

# Sustainable Logging Benefits Environment And Economy

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IPOH (Bernama) -- The mention of logging usually brings to mind deforestation, river pollution, destruction of wildlife habitats and even that of human settlements.

At the same time, many are unaware that timber-based commodity is the country's third largest export after palm oil and rubber.

For a developing country like Malaysia, the export value on the country's timber industry has a significant impact on the country's economy.

The export value for the commodity jumped from RM20.79 billion in 2014 to RM22.15 billion in 2015 before taking a slight dip last year to RM22.11 billion.

This amount is not including the domestic market in 2016 which is valued at RM18 billion, making the total value of the industry RM40.11 billion in that year alone.

For 2017, the export value recorded from January to June is RM11.5 billion with Japan and the U.S. being the main markets, followed by countries like India, Australia, Singapore, South Korea, United Kingdom, China, Taiwan and Thailand.

Interestingly, the highest percentage of timber-based export is in the form of finished products such as furniture. This is followed by semi-finished products such as plywood, sawn timber and wood chips.

## THE NATION'S TIMBER SUPPLY

Seeing the figure, many may wonder where the source of raw timber comes from.

Some of it are harvested locally while others are imported from countries like the U.S., China, Australia, Vietnam, Thailand and Brazil.

This is done to prevent overlogging in the country. Malaysia has pledged to ensure that at least 50 percent of the country's perpetual forest and tree cover remains. Today, 55.3 percent of the nation is still covered in forests.

Importing timber also provides local manufacturers the chance to work with quality timber from overseas to make products for specific purposes in buyer countries.

This is the way the industry becomes the source of income for 240,000 workers (upstream and downstream) nationwide and retains its resilience and competitiveness in local and overseas markets.

## HARVESTING INSTEAD OF FELLING

When receiving the media during a visit to the [Malaysian Timber Council \(MTC\)](#) headquarters organised by MTC in late September, the CEO of MTC Datuk Dr Abdul Rahim Nik said the word 'logging' might no longer be suitable for use in the context of today's sustainable logging practices.

For Abdul Rahim the better term would 'harvesting' as sustainable logging involves only mature trees while leaving the immature ones to continue growing.

He added that the term had been widely used in the logging industry in developed countries and described the standards used in Malaysia as adhering to the global standards and work practices stipulated by international organisations.

"It is time for the public to be aware that the country has been practicing Sustainable Forest Management (SFM) since 100 years ago.

"It is important to show that we have taken various efforts to ensure the sustainability of the environment and the protection of the community," he said during the two-day MTC Familiarisation Programme for Local Journalists on Sept 27.

## ONLY MATURE TREES

SFM was first used in 1901 when it was introduced by the British. Then called the 'Selective Management System', it is one of the logging techniques that adhere to the SFM guidelines.

Senior Principal Assistant Director of the Inland Forest Management Section of the Forestry Department of Peninsular Malaysia Yusoff Muda said that the British system required for every plot for logging to be inspected by an officer from the Forestry Department who would then identify the trees allowed for harvesting.

Loggers cannot fell trees other than those that have been marked with white tags printed with reference numbers.

The officer would mark the trees illegal for felling with blue tags with reference numbers. If loggers do as much as to even scratch trees, action would be taken upon them?

Trees that are allowed to be felled are determined by their size and type. For dipterocarps, the minimum diameter of the trunk should at least be 65cm.

For non-dipterocarps, the minimum diameter of the trunk allowed for felling is 55cm.

The diameter sizes is indicative of a tree's growth with dipterocarps needing more time to grow compared to non-dipterocarps.

## CONTINUAL MONITORING

The Director of Licensing and Enforcement Division of the Malaysian Timber Industry Board Zulkpli Abd Rani said that the board was constantly monitoring logging practices nationwide.

"There are 3,580 factories nationwide that work with timber. Most of them are in Peninsular Malaysia (2,409 factories) followed by Sarawak (742) and Sabah (389)," he said.

Among the areas closely monitored are the issuance of import and export licenses and physical inspection under the Customs Act 1967, the Malaysian Timber Industry Board Act 1973 and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna 2008.

The board is also working closely with enforcement agencies to deal with cases involving legal repercussions, particularly in the export of banned timber overseas.

Such cooperation is important as its success is imperative to preservation of the country's forests for the generations to come.

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