

Forum Konservasi Gajah Indonesia (Indonesian Elephant Conservation Forum)

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Indonesia has a multi-stakeholder forum called Forum Konservasi Gajah Indonesia (FKGI), or Indonesian Elephant Conservation Forum in English. This forum was established in 2006 by a small group of conservationists who realised that elephant conservation problems required an effort beyond what they could do in the field through their individual project activities. The objective was to create a stronger collective effort at the appropriate level to address key issues. A small meeting was held in Medan (Sumatra) where the initial agreement was reached to set up the forum. FKGI has a cross-sectoral membership representing government, NGOs, academia, and media. FKGI works closely with government agencies to develop, monitor, and evaluate elephant conservation strategies in Indonesia.

FKGI's mission is to develop elephant conservation efforts by intensifying coordination, communication, and better networking between institutions and individuals who work for conservation in Indonesia. As a communication forum, FKGI is not meant to be a conservation NGO, it has a specific niche which is filling the gaps that are not covered by groups who work based on a specific region. National policy development, cross regional issues, and coordination are the main focus of the FKGI mandate.

Indonesia is one of few Asian countries with a formal elephant conservation strategy and action plan (Strategi dan Rencana Aksi Konservasi Gajah Sumatera dan Kalimantan 2007 - 2017). FKGI was the main government partner involved in the development of the strategy and action plan, which was a good exercise for multiple stakeholders to pull resources together and agree to lead Indonesian elephant conservation efforts.

The president of Indonesia formally launched this Action Plan in 2007.

FKGI members are primarily Indonesian residents, and are nominated, then invited to become members. As regulated in the statute, a chairman is elected by the members. As the forum was initiated before the statute was developed, the first chairman was appointed by agreement of the founder group of members. This position changes every two years, and is voted on by the membership. Additionally there are two other executive staff positions as Secretary and Treasurer. The current FKGI Chair is Wahdi Azmi, the Secretary position is filled by both Donny Gunaryadi and Nazaruddin, and the Treasurer is Syamsuardi Jambak.

FKGI members represent various sectors of government such as the conservation agencies at the provincial (BKSDA) and national (PHKA) levels, as well as professionals working closely with elephants such as mahouts and veterinarians. Members also represent a wide variety of large and small conservation NGOs. To include as many viewpoints as possible, academics and environmental journalists are also included in the FKGI membership.

Similar to the IUCN Asian Elephant Specialist Group (AsESG), FKGI is an advisory body. With a focus on policy development, FKGI is equipped with communication tools and organizes an annual meeting for its members; at times FKGI is invited to send representatives to meetings hosted by the government conservation agencies (PHKA and BKSDA). In addition to meetings, FKGI communicates regularly with all of its members via email and through other social media such as Facebook.

At the last FKGI annual membership meeting from 30. March to 1. April 2012, in Banda Aceh (Sumatra), some key issues were discussed such as the new ‘critically endangered’ status of the Sumatran elephant by IUCN, how to raise awareness about this status, and what is required to respond to it. An agreement was reached to develop a national species recovery plan to back up the existing national strategy and action plan document, which was developed prior to the critically endangered status listing. The meeting also discussed issues raised by members from various regions, such as the overlap of critical elephant habitat with forest estate concessions. Meeting participants recommended that select issues be taken to a higher level of communication within the government, and to report on these key points to the PHKA Director General and to the Minister of Forestry in FKGI’s annual report to the Indonesian Ministry of Forestry. A discussion was also held about the need to develop an awareness campaign at the national level.

As a result of the last FKGI member meeting, recently an annual formal meeting and correspondence with the Minister of Forestry has been initiated. The annual meeting will address all the important issues across the region for both the Sumatera and Kalimantan elephant populations. Meetings for coordination with the Indonesian government conservation agency (PHKA) Director General (DG) will take place prior to the meeting with the Minister.

On 17. September 2012, a small delegation from FKGI met with the Minister of Forestry and with the DG of PHKA. During the meetings FKGI outlined the following current concerns regarding elephant conservation in Indonesia:

1. Due to the newly designated critically endangered status of the Sumatran elephant by the IUCN, there is a need for a species recovery plan. Both the PHKA DG and Minister support the idea to back up the existing strategy and action plan
2. FKGI brought to the Minister’s attention the current increase of elephant poisonings in Aceh, Riau, and Jambi provinces, and requested a serious handling of the cases.
3. FKGI brought up the mandate from the last membership meeting to develop a national awareness campaign. This campaign proposes a new Indonesian currency coin embossed with an elephant to acknowledge the decade during which the Sumatran elephant became critically endangered. The Minister agreed with the idea, and stated that a formal process is required.
4. Some critical elephant habitat issues in regions such as Jambi and Bengkulu were highlighted to the Minister. A high level of coordination is needed to ensure the elephant population in those regions will remain sustained. The habitat overlaps with forest estate concession, and an advance management will be required to ensure both interest are achieved.
5. FKGI also supports the sustainable field strategies of some partners. Conservation Response Units (CRU) and Elephant Flying Squads are two programs being implemented in various regions in Sumatera. These programs empower mahouts and captive elephants to address various conservation issues in the region where they operate, especially human elephant conflict mitigation and forest patrolling on elephant back. FKGI encourages the government to formally adopt these programs and allocate a budget for basic operational costs, therefore guaranteeing the sustainability of the programs in the future. Relying on private donor funding is not a sustainable approach to these programs.

FKGI intends to follow up each of the issues by separate correspondence with the PHKA DG and with the Minister.

As a similar type of forum, FKGI is planning a more structured coordination with the IUCN-AsESG. FKGI will actively work with AsESG to ensure that the critically endangered elephants of Sumatra benefit from AsESG intervention. FKGI relies on input from the membership to raise awareness and address issues that effect elephants across Indonesia. Through open communication among the membership, sharing information, and advising government, FKGI continues to impact elephant conservation in Indonesia.