

THE ROLE OF THE FISHERIES SERVICE IN EMPOWERING FISHING COMMUNITIES IN BINTAN REGENCY IN 2023-2024

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Abstract

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Bintan Regency has great potential in the capture fisheries sector, but fishing communities still face various challenges such as limited infrastructure, low education and skills, and vulnerability to weather changes. The Bintan Regency Fisheries Department plays a strategic role in empowering fishermen to overcome these issues. This research aims to analyze the role of the Fisheries Department in empowering fishing communities using a descriptive qualitative approach. Three main indicators were used as benchmarks: the roles of regulator, dynamizer, and facilitator, through data collection techniques such as interviews, observations, and document studies. The research results indicate that as a regulator, the agency focuses on implementing central policies such as Law Number 7 of 2016 through socialization to fishermen. As a dynamizer, the agency organizes musrenbang, training, extension services, and technical guidance, although these are still limited by budget constraints and low participation due to limited human resources. Meanwhile, as a facilitator, the agency regularly provides fishing gear assistance such as boats, traps, and nets, but distribution is not yet equitable. Overall, the role of the Fisheries Department has been functioning, but it still needs strengthening in terms of regulation, program effectiveness, and equitable distribution of assistance to achieve sustainable empowerment of fishermen.

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INTRODUCTION

Indonesia as a maritime country has large marine fisheries potential with an ocean area of 6.4 million km² and fish resource wealth reaching 12.01 million tons per year, with a permitted catch limit of around 8.6 million tons per year (Decree of the Minister



of Maritime Affairs and Fisheries Number 19 of 2022) Indonesia's position as the second largest fisheries producer in the world after China (FAO, 2022) This demonstrates the importance of this sector to the national economy. The fisheries sector is a mainstay of coastal communities' livelihoods and a source of food for the general public (Husain Latuconsina et al., 2023) .

Fishermen play a vital role in managing fishery resources, as their success depends heavily on the quality of the human resources who utilize them (Yusuf, 2023) . Despite Indonesia's vast marine resources, the welfare of fishermen has not been optimally realized, resulting in coastal areas experiencing extreme poverty (Indraswari, 2023) .

Poverty among fishermen is caused by various interrelated factors. Internal factors include low human resources, lack of business capital, limited access to fishing technology, low fish prices, difficulties managing fishing businesses, high dependence on fishing activities, and a consumerist lifestyle. External factors include fisheries sector development policies that prioritize productivity for national economic growth, marketing systems that favor middlemen, damage to coastal and marine ecosystems, and misuse of mangrove forests (Ginting, 2022) .

Empowering fishermen is the government's responsibility as a conscious, planned, systematic, and sustainable effort to build their socio-economic and political independence through managing existing resource potential to achieve sustainable social welfare (Setiawan, 2022) . This is regulated in Law Number 7 of 2016 concerning the Protection and Empowerment of Fishermen, Fish Farmers, and Salt Farmers.

Bintan Regency has significant fisheries potential, covering an area of 74,200.94 km², of which 96.74% is water and comprised of approximately 240 islands (Slamet, 2024) . Its strategic geographic location at the confluence of the South China Sea, the Java Sea, and the Strait of Malacca offers a potential fish resource of 106,018 tons, with a permitted catch of 50,287 tons. However, most fishermen still use traditional fishing gear such as traps and nets, which limit catches (Faisal et al., 2021) .

Capture fisheries production data for Bintan Regency shows a consistent increase: 57,131.26 tons (2021), 58,790.62 tons (2022), and 59,832.45 tons (2023) (Bintan Regency Fisheries Service, 2024). The number of fishermen in Bintan Regency reached 7,530 people spread across 10 sub-districts (One Data Portal, 2023), with the majority still using simple fishing gear (BIP, 2022).

Fishermen in Bintan Regency face a variety of complex challenges. Dependence on weather conditions leads to income instability, particularly during the north wind season, when thousands of fishermen experience economic hardship due to being unable to go to sea (Haryanto, 2021) . Other problems include limited modern equipment and damage to fishing gear (BIP, 2022). the threat of sea sand exports to the ecosystem (CNN Indonesia, 2024) , pollution due to black oil spills (Sahputra, 2024) , criminalization by Malaysian authorities (Wiyoga, 2024) difficult market access due to the absence of TPI (Faiz, 2024), and difficulty in obtaining subsidized diesel (Haryanto, 2021) .

The Bintan Regency Fisheries Service has duties and functions based on Bintan Regent Regulation Number 61 of 2023, including the formulation and implementation of policies in the areas of capture fisheries, aquaculture, processing, marketing of fishery products, and supervision. The Fisheries Service's 2021-2026 Strategic Plan focuses on increasing fisheries production through infrastructure development, fisherman empowerment, product quality improvement, and the Gemarikan program.

However, the implementation of fisherman empowerment programs has been suboptimal due to a lack of ongoing technical guidance and assistance, as well as a limited understanding of the program's objectives and mechanisms (Setiawan et al., 2022). Existing empowerment programs are sometimes not aligned with the priority needs of fishers and tend to create dependency.

Based on the various complex problems faced by fishermen in Bintan Regency and the suboptimal empowerment program carried out by the Fisheries Service, this study formulates the question: "What is the Role of the Fisheries Service in Empowering Fishermen Communities in Bintan Regency?" with the aim of knowing the role of the Fisheries Service in empowering fishing communities in Bintan Regency.

This research provides theoretical benefits by enriching the study of the government's role in community empowerment in the fisheries sector and adding to the reference literature for studies on public policy and community development. Practically, the research findings can provide concrete input to the Bintan Regency Fisheries Office to improve the effectiveness of its empowerment programs.

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This study uses three previous studies for comparison. First, Keken Cahya Dwi Marini (2022) examined the empowerment of small-scale fishing communities by the Maritime Affairs and Fisheries Service in Bintan Regency using Mardikanto's theory (awareness, capacity building, and empowerment stages). The results showed that empowerment was hampered by internal (human resources, infrastructure, capital, work ethic) and external (technology, weather) factors. Efforts were made through program optimization and the provision of capital and facilities.

Second, Zahrun Efendi (2022) analyzed the allocation of community empowerment assistance funds for fishermen at the Tanjungpinang City Agriculture, Food, and Fisheries Service using qualitative methods. The results showed that the fund allocation process begins with planning, management, and accountability.

Third, Lisdariani (2022) examined the role of the Fisheries Service in empowering fishing communities in Resun Pesisir Village, North Lingga District, using Iyas Yusuf's theory of government roles (regulator, dynamic, facilitator). The results showed that the Fisheries Service's role has not been optimal, thus not improving the community's economic welfare.

This study differs in focus from previous studies in its use of government role theory (regulator, dynamic, facilitator) and its coverage of all fishermen in Bintan Regency. The similarities lie in the study of fishing community empowerment using a qualitative approach and the involvement of the Fisheries Service. Weaknesses of the study include its limited focus on the Fisheries Service, its lack of involvement of other actors, its lack of quantitative data, and its failure to measure the program's direct impact on fishermen's welfare.

Theoretical Framework

Community Empowerment

Empowerment is a process of strengthening individuals or community groups to become more empowered by enhancing their decision-making abilities. According to Soeharto, empowerment can be viewed as both a process and a goal of realizing social change, enabling resilient communities to participate in meeting their physical, economic,

and social needs (Yunus et al., 2022) .

Community empowerment is a development process that encourages communities to take the initiative in social activities to improve their conditions and contribute to national development (Haerana et al., 2023) . This concept integrates local values to create a development paradigm that is community-focused, participatory, empowering, and sustainable. According to the Chamber, this approach not only meets basic needs but also seeks alternatives for sustainable local economic growth (Bahri, 2019) .

Law Number 6 of 2014 concerning Villages defines community empowerment as an effort to foster regional autonomy and government support to improve access to information, mentality, skills, behavior, capacity, awareness, and utilization of resources through policies, programs, activities, and assistance according to the priority needs of village communities.

The empowerment process focuses on developing responsibility, commitment, the ability to maintain the sustainability of communal living, and problem-solving skills to influence environmental change and improve quality of life. The core theory of empowerment is the result of a democratic atmosphere to overcome powerlessness caused by societal structures and systems (Ulum & Anggaini, 2020) .

According to Kartasasmita (1996) in (Mataufina, 2024) , the community empowerment process goes through three stages: *Enabling* (creating an environment that allows community potential to develop by opening access to opportunities and resources), *Empowering* (strengthening potential through positive steps to provide input and access to opportunities), and *Protecting* (providing protection and support to weak groups).

Roles of Government

The role of government is a manifestation of the implementation of state sovereignty to achieve specific goals guided by prevailing norms and core values. This role illustrates the interaction between the governing body and the public to achieve results aligned with the state's vision and mission (Sari, 2023) . The government plays a significant role in the economy as a provider of private sector regulation and economic recovery in the event of market failures such as monopolies, oligopolies, externalities, information imbalances, and limited public goods provision (Khusairi, 2019).

The government plays a crucial role in managing governance to achieve national goals, including improving the welfare of fishermen, given their significant contribution to the development of the fisheries and maritime sectors, as well as the economic development of coastal and rural areas (Sari, 2020) . Regional governments play a strategic role in regional development planning as providers of public services to improve the welfare, prosperity, security, justice, and peace of the community.

The role of government in regional development planning is an activity designed for the future through the stages of preparing programs and activities that involve various parties to optimize the use and allocation of available resources with a focus on improving community welfare within a certain period of time (Nainggolan, 2022) .

According to Yusuf (2014) in (Restu, 2023) , the success of the government's role in community empowerment is measured through three indicators: Regulator (directing and balancing the implementation of development through issuing regulations as basic guidelines for the community), Dynamizer (driving community participation in facing obstacles during the empowerment process through effective guidance and direction by an extension team or certain agency), and Facilitator (provider of resources such as

financial assistance, facilities, training, guidance, and mentoring so that the community can utilize resources effectively to achieve independence and prosperity).

Fisherman Concepts

Fishermen are a profession that relies on fishing to meet their daily needs (Yusuf, 2023). Fishermen work catching fish or other organisms not only in the open sea but also in shallow waters and on the sea surface (Rahayu, 2020).

According to Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 45 of 2009 concerning Fisheries, fishermen are defined as individuals who rely on fishing for their livelihood, while small-scale fishermen are individuals who fish for their daily needs using fishing vessels with a maximum size of 5 gross tons (GT). Fishermen's income is highly dependent on weather conditions, as bad weather can hamper fishing activities.

Law Number 7 of 2016 concerning the Protection and Empowerment of Fishermen, Fish Farmers, and Salt Farmers classifies fishermen into: Small Fishermen (catching fish for daily needs without a boat or with a boat of a maximum of 10 GT), Traditional Fishermen (catching fish in traditional waters that have been used for generations according to local culture and wisdom), Labor Fishermen (working as laborers in fishing businesses), and Owner Fishermen (having fishing boats for business and actively carrying out fishing activities).

Concepts of Fishing Communities

Fishing communities are groups whose livelihoods depend on marine resources through fishing and aquaculture activities, typically living in coastal areas near their activity locations. This group has distinct social and economic characteristics due to their livelihood patterns, availability of infrastructure, and unique cultural backgrounds. Their lives are heavily influenced by environmental conditions and are vulnerable to ecosystem damage, which impacts their social and economic well-being (Agus, 2023).

According to (Novedri, 2023), fishing communities have characteristics: in terms of livelihood as individuals who catch fish by utilizing marine potential, in terms of lifestyle they are known for their mutual cooperation and cooperation to reduce costs, and in terms of skills they have special abilities such as reading current and weather conditions even though it requires great physical strength.

The social and economic structure of the fishing community includes: Fishermen's households that utilize coastal and marine areas together as production resources with working hours depending on sea conditions (an average of 20 days per month at sea) and tend to live in poor conditions (Nantika, 2023). Fishermen's wives who play an important role in maintaining household economic stability through financial management, budgeting, setting spending priorities, and managing catches (Iqlima, 2023), and Fishermen's husbands who have the primary responsibility as breadwinners while facing the challenges of limited fishing gear, high operational costs, and unpredictable weather conditions (Ubaidillah, 2023).

METHOD STUDY

This research uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive qualitative type. Qualitative research focuses on the authenticity and naturalness of data without any particular treatment or conditioning on the research object/subject, with the researcher as the key instrument who conducts intensive interactions in the field and produces data in

the form of words, images, or videos that are not related to numerical quantities (Helaluddin & Wijaya, 2019) . Researchers are directly involved in interactions with research subjects to gain an in-depth understanding of the topic being studied, acting as the main instrument that collects, analyzes, and concludes data directly in the field.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Role as Regulator

The Fisheries Service is tasked with implementing central government policies regarding the regulation of fisheries activities. They do not develop specific regulations at the regional level, but instead refer to national regulations, such as Law No. 7 of 2016 concerning the Protection and Empowerment of Fishermen, as well as technical policies from the Ministry of Maritime Affairs and Fisheries (KKP).

These regulatory duties include:

- Determination of fishing zones.
- Prohibition of destructive fishing gear.
- Issuance of business permits and distribution of subsidized fuel through a quota system.
- Socialization of regulations to fishermen, including through field activities and village meetings.

However, the low level of education among fishermen and the continued occurrence of violations of regulations such as the use of illegal fishing gear indicate that the effectiveness of regulations needs to be improved, especially in the aspects of education and law enforcement.

Role as a Dynamicator

As a dynamic force, the Fisheries Service encourages the active participation of fishermen in fisheries sector development through various empowerment activities such as training, outreach, and the formation of joint business groups (KUB). The Development Planning Consultative Forum (Musrenbang) is an important tool for gathering direct input from fishermen regarding equipment needs, training, and other socio-economic access. Some of the dynamic programs implemented include:

Table 1. Empowerment Program of the Bintan Regency Fisheries Service

No	Activity Name	Output	Outcome	Source of funds
1	Fiber Boat Building Training	Fiber boat training	Fishermen understand the techniques of making	2023 Regional Budget
2	Socialization of BPJS Employment	40 participants	Understanding of marine work risks is increasing	2023 Regional Budget
3	Fishing Gear Technical Guidance	API & ABPI Education	Technical knowledge increases	2023 Regional Budget
4	Small-Scale Fishermen Human Resources Training	40 participants	Improving understanding of maritime law	2024 Regional Budget



Implementation results show that most fishermen responded positively and actively participated in the programs. However, the distribution of activities was uneven; some coastal areas, such as Berakit Village, felt they hadn't been optimally reached, necessitating an evaluation of equitable access to training based on local needs.

Role as a Facilitator

The facilitator's role is carried out by providing facilities and infrastructure to support fishermen's activities, such as fishing gear, fiberglass boats, fiber optic boxes, radio communication, and business training. The mechanism for proposing assistance is participatory, with proposals submitted through the Musrenbang (Regional Development Planning Forum) or directly to the Fisheries Office and the Regent.

Table 2. Fisheries Facility Assistance 2023–2024

No	Types of Assistance	Amount	Source of funds
1	Bubu	5,547 pieces	Regional Budget
2	Net	5,123 pcs	Regional Budget
3	Wet Battery	13 units	Regional Budget
4	Fiber Box	13 units	Regional Budget
5	Fish aggregating device rope	1,162 kg	Regional Budget
6	Fiber Boat	2 units	Regional Budget
7	Radio Communication	15 units	Regional Budget

However, the aid distribution process also faces challenges, particularly related to limited regional budgets. Therefore, a strict selection process is conducted based on verified priorities of fishermen groups. The aid is provided in the form of a grant and is the recipient's full responsibility for its management. It cannot be sold, and it will be monitored through quarterly evaluations.

One fundamental weakness in the role of facilitator is the lack of a Fish Auction Place (TPI) in Bintan Regency. The absence of a TPI forces fishermen to rely on middlemen or toke (traders) to sell their catch, often leading to losses due to unilaterally determined prices. This poses a serious challenge to creating a fair and sustainable fisheries business system.

Overall, the Bintan Regency Fisheries Service has demonstrated a significant role in empowering fishermen. All three roles (regulator, dynamic agent, and facilitator) have been implemented, although inequalities remain in implementation on the ground. The regulatory role is limited to implementing central policies; the dynamic agent is quite active but not evenly distributed; and the facilitator role has not yet reached all critical needs, such as the availability of fisheries markets (TPI) and market guarantees for fishermen.

Regional governments are expected to improve cross-program integration and ensure adequate budget availability so that all policies are not limited to technical assistance but directly impact the economic well-being of fishermen. Participatory and locally based approaches need to be prioritized to ensure each program is more targeted.

As a regulator, the Fisheries Service has performed its normative function by following central regulations and conducting outreach to fishermen. However, its effectiveness is still hampered by low levels of fisher education and a lack of local

regulations. As a dynamic agent, the service actively participates in training and routine technical guidance to improve the capacity of fishermen, but distribution has not been evenly distributed across coastal villages. As a facilitator, the service has distributed various fishing gear and fisheries facilities, but has not been able to provide market facilities such as TPI, which are crucial for creating a fair seafood trading system.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings, the Bintan Regency Fisheries Service's role in empowering fishing communities can be said to be effective, but its implementation still requires strengthening in several key aspects. This is evident in the three indicators used in this study: regulator, dynamic agent, and facilitator.

First, in its role as regulator, the Fisheries Service does not yet have specific regional regulations regarding the empowerment of fishing communities. To date, policy implementation has relied on central government regulations, specifically Law Number 7 of 2016 concerning the Protection and Empowerment of Fishermen, Fish Farmers, and Salt Farmers. Nevertheless, the service has conducted various outreach programs with fishing communities to ensure understanding of applicable regulations and facilitate the implementation of central government policies at the regional level.

Second, in carrying out its dynamic role, the Fisheries Service has organized several activities aimed at improving the quality of human resources for fishermen. These activities include development planning meetings (musrenbang), technical training, outreach, and outreach. However, budget constraints are a major challenge, preventing comprehensive and sustainable program implementation in all coastal areas of Bintan Regency.

Third, as a facilitator, the Fisheries Service has distributed aid in the form of facilities and infrastructure to support fishing activities, including boats, nets, traps, and other fishing gear. However, the distribution of this aid remains uneven, with some fishermen lacking direct access to these facilities. This indicates that the role of facilitators needs to be enhanced to reach all levels of fishermen in need of assistance to increase productivity and economic independence.

Based on research findings on three indicators of the role of the Bintan Regency Fisheries Service, it is recommended that the service develop regulations or technical guidelines at the regional level that are more specific and adaptive to the local needs of fishermen, rather than solely relying on central policies. Socialization activities need to be expanded to ensure fishermen fully understand the regulations regarding permits, fishing areas, and the use of environmentally friendly fishing gear. In its role as a dynamic agent, the Fisheries Service is expected to more actively involve fishermen in program planning through musrenbang (development planning meetings) and improve the quality and quantity of training, outreach, and technical guidance, particularly in the areas of fisheries technology and management. Regular evaluation of the effectiveness of training is also necessary to ensure that activities truly contribute to increasing fishermen's capacity. As a facilitator, the service needs to expand the distribution of aid for facilities and infrastructure equitably, simplify application procedures, and strengthen monitoring and mentoring mechanisms so that the assistance provided can be optimally utilized and have a real impact on fishermen's welfare.

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