

HELP SAVE THE WHALES

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KOTA KINABALU: The current Bryde's whale saga has highlighted the key role of Sabah's leading marine researchers in the battle to save some of the world's most endangered species.

The Borneo Marine Research Institute at the Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) has been heavily involved in the aftermath of the giant sea mammal's tragic death off Gaya Island.

And the public interest the episode has sparked points up the importance of building up a body of scientific expertise, said the institute's chief, Prof Dr Saleem Mustafa (pictured).

He said marine conservation required the backing of scientific facts and figures in order to convince policy-makers of the dangers of inaction.

"We are leading the efforts toward conservation of marine life by assuming a wide range of responsibilities expected of an institution of tertiary education in Sabah," Dr Saleem added.

Aggressive campaigns by UN agencies had helped ensure measures to save dolphins and small whales.

Now these agencies were seeking to further upgrade international protection for more species including the

Ganges river dolphin, Atlantic spotted dolphin and the Northern right-whale dolphin by bringing them under Appendix II of the Convention on Migratory Species.

"Our roles include scientific and policy expertise on issues relating to marine resources and advancing the ecologically sustainable management agenda through an aggressive education programme," he added.

Dr Saleem also said the marine aquarium-museum of UMS which has on display the preserved remains of a whale and dolphin, was leading the way in promoting marine conservation.

"It provides an important venue for teaching of marine biodiversity, training in life support systems and in disseminating the marine conservation message to the general public," he added.

Dr Saleem said that if given an opportunity, UMS scientists would conduct thorough studies on the Bryde's whale that died in the shallow waters off Gaya Island recently.

"We also want to contribute to the development of guidelines for rescue and rehabilitation of resident and transient populations of marine mammals," he added.

