

Mission Report - Kuching, Sarawak

13th – 15th April 2025

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From 13 to 15 April 2025, the Singapore Water Association (SWA) led a follow-up mission trip to Kuching, Sarawak. This trip was conceived as a continuation of engagements first initiated during the Borneo International Water and Wastewater Exhibition and Conference (BIWWEC) in October 2024. The delegation, spearheaded by SWA Managing Director Mr. Michael Toh, comprised member companies that had participated in last year's BIWWEC, including the Southeast Asia Partnership for Adaptation through Water (SEAPAW)—an initiative by the Singapore International Foundation (SIF) in collaboration with the World Economic Forum (WEF). The objective of this trip was to deepen relationships with key Sarawak stakeholders, better understand the region's water infrastructure developments, and explore areas for potential collaboration, particularly in light of major upcoming international events such as the IWA World Water Congress & Exhibition in 2028. Delegates met with senior representatives from the Ministry of Utility and Telecommunication (MUT) Sarawak, the Ministry of Energy and Environmental Sustainability Sarawak (MEESy), Jabatan Bekalan Air Luar Bandar (JBALB), Malaysian Water Association (MWA) Sarawak, Weida Resources (Sarawak) Sdn Bhd, and the UOB Bank Kuching branch.

The following is the list of delegates who participated in this mission trip:

| S/N | Company |
|-----|--|
| 1 | Century Water Systems & Technologies |
| 2 | HSL Constructor |
| 3 | Pinnacle Infosys |
| 4 | Pipeline Integrity Consulting Engineers |
| 5 | Sanli M&E Engineering |
| 6 | Southeast Asia Partnership for Adaptation through Water (SEAPAW) |
| 7 | Tigernix |

SWA Insights – Why Sarawak Matters

The trip was designed to foster continued dialogue with Sarawak's water and environmental authorities, strengthen cross-border industry partnerships, and identify business opportunities aligned with the state's water and sustainability objectives. Specifically, the delegation sought to gain firsthand insights into the Sarawak Alternative Water Supply (SAWAS) programme, assess developments in the restructuring of Sarawak's water agencies, and explore avenues for industrial collaboration, digital innovation, and financing. Additionally, the trip aimed to lay the groundwork for SWA's support and participation in the IWA 2028 Congress, which will be hosted in Kuching.

SAWAS Project

The SAWAS project, a cornerstone initiative under MUT and JBALB, aims to provide safe and clean water to isolated rural settlements that lack proper water access, with a target of full coverage by 2030. The programme is set to achieve 100% water supply coverage for Sarawak's estimated 1 million rural residents, with the current coverage standing at 70.5% as of 2024¹.

This is a major project with strong potential for our member companies to introduce tested and proven solutions from Singapore, with the opportunity for wide-scale deployment across multiple rural villages in Sarawak.

Here are some key findings to help our member companies understand the current requirements of JBALB for the SAWAS project:

- Minimal or no use of chemicals required
- Tailored solutions needed based on the local water source (e.g., river water, rainwater, surface water, etc.)
- Certain rural villages may require off-grid solutions due to limited or no internet connectivity
- Nine local consultants have been engaged for solution design, monitoring, and supervision. Ongoing engagement with these consultants will be necessary to remain informed of on-the-ground developments.

With more information expected to be released in due time, member companies can look forward to receiving more information from SWA on possible business opportunities related to the SAWAS project.

2028 IWA World Water Congress & Exhibition

The International Water Association (IWA) World Water congress and exhibition is a biennial global event that brings together water professionals from around the globe, covering the full water cycle and attracting participation from across the sector. At the 2023 edition held in Bordeaux, France, the IWA unveiled Kuching, Malaysia, as the host location for the 2028 edition. The congress is expected to attract 10,000 participants from over 80 countries and will take place at the Borneo Convention Centre Kuching (BCKK).

We are looking forward to supporting our counterparts in this prestigious event.

Other Developments and Opportunities

To enhance the efficiency of water supply management throughout Sarawak, MUT announced the merger of Laku Management Sdn Bhd, Kuching Water Board (KWB), and Sibü Water Board (SWB) into a single entity². As an integrated management office, its main objectives are to optimise water distribution and address challenges like ageing infrastructure and non-revenue water (NRW). Meanwhile, the Sarawak Rural Water Supply Department, or also known JBALB, will continue to operate independently to mainly serve the rural communities across the state.

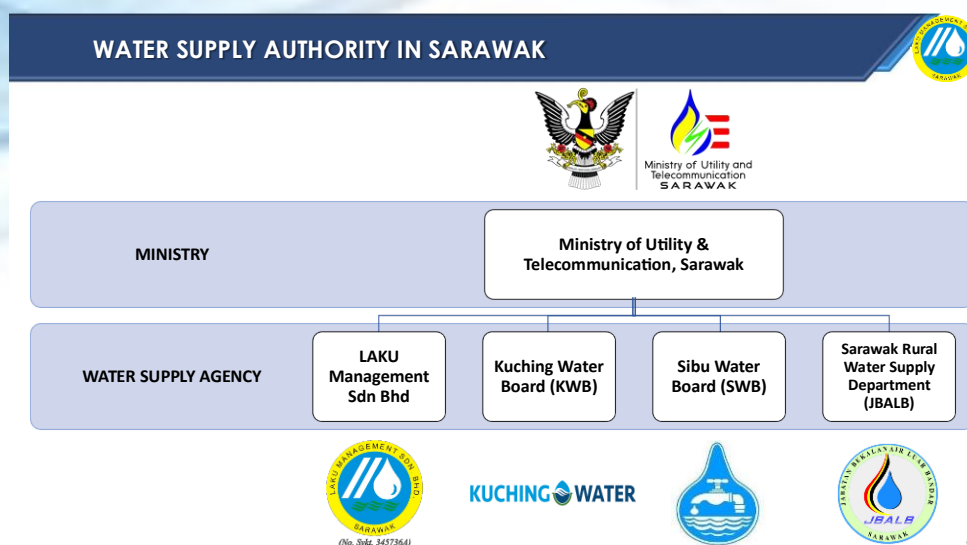


Figure 1 Organisation of the water supply authority in Sarawak, prior to the merger

¹ https://mut.sarawak.gov.my/web/subpage/news_view/694

² https://mut.sarawak.gov.my/web/subpage/news_view/718

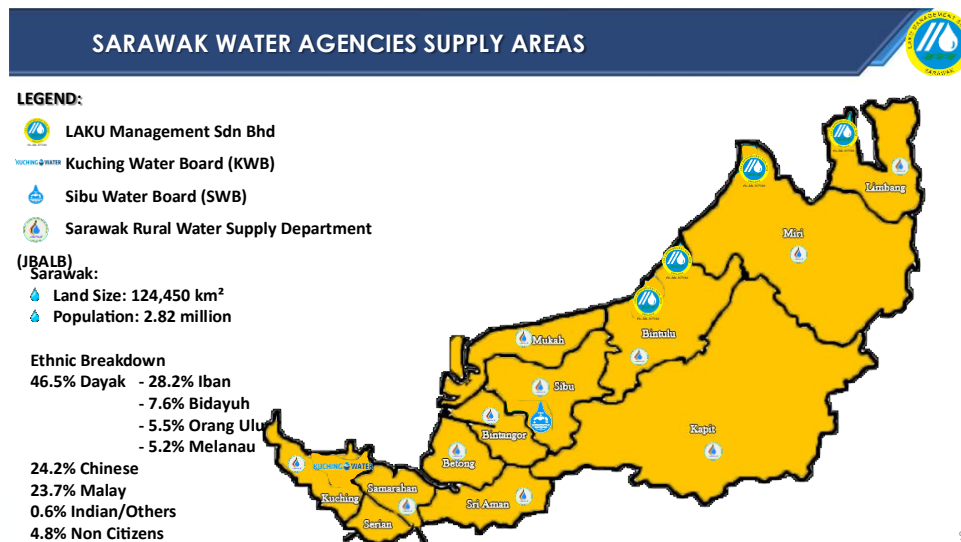


Figure 2 Map of the water supply agencies in Sarawak

The merger of the three water agencies also presents new opportunities for SWA member companies to support and add value, particularly by helping to optimise water distribution and address challenges such as ageing infrastructure and non-revenue water (NRW).

- **Industrial Water Recycling and Zero Liquid Discharge**

Industrial water recycling can help to alleviate water demand, especially in remote areas where there may be a limited supply of freshwater. Widespread implementation of ESG practices by individual companies will also support MEESTy advance their aim of spearheading Sarawak state's efforts towards a greener and more sustainable future.

- **Digitalisation**

There are plans to centralise water monitoring and management by the water supply agencies via a centralised control centre, which will require heavy investments into digitalisation. Asset and water management can be optimised through the use of smart metering, data analytics, and integrated management systems. IoT-enabled operations enable real-time monitoring, predictive maintenance, and data-driven decision-making, all of which contribute to greater operational efficiency and performance.

- **Non-Revenue Water**

Non-revenue water (NRW) remains a key challenge for Sarawak's water utilities. Implementing solutions such as leak detection and pressure management can help reduce water losses while maintaining a reliable and consistent supply.

Day 1: Engagement at MUT Raya Open House

The mission began with attendance at the Raya Open House hosted by MUT Sarawak at the Borneo Convention Centre Kuching (BCKK). This festive occasion proved to be a valuable networking opportunity, allowing the delegation to reconnect with stakeholders including officials from JBALB, MWA (Sarawak), and Weida. The informal setting fostered relationship-building and signalled strong goodwill on both sides, reinforcing SWA's position as a trusted and collaborative partner in the region.



Figure 3 Our delegation with the Minister for Utility and Telecommunication Sarawak, YB Dato Sri Haji Julaihi bin Haji Narawi, pictured in yellow (centre), as well as various associates from JBALB, MWA (Sarawak) and Weida.



Figure 4 Our delegation with various local contacts in Sarawak

Day 2: Strategic Meetings and Institutional Dialogues

The second day of the trip was marked by a series of focused meetings with government bodies and regulators. The day commenced with an inaugural engagement with MEESTy. Established in 2022, MEESTy plays a central role in advancing Sarawak's sustainability agenda. During this meeting, SWA introduced its delegation and proposed avenues for collaboration, particularly in the areas of environmental stewardship, ESG practices, and green technology. The significance of this meeting was underlined by its coverage in local media, including a digital and physical print feature in The Borneo Post, and a reel shared on the Facebook account of YB Datuk Dr. Hj. Hazland bin Hj. Abang Hipni.

- Reel: [Facebook](#)
- Article: [TVS](#)
- Article: [The Borneo Post](#)
- Article: [Sarawak Tribune](#)

Home



Dr Hazland (fourth left) presents a memento to Toh. — Photo by Kentigern Minggu

Water sector as revenue stream via Singapore collab



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KUCHING: Sarawak is exploring potential revenue-generating opportunities in the water sector through future collaboration with Singapore, particularly via the Singapore Water Association (SWA), said Datuk Dr Hazland Abang Hipni.

The Deputy Minister for Energy and Environmental Sustainability said the collaboration, which will involve the Ministry of Energy and Environmental Sustainability (MEESTy) and the Ministry of Utility and Telecommunication (MUT), is seen as a strategic move to unlock the economic potential of water beyond its conventional uses.

"We believe there is an opportunity for Sarawak to collaborate with Singapore through the Singapore Water Association, together with our two ministries (MEESTy and MUT).

"They (SWA) have expressed some interesting ideas. Water is not just for drinking or bathing, as commonly perceived. It holds great potential as a revenue-generating resource.

"Water can also be a source of energy. For example, water has two parts of hydrogen and one part of oxygen. That is why water is also under our ministry,"

We believe there is an opportunity for Sarawak to collaborate with Singapore through the Singapore Water Association, together with our two ministries (MEESTy and MUT).

Datuk Dr Hazland Abang Hipni

he said during a courtesy visit by SWA delegates on his ministry here yesterday.

Dr Hazland said water has wide-ranging economic value, particularly in the context of Sarawak's natural resources and infrastructure.

"Water can also generate energy, for instance, through our hydroelectric dams, run-of-river systems, and cascading dam infrastructure. It also serves as a means of transportation in many rural and riverine areas.

Even brackish water can be harnessed as feedstock in industries such as microalgae production. The range of uses is extensive," he said.

Dr Hazland said such a collaboration would align with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (UN-SDG) 17, which promotes Partnerships for the Goals, specifically encouraging cross-border cooperation in achieving sustainable development.

SWA managing director Michael Toh said both Sarawak and Singapore share a unique connection and mutual interest in sustainable development.

"We've been working

closely with the MUT and the Malaysian Water Association (MWA) Sarawak branch, sharing knowledge on water management," he said.

Toh said collaboration is increasingly vital, especially in the context of global climate challenges as water becomes an existential issue for many countries.

"This has been an excellent meeting with the ministry responsible for energy transformation in the water sector. In Singapore, we're focusing on energy efficiency and decarbonisation, and we're just at the beginning of this journey. We would be happy to explore opportunities with Sarawak in this area," he said.

He pointed out shared challenges between Singapore and Sarawak, particularly in efforts to reduce fossil fuel dependence and the transition to renewable energy technologies.

"These common goals provide a strong foundation for deeper cooperation. We see a lot of potential and look forward to a long-term partnership with our counterparts in Sarawak," he added.

Figure 5 Newspaper article on The Borneo Post, featuring SWA's meeting with MEESTy

Later that day, the delegation reconvened with MUT Sarawak, where we had the honour of meeting YB Dato Sri Haji Julaihi bin Haji Narawi, Minister for Utility and Telecommunication Sarawak. The discussions focused on follow-up initiatives from BIWWEC 2024, while also highlighting the significance of BIWWEC 2026 and the upcoming IWA 2028 Congress. SWA reaffirmed its commitment to supporting both events and emphasized its interest in working closely with MWA and its Sarawak branch. The meeting provided a platform to update MUT on follow-up initiatives led by SWA and its member companies, while also strengthening institutional ties with Sarawak's utility leadership.



Figure 6 Our delegation with MUT Sarawak and his team, JBALB and MWA (Sarawak).

The afternoon concluded with a session at JBALB, the agency tasked with implementing the SAWAS programme. Mr. Awang Mohamad Fadillah, Director of JBALB, provided a comprehensive overview of the department's work in delivering rural water supply and elaborated on JBALB's approach to execute the SAWAS project. The delegation gained valuable insights into the programme's ground-level implementation plans and the timeline for upcoming developments, with key updates expected in June 2025. One of the key recent updates revealed that Sarawak's rural areas have been divided into nine zones, each overseen by a dedicated consultant responsible for solution design, monitoring and supervision. We look forward to sharing further information as it becomes available and will facilitate follow-up engagements and workshops accordingly.



Figure 7 Our delegation with MWA (Sarawak), in discussion with JBALB

Day 3: Industry Insights and Financial Facilitation

The final day of the trip focused on strengthening ties with industry partners and understanding financial infrastructure. The morning began with a visit to Weida Resources (Sarawak) Sdn Bhd, hosted by its Director and Deputy Chairman of MWA (Sarawak), Mr. Jeffrey Bay. The exchange allowed SWA members to gain first-hand knowledge of local operations and to appreciate how companies like Weida are contributing to Sarawak's water industry and ecosystem. The meeting helped bridge the knowledge gap for member companies by enhancing their understanding of the local demand for specialised water solutions and the implementation of these solutions, providing a grounded perspective on the Sarawak market.



Figure 8 Our delegation with Mr Jeffrey Bay, pictured in green (centre), and his team from Weida

In the afternoon, the delegation visited the Kuching branch of United Overseas Bank (UOB), where Mr. Francis Chapman, Area Head of Wholesale Banking, shared insights into the bank's cross-border financing support for Singaporean companies operating in Malaysia. UOB's position as a Singaporean bank enables it to offer unique escrow arrangements and seamless administrative coordination between its Singapore and Kuching branches, making a compelling case for SWA member companies in Singapore considering regional expansion. The session provided clarity on banking procedures and reassured participants institutional support available for transnational ventures.



Figure 9 Our delegation with Mr Francis Chapman, pictured 5th from the left, and his team from the UOB branch in Kuching

Moving Forward

Looking ahead, SWA is planning a return visit to Sarawak later this year to deepen ongoing discussions and facilitate knowledge-sharing sessions. Future engagements are expected to expand beyond the water sector, potentially involving partners from other industries in Sarawak. The following outlines the planned events and engagements, alongside identified key stakeholders in Sarawak with whom we intend to engage. These activities are designed to facilitate meaningful exchanges and address the interests and priorities identified during this mission trip.

JBALB

HSL Constructor from Singapore and Weida from Sarawak have collaborated to deliver solutions at two sites, with JBALB expected to provide further details on the specific sites soon.

We will continue to follow up with JBALB regarding the nine appointed consultants for the SAWAS project, with the aim of initiating further engagement sessions. In line with our efforts to facilitate more knowledge-sharing activities, these sessions may take the form of workshops, offering a platform for our member companies to gain a deeper understanding of the local context, pain points, and challenges. For instance, rural areas face challenges such as limited access for heavy machinery.

during construction and the long distances that pipes must cover to deliver clean water. The workshops will showcase how our member companies' proven expertise from Singapore can support JBALB and the nine project consultants in delivering the SAWAS project, while also fostering collaborative solutions to local challenges.

As part of our efforts to engage overseas stakeholders in Singapore, extending an invitation to JBALB for a study visit would be highly beneficial. The visit could include a tour of key facilities, such as ST Engineering's control room, to provide insights into Singapore's approach to centralised water management. This would offer an excellent opportunity to showcase Singapore's expertise in integrating smart water technologies and digital innovation into utility operations and management, and to share how these strategies can help JBALB strengthen and future-proof Sarawak's water infrastructure.

UOB Kuching Branch

During our engagement with UOB Kuching, we identified potential cross-industry synergies that could support our member companies in entering the Sarawak market. Plans are underway to organise a knowledge-sharing session with UOB Kuching's clients. Our member companies in Singapore offer validated solutions that effectively address Singapore's robust water demand and ecosystem. In collaboration with UOB Kuching, SWA can facilitate cross-sector partnerships with clients of UOB to explore opportunities in Sarawak. By leveraging each other's strengths and product offerings, our member companies can deliver enhanced solutions for customers and utilities in the region.

To effectively conclude our engagement with stakeholders in Sarawak, we held an informal discussion with Mr. Kelvin, Chairman of MWA (Sarawak), at the end of the trip. During this meeting, we aligned on next steps and explored opportunities for closer collaboration as regional association counterparts.

The success of this mission trip was reflected in post-trip feedback, with all delegates indicating that the trip met their business objectives. We remain committed to ensuring that future mission trips continue to deliver meaningful value and insights for our delegates and member companies.

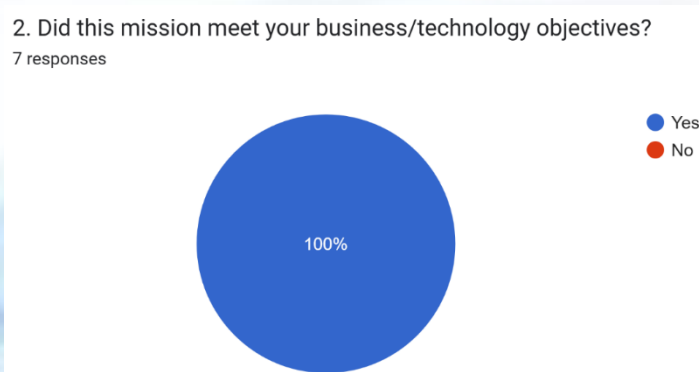


Figure 10 Survey results, where 100% of our delegation met their objectives

Conclusion

This overseas mission trip served as a meaningful opportunity for our delegation to continue conversations initiated during BIWWEC. The on-site engagements also provided first-hand insights into the SAWAS project, which presents promising opportunity for member companies to add value and offer impactful solutions to the rural communities in need of clean water. This overseas mission trip reaffirmed SWA's role as a strategic bridge between Singapore's water industry and emerging opportunities in Sarawak. SWA was able to lay the groundwork for enhanced institutional collaboration, deeper market understanding, and sustainable business development for its members in Sarawak. The association remains committed to supporting our member companies in these endeavours and will continue to explore regional missions that foster innovation, inclusion, and international partnership.

SWA facilitates members' growth and serves as an integral linkage to the global water network. We actively engage with partners, industry associations, foreign chambers of commerce and embassies to connect end users with the most effective and impactful water technologies for their needs. SWA also occasionally plans missions and pavilions around the

region, according to interest, to help member companies understand the local business environment and build the networks essential for successful market expansion.

Please feel free to contact SWA at enquiry@swa.org.sg for collaboration opportunities and to explore potential partnerships.

Annex

Survey Results



Survey Results.pdf

Post-BIWWEC 2024 Review



Post BIWWEC 2024
Review.pdf