MEDIA RELEASE

AID/WATCH WELCOMES MALAYSIA'S DECISION TO STOP LYNAS DUMPING MORE RADIOACTIVE WASTE

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MELBOURNE | Aid/Watch supports Malaysia's decision to uphold the licence conditions imposed on Australia's Lynas Rare Earth Ltd (Lynas) in not allowing it to import further lanthanide concentrate (LC) contaminated with radioactive materials at the expiry of its current licence from this July.

Prof. James Goodman, Chair of Aid/Watch and Professor of Social and Political Sciences with extensive research backgrounds in global politics, socio-cultural change and climate justice, said:

“We are deeply concerned that Lynas has tried to overturn its licence conditions when the current Malaysian Government has merely upheld its own law to protect public health and its environment.”

“Lynas has no justification to expect Malaysia to accept further radioactive waste, especially as the Western Australian Government has refused to accept this waste . Lynas must abide by its legal undertaking, signed in 2012, that it would remove its radioactive waste from Malaysia.” 1,2

“A good corporate citizen upholds the law wherever it operates .3 It should not be disrespecting a developing country which has granted a 12-year tax break, fast tracked its production permits, and tolerated ten years of below standard toxic and radioactive waste storage and disposal. This is uncalled for, it is ethically, socially and ecologically irresponsible and would not be accepted within Australia.” Prof. Goodman added.

Lynas mines rare earth ores from its mine in Mt Weld near Laverton in Western Australia (WA). The rare earth minerals are enriched at the mine then the lanthanide concentrate is transported over 600km to the port of Fremantle to be shipped to its Kuantan secondary cracking and leaching (CnL) plant, Lynas Advanced Materials Plant (LAMP). LAMP generates massive quantities of wastes contaminated with radioactive materials, toxic heavy metals and chemicals including residual rare earth minerals in the mix.4,5

“WA EPA has imposed conditions on Lynas to remove its radioactive waste from its CnL Kalgoorlie plant currently under construction, within 24 months of its generation. It must be returned to Mt Weld to be managed under a radioactive waste management plan. In Malaysia, the waste has simply been accumulating in unsafe residue retention ponds subject to heavy tropical deluges that cause flash flooding in the monsoon period.”

Lee Tan, Kuantan-born Policy Co-ordinator for Aid/Watch pointed out.

AidWatch has joined environmental groups in Malaysia to advocate for Lynas to stop generating radioactive waste in the country as the Malaysia has a poor track record managing pollution, especially complex hazardous waste contaminated with long-live thorium-232 and uranium-238, which requires highly technical and scientific understanding to safely manage.

These naturally occurring radioactive materials (NORM) are known sources of cell mutating cancer causing ionising radiation that must be contained and not be released into the environment. It is a costly measure if done to scientific robustness.

Ms Tan explained:

“LAMP is constructed in a low-lying peat swamp that floods every monsoon. Furthermore, Lynas uses massive amounts of water every day, adding to the frequent disruptions of supply for residents in Kuantan.”

“We have seen contamination data from a government review and Lynas’ own environmental impact assessment reports. It is worrying that children continue to play in the estuary, where Lynas’ waste water flows into the South China Sea. Seafood is caught and collected in the estuary, mangrove swamp and coastal water nearby.”

“Some households depend on well water near the LAMP, which may well have been contaminated. The full extent of the pollution and contamination has been impossible to determine as we have no access to monitoring data from Lynas or the Government, despite repeated requests.”

Added Ms Tan.

AidWatch acknowledges that rare earth elements are critical for renewable energy and the transition to a green economy and other advanced digital technologies essential for our modern life including advanced weapon technologies.

“We advocate for all rare earth supply chains to be clean, just and fair. It is vital that solutions to address climate change do not replicate the negative impacts of the fossil fuels industry. We note that the UN Special Rapporteur is currently calling for submissions on the toxic impact of some climate solutions . Hence Lynas must come clean with its operations in Malaysia regardless of geopolitical factors which place it as an important non-Chinese supplier of rare earth oxides.”

Concluded Prof. Goodman.

For further information:

Lee Tan, Policy Co-ordinator, Aid/Watch

Footnotes and attachments can be accessed here .

They include:

1. Malaysian Cabinet and Ministers 2012 announcement promising that ALL of Lynas' wastes would be removed from Malaysia by Lynas.

2. December 2018 Press Statement of Malaysian Minister releasing the government's Executive Review Report with Lynas' legal undertakings to remove the radioactive waste from Malaysia in Attachment 3 and 4 of the report.

3. Letter to Lynas and Australian Federal Police over the company controversial contract in the State of Pahang, Malaysia.

4. Drone view of close to 1 million tonne of Lynas' radioactive waste (reddish brown mass) dumped in open ponds subject to heavy tropical deluges against international standard for the storage and disposal of this type of waste captured in August 2022.

5. Drone view of LAMP, two streams of wastes – Whitish mass is the gypsum waste that is contaminated but with below the 1Bq/g radioactive concentration; reddish brown radioactive (NORM) waste and at the right-hand side, the peat swamp for the permanent disposal facility proposed by Lynas which is being legally appealed by residents and Malaysian groups captured August in 2022