

Special committee to monitor rivers in Putatan

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PUTATAN: A special committee will be set up soon to put the message across that protection of rivers and their marine life is the responsibility of every individual.

Stressing that awareness on river protection is still low among the people here, Deputy Chief Minister Datuk Seri Panglima Yahya Hussin said he had directed the district officer here to ensure that the committee is established to monitor rivers in the district, particularly the Petagas River, which has been categorized as having among the poorest water quality in the state.

"The committee will also be entrusted to educate the people, and to get their participation, to protect the rivers in the district.

"The river is an important element and some believe that civilizations began from the rivers. In many developed countries, the river is their sanctuary. Take South Korea for instance, they decided to tear down the hotels and whatever development in one of the areas to revive the river. Today the area is a tourist spot and generating revenues for the area.

"Unlike here, where the rivers have become our dumping site. We throw rubbish and even human waste into the river. And this water is processed for us to use in our daily chores, and even cooking, ... so it is time before we pollute our rivers, that we take a minute to think of the consequences of our action," Yahya reminded the people, when launching a programme by Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) to improve the fresh water prawn rearing and to create awareness on river protection at Kampung Petagas near here, yesterday.

Yahya added that what saddened him more was that there had been reports that some irresponsible people were dumping toxic waste into the rivers late into the nights



Saleem (second left) presenting the fresh water prawn fries to Ag Abd Ghani, witnessed by Yahya (middle), Ann (left) and Rayner (second right).

or in the wee hours to avoid detection.

The Petagas assemblyman also in commending the efforts undertaken by UMS to create awareness amongst villagers on the importance of river protection, added that the people should also show similar commitment to ensure that the river would continue to serve them forever.

"If an outsider is able to show such commitment to protect our rivers, we as locals in this area should double or even triple our commitment. This river is for us to keep, and we want the next generation to also enjoy what we are enjoying today," he said.

The programme was first introduced in April this year with collaboration between UMS Borneo Marine Research Institute (BMRI) and the Putatan District Office. Thousands of fresh water prawns and several types fish fries were released into the river, as part of efforts to increase marine life in the Petagas River.

A research station is being placed at the jetty in Kampung Muhibbah, Petagas, to monitor

the progress of the river and its marine life.

When asked on the progress, Yahya said since the programme was launched eight months back, public awareness is still low, but he hoped to see some changes in within six to 12 months.

"I would like to see public awareness improve sooner, that is why it is important to put the message across that every single individual must play their role to refrain from polluting the rivers. One of our efforts was to revive the Putatan River by sacrificing a Muslim burial site in order to allow swelling water from the Moyog River to flow to two exit points, namely the Petagas and Putatan rivers.

He also said that there should be no development, including houses, built along the riparian reserves.

"We notice that residents of houses built nearby the rivers would dump their waste into the river. Our mission is to turn the riparian reserves into a recreational area. We would plant trees and flowers and turn them

into a beautiful garden. This will eventually help to clean our rivers and it will once again be abundant and filled with marine life. For all we know, it could also be a tourist attraction and people may want to come and stay in the district instead of going to the city," he said.

Meanwhile, BMRI director Dr Saleem Mustafa disclosed that since the first phase of the programme was launched on April 23, it is now entering its second phase where some 2,000 fresh water prawn fries have been distributed to 10 villages here.

"With the increasing demand for aquatic food in the future, we believe that science and technology method-based effort is the best method to improve the production of aquaculture products," he said.

Also present at the event were Sabah Fisheries Department director Rayner Datuk S Galid, district officer Ag Abd Ghani Pg Yusoff and the programme's organising committee chairman, Datin Seri Panglima Dr Ann Anton.