

Govt urged to take action against waste imports

Environmental activists have urged the government to take harsh action against any companies or individuals who bring waste products to Indonesian soil.

They made the call following the recent confiscation of over 100 containers allegedly containing hazardous waste imported from England and the Netherlands.

The Indonesian Forum for the Environment's (Walhi) mining and energy campaign manager Pius Ginting said the government should take legal action against the import of waste, regardless of whether it was dangerous or not, because it would damage the environment.

"We must reject waste imports for any reasons as it might double the country's environmental damage. It is unfair to allow waste, which mostly contains minerals, to be imported to Indonesia after the country suffers environmental damage in producing [minerals] for the sake of export," he told The Jakarta Post on Sunday.

Pius added that waste imports were a violation of the 2009 Law on Environment Protection that banned the importation of hazardous and toxic waste.

Separately, Indonesian Center for Environment Law (ICEL) researcher Dyah Paramita said that waste imports also violate the 2008 Law on Waste Management that forbids imports of waste, of any kind, to Indonesia.

She said, however, that a trade ministerial decree allowed certain kinds of waste to be imported to support industry.

"Actually, we should not call this substance 'waste' because it is usable and can be recycled.

"Leftover electronic products can be reused for industry. However, much of the electronic waste brought from developed countries still uses old technology, which might not be proper for reproduction due to the rapid development of technology," she said.

Dyah emphasized that waste imports would damage the environment no matter what, and thus called the government to strictly ban the activity.

Recently, the customs office seized 113 containers of scrap metal, each weighing 28,200 kilograms, allegedly contaminated with hazardous and toxic waste, known as B3, at Tanjung Priok Port in North Jakarta.

Those containers, of which 89 from England and 24 from the Netherlands, came in five shipments between late December and January from the Port of Felixstowe, England, and the Port of Rotterdam, the Netherlands.

Environment Minister Balthazar Kambuaya said his office was still closely examining the waste to know the kinds of toxic it contained.

The minister said scrap metal was not banned from entering Indonesia.

"However, the material must be safe and clean. These [materials] look like garbage. Some of them are wet, some are dry and some even drip smelly liquids. These clearly violate the law," Balthazar said.

Central Kalimantan has had consistent economic growth of around 6 percent for the last 6 years. Unfortunately, the growth in Central Kalimantan came from unsustainable practices in agriculture and mining. To become a “green” province, Central Kalimantan needs to curb such quick-yielding but destructive activities, and move toward a low-emission development path at the earliest opportunity.

The challenge for the national government in Jakarta, and also for the international community, is to create an enabling environment in Central Kalimantan through sufficient incentives and a supportive policy environment in implementing sustainable development. Such incentives are needed sooner rather than later, and REDD is currently the only scheme on the table for immediate utilization.

Research in has shown that based on current practices, emissions levels in Central Kalimantan in 2020 are expected to be 50 percent higher than emissions in 2005, making it one of Indonesia’s highest emitting provinces with about 17 percent of the total national emissions in Indonesia. Forest fires, palm oil and peat decomposition are the largest drivers of emissions in the province.

The chair of Indonesian REDD Task Force, Kuntoro Mangkusubroto, at an event on the sidelines of the COP-17 meeting in Durban, acknowledged the complexity of land tenure problems in Central Kalimantan.

The province is suffering not only from the continuing impacts of the failed Mega Rice project under president Soeharto’s administration, which has damaged hundred of thousands of hectares of peat land forests, but also from overlapping concessions between central and provincial level authorities, and between different sectors. The fact that indigenous people’s rights have not been fully recognized makes such overlapping concessions a problem of an even more sensitive nature.

The complicated challenges in implementing sustainable development are not unique to Central Kalimantan. However, with a relatively small area to work with, compared to more than a hundred million hectares of forests through out Indonesia, the government can experiment with selected sectoral reforms and integrated approaches.

Simply said, the REDD+ Task Force and the Central Kalimantan government will embark on a review of existing licenses for mining and plantations within a few selected districts, and explore the legal options for honoring the rights of indigenous people. The Central Kalimantan pilot project will allow the world to share lessons learned.

But, our determination can only yield results if the developed countries are serious in both acknowledging their historical responsibility in accumulating CO₂ in the atmosphere and changing their polluting lifestyles.

Though one can be sympathetic to the domestic challenges in the US, Japan, Russia and Canada to support the second period of commitment under Kyoto Protocol, their absence in committing to the only global regime to reduce carbon emissions is a betrayal to more than 180 countries that have worked hard to keep the earth safe for humanity and all other species.

It is also absurd to demand developing countries such as China, India, Brazil, South Africa and Indonesia, to commit to reducing emissions, while the advanced economies, with almost half of the global GDP, continue to live in amnesia of their past responsibility and dodge their responsibility to reduce future carbon emissions.

Such ignorance will exacerbate the delays in the implementation of REDD+ activities and further discourage communities and companies to cut emissions from Indonesian forests and peat lands.

The writers are staff members of the presidential office on climate change.