

Portrait of Communication and Sea Sand Mining Conflict in Indonesia

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Abstract

Conflicts over sea sand mining in Indonesia has intensified over the past ten years as more concessions have been granted to companies engaged in sea sand production. The location of the sea sand mine overlapping with fishermen's fishing grounds and the lack of communication cause conflicts between coastal and small islands society and local governments, as well as companies that hold license or companies that conduct sea sand mining. The sea sand mining conflicts in three provinces has occurred, escalated and reached the stage of violence. The research used a variety of conflict analysis tools to explain the typology, stages, cycles and applicable conflict management. The research used qualitative methods with a multi-special approach and data collection was carried out by interviewing several informants, and researching documentation studies including literature from similar previous research documentation. The research found that the resolution of sea sand mining conflicts that occurred on the islands of Sumatra, Sulawesi and Nusa Tenggara was competitive with a lose-win orientation. Conflict settlement took place with one party conceding to the other, third-party intervention and consideration on the demand of sea sand market. In three research locations it is known that conflict resolution fails to address the root cause of the issue, causing it to revert to the basic stage of conflict. As a result, at some point, conflict can escalate and become apparent as in line with market demand after the legalization of sea sand exports.

Keywords

Action, Coastal, Fisherman, Society, Third-party

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INTRODUCTION

Sea sand mining activities in Indonesia over the last ten years have witnessed a notable increase, in accordance with the rising tensions between coastal and small islands society in public spaces across various regions in Sumatra, Sulawesi and Nusa Tenggara. The lack of effective communication among stakeholders involved in Indonesia's marine sand mining activities has engendered conflicts between companies, governments and affected local communities, predominantly comprised of fishermen. The detrimental effects of sea sand mining on the coastal ecosystem have proven to highly impact the livelihoods of these fishermen. Fishermen in Riau Islands admitted that sea sand mining caused them to lose half of their income (Satria 2009). Conflict has manifested in sea sand mining areas in Indonesia, with instances of violence even being reported.

In the research area, there appears to be a common pattern that companies operating in sea sand mining activities are relatively more closed off in communicating with the affected communities. The company's communication with the affected community is conducted solely to convey information about the planned sea sand mining activities, with the aim of fulfilling administrative requirements only. Similarly, the company's communication with the affected community is closed off because the communication only flows in one direction from the company to the community, and the participants in the communication do not have space to provide feedback. Additionally, the participants do not involve many directly affected groups, such as fishermen. Most of the invited community members tend to have close ties or affiliations with the village government. In contrast, the communication between the company and the local government is relatively open, intense, and collaborative during the permit processing.

On the other hand, NGOs focusing on environmental issues communicate more directly with the affected communities, especially when the issue of sea sand mining in their area comes to the public's attention.

The NGOs' open communication with the affected communities regarding the impact of sand mining on short-term and long-term income reduction, particularly about environmental damage, fosters a shared perception among the community about the differing interests between the affected communities, especially those who are fishermen, and the companies and government. The NGOs' participatory and critical communication about the impact of sea sand on the community and marine environment, conducted openly and intensively with the fishermen groups, has led to the emergence of conflict groups that advocate for their interests collectively, directly, and openly, even to the point of violent actions.

Sea sand mining-related conflicts possess the potential for radical implications because the dominance of one party over another in terms of natural resources intersects with underdevelopment, isolation, and poverty, the gaps in the fulfilment of basic human needs, and ideological, political, and legal disparities (Sumardjo 2015). The shift in Indonesia's development orientation to coastal and offshore areas and the extensive reclamation activities that drives demand for sea sand present a potential future threat. Conflicts arising from sea sand mining in Indonesia are predicted to intensify due to alterations in environmental regulations in the Government Regulation in Lieu of Law regarding Job Creation, which eliminates environmental permits that formerly facilitated communication space with affected societies and the legalization of sea sand mining based on sea sand export policies after the issuance of Government Regulation No. 26 of 2023 concerning sedimentation product management at sea.

The communication approach enables stakeholders to address conflicts at early stage or when conflicts become apparent to avoid violent conduct. However, communication alone is not a solution of conflict resolution as poor communication itself even can be a source of problems, but it can direct the parties involved to be more constructive (Sudira 2017). Convergent communication approaches play a pivotal role in shaping the

direction of communication among stakeholders leading to relationships of conflict and cooperation (Littlejohn and Foss 2016).

Portrait of sea sand mining conflicts in Indonesia employed a serial conflict analysis tool which is a development of conflict typology (Fisher, *et al.* 2001), stage of conflict escalation (Engel and Korf 2005), conflict cycles (Kriesberg and Dayton 2012), and conflict management (Sumardjo, *et al.* 2014a). The research problem focuses on the portrait of communication and conflict due to sea sand mining in Indonesia. The study aims to depict a portrait of communication and conflict of sea sand mining in Indonesia based on mapping of parties involved in conflict, typology, cycle, intensity and applicable conflict management.

METHOD

The research is designed as qualitative research with multi-case methods analysis (Yin 2018). The selection of multi-case methods is based on differences in communication, conditions and conflict situations resulting from sea sand mining at the research site. The research locations covered three provinces in Indonesia including Makassar City, South Sulawesi Province (location 1), Bengkalis Regency, Riau Islands (location 2), and West Lombok Regency, West Nusa Tenggara Province (location 3). The study period was May-September 2023. Data collection techniques were carried out through interviews with several informants involved in conflicts both directly and indirectly from environmental NGOs, documentation studies based on news and literature including similar previous research documents conducted by the author alone or with the research team. Data analysis used interactive models (Miles, *et al.* 2014).

The selection of research sites is intentionally predicated upon certain considerations: (1) conflicts between stakeholders occurred over the past decade when the Provincial Government held the authority to grant Mining Effort License before the authority for mining license was transferred following the enactment of the Job Creation

Law on the Environment, which is the regime of the Central Government; (2) conflicts occurred in districts/cities that represent other regions in the territory of major islands in Indonesia; (3) observable conflicts that manifest in public spaces and documented by mass media to be accessed digitally.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The absence of early communication among the company, government, and communities affected by sea sand mining has given rise to conflicting groups of stakeholders in sea sand mining in Indonesia. Communication has not yet been present to facilitate differences in perceptions and interests except when public rejection occurs in the form of peaceful actions, protests, riots, and radical actions. There is an increasing escalation of conflict in line with the closing of communication channels. The escalation of conflict is closely related to the formation of conflict groups. The patron-client structure within the fishermen's conflict group fosters group solidarity, leading to quicker escalation of conflict and a tendency towards radicalism. Conflict resolution occurs in the form of a win-lose orientation, third-party intervention, and due to external factors such as the cessation of market demand.

Stakeholder conflicts that manifested in the Spermonde Islands, Makassar City, South Sulawesi Province, Rupat Island, Bengkalis Regency, Riau Province and Sekotong Waters, West Lombok Regency, West Nusa Tenggara Province (NTB), involving local communities who work as fishermen, provincial local governments and companies, can be classified as environmental conflicts. These conflicts have arisen due to environmental damage caused by specific party (company) and have adversely affected fishermen. Across all the research sites, it has been observed that the local society has actively participated in various communication endeavors to fight for their interests in an organized manner, in the form of demonstrations, primarily directed towards the local governments.

Coastal and small islands societies

relatively possess limited authority because they do not have a bargaining position of interest in waters and small islands. In accordance with Satria's statement (2009), fishermen groups are motivated to defend their interests in public spaces because of the role of Civil Society Organization (CSO) or Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) that have fortified these groups. According to Kinseng (2017), the process of decentralization fosters fishermen's determination and openness to stand for their right against local governments. Conflicts' series over sea sand mining occurred in Indonesia are shown in Figure 1 below.

Conflicts arising from sea sand mining in Indonesia in the era of decentralization are occurring more frequently as sea sand mining activities, driven by economic motives, are more supportive of corporations and interest of foreign investors. Capital-centered development that relies on investment with money and technological capital serving as the primary development tools in the setting of natural resources are more exploitation-oriented. Practically, the occurrence of dehumanization is frequent and the society is powerless (Nasdian 2014). The World Bank research in Indonesia between 2004 and 2012 reveals that conflicts among societies, local governments and companies have increased along with an increase in post-autonomy regional investment in the use of natural resources. Many natural resource-related conflicts manifest in the form of violent confrontations (Barron, *et al.* 2011).

Figure 1 demonstrates how the types, stages, and cycles of conflict resulting from sea sand mining vary by region but are managed using the same strategy, namely

the competition approach. This approach, characterized by the outcome of one party winning and the other losing, is called a win-lose orientation. Similarly, conflict resolution in each case remains relatively consistent because the conflict does not address the root cause, so it is not in a position of no conflict.

Conflict cases in the Spermonde Islands have reached all conflict stages from the lowest to the highest level. When the conflict escalated to the violence stage, it is resolved; but not the root cause, so it returns to the conflict base. This implies that there is a possibility of the conflict to recur, as it has not been comprehensively resolved. The case of Rupert Island conflict has reached the stage of escalation and resolution but not to the point of resolving the root cause, so that it returns to the basis of the conflict.

No conflict explains a stage where the conflict has been resolved from its roots. Kinseng (2015) explained that Dahrendorf believes that conflict resolution cannot be achieved in society as a whole because of the diverse conflicts. However, in specific cases it is highly probable to attain, as exemplified by the case of traditional fishermen with trawl fishermen in Indonesia. In general, the resolution has been attained owing to the regulation of Presidential Decree No. 39/1980, which imposes a prohibition on trawl.

Conflict of Kodingareng Community with PT. Royal Boskalis and South Sulawesi Provincial Government

Close communication of local governments and company that owns sea sand operations in the formulation of policies and implementation of sea sand mining activi-

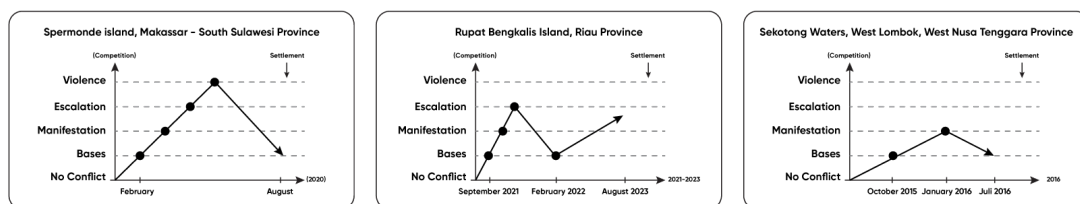


Figure 1. Sea Sand Mining Conflict Series in 3 Provinces in Indonesia (Source: data from various sources)

ties in Spermonde Waters, Sengarrang Islands District, Makassar City, South Sulawesi Province, resulted in conflicts between the people of Kodingareng Islands, Kodingareng Village Government, South Sulawesi Provincial Government and PT. Royal Boskalis. Sea sand mining in Spermonde waters was conducted during February-August 2020 for the reclamation of the Makassar New Port (MNP), national strategic project which is proclaimed to be the largest port in Eastern Indonesia with an area of 1.428 hectares.

Sand mining operations are considered to damage the coastal ecosystem environment, muddy the sea water, the depletion of fish populations, and a reduction of fishermen's catches. Sea sand mining activities in Spermonde Waters has directly contributed to a decrease in income to losing the livelihood of Kodingareng Island societies, most of whom are fishermen, making it difficult to meet the needs of their families. The decline in the welfare of fishermen's families in Kodingareng Village is also directly attributed to the activity of sea sand mining. This reason led to the Kodingareng society's engagement in hostilities. According to Sumardjo (2014b), people become embroiled in conflicts because they feel marginalized in the use of natural resources to meet their needs.

The lack of communication between the parties involved in the conflict, namely stakeholders in Spermonde Waters, has arisen conflicts between the following parties: (1) the Kodingareng society and PT. Royal Boskalis as the tender owner of sea sand production operations; (2) the Kodingareng society with the South Sulawesi Provincial government, who has enacted Regional Regulation No. 2 of 2019 concerning The Zoning and Small Islands Zoning Plan (RZWP3K) wherein it explains the material source of Spermonde Waters to build the MNP project; (3) the Kodingareng society and the Kodingareng Village Government, as the village government approved sea sand mining activities; (4) internal social conflict within Kodingareng society, involving factions supporting and opposing sea sand

mining.

The conflict between the Kodingareng society and the South Sulawesi Provincial Government and PT. Royal Boskalis is an open conflict at manifestation stage. In fact, the conflict has escalated into violence. It is evident through the mass action conducted by the Kodingareng society, which the peak is the attack using Molotov cocktails on operating sea sand mining ships and the criminalization of the Kodingareng society. This conflict bears resemblance to other conflicts pertaining to the struggle or utilization of natural resources in general that occur in various forms of demonstrations, anarchism, social disputes between layers, separatist movements and human rights violations (Sumardjo 2015).

The Kodingareng society, which holds a stance in opposition to the sea sand mining, has undertaken a number of large-scale protests to fight for their interests openly. Forms of open conflict based on mass actions, as outlined by Muldi's (2022), from the perspective of public communication include: (1) peaceful actions to convey grievances or aspirations to local governments; (2) joint protests aimed at criticizing policies, expressing opposition to sea sand mining and demanding or urging the local government to halt such activities; (3) riots to declare a joint protest through acts of domination or control of other parties by force to the company by means of termination and expulsion of operating sea sand mining vessels; (4) radical actions of the society who express anger in the form of acts of intimidation, and mass judgment resulting in human rights violations and material destruction in the form of mass attacks on sea sand mining ships using Molotov cocktails (detik.com 2020).

The increasingly transparent and democratic political system in post-reform Indonesia enables community groups to actively advocate for their aspirations in the public sphere. The characteristics of fishermen (including traditional) after the reform have increasingly exhibited a willingness to openly and fearlessly assert their desires in public domains (Kinseng 2017). The big crowds and

participants in mass protests are influenced by the increasingly open social and political conditions (Soegijono 2015). However, should the problem persists, regular mass demonstrations could degenerate into riots and radical movements because disputes amongst fishermen over access to fisheries resources are frequently violent (Kinseng, 2015).

Sultana (2011) explains that the presence of violence in conflicts over natural resources depends on location, community characteristics and the resources themselves. In contrast to Sumardjo (2015), regarding protests leading to anarchy and damage, explicates that these occurrences are assessed through the causes of economic and political inequality factors triggered by dissatisfaction with how access, control and domination over economic resources are distributed between different parties, or in other words, the dominance of natural resources. Dharmawan (2006) considers that issues with poverty, economic pressure, and life insecurity brought on by the entry of competitors from other groups lead to conflict to escalate and intensify swiftly.

Conflicts often exhibit similar patterns and progressive developing stages between the parties involved, forming a cycle from the basis of the conflict to its resolution. Kodingareng society conflict management approach with South Sulawesi Provincial Government and PT. Royal Boskalis is a competitive approach, in which conflict resolution is achieved because one party defeats the other. It is referred to as distributive settlement (win-lose orientation) by Kriesberg and Dayton (2012), which is the antithesis of cooperation settlement (win-win orientation). PT. Royal Boskalis suspended sea sand production operations after the attack of several locals using Molotov cocktails on the operating ship of PT. Royal Boskalis and criminalization of Kodingareng fishermen who oppose sea sand mining (tirta.id 2020).

The Conflict Between the Suka Damai Society, Titi Akar and the Riau Provincial Government with PT. Logo Mas Utama

(LMU).

In the case of sea sand mining on Rupert Island, conflicts emerged between the people of Rupert Island, namely Suka Damai Village, Titi Akar Village residing on Rupert Island, Bengkalis Regency and the Riau Provincial Government and PT. LMU as the owner of the sea sand mining permit. The people of Suka Damai Village and Titi Akar are mostly fishermen who fish on Rupert Island. Sea sand mining operations directly disrupt them in going to sea because the location of the sea sand mine is a fishing ground for fishermen, resulting in a sharp decline in income. The initial communication between the local government and the company was not substantially different, it was closed.

In the case of the sea sand mining conflict in Makassar City, South Sulawesi Province, it is evidence that the process of peaceful to radical mass action occurs concurrently, while in the case of the conflict on Rupert Island, Bengkalis Regency, the basis conflict process transitions swiftly into conflict escalation. Open conflict between the society of Suka Damai and Titi Akar occurred in the form of joint riots to expel the operating ship of PT. LMU (walhi.or.id 2022).

In the case of environmental conflicts, in general, the primary economic aspect underlies the affected communities involved in conflicts with the company. Conflicts over economic interests arise when environmental disasters occurred in China, involving the affected communities (Yang, *et al.* 2014; Perc, *et al.* 2013). As seen from demographic variables, economic interests are closely related to individual characteristics including perceptions of interests (losses), employment and income. Relatively not much different from the case of conflict mining in Riau Province, the affected fishing communities involved in conflicts due to a decrease in income and technical work disruptions represent an economic interest (Satria 2015; Muldi 2022).

The characteristics of social groups have a strong influence on the pace of occurring conflict transformation. The character-

istics of the group referred to by Kriesberg and Dayton (2012) include members homogeneity, ease of communication, members solidarity and organizational potential that binds solidarity within established social relations. The characteristics of the conflict groups described are considered consistent with the characteristics of coastal society as mentioned by Satria (2015). Changes in the situation and conflict conditions of the society in Rupert Island opposing PT. The Mas Utama logo is closely related to the characteristics of the coastal society itself or the people of Rupert Island. Kinseng (2015) explained that conflict group solidarity for fishermen is also directly associated to the patron-client and dominant-subordinate fishermen structure. In the case of sea sand mining conflicts in Serang Regency (Muldi 2019), it is known that the structure of fishermen is bound by social relations between employers and boat owners (*juragan*), capital owners (*langgan*) and fish collectors (*bakul*).

In contrast to South Sulawesi Province, the Riau Provincial Government takes a distinct stance towards disputes involving sea sand mining on Rupert Island, Bengkalis Regency, Riau Province. The Riau Provincial Government is more receptive and accommodating towards the aspirations of the society in dealing with PT. Logo Mas Utama as the owner of Mining Efforts License and a sea sand mining company with an area of 5,030 ha on Rupert Island. This is despite the fact that initial issuance of Mining Efforts License of PT. LMU was authorized by Riau Provincial Government, as per the Decree of the Head of the Investment and One-Stop Integrated Services Agency with letter number 503/DPMPTSP/IZIN-ESDM/66 in March 2017 (walhiriau.or.id. 2023).

PT. LMU does not directly conduct sea sand mining because there is no demand for sea sand management projects. PT. LMU commenced operations in September 2020. The absence of communication of PT. LMU to communities affected by sea sand reaps conflict between PT. LMU with the people of Suka Damai and Titi Akar. In contrast, the people of Suka Damai and Titi

Akar who are assisted by Civil Society Organization have maintained relatively open lines of communication with the South Sulawesi Provincial Government. This open communication with the South Sulawesi Provincial Government has officially resulted in the support of the Governor of Riau to the community. The Governor of Riau proactively communicated his stance through an official letter to the Minister of Energy and Mineral Resources to request the revocation of the Mining Efforts License of PT. LMU.

In mid-February 2020, the Ministry of Maritime Affairs and Fisheries sealed the sea sand mining vessel of PT. LMU which thereafter the sea sand operations ceased. Government intervention from the level of Bengkalis Regency, Riau Province and the Ministry of Maritime Affairs and Fisheries that resolved the conflict between the people of Rupert Island and PT. LMU can be seen as a conflict resolution through a third party. This phase, according to Kriesberg and Dayton (2012), typically occurs in the de-escalation cycle. This cycle allows third parties to intervene and participate, thus leading to a conflict resolution cycle. In this instance, the third party is represented by an authorized position or institution. When the conflict cycle returns to the basis of the conflict, PT. LMU replaced the President Director responsible for conducting sea sand production operations.

The conflict over sea sand mining on Rupert Island suddenly escalated into a manifestation of conflict about 3-4 months after the cessation of sea sand mining PT. LMU until August 2023. The increase from the basis to a manifestation of conflict was marked by a joint protest with the people of Suka Damai and Titi Akar to demand the revocation of the Mining Efforts License of PT. LMU. The trigger for conflict was the emergence of Presidential Regulation No. 55 of 2022 concerning the delegation of business licenses in the field of mineral and coal mining by the Provincial Government and the discourse on sea sand exports which was legalized after the issuance of Presidential Regulation No. 26 of 2023 concerning the management of sedimentation products at

sea. The conflict cycle of sea sand mining on Rupat Island, Riau Province has increased to manifestation because of the Mining Efforts License of PT. LMU is the basis of conflict. As long as there is a valid Mining Efforts License, PT. LMU is permitted to conduct sea sand mining (conflict base).

Conflict Between Lombok Island Coastal Care Community Forum and West Lombok Regency Government and West Nusa Tenggara (NTB) Government

The case of sea sand mining conflict on Lombok Island, NTB Province is more driven by civil society than affected fishermen. The involvement of fishermen is limited, and PT. Sukses Timur Bersama (STB), the recipient of Mining Efforts License, has not yet commenced operations with the sea sand mining ships. Conflicts occurred between civil society groups, students, environmentalists, fishermen and culturalists with the West Lombok Regency and Provincial Government. The opposition of community groups against marine sand mining on Lombok Island is supported by an open flow of information regarding the administrative procedure and studies concerning the issuance of the Mining Efforts License based on local press information.

The conflict had been occurred since 2015 triggered by the discourse on granting Mining Efforts License to PT. STB with an area of 1,000 ha in the waters of Sekotong District, West Lombok Regency. Production operations of PT. STB is to mine 10 million cubic meters of sea sand for the purposes of reclaiming Benoa Bay, Bali Province (Mataram.antaranews.com 2016). The conflict between the Lombok Island Coastal Care Community Forum to the Regional Government was because the West Lombok Regency Government and the NTB Government gave permission to PT. STB in the subsequent year, 2016.

The conflict on Lombok Island in NTB entailed civil society opposing the local government due to ongoing process of licensing for PT. STB in obtaining Mining Efforts License in accordance with Benoa Bay reclama-

tion policy. Balinese people also express their strong disapproval (manifest) to the state and local government. The massive exposure of information from the mass media about the licensing process triggered the public rejection. The parties to the conflict are not dominated by the Sekotong water fishermen group as PT. STB not yet commenced operations nor displayed any discernible evidence of producing sea sand in the Sekotong Waters by the time the conflict reached its solution.

Conflicts over sea sand mining plans are more prominent in the public discourse of the local press. Nevertheless, there is a polarization of parties who are pro and con of sea sand mining. According to Engel and Korf (2005), open conflict in public spaces not only follows social action but also includes public discourse. The proponents of sea sand mining consist of local governments (districts and provinces), whereas the opposition side includes civil society groups, culturalists and civil society environmentalists. Both sides engage in extensive discourse in the local mass media in attempt to convince public opinion.

Sea sand mining conflicts are closely related to sea sand market demand for reclamation activities. The conflict between the Lombok Community Care Forum and the West Lombok Regency Government and the Provincial Government was facilitated by external factors rather than the involved parties themselves. The Benoa Bay reclamation conflict between Balinese indigenous peoples and various groups, and even public figures (artists) with the Central Government and the Provincial Government of Bali is more popular and rifer. Consequently, the reclamation process of Benoa Bay has come to a standstill. The inability to initiate the reclamation process has resulted in PT. STB being non-operational due to the absence of demand for sea sand. Conflict resolution like this is described by Kriesberg and Dayton (2012) as changes in external factors that influence conflict resolution.

CONCLUSION

The demand of the sea sand market for basic materials of the Benoa Bay, Makassar New Port and other construction has led to the policy of the Governments of South Sulawesi Province, Riau and NTB for the exploitation of coastal and ocean areas as sea sand mining sites. The location of sea sand mines overlapping with fishing areas disturbed and affected the decline in the incomes of the coastal societies, mostly fishermen. The communication interaction of NGOs with affected fishermen plays a pivotal role in strengthening the community groups involved in conflict.

The limited communication between the government, businessmen and affected fishermen incited the public to conduct various demonstrations in order to bring the conflict into public space and thus amplify the differentiation between the involved parties. Consequently, the conflict escalated rapidly. The typology of conflicts arising from marine sand mining can be categorized based on their intensity, taking the form of open conflicts, escalating open conflicts, and conflicts involving violence. In cases where the conflict escalates or involves violence, communication channels are closed and the parties in conflict compete to defeat the other. In conflict management scenarios characterized by a competitive approach that emphasizes one side's win over the other (a win-lose orientation), the utilization of violence tends to prevail. Despite this, the resolution of these conflicts often necessitates the intervention of a third party, such as state officials, authorities, and corporations, who no longer uphold the practice of reserving sea sand.

The settlement of the conflict by third-party intervention fails to address the root of the problem. Consequently, the cycle of conflict does not move to a state of no conflict but the cycles return to the basis of the conflict. Sea sand mining conflicts that are currently in the basic cycle of conflict positions are still vulnerable and potentially increasing to become real/open in the future. The reality of the issue of marine sand export policy sparked an open conflict between civilians and affected fishermen in

Riau and South Sulawesi provinces with the local government for the withdrawal of the Mining Efforts License of the company due to concerns about the resurgence of sea sand mining. Research suggests that it is imperative to create opportunities for dialogue and communication among conflicting parties from the early stages of the conflict. This approach, at the very least, redirects conflicting parties towards constructive behaviour and prevents the escalation of violence, while also ensuring that communication channels remain open.

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