

## Singapore's overdue response to Cambodian sand-trade data misses the point, NGO says

Jurisdiction : - Asia / Cambodia / Singapore / South East Asia

17 Jan 17 | 09:04 GMT

Author: Phoebe Seers

### IN BRIEF

After months of silence, Singapore's Ministry of National Development has responded to concerns that the city-state is importing illegal sand from Cambodia, alluding to "limitations" in United Nations Comtrade data. The non-governmental organization Mother Nature said the statement fails to answer the key question at issue: "Have they really imported over 70 million tons of sand from Cambodia? And if so, then why is Cambodia only reporting less than 3 million tons of sand exports to Singapore?"

After months of silence, Singapore's Ministry of National Development has responded to concerns that the city-state is importing illegal sand from Cambodia, alluding to "limitations" in United Nations Comtrade data. The non-governmental organization Mother Nature said the statement fails to answer the key question at issue: "Have they really imported over 70 million tons of sand from Cambodia? And if so, then why is Cambodia only reporting less than 3 million tons of sand exports to Singapore?"

"Import or export figures reported by a country are dependent on their own calculation formula," Gene Ng, manager of corporate communications at the Singaporean Ministry of National Development, or MND, told MLex. "Singapore does not condone any trade or extraction of sand that breaches the source countries' laws and regulations on environmental protection."

UN Comtrade is considered the most comprehensive trade database available, although it relies on data submitted to it by national authorities.

The Singaporean ministry was responding to a November email from MLex asking if it was looking into UN data that showed Cambodia had exported 2.8 million tons of sand to Singapore over a seven year period, while Singapore had recorded 72.7 million tons of sand imports from Cambodia, a discrepancy valued at around \$750 million. Ng declined to say whether the ministry was investigating the difference in the volume or value of the two sets of figures.

"Our contractors endeavor to import sand from viable sources and are expected to obtain sand supply in accordance with domestic laws and regulations," Ng said. "If there is any evidence that our contractors are not in compliance with the source countries' laws and regulations, Singapore will respect that legal process will take its course."

[www.mlex.com](http://www.mlex.com)  
MLex customer services  
customerservices@mlex.com

MLex London  
141 Moorgate  
London EC2M 6TX  
United Kingdom

MLex Brussels  
Rue de la Loi 67  
1040 Brussels  
Belgium

MLex Washington  
1776 I (Eye) St. NW  
Suite 260  
20006 Washington, D.C.  
USA

MLex New York  
535 Fifth Avenue, 4th  
Floor  
10017 New York  
USA

MLex San Francisco  
32 7th Street  
CA 94103  
USA

MLex Hong Kong  
3901 39/F Hopewell  
Centre  
183 Queen's Road East  
Hong Kong

[www.mlex.com](http://www.mlex.com)  
MLex customer  
services  
customerservices@mlex.com

**MLex London**  
141 Moorgate  
London EC2M 6TX  
United Kingdom

**MLex Brussels**  
Rue de la Loi 67  
1040 Brussels  
Belgium

**MLex Washington**  
1776 I (Eye) St. NW  
Suite 260  
20006 Washington, D.C.  
USA

**MLex New York**  
535 Fifth Avenue, 4th  
Floor  
10017 New York  
USA

**MLex San Francisco**  
32 7th Street  
CA 94103  
USA

**MLex Hong Kong**  
3901 39/F Hopewell  
Centre  
183 Queen's Road East  
Hong Kong

Cambodian NGO Mother Nature has instructed a Singapore law firm to provide advice in relation to possible courses of action against public and private entities in Singapore.

Alex Gonzalez-Davidson, the NGO's founder, said Singapore's statement woefully missed the point.

"They keep referring to the need for private enterprises importing the sand to respect Cambodia's laws and regulations, but it makes no mention of the fact that government agencies from Singapore are the ones obtaining that sand, or that there is also a need to respect Singaporean law.," he told MLex.

Singapore's response echoes statements from Cambodian ministries, which have previously blamed different record-keeping techniques for the discrepancy in the numbers, along with "inefficient practices" and "some challenges" in regulating the sand trade.

Last week, Singapore's President Tony Tan Keng Yam's visited Cambodia, but no words were reportedly exchanged on the controversy.

Sand mining along the Mekong River is related to widespread river collapse and environmental destruction, and many homes have collapsed into the water. Villagers have had to migrate away from sand mining areas, both along the Mekong and along the coast, because of ecological destruction and loss of livelihood caused by the trade.

"While we do not know yet if the sand extracted from the Mekong is ending up exported onto Singapore, last week a Cambodian government official was quoted as saying that Cambodian sand from the Mekong, used for construction purposes, was exported to Vietnam, which was then exporting it onto Singapore," Gonzalez-Davidson told MLex.

"The government of Singapore needs to understand that the current mafia-like government of Cambodia, lead by the Cambodian People's Party, will not always be in charge of the country. Cambodia will eventually see regime change, and future governments will be pressed by civil society to hold Singapore accountable in court on the issue of sand imports from Cambodia, so the sooner they change their current strategy, the better," he said.

"If they think this kind of statement is enough to stop journalists, the Cambodian public and activists from talking about this issue, they're making very a big mistake."

#### **Related case file(s)**

Trade - Environment - Sand exports - Cambodia - Singapore

[www.mlex.com](http://www.mlex.com)

MLex customer  
services

customerservices@mlex.com

**MLex London**

141 Moorgate  
London EC2M 6TX  
United Kingdom

**MLex Brussels**

Rue de la Loi 67  
1040 Brussels  
Belgium

**MLex Washington**

1776 I (Eye) St. NW  
Suite 260  
20006 Washington, D.C.  
USA

**MLex New York**

535 Fifth Avenue, 4th  
Floor  
10017 New York  
USA

**MLex San Francisco**

32 7th Street  
CA 94103  
USA

**MLex Hong Kong**

3901 39/F Hopewell  
Centre  
183 Queen's Road East  
Hong Kong