6 days and he’s still in PAIN

No work, no money and he can’t stand or walk - all because of stonefish sting

By Joyce Lim

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IT has been six days since he stepped on the venomous spines of a stonefish in Sentosa, but his leg is still swollen.

Mr Diao Xiao Gen, a Chinese national, had gone to Palawan Beach on Sunday evening to unwind after finishing work on the island.

After about 20 minutes of soaking in the waist-high waters, he felt a sharp pain in his right foot.

With the help of a colleague, Mr Diao made his way to the shore and sought help from Sentosa staff.

"My foot was so painful and it felt so stiff. The staff gave me first aid before calling for an ambulance," the 40-year-old construction worker recalled.

He was later taken to Singapore General Hospital, where he received outpatient treatment.

"I was given two injections and told that the swelling would subside in two to three days," Mr Diao told The New Paper in Mandarin.

But Mr Diao's right foot was still swollen when The New Paper met him yesterday.

"The doctor told me that I was stung by a stonefish," he said.

The stonefish is a greenish-brown creature that has dorsal spines which discharge poison if stepped on.

Mr Diao said he was given painkillers and told to go home.

Sentosa's management paid for his outpatient treatment, which came to about $90.

The father of two from Jiangsu province in China earns $40 a day as a construction worker.

With his swollen right foot, Mr Diao said he is unable to return to work at the construction site.

He said: "It has been so many days and I am still in pain. I can't stand and walk properly. Without work, I don't have money."

The rest of his family are in China.

Said Mr Diao, who has been working in Singapore for about six years: "It was only six months ago that I started working in Sentosa. I don't usually go to the beach as I'm usually tired after working 12 hours a day.

"But as it was a Sunday, I thought of relaxing my feet by soaking them in salty sea water."
On Thursday, he approached Sentosa's management for help.

'I was told that the management will not be liable for injury that has to do with marine life,' he said.

Ms Bernadette Toh, director of service quality and communications of Sentosa Leisure Group, confirmed Mr Diao's unfortunate incident.

She said: 'We are sympathetic about what happened.

'However, Mr Diao was actually in open water where we have no control over the marine life that's brought in by the current.

'We cannot be held liable for whatever happens.

'Nevertheless, the welfare of our guests is always our priority. Our staff attended to Mr Diao immediately. It is also out of goodwill that we paid for his medical fees that day.'

Last year, beachgoer Adam Hamzah, had taken the Sentosa Development Corporation to court after he was stung by a stonefish in the waters off Tanjong Beach in 2005.

In early 2006, District Judge Thian Yee Sze dismissed Mr Adam's claim.

Judge Thian said beachgoers and swimmers should expect stonefish or other marine creatures, both poisonous and non-poisonous, to lurk in the waters.

As the presence of stonefish was not an unusual danger, the question of Sentosa Development having breached its duty did not arise.