

Action Alert for Nature Conservation

You can help save the Golden Triangle of Biodiversity of Lembeh Strait, Pulisan, and Bangka Island.

The pristine marine waters of Lembeh – Cape Pulisan – Bangka Island which are world renowned in the international divers' world as a top dive destination because of the high degree of marine biodiversity hosting some biota that are only found here and nowhere else in the world are at risk if the Australian gold mining company Archipelago Resources Plc is given permission to operate its gold mining site Toka Tindung in the area.

Among the unique marine creatures to be found here are the Marbled Stargazer (*Uranoscopus bicinctus*), the Pygmy Seahorse (*Hippocampus bargibanti*), the Hairy Frogfish (*Antennarius striatus*), the Cockatoo Leaf-fish (*Ablabys taenianotus*), the Weedy Scorpionfish (*Rhinopias frondosa*), the Ornate Ghostpipefish (*Solenostomus paradoxus*), and the Blue-ringed Octopus.

The land fauna is just as unique in this area known as the Wallacea, with its protected jungle areas of Tangkoko and Dua Saudara, including the Maleo bird (*Macrocephalon maleo*), the Sulawesi tarsier (the world's smallest primate, *Tarsius spectrum*) and the Sulawesi Black Macaque (*Macaca nigra*). This place is home to 13 species of mammal, 155 species of bird and 17 reptile species. It is one of only three nesting beaches known in Sulawesi for the threatened Leatherback Turtle (*Dermochelys coriacea*), and it is a haven for endemic species.

Between Lembeh Strait and Bangka Island there are already 20 hotels and dive operations, with the prospect for further increase. The provincial government of North Sulawesi is planning to develop the area into the second most important tourist destination after Bali. The provincial governor stated he won't give his permission to the submarine disposal of mining tailings in this unique area. The final decision if the mine will be operated lies with the authorities in Jakarta. And over the past few months a quarrel started between the ministries involved over the permission for the mine. The same quarrel is going on at the regency's level, and there are strong indications of money politics involved.

Thousands of jobs in the sustainable tourism sector are at risk if the gold mine, which is going to operate only for five years, is given government permission. Equal damage will be inflicted on the prosperous fishing industry of which the Bay of Batuputih is the regional center.

In the meantime, construction work is going ahead at the Toka Tindung mining site near Rinondoran/Batuputih, East Likupang District, North Minahasa Regency and Bitung Regency to establish a gold mine that will dispose of its tailings either in the sea (original plan) or at a dumping site on land. Although the plan for the submarine tailings disposal seems to be abandoned finally, the disposal and storage on land holds a great risk for the environment and villages in the surroundings, as North Sulawesi is known for torrential floods and is classified as a tsunami/earthquake high risk area. If the tailings overspill or enter the ground water via cracks, the water reservoir for a majority of people in North Minahasa region will be contaminated.

The Australian company, Archipelago Resources PLC, which is registered at the London Alternative Investment Market (AIM) since September 2003 and operates in Indonesia through its subsidiary PT. Meares Soputan Mining (MSM) currently doesn't hold any valid construction or production permits except for the original government contract 43/Pres/86 that dates back to 1986 and that it acquired in the fourth generation in 2002 from the Australian company Aurora Gold. The contract itself doesn't match current standards of law, as it was issued 13 days before the company was even formed legally.

The original environmental impact assessment study (EIA/AMDAL) was declared expired by the Indonesian Ministry for Environment in December 2005, but the Ministry of Energy and Mining said in May 2006 it could be still used until the AMDAL was revised. Although the company hasn't yet produced a new AMDAL, in which it has to prove that it will handle the tailings in a way that won't put the environment at risk, it goes ahead with construction. A decision by the Indonesian High Court Jakarta that 30 ha of concession land have to be returned to the local landowners is violated by the company. Violence is prone as the local people try to defend their livelihoods. Just recently a sea blockade prevented the company to discharge building materials at the newly built jetty in Rinondoran.

Despite its promise to employ environmentally friendly and up-to-date technology, MSM has acquired a secondhand processing plant from El Tambo/Chile, which is going to be shipped to and installed at the Toka Tindung Site.

We urge the Indonesian government to save this unique marine area from destructive gold mining practices, either in the form of foreign companies or in the form of local small scale miners.

Save this unique area as a natural world heritage and preserve it for sustainable use for future generations!