

Technical Meeting on an Integrated Management Plan for Peatlands in Southeast Asia

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The balance between hydrology, soil and vegetation is crucial to the ability of peatland areas to support biodiversity, regulate water supply and maintain, if not increase, soil carbon stocks in Southeast Asia.

To ensure the sustainable management of peatlands and peat swamp forests, the importance of integrated management of peat swamp forests cannot be stressed enough. These were the thoughts from deliberations of a Technical Meeting on Integrated Management Plans for Peatlands in Southeast Asia held on 9-10 July 2012 in Pahang, Malaysia and attended by 40 participants from Malaysia, Indonesia, Vietnam and the Philippines; involved in the

implementation of the ASEAN Peatland Forests Project (APFP), SEApeat Project as well as some regional experts.

To encourage sustainable management of key peatland areas in Southeast Asia, speakers from the region and staff from several Malaysian government agencies involved in peatland management shared their thoughts and experiences. Peatland management in Southeast Asia, over the last 2-3 decades is at a crossroads. Moving forward to resolve these peatland issues and managing it to achieve the objectives of the ASEAN Agreement on Transboundary Haze Pollution (AATHP) and guidance of the ASEAN Peatland Management Strategy (APMS), the meeting focussed on key objectives including:

- Share experience on integrated management of peatlands from the region;
- Identify strengths and weaknesses and gaps for implementation of existing plans;
- Identify good practices and lessons learned; and
- Identify key principles to guide future integrated management measures.

The meeting was successfully held and was made possible by support from IFAD/GEF and the European Union through the APFP and SEApeat projects.

Demonstrating Actions on the Ground by Malaysia

The host country, Malaysia, organized a field visit for the participants, to



Dr Raman Letchumanan, Project Director and Head of ASEAN Environment Division opening the meeting. Photo: Chin Sing Yun

highlight some practical solutions that are being applied particularly to control forest and peatland fires, and through inter-agency cooperation, sustainable timber harvesting and rehabilitation in peatland areas.

In the Penor Forest Reserve, a peat forest surrounded by urban and agricultural zones, a tube well, fire watch tower and check dams have been constructed to help prevent and control the annual incidences of fire in the surrounding land.

This approach is guided by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment and involves inter-agency cooperation from the Forestry Department of Peninsular Malaysia (FDPM), Department of Drainage and Irrigation (DID), the Department of Geology and Minerals (DGM), Department of Environment (DOE), Fire and Rescue Department of Malaysia (FRDM) and the Malaysian Volunteer Corps (RELA).

The tube well was commissioned by DID and managed by DGM to supplement water flow in dry seasons and provide a water source for fire fighting. Four check dams have also been built and maintained by DID to regulate the water level in the neighboring canals as part of the fire prevention measures.

The watch tower is managed by the DOE and manned by volunteers from RELA. Powerful binoculars and a compass are utilised in fire detection during the dry months. In the event of fire, the FDPM and FRDM are responsible for providing immediate assistance.

In the Pekan Forest Reserve, Reduced Impact Logging (RIL) is practiced under guidance of the Pahang Forestry Department.



From 520,000 ha of Forest Reserve managed under the Sustainable Forest Management System (SFM) in Pahang, 200,000 ha is peat swamp forest, making up about 60% of protection forests and 40% of production forest in the state. Logged using the Selective Management System (SMS), affected areas are replanted, including the 20 m buffer zone area.

At this site, there was a demonstration of RIL using a modified grabber and crane to extract felled timber. Due to the high cost and strict regulations for sustainable logging in peat swamp areas, the logging activity in the area

is lower than the allowed coupe of 500 ha/yr. The group also visited an area which has regenerated well 12 years after logging. Areas logged using RIL have shown better forest recovery compared to areas logged using conventional methods.

Some valuable thoughts from the Region

Eight speakers from Peninsular Malaysia (Pekan FR), Sabah (Klias FR), Sarawak (Loagan Bunut NP), West Kalimantan, Central Kalimantan, Riau provinces, Philippines and Vietnam presented experiences with the integrated management planning in their respective locations. Several





Demonstration of water pumping at the tube well in Penor. Photo: Noor Azura Ahmad

notable points were highlighted and discussed during the meeting.

Dr Khali Hamzah from Forest Research Institute Malaysia (FRIM) stressed the importance of stakeholder consultation and endorsement to ensure that the Management Plan is implemented. He also shared a lesson learnt regarding the importance of financing in effective implementation of the management plan. From the views of West Kalimantan, the suitability of crops for agriculture on peatlands is related to the challenge of addressing economic needs of communities living on peatlands. In Loagan Bunut, Sarawak, the speaker shared his experience with the effect of development outside

conservation area boundaries on the quality of protected forests and its hydrology. Dr Le Phat Quoi from Vietnam highlighted the importance of keeping water at optimum levels instead of constant flooding because while flooding helped to control fires, it affected vegetation growth. Some natural fluctuation is also necessary for the growth of seasonal grass beds in the area. The event report and presentations are available on www.aseanpeat.net/index.cfm?&menuid=164&parentid=116.

Recommendations

The meeting concluded that it is necessary to focus on coordinated management of peat domes or hydrological units; and good

hydrological management to reduce the rate of subsidence, optimise production of economic products and prevent fires at all times. The meeting also recommended that governments and other stakeholders should work together to address the following:

- Manage peatlands in an integrated manner
- Collate best practice and experience for integrated peatland management and develop guidelines;
- Develop IMPs for all significant/ large scale peatland ecosystems and enhance the availability of resources for the implementation of the existing IMPs;
- Strengthen the linkage and coordination between IMP activities with implementation of the national and regional mechanisms;
- Improve the engagement of key stakeholders;
- Enhance regional and national cooperation and exchange among related stakeholders;
- Monitor and report regularly at local, national and regional levels on the status and trends in peatland protection and management and the implementation of IMPs for key areas.
- Strengthen the institutional & regulatory framework for peatland management at national and local levels and assign clear responsibilities for peatland protection and management.
- Link IMPs for peatlands with ongoing work on climate change, REDD, subsidence control and community development.
- Strengthen capacity for integrated peatland management through training and awareness programmes as well as Research and Development (R&D) activities.

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Global Environment Centre (GEC) is the Regional Project Executing Agency the APFP. It aims to demonstrate, implement and scale up the integrated management of peatlands in Southeast Asia. The related SEApeat project, funded by the European Union through GEC seeks to reduce deforestation and GHG emissions caused by the degradation of peatland forests in Southeast Asia.

The combined projects involve all ten ASEAN countries in regional activities and/or pilot site activities for the period 2010-2014. The projects aim to promote and support the implementation of the ASEAN Peatland Management Strategy (2006-2020) especially related to capacity building, fire prevention and sustainable management of peatlands in the region. Further details of these two initiatives can be found at www.aseanpeat.net.