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PENANG

Creating forested wetlands

Mangrove planting move will mitigate state's land reclamation impact

THE Penang South Reclamation (PSR) development will include the planting of mangroves to create new forested wetlands in coastal areas around the state.

Penang Infrastructure Corporation (PIC) chief executive officer Datuk Seri Farizan Darus said mangrove planting would be part of the PSR Ecology Offset Programme (PEOM) designed to mitigate the project's reclamation impact and create new habitats for marine life.

"Mangroves will have an integral part in the PSR development. Island A will have a reserve of about 20ha to plant suitable coastal vegetation species.

"We aim to plant some 22,300 trees to create these new coastal forests on Island A, which will serve as new habitats for marine life, recreational zones and eco-tourism attractions," he said.

He was speaking at a press conference on a mangrove-planting programme with the Penang Forestry Department in Sungai Chenaam, Nibong Tebal.

Together with the department and the Penang Inshore Fishermen Welfare Association (PIFWA), PIC and project delivery partner SRS Consortium have planted 1,000 mangrove saplings in Sungai Chenaam for the programme.

To date, mangroves planted in relation to the PSR project total 1,500 trees, inclusive of the 500 saplings planted by SRS Consortium in Sungai Acheh back in 2016.

Farizan said PIC and the department would be working closely this year to plant more mangrove trees in other parts of Penang under the PSR PEOM initiative.

He said while the state government works towards securing the Department of Environment's approval of PSR's Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) report, PIC and SRS will begin implementing some of the environmental-offset programmes to boost marine habitats ahead of reclamation works.

"The PEOM also involves other initiatives like deploying artificial reefs and building eco-friendly shorelines to enhance coastal areas.

"For now, we are starting off with mangrove planting.

"Mangrove forests protect the coastline from storms, land erosion and tsunamis, create new habitats for marine life like fish, crabs, shellfish and other species, and encourage biodiversity.

"They will help preserve the marine ecosystem and have a posi-



Artist's impression of the Penang South Reclamation project's proposed Island A which will be developed with eco-friendly features like mangrove forests to promote marine life and serve as an eco-tourism attraction.



Ezhar: The state has identified 36 forest wetland locations measuring 1,612ha across Penang for gazette-ment as permanent forest reserves.

itive impact on the fisheries sector, which addresses the reclamation impact concerns raised by fishermen," he said.

"The move to plant more mangroves is also in line with the state government's policy to increase the size of mangrove forests in Penang," said state Forestry Department director Muhammad Ezhar Yusuf.

Under the Penang Structure Plan 2030 (PSP 2030), the state government plans to gazette more perma-



Farizan (right) planting mangrove saplings in Sungai Chenaam, Nibong Tebal.

nent forest reserves, including environmentally sensitive wetlands like mangrove forests.

Ezhar lauded the state's decision, pointing out that Penang's mangrove forests had decreased from 1,967ha in 2017 to 1,050ha in 2020,

according to Forest Research Institute Malaysia's (FRIM) *Status of Mangroves in Malaysia* report that was published in 2020.

He said the state had identified 36 forest wetland locations measuring 1,612ha across Penang

for gazettement as permanent forest reserves.

The state gazetted 428.61ha of forested wetlands in Air Hitam Dalam, Sungai Jawi, Penaga and Pulau Betong in 2021, and will do the same for another 304.1ha in Sungai Udang and Sungai Chenaam in Nibong Tebal this year.

"We welcome the state's policy to plant more mangroves. This initiative will increase the area of mangrove forests protected under the National Forestry Act 1984," Ezhar said.

Currently, only about 381.4ha of forested wetlands in Penang – 166.38ha in Balik Pulau and 214.66ha in Byram, Nibong Tebal – are protected as permanent forest reserves in the entire state.

This makes up only 7.07% of the state's total 5,386.77ha of permanent forest reserves.

Ezhar said his department would support the state's policy by organising more mangrove planting programmes.

"We aim to plant more than 10,000 trees, including mangrove trees, yearly.

"This is also in line with the Penang2030 aim to plant 200,000 trees by 2030, and the national 100 Million Tree-Planting Campaign," he said.