

# Wetlands centre planned at Lahad Datu

**KOTA KINABALU:** A collaboration towards wetland conservation is proposed to POIC Sabah Sdn. Bhd by the Sabah Wetlands Conservation Society (SWCS).

The collaboration explored between POIC and Sabah Wetlands Conservation Society includes the setting up of a Centre of Excellence for Wetlands Conservation.

The establishment of a wetlands Centre of Excellence will be a platform to raise awareness and attract experts to conduct feasibility studies in the wetlands ecosystem conservation.

This will prepare the grounds in the long run for the proposal of a RAMSAR Site near the proposed Lahad Datu International Airport which is being envisaged as an integral infrastructure to transform the economy of Sabah's east coast.



Sabah Wetlands Conservation Society president Datuk Haji Zainie Aucasa (sixth from right) and from his left, Datuk Seri Panglima Yong Teck Lee, chairman of POIC and Datuk Fredian Gan, CEO of POIC.

"We recognise where we are, and that wetlands are an important part of the marine ecology that must be handled responsibly. Thus, we welcome organisations such as Sabah Wetlands to work with us," said POIC CEO Datuk Fredian Gan, following a meeting with a Sabah Wetlands delegation in Kota

Kinabalu on Oct 28.

"Our idea of inclusive collaboration is to have stakeholders such as the State Forestry Department, Environment Protection Department (EPD), Department of Environment (DOE), Land and Survey Department, NGOs and the local communities with us

from the beginning, and not as an afterthought."

Also in the meeting were Sabah Wetlands President Datuk Haji Zainie Aucasa, POIC Sabah chairman Datuk Seri Panglima Yong Teck Lee and senior officials from both parties.

Ramsar Convention, a global initiative for wetlands

conservation, was born in 1971. It has more than 170 member countries worldwide.

Wetlands marked for Ramsar protection are called Ramsar sites, after the city in Iran where the idea was mooted.

There are two Ramsar sites in Sabah, in Lower Kinabatangan Wetlands and Kota Kinabalu

Wetlands.

If a Ramsar status is granted at Lahad Datu, it will be third site in Sabah.

"With sustainability being increasingly used as a yardstick on a company's corporate profile, growth path and business models, it is imperative that we at POIC Sabah consider sustainability and environmental issues in our planning," Fredian added.

Meanwhile, the proposed Lahad Datu international airport is being planned to be sited at Silabukan, about 30km east of Lahad Datu town, on land mostly under state-owned Sawit Kinabalu oil palm company.

The project, to be developed in the concept of a transportation hub incorporating a ferry terminal and land transport infrastructure, is expected to generate much economic knock-on effects in the BIMP-EAGA region.