

'EFT incentive will help protect forests'

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ALOR SETAR: The RM70mil Ecological Fiscal Transfer (EFT) incentive for state governments announced in Budget 2021 means states will be able to strengthen efforts to ensure the sustainability of forest resources.

Kedah Timber Association (KTA) chairman Amin Mokhtar said the EFT incentive could spur more people to look at forests in a more holistic way.

"There will be more avenues to plant natural timber species and hopefully also set up a seed vault of rare trees.

"We also hope to see a soil bank created to preserve soils critical for the survival of rare trees," said Amin.

He said KTA hoped this fund could also be used to hire more forestry officers to manage and protect the jungles, on top of digitalising forestry work procedures to channel man-hours into conservation efforts.

"We must also devise programmes



that will allow states to unlock other economic values from the forest such as tourism, minerals and infrastructure development," added Amin.

He said the EFT incentive was particularly important for Kedah, which is burdened with the task of setting aside and maintaining parts of the vast Ulu Muda Forest Reserve as a water catchment for itself, Penang and Perlis.

"We hope this will establish a more level playing field for conservation efforts in Kedah. The EFT incentive can partly solve the dilemma faced by Kedah in having to choose between conservation and economic loss.

"We hope the fund can be used to build a foundation for the development of an alternative industry for

traditional loggers to move into.

"That way, the wealth of the state's economic sectors do not have to be destroyed and can be re-channeled as an investment for a more sustainable ecological economy," he added.

On Friday, Finance Minister Tengku Datuk Seri Zafrul Tengku Abdul Aziz announced that the EFT was meant for states to secure the country's biodiversity and was part of the Economic Development, Infrastructure and Welfare (Tahap) grants that states could apply for.

Originally at RM350mil, Tengku Zafrul said the government would increase it to RM400mil.

In 2018, the states that received Tahap grants were Kedah (RM24.4mil), Penang (RM13.5mil), Kelantan (RM28.5mil), Sarawak (RM23.8mil), Terengganu (RM27.7mil), Perlis (RM23.3mil) and Perak (RM21mil).

Tengku Zafrul also said an extra RM20mil was allocated to deploy 500 ex-soldiers, ex-policemen and Orang Asli to patrol jungles to check on encroachment and poaching.