

'Gazette mangroves as forest reserve'

SAM urges Penang to save Penaga, Kepala Batas areas and not make empty vows

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GEORGE TOWN: Sahabat Alam Malaysia (SAM) has urged the state government to carry out conservation efforts for the mangrove forest in Penaga, Kepala Batas, and not make empty promises like before.

Its field officer Meor Razak Meor Abdul Rahman said the government had principally agreed to gazette the mangrove forest as one of the state's permanent forest reserves back in 2007 but nothing has been done since then.

"The state government had agreed during an exco meeting in 2007 to gazette the area but the plan

seemed to have turned to dust.

"At that time, the state Forestry Department had already mooted to the state government that the Penaga mangrove area, which was then approximately 200ha, and other sites should be gazetted as permanent forest reserves," he said.

Meor Razak said he had also attended a public hearing on the Penang Structure Plan 2030 (RSNPP) early this year and urged the state government to expedite the proposal that had been agreed to in 2007.

On Nov 1, *The Star* carried an exclusive report on the Penaga coastal mangrove forest along the Kedah border and mainland Penang, which had amazed experts

after growing from only 200ha two decades ago to almost 600ha.

Seberang Prai City Council mayor Datuk Rozali Mohamud had given his assurance that the mangrove forest would be zoned as a sensitive area, contrary to claims that the area – a haven for migratory birds and a boon for fishermen with huge revenue potential for tourism – had been marked as an "aquaculture industrial zone."

He had reportedly said a 500m buffer zone would be created to separate the forest from the industrial-scale aquaculture ponds.

Meor Razak said besides the Penaga mangrove, other mangrove sites proposed by the state Forestry

Department to be gazetted as permanent forest reserves were Air Hitam Dalam (10ha), Sungai Prai (100ha), Sungai Juru and Sungai Jawi (150ha), Sungai Kerian, Sungai Chenaam and Sungai Udang (100ha), Pantai Acheh (60ha), Balik Pulau (40ha) and Batu Maung (4ha).

Meor Razak said the gazetting of these mangrove areas was in line with the Key Planning Policy and Implementation Strategic Policy of RSNPP 2030, as well as being one of the objectives in the National Forest Policy.

"The objective by the Malaysian Peninsular Forestry Department in 2020 is to achieve at least five million hectares of permanent forest

reserve of the total land area of Peninsular Malaysia. The current (permanent forest reserve) area is approximately 4.81 million hectares.

"The gazettement of these mangrove sites should be in accordance with recommendations from the Federal Government during the Budget 2020 presentation that every state government must make an effort to protect the existing sites and add more protection areas," he said.

Watch the video
thestartv.com

