

Panglima Laot to Remove Abandoned Boats and Clear Navigation Hazards from Krueng Aceh River

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River Cleanup
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Krueng Aceh is the largest fishing port in Aceh, home for over two hundred and fifty boats from all over Aceh. These fishing boats employ over 6,000 fishermen and their respective families. The Panglima Laot (usually an elder fisherman) is the representative elected by the fishermen to represent them and maintain order in the estuary. His responsibilities range from assigning parking places in the river, arbitrating disputes between fishermen, determining damages should one fishermen's boat damage another, and one of my more serious responsibilities is to organize a rescue should a boat get lost at sea.

The generosity and efforts of Donors and NGOs have helped rebuild so many lives that were devastated by the tsunami. However, in the rush to provide aid, many relief organizations built a large number of boats very quickly. Similarly, eager to help as many people as possible, beneficiaries were hastily identified. As a consequence, many of these boats litter the shoreline, their engines rusting or removed. Their empty hulls are now abandoned and have sunk where they were parked. The end result is that these abandoned boats have now created other problems. Besides taking up limited shoreline parking spots, many of these boats have oil in the engines and fuel in their tanks, the petroleum is now leaking into the ocean creating an environmental hazard. Also, many of these sunken boats are creating problems for other boats in that they are collecting silt around them to the point where the channel quickly becomes impassable.



Figure 1 Krueng Aceh



Figure 3 Krueng Aceh tributary

Looking towards the future, the Panglima Laot Krueng Aceh has developed a fishermen's database on <http://www.panglima.net>. In this database we record all the details about who owns which boat, where each boat's home port is, what equipment each boat has, what type of fish each boat catches, which boat has received aid, who has yet to receive help, etc.. One of the responsibilities of the Panglima Laot is to assign parking places and to try to ensure the river remains navigatable. With that goal in mind, Panglima Laot is notifying those who received the boats, to take responsibility for removing their boat from the river. Alternatively, if the owner cannot be found or afford to remove the boat, the Panglima Laot will remove those boats to a safe location nearby. Furthermore, for those that are salvageable, Panglima Laot will reassign ownership to a fisherman who is still waiting to receive a boat.

The Panglima Laot, Marine Police and the Department of Fisheries all agree that this is an important project for the fishermen because accidentally running their boat into these sunken boats is a real risk. The pictures at the right are of two large fishing boats that have recently been sunk due to collisions with sunken boats in the river.



Figure 4 Sunken boats, September 6th, 2008 and October 25, 2008