

# 'EIA APPROVED FOR FOREST FARMING'

Approval not for durian plantation, says DoE director-general

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**T**HE Department of Environment (DoE) confirmed that an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) was approved for the Gunung Inas plantation project for forest farming.

Director-general Wan Abdul Latiff Wan Jaffar said the approval was not for a durian plantation.

He said the EIA report titled "Detailed Environmental Impact Assessment for the Development of Forest Plantation in Gunung Inas Forest Reserve Mukim Bakai, Kupang and Pulai, District of Baling, Kedah Darul Aman" was approved on July 25, 2013.

"The EIA was approved after the EIA Technical Review Committee was satisfied that the prevention measures, mitigation and pollution containment were sufficient," he said in a statement released in Putrajaya on Saturday.

According to Wan Abdul Latiff, the committee comprised agencies at the federal and state levels as well as experts from stipulated fields.

Among the agencies were the Malaysian Peninsular Forestry Department, state Department of Drainage and Irrigation, Agriculture Department, Baling district office, state Mineral and Geosciences Department, state Wildlife and Park Department,



A bird's-eye view of the Musang King durian plantation on Gunung Inas in Baling on Wednesday. PIC BY DANIAL SAAD

state Environmental Department and Baling District and Land Office.

"In the early stages, the proposed project was undertaken by Kedah Menteri Besar Incorporated, JV Kedah Agro Plantation Sdn Bhd before it was changed to Aman Mega Sdn Bhd," he said.

Wan Abdul Latiff said the approval was for the development of forest farming in an area not exceeding 5,000ha.

He said the approval comprised three components, namely logging and silviculture (replanting

of timber species or existing plants); total felling of trees for timber cloning; and the development of forest farming comprising mono-crop forest plantation for the production of rubber trees and latex.

"Based on the DoE's investigation, a Notice of Order was issued on March 10, 2021, to the project owner when it was found there was a change to the approved concept at the site, following the planting of durian trees and not cloned timber trees.

"The latest enforcement check

by the Kedah DoE on May 24 revealed that no tree-seedling activity was carried out in Compartment 8 of Gunung Inas Forest Reserve in Baling.

"There was also no active logging or replanting during the Movement Control Order until today as the activity did not receive approval from the International Trade and Industry Ministry," he said.

However, Wan Abdul Latiff said ground plants had been used to cover the exposed site.

He added that the state DoE

had also been ordered to continue monitoring and carry out periodic enforcement to ensure that all development complied with regulations.

"I also wish to remind the owners of projects that are subject to an EIA to always comply with the approval terms and existing laws," he said.

The *New Straits Times* yesterday reported that the company allegedly operating the Musang King durian plantation in Gunung Inas claimed that the EIA for the site had already been carried out.

The company's spokesman, however, claimed that he had no information on whether the EIA was given for a Musang King plantation or forest farming.

He also claimed that the project was not directly awarded to the company as his employer had bought it over from another company.

The spokesman declined to comment on claims that Musang King plantation activities had contributed to the massive floods in Kupang on Monday, which inundated 12 villages.

He claimed that logging had been carried out in the area for more than 10 years before the company bought over the site.

On Thursday, Kedah Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Muhammad Sanusi Md Nor asked whether the joint-venture company that developed the Musang King durian plantation in Gunung Inas had carried out an EIA beforehand.

Sanusi was reported as saying that getting the EIA approval would require strict compliance, including disallowing any development 300m above sea level.

He had said that these doubts prompted his administration to issue a stop-work order to the company in July 2020.