

Abstract No: A-457

PLANTING OIL PALM IN PEAT LAND: MY EXPERIENCE, CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Abdul Hamed Sepawi

Sarawak Oil Palm Plantation Owners Association

** Corresponding author: lsw@taann.com.my*

This paper attempts to provide a comprehensive, albeit compact, account of the development of oil palm plantations on peatland in Sarawak and the prospect it offers. The writer firmly believes that palm oil is the cheapest seed oil to produce oils and that it also has an important role to play in carbon sync for purposes of sequestration of gaseous CO₂ into solid carbon in the form of biomass and this ensures the sustainability of production of the oil it produces. In tracing the course of its development, the writer brings to light some of the major issues and challenges confronting the pioneers who dared to take their dreams to places on which many feared to tread. He shares his experience in planting oil palm on peatland and later efforts to meet the compliance standards set by MSPO and RSPO. Writing in the first person, the writer provides an insightful account of the early years when he was part of a pioneer group who ventured into planting oil palm on peat land. His is a narrative that brings to light an experience that saw him and the pioneer group taking a courageous and bold step in exploiting the potential of peatland. They initiated new planting techniques and scientific innovations that would soon turn peatland once regarded as uncondutive to agriculture into arable land for large-scale plantations, where productivity has increased from 12 to 30 tons per hectare per year. The efforts paid dividends. Today, the oil palm industry in Sarawak bears witness to the success story of the planting of oil palm on peatland. But the journey ahead continues to face challenges from unfounded attacks and criticism from NGOs who demonise the palm oil industry in the face of the stiff competition it poses to the seed oil industry of Europe. The writer views the barrage of criticism arising from the competition as reminiscent of genocide acts waged by the Dutch East India Company against inhabitants of the Maluku Islands to exert a monopoly over the spice trade in the region. To the writer, the tactics employed by present-day NGOs to demonise palm oil are no different in their hideousness and patronising attitude. In this context, the palm oil producers must stand united and remain committed to the pursuit of a sustainable palm oil industry.

Keywords: -