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Letter to the Editor

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SAM OBJECTS TO DEVELOPMENT OF MONOCULTURE PLANTATIONS IN PERMANENT RESERVED FORESTS

The Federal government and several states in Peninsular Malaysia are still pursuing policies and approving the implementation of large scale monoculture plantations (for example timber latex clone plantations and “musang king durian” plantations) in Permanent Reserved Forests (PRF).

Among the states that are actively implementing development of monoculture plantations in PRF are Kelantan, Perak, Pahang, Terengganu and Kedah.

SAM objects to the development of monoculture plantations in PRF as it adversely impacts the functions of biological diversity of forests. Implementation of monoculture plantation development in PRF destroys original forest cover (natural forest) through clear-felling harvesting methods.

Even the concept of plantation is in fact contrary to the concept of forests in terms of language and terminology. A plantation is a large-scale monoculture cultivation area planted with crops whilst forest is naturally formed by plants and has a high biological diversity and ecologically diverse functions.

SAM opines that the policy on promoting the development of monoculture plantations within the PRF area should be abolished.

Typically, the justification and main reason of a State Authority to approve a monoculture plantation development project is that areas identified are defined as poor forests or degraded forests.

It should be noted that a PRF area in Malaysia becomes a poor forest or degraded forest not due to natural factors but due to human factors, especially encroachment activities and illegal exploration.

Based on previous SAM observations and field surveys, it was found that most monoculture plantation development operations were conducted without control although the relevant State Authorities are the approving authorities and had a ‘standard operating procedure’.

KELANTAN

Of utmost concern is the increase of area for the implementation of monoculture plantation development in the state of Kelantan.

In 2017, 169,133 hectares (ha) or more than 27% of the total PRF area in the state of Kelantan covering 613,275ha was developed for monoculture plantations especially for timber latex clone species.

There are also “musang king durian” plantations in the PRF area in Kelantan, for example in Balah Forest Reserve (HS Balah) covering 400ha.

SAM had undertaken various efforts to stop the implementation of monoculture plantation development in PRF in the state of Kelantan. Among them SAM had submitted a letter to the Menteri Besar of Kelantan on 25 March 2015; and then had a meeting with the Deputy Menteri Besar of Kelantan together with representatives of the Orang Asli community and submitted a memorandum dated 1 November 2016.

We have yet to get feedback from the State Authority. On the contrary, the Kelantan State Authority is still pursuing the implementation of large-scale monoculture plantation development within the PRF area without considering and adhering to certain criteria of establishment of plantations in forests.

The lives and livelihoods of local communities, especially Orang Asli communities who depend on the forests for their water supply, settlements, burial ground, foraging area for forest products and produce, continue to be disrupted or destroyed by companies licensed for timber harvesting and companies granted approval to undertake monoculture plantation development in the PRF areas in Kelantan.

SAM hopes that the State Authority will consider stopping and not approving any more monoculture plantation development projects in PRF in Kelantan.

PERAK

Several PRF areas in the state of Perak have been identified for the implementation of monoculture plantation development specifically for timber latex clone (TLC) and musang king durian plantations.

In 2017, 56,503ha or 5.67% of the total PRF area in the state of Perak covering 995,216ha was developed for monoculture plantations mainly TLCs.

The proposed areas are water catchment areas at Kledang Saiong Forest Reserve (HS Kledang Saiong) whilst three areas in Bukit Kinta Forest Reserve (HS Bukit Kinta) and one area in Piah Forest Reserve (HS Piah) are areas involving the Orang Asli communities, affecting their settlements and foraging area.

The proposed areas at HS Kledang Saiong and HS Bukit Kinta are also part of the Kinta Valley Geopark area which should be protected.

The area identified for the proposed development of a 'musang king plantation' in HS Bintang Hijau is located in the Bintang Hijau Range and Belukar Semang Forest Reserve (HS Belukar Semang), which are part of the 'Central Forest Spine' (CFS) Ecological Network - PL 8: Kendrong Forest Reserve (HS Kendrong - HS Bintang Hijau which should be protected.

The CFS Ecological Network is identified by the Peninsular Malaysia Town and Country Planning Department as a corridor and wildlife route between separate forest complexes.

Some areas identified for development of musang king durian plantation in HS Bintang Hijau are also watersheds that should be protected.

During a meeting between the Menteri Besar of Perak and SAM on 19 February 2019, one of the agenda / matters submitted by SAM was to urge the State Authority to stop implementation of monoculture plantation development projects in PRF.

KEDAH

Some PRF areas in Kedah have also been identified for the implementation of monoculture plantation development, namely, TLC and musang king plantations at Gunung Inas Forest Reserve (HS Gunung Inas) and Bukit Enggang Forest Reserve (HS Bukit Enggang).

In 2017, 9,583ha or 2.80% of total PRF area in Kedah covering 341,976ha have been developed for monoculture plantation, mainly TLCs.

The monoculture plantation project in HS Bukit Enggang is one of the monoculture plantation projects that was controversial as it was implemented before submitting and getting approval of the Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIA Report) although the project proponent is a State Government subsidiary, Perbadanan Menteri Besar Kedah (MB Inc).

PAHANG

Pahang is a state that does not take into account the sensitivities of an area when implementing monoculture plantation development in PRF.

In 2017, 104,905ha or 6.72% of the total area of PRF in the state of Pahang covering 1,558,898ha was developed with monoculture plantations, mainly for planting timber latex clone (TLC) tree species.

Most of the areas for development of monoculture plantations in PRF are very large, exceeding 1,000ha and up to 9,000ha.

For example, two approved monoculture plantation projects at Lesung Forest Reserve (HS Lesung) covers 9,946ha (Block C) and 9,988 hectares (Block B).

Approval of large areas of PRF for the purpose of implementing monoculture plantation development will certainly have a significant impact on the ecosystem and the environment as well as impact the local community especially the Orang Asli communities, and wildlife habitats and roaming areas.

The development of monoculture plantations in PRF in Pahang is not only implemented in the CFS forest complex but is also implemented in the PRF area separate from CFS forest complexes such as the Jengka Forest Reserve (HS Jengka) covering an area of 1,648.12ha.

Until now, SAM has yet to get feedback on our calls to stop implementation of monoculture plantation development in PRF areas. These calls include submissions to the Kelantan and Perak State Authorities and to the Director-General of Forestry Peninsular Malaysia during a discussion session with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) on 26 May 2017.

SAM urges the State Authorities and relevant authorities comply with the physical planning development plans especially the National Physical Plan, the State Structure Plan, the CFS Master Plan and other related policies in addition to enforcing provision of existing law.

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