

**KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY
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KETUA MENTERI SARAWAK
IN CONJUNCTION
WITH THE OPENING OF THE INDUSTRIAL FOREST
PLANTATION SEMINAR, MIRI**

1. It is indeed my great pleasure to be given the opportunity to deliver a speech and to grace open the Industrial Forest Plantation Seminar 2020 with the theme “*Advancing Sustainable Forestry through Aggressive Industrial Forest Plantation*”
2. Firstly, let me welcome all of you especially presenters and participants from China, Indonesia, Peninsular Malaysia, Sabah to join this hybrid seminar either through online zoom platform or attending physically to this very important seminar.
3. This seminar is indeed timely and appropriate as this is the 23rd year since The Forests (Planted Forests) Rules 1997 came into force. I believe that there will be a lot of issues or experiences especially on Research and Development to be shared during this seminar.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Background of Planted Forests in Sarawak

4. A serious effort to start big scale forest plantations in Sarawak began in 1996, when the State had reached its peak in producing timber from the natural forests and needed to find better ways to sustain the timber resources. Realising this, the State government embarked on large-scale forest plantation as a long-term strategy towards providing a new source of wood material for the wood-based industries in Sarawak. With the planting of fast-growing species, the State Government is hoping to establish 1 million ha of industrial forests by 2025.

5. Forest plantation is also hoped to relieve pressure on natural forests and at the same time increases the state's forest cover which will reduce the greenhouse effect. Sarawak is committed to preserving a good balance of forest for perpetuity including the preservation of biodiversity and the ecosystem functions. This would mean that more timber has to be obtained from other sources. Forest plantations offer a promising source of timber. Intensively and sustainably managed plantations will have to play a significant role to meet the increasing demand for wood products and avoid further reduction of the natural forests.

6. Forest plantation is also to ensure better land use in the rural area. The land will be well-utilised and there is also the added benefit of bringing social development to the rural people.

Strengthening the Development of Industrial Forests Plantation

7. Over two decades of development of industrial forests plantation in Sarawak has seen a number of issues and challenges faced in order to have a viable industry. The gaps in implementation such as lacking in availability of high quality planting materials, incidences of pest and disease, the right species to be planted amongst others, need to be addressed holistically to ensure success in achieving the main objectives of forest plantation development. Research and Development (R & D) is one of the key initiatives to address the gaps and facilitate the implementation of industrial forest plantation in Sarawak.
8. Therefore, I believe that the industry players have been carrying out their respective R & D programmes for the past 20 years. I know that R & D requires time, money, dedication and collaboration of many parties. In 2014, the government commissioned a study as well as a state-wide inventory on planting materials in the State. The objective is to fast-track the development of R & D capacities amongst the LPF (Licenses for

Planted Forest) operations in the State. To date, 21 Seed Production Areas (SPA) at seven (7) LPFs had been established.

9. We can only have sustainability and profitability if we care about the quality of what we plant and for that we must invest in R & D to look after our plantations well. Aggressive plantation development is only possible if it is based on scientifically sound and reliable research. To carry out R & D, one could not work alone. Collaboration and knowledge sharing are equally important for fruitful outcomes.
10. As previously mentioned by the Director of Forests, signing of MOU with LPF holders in 2016 was one of the initiatives for a collaborative research. To further enhance this collaboration, the State Government through Forest Department Sarawak will embark on a collaborative project with the Forest Research Institute Malaysia (FRIM) and the LPFs by signing the MOU which we are going to do and witness today.
11. With this MoU signed today, a strengthened collaborative R & D will be formed through establishment of working groups between all the licenced planted forest holders. This is indeed an excellent strategy by Forest Department in strengthening collaboration in R & D related to industrial forest plantation. This MoU will go beyond tree breeding and I was informed we will have intensified

breeding program that is already well-structured by the Industrial Forest Research Centre of Forest Department Sarawak where the likes of the Chinese Eucalyptus Research Centre as well as the Chinese Paulownia Research Centre will be involved in the big picture later. We need further international level research centre to improve and further bring the best out of our R & D in this area apart from the National Level Agency such as FRIM.

12. I know big companies have their own research activities, some are very advance but unfortunately, they are not willing to share the crucial data for the betterment of industrial forest development in Sarawak. Perhaps this is probably due to the competition mentality amongst the LPFs.

13. If you want to succeed, you have to change the mindset of working in silo and keeping information to yourself. You are not competing among each other but rather competing with other countries such as Vietnam, Indonesia, China, etc. We are just small player in this global industry and ought to rely on each other. Every information such as R & D findings are crucial for our progress and to produce better quality timber and timber products as well as to increase productivity of forest plantation.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

14. Forest Research has made significant contributions to forest-related industries world-wide. For example, the many research r established under the Chinese Academy of Forestry have played key roles in the development of China's eucalyptus and bamboo plantations and related industries. According to FAO, better vegetative propagation techniques and marker-assisted tree selection are helping to improve the quality of planted forests. All these are possible through intensive research and development.
15. Government agencies such as Forest Department is here to assist and facilitate information sharing as well as playing the role as a bridge between the research institutions and the industry players.
16. R & D in industrial forest is a long term and continuing efforts, hence commitment from both the department and the LPF holders is vital because "an empire is not built in a day". Commitment means working together, provision of sufficient fund and resources and sharing of information and data in order to get the desired results. Perhaps this is the right time to have big data on forest plantation in Sarawak. I am for one a strong believer in big data. Forest Department will be the custodian of this data and will facilitate the information sharing among the industries.

Leveraging on technologies in plantation development

Ladies of Gentlemen,

17. In today's world, the use of advance technologies could bring further changes to the forest sector especially in planted forest. Technology like hyperspectral could be used in the monitoring of incidence of pest and disease in a big plantation, mapping of soil type, volume prediction, etc. While for the downstream industry, the advancement of technology could help in better processing of plantation logs to ensure optimum utilisation. I was made to understand that Forest Department Sarawak is currently conducting a study using the hyperspectral remote sensing technology to detect early incidence of pest and disease in forest plantation areas. Early detection could help in assessing the health of the plantations and for better management of plantation forests.
18. For owners of timber mills, it is about time to retool for the smaller fast-grown plantation logs and to add value to the timber harvested. You should be well-advised to explore the new technology for better utilisation and diversification of timber products.
19. For the past years, various testing conducted on planted timber like acacia, batai, eucalyptus and many others either on its properties or the end products that could be developed out of

planted timbers. I would like to urge the industries together with government agencies like Forest Department and STIDC and local universities to intensify R & D on the product diversification. There is no point of having a good plantation if we are not clear on what are the end products for our plantation.

Forest Plantation Certification

Ladies and Gentlemen,

20. In 2019, the State Government has endorsed a policy on forest management certification which requires all long-term forest timber licences to be certified by 2022. We have two more years to go. The policy is one of the efforts to ensure sustainability of our forest resources.

21. Likewise, all forest plantations in the State are also encouraged to undertake forest plantation management certification as reflected in the Policy Direction on Industrial Forest Plantation in Sarawak. Until today 66,873 hectares of Forest Plantation Management Unit (FPMU) have been certified under the Malaysian Criteria and Indicators for Forest Management Certification (Forest Plantation) by SIRIM QAS International. I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate those certified FPMU namely Lana, Segan and Marudi of the Samling group and Penyuan and Masama of Shin

Yang group for this achievement. I hope that other plantations will also follow suit in this endeavour.

22. Certification is a tool to ensure good plantation management practices leading to an efficient harvesting and production and also help in increasing the market confidence of timber products from well-managed plantations.

The Way Forward

Ladies and Gentlemen,

23. We need to explore further in enhancing the development of industrial forest. To meet the increasing needs for raw materials, other degraded areas in the state could be identified for planted forest development. These could include abandoned/idle land, shifting agriculture area or even NCR land that could be developed in a joint-venture with the land owners and local communities. Besides planting tree species, planting of non-timber forest product (NTFP) such as bamboo and rattan could also be looked at.
24. Another aspect that could be explored through R & D is the planting of other fast-growing indigenous species such as Geronggang, Tebulan, Engkabang Jantong and others. Not only planting fast-growing trees but also look at value-added and

diversification of the end products, for example decorative products, gifts, etc., rather than just focusing on traditional products such as plywood and furniture.

25. Having just a good plantation is not adequate if we do not look into the whole value chain. Marketing and promotion of timber and timber products are very important if we want to gain profit from the industry. For this, agency like Sarawak Timber Industry Development Corporation (STIDC) plays a crucial role to facilitate the industrial forest industry in promoting and marketing of planted timber products. I know in the situation that we are facing now; it is not possible to organise physical trade missions, but we have other platforms such as online platforms to promote and market our products. We just have to be creative and innovative in leveraging on digital technologies. At this State I would like to urge you to look into the use of AR platform.

26. To support R & D, the State Government is also looking into the possibility of working closely with two local universities namely, Universiti Putra Malaysia, Bintulu Campus and University College of Technology Sarawak (UCTS). We propose that these two universities to become research hub for forestry research in Sarawak as they have the expertise and facilities. The State Government is willing to allocate fund to undertake collaborative research through this hub. I will put this in our budget. Forest

Department as the anchor agency could play a role to coordinate the R & D activities. At the same time your researchers could also be trained and participate in research programmes.

Ladies and gentlemen,

27. I hope that this seminar will provide some answers or means to address the gaps and most of all as platform for sharing knowledge and experiences especially from other places like China, Indonesia, Peninsular Malaysia and Sabah. I also hope that through discussion and deliberation, you could come up with a better strategy to further strengthen the implementation of industrial forest plantation in Sarawak. The government is most willing and ready to provide the enabling conditions but we need LPF owners and other stakeholders to play their parts as well.
28. The successful implementation of planted forests will create a new dimension in downstream processing in Sarawak. Therefore, we need the commitment of all the players to ensure that the sustainability of the timber industry in Sarawak.
29. On that note, I wish to congratulate the Forest Department Sarawak, in particular the organising committee for their hard work, contribution and dedication in organising this seminar.

30. It is with great pleasure I now declare The Industrial Forest Plantation Seminar 2020 open and wish you all success in your deliberations.

Thank you.