Singapore Environment Council gets new chief

Former journalist Jose Raymond takes over on Thursday, after green group’s 6-month search

Jessica Cheam

The Singapore Environment Council (SEC) has finally found a new executive director - former journalist Jose Raymond, who was press secretary to Minister for the Environment and Water Resources Vivian Balakrishnan.

SEC chairman Isabella Loh confirmed that Mr Raymond, 39, will start work at the SEC this Thursday, capping an almost six-month search for a new chief.

Former executive director Howard Shaw, who was at the SEC for 15 years and helmed it for the past eight years, left in April to join the private sector.

In a letter circulated to SEC advisers and seen by The Sunday Times, Ms Loh said: “We welcome him (Mr Raymond) warmly on board embarking on this journey with us, bringing SEC to greater heights of the environment cause.”

Mr Raymond told The Sunday Times that he was looking forward to the new full-time appointment and “will continue to maintain its (the SEC's) standing as Singapore’s most recognised green organisation”.

He recently served as Dr Balakrishnan’s press secretary while on a three-month secondment to the Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources from the SSC.

Mr Raymond, who is currently doing part-time studies for a degree in communications, conceded that he may not have much experience in the environmental sector. But he said he believed the role required someone with strong organisational skills with a good network who could lead it.

He said he comes into frequent contact with nature as an open sea diver, and has always “appreciated nature and am aware of how the ecosystem is at risk because of climate change”.

“I’m quite excited about the role, especially as there is a growing national emphasis and awareness of environmental issues,” he said.

Mr Raymond will manage SEC’s team of 15 full-time staff. The local environmental non-governmental organisation was set up in 1995 and is independently managed by its executive director and staff. It has a board of directors comprising members with a diverse range of relevant expertise drawn from the private sector, academia and government.

Its vice-chairmen are Professor Leo Tan from the National University of Singapore and Dr Teo Ho Pin, Mayor of North West District.

SEC is an approved charity that can offer tax exemption to donors.

Under Mr Shaw’s leadership, SEC grew from a small organisation to an established one driving many environmental initiatives in Singapore, including the Bring Your Own Bag Day, now a weekly affair in supermarkets. It also runs programmes such as the Green Label project, which certifies firms whose products meet global eco-friendly standards.

Mr Shaw, who is now senior vice-president of corporate social responsibility at investment holding firm Halcyon Group, said he was confident that Mr Raymond will fill the role at the council and take it to the next level.

When asked if Mr Raymond’s lack of experience in the environmental sector would be an issue, Mr Shaw said what was more important were strong leadership skills, which he believed Mr Raymond has, and that technical support on specific issues can be provided by the organisation.

“I look forward to working with SEC from the private sector to drive further partnerships,” said Mr Shaw.