

## **‘Surrender licensed areas if you can’t adapt’**

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KUCHING: Existing holders of both License for Planted Forests and Forest Timber License can surrender the licensed areas if they are unable to work in line with the proposed forestry policies.

Sarawak Forest Department director Hamden Mohammad said this is because the Sarawak government has other interested parties to work over the areas.

“All this while, our timber industry still focuses in producing primary products such as sawn timber and plywood.

“The state timber industry has to transform structurally from primary processing to producing higher value-added products.

“The industry players must align themselves to the external changes and must be ready to adopt new ways of doing things and the usage of latest technology. They must use the right technology to produce suitable and new products with quality acceptable in the global market place. Technology can also shift the industry from labour-intensive sector to automated manufacturing.

“Therefore, I hope the state timber industry players will continue to work hand-in-hand with the government in implementing these policies to strengthen forest management, enhance environmental protection and accelerate the development of timber-based industries to a higher level,” he said in a statement yesterday.

Hamden pointed out that the Sarawak government is very cautious and taking into consideration all factors in formulating forestry policy, based on current needs and development in forestry.

He also mentioned the recently proposed forestry policies is aimed to strengthen the sustainable forest management and had taken into consideration the current

needs in environmental protection, economic development and social well being of the local people.

“The formulations of several forestry policies by the state government have undergone a series of consultation sessions with the industry players and other stakeholders, to achieve a win-win situation between stakeholders.

“Our objective is to formulate a comprehensive policy that is good for the state government and all stakeholders, especially for the people of Sarawak,” he said in response to statements made by Sarawak Timber Association (STA) in The Borneo Post on March 29 regarding the government’s policies.

The recently proposed forestry policies by the Sarawak government was at the very heart of the present concerns raised by STA members during its annual general meeting (AGM).

Hamden also said the implementation to increase timber premium and cess last year is not the biggest obstacle to the timber industry to accelerate its development.

“The current policies, including review of timber rates, have and always been reflecting on the actual situation of the industries and supported by feasibility studies.

“For example, the charges on certain amount of forest produce have never been revised for the past 20-30 years, in which the rate is no longer relevant with current situation. The revenue from Hill Timber Premium and Rehabilitation and Development cess are mainly for financing education and welfare for the benefit of the people of Sarawak,” he said.

He also mentioned that the Sarawak government believes that Sustainable Forest Management (SFM) Certification principles are good practice and in line with the goal of ensuring the state’s forests are managed sustainably.

“The Forest Management Certification strengthens SFM by promoting good governance through transparency and credibility in managing forest management area; advocating responsible forestry through compliance with laws and regulation, and international standards; and ensuring comprehensive approach by taking into account economic viability, environmentally sound and socially acceptable forest management.

“The sustainability of our forest should not only be valued by dollar and cents,” he said.

On another issue, Hamden said the implementation of planted forests (LPF) is to reduce the pressure on natural forests. He however noted for the past 20 years, the performance of planting was not very encouraging.

He pointed out the Sarawak government has in fact provided incentives to the forest planted licence holders by allowing some parts of the area to be planted with one cycle of oil palm to provide financial support.