

Environmentalists blast Jokowi's maritime plans

A coalition of green groups has urged president-elect Joko "Jokowi" Widodo to incorporate sustainable development into his maritime development programs, including the so-called "ocean toll road", which aims to turn the country into the world's maritime axis.

The Indonesian Forum for the Environment (Walhi) said on Tuesday that Jokowi had not yet provided enough detail as to how his maritime program would differ from that of his predecessors in terms of sustainability.

Ode Rakhman of Walhi told The Jakarta Post that after his organization had analyzed Jokowi's statements, they found that his maritime programs lacked a vision of sustainability.

Greenpeace Indonesia, meanwhile, said that Jokowi still had time to alter certain parts of his development programs so that they would not be harmful to the environment.

"If you look closely at the concept of a maritime axis, you see it only concerns the economic aspect," Greenpeace Indonesia chief Longgena Ginting said.

Longgena said that the ocean toll road would cause more harm than good if Jokowi failed to take into account environmental protection.

"Jokowi should have taken the condition of our ocean into consideration before he designed the program. He should have recognized that our ocean is in crisis," he said, explaining that the plan would increase the burden on the ocean, which has been heavily exploited for economic purposes.

"Our natural-resources economy is in fact an economy of exploitation. The ocean toll road will speed up the exploitation and destruction of our natural resources," he said.

Longgena also warned the government that the ocean toll road risked being abused by foreign companies to exploit the country's natural resources.

The planned ocean toll road is a massive, rapid sea-transportation system designed to continually transport goods from the westernmost area of the country to the less-developed eastern region.

The emphasis on transporting goods has raised concerns about the potential impact to the environment on the back of data showing the country's marine biodiversity was in peril.

Data from the Indonesian Biodiversity Research Center (IBRC) shows that more than 30 percent of Indonesian marine life has been severely damaged.

High-value fish such as tuna, shark, humphead wrasse and grouper are depleted and some species are almost extinct due to overfishing, among other causes.

In order to prevent Jokowi's maritime programs from damaging the environment, the coalition has submitted a list of recommendations, one of which is a strict limitation on the extraction and export of resources.

"If we fail to improve our monitoring efforts, our resources will be exploited," Longgena said.

A further recommendation is that the ocean toll road be restricted to environmentally friendly transportation and fuel.

Responding to the criticism, Jokowi transition team deputy Akbar Faizal said that Jokowi had no desire to damage the environment with his maritime axis project.

"These NGOs have failed to understand our plan. The plan is environmentally friendly," he insisted. (idb)