

Timber industry still main contributor to Sabah's economy

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Joachim (centre) receiving a memento from Tan Peng Yuan.

KOTA KINABALU (Jan 8): The timber industry is still one of the main contributors to Sabah's economy, said Deputy Chief Minister Datuk Seri Dr Joachim Gunsalam.

He said the total export generated from the timber sector last year (January-June 2022) was RM587,993,764, adding the main products that were exported include plywood, sawn timber and moulding-related products.

“This is an increase of 22 per cent in terms of value compared to the same period in the year 2021. In terms of volume, there is a slight increase of 9.42 per cent,” he said at the Lumber Night 2023 held here on Saturday.

Dr Joachim, who is also Industrial Development Minister, said the State Government has been managing the State's forest in a sustainable manner since the establishment of the Sustainable Forest Management (SFM) Policy in the year 1997.

In addition to this, he said the timber industry in Sabah shall witness significant changes in the future with plantation timber taking over as the primary source of raw material for both the upstream and downstream sectors.

To achieve this aim, he added the State Government had launched the Action Plan on Forest Plantation Development (2022-2036) in March 2022.

“The Sabah Government particularly my ministry is supportive of the policy to establish 400,000 hectares of forest plantations by 2035 as a measure to reduce dependence on timber from forest reserves, as well as to enhance timber productivity in the State.

“The Forestry Department has also deemed it is important to ensure there is a reduction in the number of logging concessions issuance as a proactive move in promoting sustainable forest management (SFM) as a long-term plan,” he said.

Since the start of the conservation initiative, Dr Joachim said the State Government had achieved significant progress in forest conservation.

“At this point in time, I am proud to be a Sabahan since Sabah still has 64 per cent of the total land mass that is still covered with forest. We all should be very proud of this heritage for the next generation to see and enjoy. Kudos to the Sabah Forestry Department,” he said.

Encouraging all to actively promote industrial tree plantation as the main source of raw materials for the downstream timber industry, he said his ministry was given to understand that if Sabah manages to develop 400,000 hectares of forest plantations with an estimated 200 cubic metres of timber per hectare per year, over a period of 10 years, the State can expect eight million cubic meters of timber extraction.

With this volume, he said his ministry will be able to confidently promote the wood-based industry, especially in the downstream activities which will then provide more employment for the locals.

“This I think is a very important target to be realised and achieved,” he added.

Dr Joachim said the commitment to this policy requires huge investments of up to RM170 million annually and in this regard, both the Federal and State Governments have provided various incentives to the SFM licensees to support forest plantation development.

He called on both the upstream and downstream industry players, to work closely with the government as the way forward to continue the development of the timber industry in Sabah.

“The Sabah Forestry Department and my ministry will work hand in hand together with the industrial players to ensure our target is achieved. I am happy to note the industries’ active participation in tree planting activities in support of the Greening Malaysia Programme, which is one of the national agendas that address climate change and quality of life with the goal to plant 100 million trees across the country by 2025. I have joined the Sabah Timber Industries Association (STIA) in several tree planting events and I perceived this is as a good initiative to promote public awareness and nurture the mindset of younger generations on the importance of replanting towards tackling climate change issues, he said.

He said based on the 100 Million Tree Planting Campaign by the Federal Natural Resources, Environment and Climate Change Ministry, as of December 22, 2022, Sabah had done a good work where we were second to Sarawak in the number of trees planted so far.

“I am confident, Sabah will continue to plant and achieve its target of 40 million trees by 2025,” he said.