KEMENTERIAN TENAGA DAN SUMBER ASLI

KERATAN SURAT KHABAR

SURAT KHABAR	:	NST			
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Send your letters to
Letters Editor,
The New Straits Times Press (M) Bhd,
31, Jalan Riong, 59100 Kuala Lumpur or
email letters@nst.com.my (Tel: 03-2056 9411).
A letter must have a writer's name, signature, home address, phone and MyKad numbers. It should ideally not be more than 500 words.
The editor reserves the right to edit a letter for clarity and length.

LETTERS

CONSERVATION

SAVING OUR WILDLIFE

THE Wildlife Conservation Society Malaysia Programme (WCS Malaysia) is heartened by the news that the Wildlife Conservation (Amendment) Bill 2021 has been passed in the Dewan Rakyat recently, which provides heftier punishments for wildlife offenders.

Some of the notable amendments include an increase in fines of up to RM1 million for certain offences and jail terms of up to 15 years for others.

WCS Malaysia commends the Energy and Natural Resources Ministry and the Department of Wildlife and National Parks for spearheading the effort to pass the bill and looks forward to it being gazetted to deter poachers.

There is also a need to increase enforcement personnel to patrol forests, beef up intelligence gathering and increase capacity-building on gathering evidence in order to prosecute wildlife offenders.

This is critical as we can have the best laws, yet still lose this fight to conserve wildlife without sufficient enforcement capacity and resources to enforce the laws.

In the past few years, the government had initiated major initiatives to curb poaching and wildlife crimes. The Biodiversity Protection and Patrolling Programme has been set up to mobilise hundreds of patrollers consisting of veteran army personnel and Orang Asli.

This is one of the most significant initiatives for on-the-ground protection of wildlife, with active the participation of environmental non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

This has to be sustained in the long term by enabling permanent hired positions to not only ensure consistent and sufficient boots on the ground but also as a means of sustained livelihood and empowerment of Orang Asli as stewards of conservation.

Another notable initiative is Operasi Bersepadu Khazanah, led by the Royal Malaysia Police (PDRM) and the Department of Wildlife and National Parks with the participation of other enforcement agencies and environmental NGOs.

Earlier this year, Operasi Bersepadu Khazanah won international recognition when it emerged as one of the winners of the 2020 Asia Environmental Enforcement Awards for its role in arresting 87 wildlife offenders, destroying 460 wire snares and carrying out seizures worth RM2.7 million.

This is another commendable initiative, but to strengthen these efforts, WCS Malaysia hopes that the formation of a Wildlife Crime Unit under PDRM could be activated to aid enforcement, as well as intelligence gathering on wildlife poaching and trade syndicates in which PDRM is well equipped and trained.

No less significant is the announcement by Energy and Natural Resources Minister Datuk Seri Takiyuddin Hassan on the formation of a National Conservation Task Force (MyTTF) chaired by the prime minister.

This is what environmental NGOs have been advocating for the past decade and it has come at a critical time when preliminary results from Malaysia's first National Tiger Survey show that there are fewer than 200 Malayan tigers left in the wild.

The formation of a Tiger Working Group (MyTWG) at the state level is also much welcome as land is a state issue and the efforts to save tigers need to include measures to halt habitat loss of tigers and restore connectivity in which states have the authority to do so.

Ultimately, how MyTTF and MyTWG structure themselves and work together will be crucial to ensure how executive decisions on policy, allocation of resources, enforcement and land management favourable for tiger conservation are implemented.



It is hoped that the Wildlife Conservation (Amendment) Bill 2021 will better protect our wildlife. PIC BY GHAZALI KORI

Our national symbol is on the line. We must pull out all the stops to protect them from going extinct.

Judging by the initiatives rolled out in the past two years and recent announcements, looks like Malaysia is headed in the right direction to make a strong stand that we will not tolerate wildlife poaching and illegal wildlife trade.

WCS Malaysia is hopeful that through these efforts, we stand a chance to curb the decline and eventually recover our tiger population, provided that these initiatives are backed by committed political will, sufficient funding and resource allocation, continuos multiagency cooperation, particularly PDRM, enhanced intelligence on wildlife poaching and trade syndicates that lead to arrests and prosecution, as well as unwavering commitments from states in halting natural forest clearing and fragmentation.

There is hope, but time is of essence and how well we execute the recently announced initiatives and plug in gaps will dictate how our wildlife will fare in the near future.

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