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## **Sarawak Energy: Norwegian CEO assumes responsibility for controversial mega-dams**

*Former Norsk Hydro manager Torstein Dale Sjøtveit to be paid 1.2 million US dollars per year for replacing the Sarawak Chief Minister's brother-in-law as CEO of Sarawak Energy Bhd.*

KUCHING, SARAWAK / MALAYSIA. Torstein Dale Sjøtveit, a Norwegian national who has formerly worked as an executive with the Norsk Hydro group, has recently been appointed the new Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Sarawak Energy Berhad Group, a state-owned power monopolist in East Malaysia.

In his new position, Sjøtveit will be in charge of implementing the Sarawak state government's plan of constructing twelve new dams on Sarawak's main river systems. The dams are bound to destroy the livelihood of thousands of natives and to further deteriorate Sarawak's fragile tropical forest environment. Even before the completion of the highly controversial 2400 MW Bakun dam, construction work on another mega project, the 940 MW Murum dam, has started.

The Sarawak government refutes all criticism of its excessive power generation plans. Last September, police detained fifteen native leaders who attempted to hand over a protest memorandum to the authorities in the state capital, Kuching.

"To dam the rivers constitutes a disruption of the native communities' traditional way of life", said Kuching-based indigenous lawyer, Baru Bian. "It is the destruction of their land and history. Their very existence and livelihood are being threatened." Baru, who chairs the Sarawak branch of Anwar Ibrahim's People's Justice Party (PKR), suspects the dam plans are also a "pretext for extinguishing native land rights in the watersheds of our main rivers, in the name of a public purpose. There is no real need for these dams as we have enough power in Sarawak."

In a first media briefing, Torstein Dale Sjøtveit said he had visited both the Bakun and Murum dam sites and found them very impressive. 54-year-old Sjøtveit replaces Sarawak Chief Minister Taib Mahmud's brother-in-law, Abdul Aziz Husain, who has handed over to Sjøtveit without an official explanation being given.

The Bruno Manser Fund has learned that Sjøtveit will be paid an annual salary of 1.2 million US dollars (tax free) and will be provided with free housing. Sarawak's average annual household income is estimated to be around 10,000 USD (35,000 Ringgit) per year.

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