



## Media Release

For Immediate Release

### **Response To Earth Island Journal's Article Titled "TAKING ON BIG TIMBER"**

**20 June 2022, Miri Sarawak** - Samling was once again at the receiving end of a campaign perpetuated by a group of NGOs bent on smearing our name with the intent of pressuring us to drop our defamation suit against local NGO SaveRivers.

At the outset, let us make it clear that our suit against SaveRivers is not a form of SLAPP or Strategic Litigation Against Public Participation, as has been the constant accusation laid against us by the NGOs.

Our suit against SaveRivers is about protecting our name and reputation against defamatory statements and untruths that have been levelled against us through articles posted on the SaveRivers website.

The suit has nothing to do with shutting the voice of the public or NGOs or local communities. We have never had any issue with these groups voicing their opinions on the company or its activities.

But we have always contended that any statements or articles must be based on facts and that no party – not even NGOs – have the right to smear companies through defamatory statements and untruths.

That is what our suit is about. And bear in mind that we had only resorted to filing our suit when all attempts to address this issue had been rebuffed by SaveRivers and when the period of one year for the filing of defamatory suits had expired.

We have said this and repeated this ad nauseam. Unfortunately, the NGOs are intent on going with their narrative that our suit is a form of SLAPP, despite the facts and arguments we have presented time and again.

In their latest attempt, we have the Earth Island Journal publishing an article titled "Taking on Big Timber", where once again the habit of presenting unfounded allegations as fact and the fudging of the facts, has been used to paint Samling in the most negative light.

The same untruths are repeated in this article:

- (i) That Samling is carrying out "unpermitted logging";
- (ii) That Samling is logging outside of its licenced concession area;
- (iii) That the certification issued by SIRIM QAS International Sdn Bhd and endorsed by the MTCC is flawed and does not meet the required criteria;
- (iv) That the certification process failed to obtain free, prior and informed consent from the communities.



Simply because it cannot accuse Samling outright of failing to obtain consent from the communities to begin operations, the article hedges by quoting villagers as saying Samling failed to obtain free, prior, and informed consent “from the headman and many community members who oppose logging”.

But even as they concede that we did in fact obtain consent from young people of the villages, the article again attributes insinuations that the company bribed these young people into giving their consent, to the villagers.

“Rather, villagers say, the company relied on a handful of young people, some of whom are presumably under its employ or have been promised employment, to claim that consent had indeed been obtained.”

By their wording, the NGO has very conveniently protected its own skin by citing the villagers for all these unfounded accusations – “we didn’t say this, we are just repeating what the villagers told us”. So much for verification of facts, or in this case, unfounded allegations.

The fact is engagement sessions were held with members of the communities in the area. Samling has never said that consent was given by 100 percent of the communities. It would be illogical and impossible to obtain this number. The audit process did however, receive consent from a majority of the villagers, as is the requirement for certification.

However, this time, Earth Island Journal goes beyond finding fault with Samling. In this article, they also attempt to smear the credibility of the Malaysian Timber Certification Scheme or MTCS, the efficiency of the Malaysian Timber Certification Council or MTCC, the honesty of the auditing company SIRIM QAS International Sdn Bhd, and the integrity of the Sarawak state government agencies.

The article insinuates that the authorities are in cahoots in rubber-stamping as clean and green, “timber that doesn’t meet” the criteria contained in the MTCS. But make no mistake, this accusation isn’t being made by the NGOs. No, the article conveniently claims that it is the locals who are making the accusations when it writes:

“But locals say that timber that doesn’t meet these criteria is frequently rubber-stamped as clean and green, labelling which makes it ideal for sale in the United States and Europe. In reality, operations certified by these programs have a host of issues, including failure to consult communities or to adequately obtain consent.”

Once again, “We didn’t make the accusations. We just repeated what the villagers told us.” Convenient indeed.

The article then takes issue with the audit process itself, implying that because the auditors are paid by Samling that the process is somehow compromised.

We would like to draw Earth Island’s attention to the auditing process in all other countries for logging certification whereby the logging company is always the party that is responsible for all costs of the auditing process.



It is akin to the audit process of companies whereby external auditors are hired and paid by the companies concerned to carry out annual financial audits. Is Earth Journal insinuating that because this is so, that all financial audits are compromised as well?

The repetition of the unfounded allegations and untruths, the half-baked accusations and the lame arguments frankly, have become truly tedious and tiring.

As far as Samling is concerned, we have taken the only option that was open to us after SaveRivers rebuffed our olive branches by instituting a civil suit against them. We leave it to the courts to decide if indeed defamation has occurred in this case.