

Sarawak's Forests: Myths & Reality

1. The state of Sarawak's forests

CLAIMS:

- Taib claims that "*Sarawak's forests are still as luxuriant as ever*", and that this is demonstrated by Google Earth satellite imagesⁱ
- Sarawak forest officials claim that 84% of Sarawak remains forestedⁱⁱ, while Taib has claimed that 70% of the State's forests are 'preserved'ⁱⁱⁱ

REALITY:

- The 84% figure includes areas of monoculture oil palm and exotic timber plantations; in fact only 65% of the land still has natural forest cover^{iv}.
- Google Earth satellite images clearly show that **the vast majority of the remaining natural forest has been heavily degraded** by multiple rounds of selective logging and is criss-crossed by a spider's web of logging roads (see image).
- Environmental Impact Assessments of such areas describe them as being "beyond recovery"^v.
- Satellite images show that **only 5 per cent of Sarawak's forests remain in a pristine state (unaffected by logging or plantations)**^{vi}.
- Independent analysis of satellite images shows **Sarawak has a higher deforestation rate than any other major tropical timber producer**^{vii} and that the deforestation rate is increasing^{viii}.

©2011 Google Earth, ©2011 Tele Atlas



Comparison of logged forest in Sarawak and intact forest in neighbouring Brunei

2. Forest conservation

CLAIMS:

- Sarawak officials claim that 1 million hectares of Sarawak's forest is 'totally protected', with no logging allowed^{ix}
- Sarawak officials have claimed that the State is the 'biggest contributor' to the 'Heart of Borneo' tri-national conservation project led by WWF^x

REALITY:

- Only 0.5 million hectares is actually protected^{xi}.
- A further 0.5 million hectares has been 'proposed' for protection for decades.
- 'Proposed' protected areas are currently being logged and clear-felled for oil palm (see image)^{xii}.
- Some genuine protected areas were heavily degraded by logging before designation^{xiii}.
- The 1990 official International Tropical Timber Organisation (ITTO) mission concluded that even 1 million hectares would be *'inadequate to preserve the full range of biological diversity in Sarawak'*^{xiv}.
- Only ¼ of Sarawak's part of the 'Heart of Borneo' is in a pristine state^{xv}; another ¼ is licensed for clear-felling^{xvi}.
- More virgin forest was degraded in Sarawak's

©2012 Global Witness

Heart of Borneo during 2005-2010 than in Indonesian Borneo, Sabah and Brunei combined^{xvii}.



Proposed national park, clear-felled for oil palm, 2011^{xviii}

3. Sustainable forest management

CLAIMS:

- Taib claims that Sarawak practices 'sustainable forest management': felling only small numbers of larger trees in a low-impact manner and then leaving the forest to recover for 25 years^{xix}

REALITY:

- Environmental Impact Assessments demonstrate that Sarawak's forests are regularly re-logged after much less than 25 years^{xx}.
- Even the 25-year cycle is considered by experts to be insufficient to allow the forest to recover^{xxi}.
- Investigations by Global Witness and others have shown that regulations meant to ensure selective logging impact is minimised (such as minimum sizes for logged trees, maximum widths for logging roads and prohibitions on logging in steep slope areas) are routinely flouted by the major logging companies in Sarawak^{xxii}.

©2012 Global Witness



'Sustainable forest management' in a steep slope area, 2009^{xxiii}

4. International support

CLAIMS:

- Taib claims that the International Tropical Timber Organisation (ITTO) has 'certified' Sarawak's forest management policy & practices and described these as '*one of the best in the world*'^{xxiv}
- Taib claims that the ITTO's mission to Sarawak in 1990 "*agreed generally speaking with what we were doing before that*"^{xxv}
- Taib claims Sarawak is following ITTO advice by restricting logging to 9.2 million cubic metres/year^{xxvi}

REALITY:

- ITTO has never 'certified' Sarawak's forest management policy or practices.
- The ITTO mission in 1990 found that Sarawak's forests were being logged at double the sustainable rate and '*in a manner which is damaging to the environment*'^{xxvii}.

©2012 Global Witness

- ITTO's recommended maximum annual logging volume was based on the existing area of permanent forest estate (PFE), which has reduced by more than one quarter since 1990^{xxviii}.
- Adjusting for the reduced PFE, and accounting for standard logging practice in Sarawak, a 'sustainable' harvest (consistent with ITTO definitions) would be 4 million cubic meters^{xxix}.
- Actual log production in Sarawak has averaged 13 million cubic metres in the 20 years since the ITTO recommendation^{xxx}.



Small diameter logs going to a sawmill

ⁱ Malaysian Observer TV, interview with Chief Minister Taib, 3rd April 2013 - <http://mobtv.my/talkshow-3094.html>

ⁱⁱ As stated by Abang Ahmad Abang Morni, Assistant Director (Forestry Development Sector), Forest Dept Sarawak at briefing for media by Sarawak State Forest Department, 2nd April 2013 - <http://mobtv.my/talkshow-3106.html>

ⁱⁱⁱ Interview with Chief Minister of Sarawak, March 2011, uploaded to Youtube <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zpUUJkcEG7s>

^{iv} Latest analysis shows 8.1 million hectares of forest remain (including degraded, logged forests) (Sarvision, 'Impact of oil palm plantations on peatland conversion in Sarawak 2005-2010: Summary Report', 25th January 2011) out of a total land area of 12.4 million hectares

^v This language is used to describe logged forest areas in Sarawak in multiple Environmental Impact Assessments (EIA) for Licenses for Plantation Forest, including those for LPF/0004 and LPF/0008. EIAs for forest clearance for oil palm and timber plantations in Sarawak routinely cite the heavy degradation caused by multiple rounds of logging as a justification for clear-felling

^{vi} Analysis by Global Witness of Greenpeace/WRI maps of 'intact forest landscape' (IFL) (significant areas of unlogged forest, identified using satellite imagery - www.intactforest.org) as of 2010, with adjustments for additional areas degraded by logging since 2010, as shown in Landsat ETM7 imagery for subsequent years, and with addition of unlogged gazetted protected areas not large enough to be classified as IFL.

^{vii} A 2011 study found the deforestation rate in Sarawak in 2010 was 2.16% (SarVision, Impact of oil palm plantations on peatland conversion in Sarawak 2005-2010, Summary report, 25 January 2011). This rate is higher than both the official FAO deforestation rates and published independent assessments for all other major tropical forest countries. Indonesia, for instance, claims a deforestation rate of 0.5 per cent during 2000-2010, while Miettinen et al 2011 found the true rate to be 1 per cent (Miettinen, J., et al., Deforestation rates in insular Southeast Asia between 2000 and 2010, Global Change Biology (2011) 17, 2261–2270). The independently measured rate of deforestation in the Brazilian Amazon is currently around 0.3 per cent (INPE).

^{viii} SarVision, Impact of oil palm plantations on peatland conversion in Sarawak 2005-2010, Summary report, 25 January 2011

^{ix} Sarawak Forest Department 'Facts & Figures',

http://www.forestry.sarawak.gov.my/modules/web/page.php?id=117&menu_id=0&sub_id=140, accessed 25th March 2012

^x Borneo Post, 'Sarawak Biggest Contributor to Heart of Borneo', 24th March 2012

^{xi} Areas of individual gazetted National Parks and Wildlife Sanctuaries from Forest Department website, accessed October 2012

(http://www.forestry.sarawak.gov.my/page.php?id=1012&menu_id=0&sub_id=257 &

http://www.forestry.sarawak.gov.my/page.php?id=1013&menu_id=0&sub_id=258),

^{xii} Global Witness, 'In the future, there will be no forests left', Nov 2012, p11-12 show that the proposed Danum-Linau National Park is being logged by Shin Yang under T/3342, and p14-15 show that the proposed Mud Volcano National Park is being cleared to make way for a Sarawak Oil Palms Bhd plantation

^{xiii} For instance, all of Sarawak's peat swamp forest protected areas, including Maludam National Park - Sarawak's third largest national park - were selectively logged prior to being gazetted (See IUCN review of CITES Appendix II listing proposal for ramin (*Gonystylus* spp.), 2004

at http://data.iucn.org/Themes/ssc/our_work/wildlife_trade/citescop13/pdf/CoP13_Prop_50_Gonystylus_spp.pdf, page 3, last paragraph; for Maludam NP see also The Star, 1/12/2004, 'Conservation plan under way for Sarawak park')

^{xiv} Report submitted to the ITTC by Mission Established Pursuant to Resolution I (VI) "The Promotion of Sustainable Forest Management: A Case Study in Sarawak, Malaysia", 7 May 1990, p 49-50

^{xv} Official boundaries of Sarawak's 'Heart of Borneo' taken from Sarawak Forest Department map

at http://www.forestry.sarawak.gov.my/modules/web/page.php?id=993&menu_id=0&sub_id=146; areas of intact primary forest within it mapped and measured using 2010 Greenpeace/WRI Intact Forest Landscape maps (www.intactforests.org), with subtractions made to account for additional degradation of primary forests in the upper reaches of the Melatai, Danum and Baram river basins during 2010 to 2012 documented in Landsat ETM7 satellite imagery obtained and analysed by Global Witness

^{xvi} Official maps of oil palm plantation and timber plantation license areas, drawn from Environmental Impact Assessments

-
- ^{xvii} Measurements by Global Witness of differences between Intact Forest Landscape maps provided by Greenpeace/WRI for Borneo for 2005 and 2010 (www.intactforests.org)
- ^{xviii} Clearance by Shin Yang inside proposed Danum Linau National Park. See Global Witness, 'In the future, there will be no forests left', Nov 2012, p11-13
- ^{xix} Malaysian Observer TV, interview with Chief Minister Taib, 3rd April 2013 - <http://mobtv.my/talkshow-3094.html>
- ^{xx} Analysis by Global Witness of numerous Environmental Impact Assessments for 're-entry' logging in individual logging concessions in Sarawak between 1996 and 2010
- ^{xxi} Report submitted to the ITTC by Mission Established Pursuant to Resolution I (VI) "The Promotion of Sustainable Forest Management: A Case Study in Sarawak, Malaysia", 7 May 1990, p 163, & Philip Shearman, Jane Bryan, William F. Laurance, 'Are we approaching 'peak timber' in the tropics?', Biological Conservation, volume 151, Issue 1, July 2012, Pages 17–21, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.biocon.2011.10.036>
- ^{xxii} Global Witness, 'In the future, there will be no forests left', Nov 2012
- ^{xxiii} Land-based logging in prohibited steep slope area within Samling concession T/0413 - see Council on Ethics, The Government Pension Fund Global, Recommendation of 22 February 2010, on the exclusion of the company Samling Global Ltd, <http://www.regjeringen.no/pages/13897161/Samling.pdf>
- ^{xxiv} Malaysian Observer TV, interview with Chief Minister Taib, 3rd April 2013 - <http://mobtv.my/talkshow-3094.html>
- ^{xxv} *ibid*
- ^{xxvi} *ibid*
- ^{xxvii} Report submitted to the ITTC by Mission Established Pursuant to Resolution I (VI) "The Promotion of Sustainable Forest Management: A Case Study in Sarawak, Malaysia", 7 May 1990, p34-35
- ^{xxviii} *ibid*
- ^{xxix} Global Witness calculation, using ITTO 1990 methodology, adjusting to reduced PFE area of 3 million hectares (compared with the 4.5 million assumed by ITTO) and assuming no silvicultural treatment of logged forests
- ^{xxx} Log production figures for 1991-2001 from Jomo et al., 2004 'Deforesting Malaysia'; approximate figure of 12 million m³/yr for 2002-2004 and 2006-2007 and precise figures for 2010 and 2011 from The Star, 10/3/12, 'Sarawak log production last year lowest in more than two decades'; figure for 2005 from Malaysian Timber Council, Malaysia Forestry & Environment (Facts & Figures), <http://www.mtc.com.my/info/images/stories/pdf/factsheets.pdf>, p10; figures for 2008 and 2009 from The Star, 1/4/2010, 'Dry spell hampers Sarawak log exports'. Total for 20 years from 1991-2010 is 275.1 million cubic metres, giving an annual average of 13.75 million cubic metres