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Joint Statement by the Friends of Ulu Muda II on the Proposed Logging at Ulu Muda

The Importance of the Ulu Muda Forest

The Ulu Muda forests cover an area of approximately 160,000ha (about twice the size of Perlis) located within the districts of Baling, Padang Terap and Sik in the north-eastern corner of Kedah. The Ulu Muda area consists of a number of forest reserves, the biggest of which is the Ulu Muda Forest Reserve (see Table 1 and Figure 1). There are three large man-made lakes within the Ulu Muda area, namely Muda, Pedu and Ahning, formed by the construction of three correspondingly-named dams that store water from the surrounding catchment forests and regulate it for use in Kedah, Penang and Perlis for rice cultivation and for domestic and industrial consumption.

Table 1: Forest Reserves (FR) in the Ulu Muda Area

Name of FR	Area (ha)
Ulu Muda FR	105,060
Pedu FR	15,299
Padang Terap FR	12,785
Proposed Bukit Keramat FR	10,226
Chabar Besar FR	8,827
Proposed Bukit Saiong FR	8,191
Proposed Ulu Muda FR (Addition)	1,359
Chabar Kecil FR	1,184
Total	162,931

Source: Kedah State Forestry Department Annual Report 2003

The Ulu Muda forests plays an important role as a water catchment area for the Pedu, Muda and Ahning dams and provide upstream protection to major rivers that supply 80% of drinking water for Penang and Kedah, and to a lesser extent, Perlis.

The most important rice producing region in Peninsular Malaysia, the Muda irrigation scheme, so aptly named as the Rice Bowl of Malaysia, relies on water sourced from the Ulu Muda forests. The area under the scheme accounts for about 40% of total rice production in Malaysia and supports the livelihood of 63,000 families that are

directly involved in rice farming. This area is also in fact one of the country's eight large granary areas designated under the Third National Agriculture Policy (1998-2010) as permanent rice producing areas to realise a minimum self-sufficiency level for rice of 90% by 2010. As such, the protection of water supply to this important "rice bowl" of Malaysia is of utmost importance for the country's food security, more so now with the recently worldwide crisis of shortages in rice supply.

The rivers that originate from the Ulu Muda forests, including the Muda and Kedah rivers, sustain the fisheries resource important for the livelihood of fishing communities of the Kedah coast, as well as supplementing the income of padi farmers who depend on the rivers. These rivers are also important for maintaining critical ecosystems such as the mudflats along the Kedah coast which is an important area for migratory birds and edible shellfish.

The industrial areas in Kedah such as the Kulim Hi-Tech Park and those in Penang, including Bayan Baru and Seberang Perai, are dependent on the water which originates from the Ulu Muda forests. The tourism industry in Penang, particularly the hospitality sector, is also a heavy user of water sourced from Kedah.

The National Physical Plan and draft Kedah Structure Plan identifies Ulu Muda as an Environmentally Sensitive Area Rank I, which means that the area is for strict protection and logging is not allowed. The sheer size of the Ulu Muda forests and the presence of relatively untouched primary forest support a rich diversity of fauna and flora. It is important for conservation of large mammals such as the Asian elephant, the Malaysian tiger, the Malayan tapir, seladang and the clouded leopard,. It is also designated as an Important Bird Area (IBA) for the rich avian fauna found within its boundaries.

The Proposed Heli-Logging at Ulu Muda

Helicopter logging at Ulu Muda Forest Reserve was first proposed in 2002 by the Kedah State Government which was at that time governed by Barisan Nasional with YAB Dato' Seri Syed Razak bin Syed Zain Barakbah as the Menteri Besar. This project provoked much controversy as a result of which Friends of Ulu Muda, a loose coalition of NGOs, was formed in 2003 to campaign against the proposal to log Ulu Muda. Despite claims by the project proponent and the Menteri Besar of Kedah that the project was "environmentally-friendly", the Detailed Environmental Impact Assessment (DEIA) for the heli-logging project was rejected in March 2003.

In recognition of the strategic importance of the Ulu Muda catchment area, the Federal Cabinet decided on 18th May 2003 to ban logging at Ulu Muda. The then Minister of Primary Industries, Datuk Seri (now Tun) Dr. Lim KengYaik was quoted in major newspapers as saying that the Federal government had also decided to compensate Kedah for the loss of timber revenue due to the logging ban.

It was therefore a great surprise that the plan to log Ulu Muda has resurfaced again, this time proposed by the PAS-led State government under the leadership of the present Menteri Besar, YAB Azizan Abdul Razak. The Kedah Menteri Besar has been quoted by the press as saying that the logging plan would still go ahead even if the Federal government compensates the State government to the tune of RM100 million per year.

Based on statements made by the Menteri Besar, the current proposal to log Ulu Muda is very similar to what was proposed in 2003. The Menteri Besar is echoing his predecessor's argument that the logging will be carried out in an environmentally-friendly manner. However, it was established from the DEIA for the 2003 logging proposal that an extensive road network totalling 404km and 10-24m wide was proposed which would result in the clearing of more than 4 million trees. Such a damaging activity would no doubt seriously threaten the economic values of the Ulu Muda water catchment area as outlined above.

FoUM II's Stand and Recommendations

Considering the conflict that is yet again arising with regard to the Ulu Muda forests, several environmental non-government organisations (NGOs) and community-based organisations (CBOs) have agreed to revive the coalition to save Ulu Muda, now known as Friends of Ulu Muda II, to prevent the social, environmental and food crisis that will arise from logging Ulu Muda. Our stand and recommendations are as follows:

1. FoUM II's stand is that there should be **zero logging** at Ulu Muda. Logging of any kind and for whatever reasons should not be allowed at Ulu Muda. The Federal government directive of 18th May 2003 banning logging at Ulu Muda should be upheld.
2. The rich biodiversity of the Ulu Muda forests and their potential for the sustainable utilisation of non-timber forest products and services, should be protected and conserved to serve the long term interests of the State and the country. The protection of the Ulu Muda forests should be enhanced by establishing a State or National Park covering the entire Ulu Muda catchment area. A management plan should be prepared for the State or National Park.
3. The Federal government should deliver on its promise to compensate the Kedah State government for not logging Ulu Muda. This could be in the form of annual funds for development, the amount of which is proportionate to the forested area set aside by the State government for protection.
4. An Ulu Muda Trust Fund should be established and beneficiaries of water sourced from Ulu Muda should contribute to this trust fund. The Penang State government should contribute to this fund and private companies and members of the public should also be encouraged to contribute. There should be a committee comprising Federal and State agencies, as well as representatives from the private sectors, farmers, and NGOs, to ensure that the trust fund is effectively used for the protection of the Ulu Muda water catchment areas.

Friends of Ulu Muda II Coalition Members

1. Malaysian Nature Society (MNS)
2. Malaysian Karst Society (MKS)
3. Sahabat Alam Malaysia (SAM)
4. WWF-Malaysia
5. Environmental Protection Society of Malaysia (EPSM)
6. WaterWatch Penang
7. Partners of Community Organisations (PACOS Trust)
8. Treat Every Environment Special (TrEES)
9. Environmental Management and Research Organisation of Malaysia (Ensearch)
10. Muafakat Warga Desa Negeri Kedah (Rural Citizens)
11. Kumpulan Bertindak Petani MADA
12. Pergerakan Penyelidikan dan Pembangunan Komuniti (KOMUNITI)
13. Campus Environmentalist Network (CARE)
14. Gabungan Angkatan Sahabat Alam Sekitar Nasional (GAGASAN)
15. Persatuan Pengguna Pulau Pinang (CAP)
16. Teras Pengupayaan Melayu (TERAS)
17. Suara Rakyat Malaysia (SUARAM Penang)
18. Jaringan Bertindak Nelayan Pantai Semenanjung (JARING), Kedah
19. Pertubuhan Prihatin Kesihatan & Sosial Malaysia (PRIHATIN MALAYSIA)

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