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# VARIATIONS IN MALAYSIA'S 'ICONIC MARINE LIFE' NATIONAL DEFINITIVE

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On 18 July 2020, the much-awaited marine life definitive series of postage stamps was issued by Pos Malaysia. The set, apart from a RM5 miniature sheet, comprises five stamps bearing the new values, including Green Turtle (*Chelonia mydas*, RM1.30); Indo-Pacific Hump-backed Dolphin (*Sousa chinensis*, RM1.40); Whale Shark (*Rhincodon typus*, RM1.50); Small Giant Clam (*Tridacna maxima*, RM1.70) and Dugong (*Dugong dugon*, RM1.90).

These were issued in sheetlets of 10, with a broad, illustrated selvage on top. A total of 25,000 sheets of each design were produced, the designer being Kooi Yong Lim, of Reign Associates. Figure 1 shows the RM 1.30 sheetlet. The RM5 Hawksbill Sea Turtle (*Eretmochelys imbricata*) is featured on the miniature sheet.



Figure 1: Sheetlet of 10 of the RM1.30 Green Turtle (*Chelonia mydas*) stamps

First day covers, issued for SODA (Standing Order Deposit Account) members, bearing Kuala Lumpur cancellation show the stamp set in a se-tenant format (Figure 2).



Figure 2: Stamp set from first day cover issued for SODA members, showing se-tenant stamps.

We now have at hand the counter sheets for the lowest value (RM 1.30), issued in sheets of 100 (Figure 3). The same sheets were received by state post offices by the end of June 2020, with the following known dates of sale:

1. 23 June 2020: Jinjang, Kinrara and small post offices around Ipoh.
2. 24 June 2020: Kuala Lumpur General Post Office (received in Kuantan but not on sale).
3. Towards the end of July 2020, most post offices in the country were selling the RM1.30 stamps.

The general instruction given was to sell the counter sheets of hundred after the philatelic sheetlets of ten stocks were exhausted. In addition, the selling code to key into the ERP system was not released until the earliest known date of sale.

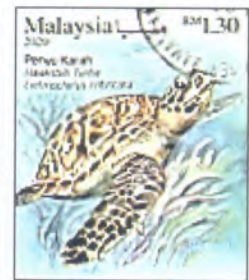


**Figure 3: Counter sheet of 100 of the RM1.30 value stamp**

A close examination of the three issues shows major variations between the stamps from the sheetlets of 10, the se-tenant version on first day covers and the counter sheets of 100. Multiple copies of all these items were inspected by us.

Under natural light, the colours of the stamps in the sheetlet of 10 are more intense, especially on the head, scutes of carapace and right fore-flipper of the sea turtle, and paler towards the south-east (bottom right) corner, rendering the soft corals less defined.

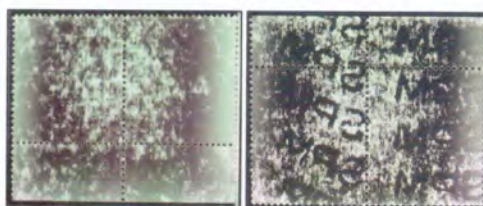
The reprinted issue for the Kuala Lumpur-issued first day cover and on the counter sheets show a lower colour intensity, the right flipper of the turtle having an obliquely elongated pale area (as in a reflection), the scutes on head and carapace with far less contrast, and significantly, the soft corals in the south-east corner, more clearly defined, with distinct margins. Figure 4 shows postally-used examples of the two varieties.



**Figure 4: Postally-used cover, showing the two stamp varieties- counter issued stamp from sheetlet of 100 on top; originally-issued stamp from sheetlet of 10 below. The middle scan shows stamp from the counter issued stamp sheetlet of 100 while the scan of the stamp on the right is from the sheetlet of 10.**

These stamps differ in dimensions as well; the stamps from the sheetlet being 28.5mm x 31mm, as opposed to 27mm x 33mm (that is, significantly shorter and broader) in the stamps from the sheet of 100. The sheetlet issue showed perforations of 13 ½ x 13 ½, while the se-tenant stamps and the counter sheets were perforated 14 x 14 ¼.

Finally, we noticed that all five values from the original sheetlet, and the accompanying miniature sheet, lacked a watermark, while the RM1.30 counter sheet showed a clear 'SPM' upright, the top of the letters slightly tilted upwards to the left (when viewed from the back). Both of these images were photographed using a Nikon D600 camera and 105 mm Micro-Nikkor f/2.8 D lens, from a Detectamark Spectrum™ Watermark Detector (Figure 5).



**Figure 5: Watermark absent in a pair of stamps from a sheetlet of 10 (left) and SPM watermark present in a pair of stamps from a counter sheet of 100 (right)**