

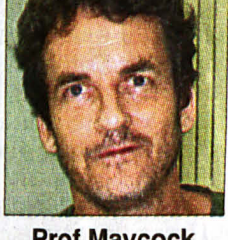
Aussie don sees hope in recovery of Sabah's forests

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WILL Sabah's forests ever return to its original level of productivity, given all the restoration rhetoric?

Daily Express actually once posed this question to Forestry Director Datuk Sam Mannan who said it will take 20 years – revenue-wise, at least.

We asked Dr Colin Maycock, Associate Professor of Forest Ecology at UMS, on what is his take on the state of the forest in Sabah, as even people like Mannan conceded the State had made a lot of mistakes and now they are trying to correct the mistakes?



Prof Maycock

“Yes, Sabah quite earlier on made mistakes and there are some conference papers from the 1990s by Datuk Sam where he said, ‘We ate the cake first’, and that changed the whole forestry systems. Now everything got to be certified which is creating challenges!” he said.

Asked if he sees hope in the future of forestry in Sabah, given that there are some positive signs?

“Yes, it's the 30pc totally protected forests part, we have also got the production forests which are going to be managed sustainably and the good thing is they now got long-term tenure.

“Again, going back to the past era when the operations were given much shorter time frame when companies weren't given the time required to put in the systems of sustainable forest management. But they now have a 100-year lease that allows them to plan for the future and allows sustainable forest management,” Dr Maycock cited.

Everybody knows Sabah's forests had suffered much damage and depleted.

Does Maycock see Sabah's forest ever recovering to its original productivity?

Whatever reservation or misgiving one might have, *Daily Express* actually saw some positive signs.

In an early 2015 visit to the Forestry Department restoration project in Bukit Piton, Malua, Ulu Segama, and funded RM25mil by the Sime Darby Foundation, this writer saw groves of fast growing timber fruit trees called Sengkuang towering easily 60-70 feet with canopies closing – a key indicator of successful regeneration.

I asked the forester-in-charge, “How old are the trees?”

He replied, “Four years old only”.

And in a more open area, we saw an orangutan nest on a Laran tree planted only four years ago under the same restoration project.

These encounters did some personal convincing and belief that, yes, restoration work from active agents of environmental protection can actually inhibit the advance of negative anthropogenic impacts and stimulate a functional return of damaged forest ecosystems.

And if the FMUs do their part in keeping the forest ecosystem in good repairs, there's then hope of a return to the original glory, even if not completely.

Given these incidental positive signs, I asked Dr Maycock whether he sees hope in Sabah's forest returning to its original productivity in 20 years, he said:

“Ah, some areas will take longer than that because we got a very diverse forest mosaic. Not all forests grow on good soil and the poor soil take longer to regenerate, some have been more damaged than others and so if you look when you go around you see a wide variety of forest conditions.”

Timberman reveals 'very tough' strictures on FMUs to forge recovery

Fung agreed with Dr Maycock he is hard pressed to make it work.

“We have just past the second stage,” he said, in reference to Forest Stewardship Program requirement – independent third party auditing for FMUs like his to ensure their operational practices 3P-friendly, that is, interest of People, Planet, Profit are taken care of simultaneously to ensure the forests will last forever functionally (sustainable) henceforth.

DE: But is that tough for you?

Fung: Very tough. You have to prepare everything. The problem that we are facing human resources, the whole area of human resources. This is because when you want to be certified, you cannot say only the Forestry Unit need do the job. No, no, everyone in the company has to do the job.

DE: But isn't that good in the end because you will be very happy because it shows you are really achieving something of world standard.

Fung: Yes, yes, correct.

DE: Do you think the certification system is good, as it is at the moment?

Fung: There is always room for improvement. So we are waiting for them to help us to fix all the weaknesses in our industry.

DE: For example?

Fung: These people (third party auditors) will pick up all the weaknesses and then of course the industry will have a quarrel with them and when a balance point is achieved then we go on, move on, with innovations coming out.