

# The Future is Now

## - Malaysian Timber Conference 2019

**T**imber and timber products, like furniture, play a vital role in the global circular economy – while new and improved uses of timber, ensures the sustainability and robustness of the industry.

Currently, innovation coupled with visually pleasing designs, technological advancements and branding, are key elements that industry players must embrace along with the need for certified and legal timber to ensure economic viability in the long-term, as issues revolving around climate change take centre stage.

These were some of the pertinent topics discussed at the Malaysian Timber Conference 2019. Themed “The Future is Now”, the conference was held at the Hilton Kuala Lumpur in July this year.

As a signature event of conference organiser, the Malaysian Timber Council (MTC), it was officiated by the Ministry of Primary Industries YB Mdm. Teresa Kok. Also present were Deputy Minister of Primary Industries Datuk Seri Shamsul Iskandar Mohd Akin, who also delivered the keynote closing address, as well as Deputy Secretary-General of the Ministry of Primary Industries Mr. Ravi Muthayah. MTC Chairman Dato’ Low Kian Chuan and MTC’s Board of Trustees and Chief Executive Officer Mr. Richard Yu, were also present at the event.

For decades, the timber industry has been a revenue generator for the country. In 2018, the timber industry contributed 1.6 percent to the Gross Domestic Product, or 2.2 percent of the country’s total export with earnings of RM22.3 billion.

Wooden furniture is among the top contributors. In 2018, furniture contributed about 35 percent of the total export earnings, followed by plywood at 21 percent.

“I hope Malaysian timber-based manufacturers can continue to offer distinctive product differentiation and experience to meet customers’ diverse expectations and needs,” YB Mdm. Kok said.

“Industry players must understand the importance of investing in technologies to enhance productivity and to remain competitive in the global marketplace,” she continued.

On the conservation front, YB Mdm. Kok was happy to note that MTC has allocated RM1.5 million for the study of pygmy elephants and orangutan rehabilitation in Sabah. She also said Malaysia will honour its commitment of maintaining at least 50 percent of its land area under forest cover.

Dato’ Low said timber-based manufacturers should also aggressively move towards producing better, value-added, downstream products using high value timbers.

She said these incentives are part of the Council’s Five-Year Action Plan (2019-2023) repositioning strategy to help the industry move towards the next frontier. This includes the introduction of the Market Vendor Development

Programme, where more established timber-based manufacturers take SME’s under their wings to collectively grow the overall economic pie of the timber and wood-based industry.

The conference featured 10 speakers who are thought leaders from the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, and Brazil, among others. The line-up featured a wide range of topics aimed at shaping the future of sustainability, consumption patterns, Industry 4.0 introducing disruptive thinking and practices in a traditional industry, understanding branding, marketing, and the next generation.

Speakers included CEO of Naluri Malaysia Mr. Azran Osman Rani and Executive Director Mr. Lee Heng Guie; Dr. Ivan Tomaselli, who is the president of STCP Engenharia de Projetos Ltd; award-winning design critic and New York Times Columnist Ms. Alice Rawsthorn; Mr. Nigel Hollis, the Chief Global Analyst of Kantar Millward Brown; “Design King” of Malaysia Dr. Eric Leong; and Mr. Michael O’Hara, Director of Global Furniture, UL.

Other speakers included Dr. Maung Maung, Country Director for The Centre for People and Forests in Myanmar; Mr. Peter Hartman, a consultant at Schuler Consulting; and Research Director of the Institute of Tropical Forestry and Forest Products in Malaysia, Dr. Jean-Marc Roda.

### Take-Home Furnish Now Points for Furniture Makers:

#### Point 1

Think together how to solve sustainability issues, reduce waste and create legacies without fear of ideas or resources running out, working together for good of all, with a broader mindset.

#### Point 2

Invest in worker’s welfare, or develop a track record of caring for workers fairly in a way that attracts more talents.

#### Point 3

Furniture industry players must think about how to use automation in any way to make production more efficient where possible.

#### Point 4

Invest in the upcoming generation via education, training and creating ways to reach out to them so that perception of industry will be the good 3D’s (delightful, desirable, discovery).

#### Point 5

Continue to ensure best practices in industry especially in sustainable management practices, tap into government bodies supportive of the timber industry like MTC, MTCC, and relevant bodies.

#### Point 6

Creating something of value is a long term growth mindset, an investment that goes beyond merely making some profit for today that would yield ROI in the long run.