

Sabah Tourist Association willing to do research on firefly with UMS, depts

By Chok Sim Yee

KOTA KINABALU: The Sabah Tourist Association (STA) is willing to work with Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) and the relevant departments to conduct a study and research on firefly population and tourism sustainability.

Its chairman, Tonny Chew, welcomed Tourism, Culture and Environment Minister Datuk Seri Panglima Masidi Manjun's request to UMS to conduct the right carrying capacity of tourists in order not to affect the firefly population in tourism spots.

He said such a study would enable

tourism industry players to understand more about protecting the environment in eco-tourism, so that our natural resources could be passed on to the next generation.

Chew said this when asked to comment on Masidi's statement that the current practice among tour operators to bring large numbers of tourists for river cruise and fireflies watching was threatening the survival of the species.

Masidi said it was of some concern that the increasing popularity of night river cruise packages for firefly watching among the tourists seemed to have a negative impact on the population of the insect.

Chew stressed that a study on

environmental protection in tourism spots was also important to create more awareness on sustainability for those who leverage on the natural resources to earn a living.

Confessing that he was not an expert, Chew said logically, too many human activities in a firefly tourism destination would affect the firefly population and habitat, either directly or indirectly, though the extent of impact was yet to be determined.

He said fireflies larvae lived under the soil along riverbanks and ripples caused by boats travelling along the river would damage their habitat.

Chew said STA had formed an Eco-Tourism Committee which looked into self-

governing, standard operating procedure (SOP), cleanliness and environmental protection.

He said STA hoped and was willing to work with UMS and the relevant departments to look into this issue of firefly population to achieve a win-win situation, to ensure tourism players could operate sustainability without affecting the firefly's habitat.

On a related note, Chew hoped the relevant authority would draw up an SOP as soon as possible to curb speeding among boat operators in tourism destinations.

Although this is not a frequent occurrence, he said speedboats travelling at high speed would further erode river banks.



Chew