



## Ensuring Sustainable Logging Practices

Last update: 21/11/2017

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IPOH (Bernama) -- The world is currently moving towards sustainable logging practices in the bid to sustain the timber industry while preserving the integrity of forests and local ecosystems.

Malaysia itself has been employing the Selective Management System (SMS), one of the initiatives under Sustainable Forest Harvesting (SFM) which has been practiced in the country since 1901.

This writer and a group of journalists had the chance to witness the SMS practice at the Bukit Kinta Forest Reserve in Hulu Kinta, Perak during a programme organised by the Malaysian Timber Council (MTC) from 27 to 28 Sept.

### SUSTAINABLE LOGGING

Sustainable logging has long been practiced across the world. In developed countries, the word 'logging' has been replaced with 'harvesting' to symbolise the industry's rigorous standards in the extraction of timber from the forests.

In Malaysia, SFM is governed by several guidelines, including the Forestry Manual 2003, the MS-ISO 9001:2008 - Management of Sustained Yield Timber Harvesting in Permanent Reserved Forest of Inland Natural Forest, the Code of Practices for Forest Harvesting in Inland Natural Forest in Peninsular Malaysia and Guidelines for Forest Road Construction 2010.

This is done to ensure the practices of the timber industry in Malaysia is at par with the countries that pledge to adhere to the ITTO Objective 2000.

The ITTO, or International Tropical Timber Organisation, has members from 73 countries that produce and consume timber products. Producing countries include the Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia, Brazil, Guatemala, Peru, Congo, Gabon, Ghana, Liberia and Togo.

Consuming countries, meanwhile, include Albania, Australia, China, Austria, Denmark, Finland, Italy, Latvia, the Netherlands, Poland, Spain, Japan, South Korea and the U.S.

The ITTO Objective 2000 is a commitment by member countries to move as rapidly as possible towards achieving exports of tropical timber and timber products from sustainably managed sources.

It is hoped that the commitment would raise the capacity of government, industry and communities to manage their forests and add value to their forest products, and to maintain and increase the transparency of the trade, and access to international markets.

### HARVESTING, NOT FELLING

Under the SMS practice, trees are only harvested when they have reached maturity.

"This is determined by the diameter size and tree type. For dipterocarps, the diameter must be a minimum of 65cm.

"For non-dipterocarps, the minimum diameter is 55cm. The size correlates with the tree's level of growth," said the Senior Assistant Director of the Inland Forest Management Section of the Forestry Department of Peninsular Malaysia (JPSM) Yusoff Muda.

After a plot has been fully harvested, it would be left untouched for between 25 and 60 years to allow surrounding trees and shrubs in the area to regrow and allow young trees grown for timber reach maturity.

Adherence to SFM was not only limited to the logging process, said the Forest Management Division Manager of the Malaysia Timber Certification Council, Siti Syaliza Mustapha. Social impact assessment was also another criterion of the SFM.

"Social Impact Assessment (SIA) has to be done before, during and after harvesting of forest products. This is to assess, for example, the impact of the activity on the lives of the indigenous community and the policy that ensures a quota for workers from among local settlers in a forest harvesting project so that their economic activities will be preserved," she said.

### STEP BY STEP

The JPSM would audit a timber harvesting site before loggers are allowed into the area.

They would record the number and types of trees present and mark them by category. There are three general categories, namely the mother tree (reserve tree), trees that can be harvested and trees that can be felled to make way for a route to the site.

Each tree would be tagged with a special colour code while the mother tree would be spray painted to clearly distinguish it during the harvesting process.

Loggers are only allowed to harvest trees marked for the purpose. If loggers do as much as to even scratch the mother tree, action would be taken upon them.

Before trees are harvested, it would first be measured and its size recorded. When the media entourage were on site, the harvesting of a Rengas tree with a diameter of 65cm was in progress.

Harvested timber would carry the relevant tags and this would help with the recognition and declaration process when the logs are being carted off.

JPSM officers would also conduct continual monitoring and surveillance on loggers to ensure that they adhere to the stipulated guidelines.

### DECLARATION

All harvested and chopped logs would be brought via lorry to a field supervised by JPSM.

This is the Forest Checking Station, where JPSM officers would conduct a final inspection before issuing a transfer permit which allows for the logs to be ferried off to processing mills.

This is also where sale transactions between loggers and buyers, most of whom are manufacturers, would take place. This is because the latter would like to first inspect the quality of the timber before purchasing them.

At the station, JPSM officers calculate taxes imposed on logging companies. The amount imposed would depend on the trees harvested.

Once everything has been verified to be in order, the officers would use an iron stamp to etch into the logs the officer-in-charge's identity number.

The transfer permit, meanwhile, allows JPSM to track the destination of the logs to ensure that they reach the intended destination.

This is necessary as every log has a 'birth certificate' that indicates it was harvested according to SFM standards and prevent it from being smuggled out of the country.