

# Fighting Over the Bangka Sea The Tin Mining Conflict in the Marine Area Of Bangka

Regency

by Aimmie Sulaiman



**Submission date:** 30-Mar-2023 04:50PM (UTC+0700)

**Submission ID:** 2050884564

**File name:** The\_Tin\_Mining\_Conflict\_in\_the\_Marine\_Area\_Of\_Bangka\_Regency.pdf (593.29K)

**Word count:** 6585

**Character count:** 37029

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## Fighting Over the Bangka Sea: The Tin Mining Conflict in the Marine Area of Bangka Regency

Aimie Sulaiman<sup>1</sup>, La Ode Muhamad Muliawan<sup>2\*</sup>, Komang Jaka Ferdian<sup>3</sup>, Marwan Yaumal Akbar<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Sociology, Universitas Bangka Belitung, Indonesia

<sup>2</sup>Department of Political Science, Universitas Bangka Belitung, Indonesia

<sup>3</sup>European Studies, Kazan Federal University, Russia

\*Correspondence Email: [odeubb@gmail.com](mailto:odeubb@gmail.com)

Received: 2 January 2023; Revised: 12 March 2023; Accepted: 23 March 2023



**Abstract:** The tin mining conflict in the marine area of Bangka Regency involves four main actors: the government and PT Timah is the spearhead of the tin exploitation, illegal miners, fishermen, and tourism businessmen. This research uses qualitative methods by collecting data through in-depth interviews and literature studies. This article found that economic factors are accounted for by the node that equalizes the motives of actors to be present in the socio-economic dynamics of the region. However, there are two different patterns of sea utilization, namely tin mining, which causes damage to 57.09% of coral reefs, reduces fishing hauls and threatens 16,000 traditional fishermen who depend on the sea for fishing, and the development of tourism, which requires the maintenance of marine ecosystems, on the other hand, it can cause conflict between actors. The unequal power network between actors causes the distribution of benefits over the sea in Bangka Regency to be unsatisfactory. The operationalization of state power through spatial arrangements in the form of mining business licenses has made the state the actor that receives the most economic benefits. Relations with state actors in the workings of the shadow state allow illegal miners to gain economic benefits because they can be connected to the global tin business chain. On the other hand, the combination of the lack of power, pseudo-participation in policy formation, and the stalemate of alternative participation has resulted in the marginalization of fishermen.

**Keywords:** Actors; Economy; Mining; Tin

### How to Cite:

Sulaiman, A., Ode, L. M. M., Ferdian, K. J., & Akbar, Y. M. (2023). Fighting Over the Bangka Sea : The Tin Mining Conflict in the Marine Area of Bangka Regency. *Journal of Governance*, 8(1), 61-75. <https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.31506/jog.v8i1.18814>



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## Introduction

The massive supply of development ideas, especially for third-world countries, was carried out subsequently at the end of World War 29 by various supranational institutions such as the United Nations, the IMF, the World Bank, and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). This idea was encouraged by the saving and investment of Harrod-Domar, the concept of the need for achievement by David McClelland, and Rostow's Model of Development (Budiman, 1995). According to these theories, Ardianto (2016) emphasizes that the perspectives on the development model have become very economical as a result of the relationship that economic development is considered the main key that illustrates the triumph of a country's development.

This economic view influences how a country sees the problems of natural resource exploitation. Many experts suggest that this notion is related to the effort towards industrializing economic development. Rostow (1961) states that developing countries might think that exploitation of natural resources could bring them in line with developed countries such as Australia, the United States of America, or Great Britain.

The mining industry is one of the most intensively exploited natural resources. In countries with abundant natural resources, such as Indonesia, mining business activities are a significant source of finances. The mining business does not only provide employment, capital, energy, and materials, but it can support development projects such as infrastructure development and public service facilities (Ardianto, 2016). Based on data issued by BPS, the mining sector

contributed at least 8.08% to Indonesia's GDP in 2018 (Savirani & Wardhani, 2022) and will increase to around 8.98% in 2021. Even so, illegal activity in the mining sector, which is detrimental to the state, is 59%o massive and quite significant. About 90% of small-scale mining in Indonesia is considered illegal activity (Aspinall, 2001). Estimated losses to the state in 2005 from mining without permits were around Rp. 325.1 billion per year (Soelistijo, 2011). Even in recent years, the state has lost around Rp. 38 trillion in the gold mining sector and Rp. 315 billion in the non-gold mining sector (Setiawan, 2021).

However, contrastively, mining industrialism bears no critics on the basis of economic profits. The concept of economic development supported by the theory of modernism places the idea of development as an internal matter of a country, whereas, on the other side, the problem arises from the unfairness or inequality between rich and poor countries. The trickle-down effect that was imagined to be born from industrialization did not become a reality, and instead of trickling down as development theorists claim, industrialization gave birth to an upward effect.

Arundhati Roy, as stated in Ardianto (2016), claims that rich countries take industrial advantage much more than poor countries. Furthermore, Auty (1993) claims that economic development based on natural resource mismanagement results in the phenomenon of resource curses. From 1960 to 1990, the growth of low-resource countries was twice or three times that of high-resource countries. This is caused by resource dependency, and it has social consequences such as corruption and poverty.

The term resource curse has been seen as a failure for rich countries as the result of mining industrialism. The failure relates to the deficiency of economic development ideas in supporting the ideal economic growth for developing countries. Instead, the environmental issue becomes another focus of very serious concern in countries that extraordinarily exploit natural resources, especially mining.

Lay (2007) states that in Indonesia, for example, many facts show the characteristics of a punitive environment as the result of resource exploitation. According to Said (2019), the hot mudflow mixed with gas erupting from the Banjarpanji well, Porong, Sidoarjo, East Java on May 29th, 2006 is one of the grievous phenomena as a result of resource mistreatment. In addition, CNN Indonesia (2019) suggests that the existence of oil drilling conducted by the company was considered the cause of the eruption in that area, according to many controversies over it.

Therefore, even though the oil drilling disaster was confirmed as a natural disaster not due to human negligence, the compensation payment provided by the company concerned to the victims affected by the Lapindo mudflow was still carried out. Rachmawati (2019) adds that failure, which causes natural adversity and even death, can also be seen in the portrait of mining in Kalimantan.

The former coal mine left a thousand holes that are potentially causing natural destruction and may even kill much of humankind. Based on a report by JATAM (the Mining Advocacy Network), there are 3,033 former coal mining pits left without rehabilitation. In the same report,

JATAM recorded that at least 138 people died as a result of mining pits from 2014–2018 throughout Indonesia (JATAM, 2018).

The emergence of conflicts of interest between actors in disputing access to natural resources is regarded as another important and even more serious issue related to the exploitation of natural resources. The Mine Advocacy Network recorded at least 116 mining conflicts between 2014 and 2019. By 2020, there were 45 cases of mining conflict across Indonesia that included environmental pollution and destruction, land deprivation, the criminalization of citizens, and the termination of employment relationships. The total area of mining conflict from 2014-2020 reached 1.640.440 hectares (JATAM, 2021).

The fact that presents the phenomenon is that Bangka Regency has become one of the many points of timber mining conflict in the Bangka Belitung Islands. Lead mining, both legal and illegal offshore, can kill 30% of coral reefs in a year (Rosyida, Khan, & Sasaoka, 2018). Around 57.09% of coral reefs have been damaged in extremely poor conditions due to offshore mines (Rismika & Purnomo, 2019). This damage can be understood as a result of the contamination of seawater by lead mining liquid waste. (Kurniawan, Supriharyono, & Sasongko, 2014).

The impact of lead exploitation offshore creates resistance, especially from the most vulnerable group of fishermen. The Rebo fisherman community's rejection of the seawater's existence (Tribunnews, 2019), the occupation of the seawater by the fishermen of Air Hantu-Bedukang (Wiyoga, 2021), and the protests of the

Traditional Fishermen Care for the Environment (NTPL) Matras-Pesaren (Laia, 2021) are just a few of the many hot moments of access to the waters in the lead-producing area.

Therefore, the timber mining conflict in the seawater area of Bangka became the main issue in this article. The selection of the issue as well as the location are based on several considerations. First, the Bangka district becomes one of the areas in the "Timah Province" with a lead mining conflict that has been quite heated in recent times. Second, the formation of a fishing alliance as one of the mechanisms to coordinate and mobilize the interests of fishermen to deal with mining companies. Both of these things enable the lead mining conflict in the Bangka district to become much more exposed, and more than that, the conflicting actors become much easier to identify.

Specifically, this article will try to resolve the conflict of timber mining in the Bangka Sea Territory, and it will focus on two main issues, namely, the decision of the actor and its importance in the timber mining conflict in the sea area of the Bangka Territory. Second, this article will try to outline the processes and conditions that allow conflicting actors to benefit from resources (the sea) so that the distribution of benefits to each actor is unequal. And to discuss these two things above, this article will use the prospective access model ala Ribot and Peluso (Ribot & Peluso, 2003).

### Method

This research uses qualitative methods to discuss the timber mining conflict in the Sea Area of Bangka. Data for this study is collected through two

techniques: field studies and literature studies. Field studies were conducted by doing interviews with actors involved in the timber mining conflict in the Bangka district, such as fishing groups spread across points such as Tuing and the Gulf of Kelabat Dalam, and civil society groups involved in environmental advocacy efforts in the area studied. Literature studies were carried out by studying policy products, articles, and media studies related to the lead mining conflict in the West Bank District. Data analysis regarding mining conflict is carried out through several stages of classification, description, and interpretation.

This method is determined by its ability to interpret phenomena in a particular social background by conducting interviews, recording, or recording to obtain a complete picture of the phenomenon studied and find the connections between events in it. (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). In short, this method is relevant and effective to delineate the lead mining conflict in the coastal district of Bangka.

### Result and Discussion

#### Bangka Sea: Single Motive of Plural Actors

The intensity of the conflict in the marine territorial waters of Bangka Regency has inflamed in recent times, as proven by the fishermen's protests and the occupation of suction boats by fishermen over Bangka's sea access. The exploitation of natural resources has been generally recognized as stimulating conflict occurrences. That condition could be best triggered by the history of tin exploitation on the island of Bangka, which has been carried out since the early 18th century

and has created many serious problems, not only from a socio-economic perspective but also from an environmental perspective. J.A. Schuurman and Karl Helbig, two German geographers, as cited in Erman (2017), suggested that devastating topographic changes and the destruction of forests and rivers were claimed as a negative consequence of tin exploitation.

The long history of lead exploitation has given rise to a number of negative impacts, such as the degradation of agricultural land, the destruction of fishing potential, the ruin of tourism potential, environmental destruction, and even a tendency to generate public distrust. (Ibrahim, Haryadi, & Wahyudin, 2018).

This environmental tragedy was confirmed and published through many media outlets as observed evidence of tin exploitation in Bangka. According to Aini (2019), the evidence of environmental damage caused by tin misuse is detailed by the Forestry Service of Bangka Belitung Province, which noted that 200 thousand hectares of forest in Bangka Belitung were damaged. This is supported by the damaged and polluted rivers due to tin mining in Bangka (Ismi N., 2020).

The data presented above does not show any signs of ending the conflict. In the first part of this article, the motivation for the exploitation and the resistance to tin mining in Bangka Regency became two important things to consider. The approach of perspective access by Ribot and Peluso (2003) was applied to highlight the actors and their interests in tin mining conflicts in the marine area of Bangka Regency. In general, this theory outlines the actors and their interests in

this conflict by tracking the benefits diverted to each actor and the processes or mechanisms used in accessing resources in the Bangka Regency's marine area.

The result of this study indicated that the government, represented in the form of PT Timah, Illegal Miners, Fishermen, and tourism businessmen are considered to be the associated actors of the conflict, with different interests and different operations. First, in the context of tin exploitation on the island of Bangka in general and the marine area of Bangka Regency in particular, the government does not refer to a single actor.

Government in this context refers to two levels of government that are divided vertically, namely the central government and the local government. Generally, these two levels of government have become the central controllers of tin exploitation on Bangka Island. Based on Law Number 3 of 2020 concerning Amendments to Law Number 4 of 2009 concerning Mineral and Coal Mining, the authority to issue mining business permits resides or is withdrawn by the central government through the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources or *Kementrian Energi dan Sumber Daya (ESDM)*. The central government may issue mining business permits to PT. Timah, which operates as a state-owned enterprise.

Meanwhile, the role of provincial and local governments in the issuance of mining business permits existed before the enactment of Law Number 3 of 2020 concerning Mineral and Coal Mining. In the context of tin mining governance, historically, it is recorded that the local government had issued Regional Regulation No. 146 of 2001, which allowed



open access for residents and various businessmen to get involved in the tin business in the regency, which has its capital in Sungailiat, despite the many controversies that have arisen (Erman, 2017; Indra, 2014).

The involvement of central and local governments in the tin mining business is allowed by the applicable laws as described above. In this case, PT. Timah is permitted to have open access as the main actor in the mining business since the legalization of mining business permits has been agreed upon and issued by both central and district governments.

Recently, according to the official data displayed on the PT. Timah website, the tin mining business permit area owned by this company reaches 512,369 hectares spread over three areas: Bangka, Belitung, and Kundur islands, with 139.663 hectares dominantly in Bangka Island according to the Public Expose document in the November 2020 edition.

Both national and local governments take significant economic advantage of the tin industry or exploitation in Bangka Belitung. As marine states, PT. Timah had contributed non-tax state revenues of 1.1 trillion rupiahs throughout 2019, consisting of royalties of 556 billion rupiahs, taxes of 393 billion rupiahs, PBB of 103 billion rupiahs, and dividends of 120 billion rupiahs. From 2001 to 2015, tin mining contributed approximately Rp. 4,2 trillion per year to the regional economy. (Sulista & Rosyid, 2022).

They are not accounted for in a small number if it is compared and accumulated with decades of tin exploitation organized and conducted by PT Timah in the Bangka Belitung Islands.

In addition, it has significantly contributed to local finances. In addition, for the provincial government of the Bangka Belitung Islands, the contribution of tin management or exploitation to regional finance is also quite significant. According to the annual report issued by the Central Bureau of Statistics for Bangka Belitung Province in 2021,

PT Timah as the main organizer of tin mining in Bangka Belitung had contributed non-tax revenues of almost 489 billion rupiahs to the Regional Revenue and Expenditure Budget of Bangka Belitung Province from 2017 to 2020. Ismi (2020) emphasizes that the contribution of tins to the Gross Regional Domestic Product or *Produk Domestik Regional Bruto* (PDRB) reaches up to 40 percent of the total of Bangka Belitung local revenues or PAD. The Bangka Regency government gains the same advantage through the revenue mechanism on tin exploitation in this area.

Second, illegal miners are recognized as one of the principal actors in tin exploitation in Bangka Belitung. Because of their illegal mining operations on land or in the sea, this group is known as unconventional mining or *tambang inkonvensional* (TI). The latter is known as a floating mine or TI Apung. Their existence had been documented and widely publicized through various scientific research and media outlets, establishing them as one of the key players in tin management in Bangka Belitung.

This claim is strengthened by Persada (2019), who describes the attack on the entourage of the Deputy Governor of the Bangka Belitung Islands in November 2019 in the Belitung region by illegal miners as a form of protest or

refusal against the government's plan to control and ban the illegal miners. Wahyono (2019) highlights that incident as a tendency to distrust law enforcement in efforts to control illegal mining. This is proven by the non-involvement of the police in that action. The same thing happened in Kelabat Dalam Bay, Bangka. As one of the mining-free areas stipulated in Regional Regulation 3 of 2020 concerning the Zoning Plan for Coastal Areas and Small Islands (RZWP3K) of the Bangka Belitung Islands, illegal miners conduct their illegitimate activity in the cultivation and fishing zones.

Regarding this finding, the fishermen's group suspects the possibility of a line of business between law enforcers and illegal miners. This speculation was grounded and strengthened by the discovery of *ponton* or pontoon, commonly called floats which refer to an airtight hollow structure similar to vessels that are designed to provide buoyancy in water, found in an area that is legally forbidden to be used as a mining location. Assumably, the existence of the floats was permitted under the "big boss backup" or several investors with absolute power. In line with this, Erman (2007), concerning the tin economy and the birth of a local shadow state, explains that the strong relationship between the businessmen and the state's actors facilitates mining activity conducted by illegal miners. Nugraha & Purwanto (2020) allocate the role of illegal miners, or TI, as the main actor of tin exploitation in Bangka. According to neo-extractivism, illegal miners ensure the continuity of the global tin trading business, which is linked through sub-collectors, collectors, and smelter industries networks.

From an economic standpoint, the involvement of illegal actors who violate the law and cause environmental damage, particularly in cultivation and fishing areas, is quite reasonable. Economic motives that are quite promising from tin mining result in illegal mining in the territorial waters of Bangka Regency encouraging exploitation. For instance, in the case of Teluk Kelabat Dalam, Bangka Regency, the majority of illegal miners came from the Selapan area, South Sumatra, which is a very attractive justification for tin mining from an economic standpoint, even though it is legally illegal. Also, the recent increase in the selling price of tin has had an impact on the activity of illegal mining in the marine area of Bangka (Putra, 2021). This finding confirms and expands on the previous finding that unconventional mining has been integrated into the much larger tin mining business, as well as emphasizing the economic factor that underpins this illegal activity in particular (Nugraha & Purwanto, 2020).

Third, fishermen are the most disadvantaged group due to imbalances in the distribution of benefits and the impact of offshore lead mining. (Rosyida, Khan, & Sasaoka, 2018). This is determined by a very high level of dependence on coastal resources. Their existence in the movement against tin mining in the Bangka marine area has been recorded through several studies and mass media publications (Tempo.co, 2015; Wahli.or.id, 2018; Ismi N., 2020; Laia, 2021).

The rejection and retention of mining activity are triggered by massive environmental damage due to tin mining, which is either legally carried out by the government through PT. Timah or illegally

by unconventional miners, or TI. According to the press report released by KIARA (the People's Coalition for Fisheries Justice), there are about 16,000 traditional fishermen in Bangka Belitung who experienced a decline in income and planned to change professions due to timber mining (KIARA, 2013).

This serious problem has been a concern for a long time for the majority of the traditional fishermen living in the seacoast area of Bangka Regency. In addition to the problem of mining waste and sludge polluting the sea, a decrease in fishermen's catch becomes an issue. Sea pollution along the coast forces fishermen to travel up to 20 miles from the shoreline to obtain satisfactory results, increasing operational costs. Besides, the classic problem is the typical character of traditional fishermen, who do not have sufficient equipment to operate in waters that are quite deep and far from the shoreline.

Tourism business developers are regarded as the fourth actors involved in this polemic. This is understandable considering that for tourism businesses, the preservation of the environment, especially in the sea area of Bangka Regency, is an attraction for local tourists and domestic tourists. The tourism industry suffers as a result of marine destruction caused by tin exploitation. The hotel, restaurant, and other types of businesses that benefit from the growth of the tourism industry are, of course, the ones who suffer the most. To explain the role of tourism businessmen in this conflict, a more extensive study is necessary to be conducted due to their untouchable existence. However, it does not suggest that they take no part in this

conflict. Agustin's (2017) study on conflict management due to tin mining in Kelabat Bay and the Matras Sea confirms businessmen as one of the actors involved in the conflict. Our field findings in several actions by fishermen groups that refuse suction boats also found the presence of business actors who have an interest in protecting the environment in the territorial waters of Bangka Regency. Even though they are not openly involved, this actor is also a part of strengthening fishermen's groups from behind the scenes.

#### **Controlling Bangka Sea: State Authority, Defeating Fishermen and Maintaining Illegalism**

Previously, it has been clear that the economic interests of each actor establish the conflict of tin mining in the marine area of Bangka Regency. Furthermore, this section is focused on the process by which each actor accesses resources (the sea of Bangka Regency) to gain economic benefits. To account for this, the approach of access and power perspective, as proposed by Ribot and Peluso (2003), is employed to describe the variety of actors who take part in this conflict.

The concept of access is described as an ability to take advantage of people, organizations, symbols, or materials, and this is developed through great authority. Simply, access emerges within power structures and has to do with the abilities of actors to benefit from 'things' (Ribot & Peluso, 2003). In this case, the marine area of Bangka Regency is considered the main natural resource where the actors are fighting each other to attain the flow of economic benefits. Meanwhile, the term

*bundle of power* is regarded as an authority network that allows an actor to avail himself of the resources. Therefore, actors' access to authority, capital, technology, knowledge, markets, social relations, and social identity grants them the convenience to distribute the benefits and bear the more dominant power in controlling the contested resources.

Regarding this, here are several findings according to the investigation through related documents and various kinds of literature. First, the government's presence, in the representative form of PT. Timah, is a licensing organization that allows the mining business permission. This permission is then considered a "green light" for the actors to freely reap benefits on behalf of the state. The fishermen's protest against PT Timah and its partners was prevented by the security forces through the arrest and detention of several fishermen due to the destruction of a suction boat (Wahyuno, 2021). The ability to mobilize state resources for tin mining activities in the sea area has made PT Timah the actor that has received the most benefits.

The first, illegal or unconventional mining groups obtain considerable benefits from the use of the sea in Bangka Regency as a tin mining area. Several factors make it easier for this illegal activity to gain access to tin exploitation: Physical abuse towards the fishermen as a group of society that refuses offshore mining activity is the first factor. For example, the case of the Teluk Kelabat Dalam clash depicted the bloody clash between the fishermen and illegal miners in the cultivation and fishing zone. The miners had equipped some weapons to encounter the protest.

The second, factor is the availability of large capital, which supports and sustains this illegal activity by providing equipment assistance (pontoon) valued in the hundreds of millions of rupiah. Third, the relationship between these actors and the trade has facilitated them to connect with the global tin market (Nugraha & Purwanto, 2020).

The third, the ability to establish positive relationships with state actors allows miners to exploit and reap economic benefits even if their actions violate the rule of law. The justification is simply that ongoing illegal mining for a long period of time requires the submission of the state, especially law enforcers, either through tactics or collaboration between the two actors. Stories about information raids conducted by law enforcement officers on illegal mining have become a common discussion among fishing communities that reject sea mining.

The fourth, the sea activity conducted by fishermen such as fishing, for example, is regarded as an inherent right of indigenous people who have inhabited coastal areas for a long time. Law Number 1 of 2014 concerning the Management of Coastal Areas and Small Islands guarantees respect towards indigenous peoples who have lived in certain geographic areas for generations. The relationship among coastal communities, especially fishermen, is viewed as a culture of living; therefore, their recognition and protection must be guaranteed and a priority of the state. Consequently, the sustainability of the marine area must be maintained and protected, not merely as an economic fantasy resource. The use of traditional

fishing gear is a typical typology of traditional fishermen.

The fifth, hospitality businessmen are marked as the last actors who take advantage of the sea from an economic perspective. The capital support and the ability to access the authority in the process of business license issuance allow

them to gain economic profits through tourism development on the coast of Bangka Regency.

The following table describes the access mechanism and bundle of power owned by each actor in the tin mining conflict in the maritime area of Bangka Regency.

**Table 1. Access Mechanism and Bundle of Power in the Tin Mining in Bangka Regency**

Actors	Access Mechanism	Bundle Of Power
Government (PT. Timah)	- Rights-based - Structural and Relational	Politic and Law Authority, Capital and Market Access
Illegal Miners	- Illegal - Structural and Relational	Relations with the capital owner (Prive), Market, and State Actors
Traditional Fishermen	- Rights-based - Structural and Relational	Social Bound, culture, history, ecology and economy
Businessmen	- Rights-based - Structural and Relational	Capital ownership

Based on the foregoing, it is possible to conclude that the government and illegal miners are the most powerful beneficiaries of the Bangka district's maritime territory due to their ability to establish relationships with state actors. The distribution of the benefits and the imbalanced impact are determined by the amount of power held by each actor. Access to political power, law, capital, and markets is the basis of power-enabling government through PT. Timber can be

controlled while at the same time getting the benefits of the marine exploitation of Bangka. Through the operationalization of its power, the state issued a number of regulations that formed the basis for offshore mining. (Ibrahim, Saista, & Pratama, 2022). Furthermore, weak law enforcement has increased the fertility of small and large-scale illegal mining. (Aspinall, 2001). The ability to form networks with state actors created a shadow state phenomenon in the Belitung

Framework (Erman, 2017), allowing illegal mining to reap significant economic benefits due to its proximity to the global tins market.

On the other hand, tourism entrepreneurs and fishermen with limited power bases are the most disadvantaged groups in offshore mining activities. The issuance of mining permits that require the harvesting of affected communities is just giving rise to pseudo-participation. (Rosyida, Khan, & Sasaoka, 2018). Lack of attention to the benefits and impacts of lead mining has given rise to regulatory bias in the interests of the state. At the same time, protests against mining activities were responded to with repression by the state. (KumparanNEWS, 2017). The combination of minimal power, the participation of the miners in the formulation of mining policy, and the creation of alternative participation channels such as demonstrations and blockades have marginalized fishermen from coastal resources.

### Conclusion

The tin mining conflict in the marine area of Bangka Regency up to a certain point involves four actors: the government in the form of PT. Timah as their cooperator, illegal miners, or TI, fishermen, and tourism businessmen. The imbalanced network of power sets forth the uneven distribution of the benefits obtained through access to the sea. The practice of spatial regulation by the state to serve economic fantasies provides a bridge for PT Timah to carry out mining activities in the sea area of Bangka Regency. The spatial regulation is confirmed as the mining area determination through mining license

issues. This regulation disrupts the traditional income at sea as well as the attractiveness of the beach as a tourist attraction for business actors. On the contrary, the ability of illegal miners to establish good relationships with state actors and markets has had a significant economic impact on tin mining. In short, even though all actors can access the sea, the ability of each actor to draw benefits from it is unequal, causing an unequal distribution of benefits to all parties.

### Acknowledgment

Thank you to the Universitas Bangka Belitung, through Penelitian Dosen Tingkat Fakultas (PDF) Funding for the 2021 fiscal year this research can be completed and can be published.

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