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Transition to sustainable forestry going well

BINTULU: The timber industry plays an important role in shaping Sarawak's economy and continues to be the fourth largest contributor to the state's gross domestic product after oil, gas and palm oil.

However, the shape of this sector has changed, said Sarawak deputy director of Forests, Jack Liam.

According to him, although plywood, logs, pulp and sawn timber still contribute a large part to the state's timber exports, the transition towards a sustainable industrial model is progressing well.

"This is because the bulk production of timber had decreased following the introduction of the Forest Management Certification Policy in ensuring the sustainable management of forests and their resources in accordance with global standards.

"The only solution to the imbalance between timber supply and demand in Sarawak is to intensify reforestation programmes and use existing forest resources more efficiently.

"Thus, protecting natural forests while expanding plantation forests and pursuing more efficient use of resources has become a national priority," he noted.

He was speaking at a dinner in conjunction with Plantation Industries and Commodities Deputy Minister Datuk Willie Mongin's working visit to the Samarakan Forest Estate, on Friday.



WILLIE (centre) at the press conference.

Liam added that Sarawak started forest plantations since 1997, setting aside 2.1 million hectares of gross area allocated for the development of planted forests to increase timber production in ensuring the sustainability of raw timber supply.

"To date, the Sarawak government has planted about 551,704 hectares of forest.

"We aim to have 1 million hectares of planted forest area by 2025 with a projected production of 15 to 25 million cubic metres of timber per year," he said.

In the meantime, Liam emphasised that research and development (R&D) is one of the important elements to ensure a sustainable approach to forestry plantation management.

Therefore, the Sarawak

Forest Department has set up the Industrial Forest Research Centre with a focus on continuous improvement of planting material to produce higher quantities including better stem shape and wood properties, lower energy consumption, better genetic diversity wider and lower susceptibility to pests and diseases.

"All these R&D programmes are designed towards one main goal — to increase timber productivity from 10 cubic metres per year per hectare to 25 cubic metres per year per hectare.

"Realising that departments cannot work in silos in terms of R&D, we want to work with other stakeholders, academics and other countries that share similar interests.

"In this regard, recently, the

department has signed a memorandum of understanding on strategic R&D collaboration with 13 Planted Forest License holders focusing on an R&D programme known as Aggressive Industrial Planted Forest Research," he added.

Apart from that, his office will work closely with the Forest Research Institute of Malaysia, especially in tree breeding and pest and disease management.

He believed all researchers and stakeholders from the floor understand that R&D is not a magic show.

"This is particularly evident in the genetic improvement efforts of tree species, which generally take more than 20 years of continuous research effort," he added.