Survey Finds That Majority of Sabah’s Voters Are Concerned About The Environment

16 September 2020, Kota Kinabalu: As we reflect upon the spirit of Malaysia Day, the theme this year, Malaysia Prihatin’ (Malaysia Cares) reminds us to give equal care about the environment as the country continues to move forward. At a time of increasing challenges around the globe and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on our economy, it is crucial to consider the importance of environmental protection and sustainable development to ensure a healthy and resilient recovery for people and nature in Malaysia.

This is also a relevant theme for Sabahans who will go to vote for their next government on the 26th of September. On this note, WWF-Malaysia had launched a public survey inquiring Sabahans about their environmental concerns and areas in which they are most concerned about. This follows WWF-Malaysia’s recent open letter to Sabah politicians, urging them to include environmental commitments in their party manifestos.

The environmental survey, which was released on 27th August 2020 via digital media and messaging service had garnered a total of 1,239 respondents from various age groups and backgrounds. Majority of the respondents belong to the 31-45 age group (42%), followed by below 30 years (29%) and 46-60 years (22%). Only 7% are in the age group of 61 and above.

The survey included questions on the level of concern for the environment, the topics of concern as well as whether or not the environment will factor into a voter’s decision on which candidate they would vote for.

Out of 85% respondents that planned to vote in the upcoming State Election, 80% expressed that they would like to know more about the political parties' environmental aspirations for Sabah State. This number also resonates with those who would consider the environment as one of the factors that will decide their votes (71%).

Sabahans, in general, are concerned about the environment. A majority of respondents comprising 72% across all age groups expressed that they are “very concerned” about the state of our natural environment, covering a wide range of topics including marine and terrestrial issues.

While respondents aged 61 years and above make up for the smallest group of respondents in this survey, 79% of them are most concerned about the environment. This is followed by the age group of 31-35 years (74%), 46-60 years (70%) and under 30 years (69%) who were very concerned about environmental issues.
Plastics and waste management, loss of coral reefs, and deforestation are three major issues of particular concern to the respondents. Other environmental concerns such as unsustainable infrastructure, air pollution, climate change and unsustainable agriculture followed.

"Our fellow Sabahans have voiced their concerns and it is clear that the environment is an important aspect for them. But our actions cannot stop here. We as Sabahans need to continue to use our voices and share our concerns. As our future wellbeing is dependent on the state of the environment, we should continue to hold our political leaders to a high standard and accountability to ensure that Sabah’s rich biodiversity continues to be protected and conserved for the benefit of people and nature."

“We hope that the results of this survey can serve as a platform for politicians and leaders to truly understand the concerns of the people and find effective solutions to tackle environmental issues,” said WWF-Malaysia Head of Conservation Sabah, Dr Robbecca Jumin.

In addition to general environmental concerns, respondents had expressed concern over several specific ongoing projects such as the Tanjung Aru Eco Development, Papar Dam project, Kalabakan deforestation and Balambangan silica mining.

“Although the main aim of this activity is to inform both political parties and voters, this information will also serve as a guide to the potential conservation programme and advocacy for WWF-Malaysia to respond to Sabahan’s environmental concerns. We hope the insight of this survey will benefit everyone, this generation and the next,” said Dr Robbecca Jumin.

WWF-Malaysia also reiterates its call to political parties to include bold yet achievable environmental commitments in their manifestos. In its open letter shared with all political parties in Sabah last month, WWF-Malaysia outlined its six key environmental asks. They include achieving the targets of 30% Totally Protected Area of landmass and 13% or more Marine Protected Areas in Sabah.

Other asks include ensuring green growth in Sabah; environmental sustainability and biodiversity protection in major infrastructure and development projects in Sabah; beefing up anti-poaching efforts; and outlining plans to increase the resilience of Sabah’s people, nature and economy, in light of a possible future that includes zoonotic and climate change disasters.

WWF-Malaysia is a non-partisan environmental NGO operating in Sabah since the 1970s. Regardless of the political outcomes from the state election, WWF-Malaysia champions the protection of biodiversity for the benefit of people and nature.

WWF-Malaysia would like to take this opportunity to thank all 1,239 respondents who participated in this public survey.
Figures

Figure 1: Age group of survey respondents

Figure 2: Percentage of respondents who would like to know more about the political parties' environmental aspirations for Sabah state
Figure 3: Percentage of respondents who would consider the environment as one of the factors that decide their vote.

Figure 4: Respondents expressing their concerns about the natural environment in general.
Figure 5: Environmental topics in which respondents are particularly concerned about

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About WWF-Malaysia
WWF-Malaysia (World Wide Fund for Nature-Malaysia) was established in Malaysia in 1972. It currently runs more than 90 projects covering a diverse range of environmental conservation and protection work, from saving endangered species such as tigers and turtles, to protecting our highland forests, rivers and seas. The national conservation organisation also undertakes environmental education and advocacy work to achieve its conservation goals. Its mission is to stop the degradation of the earth’s natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature, by conserving the nation’s biological diversity, ensuring that the use of renewable natural resources is sustainable, and promoting the reduction of pollution and wasteful consumption. For latest news and media resources, visit [http://www.wwf.org.my/media_and_information/media_centre/](http://www.wwf.org.my/media_and_information/media_centre/)

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