

NGOs Call for Tighter Recommendations to Prevent Depletion of Natural Forests in the State of Sarawak

We, environmental NGOs, are deeply concerned about decline of biodiversity and depletion of forest ecosystems in the world especially in the tropics such as the state of Sarawak in Borneo Island, a global megadiversity center.

Based on the ITTO Sarawak Mission (involving three trips to Sarawak from 1989 to 1990), the state of Sarawak was recommended to reduce the annual yield of logs to less than 9.2 million m³. However, the total volume of log production from Permanent Forest Estate, State Land and the other Land has never complied with the recommendation, always exceeding. Sometimes it was recorded 19 million m³, having stayed around 12 million m³ for the last decade.

Therefore, we make the following recommendations to ITTO:

1. We urge ITTO to fulfill its Sarawak Mission to impose tough guidance to the Sarawak government to set its maximum of log production capacity and to downsize its forestry operations towards true sustainable forest management. The maximum of production should be set under 9.2 million m³ and the combined production volumes from Permanent Forest Estate (PFE), State Land and other forests should be under the maximum.

In total 2.8 million hectares have been licensed (23% of the total land area of Sarawak) under License for Planted Forest (LPF) in Sarawak.

Advent of large monoculture plantations, of mostly fast growing species and oil palm on forested areas there will cause adverse effects on biodiversity and climate change, environmental issues that the entire international community must address.

Most of the 2.8 million ha areas are overlapped with Native Customary Rights Land. More than 200 NCR related land cases are now pending in courts in Sarawak and the number of court case is expected to increase.

An expanded conversion to plantation, which leads to the depletion of native forest resources, is never true of sustainable forest management.

Now in the Sarawak state as many as 12 projects of hydropower are developing under the policy of Sarawak Corridor of Renewable Energy (SCORE). Indigenous communities have blockaded access to Murum Dam, which is already under construction and affected communities have been fighting the construction of Baram Dam, with its groundbreaking coming soon. These dam projects are causing destructive impacts to threatened tropical forests.

So, we are urging ITTO further to commit itself to protecting tropical forests.

We also urge the Japanese government to take its measures against deforestation as follows:

2. Japan has been the largest single donor nation to ITTO as well as the largest consumer of plywood products from the Sarawak state. That means that the Japanese government should exercise its right responsibility to the realization of ITTO mission and maximize its efforts to make sure ITTO should contribute to tropical forest protections.
3. We strongly urge the Japanese government to reinforce its existing timber procurement policy; its legislation should ensure the procurement of wood and wood products from Sarawak with not only verified legality but also sustainability. In this way the Japanese government should contribute to the prevention of deforestation and forest degradation in the tropics as soon as possible.

Junichi Mishiba
Friends of the Earth Japan (FoE Japan)
EMAIL: forest@foejapan.org

Yoshio Nishioka
HUTAN Group

Akira Harada
Japan Tropical Forest Action Network (JATAN)
EMAIL: harada@jatan.org