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## **Automatic licence for fishing crewmen**

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KUALA TERENGGANU: Fishing crewmen nationwide will be granted a fishing licence automatically if they possess a boat and had obtained a monthly allowance from the government.

Agriculture and Agro-based Minister Datuk Seri Noh Omar said to be eligible, the crewmen must at least have a sampan, were receiving a monthly RM200 allowance and had a Malaysian Fisheries Development Authority (LKIM) card.

“We want to make it easier for the crewmen to earn a living by granting them the licence.

“It is in line with the government’s motto of putting the rakyat first,” he said at a presentation of aid to local fishermen here.

He added there were more than 15,000 licensed fishermen nationwide.

Noh also announced that the proposed insurance coverage for fishermen was expected to be introduced by August, subject to the Cabinet’s approval.

“It takes longer to bring the matter to the Cabinet as the ministry is choosing the best insurance company for the scheme.

“Among the criteria considered are cutting the red tape to ensure faster claims as well as a policy, which will not burden the fishermen,” he said adding that, among the companies considered were Agro-Bank and Takaful.

Noh said the ministry, through LKIM was also gathering feedback from fishermen nationwide, and so far, most of them had agreed to the proposal.

“The insurance coverage will incur a fee of about RM10, which will be deducted from the monthly allowance given to the fishermen.

“We expect the insurance coverage to cover some 70,000 fishermen in the country,” he said.

He added the insurance benefits, include coverage for natural disasters, life insurance as well as disability due to accidents while working.

Commenting on the protest against the proposed vessel tracking system to be installed on all fishing boats, Noh said the government would go through with it as it would benefit fishermen in the long run.

“The system will enable the LKIM to monitor the boats and its movements.

“It can also prevent the boats being wrongly used for criminal activities such as the illegal sales of subsidised diesel,” he said.

He added the ministry would not back down in suspending the licences of Vietnamese fishermen plying their trade in local waters.

“The only way for us to review our decision is for them to come forward and allow us to inspect their boats.

“Some boats have hidden compartments to store subsidised diesel to be sold in the black market, so the ministry must take every precautions,” he said, adding that, the licence would be granted if the boats met the specifications.