



Zainie (sixth from right) and on his left, Yong and Gan.

NGO wants to collaborate with POIC on conservation

KOTA KINABALU: Sabah Wetlands Conservation Society (SWCS) has proposed collaborating with POIC Sabah Sdn Bhd in wetland conservation.

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

The establishment of the 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.

"We recognise where we are, and that wetlands are an important part of marine ecology that must be handled responsibly. Thus, we welcome organisations such

as SWCS to work with us.

"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," said POIC Sabah CEO, Datuk Fredian Gan, following a meeting with a SWCS delegation.

SWCS President, Datuk Haji Zainie Aucasa, POIC Sabah Chairman, Datuk Seri Yong Teck Lee and senior officials from both parties were also present in the meeting.

Presently, Sabah has two Ramsar Sites, namely the Lower Kinabatangan Wetlands and Kota Kinabalu Wetlands. If a Ramsar status is granted in Lahad Datu, it will be the third such site in the State.

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.

"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," said Gan.

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.

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