

Environmental group to report Timor Sea oil spill to KPK

An environmental group in Kupang, East Nusa Tenggara (NTT) said that it would file a report to the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) over alleged gratuities given by Thailand-based oil and gas producer PTTEP Australasia to a number of parties in Indonesia.

PTTEP Australasia is responsible for the Montara oil spill in the Timor Sea, off the northern coast of Western Australia. The environmental group in question, Ocean Watch Indonesia (OWI), alleged that the oil and gas company had paid gratuities to certain individuals to prevent them from speaking about the magnitude of the damage from the spill.

“The case has been going on for four years, but we haven’t seen any efforts by the company, the Indonesian government or the Australian government to settle the problem. We suspect that there is a conspiracy resulting from the gratuities given,” executive director of OWI Herman Jaya said as quoted by Antara news agency.

Herman said that the KPK should launch an investigation into a possible case of graft that resulted in no progress in the oil spill investigation. The group said that the company’s account of the disaster, published on a PTTEP AA Fact Sheet, could be used as a starting point for the KPK to begin investigations.

The report said there was no scientific evidence to verify that the oil spill had brought environmental degradation to Indonesian waters, Herman said. The OWI alleged that one of the country’s top universities was responsible for authoring the report and was willing to do so only after payment from the company.

Earlier, fishermen who earned a living from catching fish or farming seaweed in the south of East Nusa Tenggara, had filed a lawsuit at the Australian Federal Court against PTTEP Australasia, after the company stated that it would not pay compensation to victims who had suffered from the impact of the oil spill since Aug. 21, 2009.

The lawsuit also demanded that PTTEP Australasia hire an independent team comprising of scientists from Indonesia, Australia, Timor Leste and the US to conduct scientific research to determine the impacts of the pollution in a scientific, transparent and accountable manner. On Aug. 31, 2012, PTTEP Australasia accepted fines totalling A\$510,000 (US\$536,010) handed down by the Darwin Magistrates’ Court for its responsibility in the 2009 Montara incident.

In Dec. 2010, then transportation minister Freddy Numberi said that PTTEP Australasia had acknowledged responsibility for the oil spill. Freddy said that the government had demanded Rp 23 trillion (\$2.56 billion) in compensation from the company to repair the damage.

PTTEP Australasia’s oil platform in the Montara field, off Australia’s northern coast, exploded and spilled more than 500,000 liters of crude oil per day into the Timor Sea in August 2009. Oil and gas leaks continued for 74 days until Nov. 3, 2009, and a permanent cap was installed a month later. The oil rig, called the West Atlas, is owned by Seadrill, a Norwegian-Bermudan offshore drilling company, and operated by PTTEP Australasia, a subsidiary of the Thai-owned oil and gas company PTT. Thirty eight percent of Indonesia’s marine territory in the Timor Sea was reportedly affected by the spill.