

Malaysia will be affected by any changes in Antarctica, says expert



KUALA TERENGGANU: Although Antarctica is many thousands of kilometres away from Malaysia, every changes in that continent will have an impact on the country, particularly, in terms of climate.

Antarctica researcher Dr Wan Mohd Rauhan Wan Hussin said the Antarctica continent, referred to as a natural laboratory, had important clues to the complex processes of the planet and plays an important role in the earth's climate system.

He said the Antarctica continent which is surrounded by the Southern Ocean (also known as the Antarctic Ocean) stores about 90 per cent of the fresh water on the earth's surface in the form of water layers, glaciers and ice blocks with the Antarctic ice sheet is a freshwater storage on earth which is equivalent to almost 60 metres of sea level.

"The Southern Ocean is the most powerful carbon sink and absorbs about 30% of human-generated carbon dioxide emissions.

"The circulation of water and the temperature of the Southern Ocean which connects the three main ocean basins is also strongly affected by the ice on the continent," said the Universiti Malaysia Terengganu (UMT) lecturer in a statement on Wednesday (Jan 24).

Wan Mohd Rauhan, who was also the deputy director of the National Antarctic Research Centre (NARC) said that the destruction of ecosystems and biodiversity in the Southern Ocean would reduce its ability to absorb carbon, further increasing the earth's temperature.

"Antarctica cannot escape from the adverse effects of global warming which will lead to disasters such as extreme droughts, heat waves and major floods.

"The destruction will be enormous if this ice block melts. In simpler terms, what happens in Antarctica affects the entire planet and Malaysia will not be spared," he said while calling on the public to spread information about the Antarctica continent and its importance.

He said the Malaysian government's commitment to drawing up an action plan to be part of the countries that conduct Antarctic research should also be commended when the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Sustainability (NRES) and the Sultan Mizan Antarctica Research Foundation (YPASM) have contributed more than RM8mil in grants for research and scholarship.

"Although Malaysia does not have an official research base in the frozen continent, the donation of the fund is enough to express Malaysia's desire and as a key indicator to help researchers get cooperation with scientists from other countries," he said.

Malaysia was among the 196 countries that signed the Paris Agreement which aims to keep the average global temperature rise below 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels, he said.

"Some may argue that we should focus efforts on a regional scale without having to commit to larger efforts in a continent far away from us. However, it is necessary to realise that we also contribute to global warming and the responsibility to preserve Antarctica should not be dismissed," he said. - Bernama