

## TOTALLY PROTECTED SPECIES

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# Kampung Sim-Sim folks concerned about dugongs' safety

**SANDAKAN:** With people flocking to see the two stranded dugongs, Kampung Sim-Sim residents are worried over the safety of the marine mammals.

They are afraid that some might have bad intentions to harm the dugongs, which are listed as totally protected species under the Wildlife Conservation Enactment 1997.

It was reported that Sabah Wildlife Department (SWD) first received a report that a dugong was spotted in the shallow waters of the coastal village on Friday morning.

This morning, SWD director Augustine Tuuga said two mammals were sighted there.

"Our village has become a hot spot in the past week since the (first) dugong's presence. This is probably the first time the marine mammal appeared here.

"However, this species only appears during the high tide.

"We are worried there might be some irresponsible people who want to catch this animal," said a 59-year-old villager, who wanted to be known as Chu.

Augustine said wildlife officers were monitoring the situation as they wait for the research team from Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) to arrive and con-

duct their studies today.

He said the department needed UMS's help to assess the animals' condition before determining the next course of action.

He added that unless the dugongs were ill or injured, SWD planned to let them be, as they were not in immediate danger.

"(We will) let them (remain in the waters) there.

"But (we also) worry that people may harm them, or they are accidentally hit by passing boats," he said, adding that SWD had called on the public not to disturb the dugongs.

Meanwhile, state Tourism, Culture and Environment Minister Datuk Seri Masidi Manjun said stranded marine wildlife, such as dolphins, normally would be assisted back out to sea, unless the animals were injured, whereby they would be nursed back to health.

Masidi stressed that the public needed to be proactive and not "pass the buck" when it came to protecting the species.

Listed under Schedule 1 of the Enactment, dugongs are in the same totally protected category with Sumatran rhinoceros, orang utans, sun bears, proboscis monkeys, clouded leopards as well as green turtles and hawksbill turtles.



*The dugongs' presence in Kampung Sim-Sim generated much excitement among the people in Sandakan yesterday. PIC COURTESY OF SANDAKAN WILDLIFE DEPT*