



LET'S SHAKE ON IT: Penguang (left) and Khairuddin at the signing ceremony witnessed by Wong (centre). At second left is Environment and Public Health permanent secretary Ganie Ugay and Unimas deputy vice-chancellor Professor Peter Songan (second right, partially hidden). — Photo by Kong Jun Liong

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Unimas, NREB sign MoU on river conservation

By Zora Chan

KUCHING: A memorandum of understanding (MoU) to promote cooperation in R&D, capacity building in environmental protection, conservation, rehabilitation and management particularly in rivers and river water in Sarawak has been inked between Natural Resources and Environment Board (NREB) and Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (Unimas).

The cooperation will see research in the fields of environmental protection, rehabilitation and policy; staff development in the field of environmental management; and student training in the field of environmental science and management.

NREB controller of environmental quality Dr Penguang Manggil inked the document for the board while Unimas vice chancellor Professor Dr Khairuddin Abdul Hamid for the university, witnessed by Environment and Public Health Minister Dato Sri Wong Soon Koh here yesterday.

Earlier, in Wong's speech, he said the MoU was timely to optimise both organisations' resources and avoid duplication of works and programmes for mutual benefits and the state as a whole.

As far as Sarawak was concerned, the state government had always put great emphasis on environmental protection in tandem with the national environmental agendas and commitments towards various international conventions.

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Dato Sri Wong Soon Koh, Environment and Public Health Minister

Environmental Consultant Rules, Wong said.

He said NREB also expanded the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) review panel members to include representatives from higher learning institutions and non-governmental organisations.

"This is to improve the transparency in the EIA process and better presentation of views and opinions of relevant stakeholders," he said.

NREB had taken other initiatives such as the buffer zone study in Batang Lupar to mitigate siltation and sedimentation problems arising from development of plantation and realty projects and Geoenviron database for storing, analysing and retrieval and interpretation with Geographical Information System (GIS) to provide better spatial representation, he said.

Besides, he said NREB had embarked on a study of the Strategic Environmental Master plan for Mukah and directed the Strategic Environmental Impact Assessment (SEIA) be done to Santubong Development Master Plan by Sarawak Economic Development Corporation (SEDC) and Samalaju Industrial Estate by Bintulu Development Authority, he said.

Speaking to reporters later, Penguang said MoU would initially focus on Sarawak River and several environmentally sensitive rivers like Rajang River and Baram River and eventually cover other rivers.

In his speech, he said NREB was currently monitoring about 50 major rivers, three lakes and

three dams in more than 140 predetermined monitoring stations to ensure that the quality of all rivers was at least Class IIB of the National Water Quality Standard for Malaysia.

Water samples collected would be tested individually for a number of parameters namely Ammonical Nitrogen, Biochemical Oxygen Demand, Chemical Oxygen Demand, Dissolved Oxygen Demand, Total Suspended Solids, Turbidity, Faeca Coliform Counts, and heavy metals like Arsenic, Iron, Manganese, Nickel, Copper and lead.

Khairuddin on the other hand said Unimas' Institute of Biodiversity and Environmental Conservation (IBEC) focused on the environment, its diversity, its resources and its resulting impacts from various anthropogenic activities.

IBEC's Centre for Water Research had formed the Metal in Environment (Mite) research group that currently working on the fate and mobility of heavy metals in Kuap River and leaching of heavy metals into the groundwater from landfill sites, he said.

"I believe that Mite and NREB can collaborate in these two projects. The findings of the research may be able to form the basis for NREB to set various environmental standards with regards to heavy metal discharges," he said.

Khairuddin said Unimas hoped to see IBEC and Faculty of Resource Science and Technology would make their mark as a world leader in environmental R&D in the future.