

Seagrass in waters around Pulau Sampadi useful to juvenile green turtles

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KUCHING: Water bodies surrounding Pulau Sampadi, west of the turtle islands of Pulau Satang Besar and Pulau Talang Talang, have high marine conservation value.

Initial findings by Sarawak Forestry Corporation (SFC) show that water bodies have seagrass which juvenile green turtles feed on. It also houses the endangered dolphin populations.

SFC acting deputy general manager Oswald Braken Tisen said water bodies around Pulau Sampadi were equally important as those in neighbouring islands because these were feeding and growing up grounds for the turtles and other marine life.

Unlike Pulau Satang Besar and Pulau Talang Talang, Pulau Sampadi does not have a landing beach for turtles.

So after turtles are hatched and released into the sea, where do they go?

“During a field work by SFC in 2009, we discovered Pulau Sampadi has seagrass which juvenile green turtles feed on,” he said.

“This initiated a need to further explore the island’s water bodies so that SFC would have enough justification to recommend the area to be gazetted as marine protected area,” he told reporters after the launch of “Pulau Sampadi Marine Life Expedition” at Matang Wildlife Centre yesterday.

On the island itself, Braken said the 30ha Pulau Sampadi in Lundu District was a titled land belonging to a group of family.

It was given to the family by the White Rajah about 150 years ago, he added.

Earlier, SFC managing director Ali Yusop when launching the expedition, said the one-year field study held together with Sarawak Biodiversity Centre (SBC) and University Malaysia Sarawak (Unimas) was the first of its kind to be done around the island.

The islands water bodies, among others, featured 15ha of seagrass bed, he said.

The expedition was pivotal to build and compile a baseline database for the area and the output would then form the basis of a strategic recommendation to the state for further protection, he said.

“The findings will also help to mitigate critical issues related to management of wildlife particularly on sea turtles,” he said.

Ali said to date, Sarawak had gazetted more than 700,000ha of its land as totally protected areas and these covered about 8% of the total area of the state.

The state government would like the percentage of total protected areas to be increased to 10% in two years, he said.

He said the target was in line with the state government's adoption of the declaration of IUCN during the United Nation Conference on Environment and Development, or Rio Summit, in 1992.

Besides, to date 210,000ha of water bodies had been gazetted as totally protected areas to protect and conserve endangered marine species, he said.

About 60 researchers from SFC, SBC and Unimas would be taking part in this expedition. The first expedition would take five days starting yesterday and would end July 20.

They are divided to undertake 13 research projects. These projects are water quality study; heavy metal study; nanoflagellates diversity of Pulau Sampadi; seagrass communities, morphological and molecular characterisation of seagrass taxa; meiofauna, macrofauna and mollusca; and ichthyoplankton at seagrass bed.

The projects also cover echinoderms at seagrass bed; distribution and biological study of crustacean at seagrass bed; fish community in seagrass bed; morphology and molecular characterisation of phytoplankton; seaweed community from an intertidal area; and coral reef community structure and reef profile mapping.

Unimas Faculty of Resource Science and Technology dean Prof Dr Shabdin Mohd Long said healthy water bodies around Pulau Sampadi were good food resources for local fishermen and villagers. They also provided opportunities for ecotourism development.

Source : [thestar](#)