



THE URGENCY OF STRENGTHENING INDONESIA'S MARITIME SECURITY IN COMBATING LOBSTER SEED SMUGGLING

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Abstract

Lobster seed smuggling poses a serious threat to maritime security, causing economic losses and endangering the sustainability of Indonesia's marine ecosystems. This paper analyzes the issue of lobster seed smuggling and the challenges in preventing it, while emphasizing the urgency of strengthening national maritime security. Although various agencies have made efforts to prevent illegal activities at sea, coordination in maritime patrols remains a challenge. Currently, Indonesia implements a fragmented maritime security system, unlike several other countries that have established a unified coast guard authority to safeguard marine resources. This fragmentation presents a challenge to Indonesia's capacity in tackling transnational crimes. Therefore, the evaluation conducted by the Working Committee on Maritime Security Oversight (Panja Kamla) of Commission I of the DPR RI is a strategic step toward building a more effective maritime security framework. Panja Kamla may consider formulating recommendations to underpin the drafting of a Maritime Security Bill, providing a strong legal foundation for affirming the existence of a national coast guard institution in Indonesia.

Introduction

On March 11, 2025, the Maritime Security Agency (Bakamla) successfully foiled an attempt to smuggle 60,000 lobster seeds worth an estimated IDR 1.05 billion in the waters of the Seribu Islands. The operation began with intelligence from the Strategic Intelligence Agency (Bais) of the Indonesian Armed Forces (TNI), which was followed up by Bakamla's Director of Maritime Operations by deploying the State Vessel (KN) Pulau Marore-322. At 2:10 AM local time, the Visit, Board, Search and Seizure (VBSS) team identified an unmanned boat, which was later searched and found to be carrying two suitcases containing 22 bags of lobster seeds. The evidence was examined by the Ministry of Marine Affairs and Fisheries (MMAF) before being handed over to the Directorate General of Ma-

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rine and Fisheries Resources Surveillance (PSDKP) in Jakarta (Mahendra, 2025).

The smuggling of marine products, such as lobster seeds, represents a serious threat to Indonesia's economy and the sustainability of its marine resources. This illegal practice not only causes state revenue losses but also endangers marine ecosystems due to overexploitation. Amid rising maritime crime threats, strengthening maritime security has become a critical agenda for Indonesia as an archipelagic country with vast, resource-rich waters. While countries like the United States and Vietnam have consolidated maritime security under a single coast guard authority, Indonesia's fragmented maritime security structure presents coordination challenges in addressing illegal activities. This paper examines lobster seed smuggling and the associated challenges, as well as the urgency of reinforcing national maritime security.

Lobster Seed Smuggling

Indonesia has nine types of potential fishery resources regulated by the Ministry of Marine Affairs and Fisheries, including lobster, which is considered a key commodity. Lobster seeds have high economic value, as their market price increases significantly when farmed to an ideal size. Due to weaknesses in Indonesia's aquaculture system, lobster seeds are often sold immediately – frequently through illegal overseas channels. Such smuggling constitutes a form of transnational organized crime that damages Indonesia's economy by allowing other countries to reap the profits of lobster aquaculture (Indranata & Samputra, 2023).

In 2024 alone, the government thwarted the smuggling of 5,525,108 lobster seeds worth IDR 754 billion (MMAF, 2024). Palembang recorded the highest number of smuggling cases, totaling 312,000 seeds. Tangerang Regency followed with 208,372 seeds, and Bangka Belitung ranked third with 177,600 seeds seized (Sutrisno, 2024).

Vietnam is the largest destination market for smuggled lobster seeds from Indonesia, with an estimated 600 million seeds entering the country each year. Vietnam has optimized its lobster farming practices, making it one of the world's largest lobster producers (Ambari, 2024). Nearly all of Vietnam's farmed lobsters originate from Indonesian seeds smuggled via Singapore and Malaysia. The final products are then absorbed by the Chinese market.

The ongoing smuggling of lobster seeds promotes overexploitation, threatening lobster populations and disrupting marine ecosystem balance. Tackling this issue requires collaboration among various land and sea surveillance agencies, especially improved coordination among institutions with maritime patrol authority (Grahadyarini, 2024). Technically and infrastructurally, one major challenge is that patrol vessels from different institutions only act within their respective jurisdictions. A comparison of the duties of six maritime patrol institutions in Indonesia is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. *Comparison of Maritime Patrol Agency Duties*

Institution	Maritime-Related Duties
Indonesian Navy (TNI AL)	Maritime diplomacy & law enforcement
Indonesian National Police	Criminal enforcement at sea
Ministry of Transportation (Sea and Coast Guard Unit)	Supervision of national shipping policy
Ministry of Finance (Customs)	Customs enforcement
MMAF (PSDKP)	Oversight of marine and capture fisheries policies
Bakamla	Maritime law enforcement patrols

Source: Kurnia et al., 2024.

This situation creates the risk of other violations going undetected during inspections. Furthermore, interagency synergy remains a challenge, as operational independence – regulated by separate laws – often hinders joint patrol missions. Therefore, political will is required to ensure more holistic law enforcement at sea (Kurnia et al., 2024).

The Urgency of Strengthening National Maritime Security

Illegal activities such as marine product smuggling demand more effective maritime surveillance. A robust maritime security system enables the country to maximize the use of marine resources and foster the economic growth of coastal regions. Moreover, stricter maritime monitoring creates a conducive environment for the sustainable development of marine and fisheries industries. Thus, many countries prioritize maritime protection through dedicated coast guard institutions.

The United States positions its Coast Guard as the front line for various maritime response operations, supporting national and border security while promoting economic growth in maritime areas, including the monitoring of marine resource utilization. Under the Homeland Security Act of 2002, the United States Coast Guard (USCG) is tasked with law enforcement missions related to marine biological resources and maritime environmental protection. The USCG also routinely conducts fishery boardings of commercial, recreational, and charter vessels to ensure compliance with fisheries regulations. These operations involve enforcing laws that protect endangered marine species and conservation areas (Office of Homeland Security Statistics, 2024).

Meanwhile, Vietnam has also bolstered its maritime surveillance capabilities through the Vietnam Coast Guard (VCG). Following the enactment of the Coast Guard Law in November 2018, the VCG received a clearer mandate. In line with Vietnam’s Maritime Strategy Resolution through 2030, the VCG is responsible for securing activities in Vietnamese waters through preventive and responsive programs. The VCG also plays a role in safeguarding national maritime sovereignty and enforcing laws related to marine resource exploitation (Vu & Nguyen, 2019).

Unlike the USCG and VCG, which function as the main authorities under clear legislative frameworks, Indonesia's maritime law enforcement system remains fragmented across multiple agencies. This fragmentation hinders coordination in handling illegal activities, including lobster seed smuggling. Therefore, to protect marine resources and national economic interests amid rising transnational maritime threats, Indonesia urgently needs a more cohesive maritime law enforcement strategy. In this regard, the oversight conducted by the Special Oversight Team on Maritime Security of Commission I of the DPR RI is a strategic step toward building a more effective maritime security system. The outcomes of this oversight process are expected to provide comprehensive recommendations for improving maritime security governance, potentially through the drafting of a Maritime Security Bill (RUU Kamla). Such legislation would establish a solid legal foundation for affirming the existence of a unified coast guard authority in Indonesia as the leading sector in integrated maritime law enforcement.

Conclusion

Indonesia faces economic losses due to the smuggling of lobster seeds. Addressing this issue requires synergy among agencies with maritime patrol authority, which is challenging because each agency tends to operate within its own jurisdiction, potentially overlooking other violations. While countries like the US and Vietnam empower their coast guards as primary authorities in safeguarding marine resources, Indonesia struggles with fragmented maritime security coordination. Therefore, a comprehensive maritime security regulation is a strategic step toward achieving integrated law enforcement at sea – particularly in the fight against transnational crimes.

Working Committee on Maritime Security Oversight (Panja Kamla) of Commission I of the DPR RI needs to focus on thoroughly evaluating Indonesia's maritime security system and identifying its main challenges. The team may consider formulating recommendations that support the drafting of the Maritime Security Bill (RUU Kamla), thereby establishing a strong legal framework to ensure the presence of a coast guard institution as the leading sector in maritime law enforcement.

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