

Nine-month ecosystem study to rehabilitate Sipadan

13 March, 2005

Kota Kinabalu: A team of experts has been directed to conduct a nine-month study on the ecosystem of Sipadan as part of the island's rehabilitation programme.

State Secretary Datuk K.Y Mustafa said the team to be led by Prof. Ibrahim Komo of Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) also comprises a team from Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) and Sabah Parks.

Mustafa was speaking after the Joint Committee on Management and Supervision of Sipadan and Ligitan islands meeting, which he co-chaired with Chief Secretary to the Government, Tan Sri Samsudin Osman at the Pacific Sutera Harbour Resort, here, Saturday.

He said the committee expects the reports and recommendations to be submitted to the Government by end of this year. The study begins next month.

During the meeting, the committee was briefed on this particular research project proposal on the island and surrounding areas as well as the demolition exercise.

Towards this end, he said members of the committee would be visiting Sipadan and survey its surrounding areas in the efforts to rehabilitate the world-renowned dive site.

At the same time, they would be observing the progress of the structural demolition at the island which was still in progress despite the deadline last month.

All the dive operators had been ordered to remove their structures and shift their bases to nearby islands or the mainland in Semporna following the decision by the Government to disallow people from staying overnight in the island.

Mustafa said the operators had been cooperating well with the authorities, especially with regard to night stays which were no longer allowed after Dec. 31. "However, structure dismantling has been a bit slow," he said, adding that the National Security Division had, in this respect, appointed a contractor to do the job and the process had been going on smoothly.

"The demolition is ongoing but the process is a bit slow because we have to take the debris out of the island. This takes hours to reach the mainland," he said.

On the issue of the customary rights claimed by one of the operators, Mustafa said it would be addressed by Sabah Parks that is managing the island when the vacating process is completed together with the Land and Survey Department.

"I think we should not doubt our security," he said when asked whether there was any concern over the presence of Malaysian and Indonesian warships following tensions during the past few days due to the overlapping claims in the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of both countries, not far from Sipadan.

"The divers are still there," he added. Mustafa and Samsudin later took a flight to Tawau and proceeded by road to Semporna where they would have to board a two-hour ride to Sipadan.