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Prof. Dr. Syamsul Maarif
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Ministry of Marine Affairs and Fisheries
Republic of Indonesia
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Jl. Medan Merdeka Timur No. 16
Jakarta Pusat 10110
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02 March 2010

Dear Dr. Syamsul Maarif,

It was a pleasure to meet with you, Dr. Subandono Diposaptono and other colleagues of the Ministry of Marine Affairs and Fisheries on February 22nd, 2010 in Jakarta.

As we discussed IUCN has received concerns from various sources on hydrocarbon exploration and seismic surveys allegedly being conducted within the Raja Ampat Marine Protected Areas in West Papua. Members of IUCN's Species Survival Commission have reported recent observations of seismic surveys being carried out by the company TGS Nopec on behalf of Niko Resources in Raja Ampat, at the center of what has come to be known as the Coral Triangle. As I am sure you are aware, this is a region of global significance to biodiversity with the highest recorded richness and diversity of corals and coral reef fishes in the world. The area is also a 'hotspot' for whales and dolphins (cetaceans), including some that are endangered.

Mining and exploratory activity such as seismic testing can have serious negative impacts on marine life. Such impact is of course not limited to the protected areas themselves as high-energy underwater sound such as that produced by seismic airguns can have very serious, in some cases lethal, effects on marine life such as whales and dolphins. Unlike some direct threats to marine life, such as fishing gear, high-energy sound propagates over considerable distances from the source location.

IUCN applauds the Government's action to protect the values within the Coral Triangle through the creation of a network of seven Marine Protected Areas covering approximately a million hectares in the waters of Raja Ampat. This network has the support of communities, local governments and the traditional leaders' council, the Dewan Adat and a number of IUCN Members, international and national non-governmental organizations, including Conservation International, the Nature Conservancy and the World Wide Fund for Nature. We further welcome the strong leadership of the Government of Indonesia in committing to targets of a total of 20 million hectares of marine protected areas by 2020 as was originally announced during the signing ceremony at the Coral Triangle Summit at the World Oceans Conference in May 2009.

In addition we understand that the Raja Ampat Marine Protected Areas were included in 2005 onto the Government's Tentative List of World Heritage Properties reflecting, quite appropriately, the future potential for these areas to be added to the World Heritage List under the UNESCO World Heritage Convention.

Finally I would also like to make you aware of the position of the collective membership of IUCN on mining and protected areas as expressed through an IUCN Resolution which was passed at the IUCN World Conservation Congress in Amman, Jordan, 2000. A copy of the resolution is attached for information and reinforces the essential incompatibility that the majority of IUCN Members see between mining and nature conservation objectives when protected areas have been created.

We view the above concerns seriously and ask for your urgent clarification as to the veracity of the claims and the position of the Government of Indonesia on mining and exploratory activity in the waters of Raja Ampat.

With best wishes,

Yours sincerely,



Aban Marker Kabraji (Ms.)
Regional Director, Asia

cc Sudirman Saad, Secretary General of Marine, Coasts and Small Islands, and Acting Director General of Marine, Coasts and Small Islands, MMAF
Agus Dermawan, Director of Conservation and Marine National Parks, MMAF
Subandono Diposaptono, Director of Coasts and Marine Affairs, MMAF
Head of Raja Ampat Regency
Julia Marton-Lefevre, Director General, IUCN
Juan Marco, Head, Global Business & Biodiversity Programme, IUCN
Jane Smart, Head, Global Species Conservation Programme, IUCN
Tim Badman, Head, World Heritage Programme, IUCN
T.P Singh, Head, Ecosystems & Livelihood Group 1, IUCN Asia
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Nik Lopoukhine, Chair, World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA)
Seong-il Kim, Regional Vice Chair, WCPA Asia
Simon Stuart, Chair, Species Survival Commission (SSC)