

"We are happy if a special agency focused on REDD can help us focus on the already huge task of managing Indonesia's dwindling forests," Zulkifli told reporters on Thursday.

The planned special agency will report directly to President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono to coordinate efforts pertaining to implementation of REDD.

The plan was agreed to after Indonesia and Norway signed a climate deal to curb deforestation in Indonesia, which currently stands at more than 1 million hectares per year.

Under the US\$1 billion deal, Indonesia pledged to stop issuing new permits to exploit natural forests and carbon peat land areas from 2011 to 2012.

In return, Indonesia would receive financial incentives from Norway based on the total emissions contained by reducing deforestation.

Before the deal with Norway, the ministry had been the focal point on REDD issues, including participation in international climate talks.

The ministry has also set up a special working group on REDD and has issued a number of REDD regulations.

A 2009 ministerial decree allows indigenous people, local authorities, private organizations and businesspeople — both local and foreign — to operate REDD projects.

In addition to the special agency on REDD, Norway's climate deal requires Indonesia to develop an independent body to monitor, report and verify (MRV) each emission reduction from the forestry sector.

Under the REDD program, forest nations would receive financial incentives for protecting their forests, and would be rewarded for preventing the excessive release of carbon.

Not everyone is as enthusiastic. The planned REDD council would make forest management more complicated, the National Forest Commission said.

"It would create a confusing overlap of authority," commission member Agus Setyarso said.

Agus said it was the case with the National Council on Climate Change (DNPI) and the environment minister. The DNPI took over issues of climate change despite the 2009 Environment Law which stipulated that the Environment Ministry should take the lead on climate change.

The DNPI also has the authority to decide whether to endorse emission cutting projects under the clean development mechanism (CDM), which previously was under the Environment Ministry.

The DNPI has a working group on forestry issues that has also dealt with REDD affairs.

World Agroforestry Center (ICRAF) researcher Martua Sirait and Bogor Agricultural University (IPB) forestry expert Togu Manurung hailed the REDD special council plan, saying it would help improve forest management in Indonesia.

“The special council on REDD is crucial for Indonesia to mitigate climate change. The Forestry Ministry could maintain its focus on managing forests,” Martua said.