

PROTECT MELAKA'S TURTLE NESTING SITES

IREFER to the report "Melaka orders halt to sand mining, forest product harvesting" (NST, June 11) and would like to applaud Chief Minister Adly Zahari's endeavour to ensure the quality and sustainability of the state's environment.

The new cabinet, with 13 federal ministers from Pakatan Harapan (PH), was sworn in late last month, but the absence of a natural resources and environment minister stirred anxiety among the environmental non-governmental organisations.

Although environmental protection is not one of the top 10 priorities in the first 100 days of the PH administration, Adly's decision to cease sand mining and logging in Melaka is indeed encouraging. It shows that PH is earnest about its promise to balance economic growth and environmental protection, as stated in Promise 39 of its manifesto.

Given Adly's enthusiasm towards environmental protection, I wish to highlight the issue of turtle conservation in Melaka.

There are 10 prime hawksbill turtle nesting sites in Melaka that contributes 400 to 450 nests annually: Pulau Upeh,

Padang Kemunting, Balik Batu, Kem Terendak, Tanjung Bidara, Pasir Gembur, Teluk Belanga, Tanjung Serai, Tanjung Dahan and Meriam Patah.

Pulau Upeh once had the highest number of turtle landings and nesting sites. Due to its close proximity to the Klebang land reclamation project site, rapid coastal erosion degraded the once-pristine beach, robbing turtles of the warm sand to nest and lay eggs.

Fewer turtles landed to nest in Pulau Upeh over the years.

While promising economic growth and development, land reclamation has caused extensive environmental catastrophes. It is, therefore, vital to study the sustainability of land reclamation projects for development in Melaka.

In March, former chief minister Datuk Seri Idris Haron announced a RM20 million project to redevelop Pulau Upeh into a top tourism destination in Melaka.

With turtle landings one of the major attractions, Pulau Upeh should attract about 51,000 tourists upon completion of the redevelopment project next year.

In an interview last month, Adly also expressed an interest to turn Pulau Upeh into a turtle rehabilitation zone. Given the environmental degradation in Pulau Upeh, however, Adly should perhaps reconsider this move.

Beach restoration will likely incur a heavy financial burden and there is no guarantee that turtles will return to nest in Pulau Upeh.

Instead of saving a sinking ship, the state government should turn its focus to other prime turtle nesting beaches in Melaka, especially Padang Kemunting and Kem Terendak.

In November 2016, Tanjung Bidara assemblyman Datuk Md Rawi Mahmud proposed gazettement an 800m stretch of the Padang Kemunting beach as a turtle sanctuary.

Although it pales in comparison to the Sabah government's gazettement of 898,762.76ha in the northern seas of Sabah as the Tun Mustapha Marine Park in May 2016, Rawi's proposal, if approved, would have given Melaka its first turtle sanctuary to better protect nesting turtles.

Almost two years have passed since, but no turtle sanctuary has come into existence.



Pulau Upeh's close proximity to the Klebang land reclamation project site has degraded its once-pristine beach, robbing turtles of warm sand to nest and lay eggs. FILE PIC

Now that PH has taken over the governance of Melaka, why not immediately gazette Padang Kemunting as the first turtle sanctuary in Melaka to demonstrate the new administration's commitment to environmental protection and sustainability?

Such a sanctuary will serve as a significant stride towards a greener Melaka.

PH's Melaka government has

so far shown promising dedication towards environmental protection and sustainability.

I hope Adly could balance economic growth and environmental protection in developing Melaka. I look forward to a greener Melaka and its first turtle sanctuary.

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