

Project Update: February 2023

From January to February 2023, we successfully conducted face to face interviews using a tested questionnaire with 207 local fishermen covering several fishing jetties and villages in Kota Kinabalu (n = 50), Kota Marudu (n = 56), Pitas (n = 50), and Kudat (n = 51) in Sabah.



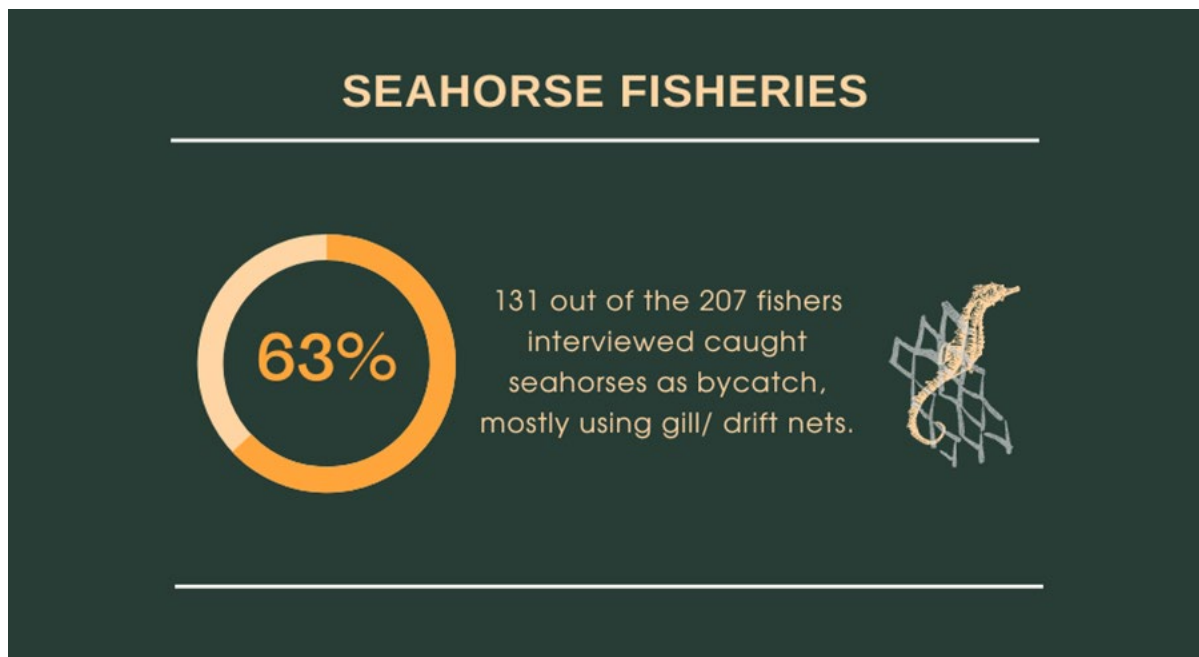
A bag of *Hippocampus barbouri* (left) both caught as bycatch and targeted by a fisherman in Pitas (right) and collected to be sold. © Chin Nurhiqwanalina.



Seahorse bycatch that was hung by a fisherman in his house in Kota Marudu, believed to steer away evil spirits. Right: Dried seahorses (*H. barbouri*) sourced from local fishermen and suppliers being sold for RM170/ 38 g in a TCM shop in Kota Kinabalu. An estimate of only 500 g of these seahorses are sold in the span of 2-3 years. © Chin Nurhiqwanalina.

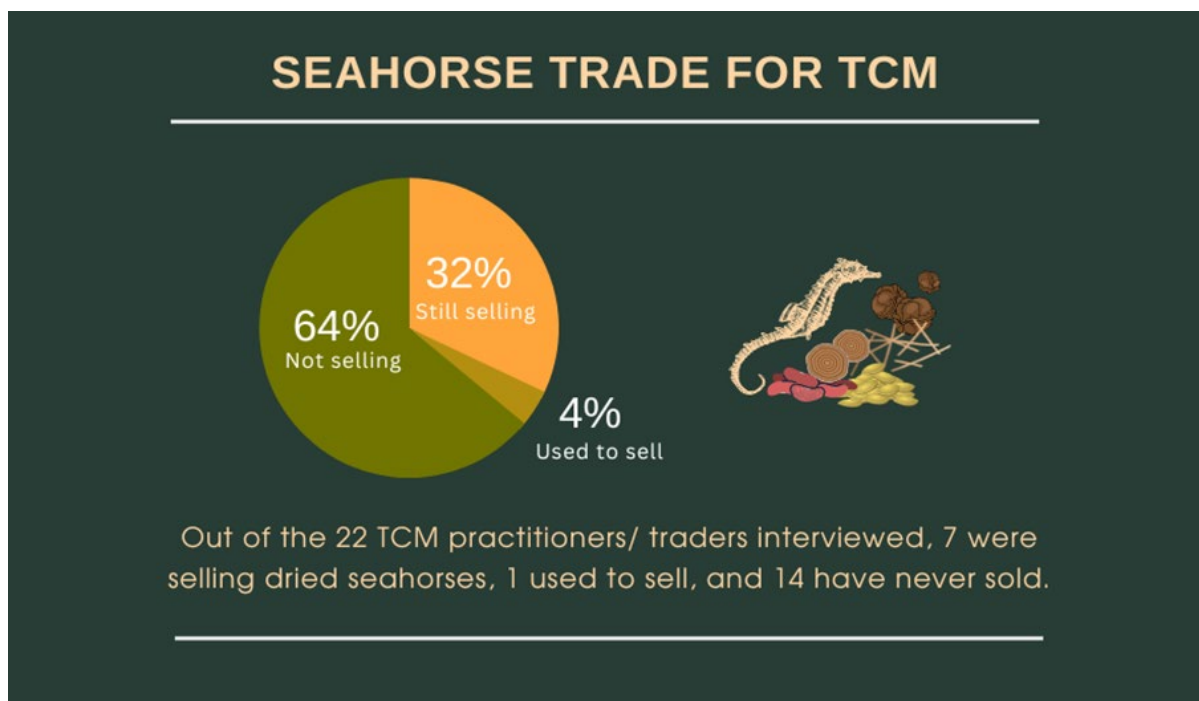
Besides that, we carried out the traditional medicine survey across Kota Kinabalu (n = 21) and Kota Marudu (n = 1) through interviews with a total of 22 traditional Chinese medicine practitioners/ traders at traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) shops.

We also gathered additional insights from eight traders in street and dried fish markets in Kota Kinabalu and Kota Marudu who either were still selling dried seahorses or historically sold them.



The results from the fisher and TM surveys are summarized as below:

Seahorses catch among fishermen in Kota Kinabalu, Kota Marudu, Pitas, and Kudat.



Seahorse trade among TCM practitioners/ traders in Kota Kinabalu and Kota Marudu.

Thus far, we have gathered comprehensive local knowledge on the use, fisheries, and trade of seahorses through these surveys in Sabah. Our plan for the next couple of months is to continue to conduct these surveys in Sandakan and Tawau, Sabah.

These efforts could provide current documentation of not only local seahorse catch and trade but also imports and exports from Sabah. This would facilitate relevant intervention measures to promote sustainable use, fisheries, and trade of seahorses as a highly valued marine resource in the state.