

## RAPP claims clean hands in land dispute in Riau

Amid ongoing protests from local residents, PT Riau Andalan Pulp and Paper (RAPP) says its operations on Padang Island in Meranti Islands, Riau, will not harm the environment.

The company said on Monday it received an environmental impact analysis (Amdal) from the Environment Ministry in 2006 and had commissioned five studies between 2005 and 2011 to measure the ecological impact of its operations.

PT RAPP began activities on the 110,000-hectare island, inhabited by 40,000 residents, late last year.

"A study led by Asep Sapei, a professor of civil and environment engineering department at the Bogor Agricultural Institute (IPB), in June, for example, found that the island stands on rock layers that are thick enough to prevent the island from sinking, as long as the company sticks to its proposed operation plan," RAPP's sustainability chief Dian Novarina told The Jakarta Post on Monday.

Securing a license from the Forestry Ministry in 2009 to manage 41,025 hectares of peatland forest on Padang Island, RAPP, a subsidiary of Indonesian pulp and paper giant Asia Pacific Resources International Ltd. (APRIL), has seen a series of protests from local residents demanding that the ministry revoke RAPP's operation license amid fear of ecological damage.

Dozens of Padang Island residents came to Jakarta to rally in front of the House of Representatives in December, protesting the local administration's decision to give RAPP a license.

On the first few days of the protest, 28 demonstrators took extreme action by sewing their lips shut to oppose RAPP's presence.

In response, Forestry Ministry forest utilization chief Iman Santoso ordered RAPP to halt its operations on the island on Jan. 3 until further notice.

Dian said the company would only use 27,375 hectares, or 66 percent of its permit, to grow acacia trees, and 808 hectares for production infrastructures.

Most of the remaining 13,000 hectares will be left idle for natural conservation.

RAPP president commissioner Tony Wenas said the company had secured written support from the heads of 14 Padang Island villages in October "to develop the island together", although three heads revoked their support following what Tony alleged was intimidation from the Riau Farmers Union (STR).

Meanwhile, Muhammad Ridwan, a protester, said he was unsure the company's environmental studies and employment offers would convince local residents to support RAPP.