



Indonesia Sustainable Development News Digest

2023 Issue 25 — 14 December

*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.*

CONTENTS

- A. Marine and Fisheries
 - B. Forests and Land Use
 - C. Biodiversity, Conservation, and Protected Areas
 - D. Climate Change, Energy, and Mining
 - E. Pollution and Waste
 - F. Investment and Finance
 - G. Human Rights and Gender Equality
-
- I. RI General Elections
 - II. Indonesia in Geopolitics

A. Marine and Fisheries

[RI Can Get Rich Just from Fish, Here's the Proof](#)

—Artyasari Rizky, *CNBCIndonesia*, 12 December 2023

The Minister of Maritime Affairs and Fisheries predicted that by 2030 the global market for Indonesian fishery products could reach up to US\$730 billion. According to him, Indonesia continues to experience a very significant increase, where in 2021 and 2022, the Indonesian market for fisheries products reached US\$310 billion and US\$338 billion respectively. The

marine & fisheries sector has enormous potential with more than 17,504 islands, 6.4 million km² of water area, and 108,000 km of coastline. Indonesia also plays a large role in providing the world's protein needs which continue to increase. The Minister continued to explain that MMAF established five blue economic policy directions that place ecology in the center. This includes expanding marine conservation areas, quota-based fishing, developing sustainable coastal and inland mariculture, monitoring and controlling coastal areas and small islands, as well as cleaning up plastic waste in the sea through fishermen's participation movements.

[Southeast Asia eyes seafood export bounty as sustainability falls by the wayside](#)

—Aidan Jones, *SouthChinaMorningPost*, 9 December 2023

Governments in Southeast Asia are dismantling vital protections for their lucrative fishing sectors, sparking concerns among environmentalists. Controls addressing illegal fishing and labor abuses, previously crucial for supply chain integrity, are being eroded. Indonesia lifted a ban on transshipment, risking unregulated catch transfers and crew trafficking at sea. Meanwhile, Thailand, once praised for anti-illegal fishing efforts, plans to ease strict regulations that curb overfishing and labor exploitation, facing criticism for proposed rollbacks in regulations. In Indonesia, a decree demands fees from foreign investors fishing in its waters, contributing to a \$6.4 billion industry mainly exporting to the US, China, and Japan. These decisions exacerbate overfishing, pitting local fishermen against large foreign vessels in already depleted waters. Vietnam, a top seafood exporter, faced EU scrutiny in 2017 but saw increased fishery value despite ongoing illegal fishing. However, as controls weaken amid warming seas, the region faces a looming crisis. Environmentalists fear this may reverse progress, endangering marine life and the credibility of seafood worldwide.

[Quota-Based Fishing Suspended](#)

—BM Lukita Grahadyarini, *Kompas*, 6 December 2023

The government's decision to delay the quota-based fishing policy, amidst considerable public controversy, is outlined in a Circular Letter issued by the Minister of Maritime Affairs and Fisheries dated November 29, 2023. The Circular Letter outlines the relaxation of policy implementation during the transition period of implementing the measured fishing policy, and encompasses several key aspects. Notably, the commencement of catch quotas and quota certificates, initially set for the 2024 fishing season, has been rescheduled to 2025. Additionally, this postponement extends to the withdrawal scheme for non-tax state revenue (PNBP) linked to granting fishing quotas, PNBP related to quota transfers, and PNBP associated with business permits for local fishermen issued by the governor. This deferment remains in effect until official regulations governing these matters are established. The government's decision to delay implementation is seen as a recognition of the importance of considering stakeholder input and perspectives. It is anticipated that this postponement will facilitate the refinement of several policies concerning capture fisheries.

B. Forests and Land Use

[Indonesia's deforestation rate off target for 2030 climate goal](#)

—News Desk, *TheJakartaPost*, 13 December 2023

During COP28 in Dubai, Joko Widodo boasted of Indonesia's work in curbing the deforestation rate by 75%. He claimed that the current rate was the lowest in the last two decades. Jokowi referred to data from the Environment and Forestry Ministry that showed a reduction in deforested land from 462,000 ha in the 2018-2019 period to 115,000 ha in 2019-2020. Deforestation reduction was part of the country's goal of achieving a Forest and Other

Land Use (FOLU) Net Sink – a condition in which the carbon absorbed is higher than the carbon emitted. Under the Net Sink, Indonesia plans to contribute to the country's emissions reduction by absorbing 140 million tonnes of CO₂e of greenhouse gases. But environmentalists refuted the claim, saying that Indonesia is actually behind in realizing its deforestation targets and urged the government to develop a more robust forest protection policy. The country had in fact exceeded the deforestation quota to reach the Net Sink condition by 500,000 ha, as Indonesia saw 4.8 million ha of deforestation of forests and peatlands between 2013 and 2019.

[Indigenous groups rebuke court OK for palm oil company to raze Papua forests](#)

—Hans Nicholas Jong, *Mongabay*, 7 December 2023

Indigenous communities in Indonesia's South Papua province express outrage over a court's dismissal of their lawsuit challenging a palm oil company's permit to raze their ancestral forest. The rejected lawsuit grants PT Indo Asiana Lestari (IAL) clearance to clear 26,326 hectares of primary forest, raising concerns among environmentalists. The impending deforestation would subsequently release at least 23 million metric tons of carbon dioxide, which is 5% of Indonesia's estimated annual carbon emissions. The conflict between the Awyu tribe and IAL stems from the larger Tanah Merah project, where disputes among investors over a 280,000 ha rainforest stretch persist. Irregularities in licensing, including allegations of corruption and forged signatures, taint the project. Despite presenting evidence of permit irregularities during a seven-month trial, the court rejected the lawsuit on Nov. 2, 2023, disappointing the Awyu tribe. The judges dismissed considerations about flawed consultation processes with Indigenous groups, emphasizing a supporting letter from a local organization, LMA, lacking representation of the affected tribe. Critics, including Greenpeace, argue that the court overlooked the environmental and social impact. The Awyu fear displacement due to the looming deforestation threat posed by IAL, despite their long-standing opposition to the palm oil project.

C. Biodiversity, Conservation, and Protected Area

[Indonesia: Critically Endangered Sumatran Rhino gets a new ray of hope](#)

—Travel News Indonesia Team, *TimesofIndia*, 3 December 2023

In a significant conservation milestone, a Sumatran rhino calf was born in Indonesia's western island of Sumatra. This calf is the second Sumatran rhino born in Indonesia in 2023. With their population on the brink of extinction, this new birth is a tremendous development, a positive addition to the remaining individuals. Rhino extinction is due two main reasons, namely habitat loss and poaching for their prized horns. Once abundant in the wild, now they are less than 50, and that's their global count. The new male Sumatran rhino calf was born to Delilah, a seven-year-old female, at the Way Kambas National Park in Lampung, Sumatra. The father is a Sumatran rhino named Harapan, who was born in the Cincinnati Zoo in the US in 2006. Harapan is the last Sumatran rhino to be repatriated to Indonesia. This means, at present, the entire population of this species is located within Indonesia. The recent birth speaks tremendously of the government and the scientific community's commitment to rhino conservation. It is a testament to successful breeding efforts at the rhino sanctuary.

D. Climate Change, Energy, and Mining

[Dubai summit adopts world-first 'transition' from fossil fuels](#)

—Team, *AFP*, 13 December 2023

Nearly 200 nations meeting in Dubai approved a first-ever call for the world to transition away from fossil fuels, the top culprit behind our planetary crisis. After 13 days of talks and another sleepless night in a country built on oil wealth, the Emirati leadership of the COP28 summit banged a gavel to signal the world had reached consensus. Toughening language from an earlier draft that was roundly denounced, the agreement calls for "transitioning away from fossil fuels in energy systems, in a just, orderly and equitable manner, accelerating action in this critical decade, so as to achieve net zero by 2050 in keeping with the science". It marked the first mention of fossil fuels in 28 years of climate summits. The text, however, stopped short of calls for a "phase-out" of oil, gas and coal, which together account for around three-quarters of the emissions. Low-lying islands fear extinction from rising sea levels and worsening storms, with the Marshall Islands denouncing the earlier draft as a "death warrant". The bloc of small island states called the revised text "an improvement" but it reiterated concerns, saying that the deal was "incremental and not transformational".

[Pressure mounts on COP28 president as fossil fuel debate sizzles](#)

—Hashem Osseiran and Benjamin Legendre, *AFP*, 7 December 2023

The UN faced growing pressure to steer nations towards a consensus as negotiators sparred over the thorny issue of fossil fuels. A new draft climate agreement had been expected but none was published so far. The negotiations are due to end, in theory, on 12 Dec. The fate of oil, gas and coal, the main drivers of human-caused planet heating, has been the biggest sticking point on the agenda. Urging embattled COP28 president Sultan Al Jaber to ease differences, Spain's Ecological Transition Minister Teresa Ribera said: "We expect from the COP president to be an honest broker and we expect leadership." The Alliance of Small Islands States called for major emitters to enhance their commitments. "If we fail, the consequences will be catastrophic," the alliance's chairman Cedric Schuster said. Battle lines have previously been drawn on whether to agree to "phase out" or "phase down" fossil fuels. However the latest text includes a new phrase "orderly and just" phase-out. For his part, UN climate chief Simon Stiell said "key now is to sort the wheat from the chaff," urging a move towards consensus, while US climate envoy John Kerry stressed that "adults need to behave like adults".

E. Pollution and Waste

[Examining the Presidential Candidate Debate on Air Pollution with Scientific and Legal Facts](#)

—Ahmad Arif, *Kompas*, 13 December 2023

Jakarta's air pollution was one of the hot topics in the presidential candidate debate on Dec 12. A critical view is required so that the issue doesn't merely become a political debate. We need scientific data and legal facts to overcome air pollution which has shortened the life expectancy of Jakarta residents by an average of 2.4 years. The first debate had the theme "Law, Human Rights, Governance, Eradicating Corruption and Strengthening Democracy". Air pollution was brought up in the Q&A session between candidates, which showed that this issue is paramount for the public. It is undeniable that air pollution is a major health and economic burden. This is also what prompted 32 residents under Capital Coalition to sue a number of parties in the government regarding air pollution in Jakarta in 2019. Their lawsuit demanded a reduction in air pollution levels, leading to a landmark ruling by the highest courts, including the Supreme Court. The government was held accountable and instructed to

enhance national ambient air quality standards to adequately safeguard human health, particularly vulnerable populations.

[Govt calls for public vigilance over emerging COVID sub-variants](#)

—News Desk, *TheJakartaPost*, 7 December 2023

The Health Ministry has urged greater vigilance amid a recent uptick in cases of new COVID-19 sub-variants, both in the country and around the globe, while reassuring the public on the availability of vaccines. Health Ministry spokesperson Siti Nadia Tarmizi noted a daily increase of COVID-19 infections by “35 to 40 cases” and an increase in hospitalizations by “60 to 131 cases”. Siti advised people who are sick, children and elderly to wear masks, and that anyone with symptoms should see a doctor or a health worker. She also encouraged everyone to complete their two-dose vaccination against COVID-19, though she did not mention the vaccines’ efficacy against the new sub-variants. Lastly, the ministry urged people to postpone traveling to countries currently experiencing a surge in cases. Singapore’s Health Ministry said in its advisory that the sudden increase could be due to a number of factors, including the year-end travel season and waning population immunity, while Malaysian health authorities said the situation was under control.

F. Investment and Finance

[Indonesia's ambitions to be a hub to store carbon emissions could be risky business](#)

—Nivell Rayda, *ChannelNewsAsia*, 6 December 2023

With a capacity of over 600 billion tonnes, Indonesia is going big on carbon capture and storage (CCS) and aims to be Asia Pacific CCS hub. It plans to use thousands of depleted oil and gas reservoirs across the country to permanently store CO² churned out by heavy industries. But costs are high and the technology racks up a large energy bill. Also, adopting CCS as a way to reduce carbon emissions is a Catch-22, since it paradoxically helps oil companies boost their fossil fuel production. Amid the bubbly optimism, analysts cautioned about CCS’ high cost – between US\$80 and US\$1,000 per tonne of CO² stored – and the fact that it uses a lot of energy. CCS projects have a record of underdelivering on emissions reduction targets, with some projects abandoned midway into their construction. However, the biggest risk of CCS is that it takes public attention away from more viable options like transitioning from fossil fuels to renewable sources of energy, retiring coal-fired power plants or preventing deforestation.

G. Human Rights and Gender Equality

[Indonesian fish exports increase as workers in this industry continue to suffer](#)

—Adityo Nugroho, *RakyatMerdekaOnlineRMOLBisnis*, 10 December 2023

As of September 2023, the Ministry of Maritime Affairs and Fisheries recorded exports of Indonesian fishery products reaching US\$ 4.1 billion, exceeding the target set at 53%. Behind the scenes, fishing vessel crews and fishery processing workers (AKP) are forced to continue exhausting Indonesia’s marine resources according to NGO Destructive Fishing Watch. In the 2020-2023 period, the National Fisher Center (NFC) recorded 123 complaints of labor rights violations that occurred on board ships. Not infrequently these complaints can be categorized as forced labor to human trafficking. Of the number of complaints, the NFC recorded 325 victims, consisting of 54.92% domestic AKP and 45.08% migrant AKP. The regions receiving

the most complaints were North Sulawesi (49), Central Java (30) and West Java (12). The majority of victims (35.7%) reported cases of salary cuts without transparency from the ship owner or captain. Salary cuts occurred as a result of AKP recruitment being dominated by brokers who gave debts to AKP candidates and required payment through salary cuts.

[President Jokowi suspects human trafficking behind increased Rohingya arrivals](#)

—Team, *Reuters*, 8 December 2023

President Joko Widodo strongly suspects human trafficking is behind a recent increase in arrivals of Rohingya Muslims on its territory, and promises to work with international groups to address the issue. More than 1,200 Rohingya people, a persecuted minority from Myanmar, have landed ashore in Aceh since November, according to UNHCR, prompting concern among local communities about the scale of the exodus. For years, many Rohingya have embarked on perilous journeys on rickety boats, hoping to reach neighbouring Thailand and Bangladesh or further afield Malaysia and Indonesia, both Muslim majority countries. They take to the sea mostly between November and April when seas are calmer. Indonesia has long been a safe haven for Rohingya, but the high volume of arrivals in recent weeks has seen an increase in negative sentiment on social media and some pushback from people in Aceh, the westernmost province where most landings take place. Indonesia will give temporary humanitarian aid to the Rohingya but keep prioritising local residents, Jokowi said.

[As RSPO celebrates 20 years of work, Indigenous groups lament unresolved grievances](#)

—Hans Nicholas Jong, *Mongabay*, 6 December 2023

The RSPO recently celebrated its 20-year anniversary at a Jakarta conference, lauding its global expansion to over 5,700 members across 100 countries, promoting sustainable palm oil and earning a coveted green label. Yet, amidst festivities, long standing conflicts with local Indigenous groups persist. Communities accuse RSPO-affiliated companies of land rights violations without adequate resolution, undermining faith in the organization's grievance mechanism. Indigenous communities like Nagari Koto Baru and Dayak Hibun in Indonesia claim land encroachment by RSPO members. Despite filing complaints, the RSPO dismissed their cases, fueling frustration and distrust. Critics condemn the RSPO's shift from a sustainability tool to an industry legitimization mechanism. Concerns arise over RSPO-certified companies operating illegal plantations in forest areas and non-compliance with government mandates. NGOs and affected communities demand greater transparency, community involvement, and efficient conflict resolution from the RSPO. While promising improvements, criticisms persist, challenging the RSPO's credibility in resolving disputes and promoting ethical palm oil practices.

I. RI General Elections

[Prabowo-Gibran Leading, Undecided Voters Increasing](#)

—Bambang Setiawan, *Kompas*, 11 December 2023

The latest *Kompas* survey shows the electability of the presidential and vice presidential candidate Prabowo Subianto and Gibran Rakabuming Raka with 39.3% of the vote is ahead of Anies Baswedan-Muhaimin Iskandar at 16.7% and Ganjar Pranowo-Mahfud MD at 15.3%. Prabowo-Gibran excelled in almost all socio-demographic categories of respondents. However, the number of undecided voters (28.7%) is currently continuing to increase. The political dynamics that occur in the two months leading up to the voting will be very

determining. The survey was conducted face-to-face between the 29th Nov-4th Dec 2023 with 1,364 randomly selected respondents in 38 provinces of Indonesia. The increase in Prabowo's electability and the decrease in votes for Ganjar cannot be separated from the shift in support from former voters of Joko Widodo. Jokowi voters in the 2019 presidential election, who in August 2023 still predominantly voted for Ganjar, are currently recorded to have voted more for Prabowo.

[Anies Criticizes New Capital City: If the Problem is in Jakarta, Don't Leave It](#)

—News Desk, *CNNIndonesia*, 12 December 2023

Presidential candidate number 1 Anies Baswedan criticized the development of Indonesia's new capital city mega project IKN on the grounds that there are still many problems in DKI Jakarta. Anies' statement was a response to presidential candidate number 3 Ganjar Pranowo's question. Ganjar asked Anies' opinion about the government's policy of moving the country's capital. Ganjar believes that there are problems abound in the current capital, such as traffic gridlock, flood, land subsidence, sea level rise and more. Bestari Barus, spokesman for Anies Baswedan campaign team, clarified Anies' stance: Anies is not rejecting Nusantara but instead wants to "perfect" the proposal. There's no statement of refusal, he's evaluating it. According to Bestari, Anies will establish four teams for the 100-day program. One of the programs reportedly involves evaluating the IKN Law. Earlier this month, National Mandate Party vice chairman Viva Yoga Mauladi accused Anies of rejecting the new capital. Yoga's claims that Anies was opposing the Nusantara project were then deflected by the candidate's other campaign team spokesperson, Tatak Ujyati, asserting that "Anies has never expressed opposition".

[2024 election may worsen IKN's appeal for investors](#)

—Yvette Tanamal, *TheJakartaPost*, 8 December 2023

Doubt has been cast over the future of President Joko Widodo's upcoming legacy of the Nusantara Capital City (IKN), as a statement from a presidential candidate on the lack of interest in continuing its development might deter investors from throwing money at the project. Foreign investors, the already elusive key to the project's realization, are likely to be deterred from throwing their hats in the ring in the foreseeable future, as next year's election may create unpredictability for Nusantara's future. The House of Representatives has future-proofed the new capital development by passing in October a revision to law that prevents future presidents from ditching the project. But former Jakarta governor Anies Baswedan, who is running for the presidency with National Awakening Party (PKB) chair Muhaimin Iskandar, repeatedly stated that the pair would not prioritize Nusantara's development if they get elected. In contrast to Anies, his rivals Defense Minister Prabowo Subianto and former Central Java governor Ganjar Pranowo have expressed interest in continuing the new city project.

II. Indonesia in Geopolitics

[Building a New Decade of Sino-Indonesian Relations](#)

—Lu Kang, *Kompas*, 7 December 2023

2023 marks the tenth anniversary of the establishment of a comprehensive strategic partnership between China and Indonesia. What does this mean for people in Indonesia? In the past decade, both countries have improved their bilateral relationship to the highest level in history. In the political field, both heads of state have exchanged visits 11 times and held bilateral meetings several times during various multilateral conferences. Reciprocal visits between the two heads of state have taken place four times, a record high. At a meeting in

Bali last year, the President of China Xi Jinping and the President of the Republic of Indonesia Joko Widodo agreed to set general directions for building a Community of the same fate as China-Indonesia. The two countries also formed a mechanism for high-level bilateral dialogue cooperation, building a new pattern of bilateral cooperation with the "four-wheel drive" in the fields of politics, economy, socio-culture, and maritime.

End

We hope you enjoy reading our Indonesia Sustainable News Digest. If you no longer wish to receive this biweekly email, you can unsubscribe [here](#).