

Galang Batang SEZ: Advancing the Blue Economy through Strategic Development

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ABSTRACT

The development of the Galang Batang Special Economic Zone (SEZ) is a strategic effort by Indonesia to boost its Blue Economy, leveraging its coastal resources for sustainable economic growth. This study aims to explore the effectiveness of Galang Batang SEZ in advancing Indonesia's Blue Economy by analyzing the zone's infrastructure development, investment climate, and regulatory framework. The research employs a qualitative approach, examining reports, regulations, and investment data collected from government agencies, SEZ administrators, and key stakeholders. Findings reveal that Galang Batang SEZ has successfully attracted significant foreign direct investment, particularly in the alumina refinery and supporting industries, positioning it as a critical hub for marine-based industries. Additionally, the SEZ's focus on sustainable infrastructure, including environmentally friendly power plants and modern port facilities, aligns with the principles of the Blue Economy. However, challenges remain, such as environmental compliance issues and the need for improved local accessibility. The study concludes that while the Galang Batang SEZ shows promise in contributing to Indonesia's Blue Economy, it requires ongoing policy support, infrastructure enhancement, and environmental management strategies to fully realize its potential. This research underscores the importance of strategic SEZ development in achieving sustainable coastal economic growth and offers insights for future policy implementations in similar zones.

Keyword: Galang Batang; Blue Economy; Special Economic Zone (SEZ)

INTRODUCTION

The concept of the blue economy has gained traction in recent years, highlighting the potential of ocean resources to drive economic growth while ensuring sustainability (Hidayat & Negara, 2020; Moberg, 2015). As nations seek innovative strategies to address economic challenges and environmental degradation, the establishment of Special Economic Zones (SEZs) emerges as a critical solution (Asri et al., 2022; Rasyid & Darumurti, 2022). SEZ positioned strategically along vital maritime routes, presents a unique opportunity to leverage local marine resources while fostering sustainable development (Farole & Akinci, 2011; Fauzi et al., 2022). This article examines the core issues surrounding the Galang Batang SEZ's role in advancing the blue economy, shedding light on the multifaceted benefits and challenges it presents.

The urgency of addressing the blue economy in the context of SEZ is underscored by the pressing need for sustainable development amid escalating environmental concerns (Aggarwal, 2007; Harto, 2016). Coastal regions are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, overfishing, and pollution, necessitating a shift towards sustainable practices

that can rejuvenate marine ecosystems while promoting economic growth (Aritenang & Chandramidi, 2020; United Nations Conference On Trade And Development, 2019). The potential for the Galang Batang SEZ to serve as a model for integrating sustainable practices into economic development strategies cannot be overstated, making it imperative to explore its implications comprehensively.

In discussing this issue, the article positions itself within the broader discourse surrounding SEZs and sustainable development. Previous studies have illuminated the potential of SEZs to stimulate economic activity (Hidayat & Hidayat, 2010; Trisniati et al., 2022). However, there remains a gap in the literature concerning the specific application of these concepts to the blue economy, particularly in the context of the Galang Batang SEZ. This article aims to fill this gap by providing a thorough analysis of the unique characteristics of the Galang Batang SEZ and its potential contributions to the blue economy, drawing on insights from existing literature while introducing original perspectives.

One of the primary aspects to be explored is the economic significance of the blue economy, which encompasses a wide range of sectors, including fisheries, tourism, and marine biotechnology (Pramoda & Apriliani, 2016; Wibowo & Silitonga, 2020). The article will discuss how the strategic development of the Galang Batang SEZ can catalyze investment in these sectors, creating jobs and fostering innovation. Moreover, the implications of sustainable resource management practices will be examined, emphasizing how the SEZ can contribute to the conservation of marine biodiversity and the resilience of coastal communities (Alfiandri & Mahadiansar, 2020; Ramdani, 2020).

The importance of this discussion lies not only in its theoretical contributions but also in its practical implications for policymakers and stakeholders. By providing a comprehensive analysis of the Galang Batang SEZ's potential within the blue economy framework, the article aims to inform decision-making processes and contribute to the formulation of effective policies that prioritize sustainability alongside economic growth. This approach aligns with the global commitment to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly those related to life below water (SDG 14) and decent work and economic growth (SDG 8).

Galang Batang SEZ represents a pivotal opportunity to advance the blue economy through strategic development initiatives. As the world grapples with the dual challenges of economic recovery and environmental sustainability, this article seeks to illuminate the path forward, offering a roadmap for harnessing the potential of marine resources while safeguarding the health of our oceans. The findings and discussions presented herein will contribute to the broader understanding of how SEZs can serve as catalysts for sustainable development in coastal regions, ultimately promoting a more resilient and equitable blue economy.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a mixed-methods approach to comprehensively examine the role of the Galang Batang Special Economic Zone (SEZ) in advancing the blue economy. The methodology is structured to incorporate both quantitative and qualitative data, allowing for a robust analysis of the economic, environmental, and social dimensions associated with the SEZ. The quantitative component includes the collection of relevant economic indicators such as employment rates, investment flows, and output from various sectors within the SEZ. This data will be gathered from official government reports, industry publications, and economic databases to provide a statistical foundation for assessing the SEZ's impact (Bungin, 2015; Moleong, 2012).

In addition to quantitative analysis, qualitative methods will be employed to gain deeper insights into the experiences and perspectives of stakeholders involved in the Galang Batang SEZ. Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with a diverse range of participants,

including government officials, local business owners, community leaders, and environmental activists. This qualitative data will help to contextualize the quantitative findings, revealing the complexities and nuances of how the SEZ is perceived and experienced by those directly affected by its development. Thematic analysis will be used to identify key patterns and themes within the interview data, facilitating a comprehensive understanding of stakeholder viewpoints (Galvan & Galvan, 2017).

Furthermore, case studies of similar SEZs that have successfully integrated blue economy principles will be analyzed to draw lessons and best practices applicable to the Galang Batang SEZ. By examining these precedents, the research aims to identify critical success factors and potential challenges that could inform the strategic development of the Galang Batang SEZ. This comparative analysis will also provide a broader context for understanding how other regions have navigated the complexities of balancing economic growth with environmental sustainability. The overall research design emphasizes triangulation, which enhances the validity and reliability of the findings. By integrating quantitative and qualitative methods, as well as comparative case studies, this study aims to provide a well-rounded assessment of the Galang Batang SEZ's contributions to the blue economy. Ultimately, the research seeks to inform policymakers and stakeholders about effective strategies for sustainable development within the framework of SEZs, contributing to a more resilient and equitable marine economy.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Development of Special Economic Zones (SEZs) in Galang Batang

The development and operationalization of the Galang Batang Special Economic Zone (SEZ) represent a crucial component of Indonesia's strategy to accelerate economic growth, attract foreign investment, and create job opportunities. This initiative, guided by Law No. 39/2009 on SEZs and amended under Law No. 11/2020 concerning Job Creation, aims to enhance industrial activities, particularly in the aluminum sector. However, the initial stages of the SEZ's development faced numerous challenges, such as slow infrastructure growth and inadequate job creation, necessitating revitalization and structural adjustments by the national and local governments. The administrative structure of Galang Batang SEZ was established in 2018 through regional coordination between the National Council and local authorities, comprising sixteen key officials responsible for monitoring investments, managing operational activities, and overseeing licensing procedures. These officials play a critical role in ensuring smooth operations, maintaining compliance with regulatory frameworks, and reporting to the National Council to provide consistent updates on progress and issues faced.

Significant investments in infrastructure have been a hallmark of Galang Batang SEZ's development strategy. The zone has seen substantial improvements, including the construction of the Alumina Refinery, Power Plant, and Gas Plant. The Alumina Refinery, an essential project within the zone, has completed its first phase, reaching its target capacity of 1 million tons per year. Further expansions aim to double this output, demonstrating the zone's ambitions to become a major player in the global aluminum industry. Concurrently, the development of the Power Plant is progressing in stages to support the electricity needs of the refinery and future aluminum smelter projects. The power infrastructure is designed to scale up according to the expanding demands of the SEZ, ensuring that energy needs are met efficiently and sustainably. However, these infrastructure projects, while promising, also highlight the challenges related to the environmental and regulatory landscape, particularly concerning energy use and sustainability targets.

Attracting foreign and local investments has been another critical focus for Galang Batang SEZ. The zone has succeeded in drawing numerous investors, with PT Bintan Alumina Indonesia (BAI) taking a leading role as both developer and manager, injecting significant

capital into the SEZ's projects. Other foreign companies, such as Shandong Zhengtai Construction, have also contributed to building the industrial and logistical framework necessary for SEZ operations. The influx of these investments underscores the strategic importance of the SEZ in boosting Indonesia's industrial capabilities and expanding its international business partnerships. The construction of key logistical infrastructure, such as the multi-purpose wharf, is integral to these efforts. The wharf, capable of accommodating vessels up to 35,000 DWT, is designed to facilitate the import of raw materials and export of processed goods efficiently, thus improving the competitiveness of the SEZ on a global scale. This logistical infrastructure supports not only current operations but also the zone's future growth as it scales production capacity.

Employment and housing development are other critical aspects of the Galang Batang SEZ's strategy to ensure that the benefits of economic growth reach the local population. The SEZ has already created numerous jobs, and to accommodate the growing workforce, substantial housing projects are underway. These include the construction of executive housing and dormitories capable of housing up to 20,000 workers. The dormitory complex is nearing completion and is designed with supporting facilities such as mosques, schools, healthcare centers, and commercial areas to foster a vibrant and sustainable community within the SEZ. Additionally, the zone's development plan includes road construction to improve access and transportation within and around the SEZ, thus facilitating smoother movement of goods and personnel. These developments are critical in transforming the area into a self-sufficient and well-integrated economic hub.

Despite these advancements, energy supply remains a significant challenge for Galang Batang SEZ. The current power plant, with a capacity of 6 x 25 MW, has been operational, but the SEZ's expansion plans necessitate further stages of development to meet the growing energy requirements of the aluminum refinery and smelter. To support these energy demands, additional capacity is being added in phases. However, the SEZ must also navigate Indonesia's regulations on renewable energy. The government mandates a 23% contribution from renewable sources (EBT), but the available options for renewable energy on small islands like Bintan, where the SEZ is located, are limited. This regulatory challenge requires innovative solutions to align energy consumption with national sustainability goals while ensuring sufficient power for the SEZ's industrial activities.

Environmental compliance and regulatory challenges are also prominent as the SEZ expands its operations. The increase in alumina production capacity from 1 million tons per year to 2 million tons per year necessitated a new environmental impact assessment (AMDAL). This process is ongoing, and adjustments are being made to align the SEZ's operations with the necessary environmental regulations. Additionally, the SEZ faces challenges in converting protected forest areas into industrial zones. Securing permits and land rights for these areas has proven complex, with ongoing efforts to finalize legal and administrative processes required for land conversion and certification. The SEZ's commitment to managing environmental impacts and adhering to regulatory requirements is crucial for maintaining its operational license and public support.

In addressing these strategic issues, the Galang Batang SEZ must align its operations with national energy and environmental policies while ensuring that its expansion plans remain viable. The Indonesian government's focus on renewable energy and environmental sustainability poses a complex challenge for the SEZ, especially given the high energy demands of aluminum refining and smelting activities. The SEZ's reliance on coal power, while practical in the short term, may face regulatory and public scrutiny unless supplemented with cleaner energy solutions. This regulatory environment presents both risks and opportunities, as compliance can lead to access to further governmental support and incentives.

Nonetheless, failure to meet these requirements could impede future growth and reduce investor confidence.

2. Strategic issues surrounding the operationalization of the Galang Batang Special Economic Zone (KEK)

The strategic issues and solutions related to the operationalization of the Special Economic Zone (SEZ) at Galang Batang, based on the provided document, can be analyzed and elaborated as follows:

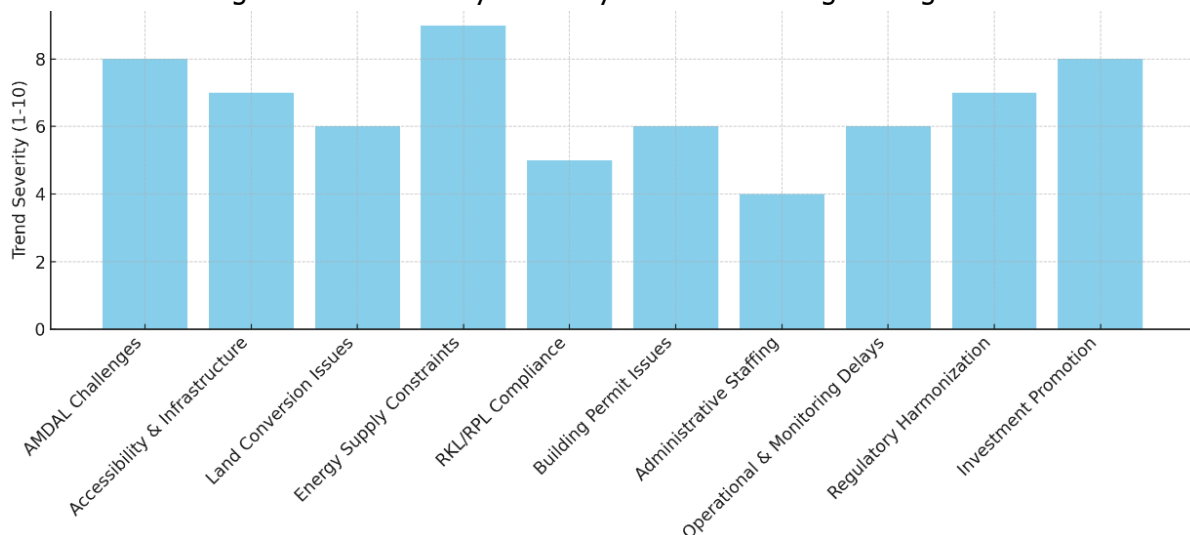
- a. Environmental Impact Assessment (AMDAL) Challenges; The expansion of the alumina refinery's production capacity from 1 million tons per year to 2 million tons necessitates a new AMDAL (Environmental Impact Assessment). The current progress involves revising documents before the assessment process at the Kepri Provincial Environmental Agency (DLH). This delay in AMDAL approval has a direct impact on construction timelines and operational efficiency, highlighting the need for a streamlined and efficient environmental review process to keep development on schedule.
- b. Accessibility and Infrastructure Development; For enhancing accessibility to the SEZ, the widening of access roads falls under the authority of the Provincial Government of Kepulauan Riau and the Central Government. This requires close coordination between local, regional, and national authorities to ensure that infrastructure projects align with the growth and operational needs of the SEZ. Accelerating these road expansions is crucial for better logistics and transportation efficiency, improving the zone's attractiveness to investors.
- c. Land Conversion Issues; The conversion of forest land (production forest) into other uses within the SEZ has secured an approval for 371 hectares. However, further steps such as boundary determination and land rights processes are still ongoing. This bottleneck indicates the complexity and time-consuming nature of land acquisition and conversion processes. The authorities need to expedite these procedures to provide certainty for investors and facilitate the full utilization of the designated area.
- d. Energy Supply Constraints; The refinery and smelter operations require a substantial power supply of 2,850 MW. The plan involves building a coal-fired power plant that meets carbon emission standards using ultra-supercritical technology. However, meeting the government's renewable energy mix target of 23% is challenging on small islands like Bintan, where renewable energy options are limited. The SEZ must explore innovative solutions or partnerships for renewable energy integration to comply with national policies while securing the necessary power supply.
- e. Detailed Environmental Management Plans (RKL/RPL) Compliance; There is a compliance gap among businesses operating within the SEZ concerning the detailed Environmental Management and Monitoring Plans (RKL/RPL) mandated by the Ministry of Industry Regulation No. 1 of 2020. These detailed plans are critical for sustainable and responsible operations. Ensuring that all companies within the SEZ comply with these regulations is essential for long-term environmental sustainability and avoiding potential sanctions.
- f. Building Permit Issues (PBG); The SEZ's management company has begun processing building permits for the power plant and alumina factory since 2021. However, many other operational buildings still lack these permits, presenting a compliance issue that could lead to regulatory penalties or operational delays. Streamlining the permit application process and ensuring that all infrastructure projects meet regulatory requirements is vital for maintaining operational continuity and legality.
- g. Administrative Staffing and Optimization; The administration of the SEZ currently involves dual roles, with personnel managing both the SEZ and the Investment and One-Stop Integrated Services (DPMPSTSP) of Bintan Regency. This dual role results in suboptimal

performance, as staff are stretched between responsibilities. To improve service quality and efficiency, there is a need to separate the personnel for dedicated SEZ management, ensuring a focused and responsive administrative team.

- h. Delays in Operational and Monitoring Reporting; While the SEZ's administrator is required to submit operational reports every six months, delays and discrepancies in reporting have been observed. Efficient monitoring and reporting mechanisms are crucial for maintaining transparency and evaluating progress. The SEZ authority must establish a reliable digital reporting system and enhance coordination with businesses to ensure accurate and timely submission of these reports.
- i. Regulatory Harmonization and Coordination; The complexity of regulations governing SEZs, including those related to permits, environmental management, and infrastructure development, poses a significant challenge. The SEZ authority must work closely with national and regional governments to harmonize regulations and provide a clear framework for businesses. Simplifying the regulatory landscape will not only attract more investment but also ensure compliance and sustainable growth.
- j. Investment Promotion and Stakeholder Engagement; Despite the development of critical infrastructure, the full potential of the SEZ has not been realized due to insufficient promotion and investor engagement strategies. The SEZ authority must intensify its efforts in global marketing and stakeholder collaboration to attract diverse investments beyond the current industrial focus. Engaging with local communities and ensuring that SEZ development aligns with local economic and social needs is also crucial for gaining broader support and reducing resistance.

The successful operationalization of the Galang Batang SEZ requires addressing environmental compliance, improving infrastructure, ensuring regulatory compliance, and optimizing administrative functions. By strategically resolving these issues, the SEZ can enhance its efficiency, attract more investments, and achieve sustainable growth.

Figure 2. Trend Analysis of Key Issues at Galang Batang SEZ



Source Author, 2024

The bar diagram illustrates the trend analysis of key challenges faced by the Galang Batang SEZ, ranked by their severity on a scale of 1 to 10. Energy supply constraints emerge as the most critical issue with a score of 9, reflecting the significant power requirements of the refinery and smelter operations, alongside the challenge of meeting national renewable energy targets on small islands. AMDAL challenges and investment promotion both score 8,

indicating that delays in environmental impact assessments and insufficient investor engagement are major bottlenecks that threaten project timelines and overall development progress.

Regulatory harmonization and coordination and accessibility and infrastructure development are also pressing issues, scoring 7, as these areas require efficient collaboration between national, regional, and local authorities to streamline processes and ensure that infrastructure and regulatory frameworks support SEZ growth. Issues like land conversion, building permits, and operational monitoring score moderately, reflecting ongoing complexities that, while significant, can be mitigated through administrative improvements and procedural streamlining. Lastly, administrative staffing and optimization rank slightly lower with a score of 4, suggesting that while important, this issue may not be as urgent as the others, although it still impacts the overall operational efficiency of the SEZ.

3. Implementation Blue Economy through Strategic Development Galang Batang SEZ

The implementation of the Blue Economy through strategic development at the Galang Batang SEZ (Special Economic Zone) involves integrating sustainable ocean-based economic practices with industrial and infrastructural growth. The Galang Batang SEZ's strategic location in the Riau Archipelago presents a significant opportunity to align its economic activities with Blue Economy principles, leveraging the coastal and marine resources sustainably. The focus includes developing eco-friendly infrastructure, enhancing marine logistics, and promoting industries such as fisheries, tourism, and renewable energy. These initiatives aim to not only drive economic growth but also preserve the marine ecosystem, ensuring long-term economic and environmental sustainability for the region.

Figure 1. Mindmap Implementation



Source: Author, 2024

To realize the Blue Economy, the Galang Batang SEZ must prioritize the development of eco-friendly ports and logistics systems. Given the SEZ's reliance on shipping for its alumina refinery operations and other industrial activities, building ports that minimize environmental impact is essential. The construction of multi-purpose docks must integrate green technologies, such as waste management systems and cleaner energy sources like LNG (Liquefied Natural Gas), to reduce carbon emissions. Additionally, enhancing the efficiency of

these facilities through innovative logistics solutions can streamline the supply chain and attract further investments, while maintaining harmony with marine biodiversity.

Another key area for implementing the Blue Economy is sustainable marine resource management. The SEZ has the potential to support aquaculture, fisheries, and marine-based tourism activities that align with sustainable practices. By investing in aquaculture technologies and responsible fishing practices, the SEZ can generate employment while maintaining the health of local fish populations and marine ecosystems. Additionally, developing tourism facilities that promote ecotourism, such as guided snorkeling tours and educational marine conservation centers, could diversify the local economy and raise environmental awareness. These efforts would contribute to the region's economic resilience and environmental stewardship.

The development of renewable energy infrastructure is also critical in applying Blue Economy principles to the Galang Batang SEZ. The area's reliance on coal-fired power plants highlights the need for alternative energy solutions, particularly in the form of offshore wind or tidal energy, which are suitable for its coastal environment. Establishing these renewable energy projects can reduce the SEZ's carbon footprint and align with Indonesia's national targets for renewable energy use. Moreover, integrating renewable energy into the industrial zone not only supports sustainable development but also enhances the competitiveness of businesses within the SEZ by lowering operational costs over time.

Finally, to fully embed the Blue Economy within the SEZ's development strategy, regulatory harmonization and community engagement are crucial. The SEZ authority must ensure that all industrial and infrastructural projects comply with environmental regulations and international standards related to marine resource management. Engaging local communities, particularly those dependent on marine resources, is essential for fostering cooperation and minimizing conflicts. Initiatives such as stakeholder consultations, community-based marine conservation programs, and skills training for the Blue Economy workforce can align local development with broader economic goals, ensuring the SEZ's growth is both inclusive and sustainable.

CONCLUSION

The development and operationalization of the Galang Batang Special Economic Zone (SEZ) play a crucial role in Indonesia's economic strategy, focusing on enhancing the aluminum industry while also creating employment and fostering foreign investment. Despite these positive efforts, the SEZ faces several strategic and operational challenges that could potentially hinder its progress. Environmental and regulatory issues, such as delays in securing AMDAL approvals and meeting renewable energy targets, illustrate the complexity of balancing industrial expansion with sustainability goals. Additionally, infrastructure constraints, such as the need for road expansions and energy supply improvements, reveal the critical need for coordination between various levels of government. These challenges highlight the importance of a well-structured development plan that not only focuses on rapid industrial growth but also ensures that these developments align with national policies and international environmental standards.

The SEZ's efforts in attracting investment and building infrastructure demonstrate a strong potential for becoming a major economic hub in the region. Significant investments in projects like the alumina refinery, power plants, and logistical facilities underscore the SEZ's ambitions to scale up its production capacity and integrate into global supply chains. However, issues such as land conversion delays, energy supply limitations, and the complexity of regulatory compliance suggest that continuous adaptation and innovation are necessary for the SEZ to achieve its goals. Addressing these concerns involves streamlining administrative processes, securing the necessary permits for ongoing and future projects, and enhancing the

SEZ's capacity to comply with environmental and regulatory frameworks. Moreover, by optimizing administrative staffing and improving reporting mechanisms, the SEZ can ensure better efficiency, transparency, and overall operational continuity, making it more attractive to investors while maintaining compliance with regulations.

The SEZ's pursuit of Blue Economy principles and sustainable development reflects its long-term vision to harmonize economic growth with environmental stewardship. The SEZ's initiatives to develop eco-friendly ports, promote sustainable aquaculture and tourism, and explore renewable energy sources demonstrate a commitment to integrating marine and coastal resources into its economic model responsibly. By implementing strategies that align with the Blue Economy, the Galang Batang SEZ not only contributes to Indonesia's national energy and environmental targets but also establishes itself as a model for sustainable development in special economic zones. However, for these efforts to be effective, regulatory harmonization, investment promotion, and stakeholder engagement must be prioritized. Ensuring local community involvement and fostering international business partnerships will be critical for the SEZ's inclusive and resilient growth, helping to overcome challenges and achieve a balanced, sustainable, and prosperous economic future for the region.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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