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Top dive spots closed due to coral bleaching

By EMBUN MAJID

embun@thestar.com.my

ALOR SETAR: Several dive sites at two of the top diving destinations in the world — the Pulau Tioman marine park in Pahang and Pulau Redang marine park in Terengganu — are temporarily off-limits to divers and snorkellers until end-October.

They are among three marine parks — the other being Pulau Payar in Kedah — which are affected by coral bleaching, a phenomenon caused by global warming that has increased sea water temperature by 2°C to between 28°C and 29°C.

Marine Park Department director-general Abd Jamal Mydin said the affected dive sites in Terengganu were Teluk Dalam, Tanjung Tukas Darat, Tanjung Tukas Laut, Teluk Air Tawar, Pulau Tenggol and Teluk Bakau; and in Pahang they were Pulau Chebeh and Batu Malang.



Underwater phenomenon: Coral bleaching takes place when the temperature of the sea increases due to global warming.

In Kedah the affected sites are Teluk Wangi, Pantai Damai and Coral Garden.

Three islands in the vicinity of the Tioman marine park that have been temporarily closed are Pulau Regis, Pulau Soyak and Pulau Tumok in Pahang.

“The closure means that no diving and snorkelling activities will be allowed at the sites.

“In Pulau Payar alone, the damage to coral is estimated at between 60% and 90%,” he told a press conference in Langkawi yesterday.

The department said it would limit the number of visitors to Pulau Payar from 400 to 200 daily during the closure.



Abd Jamal said it was necessary to close marine parks and islands to protect the coral reefs which had turned white.

“We are monitoring the extent of coral bleaching at all marine parks in the country. In the meantime, we are building artificial reefs and coral transplants,” he said.

Each year about 500,000 tourists, including foreigners, visit each of the marine parks.

Reef Check Malaysia general manager Julian Hyde welcomed the temporary closure of the marine parks, saying the corals needed time to recover.

“Corals are like the human body, Although the body can recover from a disease, it still needs time to rest,” he said.

Current climatic conditions have caused water temperatures to rise, thus affecting the corals, making them vulnerable to predators and disease, he said.

“Human activities will also have an impact on the reefs,” he added.

Malaysian Nature Society’s head of conservation Yeap Chin Aik said the department should actively get local universities and experts involved in saving the reefs.

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