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Letter to the Editor

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Grave Concerns Over Renewal of Lynas Licence

Sahabat Alam Malaysia (SAM) is gravely concerned with the renewal of the licence granted to Lynas Malaysia Sdn. Bhd., for a further 10 years until 2 March 2036, as announced by the Minister, Datuk Chang Lih Kang on Monday, 2nd March.

SAM is of the opinion that **the conditions in the latest licence renewal are merely a smokescreen** to maintain Lynas's status quo, enabling them to continue producing and accumulating even more radioactive waste, while there is no publicly available data indicating real success in reducing the radioactivity levels of the waste to levels where it may no longer be classified as radioactive waste.

The best and most effective option in the renewal of the Lynas licence ought to have been for all the radioactive wastes produced thus far and in future, to be sent back to Australia for management.

Any other approach is simply irresponsible, as the burden is passed on to the government and the public to manage the Lynas radioactive waste for thousands, if not millions of years to come, given the long lifetime of radioactivity in thorium.

According to the Minister's announcement, the following conditions have been imposed for the licence renewal:

- Lynas is required to stop producing Water Leach Purification [WLP] residue (which are radioactive) after 5 years, by 2031;
- All the WLP residue produced within the 5-year period (2026–2031) must be neutralised to below 1 Bq/g. Once below this level, it is no longer classified as radioactive waste but as scheduled waste;
- No new permanent disposal facility will be allowed; and
- The licence will be reviewed after the first 5 years and can be revoked in the event of any non-compliance.

Our concerns stem from the fact that **this is not the first time that Lynas has been asked to discontinue the production of the WLP residue and to neutralise or remove thorium [the radioactive element] from the waste.**

In the earlier licence issued in 2023 which has just expired, one of the conditions imposed on Lynas was to conduct "*Research & Development*" to reduce the activity concentration in the WLP residue to a level below 1 Bq/g through recycling or other methods approved by the Atomic Energy Licensing Board [now called ATOM Malaysia – or the Department of Atomic Energy Malaysia].

In fact, since 2012, in the very first licence granted to Lynas, Lynas was required to carry out research for recycling, waste minimisation, and commercialisation of the WLP residue, including having to keep any reuse of the waste below 1 Bq/g.

All the talk of R&D is, at best, experimental, and the public has no knowledge of exactly what is going on, or if there has been any success at all that is capable of being reproduced at an industrial scale.

Further, in the licence for the period 2020 to 2023, the company was required to ensure an overseas Cracking and Leaching [C/L] plant be operational specifically before July 2023 and after that period, no new raw materials containing Naturally Occurring Radioactive Material (NORM) were to be imported into Malaysia and that no WLP residue could be produced at the plant after the C/L process is transferred overseas. There has been no indication that this transfer process ever took place.

Instead, despite the initial licensing conditions imposed on Lynas to return the waste generated back to Australia, the government has backtracked on its own requirements, caved in, and has now allowed Lynas to continue disposing its radioactive waste in a permanent disposal facility (PDF) located in Gebeng, Pahang, posing a radioactive threat to generations to come.

Given the history of how the government has been dealing with Lynas since 2012, we are not at all convinced that the Lynas WLP waste produced under the current licence will no longer be radioactive or that the future waste will be removed from Malaysia once the current PDF is full.

It is time for the government to stop the charade and act responsibly to stop the further generation of radioactive wastes, at the expense of the people of Malaysia.

Enough time has been given for this and it is time for all the WLP wastes to be sent back to Australia, as originally promised by Lynas to the government when it first came to this country.

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