

# Update on new Developments in close proximity to the UNESCO World Heritage Site Gunung Mulu National Park (Sarawak, Malaysia) – January 2023

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## Background

An assessment submitted to IUCN/UNESCO in August 2022 points out the potential negative impact of the planned mega-development projects on the UNESCO-protected Gunung Mulu National Park. Since then, the affected community of Bateu Bungan wrote to the Sarawak Premier Abang Johari, asking him to abandon a planned mega infrastructure project in Mulu called the Mulu Mini Township (EXHIBIT 1). These plans, which date back to the 1990s, include several major construction projects such as a Mulu township, a water treatment plant, an airport expansion and a road connection (as outlined in the August Assessment report that was submitted to IUCN).

## 1. Impact on the UNESCO World Heritage Site

### A. Risk for the Sungai Melinau river/water cycle in the Gunung Mulu NP

The planned Water Treatment plant would have an impact on the Sungai Melinau, located inside the UNESCO World Heritage Site of the Gunung Mulu National Park as the map in Exhibit 1 shows.

The plans for a Water Treatment Plant will have a negative impact on the Sungai Melinau river, where the water for the Plant will most likely come from, and is therefore also a threat to the water cycle of the world famous Mulu National Park (caves). (Rachel Donald, Malaysia revokes oil palm concession near UNESCO-listed Bornean park, 5 October 2022 (<https://news.mongabay.com/2022/10/malaysia-revokes-oil-palm-concession-near-unesco-listed-bornean-park/>))

### B. Lack of environmental and social impact assessment

There is an urgent need for a proper Environmental and Social Impact Assessment (EIA and SIA) that also takes into account local communities and the potential impacts on the UNESCO World Heritage Site. Environmental and Social Impact Assessments need to be publicly available, especially for those who will be affected by the proposed developments. Any negative impact on the UNESCO World Heritage Site must be prevented at all costs. To date, it is unclear whether an assessment is planned or has been carried out. The affected communities would not be aware of it.

## **2. Lack of consultation of affected communities (NO FPIC)**

As outlined in the August 2022 Assessment, all planned developments (the planned Mulu Township, Airport Extension, Pan Borneo Highway access road and the Water Treatment Plant) pose a potential threat to the integrity of the Gunung Mulu National Park. Since our Assessment in August, the planned Water Treatment Plant project in particular has gained some momentum, as has local opposition to it.

### **A. Project affects community land in the proximity to the Gunung Mulu National Park**

The Land of the community of Bateu Bungan is directly affected by the proposed new Water Treatment Plant and supply system at Mulu. This is stated by the communities in their letter (EXHIBIT 1) and shown by the communities in the map and their submission on 26<sup>th</sup> of September 2022 (signed by Ukau Lupung, the headman of Bateu Bungan, and Juwin Lehan, the Pengulu of the area Apoh Tutoh Baram) (EXHIBIT 2)

### **B. Lack of consultation**

The community of Bateu Bungan is concerned about the potential development projects in close proximity to UNESCO World Heritage Site of the Gunung Mulu NP. But they have not been consulted on the current development plans as they point out i.e. in their letter sent to the Premier of Sarawak, Abang Johari on the 16<sup>th</sup> September 2022. (EXHIBIT 1)

### **C. Objection of the local communities**

When Land and Survey Department staff were spotted near the village of Bateu Bungan in October 2022, they were immediately informed by the Headman of Bateu Bungan, Ukau Lupung, about the lack of consent to possible surveys in connection with the Water Treatment Plant on the 10<sup>th</sup> of October 2022 (EXHIBIT 3)