

AFI is aware of mangrove degradation and related environmental concerns in the Pitas/Bengkoka Peninsula area. In 2016, AFI signed an MOU with the Sabah Wetlands Conservation Society to provide research and conservation monitoring of mangrove areas on the Bengkoka peninsula. In later stages, the cooperation aims to work with local communities and schools to develop collaborations and capacity building. This MOU complements other ongoing partnerships and environmental projects underway across AFI's forest management unit.

Lack of clear land tenure and title is an ongoing issue in the area, and AFI is unable to legally issue land title or to remove area from the gazette area in which it operates. Instead the company's approach is to promote resolution of land tenure issues through engagement, information sharing, and encouraging resolution through official channels. AFI has undertaken an extensive participatory mapping program with the support of local NGO PACOS in order to support the Pitas/Bengkoka communities in defining customary land rights and securing formal land rights as well as to clarify operating boundaries and planted areas of the company's plantation estate. Following the participatory mapping exercise, AFI sponsored community-based natural resource management workshops in 2016 and early 2017 to support the villages in managing the environmental concerns that were identified in the mapping program. Some of the individuals mentioned in the article have participated in these workshops as well as other engagement activities with the company. AFI believes the workshops have been effective in supporting individuals and villages to seek clarification of land title and to develop sustainable approaches for managing community land. AFI will also continue its efforts to develop a social forestry program that provides meaningful and lasting benefits to the villages near its operations.

In summary, New Forests and AFI remain committed to improving the overall environmental health and social wellbeing of the Bengkoka Peninsula and are focused on providing resources and programming for local villages to encourage them as partners in this effort.