



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

[Indonesia welcomes new Singapore regulation to help curb lobster smuggling](#)

—Basten Gokkon, *Mongabay*, 18 November 2023

A new regulation in Singapore could help stem the smuggling of lobster larvae from Indonesia. The city-state is a key destination for the contraband and a transit point for lobster larvae re-exported to third countries like Vietnam and China. The Singapore Food Agency

(SFA) has since Oct. 1 required traders in the city-state who are re-exporting live animals to other countries to provide a health certificate from the country where the animals originate. This applies to destination countries that demand health documentation when receiving live animals from Singapore. The SFA said the rule would improve trade facilitation and apply to all live animals, including their young and eggs. Under the new regulation, re-exporters in Singapore will have to get health certificates for live animals from the country of origin, which in theory should be impossible for smugglers. Adin Nurawaluddin, the director-general of marine and fisheries resources surveillance, cautiously welcomed the plan, saying “it is a positive move, better than nothing”. He said further both countries must work more closely on the long-running problem.

B. Forests and Land Use

Sustainability standards for palm oil remain controversial

—Vincent Lingga, *The Jakarta Post*, 27 November 2023

Sustainability standards were the central theme of the 19th annual meeting of the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) in Jakarta, attended by around 500 delegates from NGOs, banks, and palm oil growing and processing companies from around the world. Yet not a single senior official of the government addressed the meeting, even though Indonesia is the world’s largest producer of palm oil with an output of 50 million tons/year, in which 40 percent of the 16 million hectares of oil palm plantations is owned by smallholder farmers. The government apparently did not consider the forum important enough as a means of improving the sustainability of palm oil, even though the international market, notably the EU, recognizes and accepts only palm oil certified according to the RSPO sustainability standards. As the global demand for palm oil will increase, the implementation of the EU deforestation regulation makes it more imperative for the RSPO, governments, NGOs and multilateral development agencies to continue joint efforts to set a single certification mechanism for sustainable palm oil.

Investigation shows ‘shadow companies’ linked to Indonesia palm oil giant First Resources

—Mongabay Series “Indonesia for Sale, Indonesian Palm Oil” Team, *Mongabay*, 23 November 2023

There is growing evidence that First Resources, an Indonesian agribusinesses conglomerate founded by the Fangiono family, established networks of smaller shadow companies in order to circumvent sustainability policies, contradicting their voluntary “zero-deforestation” commitments. First Resources has consistently denied the allegation. But an investigation by Gecko Project has gathered insider testimony and corporate documents linking the company to more new deforestation in their plantations for the past five years. First Resources continues to supply blue chip consumer goods companies, including Procter & Gamble and PepsiCo, who sourced palm oil from First Resources in 2018. The two companies, First Resources, and Fangiono Family did not respond to the Gecko Project following detailed questions on the findings.

Report: The investigation story is part of Deforestation Inc, a reporting collaboration coordinated by the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists involving journalists from 28 countries. More info can be found here: [Chasing Shadows | The Gecko Project](#)

C. Biodiversity, Conservation, and Protected Area

Killings of Bornean orangutans could lead to their extinction

—Madeline Reinsel, *Mongabay*, 24 November 2023

Human actions have led to the deaths of more than 100,000 Bornean orangutans (*Pongo pygmaeus*) since 1999, mainly for crop protection, bushmeat or the illegal wildlife trade. People are killing the iconic orange apes at rates that could lead to their extinction, despite the efforts of conservationists. For the first time in 15 years, researchers interviewed residents of villages in Kalimantan, to find out why people kill the great apes and whether conservation projects help protect them. One-third of the villages reported that an orangutan had been killed in recent years, that killings seriously threaten the orangutan population, and that conservation projects have not yet helped. Future research should delve into what drives people to kill the animals, and should explore the effects of orangutan and forest conservation projects at local scales. To succeed, the study concludes, conservation groups must work together with people in local communities to understand what their needs and perspectives are. Understanding the root cause of the problem, namely the drivers of killing, is important in addressing the dire situation.

Study: Massingham E. *et al.*, 2023. [Killing of orangutans in Kalimantan - Community perspectives on incidence and drivers](#), *Conservation Science and Practice*, Volume5, Issue11, e13025

D. Climate Change, Energy, and Mining

Bili-Bili hydroelectric power plant non-operational for two months due to El Niño

—News Desk, *TheJakartaPost*, 23 November 2023

Bili-Bili hydroelectric power plant in Gowa, South Sulawesi, has been non-operational for the past two months due to El Niño. The authority at PLN Nusantara Power Bakaru attributed this to the local water levels not meeting the required intake and discharge. The Bili-Bili plant has a capacity of 19.5 megawatts and provides electricity for around 19,500 people. However, due to the dry conditions, the dam can only generate 2 MW at most. The State Electricity Company PLN data show that the water elevation in the Bili-Bili Dam, which supplies water for the power plant, is exceedingly low, preventing sufficient water discharge for hydropower operations. As a result, PLN has been forced to temporarily halt the operation until conditions return to normal. The Bili-Bili Dam, which is part of the Pompengan-Jeneberang River Basin Work Unit, was constructed in 1992 to prevent flooding in Makassar city and regulate water supply in Gowa and Takalar regencies. The dam serves multiple purposes, including flood control, irrigation, hydroelectric power generation, tourism and inland fisheries cultivation.

Salty wells and lost land: Climate and erosion take their toll in Sulawesi

—Agus Mawan, *Mongabay*, 21 November 2023

Erosion on the west coast of Indonesia's Sulawesi Island is so advanced that seawater has penetrated the groundwater supply. Over the past three decades, the residents of Mampie village have watched their homes and farmland vanish. The erosion is inflicting lower income and higher cost on the people of Mampie, as rising tides encroach on human infrastructure and settlements. They have yet to be served by utility water provision, so they are resorting to costly supplies of water from private distributors. Research shows that rising seas, and more frequent, powerful storms will accelerate coastal abrasion. At least 88,000 people living on 677 kilometers of coastline in West Sulawesi are vulnerable to disaster, according to a 2023

Risk Index by Indonesia's disaster management agency, BNPB. The trend looks set to worsen not just in Sulawesi but for coastal communities across the globe, as sea levels rise and extreme weather becomes more pronounced. Data showed conflicts due to water scarcity worsened by drought, climate disruptions, and growing populations have increased over the last two decades.

Study: Mentaschi, L. *et al.*, 2018. [Global long-term observations of coastal erosion and accretion](#). *Scientific Reports*, 8(1). 12876; Taherkhani, M. *et al.*, 2020. [Sea-level rise exponentially increases coastal flood frequency](#). *Scientific Reports*, 10(1). 6466

[Indonesia launches new front in climate campaign focusing on seagrass](#)

—Basten Gokkon, *Mongabay*, 21 November 2023

Indonesia has published a road map for seagrass protection and rehabilitation, as part of its efforts to mitigate the impacts of the climate crisis. Seagrass Blue Carbon Mitigation Action Profile would focus on regulatory interventions for marine zoning and seagrass restoration. Experts estimated that seagrass can sequester carbon dioxide from the atmosphere 35 times greater than tropical rainforests. They also suggest that a healthy coastal ecosystem can filter sediment and debris washing into the sea from the land, and protect against coastal abrasion and storm surges. Indonesia has long been recognized as a crucial country as it's estimated to host at least a tenth or 11.5% of the world's seagrass meadows. This is a position the government wants to leverage to increase its carbon storage options, by restoring vital ecosystems such as mangroves, seagrass and coral reefs. Nature-based solutions, like forest and marine ecosystems, are considered one of the most affordable ways to achieve nearly 37% of the emission reductions by 2030 required to meet the Paris Agreement.

E. Pollution and Waste

[The right to clean air](#)

—Editorial Board, *The Jakarta Post*, 25 November 2023

Justice was served as the Supreme Court upheld the punishments handed down to the central government and Jakarta administration for failing to cope with the air pollution that has been plaguing Jakarta. However, justice will be denied if the government refuses to comply with the Supreme Court's ruling, which is final and binding. The longer the government waits, the more people will suffer due to the toxic air they breathe. The president, his environment, health, and home ministers, as well as the governor of Jakarta should never consider themselves the losers in the legal fight, because the civil society groups who filed the class action in 2021 did this as a last resort after their demand for solutions to the air pollution had been left unaddressed. Challenging the court's ruling through a case review will constitute the absence of concrete action and lack of respect for human rights. Now, with elections around the corner, hopefully the government feels more pressure to take necessary measures to protect people's right to healthy air.

[Waste in Six Cities is Dominated by Small Plastic Packaging](#)

—Pradipta Pandu, *KOMPAS*, 22 November 2023

A study conducted by Net Zero Waste Management Consortium and *Kompas* included collecting data from 12-17 sampling points in each of the six target cities of Medan, Samarinda, Makassar, Denpasar, Surabaya and Jakarta. Sampling sites consisted of temporary disposal sites, final disposal sites, and locations such as roadsides, coastlines, and

rivers. The findings revealed that among the 625 waste types sampled, plastic packaging or fragments emerged as the predominant waste type across these six cities. These fragments pose significant challenges due to their complexity in processing, minimal economic value, susceptibility to rapid degradation, and propensity to disperse quickly as microplastics. The research also captured the perception, implementation, and expectations of the community regarding waste management. Participated by 600 respondents – mostly housewives and secondary school graduates – the poll showed that the majority of respondents were not aware of the pertaining regulations. Most respondents also had never heard of the reduce, reuse and recycle (3R) program and do not have the habit of collecting packaging and using products whose waste is collected back by the manufacturer.

F. Investment and Finance

[RI eyes building Java-Sumatra power transmission project with JETP funding](#)

—Divya Karyza, *TheJakartaPost*, 21 November 2023

Indonesia is pushing to include the Java-Sumatra interconnection transmission line project as one of the first projects to be funded through the Just Energy Transition Partnership (JETP). Indonesia's JETP Secretariat head Edo Mahendra said the government would include the transmission line project in the upcoming 2024-2034 long-term electricity procurement plan (RUPTL). The secretariat also said it would prioritize concessional loans under JETP pledges to finance several grid projects with the Java-Sumatra transmission line as one of them along with the Sumatra backbone, the Sulawesi loop and, if possible, the Sumatra-Batam-Bintan transmission line. The project is central to channeling renewable energy into Java, but must be included in the RUPTL, the business plan. This statement was issued on the sidelines of the launching ceremony of JETP's Comprehensive Investment and Policy Plan (CIPP). Experts say the rise in captive power may pose a stumbling block for Indonesia's effort to cap power sector carbon emissions and acquire international financial support for its energy transition.

G. Human Rights and Gender Equality

[Report shines partial light on worst labor offenders in opaque fishing industry](#)

—Edward Carver, *Mongabay*, 21 November 2023

In recent years, news on forced labor on industrial fishing vessels made headlines in prominent media. Yet ship owners are rarely held to account, often because it's hard to identify who they are. A report from Financial Transparency Coalition (FTC), a consortium of international NGOs, examined cases of reported forced labor on 475 fishing vessels since 2010. At least 128,000 fishers are trapped in forced labor at sea, according to ILO. The coercive practice takes many forms, from holding crew members' identity documents, withholding wages, debt bondage, abusive conditions, violence, to intimidation. The industry is so opaque that it's not possible to identify the beneficial owners — the people who ultimately keep the profits. The authors could only identify the legal owners of about half the vessels. Of the accused, half are owned by Asian companies, and nearly one-quarter owned by European companies. The report calls for countries to create public registries of beneficial owners when licensing vessels, to treat forced labor as a crime under money-laundering laws and to ratify international treaties on labor rights at sea.

Report: [Dark Webs: Uncovering those behind forced labour on commercial fishing fleets - Financial Transparency Coalition](#)

I. RI General Elections

[Presidential campaign kicks off](#)

—Yerica Lai, *TheJakartaPost*, 28 November 2023

The 75-day presidential campaign for Indonesia’s upcoming election commenced on Tuesday, with two of the three candidates hitting the road to woo voters across the nation. More than 200 million people will be voting for a new leader to succeed President Jokowi after a decade in power. The Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle’s (PDI-P) Ganjar Pranowo and his counterpart, Mahfud MD, commenced their campaign in opposite ends of the nation, Papua and Aceh respectively, a move to demonstrate unity in Indonesia. Anies Baswedan and his ally Muhaimin Iskandar commenced their campaign in their stronghold regions of Jakarta and East Java, focusing on justice and marginalized communities. Meanwhile, current frontrunner Prabowo and his running mate Gibran will finish attending to their tasks as defense minister and mayor of Surakarta, respectively, before kick starting their campaign on Friday. Polls suggest a tight contest between Prabowo and Ganjar, with Anies trailing. With none poised to secure a majority, expectations point to a runoff between the top two contenders. Key battlegrounds in densely populated provinces are anticipated to sway the election’s direction.

[Indonesia election 2024: as Prabowo dances his way up the polls, can he keep in the groove until voting day?](#)

—Amy Sood, *SouthChinaMorningPost*, 25 November 2023

Presidential candidate Prabowo Subianto is riding high in the polls after winning over Indonesia’s younger generation. He is literally dancing his way into the hearts of voters. His transformation from a controversial military strongman into a social media sensation has been enabled by massively viral TikTok videos of him doing what he refers to as “happy dance”. Now the former special forces commander, who was once banned from the US over alleged human-rights abuses in East Timor, is being called “adorable” – by a younger generation both unfamiliar with his contentious past and supportive of his campaign, as shown by his ticket’s dominance in recent polls. Observers say that if Prabowo keeps up his momentum, there is a chance he could win the election outright by capturing more than 50% of the vote on Feb 14, avoiding a run-off. Experts say to swing the electoral landscape in their favour, the other two candidates – former Governor of Central Java Ganjar Pranowo and former Governor of Jakarta Anies Baswedan – might have to intensify their criticism and reshape public perceptions of Prabowo.

II. Indonesia in Geopolitics

[Analysis: Election integrity undermined, post-polling violence becomes more likely](#)

—Tenggara Strategics, *TheJakartaPost*, 20 November 2023

The integrity of the 2024 General Elections has been undermined by the recent decision to retain six justices on the Constitutional Court even though they were guilty of ethics breaches when they issued a recent ruling on the presidential election. The court is the final arbiter of disputes, and the continued presence of these six justices raises questions about the court’s credibility. With the integrity compromised, it could pave the way for the losing parties to reject

the results of the election. In 2019, challenger Prabowo Subianto denounced the results after he lost to the incumbent President, proclaiming “massive, structured and systematic” fraud. His supporters went on a violent rampage outside the Elections Supervisory Body. Losing candidates reject election results and later incite supporters to violence has become a global trend. Donald Trump did it in the United States in 2021 after he lost to Joe Biden, and Jair Bolsonaro did so this year in Brazil after he lost to Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva.

[Beyond 2024: Indonesia's ascent in global leadership through transformative diplomacy](#)

—Moch Faisal Karim, *TheJakartaPost*, 16 November 2023

Recently, CSIS think tank provided a platform for three presidential candidates to articulate their foreign policy visions. *First*, Ganjar Pranowo who emphasizes Indonesia as the global food granary. Inspired by President Widodo's “Global Maritime Fulcrum”, Ganjar seeks to position Indonesia in the global food supply chain. However, his focus on self-reliance and industrialization, lacks specificity and innovation. It risks an overemphasis on isolationist policies in an interconnected world. *Second*, Anies Baswedan who advocates for a more proactive role and holistic approach. He criticizes the current government's pragmatic diplomacy as too narrowly focused on economic interests. Drawing from Joseph Nye's concept of smart power, he suggests a blend of soft and hard power. However, Anies' vision lacks practical details. *Third*, Prabowo Subianto's stance, echoing former President Yudhoyono's "million friends, zero enemies" philosophy, emphasizes amicable relations with all nations. However, Prabowo's vision invites a critique regarding its practical application. While each candidate shows their understanding of foreign policy, they seem to lack a transformative ambition and transformative diplomacy – a diplomacy that not only shapes the world but also saves the nation's journey toward a more democratic, just and prosperous society.
