

## **With or without moratorium, RI forests still under threat**

The Forestry Ministry has failed to show its commitment to reducing greenhouse gas emissions and deforestation despite its support for the extension of the moratorium on forest clearance, activists claim.

They accuse the ministry of getting around the moratorium by rezoning forest areas into non-forest areas through spatial planning bylaws and ministerial decrees.

Forestry Ministry secretary-general Hadi Daryanto has said that the ministry would approve the new spatial planning bylaw proposed by the Aceh administration that allows for conversion of protected forests into non-forest zones.

Data from the Coalition of Aceh Rainforest Movements shows that the new spatial planning would allow the conversion of around 1.2 million hectares of Aceh's existing 3.78 million hectares of protected forest into non-forest areas.

Under the draft bylaw, Governor Zaini Abdullah is planning to reduce forest land from 68 percent to 45 percent, paving the way for palm oil plantations and logging concessions, the coalition claims.

Hadi said that the central government would soon finalize the draft, as the total area of forest that would be converted to non-forest was not as high as was claimed by the activists.

"According to the Aceh governor, the actual forest area that will be converted under the new spatial planning bylaw is not 1.2 million hectares, but only 119,000 hectares," Hadi said on Tuesday.

"The draft will soon be finalized, but it will not be as damaging as reported in the media. The rezoning plan is actually being issued for the sake of Aceh's development," he added.

Nabiha Shahab, REDD+ Aceh Initiative Coordinator said that the Aceh administration should be transparent and publish the content of the new spatial planning bylaw and the total affected forest areas to avoid misunderstanding.

"The public and NGOs are now collecting their information from whatever sources they have, when it is actually the administration that should explain it to the public," Nabiha said.

"It is stipulated in the law that local administrations should take the public's views into consideration," Nabiha said. "And good development can be achieved without harming the forest," she added.

Meanwhile, the Association for Community and Ecology-Based Law Reform (Huma) program coordinator Anggalia Putri said the moratorium was the nation's last hope to halt further deforestation.

Presidential Instruction No. 10/2011 authorizing the moratorium was issued after Indonesia and Norway signed a US\$1 billion deal to help Indonesia reduce greenhouse gas emissions and deforestation.

The moratorium prohibits the issuance of new licenses for the conversion of primary forests and peatland in both protected forest and productive forest.

Anggalia said that should the ministry approve the new Aceh spatial planning bylaw, the protected forests downgraded to non-forest areas could not be saved by the moratorium, however the moratorium would prevent further damage to the country's forests.

"The local administration should have considered the moratorium. However the presidential instruction is not legally binding as it is only an internal policy," he said.

In August last year, the ministry issued Ministerial Decree No. 458/2012 under which around 800,000 hectares of forest in Papua, including protected forest, would be converted into productive forest and other utilization areas.