

Monday, August 22 2005,

Galloping to seahorse rescue

**JOHOR BARU, Sun**

**The Port of Tanjung Pelepas (PTP) is willing to work with a group of conservationists to save a seagrass bed at Tanjung Kupang which is a habitat of seahorses.**

The eight-hectare area is located within the port waters on the eastern side of the Pulai estuary, a place that is earmarked for development.

PTP has asked the Save Our Seahorses (SOS) Action Committee to submit a proposal on ways to protect the area, which is also a feeding ground for sea cows and storks.

SOS consultant marine biologist Choo Chee Kuang, a pioneer researcher on the seahorse population in Johor, said the seagrass bed — the largest in the country — should be regarded as a national heritage.

"As a breeding area rich in marine life, it provides an important source of livelihood for the coastal fishing community. Re-planting a seagrass bed of this size may cost close to RM3 million," Choo said. He added that the seagrass bed also helped prevent coastal erosion.

A survey conducted by him indicated only about 400 seahorses left in the Pulai estuary.

Choo was speaking to reporters at Kampung Melayu Arang after a media trip organised by SOS. Present were Malaysian Nature Society chairman Lim Teong Kheng, PTP deputy chief executive Capt Ismail Hashim and Kg Melayu Arang village security and development chairman Mohd Ali Sarno.

Ismail said PTP would have to study the proposal by SOS, adding it was supportive of the group's cause.

But he said other development was also coming up in the area, hence any action taken would have to be in line with the State Government's initiatives.

Mohd Ali claimed fishermen had reported a 50 per cent drop in catches since the area was developed six years ago.