

Sumatran tigers dwindling fast due to poor law enforcement

Slack law enforcement has allowed rampant hunting of the critically endangered Sumatran tiger to continue, an environmental NGO says. World Wildlife Fund (WWF) Indonesia told reporters on Thursday that few poaching cases were brought to trial.

“Three factors hamper the implementation of the law; namely lack of knowledge of the law, reluctance to impose the law, and neglect of environmental interests,” WWF Indonesia legal and policy senior officer Retno Setiyaningrum said.

Retno said that most law enforcement agencies in the country were not aware of the 1990 Law on the Conservation of Biological Resources, and therefore many used the Criminal Code (KUHP) to prosecute crimes involving biological resources.

She added that law enforcers appeared reluctant to arrest high-ranking officials who kept Sumatran tigers as pets.

WWF Indonesia has recorded seven cases involving poaching and or the illegal trade of Sumatran tigers since 2004, but only five criminals were brought to trial in total in those cases.

In 2008, a man in Medan, North Sumatra, was sentenced to two years and 10 months’ imprisonment for illegally trading two tiger cubs in 2008.

A year later, a man in Riau was sentenced to one year’s imprisonment for slaughtering three Sumatran tigers, while another man in neighboring Jambi was sentenced to three years and 10 months’ imprisonment for killing a tiger at a local zoo.

National Police spokesperson Insp. Gen. Anton Bachrul Alam denied that high-ranking officials were keeping Sumatran tigers as pets.

“We haven’t found any officials keeping the endangered tigers as pets. There are some officials keeping endangered birds, but with licenses, so we can monitor them,” he said.

He added that the crimes against Sumatran tigers that his office had been monitoring had involved ordinary people.

WWF is currently advocating a case in Payakumbuh, West Sumatra, for Affandi, who was arrested in March this year for trading a Sumatran tiger skin.

The NGO urged the government to uphold the 1990 law, which stipulated five years’ imprisonment and a Rp 100 million (US\$11,200) fine for trading of protected wildlife, to ensure the protection of the fewer than remaining 400 Sumatran tigers left in Indonesia.

WWF Indonesia tiger protection unit coordinator Osmantri said that illegal trading of the tigers had become an organized crime involving different stakeholders, from ordinary people to high-ranking officials.

“High-ranking officials in the country have indirectly supported the crime. This is why our law enforcement agencies find it difficult to implement the law,” he said. (msa)