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Setting sustainable foundation for timber industry

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WHILE Malaysia's timber industry contributed almost RM25 billion to the economy as of November 2022, concerns pertaining to its sustainability have been a major issue among stakeholders and industry players.

Many of them were also encouraged to practise using raw materials as part of sustainable forest management in their projects.

Following this, the Malaysian Wood Industries Association (MWIA), a member of the Malaysian Timber Industry Board (MTIB), has increased its focus to adopt Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) standards to create a safe space for industry players.

Speaking to the *New Straits Times*, MWIA president Ng Kay Yip said, "If you look into the context of what the world is focusing on—ESG and climate change—society is looking at how a country manages its resources well.

"Timber is recognised as a sustainable building material, which is getting more popular and increasingly adopted in many developed countries.

"While the adoption rate is a bit slow in Malaysia compared to our counterparts in developed countries, it is hoped that the appreciation and utilisation of



MWIA conducted a familiarisation visit and dialogue with the Forest Research Institute Malaysia for its members.

timber will continue to grow."

Ng said this is where the association plays a role in educating the public on the misconceptions of the timber industry.

"Hence, our role is to make sure



that we learn and adopt the best practices from around the world, in terms of harvesting, processing to maximising recovery, and share the knowledge among our members.

"We also present a balanced view of the timber industry to the public so that any misconception will be corrected, and we also get feedback from the public on how to be a better stakeholder."

Going beyond 3R concept

With the growing global significance of ESG and climate change, Ng said it was also important for relevant parties to look into how new legislation to protect the environment can be enacted.

"Taking into account what is happening around the world, we need to look at how we can incorporate it holistically into the act.

"The world has changed in terms of what people perceive as carbon credit, what we see as greenhouse gases, and this is why the role that our forests can play is very important."

He also said education must be enforced in schools to expand the scope of the 3R (reuse, reduce, and recycle) concept for sustainable development.

For example, he added that subjects such as the carbon cycle and carbon sequestration were important topics to be taught in school.

"Scientists have put more study into carbon sequestration, and they have found that the carbon footprint of timber is low.

"This is why a sustainable future is a responsibility of every Malay-



Members participating in data collection for a Life Cycle Assessment Project.

sian, we live sustainably and use sustainable materials and timber is a renewal resource, but they do not come cheap.

"On a similar note, I believe that the government can also help in research by coming up with resilient trees that will take up more carbon dioxide and produce more beautiful wood for the homes while players inform the government of valuable species in exchange."

Establishment of pest disease network

At the same time, Ng added that MWIA intends to establish a pest disease network unit to educate its members on the right way to plant trees, as well as gain cooperation and technology exchange with overseas researchers to establish a tissue culture lab which will generate income to operate the unit.

This, he said, was because tree planting is not about just getting seeds and

planting, but rather getting the right genes with the proper specifications to plant trees as well as proper management.

"We are working with universities to look at the soil and determine whether it's suitable for certain species of plants.

"This is also a step towards working towards a future for the industry and a future for the younger generation of timber company owners.

"We are bringing them for excursions to understand more about technology, different plantations, and the latest technology, and we hope that they can be the mouthpiece of MWIA to share how timber will be the future for all building materials."

He added that the younger generation must be educated on how to comply with regulations and do good for the environment.



Ng Kay Yip



MWIA members also visited an industrial tree plantation in Perak.