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## New ruling on projects welcomed

KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. - The new regulation requiring Federal Government approval for major development projects, including those in environmentally-sensitive areas, was welcomed by the Malaysian Nature Society today.

MNS said the ruling, which would allow development to be carried out holistically, would also help the country manage its limited resources.

"It is a long overdue major step in land-use planning but is indeed very encouraging," said MNS president Datuk Dr Salleh Mohd Nor in a statement.

The regulation was announced yesterday by Housing and Local Government Minister Datuk Seri Ong Ka Ting, and is effective immediately.

It requires new townships for more than 10,000 people, major infrastructure projects and projects in environmentally-sensitive areas to obtain the approval of the National Physical Planning Council which is chaired by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

The council's technical committee, which is chaired by the Town and Country Planning Department director-general, would first inspect the development plans and set conditions. Only then can the development plans be approved by the State and local authorities.

MNS said this ruling would prevent "piecemeal" planning by the States and local authorities, which have caused destruction of natural habitats.

"Although land matters come under the State, their development plans have been piecemeal. Environmentally-sensitive areas have been ignored and resulted in many irreconcilable impacts on our water and air.

"These matters are trans-boundary and do not recognise borders or State plans. They must be handled as a whole, such as river basins, mountain ranges and coastlines, which can only be co-ordinated on a national level."

Ong yesterday cited the example of how a local authority could approve projects but fail to consider the impact on neighbouring areas which do not come under its jurisdiction.

To avoid delays for developers, he said the working committee of the council would meet each month to vet applications. The council itself will handle major projects and will meet every four months.

The National Physical Planning Council was formed under the 2001 amendments to the Town and Country Planning Act 1976. Its members include the Deputy Prime Minister as deputy chairman, the Housing and Local Government Minister, other relevant ministries and agencies, and the Menteri Besar and Chief Ministers of Peninsular Malaysia.