

Greenpeace's Outdated Tactics Ignore the Reality of Progress

Greenpeace has today released a report that heavily criticises Indonesia's palm oil industry. There is very little new or surprising in the report. In fact, the most interesting thing about the document is its tone. It has the aggressive, antagonistic tone of an organisation that is failing to keep up with the modern world.

Indonesia today is a partner for many Western governments, aid agencies, forest-focused NGOs, and academics. The Jokowi government's success at reducing deforestation, controlling expansion, and addressing labour issues, has been praised by Secretary John Kerry, just 24 hours earlier.

In addition, Indonesia met its deforestation target agreed with the Norwegian government, and experienced record-low domestic deforestation levels. NGOs and organisations from CIFOR, to U.S. State Department, to the UNFAO have confirmed this progress.

Unfortunately, Greenpeace is not interested in progress; but rather in attacking Western governments. The main thrust of today's report is that a number of Indonesian plantation companies have planted area within the country's forest estate, e.g. within production forests, protected forests and conservation forests. For anyone that understands Indonesian forest policy and land-use planning, this is not news. This is precisely why initiatives have been introduced, such as the OneMap initiative, to ensure there is greater accuracy when it comes to Indonesia's maps and land use.

There are two things that appear to be motivating the release of the report.

First is an attempt to paint Indonesia's broader approach to climate change in a negative light in the lead up to the UN climate conference later this month.

Second is Greenpeace attempting to undermine certification systems – particularly ISPO – and lobby against them being used as a form of due diligence in forthcoming UK and EU regulations on deforestation.

Arguably the biggest omission is the report's failure to mention that the Government of Indonesia – particularly President Jokowi – has undertaken comprehensive steps towards reform of the processes associated with the granting of palm oil concessions.

President Jokowi's success in reducing levels of deforestation through the palm oil moratorium and the extension of the forest moratorium is simply not acknowledged by Greenpeace at any point -- at all.

The forward-looking approach has been praised by US climate envoy John Kerry.

Constructive approaches to forests, climate change and to certification are needed from businesses, growers, NGOs, and governments, Greenpeace is not doing any favours to itself, or the cause, by rehashing old attacks.

CIFOR, which has significantly more credibility than Greenpeace on constructing policy solutions, recently pointed towards the imbalance between the focus on forests in developing countries, and the continued inaction on energy use in rich countries.

CIFOR's Robert Nasi stated, "So far countries in the Global North have not fully delivered in many respects: the \$100 billion a year in climate finance promised in 2009 is not yet there, subsidies for fossil fuels represent \$11 million a minute, — the International Monetary Fund said in a recent report that the production and burning of coal, oil and gas was subsidized by \$5.9 trillion in 2020 — while many countries are still opening new coal mines or new coal-based power plants."

Similarly, multilateral organisations such as the UNDP have thrown their weight behind improving and reforming ISPO to ensure it provides beneficial outcomes for all Indonesians.

Greenpeace's report underlines that the organisation is not interested in looking forward - contributing to effective solutions for producing sustainable palm oil, or to improving the livelihoods of Indonesia's palm oil community. It is more interested in playing the games of the past – shouting allegations over social media, and lobbying Western regulators to undermine palm oil production.