



Sahabat Alam Malaysia
Friends of the Earth Malaysia
For Environmental Justice

1, Jalan Joki, 11400 Penang, Malaysia
Tel No: +604 827 6930
Fax No: +604 827 6932
Email: foemalaysia@gmail.com
<https://www.foe-malaysia.org>

Press Release

3 February 2020

**Lynas Waste Site – Need For Transparency And Public Consultation
Before Any Approvals Given**

Sahabat Alam Malaysia (SAM) calls on the Federal government and its relevant agencies to ensure that there is complete transparency and public feedback and consultations before approving any permanent disposal facility (PDF) of Lynas Corporation for its water leach purification residue (WLP) which contains radioactive wastes.

SAM was alarmed to learn of Lynas' recent announcement that the Pahang state government has given consent to the company to build the PDF site in Bukit Ketam.

However, according to today's media reports (New Straits Times, Feb 3) it is the Atomic Energy Licensing Board (AELB) that will decide and no decision has been made yet.

SAM would like to stress that according to the laws, the PDF will definitely require approvals from both the Department of Environment (DOE) as well as the AELB, and will require a Detailed Environmental Impact Assessment (DEIA) under the Environmental Quality Act 1974 as well as a Radiological Impact Assessment (RIA) under the Atomic Energy Licensing Act 1984.

Hence, it is not only the AELB that has to approve, it is also the DOE which must give its approval, given that there has to be an environmental assessment as well as a radiological impact assessment of the facility.

The DEIA and the RIA reports must go hand in hand and must be done properly, with the full public participation, consultation and feedback prior to any approvals being given either by the DOE or the AELB.

Complete transparency in the process must be ensured, especially since the Lynas operations have been highly controversial, generating much public outcry.

These governments agencies must not be under any pressure to approve the PDF in haste and must ensure that all public health and safety as well as environmental considerations are properly evaluated and assessed, with no compromises especially when the WLP wastes will remain radioactive and hazardous for generations to come.

The Lynas operations presently already involves hundreds of thousands of tonnes of radioactive wastes, which have been accumulated over the years, and which will continue to accumulate until it comes up with a plan to build a cracking and leaching facility (CLF) in Australia, away from its plant in Gebeng, Kuantan. This facility abroad will only become operational only within four years from the effective licensing date.

The federal government has given Lynas four years to make the CLF abroad operational and this effectively means that the company will be allowed to generate another four years of radioactive wastes until the operations shift to Australia.

In effect, this means that at least close to 1 million tonnes of radioactive wastes will have to be managed for decades if not centuries to come, as the thorium and uranium in the wastes have very long half-lives going into millions and billions of years.

With this huge amount of wastes and with very long-term impacts, there will be large costs of maintaining such a disposal facility.

According to media reports, Lynas is said it have appointed a local company Gading Senggara Sdn Bhd to manage the PDF for US\$98 million (RM400 million).

It is unclear if this also includes the cost of acquiring, preparing and building the PDF or if it is for the maintenance of the site for decades to come.

This amount appears to be rather insufficient for the maintenance of a PDF which is supposed to deal with at least 1 million tonnes of radioactive wastes for decades to come.

As a comparison, in the case of the Asian Rare Earth wastes, news reports have revealed that Mitsubishi Chemicals of Japan spent US\$100 million just to clean up the site of the ARE plant.

Another serious issue of concern relates to the expertise of the local company named by Lynas in undertaking the management of the radioactive material. The capabilities and expertise of this company has to be made transparent because what is being managed is no ordinary waste but one which will remain dangerous for generations to come.

SAM once again reiterates our call that Lynas should not be granted further extensions of its licence to operate pending a proper resolution of the handling of its wastes permanently.

Meenakshi Raman
President
Sahabat Alam Malaysia