

## Sarawak committed to forest conservation, says Abang Johari

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Taib (third left) officiates at the dinner. From left are Awang Tengah, Ragad, Juma'ani and Abang Johari.

**KUCHING:** The Sarawak government aims to continue placing high importance on conservation within the state by setting a target to gazette one million hectares of land as Totally Protected Areas by 2020.

Under the state land use policy, the forestry sector is also allocated six million hectares for Permanent Forest Estates (EPF) for sustainable management of the state's economic activities such as timber industry and eco-tourism.

To meet these objectives, Chief Minister Datuk Patinggi Abang Johari Tun Openg stressed that the state government had also made it mandatory for all long-term forest licences to be certified under the Sustainable Forest Management by 2022.

“As of today, I am glad that there are already six forest management units with a total area of about 561,703 hectares being certified,” said Abang Johari during the dinner to mark the 45th

anniversary of Sarawak Timber Industry Development Corporation (STIDC) at Borneo Convention Centre Kuching here on Saturday night.

The forest certification will strengthen Sarawak Legality Verification System, a widely accepted system internationally in countries which require proof of legality endorsement such as Japan, Australia and Korea.

Since 1997, the state government had also issued 43 Industrial Forest Plantation (IFP) licences to support the development of the timber industry.

The harvesting of the industrial forest plantation in Sarawak in 2011 had led to a log production of 44,000 cubic metres, which further increased to 1.72 million cubic metres in 2018.

With a targeted planting area of one million hectares by 2020 under the IFP, the state government has extended the timeline to 2025 in view of the slow planting progress, with 420,146 hectares being planted as of date.

On the digital economy front, the Chief Minister said he had directed that more emphasis be put on improving the state's digital infrastructure as businesses can utilise digital technology to conduct transactions, product promotions and data management.

Being aware that innovative and productive workforce is the key in remaining competitive in this challenging industry, he was glad that STIDC had initiated the Pool of Young Designers Programme (Poyod) to produce designers for the growth of the furniture industry.

“The participation of these young designers in trade exhibitions in India, Australia and Dubai last year had generated potential sales of RM47 million worth of furniture,” he said.

As such, he looks forward to STIDC establishing a design centre in Sarawak as a platform for young designers to expand their design capabilities.

Among those attending the dinner were Yang di-Pertua Negeri Tun Pehin Sri Abdul Taib Mahmud, his wife Toh Puan Datuk Patinggi Ragad Kurdi Taib, Abang Johari's wife Datuk Amar Juma'ani Tuanku Bujang, Deputy Chief Minister Datuk Amar Awang Tengah Ali Hasan and Minister of Local Government and Housing Datuk Dr Sim Kui Hian.