

Beach project protest

STORY and PICTURE

By K. SUTHAKAR
sut@thestar.com.my

BESUT: Locals and foreign tourists have begun a campaign to petition against a state project to construct a two-storey building comprising four shoplots on the beachfront on Pulau Perhentian Kecil.

The island's Long Beach or Pasir Panjang is reputedly one of the best in the world.

The powdery white sand and crystal-clear water has been a strong draw for backpackers.

However, they fear the laidback atmosphere at the beach might be lost if construction went ahead.

So far, one shed has been erected to house building materials and an unused stall has been demolished.

A single-storey building housing coffee shops already exists near the site and the operators have erected extensions almost 30m long, blocking a portion of the beach where tourists used to sunbathe.

Concerned that further construction would ruin the natural beauty of the beach, diving instructor Rushdi Ismail and several others began a signature campaign to persuade the Besut District Council to halt its

RM1mil project.

Rushdi, 34, and the 10-odd chalet and dive centre operators fear they would lose business if tourists turned their backs on the beach.

"The building should be located away from the beach," said Rushdi, who became well known after he helped tsunami victims at Koh Phi Phi in southern Thailand two years ago.

"There is already a water problem on the island and adding more businesses is not a good idea as it will deplete existing groundwater," said an operator.

Irish tourist Marian Flealy, 25, said the project did not make any sense and the building would be an eyesore.

Britons Amy Holiey, 19, and her boyfriend Gavin Jones, 27, said they might not return to Long Beach if the project went ahead.

A Besut district council officer said four units of double-storey shoplots would be built on government reserve land on the beach and the project would probably take a year to complete.

State Industrial Development and Tourism Committee chairman Datuk Mohamed Awang Tera said he was not aware of the project but would discuss it with the state exco if necessary.



CHANGING LANDSCAPE: Food outlet operators cashing in on the popularity of Long Beach in Pulau Perhentian Kecil in Terengganu by setting up extensions which mar the serene setting of the area.