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Threat to mangrove swamps

STOP IT: Control aquaculture land

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THE government has been urged to check the growth of the aquaculture industry to prevent the destruction of mangrove swamps and protect the coastal eco-systems.

In making the call, Sahabat Alam Malaysia (SAM) president S.M. Mohamed Idris said 2010 figures showed that 7.7 million hectares of land had been alienated for aquaculture.

He said the ever expanding number of aquaculture ponds eventually caused mangrove swamps to become the biggest casualty. Citing what has happened in Perak as an example, he said an analysis of

changes in the mangrove areas in the state by the Forest Research Institute of Malaysia (FRIM) showed a notable decline of 64 per cent in the extent and distribution of mangrove swamps from 1989 to 2009.

The main cause of the decline was the promotion of aquaculture development.

"We are concerned with these trends because it involves land

clearing and conversion, particularly mangrove forests to build aquaculture ponds.

"These aquaculture projects have serious impact on coastal eco-systems, affecting those who are dependent on the natural environment, especially fishermen," he said.

Idris said there were also serious weaknesses in terms of government policies on the aquaculture industry as there were no special legal provisions to regulate it.

The biggest enforcement concern included legislation to control discharge or wastewater effluents from aquaculture ponds.

He said although there was a code for "good aquaculture practice", it was not legally binding.

"All this issues are proof that the current methods of modern aquaculture are in serious need of reform. The industry is predominantly export oriented while our environment is adversely affected."

"In this perspective, the economic value of the aquaculture exports must not take precedence over the broader social, economic, and environmental value of the coastal zone."

"Aquaculture projects have serious impact on coastal eco-systems."
S. M. Mohamad Idris
 SAM president