

Cambodia bans overseas exports of coastal sand

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industry had failed to take root.

Environmental groups have long accused Cambodia of running damaging and corrupt [sand](#) dredging operations along the southwest coast and the Mekong river.

Most of the sand has been shipped to Singapore to fuel the wealthy city-state's rapid expansion—a resource plunder that activists say has devastated local Cambodian communities and ecosystems.

The new decree, issued on July 10, bars all exports of "construction sand and mud sand" from southwestern Koh Kong province to overseas but stops short of outlawing domestic sales.

It was issued in response to environmental concerns, said Meng Saktheara, a spokesman for Cambodia's mining and energy ministry.

"If we continue to allow large-scale sand dredging (in Koh Kong) for exports, it would hugely affect the natural environment and local communities," he told AFP.

Environmental activists welcomed the move but expressed doubt it would fully halt a trade that has survived previous bans.

"There has been such a ban in recent years, but they (companies) still operated and exported," said Meng Heng, from the environmental group Mother Nature.

The new directive comes after Phnom Penh temporarily suspended sand exports in November following controversy over large discrepancies in Cambodian and Singapore trade records for how much of the commodity was being shipped.

Environmental groups say illegal exports have continued despite that order.

Koh Kong province is the main region where sand is excavated and shipped to foreign countries, according to Meng Heng.

But there are also concerns about damage wrought from dredging along the Mekong River.

"We want a ban of exports of sand from the whole country, including sand from the Mekong river," he said.

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