



Bumitama Agri Ltd

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## NEWS RELEASE

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### BUMITAMA LOOKS BACK ON THE 2019 DRY SEASON

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Jakarta, 4 November 2019 - Bumitama is analysing the causes and estimating the damage caused by the fires in an aftermath of the extreme drought brought by this year's dry season. While the precise numbers are yet to be established, it will inevitably be higher than the 35 fire occurrences in 350 ha of the previous year. For reference, fire incidents during the period of 2015 – 2018 total to 257 that affected 1,477 ha, as reported in our Sustainability and Annual Reports.

To foresee any potential fires and prepare our operations for a quickly response, we have devised a specialised team to study the local weather and monitor hotspots through the NASA's Fire Information for Resource Management System (FIRMS), which are then evaluated in near real time. The resulting information is reported to our on-site fire-response teams that are dispatched to the location, using drones for ground-checking of any fire hazards.

Although hotspot monitoring is a helpful tool in identification of fires even beyond our boundaries, sometimes the subsequent site verification disproves any burning on the ground in area identified as potential fire by the hotspot monitoring system. Not all hotspots are fires and as previously established by a study conducted in Indonesia<sup>1</sup>, FIRMS only achieves about 64% accuracy.

Despite our best effort, fires still happen in our concessions, particularly in areas that have been enclaved and still belong to the local communities, probably because fire is still being used as the cheapest/easiest means of land preparation by them. Below we provide clarification for some of the fire incidents of the 2019 season in PT Gunajaya Karya Gemilang (PT GKG), PT Damai Agro Sejahtera (PT DAS) and PT Agro Sejahtera Manunggal (PT ASM).

#### **PT GKG**

Although located under our concession permits, the areas impacted by fires mostly belong to the local community. This is best illustrated on the fire-scarred areas in the southern part of the concession, in land allocated to the local farmers for padi plantation development by the

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<sup>1</sup> Validasi Hotspot Modis di Wilayah Sumatera dan Kalimantan berdasarkan data penginderaan jauh Spot-4: Any Zubaidah, Yenni Vetrira, M. Rokhis Khomarudin - Pusat Pemanfaatan Penginderaan Jauh, LAPAN



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government and which stretches beyond our boundaries. After harvesting, the fields are abandoned and quickly become overgrown with dry grasses. Once ignited, the fire spreads fast, but does not engulf the taller vegetation. Trees are usually left un-burnt as the fire is over in a short time. This complicates identification of the cause of the fire/perpetrators as it all happens fast and when we reach the location, the fire is usually almost out and all that is left is mainly charred grass.



Ahead of the dry season, we had partnered with the community consultative body (*Muspika*), who petitioned to the traditional leaders as well as the religious leaders to educate the local communities on risks of fires and urge them to refrain from use of fire in land clearing. Bumitama also partnered with the local villages in “Desa Bebas Api” and “Masyarakat Peduli Api” programmes that offer rewards for fire-free villages. Besides that, we collaborated with the surrounding communities in fire-fighting. Under our supervision, fire-response units were formed, adequately equipped and trained together with the fire department (*Manggala Agni*) to help put out fires in the village area quickly.

Despite our best efforts fires still happened, scorching some predominantly grassy areas inside our concession. Burning before planting has been the traditional way of the local people for generations and this practice seems hard to change. We will keep reaching out to the local community on alternative land clearing method as a part of our CSR programmes, alongside with the support for sustainable alternative livelihoods, so as not to leave the land fallow, and encourage NTFP to minimise land being abandoned after just one or two cycles of use as this minimises the potential for land clearing using fire.



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Image 1: Community vegetables and fruits farming as part of CSR Programme in PT GKG

### **PT DAS**

The setting and circumstances that lead to the fires in PT DAS in northern Ketapang were different. While the fires in GKG happened mostly in community farmland areas, in PT DAS it was mainly the forested land set-aside for conservation that was impacted. Our forest patrols recorded increased illegal logging activity in the conservation area prior to the incident, which is suspected to be the lead cause of the fires of PT DAS.



Image 2: Illegal logging in the conservation areas of PT DAS and one of the water barriers built to raise water levels in the set-aside areas in order to minimise risk of burning and aid regrowth of natural vegetation



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Anticipating dry and hot months ahead and its associated risks, we had conducted an assessment of water level in the conservation areas in partnership with an expert organization and based on their recommendations, started with improvement of the area's water management in order to raise the water levels and thus prevent accumulation of the dry vegetation that supports forest fires. Despite our best efforts, the lack of precipitation caused the local rivers to dry up, minimising the intended effect of the water gates and barriers.

In our effort to minimize the risk of fires, we tried engaging all stakeholder groups across the landscape. We signed fire prevention agreements with five first-ring villages with rewards to the communities for staying fire-free. Cooperating with our peers, Bumitama teamed up with the neighboring concession of PT Agrolestari Mandiri (Golden Agri-Resources group) in prevention and control of fires in the landscape. We have also joined forces with the governmental institutions, partnering with BKSDA and Forest Police (Polhut) in conservation of natural resources and wildlife in the area of PT DAS, while a cross-team of police and army assisted our team in regular fire prevention and monitoring patrols throughout the months of August – September. Our own internal fire management team consisted of nearly 50 staff trained by the specialists of Manggala Agni, ready to put their lives at risks when fighting the flames of forest fires.



Image 3: Fire fighting activities in the conservation areas of PT DAS

Managing fires speedily in the forested conservation areas is very complicated, mainly due to its inaccessibility. Although our fire patrolling team was able to conduct two rounds of fire patrols every day using motorbikes and trekking forest on foot, the situation is different when mobilising fire-fighting equipment into forested terrain, which often needs to be assisted by slow moving heavy machinery before our water canons can reach the fires.



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We are heartbroken to have recorded fires inside the conservation area, although the degree of fire damage varies widely from apparently undamaged, to scorched and burned vegetation. Although we cannot repair the damage to the ecosystem, we can and will rehabilitate all conservation areas burned in PT DAS as part of our BBCP (Bumitama Biodiversity and Community Project) conservation project, together with local stakeholders and experts.

#### PT ASM

This concession borders with the Muara Kendawangan Natural reserve (*Cagar Alam*) where fires are regular during dry season. For this reason GAKKUM of KLHK (*Kementerian Lingkungan Hidup dan Kehutanan* – Forestry and Environment Ministry) conducted an assessment of its fire preparedness in PT ASM and investigated a fire occurrence that happened just outside of its boundaries. Their inspection team concluded that the fire fighting team is adequately trained, equipped and the fire incidents that occurred in this PT were due to the local people hunting in the Cagar Alam using fire, that winds brought right onto the borderline of the concession. The investigation was discontinued and activities of PT ASM carry on normally without any restrictions being imposed on its operations.

Although for the past 2-3 weeks rainfall levels have already been high in all our Kalimantan concessions, we have started preparing our fire-fighting teams and ensuring the equipment is ready for another dry and hot year of 2020. We are continuously reviewing our fire management plans and going forward, we will be actively introducing some of the latest advancements of modern technology in assisting with the fire prevention; making use of systems providing advanced fire risk analysis, real-time hotspot monitoring and drone surveillance, while benefiting from extended strategic collaborative activities with other stakeholders and expanded fire preparedness programmes with local communities.

For further information, please email:

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