

Zubaidah Nazeer – *Strait Times Indonesia* / May 25, 2011

Cut logs being gathered from a peatland forest in a picture from a Greenpeace aerial survey mission over Sumatra last year. Some environmentalists say the moratorium is an 'anti-climax' and want it to cover existing concessions in forest areas. (AFP Photo)

Now that clearing of new peatland is banned in Indonesia, countries affected by the haze from burning peat in Sumatra could get some breathing room.



That is assuming the landmark moratorium is enforced.

For years, [Singapore and Malaysia suffered hazy skies and acrid smoke](#) as landowners in Indonesia used traditional slash-and-burn methods to clear their concessions and plant the year's food and commercial crops, such as oil palm.

[The moratorium](#) — passed last Friday after a five-month delay — places about half of Indonesia's primary forest and peatland, or 64 million hectares, off limits to development till the end of next year.

“To the extent that the moratorium leads to less disturbance of such areas, this could lead to a commensurate reduction in the frequency and severity of haze events over time,” said Ms Frances Seymour, director-general of the Centre for International Forestry Research (Cifor).

It was, she said, the first step towards Indonesia's target of reducing carbon emissions by up to 26 percent by 2020.

The new areas of peatland covered under the moratorium are mainly scattered over the east coast of Sumatra and the southern tip of Kalimantan.

Indonesia is the world's third-largest emitter of greenhouse gases, after China and the United States, due largely to deforestation caused by illegal logging, mining and expansion by palm oil plantations.

The moratorium, hailed as a landmark step in tackling climate change, had been delayed as

business people, green groups and the government tussled over the extent of the coverage.

As the world's largest palm oil exporter and one of the leading producers of rice, Indonesia is struggling to balance economic growth with environmental preservation. To nudge it forward, Norway last year extended a \$1 billion package to help Indonesia create monitoring systems and pilot projects to protect forests.

[Some environmentalists have called the moratorium an “anti-climax.”](#) They wanted it to cover existing concessions in forest areas, so that producers could no longer strip them. They also pointed out that of the 64 million hectares of primary forest covered by the ban, at least 35 million hectares are already protected.

[Greenpeace Indonesia had wanted 105 million hectares of forest to be included.](#)

Yuyun Indradi, a Greenpeace campaigner, said that if current practices such as draining existing peatland concessions continue, protected areas close by remain at risk of being burned by extreme dry weather or lightning. “This will not reduce the haze problem,” he said.

Other environmentalists have over the past few days asked how the moratorium will be enforced and what will happen after next year.

A report by the Human Rights Watch in 2009 for instance pointed out that rampant corruption meant that local officials did not enforce rules when it came to land development.

“The impact of this remains to be seen,” Yuyun said. “But the positive side of this is that the government has stepped in to suspend new concessions.”

Agus Purnomo, President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's special aide on climate change, said the government would issue recommendations on punishing those who flouted the ban.

Exact sanctions remain unclear, opening up the risk of poor implementation in a country with weak law enforcement.

Agus said the ban would allow the government to give “double protection” to natural forests at risk of illegal practices such as squatting and logging.