

MoD mulls extending 'No Plastic Bag' drive



(Top) Ministry of Development Permanent Secretary Haji Mohd Rozan Dato Paduka Haji Mohd Yunos (R) talking to shoppers during the first day of the 'No Plastic Bag Weekend'. Wanton use of plastic bags is causing environmental havoc, even to marine life (Above). Brunei aims to reach a national recycling rate of 15% by 2015. Pictures: BT file, EPA

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THE Ministry of Development (MoD) is looking to extend the "No Plastic Bag Weekend" initiative to cover weekdays as well, following a large amount of positive feedback, said an official.

Speaking to The Brunei Times, Martinah Hj Tamit, head of the Environmental Planning and Management Division under MoD, said the extension of the policy over weekdays is definite, however, surveys are being conducted to find out how best to do it.

"Yes we are planning to extend (the initiative) because we have already received so many (positive) responses from the public (asking) why not have it for the whole week, they are very supportive."

Working towards the expansion of the environmentally conscious policy, the ministry is conducting surveys and monitoring the 18 major retailers who signed up for the initiative to

collect data for a three-month review.

"Based on the survey we (are conducting), if the response is encouraging, then maybe we could initially add one or two more days for example. Maybe Friday, Saturday and Sunday."

A team of personnel from the department is monitoring the retail stores daily to find out whether members of the public are complaining, bringing in their own bags, or if the stores are breaching the agreement.

"We will do it gradually, we don't want to do things drastically and put the supermarkets in a (tough position)," said Martinah.

Asked if the ministry was working on any plans to introduce incentives for the public to use reusable bags, Martinah told the paper that the ministry was "working with the supermarkets".

For example, "Hua Ho has a membership card where they could add points to those who bring their own (reusable shopping) bags", she added.

She related that the difference in price for the reusable bags could discourage some customers from buying the expensive ones, but conceded that the price is fitting as the bags vary in size.

Martinah further said that the department will be giving out more free reusable bags, as they did during the launch of the initiative, on Saturday in Belait and Tutong.

The Sultanate will be approaching its third weekend observing a plastic-free initiative, as it was launched by the MoD on March 26 to reach a national recycling rate of 15 per cent by 2015 and 20 per cent by 2020.

The agreement with 18 major retailers reads that plastic bags distributed upon the sale of products will be withheld on weekends from March 26 onwards.

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