

Conservationists press Jakarta to follow industry lead on forests

June 7 2015, by Nicholas Perry



Trees are cleared in Central Kalimantan province on Indonesia's Borneo Island, in this photo by Greenpeace in 2014

Conservationists are urging the Indonesian government to listen to business and start taking deforestation seriously after a major paper giant joined the growing ranks of companies pledging to stop clearing forests.

Asia Pacific Resources International Holdings Ltd (APRIL), the second

largest pulp and paper company in Indonesia, announced this week it had stopped harvesting natural forest in a move hailed by its former critic Greenpeace as a "major breakthrough".

Indonesia has some of the world's most extensive and biodiverse rainforests, but huge swathes have been chopped down by [palm oil](#), mining and timber companies.

As a result, Southeast Asia's top economy has become the world's third-biggest carbon emitter.

APRIL and its major rival Asia Pulp and Paper (APP), which together produce 80 percent of Indonesia's pulp products, have been accused of destroying vast tranches of the forests that are home to endangered species such as Sumatran orangutans and tigers.

APRIL had only last year committed to phasing out [deforestation](#) in its supply chain by 2020, following APP's promise in 2013 to stop using any logs from Indonesia's natural forests in its mills.

But in what APRIL's group president Praveen Singhavi called a major step in their "sustainability journey", the company ceased forest clearing in May and promised no new developments on Indonesian forest or peat land.

Conservation groups, which stood side by side with APRIL executives in Jakarta as they made the announcement this week, said they would be keeping a close eye on the company's operations to ensure their promises were kept.

"I think that's where the challenge is," WWF's Aditya Bayunanda told AFP on Friday.

"I wouldn't say I am completely pessimistic, because I think APRIL has taken some serious steps that were not done before."



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Turning tide

But far from going it alone, APRIL and APP are part of a growing trend of companies distancing themselves from deforestation.

Wilmar International, the world's largest palm oil company, announced in December it would adopt a "zero deforestation" policy, with rival Golden Agri Resources following a few months later.

Resources firm Barito Pacific committed to no deforestation and no development on peat land in March.

"I think that there is this positive trend," Bayunanda said.

"These companies, in the end, they do listen to what their buyers are asking for, what the markets are asking for."

Intense pressure from consumers and green groups has forced some to change their business models.

APP's pledge to stop using logs from Indonesia's natural forests followed years of campaigning by green groups, which had led to the company losing packaging contracts with big brands such as food conglomerate Kraft and Barbie's Mattel.



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companies

With industry undertaking its own reforms, conservation groups are now ramping up pressure on the government to do more to protect the rainforest and vital peat lands.

There have been mixed signals so far from President Joko Widodo, who was elected in October.

Last month he extended a landmark moratorium banning new logging permits for primary or virgin forest but did not expand its coverage, leaving tens of millions of hectares (acres) still unprotected.

He also allowed deforestation for projects deemed in the national interest, crucially excluding infrastructure projects and crop plantations from the ban.

Forestry minister Siti Nurbaya Bakar described the APRIL announcement as "significant progress in [sustainable forest management](#)", but Greenpeace is calling for more concrete steps from the government as companies make the shift.

"There is no reason for the government to keep continuing business as usual," Bustar Maitar, the head of Greenpeace's Indonesia forest campaign, told AFP.

"The government of Indonesia should support this and should accommodate the effort from industry."

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Citation: Conservationists press Jakarta to follow industry lead on forests (2015, June 7) retrieved 24 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2015-06-conservationists-jakarta-industry-forests.html>

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