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## Sarawak state to reduce logging in natural forests gradually



The Sarawak government wants to gradually phase out logging activities to avoid disrupting the state's socio-economic activities. — filepic

**KUCHING:** The state government does not plan to completely stop all timber licences in Sarawak just yet as it needs to take a holistic approach in order to prevent any socioeconomic impact on the state.

Instead, Urban Planning, Land Administration and Environment Assistant Minister Datuk Len Talif Salleh told the State Assembly there would be a gradual reduction and phasing out of logging activities in the natural forest so as not to disrupt the state's socioeconomic activities.

He said this would also give the timber industry time to adjust to the new conditions and situation.

Replying to a question from Aidel Lariwoo (BN-Sadong Jaya), Len Talif said the timber industry contributed RM5.9bil in revenue last year through exports of timber products, besides employing over 100,000 people in the state.

He also said the state government collected RM550mil in royalties, premium, levies and fees from the industry every year, which was used to implement development projects.

Len Talif reiterated that the state government would no longer issue new timber licences except for development purposes and would continue to strengthen enforcement against illegal logging.

He said the state's forestry policy also included making it compulsory for timber licence holders in the Heart of Borneo conservation area to obtain internationally-accepted forest management certification to ensure good practices and sustainability.

In addition, he said the state government planned to gazette up to one million hectares as totally protected areas by 2020.

"This will provide economic opportunities through ecotourism for local communities while protecting the environment," Len Talif said.

At the same time, he said the government was stepping up its planted forest programme with a target of one million hectares to be planted by 2020.

This will reduce dependence on the natural forest and supply the needs of the timber industry, he said.