

## Indonesia Sustainable Development News Digest 2021 – 8: 15 April 2021

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### The Coronavirus crisis in Indonesia |

#### Indonesia reports coronavirus case with "Eek" mutation

—Reuters, 6 April 2021

Indonesia has reported its first case of the highly transmissible E484K new variant of the coronavirus, but the government said vaccines used in the country could withstand the mutation. The virus, nicknamed "Eek" for its ability to evade natural immunity and reduce protection offered by vaccines, was first identified in South Africa and Brazil. The first case of the variant comes as the country prepares for a reduced supply of COVID-19 vaccines due to export curbs of AstraZeneca's shot imposed by manufacturer India to prioritise its domestic supplies. Indonesia's health minister said only 20 million of the 30 million doses it had ordered for March-April delivery were available due to the export curbs. He called for the vaccination programme to be readjusted and prioritised for the elderly. With around 1.54 million cases and 41,900 deaths, Indonesia has the highest caseload in Southeast Asia and one of the worst epidemics in Asia. Its vaccination programme now relies heavily on China's Sinovac due to shipment delays for the AstraZeneca vaccine.

#### Indonesia satisfied with effectiveness of Chinese Covid-19 vaccine

—ChannelNewsAsia, 13 April 2021

Indonesia said it is satisfied with the effectiveness of the Sinovac coronavirus vaccine after Gao Fu, the head of China's Center for Disease Control acknowledged the country's vaccines only offered low levels of protection. Gao said China is considering mixing vaccines to boost their effectiveness against the virus. Siti Nadia Tarmizi, a spokesperson for Indonesia's Covid-19 vaccination program, said the WHO found the Chinese vaccines met requirements by being at least 50% effective, and noted that clinical trials of Sinovac in Indonesia showed it was 65% effective. Some experts say mixing vaccines, or sequential immunization, could improve their effectiveness. Tarmizi said Indonesia would wait to see the results of any clinical trials before considering mixing vaccines. Globally, public health experts have said any vaccine that is 50% effective would be useful, and many governments have been eager to use Chinese vaccines because rich countries around the world have snapped up more effective jabs from Pfizer and Moderna.

#### Pandemic, Low Tourism, Slow Economy

— Khairul Anam, *Tempo.co*, 12 April 2021

Among Indonesia's 34 provinces, Bali suffered the worst contraction of economic growth under the pandemic, with gross product declining 9.3 % in 2020. In early April, total daily arrivals at Bali's airport recovered from 2,600 to 6,000 passengers, but before the pandemic the number of daily arrivals could reach 16,000. The island's decline is inseparable from its high dependency on tourism sector, accounting for 17.6% of Bali's economy, but which declined 27.5% last year. Drops in the tourism-driven accommodation, food and beverage sectors impacted agriculture, trade, construction and processing. Open unemployment also spiked from 1.2% in February 2020 to 5.63% by August. West Java and Yogyakarta's economies have also been hit by the decline in tourism, though not as hard as Bali. According to Bank Indonesia's top representative Trisno Nugroho, Bali needs to attract more domestic tourists and diversify into industry and processing, including processing of grain, fruits and coffee. "[International] tourism should not be too much."

#### Marine & Fisheries

### [Billions in fisheries extortion](#)

—Linda Trianita, Tempo.co, 22 March 2021

The KPK seized Rp 52.3 billion in cash in relation to the lobster larvae export corruption case in the Ministry of Maritime Affairs and Fisheries that led to the arrest of former Minister Edhy Prabowo. It is suspected that the money was extorted from exporters who received permits to export lobster larvae from May to November in 2020. Edhy reportedly received Rp3.4 billion and US\$100,000 from entrepreneurs seeking lobster larvae export permits. The bribes were laundered through Aero Citra Kargo and Perishable Logistics Indonesia, the sole authorized providers of lobster larvae export services. The Rp 52.3 billion apparently obtained through bank guarantee payments, which Edhy arranged for the Fish Quarantine and Inspection Agency (BKIPM) to require from exporters from each export batch.

### [Ministry issues plan of action for whale shark conservation](#)

—M Razi Rahman, Fardah, Antara News, 11 April 2021

The Ministry of Marine Affairs and Fisheries (KKP) has issued a ministerial decree number 16 of 2021 concerning the National Plan of Action for the Conservation of Whale Sharks (*Rhincodon typus*) 2021-2025. "The National Plan of Action contains strategies, activities, indicators, outputs, location, time, persons in charge and related work units in the conservation of whale sharks in Indonesia," said Tb. Haeru Rahayu, the ministry's Director General of Marine Space Management. Of the 117 species of sharks existing in Indonesia, whale sharks are the only species fully protected since 2013 through the Decree of the Minister of Marine Affairs and Fisheries of Indonesia. "Determining the protection status is not enough. It requires sustainable, planned, and measurable conservation efforts for whale sharks. Therefore, a strategy and action plan for whale shark conservation in Indonesia is needed," Rahayu said, adding that he hoped the Whale Shark Conservation National Plan of Action would be carried out seriously to improve the condition of whale sharks in the wild in the next five years.

### [Five Vietnamese-flagged fishing boats detained by KKP in Natuna waters](#)

—Andilala, Fardah, Antara News, 12 April 2021

Indonesia's Ministry of Maritime Affairs and Fisheries (KKP) intercepted and detained five Vietnamese-flagged fishing vessels for poaching squid in the waters of Natuna, Riau Islands Province. A total of 20 crew members were placed in detention in Pontianak pending resolution of the legal processes. The boats carried specialized gear for catching squid and had been operating in the northern Natuna Sea for more than two months. The foreign boats attempted to evade arrest by intentionally colliding with a joint patrol vessel, a KKP official said. According to ministry data, some 100 fishing vessels were detained for poaching in Indonesian waters in 2020. Since January 2021, 12 foreign boats have been seized.

## Forestry & Land Use

### [Save Papua's Forests: Greenpeace](#)

—Yudha Baskor, Jakarta Globe, 11 April 2021

Greenpeace Indonesia activists staged a protest in front of the Environment and Forestry Ministry building in Central Jakarta last Friday, demanding the government to return customary forests in Papua to the indigenous people. The protest was based on a Greenpeace International report titled "License to Clear" which exposed allegations of systematic violations on plantation and forest release permits in Papua between 2011 and 2019 and revealed that peatland and forest protection initiatives introduced by President Joko "Jokowi" Widodo's administration, including the Forest Moratorium and the Oil Palm Moratorium, failed to produce the reforms promised. In addition, land clearing in Papua is leading to a massive carbon release that could undo Indonesia's progress in tackling climate change, the organization said. The protesters carried posters expressing the rights of the Papuan peoples which read "Save Papuan Indigenous Peoples," and "Stop Licensing Destruction of Papua's Forest."

### [Report: Greenpeace International "License to Clear" 6 April 2021](#)

### [Belgium joins ban on biofuels made from palm oil](#)

—Mongabay.com, 13 April 2021

Belgium will join Denmark, France and the Netherlands in banning biofuels made from palm oil from 2022 onward as part of its effort to combat deforestation related to large-scale conversion of native forests and peatlands to industrial plantations in Indonesia and Malaysia, Federal Minister of Environment and

Climate Zakia Khattabi said. Belgium's ban, which will also include soy-based biofuel, was its first measure since joining the Amsterdam Declaration Partnership, which aims to eliminate deforestation from agricultural commodities by 2025. These fuels have little or no advantage over conventional fossil fuels from a climate point of view, but lead to deforestation, loss of biodiversity and even human rights violations," Khattabi said, noting that consumption of palm oil-based biodiesel in Belgium increased tenfold between 2019 and 2020 to 231 million liters, a volume requiring a land area of "more than 100,000 football fields. "We know from studies that at least half of those palm oil plantations have been planted on land that has recently been deforested," she said.

### [Under shareholder pressure, JPMorgan Chase agrees to improve deforestation policies](#)

—Liz Kimbrough, *Mongabay*, 13 April 2021

Under pressure from shareholders led by the investment group Green Century Capital Management, JPMorgan Chase has agreed to expand its policies addressing deforestation and require all clients who are growers or refiners related to the palm oil sector to confirm they are compliant with "No Deforestation, No Peatland, No Exploitation" (NDPE) principles. JPMorgan Chase will also expand its current timber policy to include pulp and paper companies, requiring all clients in the sector to have appropriate supply chain certifications, and is considering how to strengthen due diligence in relation to deforestation risk in the mining and infrastructure sectors. We're committed to doing our part to address climate change and that includes working with clients and other stakeholders to help strengthen industry best practices intended to protect forests and biodiversity," Marisa Buchanan, JPMorgan Chase's global head of sustainability, said in a statement. "Through our constructive dialogue with Green Century, we're taking some important steps and plan to continue exploring ways to enhance our efforts over time."

### [Indonesian government re-classifies palm oil waste substance as "non-hazardous"](#)

—Hans Nicholas Jong, *Mongabay*, 5 April 2021

A powdered clay used to clarify palm oil has been removed from Indonesia's official list of hazardous wastes, prompting warnings from environmental activists about increased dumping of untreated wastes. The industry uses huge volumes of the powdered bleaching earth to refine palm oil and remove odour. After refining, the spent bleaching earth (SBE) retains as much as 40% residual palm oil and must be disposed of carefully to prevent it from leaching into the soil or water table, or catching fire. As such, SBE has been classified as hazardous waste since 2014, with clearly defined protocols for treatment and disposal. As of February, however, SBE with oil content of less than 3% is no longer considered hazardous waste. The delisting is part of the ongoing deregulation effort under Indonesia's "Omnibus Law on Job Creation", which has been criticized for rolling back environmental protection and favouring corporate interests over the environment and traditional communities. That bill also declared fly ash and bottom ash from coal burning to be non-hazardous.

## **Energy, Climate Change, Mining & Pollution**

### [Frustration over penalties for coal mine that polluted Indonesian river](#)

—Della Syahni, *Mongabay*, 5 April 2021

After a series of coal-slurry spills into the Malinau River in Indonesian Borneo, locals and environmental groups are calling for tougher sanctions against mining companies and for national banks to divest from the coal industry. The latest spill in February at a facility operated by PT Kayan Putra Utama Coal (KPUC) in North Kalimantan province killed thousands of fish and forced downstream municipalities to cut off their water supplies. The government of Malinau district in North Kalimantan immediately issued a decree requesting that the company repair embankments, establish a system of inspections, develop a rapid response plan, and replace the dead fish. However, the Mining Advocacy Network (Jatam), a watchdog group, says these steps are not enough to exact reform. KPUC was in 2017 required to shut down its operations for 60 days following a similar spill by another miner in the same region. According to an agreement, their mining licenses would be revoked if another spill would occur. The 2017 sanctions were heavier while the current impacts are more severe than the previous case.

### [Activists say Indonesia's net-zero emissions goal not ambitious enough](#)

— Hans Nicholas Jong, *Mongabay*, 12 April 2021

Indonesia has announced a plan to put the country on a path toward carbon neutrality by 2070, but this time-frame is too long to contribute positively to the fight against climate change. The “Long-term Strategy of Low Carbon and Climate Resilience 2050”, which the government will submit to the UNFCCC this month, maintains a heavy reliance on coal in the country’s energy mix. Of three scenarios for reducing emissions in the plan, even the most ambitious would only allow emissions to decline to net-zero by 2070. Activist Novita Indri said that Indonesia’s climate pledge is “highly insufficient” because it would not contribute to slowing global warming beyond 2.0° C from pre-industrial levels, but instead is consistent with global warming of 3-4° C. “We need to consider our national development to maintain [annual] economic growth at 5-7% as well as the population size,” Ruandha Agung Sugardiman, the Indonesian environment ministry’s director-general for climate change said. “The net-zero emissions target by 2070 is logical for us.”

#### [Java’s mangroves pay a high price for stopping plastic flowing to sea](#)

— Julia John, Mongabay, 5 April 2021

Celine van Bijsterveldt, a doctoral candidate at Utrecht University and the NIOZ Royal Netherlands Institute for Sea Research *with* her team have studied the impact of the prevalence of plastics and its effect on mangrove growth and survival in Demak, a town on Java’s northern coast. Although mangroves adapt to plastic debris, excessive amounts of plastic can kill them. Scientists worry that continued accumulation of plastics could endanger these forests and the ecological and human communities depending on them. Ground core samples indicate that plastic often sat stuck in top sediment layers, causing extended low-oxygen conditions. As expected, trees totally buried in plastic suffocated to death. On the other hand, partially covered mangroves were “relatively resilient”. However, plastic intensification in mangrove habitats could also damage fish populations breeding and nursing in the mangroves and harm mollusks, crabs and other soil-dwelling organisms which form the foundation of the coastal food web, potentially triggering cascading impacts for larger animals. The study authors called for a reduction in plastic waste through education and policies such as bans on single-use plastic packaging.

#### [Indonesia prepares incentives for energy, waste management and agriculture](#)

—*The Jakarta Post*, 6 April 2021

The Indonesian government plans to incentivize investment in environmental technologies as part of the national economic recovery (PEN) program. Arifin Rudiyaniti, Under-Secretary for Maritime Affairs and Natural Resources for the National Development Planning Ministry (Bappenas) said the green stimulus program would focus on three areas: energy, waste management, and labor-intensive farming. In the energy sector, the ministry plans to install rooftop solar panels at 70 ministries and other government institutions, generating an estimated savings of 15 million kilowatt-hours (kWh) per year. The government has also announced a Solar Archipelago program to provide rooftop solar panels for millions of poor households over the next half decade. Upgrading labor-intensive farming could increase harvests by 17% and create 151,000 jobs by 2022. Indonesia has been given negative scores on green development compared to India, Brazil, South Africa and other countries, in part because of the Omnibus Job Creation Law enacted in 2020, which critics say is having negative impacts on the environment.

#### [Opinion: Indonesia’s huge solar power potential is still going to waste](#)

—Fabby Tumiwa and Marlistya Citraningrum, *The Jakarta Post*, 8 April 2021

Renewables have proven their resilience, with an all-time high of 50 GW of global renewable energy capacity in the first half of 2020, of which 30 GW is from solar. Vietnam is the new solar celebrity, shifting from its long dependence on coal. At the end of 2020, after growing 2,400% within a year, solar installations in Vietnam had achieved a capacity of 16.5 GW. Indonesia pales by comparison. A presidential decree on the renewable energy price has yet to be issued after more than a year of preparation. The 10-year electricity plan of state-owned power company PLN will be released soon and is said to include 3.7 GW of “various renewables”, but the solar energy share remains unclear. In the future, solar energy, combined with storage technologies and smart grids, could power the entire electricity demand. Large-scale solar deployment can help Indonesia cement ambitious climate mitigation targets beyond the nationally determined contribution.

#### [Shell opens its first EV charging station in Indonesia](#)

—Norman Harsono, *The Jakarta Post*, 6 April 2021

Royal Dutch Shell has opened an electric vehicle (EV) charging station in Jakarta, the oil supermajor's first in Indonesia, in order to test the waters of the local EV market. The launch makes Shell the third oil and gas company to open a commercial EV charging station in Indonesia, after state-owned Pertamina in December 2018 and PT Medco Energi Internasional in February 2021. "This is proof of our commitment to always support the [Indonesian] government's agenda of providing clean and renewable energy," the company said. Indonesia has been pushing companies to invest in the domestic EV ecosystem to cut oil imports and spur industrialization. The country needs 31,857 new charging stations by 2030 to serve 326,350 EVs on the road by that year, estimates state-owned electricity monopoly PLN. At the same time, Shell plans to octuple its global EV charging station fleet from 60,000 in February to around 500,000 by 2025 in realizing a net zero emissions plan by 2050, according to a Feb. 11 statement.

## Conservation & Protected Areas

### [In Sumatra, a vulnerable, 'mythical' wild goat lives an unknown life](#)

—lan Morse, *Mongabay*, 31 March 2021

The Sumatran serow, a kind of goat-antelope, is a sub-species of the mainland serow (*Capricornis sumatraensis*), native to Sumatra, the Himalayas, China, and elsewhere in Southeast Asia. The IUCN lists the species' conservation status as "vulnerable," but little is known about the Sumatran serow, one of the animals most hunted for traditional medicines in Southeast Asia. The animal is also poached for its meat. In Sumatra and on the Thai-Malaysian Peninsula, it shares habitats with other mammals that more often headline conservation programs. But while iconic creatures like tigers and sun bears have no trouble attracting attention from photographers and scientists, research has largely skipped over the serow. In Indonesia, a comprehensive study of its population has never been conducted. Research has begun just to identify the locations where it can be found, but *its eating habits and social organization are almost unknown*. With so little research in the field, scientists remain divided even on how to classify serows.

### [Hydro development threatens Masapi at Lake Poso](#)

—Abdul Manan, *Tempo.co*, 5 April 2021 Fishers are concerned about the impacts of dredging in the Poso River basin in Central Sulawesi. Dams and traps are blocking the life cycle of *masapi*, or eels. *Ponyilo*, or eel fishers worry that Poso Energy's dredging activities for two hydro plants (PLTA) between Lake Poso and Tomini Bay, which is the eels' spawning migration route, is displacing the fish. Some *masapi* are taken by harpoon, while others are captured in eel traps owned by several families who share responsibilities for managing and guarding the traps. Andi Achmadi, Poso Energy's Corporate Social Responsibility Coordinator, said the company has made efforts to maintain the populations of eel, which are an icon of Poso Regency, including building fishways near a new dam to help eels swim from Tomini Bay upstream to the lake. An alternative plan under consideration is to breed and restock the declining eel population in Lake Poso. In January, 20 eels weighing 200 kg were restocked in the lake.

### [With stories and puppets, environmentalist battles to save Indonesia's mangroves](#)

—Tommy Ardiansyah, Stanley Widiyanto, *Reuters*, 5 April 2021

A former schoolteacher, Samsudin has now dedicated his life to conservation and uses puppetry and storytelling to spread his message to the young about the importance of protecting mangroves in an area suffering massive coastal erosion. "To keep tides from hitting us, we plant mangroves, forests for animals and oxygen for us to live. I weave everything into my stories," said Samsudin, 50, as he mused how some people in the area saw mangroves as a "nuisance". Indonesia is home to over a fifth of the world's mangrove forests, which naturally help keep out high tidal waters. But for years, coastal communities have chopped down trees to clear the way for fish and shrimp farms, and for rice paddies. Samsudin, who uses one name, reckons he has helped plant 700 hectares in the area. The issue has reached national attention and Indonesia recently embarked on one of the world's biggest campaigns to restore mangroves, targeting 150,000 hectares annually across nine provinces up to 2024.

### [Palm oil buyers Nestle, PepsiCo join coalition to invest in forest projects](#)

—Michael Taylor, *Thomson Reuters Foundation*, 9 April 2021

Major household brands and palm-oil buyers Nestle and PepsiCo have joined a scheme that aims to invest US\$1 billion in forest conservation across Southeast Asia over the next 25 years. The Rimba Collective, developed by Lestari Capital, a Singapore-based impact investment firm, will fund projects to protect and restore more than 500,000 hectares of tropical forests in Indonesia and the rest of the region. Some major buyers of palm oil, besides purchasing certified sustainable oil, have invested in technologies to monitor their supply chains and help stop deforestation, but with limited success. The Rimba Collective will initially focus on projects in Indonesia and aims to be the largest business-led conservation initiative in the region. Its founding partners are consumer goods companies Nestle, PepsiCo, Procter & Gamble and Singapore-based agribusiness Wilmar International. It is hoped that other investors, such as commodity traders, palm oil processors and growers, consumer goods firms and manufacturers, will join the scheme.

## Other

### [Opinion: Despite flaws, commodity eco-labels contribute to sustainability](#)

—Matthias Diemer, *Mongabay*, 14 April 2021

A recent Greenpeace report concluded that “certification is not a solution to deforestation, forest degradation or other ecosystem conversion” and that “many certification schemes enable destructive businesses to continue as usual.” Is hope lost for FSC, RSPO or Rainforest Alliance? Clearly there is room for improvement, which is why many eco-labels embrace continuous improvement in their theories of change. But as to whether certification schemes can help stop deforestation and exploitation, with respect to palm oil, the short answer is: perhaps.

The Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) certification scheme has a market share of 19% of global palm oil production, but both certified production volumes and production area of RSPO certified operations seem to be leveling off. But contrast this with POIG, which Greenpeace considers to be the “best in class add-on to RSPO”. The market share of POIG verified palm oil is only 1% and POIG membership consists of only three palm oil producers. Clearly the rigor of the POIG criteria deters other producers from joining.

RSPO needs to do a better job of sanctioning errant members and find ways to expand its scope and outreach, but the standard has helped raise the overall bar on sustainability by provoking the development of other (weaker) eco-labels such as ISPO in Indonesia and MSPO in Malaysia. Since there is a significant demand for uncertified oil in the market, producers and buyers always have a fallback option for selling and buying “cheap and dirty” palm oil, produced with disregard for No Deforestation, no Peat and no Exploitation requirements. Reports by Rainforest Action Network/Leuser Watch and others show how illegal palm oil produced in protected areas is trafficked over large distances and continues to enter global supply chains.

As long as such leakage markets exist and strong disincentives to discontinue deforestation and exploitation are lacking, it will be difficult for certification schemes like the RSPO to expand their impact. Hence rather than highlighting the shortcomings of the RSPO, Greenpeace and others should invest some of their campaigning capacity to expose the “worst-of-the-worst” operators and their connections to global palm oil trade.

What is undoubtedly needed is a combination of approaches, including certification, mandatory regulations, and a strong and growing consumer demand for sustainable products. Certification schemes need to be criticized and scrutinized. But by conveying the message to the public that they are greenwash and by suggesting that consumer goods companies develop their own rigorous systems (resulting in a plethora of sustainability claims), there is a real risk of confusing consumers, thereby weakening the demand for sustainable production, which sets us back to square one.

*Matthias Diemer is a trained ecologist who owns a consultancy in Switzerland focusing on sustainability in agricultural commodities. Diemer previously worked for WWF and in this capacity served as a founding member of the RSPO. He has been involved in POIG and various agricultural eco-labels.*