PUTATAN: A special committee will be set up soon to put the message across that protection of rivers and their marine life is the responsibility of every individual. Underlining this, Chief Minister Datuk Seri Panglima Yahya Hussein said he had directed the district officer here to ensure that the committee is established to monitor rivers in the district, particularly the Petagas River, which has been categorized as having among the poorest water quality in the state.

“The committee will be entrusted to educate the people, and to get their participation, to protect the rivers in the district,” he said.

“They have become our dumping site. We throw rubbish and even human waste into the river. This water is processed for us to enjoy. But we pollute our rivers, that we are a minute to think of the consequences of our action,” Yahya reminded the people.

“A researcher working at Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) has in collaboration between UMS Borneo Marine Research Institute (BMRI) and the Putatan District Office. Thousands of fresh water prawns and several types fish fries were released into the river, as part of efforts to increase marine life in the Petagas River.

A research station is being placed at the jetty in Kampung Mahibbah, Petagas, to monitor the progress of the river and its marine life.

When asked on the progress, Yahya said since the programme was launched eight months back, public awareness is still low, but he hoped to see some changes in the next six to 12 months.

“I would like to see public awareness improve sooner, that is why it is important to put the message across that every single individual must play their role to refrain from polluting the rivers. One of our efforts was to revive the Petatan River by sacrificing a Muslim burial site in order to allow swelling water from the Moyog River to flow to two exit points, namely the Petagas and Putatan rivers.

He also said that there should be no development, including houses built along the riparian reserves.

“We notice that residents of houses built nearby the rivers would dump their waste into the river. Our mission is to turn the riparian reserves into a recreational area. We would plant trees and flowers and turn them into a beautiful garden. This will eventually help to clean our rivers and it will once again be abundant and filled with marine life. For all we know, it could also be a tourist attraction and people may want to come and stay in the district instead of going to the city,” he said.

Meanwhile, BMRI director Dr Saleem Mustafa disclosed that since the first phase of the programme was launched on April 23, it is now entering its second phase where some 2,000 fresh water prawn fries have been distributed to 10 villages here.

“The programme is a method to increase the production of aquaculture products,” he added.