



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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Obituary

In this edition of the Indonesia Sustainable Development News Digest, Starling Resources pays tribute to a cherished friend and colleague, Kristian Thebu, affectionately known as 'Om Kris,' who departed from us on Sunday. For nearly a decade, our team had the privilege of collaborating closely with Om Kris on marine protected area management in Raja Ampat. His dedication, expertise, and warm demeanor left an indelible mark on each member of our team. Despite his demanding schedule, Om Kris generously shared his time and knowledge with us, enriching our collective understanding and inspiring us with his passion for

conservation. We are profoundly grateful for the invaluable lessons and memories he leaves behind.

Raja Ampat Conservation Figure, Kristian Thebu, Passes Away

Kristian Thebu, has left a profound void in the environmental conservation community with his passing on Sunday evening at the age of 55. As the Chairman of the Mayan Traditional Council in Raja Ampat Regency, Om Kris was a tireless advocate for the preservation of Raja Ampat's pristine natural heritage. His unwavering commitment to sustainable marine management and environmental protection earned him widespread respect and admiration. Om Kris's visionary leadership and dedication were instrumental in positioning Raja Ampat as a beacon of hope for conservation efforts worldwide. Through his role as a Program Manager at Indonesian Conservation, he championed initiatives that promoted biodiversity conservation and community livelihoods. His passing is not only a loss to the conservation community but also to the people of Raja Ampat, whose lives he touched deeply. Om Kris's legacy will endure as a reminder of the importance of safeguarding our natural treasures for future generations. He leaves behind a lasting impact on environmental conservation in Papua and beyond.

A. Marine and Fisheries

Stalemate: WTO talks again fail to end overfishing subsidies

—Elizabeth Fitt, *Mongabay*, 5 March 2024

Negotiations at the World Trade Organization's 13th Ministerial Conference (MC13) in Abu Dhabi concluded without finalizing phase two of a treaty to ban harmful fisheries subsidies, which sustain overfishing with an estimated \$22 billion annually. Despite 22 years of talks, member states couldn't bridge crucial divides in the draft, sparking concerns about fairness and effectiveness. While 10 more states ratified phase one during MC13, 39 more are needed for implementation. Analysts lamented the setback, highlighting its threat to marine biodiversity and millions reliant on fish for livelihoods. The 2022 Fish One agreement addressed some concerns but left key issues for MC13, such as curbing subsidies contributing to overfishing and accommodating developing nations. However, contentious loopholes persisted, notably in self-determined "biologically sustainable" levels and exemptions favoring developed states. Critics say the draft unfairly benefits heavy subsidizers, hindering smaller players. Moving forward, WTO working groups will refine the draft for MC14 in 2026. Despite urgency, stakeholders prioritize an effective treaty over speed, recognizing the stakes for marine resources and livelihoods.

Fisheries Subsidy Dilemma

—BM Lukita Grahadyarini, *Kompas*, 2 March 2024

Aspirations to limit fisheries subsidies were discussed at the recent 13th Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organization (WTO), 26-29 February. Nine countries, including Brunei Darussalam, Chad, and Malaysia, agreed to the fisheries subsidy agreement, bringing the total to 70 countries, with 40 remaining to reach a consensus. The agreement aims to curb harmful subsidies promoting overfishing and ensure ocean sustainability. It prohibits eight types of subsidies, such as those for ship construction and fuel purchases. However, discussions on food security and the treatment of developing countries remain challenging. Indonesia has not ratified the agreement, citing the need to support its small-scale fishermen, as mandated by national law. Government assistance targets fuel subsidies, equipment, and infrastructure for small fishermen, with plans for further aid in

2024. Critics say that existing subsidies often benefit larger vessels, urging better targeting. Indonesia faces a dilemma in balancing the fight against illegal fishing while protecting its fishermen's interests. Capture fisheries have brought state revenues, supported food security, and provided protein for the country.

[With drop in illegal fishing comes rise in piracy, study in Indonesia finds](#)

—Basten Gokkon, *Mongabay*, 22 February 2024

A recent study reveals that Indonesia's crackdown on illegal fishing, aimed at curbing significant economic losses, inadvertently fuels maritime piracy. The campaign, targeting illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing, inadvertently shifts efforts from fishing to piracy due to factors like food insecurity and poverty. The study highlights a negative correlation between reduced illegal fishing and increased piracy, especially in heavily trafficked areas like the Malacca Strait. However, the correlation needs further on-ground validation. The complexity of the issue suggests the need for collaborative efforts with neighboring countries and improved maritime security laws. While acknowledging the role of foreign trawlers in creating dissatisfaction among local fishers, the study emphasizes the nuanced nature of illegal fishing, involving both foreign and local perpetrators. Addressing piracy alongside illegal fishing is crucial for Indonesia's maritime security, requiring coordinated efforts and public participation.

Study: Phayal, A., Gold, A., Maharani, C., Palomares, M. L. D., Pauly, D., Prins, B., & Riyadi, S. (2024). [All maritime crimes are local: Understanding the causal link between illegal fishing and maritime piracy](#). *Political Geography*, 109.

B. Forests and Land Use

[Sumatra community faces up to 'plasma' disappointment after palm oil policy shift](#)

—Suryadi, *Mongabay*, 4 March 2024

A 2022 investigation by Mongabay, BBC and The Gecko Project revealed that palm oil companies in Indonesia failed to allocate thousands of hectares of land to communities where they operate, despite provisions in a 2007 law. In 2023, Directorate-General of Plantations published updated rules stating that companies with licenses issued prior to 2007 would not be required to hand 20% of their concession to local farmers, although companies licensed after 2007 would still be required to do so. Tebing Tinggi Okura, a Sumatran community, is coming to terms with this change after a near two-decade dispute with PT Surya Intisari Raya, which holds pre-2007 rights. Despite promises of shared profits and rights to farming land for hundreds of families, small farmers still struggle to benefit. While millions of farmers contribute to the palm oil sector, systemic issues persist. Government mediation has yielded little clarity. The new rules allow companies to support communities in various ways, not just through land allocation. The Tebing Tinggi Okura community remains hopeful for resolution.

[Greenpeace Slams IKN's Smart Forest City Concept: 'It's a Cosplay'](#)

—Laila Afifa, Annisa Febiola and Daniel Fajri, *Tempo*, 5 March 2024

Greenpeace Indonesia's campaign spokesperson, Rio Rompas, criticized the Nusantara Capital City (IKN) project, dismissing it as a "mere cosplay" of a smart forest city concept. Despite President Jokowi's claim that 70% of IKN would be green areas with a smart forest city concept, Rio argued that the project posed significant environmental threats. He highlighted that the development would lead to the destruction of natural forests adjacent to IKN, increasing deforestation risks. Rio emphasized that the smart forest city concept

promoted by Jokowi would actually reduce carbon and biodiversity-rich forests. Moreover, he noted that the indigenous population would be adversely affected by the project, facing disputes and land grabbing by the government. Greenpeace warned that the deforestation risks would extend beyond IKN's core area to East Kalimantan and the wider region. Rio urged attention to the impact on indigenous communities and criticized the project's failure to address deforestation effectively.

C. Biodiversity, Conservation, and Protected Area

Deforestation Affects Four Key Animals in Aceh, Including Sumatran Elephants

—Najla Nur Fauziah and Petir Garda Bhwana, *Tempo*, 5 March 2024

The Aceh Conservation and Natural Resources Agency (BKSDA) highlights that deforestation in Aceh has led to increased isolation of wildlife. Key species like the Sumatran elephant, orangutan, tiger, and rhinoceros are affected, with populations becoming fragmented due to habitat loss. Deforestation in 2021-2022 impacted approximately 5,3 thousand ha of forests, reducing space for flora and fauna and causing wildlife to significantly change their behavior, sometimes leading to conflicts with humans. Referring to the Decree of the Minister of Environment and Forestry, Aceh's forests and waters cover an area of 3,5 million ha. This forest area is divided into conservation forests covering an area of 1 million ha; protected forests of around 1,7 million ha; and production forests of 710 thousand ha. Meanwhile, the land and water conservation areas under BKSDA management totalling around 419 thousand ha, which are divided into eight areas. As a response, BKSDA conducts patrols, marks boundaries, and engages in community empowerment to protect conservation areas. Efforts also include outreach, training, and law enforcement to safeguard wildlife and ecosystems.

Maluku farmer turns guardian of eastern Indonesia's threatened parrots

—Mahmud Ichy, *Mongabay*, 27 February 2024

Jamal Adam, a former farmer turned conservationist, oversees Indonesia's largest bird sanctuary on Halmahera Island in North Maluku rehabilitating and releasing parrots threatened by habitat loss and the pet trade. Despite historically low tree cover loss (around 274,000 ha between 2001 and 2022 or an 8.9% decrease from two decades earlier), the region faces challenges from a local nickel mining boom. Adam's sanctuary, established in 2019, plays a crucial role in rehabilitating and protecting bird populations, especially parrots, which are among the world's most endangered birds with almost a third of 400 known species classed as threatened with extinction on the IUCN Red List. The sanctuary's success mirrors that of a similar project on Seram Island. Challenges persist, including interruptions from mining interests and adapting care during the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite these hurdles, Adam and his team are committed to the rehabilitation and release of birds back into the wild, crucial for their survival in the face of habitat loss and climate change.

D. Climate Change, Energy, and Mining

New rooftop solar rule set to boost industrial, commercial use

—Divya Karyza, *TheJakartaPost*, 4 March 2024

A newly revised Energy and Mineral Resources Ministry Regulation No. 02/2024 aims to boost industrial and commercial use of rooftop solar panels in Indonesia. The previous rules limiting benefits from on-grid rooftop solar panels have been scrapped. However, successful

implementation is crucial, especially in ensuring companies can access the electricity generated. The new regulation provides more certainty by detailing the approval timeframe and quota system. Yet, further legal revisions may be necessary to accommodate companies committed to using 100% renewable electricity. Solar energy developers anticipate increased industrial and commercial use but emphasize the importance of transparent quota determination and monitoring. The regulation eliminates parallel electricity-generation fees for industrial users, enhancing appeal, but may increase installation costs for commercial users. Options like off-grid systems are suggested to navigate potential challenges. The ministry targets significant growth in solar panel capacity by 2025.

[The High Potential for Tornado Disasters in Indonesia](#)

—Debora Laksmi Indraswari, *Kompas*, 23 February 2024

A whirlwind disaster struck Rancaekek area in Bandung Regency on 21 February, raising concerns as Indonesia enters the transition season prone to natural disasters. The strong winds destroyed 503 housing units, affecting 835 families and injuring 33 people, according to West Java's Regional Disaster Management Agency or BPBD. While some label it a tornado, an official with Meteorological, Climatological, and Geophysical Agency or BMKG clarified it as a whirlwind with a speed of 36.8 kilometers per hour, hence not meeting tornado criteria. Nonetheless, the incident underscores the importance of preparedness, given Indonesia's susceptibility to such events. Despite ongoing debates on the disaster classification, the event highlights the need for heightened awareness and mitigation efforts, especially as the country transitions from the rainy to dry season. Indonesia's vulnerability to hydrometeorological disasters necessitates community and government cooperation in risk reduction.

E. Pollution and Waste

[Microplastics found in every human placenta tested in study](#)

—Damian Carrington, *TheGuardian*, 27 February 2024

A recent study has raised alarms as microplastics have been discovered in every human placenta examined, sparking concerns about potential health risks for developing fetuses. Researchers analyzed 62 placental tissue samples, identifying polyethylene as the most prevalent plastic, commonly found in plastic bags and bottles. Additionally, a separate study found microplastics in all 17 human arteries examined, suggesting a potential link to vascular blockage. The widespread contamination of human bodies by microplastics, recently detected in blood and breast milk, poses unknown health implications, although laboratory studies have shown they can harm human cells. Prof. Matthew Campen, leading the research at the University of New Mexico, warns of potential impacts on all mammalian life due to the escalating concentration of microplastics in tissues. The study, published in the *Toxicological Sciences* journal, reveals concentrations ranging from 6.5 to 790 micrograms per gram of tissue in placenta samples. Campen emphasizes the urgent need to address plastic pollution, as its proliferation exacerbates the microplastics problem globally.

F. Investment and Finance

[Will the new Indonesian sustainable finance taxonomy really serve its national interest?](#)

—Ramnath Iyer, *GreenCentralBanking*, 5 March 2024

The Indonesian financial regulator, OJK, recently updated its sustainable finance taxonomy, or TKBI, aiming to promote environmentally friendly finance. However, the revised TKBI risks confusion among investors and struggles to harmonize with global sustainability standards. While it aligns with ASEAN taxonomy by categorizing activities into four environmental objectives, it controversially classifies financing for new coal-fired power plants as "transitional," undermining green commitments. The TKBI sets lax emission standards for coal plants and allows carbon offsets, deviating from science-based targets. Concerns arise over the financial implications if plants fail to meet emission reductions, potentially burdening plant owners, the public, or financiers. McKinsey estimates substantial financial losses if plants are decommissioned early. These inconsistencies may deter international financiers and raise doubts about Indonesia's climate commitments. Furthermore, end users increasingly prioritize sustainable materials, posing supply chain risks. Ultimately, the TKBI's leniency may jeopardize projects, financiers, and national interests, making Indonesia less attractive for investment and hindering emission reduction goals.

[Indonesia Still Wants to Secure EU Trade Pact This Year](#)

—Jayanty Nada Shofa, *JakartaGlobe*, 5 March 2024

The Government of Indonesia and the European Union (EU) continue negotiations on the Indonesia-EU Comprehensive Partnership Agreement (CEPA), targeting completion by 2024. In the recent 17th round held in Bandung, progress was made on three chapters, including sustainable food systems. With 11 chapters agreed upon so far out of around 20, both sides aim for a balanced agreement. In 2023, bilateral trade reached US\$30.8 billion, with Indonesia exporting US\$16.7 billion and importing US\$14.1 billion from the EU. Despite EU attempts to restrict palm oil access, it remains a top Indonesian export. Palm oil became one of Indonesia's top exports to the EU despite the bloc's ongoing attempts to restrict its access with the anti-deforestation law. The negotiations prioritize market access, aiming to reduce tariffs and non-tariff barriers. Indonesia seeks broader access for various industries, including agriculture and manufacturing.

G. Human Rights and Gender Equality

[Indonesians uprooted by mining industry call for a fairer future amid presidential vote](#)

—Petrus Riski and Taufik Wijaya, *Mongabay*, 4 March 2024

Before Indonesia's presidential election on 14 February, people affected by extractive industries gathered in East Java to highlight the ongoing impact of the Lapindo mudflow disaster. The disaster, which began in 2006, has led to displacement, environmental pollution, and hindered access to education and healthcare. The gathering aimed to raise awareness about the effects of mining and extractive industries on communities across Indonesia. Attendees showcased art and discussed the social repercussions of the disaster. Despite promises from political leaders, many affected residents feel neglected and continue to face challenges accessing basic services. The event drew attention to environmental concerns in various regions, including deforestation, pollution, and disputes over mining operations. With the upcoming increase in mining activity, communities living near these areas are bracing for further impact and are urging voters to consider these issues in future elections.

[Threats, assault against critics mar 2024 election: Amnesty Indonesia](#)

—Alifia Sekar, *TheJakartaPost*, 25 February 2024

Amnesty International Indonesia has reported numerous incidents of intimidation and persecution during Indonesia's 2024 general election, targeting critics of the electoral

process. The human rights group documented 16 cases of intimidation, police reports, and physical assaults against 34 activists who had spoken out against the administration of outgoing President Joko "Jokowi" Widodo. These incidents affected various individuals, including artists, journalists, and academics critical of the election process and those raising concerns about alleged election fraud. The report highlighted the suppression of critical voices as the election day approached, with instances of police dispersing discussions and complaints filed against legal experts featured in a documentary film *"Dirty Vote"* alleging electoral interference. Former attorney general and Amnesty Indonesia executive chair Marzuki Darusman compared the situation to tactics used during the authoritarian New Order regime. The rights group emphasized the importance of protecting freedom of expression and assembly for a fair electoral process.

[Indonesian nickel project harms environment and human rights, report says](#)

—Hans Nicholas Jong, *Mongabay*, 26 February 2024

A recent report by Climate Rights International (CRI) sheds light on the devastating impact of a major nickel mining project on Indonesia's Halmahera Island. The project, situated at the Indonesia Weda Bay Industrial Park (IWIP), has led to vast deforestation, forced displacement of locals, and severe pollution of rivers and the sea. According to CRI, affected Indigenous communities were not adequately informed or consulted, violating their rights. Land acquisition processes were marked by intimidation, with locals reporting police pressure to sell their lands at unfair prices. Deforestation has affected traditional hunting grounds and water sources, severely impacting livelihoods. Coal-fired power plants serving the industrial estate and mines are dumping hot water directly into the sea, causing further pollution. CRI calls for fair compensation, pollution mitigation, and halting new coal plant construction. Additionally, it urges EV companies like Tesla, Ford, and Volkswagen, who source nickel from IWIP, to ensure their supply chains adhere to ethical and environmental standards.

I. RI General Elections

[Right to Inquiry into Election Fraud, Fractions in the DPR Wait for Each Other](#)

—Team, *Kompas*, 6 March 2024

The discourse on investigating fraud in the 2024 Election gains traction in Indonesia's Parliament, yet action remains pending as factions await proposals. The Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P) holds the key, but its members are given freedom to decide. At a recent session, voices from PDI-P, National Awakening Party (PKB), and Prosperous Justice Party (PKS) emphasized the need for inquiry rights to improve future elections amid widespread allegations of fraud. Opposition arises from factions like Gerindra and Democrat, questioning the necessity and popular support for the inquiry. Despite discussions, concrete steps from supporting factions are awaited. PDI-P's stance is crucial, given its initial discourse through presidential candidate Ganjar Pranowo. Meanwhile, the Regional Representative Council (DPD) has agreed to form a special committee to investigate election fraud. In a twist, Ganjar Pranowo faces corruption accusations, which he denies, amid his advocacy for inquiry rights, sparking political controversy.

[Indonesia activists condemn four-star general rank for presumed president](#)

—Rebecca Ratcliffe, *TheGuardian*, 28 February 2024

Indonesia's outgoing president Joko Widodo sparked controversy by awarding incoming president Prabowo Subianto, accused of human rights violations, the honorary rank of four-

star general, a decision condemned by the civil society activists. Prabowo, 72, previously implicated in kidnapping and torturing activists, softened his image for the presidency. Critics, including families of victims, see this move as a betrayal by Jokowi. Jokowi defended the decision, citing devotion to the nation. Prabowo, who admitted involvement in past kidnappings, denies wrongdoing. He was also accused of abuses in Papua and Timor-Leste. The appointment has drawn criticism from human rights groups, calling it a stain on the military's dignity. Previously, Jokowi's alleged interference in the election to support Prabowo and Gibran Rakabuming Raka (who is also Jokowi's son) has raised concerns. Unofficial polls suggest Prabowo won over 55% of the vote, sparking fears of authoritarian regression.

[After Joko Widodo: What a Prabowo Presidency Means for Indonesia](#)

—Arif Rafiq, *GlobelyNews*, 26 February 2024

The forthcoming Indonesian president is expected to be Prabowo Subianto, despite his controversial past. Formerly a key figure in Suharto's regime, he faces accusations of human rights abuses. His victory is attributed partly to his rebranding efforts and the support of outgoing President Joko Widodo, who is barred from running again. Widodo's influence in Indonesian politics has grown, though initially seen as an outsider. His strategy of co-opting rivals has been effective, illustrated by his inclusion of Prabowo in his cabinet. However, it's uncertain if Widodo's influence will persist after his presidency. Prabowo's presidency could pose challenges to Indonesia's democracy, considering his past statements favoring authoritarianism. Economically, he is expected to continue infrastructure development but may struggle with addressing inequality and job instability. Despite progress in poverty reduction, Indonesia faces risks of a middle-income trap, highlighting the importance of addressing economic disparities and fulfilling aspirations to maintain political stability.

[Prabowo may face stiff opposition from PDI-P at House](#)

—Dio Suhenda, *TheJakartaPost*, 26 February 2024

The 2024 Indonesian general election results hint at a potential showdown between presumptive winner Prabowo Subianto's administration and the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P), which emerged as the leading party in the legislative election. While official results are pending until March 20, quick counts suggest Prabowo secured victory alongside his running mate, Gibran Rakabuming Raka. However, Gerindra, Prabowo's party, trailed behind both the PDI-P and Golkar in legislative seats. The PDI-P, critical of alleged election fraud, appears poised to challenge Prabowo's administration, signaling a robust opposition. Golkar's resurgence under Airlangga Hartarto's leadership strengthens its position in the House. Other parties, including the National Awakening Party (PKB) and NasDem, remain tight-lipped regarding their stance on a Prabowo-led government, focusing instead on contesting election irregularities. Political analysts anticipate coalition dynamics and opposition strategies to unfold as official results are awaited.

II. Indonesia in Geopolitics

[Indonesia Delivers Oral Statement Supporting Palestine at International Court of Justice](#)

—[Petir Garda Bhwana](#), *TempoEnglish*, 25 February 2024

Indonesian Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi recently delivered a significant statement in The Hague, supporting the International Court's legal advisory on Israel's occupation of Palestine.

Retno presented Indonesia's position, emphasizing two crucial points: the Court's jurisdictional authority and the substance of the legal opinion. She underscored the Court's competence to issue such advisories and highlighted Israel's violations of international law. Retno argued that the opinion wouldn't impede peace negotiations, as none were currently underway, and advocated for UN involvement in resolving the conflict. She affirmed Palestine's right to self-determination and criticized Israel's illegal annexation and expansion of settlements. Retno concluded by urging accountability for all parties and international backing for the Court's decision. This statement aligns with the UN General Assembly's call for the Court's opinion and reflects Indonesia's continued support for Palestine's rights on the global stage.

For more details, please watch a video on AlJazeera, 25 February 2024: [Indonesian FM on occupied Palestine and Indonesia democracy path](#)

[Geopolitical tensions loom over ASEAN-Australia summit - Asia & Pacific](#)

—Yvette Tanamal, *TheJakartaPost*, 24 February 2024

Geopolitical tensions overshadow the ASEAN-Australia Special Summit, with regional leaders urged to condemn actions that could destabilize the Indo-Pacific. President Joko Widodo emphasizes collaboration to uphold international law, highlighting discussions on the ASEAN-Australia security pact. Amid South China Sea disputes, the summit shifts focus, addressing concerns over human rights and territorial integrity. Australia pledges US\$41.8 million for maritime cooperation, citing growing security threats. Bilateral talks include defense cooperation agreements, notably with Australia. However, ASEAN's internal challenges, like Myanmar's crisis and Cambodia's democratic issues, remain a focal point, testing the bloc's integrity. Despite protests and criticism, ASEAN leaders aim to reinforce their role in regional stability, with Australia emphasizing its interdependence with Southeast Asia's security and prosperity.

[Indonesia, Malaysia demand ICJ declare Israel's presence in Palestinian lands unlawful](#)

—Tria Dianti and Iman Muttaqin, *BenarNews*, 23 February 2024

Indonesia and Malaysia urged the International Court of Justice (ICJ) to declare Israel's occupation of Palestinian lands illegal and demand its withdrawal and reparations. The proceedings in The Hague are separate from South Africa's case, which focuses on the Israel-Hamas war. In a passionate speech, Indonesian Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi accused Israel of using excessive force, seizing parts of the occupied territory, building unlawful settlements and discriminating against the Palestinians. The ICJ's last advisory opinion in 2004 was narrower, but the current request broadens its scope to assess Israel's conduct under international law. The ongoing war between Israel and Hamas started on 7 October 2023, causing a humanitarian crisis in Gaza. Malaysia and Indonesia joined Arab countries in calling for a ceasefire. These nations believe the ICJ's opinion, while not legally binding, will pressure Israel to comply with international law.

End

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