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KOTA KINABALU: Sabah will spare no effort to protect the cultural and traditional interests of its ocean citizens whose sustainability have come under threat.

Deputy Chief Minister, Datuk Yahya Hussin therefore urged scientists, social scientists, policy makers, and other stakeholders to come together to address the problems of the marine ecosystem.

“Malaysia, and Sabah especially, prides itself in having a rich culture where the marine heritage has played a very important role in peoples’ lifestyles,” he said when delivering his keynote address at the launch of the annual international seminar on Marine Science and Agriculture: Ocean Health and Our Future at the 1Borneo Grand Ballroom here yesterday.

He urged them to articulate their scientific resolutions in a way that can be considered for policies while at the same time addressing public concerns.

“We are open to ideas and willing to act on scientific evidences presented to us in a way that policies could be evolved based on sound decisions,” he said while noting that the seminar contained relevant topics under sub-themes that required expert discussions to reach feasible resolutions.

The seminar organised by the Borneo Marine Research Institute of Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) started from 19 to 21 March to provide a platform

Sabah stands firm in protecting its ocean citizens – Yahya

for brainstorming on topics as serious as ocean health.

Also present were the Vice Chancellor of UMS, Professor Datuk Dr Mohd Harun Abdullah, Director of the UMS Borneo Marine Research Institute, Professor Dr Saleem Mustafa and the organising chairperson of the seminar, Associate Professor Dr Rossita Shapawi.

Yahya who is also the Minister of Agriculture Development and Food Industry lamented that despite advancements in fishing technology, the capture fisheries production has not improved beyond the 90 million tons worldwide and many of the commercially important fish stocks have lost sustainability.

“Globally, fish have been harvested at rates far beyond their reproductive capacity of replenishment and this is the most serious challenge to sustainable management of commercial fisheries,” he said.

Since fish landings from the capture fisheries are not increasing to match the demand, aquaculture has to develop to supplement fish supply.

“The current level of production which is reported to be more than 63 million tons is not enough to meet human requirements. I know there are chal-

lenges in its developments but they have to be addressed.

“If as a result of exchange of experience and knowledge among the delegates, suitable strategies which are also relevant locally happen to emerge, kindly let us know. We would like to take up the matter for follow-up action,” he said.

Apart from direct pressure on seafood resources, habitat degradation, biodiversity loss and the effects of climate change are acting simultaneously to threaten sustainability.

“Besides seafood, the oceans also support the economic sectors such as tourism, shipping and energy.

“They offer opportunities for sourcing pharmaceuticals to treat human diseases and cosmetic products and in fact, the marine bio prospecting is an increasingly important topic for the pharmaceutical industry,” he added.

Marine and coastal resource industries in the world are reported to represent more than 5 per cent of the global GDP.

Yahya said the sustainability of the oceans is therefore a vital responsibility for humankind as man’s security, economy and survival all require healthy oceans.

“How can we afford to ig-



Yahya (2nd right) beats a gong to mark the opening of the Ocean Health and Our Future seminar. Also in the picture are from left Dr Rossita, Dr Harun and Dr Saleem.

nore the oceans? Oceans also provide the so-called ‘non-market’ benefits such as climate regulation, carbon sequestration and biodiversity conservation.

“All these services will be downgraded or lost if oceans are not in a good state of health,” he pointed out.

Oceans cover more than 70 per cent of the earth but face degradation and pollutions caused by some human activities.

“The vastness of the oceans

and their enormous capacity to absorb impact does not make them immune to human actions.

“This is evident from the changes in ocean chemistry, most prominently acidification, and decline in biodiversity and fisheries resources,” said Yahya.

The ecosystem degradation is not confined to the coastal belt but spreads to remote areas due to water movement while pollutants introduced locally

become a global problem in the course of time.

Yahya stressed that world-wide efforts are needed to protect the oceans as it produced the most of promising sources for humans.

He said oceans also provide the so-called ‘non-market’ benefits such as climate regulation, carbon sequestration and biodiversity conservation but all these services will be downgraded or lost if oceans are not in a good state of health.