

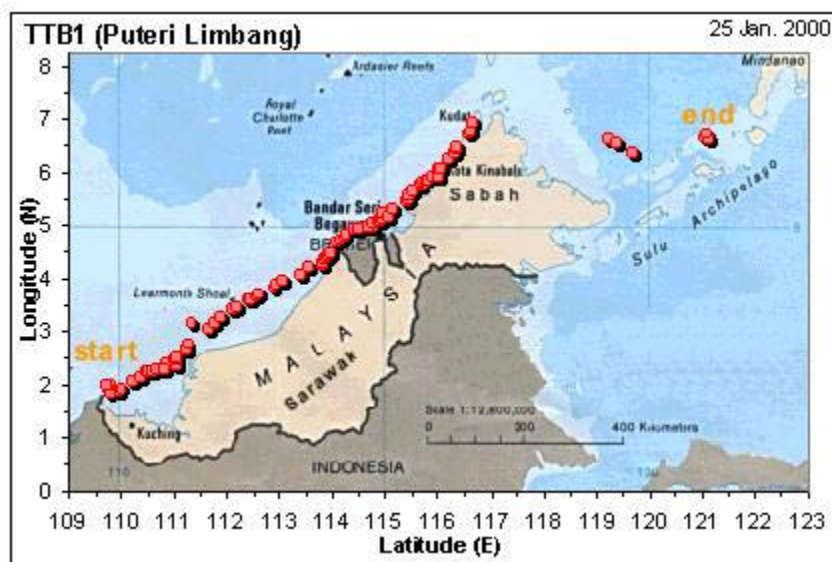
PAGE 2 FRIDAY DECEMBER 3 1999

## Charting migration path of marine turtles Wong : Research will be successful

Reports by Wilson Luke, Frankie Lian Labang, Aden Nagrace, Sharon Ling, Christie Aili and Harun Jau

PHOTOGRAPHS : MOHD RADZI and JOHN CHAN

KUCHING - Environment and Public Health Minister Datuk Amar James Wong is confident the Talang-Satang Turtle Research Working Group would determine the feeding grounds and successfully chart the migration path of marine turtles tagged with satellite tracking device by end of February next year.



Launched this year, the satellite transmitter called PTT (Platform Transmitter Terminal) is glued to the dorsal carapace or shell of marine turtles when their nesting ends on the beach. When the turtle is on the surface, above the water, the exposed PT will send a burst of radio signal carrying information on the identity of the transmitter and other sensor data.

He told reporters at the Dewan Undangan Negeri foyer yesterday this was feasible as proven by a marine turtle he had named 'Puteri Limbang' being detected in the waters of the Philippines, northeast from the Sabah turtle islands. Two others were also found swimming in the same waters.

A second marine turtle named 'Puteri Talang' by Datuk Law Hieng Ding who is Science, Technology and Environment Minister, was last detected at Pulau Banggi off the northern tip of Sabah. Another has been detected in the Celebes Island near Pulau Padjang in Indonesia (1,800 kilometres away from

Pulau Satang) and is still there now.

Datuk Amar Wong was pleased that 500 reef balls, positioned along the coast of Sarawak right up to the coast of Sabah in September last year, had prevented marine turtles from being caught and killed by trawlers furtively lurking in the open sea.

The project, funded by the IRPA grant, is a collaborative effort of the Marine Wildlife Unit, Sarawak Forest Department, and the Sea Turtle Research Unit, Universiti Putra Malaysia Terengganu.

The Minister appealed for financial assistance from the private sector to ensure that the project did not end there, as satellite batteries latched onto the marine turtles were expected to run out in two months' time. He said the ministry was also aiming to increase the number of reef balls to 10,000 from the present 500. Each reef ball costs RM500.

He said that based on these findings, more concrete steps could be taken to protect the feeding grounds of marine turtles and reduce their mortality by careless fishermen.

Other information gathered from this study, he said, would give the research group a better understanding of the biology, ecology and the effectiveness of efforts to conserve sea turtles in the region. According to Datuk Amar Wong, as a result of protection accorded by the reef balls positioned at Pulau Satang Besar, the research group found 226 nests this year compared to only 60 last year.

Up to 1,000 nests found at Pulau Talang Kecil are expected to increase to 1,400 by end of December this year. To date, the number of nests stands at 1,300. He revealed that this year, the number of turtle eggs laid had reached 120,000 (from 100,000 last year).