

MCO helps coral to grow at national park

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KOTA KINABALU: Tunku Abdul Rahman Park (TARP) has seen an increase of coral cover after the implementation of the movement control order (MCO).

Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) Vice Chancellor Professor Datuk Dr Taufiq Yap Yun Hin said a study was conducted by its Borneo Marine Research Institute's (BMRI) then PhD research candidate Nasrulhakim Maidin on the possible long-term negative impacts of ecotourism on the ecology and sustainability of TARP, a marine protected area and a popular tourist destination in Sabah.

"One of the exciting findings was the slight increase of coral cover at the TARP after the implementation of the MCO." He said the research findings, which was published in the

December 2021 edition of the Malaysian Journal of Sustainable Development, attributed such improvement to the four-month absence of tourists from March to June 2020 when the MCO was in effect.

Yap said a mere short respite from the pressures of human's presence seemed to enable nature to recover.

"Although such recovery is not by leaps and bounds, the brief, but much needed 'rest' was all that is required for nature to return to its fundamental functions, to a point that even the wildlife felt that nature was inviting enough for their return."

He said that at the virtual International Conference on Marine Science and Aquaculture (Icomsa 2022) themed 'The Ocean We Want Towards Sustainable Development' organized by the BMRI of UMS on Tuesday.

At the BMRI, he said



Professor
Datuk Dr
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researchers under the institute's Aquaculture Program, have been carrying out lab trials from developing sustainable fish feed to studying feeding behaviours and the diseases affecting aquaculture fish.

"Whilst those under the Marine Science Program, they have been carrying out field observations and monitoring, employing rigorous ecological approaches to study the marine ecosystems – the fishes, turtles and marine

mammals and microscopic planktons – their productivity and habitats particularly the coral reefs, the sea grasses and tidal flats.

"Furthermore, they ensure that their research stay relevant to society by getting involved in conservation efforts and engaging with the local community.

"These on-going efforts is what helped create BMRI today, as a centre of excellence for research in aquaculture and marine sciences in the country and abroad."

He said the importance of blue foods – a collective term for aquatic foods, such as fish, shellfish and seaweed – has been catapulted into focus following the prioritisation for sustainable recovery in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and economic uncertainties in the wake of the

Covid-19 pandemic.

He said the many new challenges and risks posed by climate change and the Covid pandemic in the foreseeable future, are the drivers for researchers to explore, adapt and scale up to available technologies to stay relevant.

"As a centre of excellence, we have seen BMRI and its researchers involved first-hand in researching for ways to make sustainable blue foods, while also researching in marine biodiversity protection.

"Therefore, I have confidence that BMRI will rise to the expectations once again and continue to make significant contributions in these areas of research.

"It may be necessary however, to revisit and evaluate existing fruitful collaborations with research institutions and non-governmental organisations that

the university entered into since its existence, and to explore new partners for strategic cooperation for ocean sustainability."

Meanwhile, organizing chairperson Associate Professor Dr Juanita Joseph said the Icomsa delved into current issues and challenges related to marine science and aquaculture.

She said the conference also supported the blueprint for the United Nations' Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (2021-2030), which was intended to intensify scientific investigations that could help in sustainable ocean ecosystem management.

"With this conference's structured programmes, we hope to be able to identify science-informed responses to pressures on the marine ecosystem, and formulate mitigation measures and adaptation strategies that are needed for a sustainable future."