

## **Chief Minister of Sabah, Malaysia, Shafie Apdal, speech at the launch of the new survey on Sabah's iconic wildlife**

I want to announce today that I have agreed to a new survey on Bornean elephants and orangutans in Sabah. With the support of the Malaysian Palm Oil Council and the Malaysian Timber Council, data collected from the survey will be vital to identifying key areas that need protection in order for the iconic orangutan and Bornean elephant to thrive in Sabah.

The data is considered crucial to the finalization of the state's land-use plan and serve the dual purposes of creating a sustainable environment for major industries to work in while conserving natural areas to support the eco-tourism industry.

The research groups include conservationists, scientists as well as the Sabah Wildlife Department. The project duration of eighteen months will also seek solutions to mitigate human wildlife conflict in Sabah.

This is a project I have wanted to initiate since I came into office. We know there are problems with the current land use plan which is why there are so many reports of human-wildlife conflict. But in order to get to this point, my government had to address other background issues. We need to correct these issues before we could get to this historic moment where Sabah will finalize its land use plans to create a sustainable economy.

This is a historic moment for conservation in Sabah that has been made possible with the certification our palm oil industry through the Malaysian Sustainable Palm Oil (MSPO) initiative. Never before has there been an opportunity for our major industries in palm oil and timber to collaborate with conservation groups and scientists to create a solid plan that reflects the needs of all Sabahans as well as the needs of our iconic orangutan and elephants.

The Sabah government is looking to protect more forests to enhance our natural asset. This will serve to increase the appeal of Sabah for nature-seeking tourists who are a major source of revenue for Sabah as well as the living environment for all Sabahans.

Sabah is committed to protecting our natural inheritance and my government is looking to rehabilitate and recover essential ecosystems that have been lost to mismanagement by the previous government.

This is why this survey on orangutans and elephants will be an invaluable guide to finalizing our land-use plan.

We know the industry stakeholders in palm oil and timber are ready to support the government in this aspect but rather than going out blindly, the Sabah government wants firm science and data behind its decisions to rehabilitate critical areas.

Too much time has been lost since the last survey on orangutan and elephants in our state. This time, we must get conservation right.

I wish to record my sincere appreciation and gratitude to YB Teresa Kok, the Minister for Primary Industries for her role in this endeavour.

End speech.