



Indonesia Sustainable Development News Digest

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*The **Indonesia Sustainable Development News Digest** is a biweekly collection of summaries of articles related to conservation, the environment, and sustainability in Indonesia that have appeared in print or online in local, regional, and global English-language media. We welcome comments, suggestions, and corrections. To learn more about us and to access previous editions of the News Digest, please visit our website at www.starlingresources.com. If you would like to add colleagues or friends to our distribution list or unsubscribe, please contact us at newsdigest@starlingresources.com.*

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A. Marine and Fisheries

[Japan set to release Fukushima water amid criticism, seafood import bans](#)

—Sakura Murakami, *Reuters*, 24 August 2023

Japan has commenced the release of treated radioactive water from the Fukushima nuclear power plant into the Pacific Ocean, a decision that has sparked criticism, particularly from China and resulted in seafood import bans. The Japanese government and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) assert that the water release is safe, meeting international standards with 'negligible' environmental and health impact. Hong Kong and Macau have imposed bans on Japanese seafood imports from regions including Tokyo and Fukushima, citing concerns for marine environment, food safety, and public health. South Korea has also seen protests against Japan's plan, and President Yoon Suk Yeol's government has faced criticism for supporting the scientific and technical aspects of the release. Japan plans to

remove most radioactive elements from the water except for tritium, a hydrogen isotope that is challenging to filter. The water release will take place gradually, starting with 7,800 cubic meters containing around 190 becquerels of tritium per liter, well below the World Health Organization's drinking water limit.

[Indonesian fishers not biting at new policy perceived as undermining them](#)

— Basten Gokkon, *Mongabay*, 16 August 2023

The Indonesian government introduced a quota-based fisheries management policy earlier this year to increase state revenue from the fisheries sector. However, a recent study published in *Ocean & Coastal Management* reveals that this policy is facing opposition from local fishing communities and authorities. The research focused on fisheries management area (FMA) 718, which covers southeastern waters, and found that stakeholders were concerned about diminished roles and benefits due to the policy. The study, which interviewed 40 key informants from various sectors, found that the policy neglected community-based management and favored large-scale investors and commercial fishers, who had more resources and access to quota trading. The policy also undermined the existing zoning system, which protected small-scale and traditional fishers from overfishing by larger vessels. This findings highlight the need for a more suitable and community-centered approach in Indonesia's marine and fisheries policy, given the nation's significant role in global seafood supply and rich marine biodiversity.

Report: Aprian, M., Adrianto, L., Boer, M. and Kurniawan, F., 2023. [Re-thinking Indonesian marine fisheries quota-based policy: A qualitative network of stakeholder perception at fisheries management area 718](#). *Ocean & Coastal Management*, 243, p.106766.

B. Forests and Land Use

[Indonesia permit payoff raises alarm about palm oil industry corruption](#)

—Hans Nicholas Jong, *Mongabay*, 22 August 2023

The former head of land agencies in Riau and North Maluku goes to trial for allegedly receiving US\$1.36 million in bribes over 5 years, for expediting palm oil companies' permits. Calls for increased scrutiny into corruption in Indonesia's palm oil sector have arisen as the trial unfolds. Environmental law experts argue that the secrecy surrounding the permit process facilitates corruption and urge the government to make the permit data publicly accessible. Despite having lost a lawsuit in the past that mandated the publication of permits, the land ministry continues to withhold this data, effectively disregarding the court's directive. The case is seen as just the tip of the iceberg, with corruption believed to be endemic in Indonesia's palm oil industry. The country's Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) dropped significantly in 2022, reflecting widespread corruption. Making permit data public would enhance transparency, curb land-grabbing, and allow public monitoring to detect corrupt practices in the permit issuance process.

[Palm oil, pulpwood firms not doing enough to prevent peat fires, analysis shows](#)

—Hans Nicholas Jon, *Mongabay*, 15 August 2023

A significant portion of tropical peatland in Indonesia, totaling more than 2 million hectares, is at high risk of burning due to companies' failure to restore the peat landscape, according to an analysis by peat watchdog Pantau Gambut. These peatlands store large amounts of carbon, and companies have historically drained them to prepare for planting, making them highly flammable. While the government set restoration targets for concession holders

between 2016-2019, more than 2 million hectares remain unrestored. A Pantau Gambut researcher pointed out that the insufficient efforts by concession holders to restore peatlands can be attributed to the government's Peatland and Mangrove Restoration Agency (BRGM) having limited oversight capabilities, which was exacerbated when the BRGM's responsibilities were expanded in early 2021 to encompass mangrove restoration in addition to peat. The Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) has implemented strict regulations prohibiting its member companies from employing fire in their operations, and has established a dedicated mapping team to closely monitor the activities of its members for any indications of burning. They claim this effort has reduced fire hotspots, but Greenpeace disputes this, stating that RSPO data is misleading and incomplete.

C. Biodiversity, Conservation, and Protected Area

[Expert says urgent enforcement is needed in Indonesia to prevent trade in endangered whale sharks](#)

—*Phys.org*, 22 August 2023

Indonesia must urgently enforce wildlife protection laws to safeguard the endangered whale shark, according to Oxford Brookes University Professor Vincent Nijman. Despite being the world's largest fish, these gentle giants pose no threat to humans but remain vulnerable to exploitation by fishing communities in Java, Indonesia's political and industrial center. Professor Nijman, who heads the Oxford Wildlife Trade Research Group, has amassed data on this issue for over two decades, including images and videos depicting the capture, butchering, and trade of these magnificent creatures. His research highlights that many of the whale sharks being landed are immature, threatening the species' reproductive potential. Whale sharks are increasingly valued for their potential in tourism, generating income through activities such as snorkeling and swimming with these gentle giants. Allowing the trade in whale shark parts not only undermines their protected status in Indonesia but also contradicts international conservation agreements, adding unnecessary pressure to their vulnerable population.

Report: Nijman, V., 2023. [Illegal Trade in Protected Sharks: The Case of Artisanal Whale Shark Meat Fisheries in Java, Indonesia](#). *Animals*, 13(16), p.2656.

D. Climate Change, Energy, and Mining

[Carbon trading: A catalyst for diversified, sustainable bioenergy development](#)

—Rahmat Riyadi, *TheJakartaPost*, 22 August 2023

Indonesia's bioenergy sector, historically reliant on palm oil for biofuel production, is at a pivotal crossroads as global concerns over climate change and environmental damage intensify. Indonesia harbors an immense untapped bioenergy potential, with just 2 percent of its staggering 442-gigawatt capacity in use. To ensure energy resilience and sustainability however, the country must diversify its biofuel sources, and carbon trading—with an estimated potential at US\$25 billion between 2022 and 2026—could become an important instrument in driving this transformation. Under the existing carbon-trading framework in Indonesia, bioenergy producers can earn carbon credits by reducing emissions and adopting environmentally friendly practices. Successful community-driven models in agroforestry and waste-based biomass initiatives offer scalable solutions that benefit both the environment and

local economies, but technical innovations, adaptive regulations, and a robust carbon credit market infrastructure is required to foster this shift. Indonesia has a unique opportunity to lead in sustainable bioenergy through carbon trading, aligning with its climate commitments and steering toward a greener and more prosperous future.

[Deep-sea mining project in PNG resurfaces despite community opposition](#)

—John Cannon, *Mongabay*, 18 August 2023

Despite over a decade of opposition from local communities and a 10-year moratorium on deep-sea mining declared in 2019, a controversial deep-sea mining project in Papua New Guinea is reportedly moving forward. The project, called Solwara 1, is operated by the Vancouver-based company Nautilus Minerals, which was acquired by Isle of Man-based Deep Sea Mining Finance Ltd. after Nautilus went bankrupt. Solwara 1 aims to extract copper and gold from depths of 1,500-1,600 meters below sea level, raising concerns about its potential environmental impacts. Opponents argue that deep-sea mining poses significant unknown risks to the marine ecosystem and communities that rely on it. The Alliance of Solwara Warriors, a group of Indigenous communities, NGOs, and religious organizations in Papua New Guinea, has campaigned against the project and called for a permanent ban on deep-sea mining in PNG waters. Activists argue that the project threatens the livelihoods of ocean-dependent communities and that monetary gain should not outweigh environmental and cultural preservation.

E. Pollution and Waste

[Govt forms task force to curb Jakarta pollution](#)

—A. Muh. Ibnu Aqil, *TheJakartaPost*, 21 August 2023

A task force was recently established by Indonesia's Ministry of Environment and Forestry that will be collaborating with regional administrations to address the escalating air pollution crisis in the Greater Jakarta area. The task force will identify pollution sources, concentrating on industry, energy, and transportation sectors, and will be enforcing existing environmental laws. Administrative sanctions, criminal charges, or civil lawsuits will be imposed on businesses failing to control emissions. Additional measures include implementing vehicle emission tests, promoting public transportation, planting air-purifying trees, and cloud seeding. The Environment and Forestry Minister Siti Nurbaya Bakar highlighted that the early retirement of coal plants and carbon financing are also measures to curb the pollution, but environmentalists maintain skepticism about the task force's ability to resolve this long standing issue, particularly since the government has not shown much effort in the past, rather has even challenged air pollution lawsuits filed by citizens in the past. Jakarta has consistently ranked among the world's most polluted cities, with high levels of hazardous PM2.5 pollutants.

[Jakarta snags 'most polluted' title as air quality plunges and officials dither](#)

—Hans Nicholas Jong, *Mongabay*, 17 August 2023

Jokowi, the president of Indonesia, has fallen ill with a cough, attributed to the bad air in the capital city of Jakarta, which has become the most polluted city in the world, according to a Swiss air quality monitoring platform. The city's air quality index (AQI) reached 231 on Aug. 17, 2023—23 times higher than what is considered safe by the WHO. The city's authorities have been slow to address the issue, despite public protests and lawsuits from environmental groups and citizens. The government has failed to implement effective policies and regulations to reduce emissions, such as expanding public transportation, enforcing vehicle

inspections, imposing emission standards and promoting renewable energy. The government should declare a pollution emergency and follow Beijing's example of taking drastic measures, such as traffic restrictions and industry shutdowns, to safeguard its residents' health from pollution. Jakarta's air quality crisis is not only an environmental issue, but also a social justice and human rights issue that affects millions of people.

F. Investment and Finance

[Indonesia Needs \\$200b Investment for Green Buildings: Minister](#)

—Jayanty Nada Shofa, *JakartaGlobe*, 22 August 2023

Indonesia's Finance Minister, Sri Mulyani, said Tuesday that about US\$200 billion is needed over the next 10 years to construct green buildings in the country. Green buildings aim to minimize environmental impact by conserving water, energy, and using renewable resources. The building and construction sector accounted for 36% of global energy consumption in 2020 and was responsible for up to 37% of energy-related CO² emissions. A report by the International Finance Corporation (IFC) indicates that the East Asia Pacific and South Asia regions are expected to host half of the world's urban population by 2030, indicating upcoming growth in construction for housing. Indonesia already faces a significant housing shortage of 12.71 million homes, with increasing demand due to its young population. Green mortgages, which incentivize energy-efficient homes with lower interest rates, could help reduce emissions but have not gained much traction in the country.

[Indonesia Submits Plan on How it Will Spend \\$20 Billion on Clean Energy Transition](#)

—Victoria Milko, *TheDiplomat*, 17 August 2023

Indonesia has submitted a US\$20 billion plan to the government on transitioning to cleaner energy and financing partners under the Just Energy Transition Partnership (JETP). The JETP deal, announced in November 2022, shifts Indonesia's renewable energy policy to target one-third of the country's power production from renewables by 2030. Challenges include retiring relatively new coal plants, securing adequate financing, ensuring equity for affected coal industry workers, and concerns about new coal-fired power plants. Details of the plan remain undisclosed whilst under review, but are expected to address issues such as captive coal infrastructure and financing challenges. The plan's emissions targets are also under negotiation, and experts suggest more ambitious targets may be necessary to align with the 1.5°C goal of the Paris Agreement. Although the JETP has committed around US\$20 billion, the International Renewable Energy Agency projects that Indonesia will require approximately US\$163.5 billion to meet its renewable energy technology, grid expansion, and storage requirements by 2030.

G. Human Rights and Gender Equality

[Domestic Workers in Indonesia Call for Passage of Long-delayed Protection Bill](#)

—Sebastian Strangio, *TheDiplomat*, 15 August 2023

Indonesian domestic workers and activists have initiated a hunger strike to protest the delay in passing the Domestic Worker Protection Bill. Approximately 40 activists from the Domestic Workers Alliance staged their protest outside the parliament in Jakarta, demanding the passage of the bill aimed at safeguarding the rights of domestic workers, which was first proposed in 2004. The proposed law seeks to provide domestic workers with rights like health

and life insurance, standard working hours, and protection from violence and discrimination. Indonesia has the world's largest population of domestic workers, estimated at 4.2 million, and these workers play a crucial but often overlooked role in the country's economy. The delay in passing the bill has left domestic workers vulnerable to abuse, prompting many to seek opportunities abroad, often in countries like Malaysia, Singapore, and Taiwan. The hunger strike, described as "sunrise-to-sunset fasting protests," will continue daily until the bill is enacted.

I. International Relations

BRICS entails opportunities, risks for Indonesia

—Deni Ghifari, *TheJakartaPost*, 22 August 2023

Indonesia has expressed interest in joining the BRICS group (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) of major emerging economies, and will be one of several non-BRICS members to attend the 15th BRICS Summit in South Africa this week. Indonesian Deputy Trade Minister Jerry Sambuaga mentioned that becoming a member could lead to new trade opportunities in "nontraditional markets" given BRICS' diverse geographical locations and massive populations. While Indonesia's exports to BRICS countries in 2022 totaled US\$93.16 billion, with China being a significant trading partner, trade with some BRICS members like Brazil and South Africa was relatively low. Experts believe the move could have economic benefits but could also have geopolitical repercussions, as Indonesia could be seen as a potential "G7 rival." BRICS initially emerged as a counterbalance to the influential G7, which has held a dominant position in global politics for an extended period. Since its inception in 2006 as BRIC, the group evolved to BRICS with the addition of South Africa in 2010.

End

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