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Press Release

30 June 2021

**Another forest in jeopardy: Proposed mining in Kuala Mukim Tembeling, Jerantut, Pahang
— SAM calls to halt project**

Sahabat Alam Malaysia (SAM) is concerned about the spate of mining projects being proposed in forest reserves. The most recent proposal of which an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) report has been submitted for public review is the proposed iron ore mining project at Kuala Mukim Tembeling, Jerantut in the state of Pahang.

The proposed project intends to excavate iron ore at an Environmentally Sensitive Area (ESA) Rank 2, covering 60.75 hectares. The proposed site is located in Som Forest Reserve, which is within the central forest spine corridor (CFS1 – SL2: Krau Wildlife Reserve – HS Bencah – HS Som – HS Yong, hence the categorization as ESA Rank 2.

It is disheartening that environmentally destructive projects such as open cast mining are being proposed at sites that are rich with biodiversity. This project would cause irreversible damage to the natural landscape, flora, and fauna. Wildlife habitat will be adversely affected as the proposed site is situated in the CFS corridor, a secondary linkage serving as a bridge for wildlife to move from one primary forest to another. In this case, these corridors connect the Krau Wildlife Reserve in Raub with Som Forest Reserve in Jerantut.

Any disturbance here could invite disastrous implications to the local wildlife in this area. According to a statement made by the then Director of Perhilitan of Pahang in 2018, Mr. Ahmad Azahar Mohammed, “poachers would usually enter forest areas which have been cleared and have access to the jungle to bring out their catch. Animals that occupy forest areas that have been cleared would usually leave their habitat to find food. Among the hot spots that the department has identified in Pahang are Kemasul (Bentong), Tekai (Jerantut) and Berkelah (Kuantan)”.

Habitat fragmentation, loss of food resources and, natural habitat force these animals to flee from their habitats and wander into human settlements. This in the end causes more human-wildlife conflicts to happen in a time where the latter is occurring rampantly.

Based on the EIA report of the project, the proposed site houses many wild animals which are classified as vulnerable, critically endangered, and threatened in the Wildlife Conservation Act 2010 (Act 716) and also in IUCN’s Red List. Species of animals found here are the Malayan tigers, panthers, tapirs, elephants, and deer like the rusa and kijang as well.

The population of these wild animals has seriously declined over the years caused by rampant development and human-wildlife conflicts. We are concerned that if the mining project is approved, it will further escalate the already worsened situation to a stage where repairing or reinstating the disturbed terrains of the proposed site will be mere impossible and it will also force these animals to live in a constant state of peril and fear.

To make matters worse, salt licks were found less than 500 metres away from the proposed project site. This natural geological structure plays an important role in providing the necessary mineral nutrients for wild animals like tapirs, deer, and elephants. Section 85 of the Wildlife Conservation Act 2010 clearly states that “no salt licks or the land in the immediate vicinity of any salt lick should be disturbed”. Hence, if this project is allowed, the project proponent will be in violation of the Wildlife Conservation Act 2010.

The proposed mining operation would also permanently alter the natural terrain which will affect the roaming routes of wildlife where several may get lost along the way and may end up far from their normal roaming range. This could cause intense distress for these wild animals, especially in terms of suffering from lack of nutrients and unable to live a normal way of life.

Our forests and biodiversity should be at the forefront when this proposed mining project and the EIA are being reviewed. Malaysia is a signatory to various international treaties aimed at combating climate change and protecting forests and biodiversity. We also have legislation that is meant to protect both forests and biodiversity. All of these must be respected. Once we lose our forests and biodiversity, there is no way we can rehabilitate the area to the way it was before.

SAM urges the Department of Environment (DOE) not to allow this project by approving the EIA report. We have to preserve and protect our wildlife and natural environment in a time where the world is working hard towards preserving our already deteriorated environment and biodiversity. The EIA must be rejected.

We also reiterate our call to the Federal and State governments not to approve mining projects in forest reserves and environmentally sensitive areas, which must be protected from all destructive projects.

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President
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