



Association for Tropical Biology and Conservation

RESOLUTION OPPOSING CONSTRUCTION OF THE PULAU BALANG BRIDGE IN EAST KALIMANTAN, INDONESIAN BORNEO

Whereas, Balikpapan Bay in East Kalimantan, Indonesia sustains a remarkable variety of forest and estuarine ecosystems, including diverse tropical mixed-dipterocarp rainforest, mangrove forests, shallow bay waters, important sea-grass habitats, and coral reefs; and

Whereas, these coastal environments have been severely reduced and degraded throughout much of East Kalimantan; and

Whereas, the Bay and its adjoining forest ecosystems provide critical habitat for a variety of rare and threatened wildlife species, including Sunda clouded leopards, orangutans, sun bears, proboscis monkeys, dugongs, Irrawaddy dolphins, saltwater crocodiles, and green sea turtles; and

Whereas, the Sungai Wain Protection Forest near Balikpapan Bay is the most important part of Balikpapan-Samarinda Important Bird Area, as classified by Birdlife International, and has been a long-term release site for orangutans; and

Whereas, forests fringing Balikpapan Bay greatly reduce soil erosion and water sedimentation that can threaten marine life and boat traffic in the bay; and

Whereas, Sung Wain forest is the most secure and reliable source of fresh water for residents in the Balikpapan region; and

Whereas, the bay itself includes a variety of freshwater, brackish, and mangrove habitats that provide vital breeding areas for commercially important fish and crustacean species that help to sustain local fisheries; and

Whereas, a major development project, the Pulau Balang Bridge, would dramatically increase human access to this relatively isolated area by providing a direct road link to the nearby city of Balikpapan; and

Whereas, uncontrolled access to this area will almost certainly result in a major increase in settlements, farming, illegal logging, and land speculation that will threaten native habitats and lead to increased fires and wildlife poaching; and

Whereas, such human pressures will degrade not only the bay and its adjoining mangrove forests, but will also imperil the tropical dipterocarp forests in the nearby Sungai Wain Protection Forest; and

Whereas, many leading Indonesian and international wildlife authorities have decried the plan to build the Pulau Balang Bridge because of its unacceptable environmental costs; and

Whereas, an alternative and shorter road route, the Tanjung Batu-Gunung Seteleng Bridge, could easily be used to span the trans-Kalimantan road section over the Balikpapan Bay, by directly linking the City of Balikpapan with Penajam to the west, which would be far less destructive to natural ecosystems; and

Whereas, local authorities in the Balikpapan City and Penajam Paser Utara Regency have recently expressed a preference for the more-direct and less environmentally destructive route of the Tanjung Batu-Gunung Seteleng Bridge;

Therefore, be it resolved that the Association for Tropical Biology and Conservation, the world's largest scientific organization devoted to the study, protection, and sustainable use of tropical ecosystems:

- Urges the Federal Government of Indonesia and the Provincial Government of East Kalimantan to join with local authorities to support a direct bridge route between Balikpapan and Penajam, the Tanjung Batu-Gunung Seteleng Bridge, over the currently proposed Pulau Balang Bridge; and
- Strongly recommends that rare coastal, estuarine, and forest habitats in the Balikpapan Bay be successfully protected from environmental degradation in the long-term, a goal that can be most effectively achieved by avoiding any further road access to these areas; and
- Further recommends that existing protected areas in the Balikpapan Bay region be extended to include coral reefs, sea-grass beds, coastal mangroves, and all biocorridors between the coastal ecosystems and Sungai Wain Protection Forest.