

## Walhi to sue Bali governor for issuing mangrove permit

The Indonesian Forum for the Environment (Walhi) has submitted a letter of legal notification against Bali Governor Made Mangku Pastika for issuing a permit to manage 102.2 hectares of mangrove forest in the Suwung area of Denpasar to a private company. The legal notification insists that the government revoke the permit issued to PT Tirta Rahmat Bahari, which was granted with the right to manage the mangrove forest for 55 years.

Signed by Walhi's national secretary, Kholisah, on Friday, the notification was also submitted to the President, the Forestry Ministry, the Environment Ministry and the Indonesian Ombudsman. According to the letter of notification, Governor Pastika violated the law and good governance principle by issuing the permit. Walhi also urged that Pastika revoke the permit, which it said went against the provincial administration's policy to create a green province on the island.

Pastika was given a two-day deadline to consider the notification and to respond to Walhi's move. "Should the government give no response, we will continue the process with a stronger legal suit," it stated. On Dec. 10, Walhi sent the first notification to the governor without any positive response after seven days. "This is the second notification. If he still refuses to respond, we will continue with the legal process," explained Wayan Gendo Suardana, chairman of Walhi's Bali chapter. Gendo explained that Walhi was ready with powerful legal tools to sue the governor if the second notification was ignored like the first one. However, he declined to elaborate on what kind of legal documentation would be used as a weapon to instigate a legal suit against Pastika.

Gendo cited some legally binding laws, such as Law No. 5/1990 on the conservation of biodiversity and ecosystems, Law No. 32/2009 on the protection and management of the environment and Law No. 28/1999 on corruption, that would be a strong legal foundation to file suit against Pastika. "We will also sue the governor for violating Law No. 14/2008 on the transparency of public information, because he closed our access to documents related to the issuance of the permit for PT Tirta Rahmat Bahari," Gendo emphasized.

In June, the governor officially issued the permit for the company to manage 102.2 hectares of mangrove forest for 55 years. The local administration agency tasked with managing that tract had admitted it lacked sufficient funds and manpower to deal with the garbage and decaying infrastructure. The tract is part of south Bali's 1,375 hectares of mangrove forest.

The permit and plans have triggered strong opposition from environmentalists and local councilors, who suggested the investor would destroy the forest. Gendo explained that Bali currently only had 22 percent forest cover. "Bali is badly in need of at least 8 percent more forest, as the ideal quantity of forest cover is a minimum 30 percent of the total area. It means that the governor should be working hard to add forest coverage and not to transform mangrove forest into accommodation facilities," he said.

The mangrove forest is also needed to control seawater intrusion and to reduce pollutants and maintain the quality of the seawater. Provincial administration spokesperson I Ketut Teneng confirmed that the governor had not yet received the legal notice, as he was attending events in Buleleng on Friday. He visited the Bali Mandara international-standard school and attended other events in the regency. "Pak Gub has not yet received and read the letter. But we will respond immediately once we receive it," Teneng promised.