

Get help of fishermen

I REFER to the report "Rehabilitating coastlines with mangrove walls" (NST, Dec 1) which quoted the Deputy Director-General (Policy And Planning) of the Forestry Department of Peninsular Malaysia, Datuk Abdul Rahman Abdul Rahim.

The initiative of the department to conserve and safeguard coastlines from tidal waves and pollution is welcome news indeed.

If not for mangroves, which act as a natural barrier, many more lives would have been lost, and properties destroyed, in the 2004 tsunami which hit Perlis, Kedah, Penang and Perak.

Apart from holidaymakers in Penang, many of the victims were settlers, especially in the coastal fishing communities.

Serious attention should be given to the monitoring, management and surveillance of mangrove habitats, and the growth and survival of the various species found all along our coastline.

Indiscriminate logging, poaching, not adhering to guidelines on development, lack of knowledge and awareness of the importance and benefits of mangroves have led to the loss of valuable mangroves in Malaysia.

Professor Dr V.C. Chong of Universiti Malaya has done some extensive research on mangroves and its relationship with fish habitat and the value of fish, prawns and mud crabs, which contribute economically to the nation, not to mention the hidden benefits



Mangroves act as a natural barrier against erosion and tidal waves.

to nature and mankind.

I recommend using the services and getting the assistance of the fishing communities in conservation work.

There are 42 registered fishing districts in Peninsular Malaysia and 23 fishing districts in Sabah, Sarawak and Labuan with a total of 125,632 fishermen.

They are engaged in marine capture fisheries and most of them live along the coastal areas and riverbanks where mangroves are located.

These fishermen know the value of mangroves. As such, they should be roped in to help safeguard and manage the mangroves.

I suggest the following:

- Fishing communities along the coastal areas where mangroves are located should be given more attention, awareness and education.

Conservation should be a collaborative effort between local government, the various agencies such as the Department of Fish-

eries, Department of Forestry, and the Department of Drainage and Irrigation, as well as the community.

- Fishing communities and local residents should be given some form of incentive and technical aid to help monitor the survival of saplings and also work as agents to help enforcement agencies crack down on indiscriminate logging, looting, etc.

- Educate the public by displaying information on billboards and posters, on the types of mangrove species that can be found at a particular location, its value and importance to nature and the benefits that can be derived from them.

- Information on contact persons, offices or agencies should be distributed to local fishing communities in various languages.

- Mangrove information centres should be set up at designated fishing villages. These centres can then collaborate with the locals to form action committees to help monitor the growth of mangroves.

- Where mangrove trees are visible or accessible to the public, especially students, the trees should be labelled — with both the scientific and common name and

- The media should be encouraged to publish articles on mangroves as a valuable national asset.

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