



UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

**IDENTIFICATION AND DISTRIBUTION OF MARINE
DINOFLAGELIATES AT SEBATU AND SUNGAI RAMBAI,
MALACCA, MALAYSIA**

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DINOFLAGELLATES AT SEBATU AND SUNGAI RAMBAL,
MALACCA, MALAYSIA**

BY

NORMAWATY BT MOHAMMAD NOOR

**Thesis submitted in Fullfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of
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DEDICATIONS

To my beloved family and husband.....

without your support this thesis would not have been possible



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In the name of ALLAH the most merciful and honourable

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iii
LIST OF TABLES.....	viii
LIST OF FIGURES.....	ix
LIST OF PLATES.....	xiii
ABSTRACT.....	xvi
ABSTRAK.....	xix
CHAPTER	
I INTRODUCTION.....	1
II LITERATURE REVIEW.....	6
Taxonomy of Dinoflagellates.....	6
Harmful Algal Bloom (HAB).....	6
Occurences.....	16
Effects of HABs.....	18
Paralytic Shellfish Poisoning (PSP).....	21
Diarrhetic Shellfish Poisoning (DSP).....	27
Ecology of Dinoflagellates.....	28
Light.....	29
Temperature.....	30
Salinity.....	31
Grazing.....	31
Nutrients.....	33
Cyst of Dinoflagellates.....	35
III MATERIALS AND METHODS.....	38
Sampling Site.....	38
Taxonomic Identification.....	40
Ecological Studies.....	44
Density of Phytoplankton.....	44
Horizontal Distribution.....	45
Vertical Distribution.....	45
Determination of Nutrients.....	46
Determination of Physical-Chemical Factors.....	48
Statistical Analyses.....	48



IV	RESULTS.....	49
	Taxonomic Identification.....	49
	Order Prorocentrales LEMMERMANN 1910.....	49
	Order Dinophysiales LINDEMANN 1928.....	54
	Order Gonyaulacales F.J.R. TAYLOR 1980.....	70
	Order Peridinales LINDEMANN 1928.....	99
	Order Gymnodinales LEMMERMANN 1910.....	152
	Order Noctilucales HAECKEL 1894.....	164
	Ecological Studies.....	167
	Monthly Variation of Phytoplankton Density.....	167
	Dinoflagellates Density.....	169
	Nutrients Level in the Studied Area.....	174
	Physical-Chemical Factors.....	178
	Horizontal Distribution of Dinoflagellates at Sungai Rambai During High Tide.....	187
	Vertical Distribution of Dinoflagellates at Sungai Rambai During High Tide and Low Tide.....	187
V	DISCUSSIONS.....	196
	Taxonomic Identification.....	196
	Order Prorocentrales.....	196
	Order Dinophysiales.....	198
	Order Gonyaulacales.....	200
	Order Peridinales.....	205
	Order Gymnodinales.....	207
	Order Noctilucales.....	210
	Key to Genera.....	211
	Ecological Studies.....	212
	Monthly Variation of Phytoplankton Density.....	212
	Total Density of Dinoflagellates and Potential HAB Species.....	213
	Potential PSP Species.....	215
	Potential Occurrence of DSP Species.....	218
	Horizontal Distribution of Dinoflagellates at Sungai Rambai During High Tide.....	219
	Vertical Distribution of Dinoflagellates Along the Transect at Sungai Rambai.....	220
VI	CONCLUSIONS.....	222
	Taxonomic Identification.....	222
	Ecological Studies.....	223
	Horizontal Distribution of Dinoflagellates at Sungai Rambai During High Tide.....	224
	Vertical Distribution of Dinoflagellates at Sungai Rambai During High Tide and Low Tide.....	225



LITERATURE CITED.....	226
APPENDIX	
A Result of PSP analysis from Sebatu and Sungai Rambai, Malacca carried out by Sabah Fisheries Department from May to November, 1995.....	255
VITA.....	256



LIST OF TABLE

Table	Page
1 Potential HAB species identified at the shellfish growing area, Malacca	170



LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1 Vegetative cell of dinoflagellate	7
2a Location of study area in Peninsular Malaysia.....	39
b Location of sampling stations in the Straits of Malacca	39
3A Location of study area in Peninsular Malaysia.....	41
B Location of sampling stations along the transect in front of the river mouth of Kesang River.....	41
4 Example of thecal plates arrangement.....	43
5 Drawing of <i>Prorocentrum micans</i>	52
6 Drawing of <i>Prorocentrum gracile</i> showing long apical spines and pointed hypotheca.....	56
7 Drawing of <i>Dinophysis caudata</i>	59
8 Drawing of <i>Dinophysis miles</i> var. <i>indica</i> showing anterior cingular list, posterior cingular list, left sulcal list with ribs, narrow cingulum dorsal projection which posses maximum development and long posterior projection.....	63
9 Drawing of <i>Dinophysis</i> sp.	66
10 Drawing of <i>Dinophysis rotundata</i> showing narrow anterior and posterior cingular list and cingulum.....	69
11 Drawing of <i>Ceratium fusus</i> showing long apical horn, long posterior horn which is bent dorsally and right posterior horn with blunt end.....	7
12 Drawing of <i>Ceratium furca</i>	76
13 Drawing of <i>Ceratium tripos</i>	80
14 Drawing of <i>Ceratium trichoceros</i> showing long apical horn with open end and two long antapical horn with open end, parallel to apical horn.....	83



15 Drawing of <i>Alexandrium tamiyavanichii</i>	86
16 Drawing of <i>Gonyaulax spinifera</i>	91
17 Drawing of <i>Gonyaulax digitale</i> showing a short apical horn, girdle displacement of one and a half of width, sulcus extended to one third of the epitheca and two pointed antapical horn which have different length.....	95
18 Drawing of <i>Pyrophacus horologium</i>	98
19 Drawing of <i>Pyrophacus steinii</i>	100
20 Drawing of <i>Protoperidinium monospinum</i>	103
21 Drawing of <i>Protoperidinium excentricum</i>	106
22 Drawing of <i>Protoperidinium depressum</i>	110
23 Drawing of <i>Protoperidinium oblongum</i>	113
24 Drawing of <i>Protoperidinium pentagonum</i>	116
25 Drawing of <i>Protoperidinium divaricatum</i>	120
26 Drawing of <i>Protoperidinium conicum</i>	123
27 Drawing of <i>Protoperidinium crassipes</i>	126
28 Drawing of <i>Protoperidinium pyrum</i>	129
29 Drawing of <i>Protoperidinium punctulatum</i>	133
30 Drawing of <i>Protoperidinium claudicans</i>	136
31 Drawing of <i>Protoperidinium pellucidum</i>	141
32 Drawing of <i>Protoperidinium balechii</i>	144
33 Drawing of <i>Diplosalopsis globula</i>	147
34 Drawing of <i>Diplosalopsis minor</i>	151

35	Drawing of <i>Gymnodinium sanguineum</i> showing chromatophores spreading radially, sulcus extended to hypotheca and two lobed.....	154
37	Drawing of <i>Gyrodinium fusiforme</i> showing pointed epitheca and hypotheca, nucleus in the center and girdle displacement more than one fifth of the cell.....	160
38	Drawing of <i>Polykrikos schwartzii</i> showing 4 nucleus, 8 cingulum and one sulcus.....	163
39	Drawing of <i>Noctiluca scintillans</i>	166
40	Total density of phytoplankton at stations A, B and C, Sebatu and Sungai Rambai, Malacca.....	168
41	Total density of dinoflagellates at stations A, B and C, Sebatu and Sungai Rambai, Malacca.....	171
42	Total density of <i>Alexandrium tamiyavanichii</i> at stations A, B and C Sebatu and Sungai Rambai, Malacca.....	172
43	Total density of <i>Gymnodinium catenatum</i> at stations A, B and C, Sebatu and Sungai Rambai, Malacca.....	173
44	Total density of <i>Noctiluca scintillans</i> at stations A, B and C, Sebatu and Sungai Rambai, Malacca.....	175
45	Total density of <i>Ceratium furca</i> at stations A, B and C, Sebatu and Sungai Rambai, Malacca.....	176
46	Nitrate concentration (mg/L) at stations A, B and C, Sebatu and Sungai Rambai, Malacca during the month of May to December, 1995.....	177
47	Phosphate concentration (mg/L) at stations A, B and C, Sebatu and Sungai Rambai, Malacca during the month of May to December, 1995.....	179
48	Silicate concentration (mg/L) at stations A, B and C, Sebatu and Sungai Rambai, Malacca during the month of May to December, 1995.....	180
49	Dissolved oxygen (mg/L) at stations A, B and C, Sebatu and Sungai Rambai, Malacca.....	181



50	Water temperature (°C) at stations A, B and C, Sebatu and Sungai Rambai, Malacca.....	182
51	Salinity (ppt) at stations A, B and C, Sebatu and Sungai Rambai, Malacca.....	184
52	Measurements of pH at stations A, B and C, Sebatu and Sungai Rambai, Malacca.....	185
53	Conductivity (mS/cm) at stations A, B and C, Sebatu and Sungai Rambai, Malacca.....	186
54	Distribution of dinoflagellates at 5 sampling stations along the transect at the river mouth of Sungai Rambai, Malacca.....	188
55a	Vertical profile of temperature (°C) at 5 sampling stations along the transect at the river mouth of Sungai Rambai, Malacca.....	189
b	Vertical profile of dissolved oxygen at 5 sampling stations along the transect at the river mouth of Sungai Rambai, Malacca.....	190
56a	Vertical profile of conductivity (mS/cm) at 5 sampling stations along the transect at the river mouth of Sungai Rambai, Malacca.....	191
b	Vertical profile of pH at 5 sampling stations along the transect at the river mouth of Sungai Rambai, Malacca.....	192
57	Vertical distributions of total density dinoflagellates at stations 1, 2 and 3 along the transect at Sungai Rambai, Malacca during high tide (21/10/94).....	193
58	Vertical distribution of total density dinoflagellates at stations 1, 2 and 3 along the transect at Sungai Rambai, Malacca during low tide (21/11/94).....	193
59	Vertical profile of temperature (°C), dissolved oxygen (mg/L) conductivity (mS/cm), salinity (ppt) and pH at stations 1, 2 and 3 along the transect at Sungai Rambai, Malacca during high tide (21/10/94).....	194
60	Vertical profile of temperature (°C), dissolved oxygen (mg/L) conductivity (mS/cm), salinity (ppt) and pH at stations 1, 2 and 3 along the transect at Sungai Rambai, Malacca during low tide (21/11/94).....	195



LIST OF PLATES

Plate		Page
1a	Light micrograph of <i>Prorocentrum micans</i>	50
b	Scanning electron micrograph of <i>Prorocentrum micans</i>	51
2a	Scanning electron micrograph (SEM) of <i>Prorocentrum gracile</i>	55
3a	Light micrograph of <i>Dinophysis caudata</i>	57
b	Scanning electron micrograph of a pair of <i>Dinophysis caudata</i> showing anterior cingular list forming a wide funnel thus hiding the epitheca (arrows).....	58
4a	Light micrograph of <i>Dinophysis miles</i> var. <i>indica</i> showing anterior cingular list (arrow) and left sulcal list (l.s.).....	62
5a	Light micrograph of <i>Dinophysis sp.</i>	65
6a	Light micrograph of <i>Dinophysis caudata</i>	68
7a	Light micrograph of <i>Ceratium fusus</i> showing long apical horn , long posterior horn and undeveloped right posterior horn (arrow).....	71
8a	Light micrograph of two different form of <i>Ceratium furca</i>	74
b	Scanning electron micrograph of <i>Ceratium furca</i> showing dorsal and ventral view with open end long apical horn (arrows), two pointed antapical horn of different length (a.p.) and ridges on the valves surface (r).....	75
9a	Light micrograph of <i>Ceratium tripos</i>	78
b	Scanning electron micrograph of <i>Ceratium tripos</i> showing trichocyst pores scattered on the thecal (arrow), short apical horn and two pointed antapical horn.....	79
10a	Light micrograph of <i>Ceratium trichoceros</i> showing long apical horn and two antapical horn.....	82
11a	Light micrograph of <i>Alexandrium tamiyavanichii</i>	85



12a	Light micrograph of <i>Gonyaulax spinifera</i> showing girdle displacement almost twice of width, sulcus extended about half of epitheca (arrow) and large pores on the theca surface.....	89
b	Scanning electron micrograph of <i>Gonyaulax spinifera</i> showing dorsal and ventral view with large pores (arrows) and two pointed antapical spines (a.p.).....	90
13a	Scanning electron micrograph of <i>Gonyaulax digitale</i> showing large pores (small arrows) and two antapical spines with different length (arrows).....	93
b	Light micrograph of <i>Gonyaulax digitale</i> of dorsal view showing girdle displacement and ventral view.....	94
14a	Light micrograph of <i>Pyrophacus horologium</i> showing hypotheca view.....	97
15a	Light micrograph of ventral view of <i>Protoperidinium monospinum</i>	101
b	Scanning electron micrograph of <i>Protoperidinium monospinum</i>	102
16a	Light micrograph of <i>Protoperidinium excentricum</i>	105
17a	Light and scanning electron micrograph of <i>Protoperidinium depressum</i> showing epitheca view.....	108
b	Scanning electron micrograph of <i>Protoperidinium depressum</i>	109
18a	Light micrograph of <i>Protoperidinium oblongum</i>	112
19a	Light micrograph of <i>Protoperidinium pentagonum</i>	115
20a	Light micrograph of <i>Protoperidinium divaricatum</i>	119
21a	Light micrograph of <i>Protoperidinium conicum</i> showing ventral view.....	121
b	Light micrograph of <i>Protoperidinium conicum</i> showing thecal plates with four sided apical plate (1') and four sided second intercalary plate (2a).....	122
22a	Light and scanning electron micrograph of <i>Protoperidinium crassipes</i>	125



23a	Light micrograph of <i>Protoperidinium pyrum</i>	128
24a	Light micrograph of <i>Protoperidinium punctulatum</i>	131
b	Scanning electron micrograph of <i>Protoperidinium punctulatum</i>	132
25a	Light micrograph of <i>Protoperidinium claudicans</i>	135
26a	<i>Protoperidinium pellucidum</i>	138
b	Scanning electron micrograph of <i>Protoperidinium pellucidum</i>	139
c	Light micrograph of <i>Protoperidinium pellucidum</i>	140
27a	Light micrograph of <i>Protoperidinium balechii</i>	143
28a	Light micrograph of <i>Diplosalopsis globula</i>	145
b	Scanning electron micrograph of <i>Diplosalopsis globula</i> showing ventral view.....	146
29a	Light and scanning electron micrograph of <i>Diplosalopsis</i> <i>minor</i> showing ventral view and hypotheca view with pronounced list attached to the left side of the sulcus (arrow).....	149
b	Light micrograph of <i>Diplosalopsis minor</i> showing dorsal view and epitheca view.....	150
30a	Light micrograph of <i>Gymnodinium sanguineum</i>	153
31a	Scanning electron micrograph of <i>Gymnodinium catenatum</i>	156
b	Scanning and light micrograph of <i>Gymnodinium catenatum</i>	157
32a	Light micrograph of <i>Gyrodinium fusiforme</i>	159
33a	Light micrograph of <i>Polykrikos schwartzii</i>	162
34a	Light micrograph of <i>Noctiluca scintillans</i>	165

Abstract of the thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science.

**IDENTIFICATION AND DISTRIBUTION OF MARINE
DINOFLLAGELLATES AT SEBATU AND SUNGAI RAMBAI,
MALACCA, MALAYSIA**

By

NORMAWATY MOHAMMAD NOOR

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Chairman : Dr. Nakisah Mat Amin

Faculty : Science and Environmental Studies

Phytoplankton is an important organism in the aquatic ecosystem as a primary producer. However, some species of phytoplankton also causes red tides or harmful algal blooms (HAB) which lead to negative impacts on human health, economics, aquaculture, fisheries and tourism. In this study, dinoflagellates, the main causative organism of red tides, were identified and enumerated from samples taken at Sebatu and Sungai Rambai, Malacca. In the identification of dinoflagellates, thecal plate tabulation and morphological characters of the cells were observed by light and electron microscopy. Thirty four species of dinoflagellates were identified, which consists of 10 potential HAB species viz. *Prorocentrum micans*, *Dinophysis caudata*,



D. rotundata, *Ceratium furca*, *Alexandrium tamiyavanichii*, *Gonyaulax spinifera*, *Gymnodinium catenatum*, *G. sanguineum*, *P. shwartzii* and *Noctiluca scintillans*. Among these species, *A. tamiyavanichii* and *G. catenatum* are the potential paralytic shellfish poisoning (PSP) species. In identifying *A. tamiyavanichii*, the most important characters are the apical pore plate (aap), sulcal posterior plate with a posterior attachment pore (pap) and the presence of the ventral pore (vp) on the first apical plate (1'). This species showed a constant size, is circular in shape and the pap is central in position. *Alexandrium tamiyavanichii* occurred throughout the year in low numbers. The highest cell density of *Alexandrium tamiyavanichii* was only observed in July at station A with 27.00 ± 6.00 cells/L which corresponded with high nutrient concentrations viz. nitrate and phosphate concentration (3.91 ± 0.02 mg/L and 0.36 ± 0.06 mg/L respectively) and low silicate concentration (0.02 ± 0.00 mg/L). In identifying *G. catenatum*, the most important characters are the cingulum displacement and the extended sulcus into the epicone and hypocone. A high density of *G. catenatum* was also recorded in July at station A (389.00 ± 30.50 cells/L) which coincided with high nitrate and phosphate concentrations (3.91 ± 0.00 mg/L, 0.36 ± 0.06 mg/L). The high number of cells of *G. catenatum* in July also coincided with the high toxin level, 325 MU as recorded by the Fisheries Department. As such, *G. catenatum* may be suspected as the PSP producer responsible for the 1993 and 1994 incidences. However, until further studies are conducted, *A. tamiyavanichii* and *G. catenatum* remain as potential PSP species. In horizontal and vertical distribution studies of dinoflagellates along the transect, the densities of dinoflagellates were high at 2-3 km offshore and well mixed through the water column. The data obtained



however, are not enough for understanding in detail the horizontal and vertical distributions of dinoflagellates at the sampling stations and therefore, further studies should be conducted.



**Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia
sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk Ijazah Master Sains.**

**IDENTIFIKASI DAN TABURAN DINOFLAGELATA MARIN DI
SEBATU DAN SUNGAI RAMBAI, MELAKA, MALAYSIA**

Oleh

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Ogos, 1998

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Fitoplankton merupakan organisma yang penting di dalam ekosistem sebagai pengeluar primer. Namun begitu, sebahagian daripada fitoplankton boleh menjadi kembangan alga beracun yang mendatangkan kesan negatif ke atas kesihatan manusia, ekonomi, akuakultur, penikanan dan pelancongan. Dalam kajian ini, dinoflagelata iaitu organisma yang sering dihubungkan dengan kembangan alga beracun telah dikenalpasti dan populasinya dikira dari contoh sampel yang dikutip dari Sebatu dan Sungai Rambai, Melaka. Untuk mengenalpasti spesies dinoflagelata, pemerhatian dibawah mikroskop cahaya dan mikroskop elektron dilakukan untuk melihat susunan plat dan morfologi sel. Hasil dari pemerhatian, 34 spesies dinoflagelata telah



dikenal pasti dan 10 spesies daripadanya adalah spesies yang berpotensi menyebabkan kembangan alga beracun iaitu *Prorocentrum micans*, *Dinophysis caudata*, *Ceratium furca*, *Alexandrium tamiyavanichii*, *Gonyaulax spinifera*, *Gymnodinium catenatum*, *G. sanguineum*, *P. shwartzii* dan *Noctiluca scintillans*. *Alexandrium tamiyavanichii* dan *G. catenatum* merupakan spesies yang berpotensi menyebabkan keracunan paralitik. Ciri-ciri penting yang digunakan untuk mengenal pasti *A. tamiyavanichii* adalah kehadiran liang pada plat apikal (aap), liang sambungan (pap) pada plat sulkal di bahagian posterior dan liang di bahagian ventral (vp) plat apikal (1'). Spesies ini juga mempunyai saiz sel yang tetap, berbentuk singular dan pap terletak di tengah-tengah plat posterior. Bilangan sel *A. tamiyavanichii* adalah rendah sepanjang tahun. Bilangan sel *A. tamiyavanichii* yang tinggi hanya didapati pada bulan Julai di stesen A dengan nilainya 27.00 ± 6.00 sel/L. Pada bulan ini, kepekatan nutrien iaitu nitrat dan fosfat juga tinggi (3.91 ± 0.02 mg/L dan 0.36 ± 0.06 mg/L). Untuk identifikasi *G. catenatum*, ciri-ciri penting yang dilihat adalah nisbah singulum dan sulkus yang memanjang dari epiteka ke hipoteka. Bilangan sel *G. catenatum* juga didapati tinggi pada bulan Julai di stesen A (389.00 ± 30.50 sel/L). Kepekatan nitrat dan fosfat pada bulan tersebut iaitu 3.91 ± 0.00 mg/L dan 0.36 ± 0.00 mg/L. Tahap toksin juga tinggi pada bulan ini iaitu 325 MU seperti yang dilaporkan oleh Jabatan Perikanan. Oleh itu, *G. catenatum* mungkin merupakan spesies yang menyebabkan keracunan paralitik pada kejadian keracunan yang berlaku pada tahun 1993 dan 1994. Walaubagaimanapun, kedua-dua spesies, *A. tamiyavanichii* dan *G. catenatum* hanya

diramalkan berpotensi menyebabkan keracunan parolitik sehingga ujian pengesahan penghasilan toksin dijalankan. Untuk taburan menegak dan mendatar di sepanjang transek, didapati dinoflagelata banyak terkumpul pada jarak 2-3 km dari pantai tetapi populasinya tidak terkumpul pada kedalaman tertentu. Walaubagaimanapun data ini tidak mencukupi untuk menerangkan dengan terperinci taburan dinoflagelata secara menegak dan mendatar, maka kajian selanjutnya perlu dilakukan.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Red tides or harmful algal blooms (HAB) are well known problems around the world. This is because the occurrence of HAB brings negative effects on human health, economic losses in aquaculture, fisheries and tourism (Hallegraeff, 1993). In Malaysia, HAB cases caused by *Pyrodinium bahamense* var. *compressum* and a few cases by *Chattonella marina* and *Noctiluca scintillans* have been reported in Sabah and the Johore Straits (Maclean, 1989). Their occurrences caused illnesses, death, shellfish farm closure, reduction in fisherman's catch and economic losses (Ming and Wong, 1989 ; Jothy, 1984).

Dinoflagellates are the main causative organisms for most red tides. The algae produce a potent toxin which affects humans through the food chain and causes fish mortality leading to great economic losses and coastal pollution. Identification of the causative species is important as the first step in managing the red tides, followed by a knowledge of its biology, ecology, life cycle, including its cystic stage, mechanism of toxin production and composition, which will help to understand the red tides.



In identification of dinoflagellates, thecal plate tabulations for thecate species and morphological characteristics such as shape, size of the cells i.e. cell outline, position of girdle and sulcus groove and girdle displacement for athecate species are used (Fukuyo and Taylor, 1989). To date, numerous dinoflagellate species have been identified and classified but changes in their groupings have been made recently or new groups are created due to undetail descriptions by previous taxonomists, differences in opinions among taxonomists, inconsistency in morphological features of some cells (Zonneveld and Dale, 1994), a few references on its taxonomy plus there are not many advanced devices available for detail and accurate observations. By using instruments such as the epifluorescence microscope (Mackenzie et al., 1996), light microscope with differential interference contrast and both scanning and transmission electron microscopes, identification of dinoflagellates is much easier and interesting. The use of staining agents such as lugol-iodine and fluorochrome calcofluor white (Hansen, 1995) allows detailed observations of the cells. With the advancement in technology, species that were previously identified as unarmoured or simple are actually more diverse morphologically (Faust and Balech, 1993) and allows the identification of most species (Horriguchi, 1995).

Nevertheless, identification using morphological characteristics has disadvantage, especially when there occurs morphological variation within a species. Furthermore, morphological characteristics cannot determine toxin compositions and concentrations (Anderson et al., 1994) and needs a lot of skill and time. As a result, taxonomists have suggested other means of identification of dinoflagellates i.e. using polyclonal antisera

and blocking antibodies (Mendoza et al., 1995) and using toxin profiles (Oshima et al., 1993). The methods suggested however, are still not able to overcome the above problems and have their own disadvantages.

Apart from taxonomy, the ecology of dinoflagellates is an important aspect, in understanding the factors which can determine the growth and the interaction of dinoflagellates with the environment. By understanding the ecology of dinoflagellates, red tide outbreaks may be predicted and managed. Therefore, a monitoring programme is one of the mechanisms suggested in understanding the ecology (Watson et al., 1992). The monitoring programme includes monitoring the plankton, the physical and chemical environmental parameters and nutrient levels (Taylor, 1992). By monitoring, sites where harmful algal species are most abundant can be detected. Monitoring must be accessible or important for fisheries, aquaculture and the ecosystem around it.

Paralytic shellfish poisoning (PSP) is a well known phenomenon in Malaysia and in the world. Its impact on human health and economic losses have long been documented (Hallegraeff, 1993). A number of species were implicated to PSP but in the Indo West Pacific, *Pyrodinium bahamense* var. *compressa* is known to be the causative organism. This species was first described in 1906 in the tropical Atlantic ocean, but the first harmful incidence was in 1972 in Papua New Guinea (Maclean, 1989). The incident caused food poisoning in three children. Since then, toxic *Pyrodinium bahamense* var. *compressa* has spread to Brunei Darulssalam and Sabah