



back

## Kurup's Ministry should act first: Dompok

### Jason Santos

KOTA KINABALU: The worsening pollution of the Kinabatangan – Sabah's longest river which supports myriad iconic wildlife including proboscis monkeys, orang utans, pygmy elephants and birds, among others – cannot be blamed wholly on palm oil mills.

Instead, Plantations Industries and Commodities Minister, Tan Sri Bernard Dompok, said the question that should be asked is what the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment was doing about it since the Department of Environment (DoE) comes under it.

Dompok said a study by the Malaysian Palm Oil Board (MPOB) revealed that Palm Oil Mill Effluent (POME) – a factor causing the high levels of Biological Oxygen Demand (BOD3) – was not just from agriculture but also human and other activity.

"A thorough check to find out the real causes is vital," he said.

Dompok said he would allow MPOB to exercise its authority to shut down and suspend licenses of errant millers but the recommendations must come from the Natural Resources and Environment Ministry.

Tourism operators and non-government organisations (NGOs) recently lambasted both Dompok and Natural Resources and Environment Ministry Deputy Minister Tan Sri Joseph Kurup of literally doing nothing about the effluents from mills being discharged into the Kinabatangan.

Both are Sabah's representatives at the Federal Ministerial level.

They said tourists who pay top dollar to watch the Kinabatangan wildlife were aghast at seeing black goeey



Dompok



Kurup

substances flowing near their boats. The operators fear that it would certainly kill the wildlife and, thus, the tourism industry that raked in RM5 billion to Sabah last year.

"My Ministry does not have the authority to go and say that these places are polluted. My role is to allow the MPOB to close down millers. But that has to be initiated by the people who are controlling the environment.

"We cannot pass judgement on them (millers) on what have been discharged," he said, while reiterating that he was on "the same page" with those who are against environmental violations.

"This will be checked by the environmental authorities and I suppose the Malaysian Palm Oil Board when they are required to check on this."

Dompok a meeting was held with the relevant NGOs where he made clear his position on the matter and tried to ensure that at all times millers, among other regulations, kept the prescribed DoE 20ppm (the strict amount of BOD3 discharged into the river) requirement.

In a July expedition to Sukau, MPOB Director-General Datuk Dr Choo Yuen May said the board's study on the Kinabatangan Basin confirmed millers to be a major source of BOD3 generation, at 55 per cent.

The biggest contributor was "Production Forest" that was kept under a non-point source with a total of 66 per cent. Her statistics also revealed that BOD3 were also generated from the population areas, agriculture and including the lodges and resorts.

Dompok said he was certain Kurup was well informed of the issues and would assist Kurup's Ministry on enforcement, including shutting down the culprit mills.