

Private sector's conservation initiatives

Sustainable Forest Management (SFM) has become a crucial issue in Indonesia. The Ministry of Forestry has to manage almost 128 million hectares of forest and it is not an easy job. The government and the private sector should work hand in hand to manage the forest. The development of wood fiber plantations, known as HTI, is a government initiative supporting Indonesia's economic growth.

The challenge is how to balance Indonesia's HTI initiative with its conservation commitment. Asia Pacific Resources International Limited (APRIL), the second largest pulp and paper company in Asia, is providing a roadmap with its upgraded commitment to responsible forestry.

APRIL announced a strengthened sustainable forest management policy last month.

The policy commits the company to renewing degraded forests in Indonesia, improving the productivity of the land, preserving high conservation value areas, protecting biodiversity, partnering with communities and managing with transparency and independent oversight.

Those are important objectives in a country that sees sustainable forest development as central to its economic growth. But not surprisingly, they've drawn objections from an old critic, Greenpeace.

The environmental campaign organization, a long-time opponent of Indonesian forest development, has disparaged APRIL's Policy saying that "it is little more than green-wash and will allow the company to continue using timber from rainforests for another six years". (Zulfahmi, The Jakarta Post, "The story of Greenpeace, APP, Wilmar", Feb. 5).

Green-wash is the go-to word when Greenpeace can't find legitimate complaints. But here's what APRIL's policy really does: sets a 2019 deadline for our pulp and paper mill to become entirely reliant on plantation wood.

Why wait until 2019? The answer's in APRIL's policy: It prohibits us from operating in high conservation value forests (HCVF). That means we must conduct HCVF assessments before we can establish plantations on our concessions. We've done 36 assessments since 2005 and declared 250,000 hectares of land off-limits for plantations. All of that took time. It slowed development.

As a result, we're not yet self-sufficient in furnishing wood to the mill. We're augmenting our plantation harvest with wood from degraded, non-HCVF land.

That stops in 2019. Our policy commits us to it. We'll have an independent Stakeholder Advisory Committee to make sure we live up to our commitment. Greenpeace points to its partner — another pulp and paper company — as the exemplar of forest management.

That's because the company temporarily suspended the use of forest wood under Greenpeace pressure. It was an easy call; that company never burdened itself with preserving high conservation value forests.

Instead it rushed to complete plantations. It bears watching to find out if and when the company resumes using forest wood.

In fact, in 2013 that company, despite declaring a moratorium, continued to use forest wood in pulp and paper products.

APRIL has taken a more painstaking approach in managing its business. It costs more. It takes more time, too. But it's the right course — the sustainable course — for Indonesia's forests.

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