

Preface

Malaysia has a rich expanse of aquatic resources, including rivers, lakes, reservoirs, swamps, mangroves, estuaries, lagoons, and the seas. The aquatic environment and its resources form a vital lifeline for the Malaysian people, supplying them with food and water for domestic, agricultural, and industrial use, medicine, energy and means of transport. Major wetland habitats cover more than 10% of the country's land area, which is bordered by nearly 5000 km of coastline and 549,500 km² of marine waters. Most Malaysians live in the vicinity of and derive much of their wealth from these aquatic resources.

Despite their crucial role, aquatic resources in Malaysia faces many challenges including siltation, water pollution, multiple-use conflict, loss of mangrove and other forests, coral reef degradation, habitat loss, declining in biodiversity and more. The highly diverse nature of these habitats and the equally dispersed nature of the institutional mechanisms set up to ensure their sustainability, means that the rate of their degradation and the depth of the management that they currently enjoy vary extensively. However, it has become increasingly clear that ecosystem health issues have taken on a major profile where their sustainability is concerned, often to the point where they have become critical impediments to achievement of national environmental and developmental goals. These stressors on aquatic resources are not expected to abate in the near future, but on the contrary will intensify due to the expected developmental activities such as: tourism, industry, housing, agriculture, fishing, and island and port development.

Attempting to achieve a balance between legitimate economic development goals and environmental sustainability is an onerous task. This difficult task provides an excellent opportunity to fully understand and appreciate the exigencies that contribute to the conflicting issues and how they may co-exist in mutual harmony. For instance, where development is concerned, current emphasis has largely involved greater community participation in resource management and conservation to ensure a more equitable distribution of resource benefits. On the other hand where ecosystem health is concerned, the necessary information base that would enable sustainable development models or even informed decisions on resource use is not often available. This is particularly true for tropical ecosystems such those in Malaysia. Research in such ecosystems has been relatively recent and their complexity often limits the pace at which they can be studied in detail. In addition, the research is often dispersed and resource workers rarely have access to an integrated package of information that they can rely on in dealing with use issues.

This special issue of the journal AEHM attempts to echo such diverse concerns by bringing together a compendium of research papers focusing on the ecosystem health of Malaysian aquatic ecosystems, especially the manner by which development has continued to affect them, as well as the current management regimes that have been imposed on them. It is hoped that these papers will not only provoke further research into tropical ecosystem health in Malaysia, but also in other countries and climes, where the same issues strike a resonant chord. All submitted papers underwent the standard peer review process and the accepted manuscripts were revised by the authors which were then technically and linguistically edited by the AEHMS. The editorial committee has worked on the project for a considerable time since it was difficult initially to draft

authors for the special assignment. The process of reviewing and revising also consumed lots of time since most of the papers were very long, which required condensation and meticulous editing. We are indeed pleased that a nice compendium of 14 manuscripts arranged in two sections has resulted. We hope that this special issue will serve as a landmark publication not only useful for Malaysia but also other tropical countries with similar issues.

We take this opportunity to thank all authors for their patience and cooperation. Thanks are also due to several referees for their thorough reviews. The untiring efforts of Susan Blunt and Jennifer Lorimer of the AEHMS are greatly appreciated for the processing and the time consuming technical and copy editing of the manuscripts. We would also like to thank H. Niblock and M. Fitzpatrick (Fisheries & Oceans Canada) for their assistance in the copy editing of several manuscripts. Finally we are grateful to the Aquatic Ecosystem Health & Management Society (AEHMS) for its generous financial support of the entire project from its inception consisting of coordination, processing, and editing to the publication of this special issue.

M. Munawar,
Chief editor-AEHMS
Fisheries & Oceans
Canada

F. Md. Yusoff,
Guest editor
Department of Biology,
Universiti Putra
Malaysia

N. Gopinath,
Guest editor
Fanli Marine and
Consultancy Sdn. Bhd.