said that before the company was closed, he could catch up to 50 kilograms per day and the catch was then sold to PT Dwikarya for Rp11,500 per kilogram.

In a day, he could earn up to Rp500.000, and on a very good day, he could bring home around Rp700.000.

"After the company was closed, we could no longer sell per kilogram, but per fish in a day," he explained. "We can catch around 10 fish a day, but sell only five."

The price of each fish is Rp10.000 and Lambertus must immediately sell the fish before they get rotten. It was different when the company was still in operation. He could catch a relatively large number of fish since the unsold ones could be stored in the company's freezer.

"After we caught the fish, we could deposit, weigh, get money, and keep the fish in the cold storage. But now, after it was closed, it is very difficult for us to find the money," he said.

Lambertus is racking his brain. All his children need money for school while the money he earns is only enough to pay for day-to-day food.

He is lucky since he gets an additional income from his wife who works on their farm. The harvests such as Chinese green lettuce, tomatoes, and long bean can be sold to the market. Lambertus also offers to rent his nets to other fishermen.

They cannot expect a lot from the aid given by the local government. One month before meeting CNNIndonesia.com, Lambertus received a storage box for fish and an engineless boat from the Merauke District Government. Before, he had also received an aid in the form of fishing nets.

The net, however, had been torn several times by crocodile's sharp teeth. He had to mend it every time since it is impossible for him to buy a new one. The price of Rp 1 million for a new net is too expensive for Lambertus.

He hopes that the company that became the backbone of his family can operate again.

"We want this company to operate again so that we can eat."

Ilwayab District has around 2,963 fishermen and has one of the largest numbers of fishermen in Merauke. The fish produced in this district can reach up to 7.2 million kilograms.



Lambertus Mahose is thinking really hard on how to support his family after the fish processing company was closed (CNN Indonesia/Andry Novelino)

### **The Operation of the Company**

CNNIndonesia.com got the chance to peek into the cold storage that belongs to PT Dwikarya. When we reached the place, we could feel the cold snap coming from inside. There were hundreds of tons of fish sacks as high as three meters. The distinct smell of fresh fish was in the air.

There were six rooms to store fish in the cold storage. Most rooms stored hundreds of sacks of kingfish, snapper, threadfin, cutlass, pomfret, and many other fishes. The total weight of the fish reached 6,000 tons.

For the past two years, the fish caught were kept in the cold storage that belongs to PT Dwikarya. Since caught committing an illegal fishing practice, the company was not allowed to take out their catch from the cold storage. As a result, hundreds of fishes caught between the years 2013—2014 were stuck inside.

One of the staff of PT Dwikarya, Kharol E Teurupun, said that the cold storage needed to stay on to ensure the freshness of the fish. “If we switch it off, the fish will rot,” explained Kharol.

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Based on the information from the MoMAF, PT Dwikarya is recorded to have seven boats which formerly belonged to Chinese companies and the names of the boats are Dwikarya 38, Dwikarya 39, Dwikarya 50, Dwikarya 59, Dwikarya 60, Dwikarya 61, and Dwikarya 62.

The port where Dwikarya 38, 39, and 50 dock is in Wanam Port, while Dwikarya 59, 60, 61, and 62 dock in Avona Port in Papua. From hundreds of boats that belong to PT Dwikarya, only around 61 have an official permit.

The company was also suspected of forging documents for the other 72 boats.

Aside from that, PT Dwikarya was accused of trading fish in the middle of the ocean or committing transshipment outside its catch operation area. A number of regulations in administration such as business activities report (*Laporan Kegiatan Usaha/LKU*) and tax obligations were also violated.

The Fishing Business Permit was revoked in June 2015. Around 470 employees of PT Dwikarya were made redundant. This includes foreign boat crews who were sent back to their home countries.

Kharol is one of 30 employees left in the company. He is the head of the PT Antarticha Segara Lines branch, a shipping agent who works in partnership with PT Dwikarya. His body is well built and he has a stern voice.

“The employees left were in charge of taking care of the boats, the diesel fuel, including the cold storage. That is it,” he said.

Kharol admitted that during the operation, the company used around 600 foreign workers by using the Special Immigration Permit.

This permit is released by Immigration based on the request of the sponsor who would like to employ foreigners as the captains or boat crews of boats which will operate in Indonesian waters. They are waived from the obligation to have work visas.

Kharol explained that the foreigners were needed since most of the new boats that belong to the company came from China. The boats use a new technology which can only be operated by the crews who are familiar with the technology.

This is mainly for the captain, the catch experts, the cold storage officer and the people in charge of the electronic devices.

“We have trained local boat crews, but they can only survive one or two fishing trips,” he added.

He also explained that the company was affected by the Minister MAF Regulation Number 2 Year 2015, which forbids the use of trawling to catch the fish. The trawl is considered to be environmentally unfriendly equipment since it destroys the sea habitat.

Kharol said that it was difficult for the company to change the equipment in all 61 boats left at the moment. The company would need a large amount of money and a very long time to install new equipment.

“The company needs to change the permit in the fishing business permit if we want to change the equipment,” he added.

With the change of equipment, the crews would need more time to learn the techniques and the method to use the new fishing net.





The frozen fish kept in the cold storage that belongs to the company in Wogekel Village in Merauke. (CNN Indonesia/Andry Novelino)

Kharol then took CNNIndonesia.com around the company's compound. The 500,000-square meter area could not be covered all by foot.

Kharol showed us the cold storage, or the place to store the fish, while riding his motorcycle. There were four units of cold storage with a capacity of 24 tons each.

There was also a room for seven generators with a built capacity of 250 kilovolt ampere (kVa) each. Aside from keeping the cold storage running, the generators were also used to provide electricity for the residents' houses.

However, since the company is no longer in operation, the residents had to chip in to buy a new generator set.

Not far from the generator room, there were other rooms to make the ice blocks.

These rooms were connected with a wooden track similar to a roller coaster ride track with the height of around two meters and the length of around 100 meters. The track was used by the company to send the ice blocks to the boats docking at PT Dwikarya's wooden jetty.

During its operation, the company could produce up to 180 tons of ice blocks each day. The wood on the track has now dried off since it is no longer used to deliver ice blocks to the boats.

Kharol parked his motorcycle and we walked to the company's port. Big chunks of wood that supported the road to the port produced a very loud noise when we stepped on them. We had to walk carefully since there were gaping holes underneath.

Once we reached the edge of the port, we could see many boats with different sizes from 200 to 300 gross tonnes docking at the port. The boats once owned by Chinese companies lined up neatly. The boat structures were beginning to rust since they had not been used for the past two years. The bodies of some of the smaller boats had even submerged halfway down in the ocean.

PT Dwikarya owns a fleet of 76 boats, which consists of 74 boats to catch the fish and 2 boats to store the fish caught. For the wooden boats, there are around 67 boats which consists of 53 boats to catch the fish and 14 boats to store the fish caught.

“There are around 87 fishing boats that work with us,” explained Kharol.

Aside from the scene of the boats lining up on the dock, there was another interesting scene in one corner of the dock; An approximately five-meter crane and a trolley tied at its end. We could see that the metal was starting to rust.

Nevertheless, the blue paint on the crane still looked as if it were new although some paint had begun to peel off. Before the company was closed, the crane was used to move the fish. The capacity of the crane could reach 30 tons per day.

“We don’t do anything with it. It cannot be used,” stated Kharol.

Kharol admitted that during its heyday, the company could make a profit up to billions of Rupiah per year, although he could not give an exact figure for the profit.

He said that the operational cost for one boat could reach Rp400 million to Rp500 million per month. The operation cost would be covered by the profit made by PT Dwikarya’s boats, not to mention the profit they got from the product exported to China.



The cold storage that belongs to PT Dwikarya Reksa Abadi. (CNN Indonesia/Andry Novelino)

In 2013, the fish exported by PT Dwikarya to China reached 36.1 million kilograms. This number was entirely taken from the total production of the company in the same year, which was 36.3 million kilograms.

In 2014, the fish exported declined to 35.8 million kilograms, while the total fish caught was 38.8 million kilograms. After the permit was revoked, all production and export activities came to a halt. The last stock that the company had was 3.07 million kilograms of fish at the end of 2014.

Kharol claimed that the company adhered to a number of regulations starting from the payment of Fishing Fee or *Pungutan Hasil Perikanan (PHP)* to the payment for the regional tax and the Land and Building Tax or *Pajak Bumi dan Bangunan (PBB)*. He said that the amount of PHP paid each year for all boats could reach Rp15 billion.

According to Kharol, the company has also provided a number of facilities for the residents, from a school, employees' accommodation, a post office, a market, a bank, to a hospital. However, since the company suffered losses, all of the facilities became empty. The company could no longer afford to pay for the activities held in the facilities.

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### **The Health Facilities**

Kharol also asked CNNIndonesia.com to see the hospital building in Wanam Village. The hospital was the only health facility from the company for the residents. It was located not far from the port.

Even though it was called a hospital, the building looked more like a health clinic.

A middle-aged woman was seen sitting on a long bench near the door. She was plump, with hair neatly made into a bun on her head. There was a warm smile on her lips.

"Please," she said asking us to come in.

Her name is Gemma Walewowan, a midwife with Government Civil Servant status. Everybody in the village knows Gemma since she is the only health professional working in the so-called hospital.

While showing us various rooms in the hospital, Gemma talked to CNNIndonesia.com. No more patients came into the hospital, let alone stayed in the hospital. The rooms in the hospital were dim. Only the lights in the examination room and the waiting room were switched on.

"Since the company was closed, the hospital also had to stop its operation," Gemma stated, while showing us the delivery room. There were two beds and a table with a few medical apparatuses on it. All still look neat and well taken care of.

Gemma told us that before the unfortunate event with the company, the hospital was bustling with activities. It had one general practitioner, eight nurses, three midwives, one laboratory analyst, and one pharmacist serving the residents.

In one month, the hospital could serve up to 800 patients, which consisted of the company's employees and the residents from the surrounding areas. She said that the majority of the residents had Acute Respiratory Disorder. "The hospital charged nothing to the residents who came to see the doctor when they were sick," she added.

Her status as Civil Servant allows Gemma to receive a monthly salary from the government and the company. Now she only gets a salary from the government.

"It is only me now. I treat the sick and help deliver babies, too," she said.





The hospital operates with minimum activities in Wanam Village after the fishing company closed its operation. (CNN Indonesia/Andry Novelino)

We walked in the alleys of the hospitals. Gemma said that during a heavy rain, she had to prepare buckets to catch the water leaking from the roof with gaps in it. The paint of the wall was also seen peeling off.

Unfortunately, Gemma could not talk to us for very long. She had to visit one of the residents who had just called her. "When somebody calls, I have to visit the person's house," she explained.

She said goodbye to us and carefully locked the doors in the hospital.

Together with Kharol, we left the hospital. Kharol was very quiet. He greeted some residents who had just come from a ceremony to welcome the Regent of Merauke on that day.

Kharol hoped that there would be a clear policy from the Ministry of Maritime Affairs and Fisheries to direct the company so that they could begin their operation again. "Now, we don't what is happening to our company. It is reluctant to live, but refuses to die," he last said.

In Ilwayab District, a lot has changed over the past one year. Maybe, this has caused many fishermen just like Lambertus Mahose to think even harder.

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