

'PENANG RECOGNISES IMPACT OF PSI PROJECT'

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Ecology offset masterplan aims to address concerns, says Penang Infrastructure Corp

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IT is crucial to acknowledge that development projects of Penang South Island's (PSI) magnitude will inevitably have an impact on the environment, the Penang Infrastructure Corporation (PIC) said.

PIC said as the state government's special purpose vehicle to implement the PSI project, the state government fully recognises this, and that was precisely why the PSI ecology offset masterplan (PEOM) initiatives had been developed, in collaboration with professionals and experts, to mitigate the impacts.

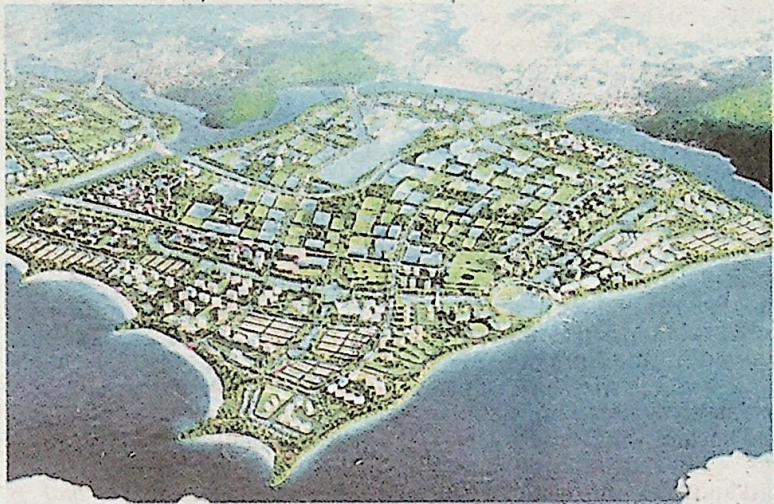
Although physical works have yet to commence on site, PIC said the PEOM initiatives had been carefully implemented in phases, demonstrating the state government's commitment to its responsibility towards the fishing community and the environment.

"The PSI project has expanded the mangrove ecosystem in the state through the planting of more than 1,600 mangrove trees, and increased fishery stock by releasing two million fish fries.

"Recently, PIC and the project delivery partner, SRS Consortium Sdn Bhd, have joined forces with the state Forestry Department to plant 200,000 trees at suitable locations in Penang by 2030.

"We are also collaborating with the Centre for Marine and Coastal Studies from Universiti Sains Malaysia to conduct research on artificial reefs and the release of fish and shrimp fries to bolster future fish stocks.

"It is essential to approach the PSI project with an informed perspective that considers its comprehensive benefits, including sustainable economic growth, improved socio-economic status for fishermen, enhanced educational opportunities for their children, and well-designed en-



An artist's impression of the Penang South Island project. PIC COURTESY OF PSI

vironmental conservation efforts.

"We remain committed to engaging with all stakeholders, addressing concerns constructively, and ensuring that the PSI project contributes positively to the long-term welfare of the fishing community and the prosperity of Penang," it said in addressing concerns and allegations raised about the project by Gerakan Ekonomi Malaysia and Institut Masa Depan Malaysia.

Gerakan Ekonomi Malaysia had recently urged the government to halt the PSI reclamation project and formulate a comprehensive policy to guarantee a sustainable livelihood for fishermen.

Its president, Armin Baniyah Pahamin, said Penang's development plan, especially PSI, would critically impact the income and future of fishermen and affect the local fish supply. Armin said the state government, unfortunately, had taken no action to provide an alternative source of income.

PIC said the PSI project was a sustainable initiative, with the goal of benefiting various stakeholders, including fishermen and their families, local communities, the state and the country's economy as a whole.

"The local community is benefiting from the PSI project, even before the commencement of the reclamation work.

"The social impact management plan under PSI is empowering the fishermen community by providing them with free well-equipped, larger and safer boats with powerful engines, free professional seafarer training, free

tuition and scholarship to the fishermen's children, new job opportunities with stable income and employment benefits, financial aid in the form of ex-gratia payments, new jetties and upgraded on-shore facilities, aquaculture opportunities and the establishment of a cooperative to protect fishermen's commercial welfare and create business opportunities for the local community.

"Furthermore, 200 days of satellite images have shown that local fishermen have been more active fishing outside of the PSI area. This is independently corroborated with satellite images from the Malaysia Space Agency."

PIC said the social impact assessment conducted for PSI found that 79 per cent of the state's residents, including fishermen, supported the development. About 74.8 per cent of the interviewed fishermen expressed agreement with the PSI project.

The Department of Environment received 93 per cent positive feedback regarding the PSI project from the 3,464 recorded responses during the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) public display period from May 20 to June 18, 2022.

PIC also gave its assurance that the PSI project was designed with a climate adaptation strategy according to the guidelines and studies from the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), National Hydraulic Research Institute of Malaysia, the Low Carbon Cities Framework, the Royal HaskoningDHV of Netherlands and the Danish Hydraulic Institute.