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Community eucalyptus plantations will boost industry

JEMPOL: Cultivating Eucalyptus trees in community plantations organised by the Malaysian Timber Council (MTC) and Malaysian Plywood Manufacturers Association (MPMA) can increase the wood supply and boost Malaysia's timber industry.

Plantation Industries and Commodities Minister Datuk Zuraida Kamaruddin said the local community can, via Eucalyptus community plantations, utilise private land for the purpose and earn a good income.

She said for a start, there is a pilot project for the programme comprising 101.2 hectares (ha)/250 acres involving 78 villagers in Batu Kikir here.

"The community farming concept is already being practised abroad and should

be implemented in our country now.

"The initiative also boosts the furniture industry and the project can provide a good income to the community that has land although it may be a small area," she told reporters after officiating at the Plus Intervest Sdn Bhd's community nursery and plantation.

MTC chairman Norrida Yusoff, MTC chief executive officer Muhtar Suhaili, MPMA chairman Datuk Sheikh Othman Rahman and Plus Intervest Sdn Bhd managing director Datuk Chua Hock Gee attended the event.

She said that every 0.4 ha (one acre) can accommodate as many as 600 Eucalyptus trees at RM200 per tree and it takes six years to yield a harvest.

"The organisers will rent the land for a period of six years at

RM300 per 0.4 ha and it is hoped that this project can become the main source of raw materials for the timber industry in this country," she said.

According to Zuraida, every landowner who wants to be involved in the programme will be given Eucalyptus saplings and the Forest Research Institute Malaysia (FRIM) will guide them in the planting and caring process.

Eucalyptus leaves can also be processed into oil for traditional medicine.

She said the module will be developed by involving non-governmental organisations in order to find more local communities to participate in the programme.

"There are challenges from the downstream side of the timber sector; if there are not enough

raw materials in the form of timber, then it will be difficult to meet the demand of buyers from abroad. On the 14-nation International Agri-commodity Tour I did this year, I found that Malaysian wood products were well received because they are more durable and are competitively priced," she said.

She said quality wooden furniture products with good workmanship are able to attract foreign investors and buyers, and the market for wood-based products is a source of income for the country because Malaysia is now the world's eighth largest exporting country.

Zuraida said the timber industry recorded exports totalling RM13.2 billion in the first six months of this year. — Bernama