

Growth and Instability of Small Pelagic Fisheries of the North Coast of Java, Indonesia: Lesson Learned for Fisheries Policy*

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The North Coast of the Java Sea is home of thousands of small-scale fishers harvesting small pelagic fish. Small pelagic fisheries make up the main economic and social activities for coastal communities where other alternatives are limited. However, these fisheries have experienced turbulence over the last 30 years due to various transitions in regulatory regimes. As early as 20 years ago, the fisheries were declared to be overfishing, and the livelihood of the fishers has continued to decline ever since. The government of Indonesia has initiated various policy schemes to save the fisheries, including the recent introduction of right-based coastal areas to address ill-defined property rights for fisheries. Nevertheless, the results of such policies are unclear. Poverty and resource degradation are still rampant in the area. This raises a critical question: Did growth policy solve the fisheries problem? This paper attempts to address the fate of the fisheries within different policy regimes, ranging from centralized policies to decentralized policies. Using instability assessment method, the results show that the instability in the fisheries was related to the growth oriented policy pursued by the fisheries authority since last two decades. The instability was also correlated with the fierce competition among vessels operating in the fishery targeting the same stock of fish. The study shows that the transition of the fishery from de facto open access to more regulated regimes designed to achieve responsible fishing has failed.

Keywords: small pelagic fisheries, the north coast of Java, instability index, decentralization, growth-oriented policy

Introduction

Small pelagic fisheries of the north coast of Java have played an important role in Indonesia. During the 1980s-1990s, the fisheries there contributed the largest share of small-pelagic landings in the country, and became the “engine of growth” for the coastal area of the north coast of Java. The fisheries have now undergone

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