

Forestry research: STIA-TAS seeks UMS collaboration

DE 19.8.174

KOTA KINABALU: The Sabah Timber Industries Association (STIA) and Timber Association of Sabah (TAS) have sought the collaboration and support of Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) in conducting research.

Head of the STIA-TAS Grouping, Norman Wong Shew Yam, said they chose UMS as research partners because of the university's insights and capability in forestry research.

"It is necessary for us to have this constructive engagement and collaboration in order to build a strong foundation for an enduring and sustainable timber industry," he said at a meeting with a delegation of UMS academics and students, here, Thursday.

Wong, who is also Deputy President of TAS and Managing Director of Sapulut Forest Development Sdn Bhd, said the group recognises the Sabah Forestry Department, STIA and TAS as the three core members of the timber industry, each with its roles, responsibilities and expectations.

He stressed the need to have a market-based mindset and approach in dealing with the current challenges faced by the industry.

"Forestry is a long-term investment and it requires both marketing and innovation in order to succeed," he said.

Forestry in Sabah, he said, enjoys a comparative advantage due to the quality and diversity of plantation species, climate conditions, good soil and good governance.

"But we have not taken good advantage of this situation yet," he noted.

He said it is only after 20 years since the State Government implemented the Sustainable Forestry Management policy and the establishment of Forest Management Units (FMUs) in Sabah in 1997 that "we are now starting to see the light; a way out."

Wong declared that the timber industry is a sunrise industry and not a sunset industry as some might perceive it to be.

"Forestry has a bright future, a force for



Wong (right) speaking at the meeting. On his left are Dr Liew (centre) and Dr Ong.

doing good socially and environmentally and for doing well economically."

He said forestry in Sabah has become a platform for creation of value-added products for both FMU licence holders as well as players in downstream industries.

Associate Professor Dr Liew Kang Ching, from the Faculty of Science and Natural Resources, who led the delegation from UMS to the meeting, said the university was willing to undertake forestry studies.

"However, we may not be able to accomplish such research projects as speedily as the industry players want, since we have other responsibilities such as teaching."

Dr Robert Ong, who represented the Sabah Forestry Department (SFD) at the meeting, briefed them on the bigger picture of the forest sector of the state economy, saying that timber production areas are shrinking.

He stated that among prevailing problems faced was a lack of innovation and passion in developing the industry.

He shared the knowledge he gained from the Borneo Forest Cooperatives (BFC) at Kota Marudu recently.

Dr Ong, who is a deputy head at the Forest Research Centre of SFD in Sandakan, disclosed that the Forestry Department is preparing a long-term state level landscape management plan that would harmonise with smaller plans and that this task might take two years to complete.

The two-hour forum enabled representatives to discuss and share experiences on various aspects of research work, including studies on specific softwood species for forest plantations.

Two students taking forestry courses at UMS were given an opportunity to share their experience of a six-month internship at an FMU under the management of Sapulut Forest Development Sdn Bhd.

Haslina Laharum and Nasru Alfiuddin bin Mohamad Sidik stated that the hands-on field experience had been very beneficial and strengthened their desire to enter into a career in the forestry field.