

THE CASE OF RARE EARTH ELEMENTS



Activists Group: You are an Environmental Activist Based in Malaysia

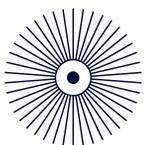
Your Background and Biography

In your work as a biologist you find ways to incorporate your passion for environmentalism. For more than 20 years you've worked on issues at the intersection of wildlife conservation, sustainable development, and community mobilization. Born in Malaysia and educated in the United States, you have become a go-to spokesperson for the western journalists who write stories about sustainable development in Southeast Asia.

You are part of a growing professional class in Malaysia that has global connections. After graduating from the University of Washington with a degree in marine biology, you came home to earn a master's degree in biotechnology from the University of Malaya. While many of your friends and classmates from both schools went into finance and international trade, you came away from school with a deep commitment to sustainable development, to figuring out ways for the current population to meet their needs without compromising future generations' ability to meet their needs.

You started working as a scientific officer and then a communications officer for the World Wildlife Fund in Malaysia, promoting sustainable fishing practices and trying to preserve rainforest habitats while meeting the needs of local residents. Eight years later you founded a nonprofit organization aimed at making sustainable development a standard business practice. You partnered with businesses, education organizations, and government agencies to teach people about what you call the "eco-nomy," about how the environment and business are connected. You try to come up with solutions that work both for businesses and for the environment.

Your organization is relatively new to the issue of rare earth element production, having been previously focused on preserving forests, building support for ecotourism, and creating national parks. But you see that public concern about rare earth production is generating a great deal of public attention and really motivating people in Malaysia. It has even drawn the support of the new prime minister, maybe marking a sea change in national politics, where environmentalism has won few victories. Your group has joined protests against a foreign-owned plant that refines rare earths in Malaysia, using ores mined in Australia. Malaysia ends up with the waste, including radioactive wastewater, while the profits go to people in wealthier countries.



In negotiations you are advocating that extraction plants responsibly deal with their waste and make sure that waste does not harm people and the environment. You also want to make sure that local people in areas where rare earth elements are mined or disposed of get a fair share of the economic benefits. It is also important to ensure that these elements are available for green energy technologies that can help reduce climate change.

Your Mission

Your goal at this hearing is to convince the Stewardship Council to include the Activists Group's recommendations in its final Sustainability Seal guiding values. To make this argument effectively, you must do the following:

- Complete the assigned readings listed at the bottom of this page.
- Work closely with the other members of your group to develop clear answers to the Stewardship Council's questions.
- Use as much specific information as possible to develop strong arguments for your position that protecting the environment and promoting human well-being (physical and economical) are critical to establishing a sustainable, ethical rare earth elements industry.
- Read as much as you can about your position and the positions of the other groups.
- Complete written reflections on your character, interest group, and readings as assigned.

Your Victory Objectives

- **You will receive 10 points** if the Stewards select your group's proposal as the final Sustainability Seal guiding values.
- The Stewards will rank the interest groups by how well their goals are represented in the final Sustainability Seal guiding values. **You will receive between 1 and 4 points** based on how the Activists Group is ranked and how well the Sustainability Seal guiding values reflect your goals.

SOURCES

Group Resources

- Activists Case Study: ["Protecting Health and the Environment in an Age of Global Trade"](#)
- Ives, Mike. ["Boom in Mining Rare Earths Poses Mounting Toxic Risks."](#) *Yale Environment 360*, January 28, 2013.



Individual Resources

- Bodetti, Austin. "[Malaysia's Rare Earth Debate.](#)" *Diplomat*, January 10, 2019.
- Law, Yao-Hua. "[Radioactive Waste Standoff Could Slash High Tech's Supply of Rare Earth Elements.](#)" *Science*, April 1, 2019.

