

Firm denies meddling with law

PT Newmont Nusa Tenggara (PT NNT) fired back at a coalition of environmental groups that accused the mining company of having a hand in the drafting of a regulation on toxic waste management, which was being discussed at the Environment Ministry.

The company's spokesman, Rubi Purnomo, said that such an accusation underestimated the authority of the ministry in independently drawing up its own regulation.

"The accusation is false and shows that the coalition does not have enough understanding of the law-making process. PT Newmont Nusa Tenggara did not order [for some articles to be included] and was not asked to be involved in the process," Rubi told The Jakarta Post on Wednesday.

Last week, a coalition of green groups, comprising the Indonesian Forum for the Environment (Walhi), the People's Coalition for Fisheries Justice (Kiara), the Mining Advocacy Network (Jatam) and the Legal Aid Institute (LBH) called on the government to revise a draft regulation on toxic waste management, saying some articles might legitimize environmental degradation.

The group claimed a number of major mining companies had played a role in drafting the regulation.

It predicted that some articles could further endanger the environment and benefit some big companies, including PT NNT.

The environmental groups pointed to Article 94 in the draft as an example of how it favored PT NNT, as it would allow it to continue dumping its waste into the sea.

The article stipulates that a company can dump its waste into a 100-meter pit in the sea, a practice that PT NNT has performed at Senunu Bay in Sumbawa, West Nusa Tenggara, since 1999.

Pius Ginting of Walhi said on Wednesday that PT NNT was the only company in Indonesia that carried out such a waste-dumping activity.

"This draft, once approved, will allow Newmont and other companies to use Indonesian waters as their dumping ground," said Pius.

He said that Senunu Bay had become the world's largest mining-tailings dump site, with more than 140,000 tons of waste being buried in the bay every day.

“Senunu Bay’s vast biodiversity must be regarded as a precious asset. But why does the government keep giving special treatment to Newmont instead of taking care of the environment?” he added.

Riza Damanik of Kiara said that the draft went against Law No. 32/2009 on the Protection and Management of the Environment.

“The law stipulates that the authority to issue an operational permit is in the hands of the minister, governor or regent, depending on a company’s scale of operation. But the draft says that only the minister can issue such a permit,” he said.

The groups have filed a lawsuit in an attempt to ask the government to revoke its permit for PT NNT. The Jakarta State Administrative Court (PTUN) is scheduled to deliver a verdict on the case on April 3.

Activists have long warned the government not to extend the permit allowing Newmont to dump mining tailings into the bay, saying it endangered marine life.

But the Environment Ministry renewed the permit on May 5 last year, arguing that PT NNT controlled the composition of its tailings far better than the government required it to.

The Environment Ministry’s deputy director for hazardous and toxic waste management, Masnellyarti Hilman, dismissed speculation that the new regulation was designed to accommodate the interests of PT NNT and other big companies. (tas)