

Reconfiguring Sanctions for Environmental Crimes Through the Application of Deferred Prosecution Agreements (DPAS) to Corporations Under Law Number 1 Of 2023 Concerning the Indonesian Criminal Code

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The reform of Indonesia's criminal law through Law Number 1 of 2023 on the Criminal Code reflects a significant shift in the orientation of punishment. Punishment is no longer viewed solely as a means of retribution, but also as an instrument of corrective, restorative, and rehabilitative justice. This shift is particularly important in the context of environmental crimes, as corporate environmental offenses generally cause extensive, systemic, and long-term harm to ecosystems as well as to surrounding communities. Although Law Number 32 of 2009 on Environmental Protection and Management has recognized corporate criminal liability and provides for additional penalties and corrective measures, its sanctioning framework still faces several problems, particularly the predominance of a retributive approach, the lack of integration of ecological restoration into the core of punishment, and the difficulty of establishing corporate fault. This article addresses two main issues. First, how is the sanctioning framework for corporate environmental crimes regulated under Law Number 32 of 2009 and Law Number 1 of 2023 on the Criminal Code? Second, what model of Deferred Prosecution Agreement (DPA) may appropriately be applied to reconfigure sanctions for corporate environmental crimes without undermining the principle of criminal liability? This study is normative legal research employing statutory, conceptual, and, to a limited extent, comparative approaches. The research relies on primary and secondary legal materials, which are analyzed qualitatively through a descriptive-analytical method. The findings show that the current sanctioning framework has not yet been fully capable of addressing the need for prompt, concrete, and measurable restoration of environmental harm. While the 2023 Criminal Code strengthens the legal basis for attributing criminal liability to corporations, it does not automatically resolve the problem of effective ecological recovery. In this context, a DPA may be considered as a model for reconfiguring sanctions, provided that it is designed in a strict and accountable manner, requiring formal acknowledgment of governance failure, measurable environmental restoration obligations, concrete recovery for affected communities, disgorgement of unlawfully obtained profits, and internal corporate compliance reform. With such a design, a DPA should not be understood as a form of penal leniency, but rather as a legal mechanism that places ecological restoration and corporate governance reform at the center of the criminal law response to environmental offenses.

Keywords: Corporate criminal liability; DPA; Sanction Configuration

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1. Introduction

Developments in modern criminal law indicate a paradigm shift from an approach that was originally retributive and collegial toward one oriented toward the effectiveness of law enforcement and restorative justice. In the National Seminar on Assessing the Application of Deferred Prosecution Agreements ("DPAs") in Corporate Corruption Offenses: An Effective Solution for Recovering State Losses or a Form of Erosion of Criminal Liability, Professor Edward Omar Sharif Hiariej, from the Master of Law Program (Jakarta Campus) at Gadjah Mada University, presented the vision that the National Criminal Code aims for social

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reintegration—that is, judges should, as much as possible, avoid imposing prison sentences. “However, even if imprisonment is imposed, it should be for a short period,” according to Prof. Edward Omar Sharif Hiariej. Additionally, Prof. Edward Omar Sharif Hiariej stated, “Law No. 1 of 2023 on the Criminal Code (KUHP) recognizes restorative justice—that is, justice for the victim’s recovery—and rehabilitative justice—that is, the restoration of the status, dignity, and honor harmed by the judicial process—so that punishment serves as both a penalty and a remedy for the victim.”

Law No. 1 of 2023 on the Criminal Code (“KUHP 2023”) is no longer viewed merely as a means of retribution, but rather as a means of correction, restoration, and rehabilitation within social relationships disrupted by criminal acts. This change is understood as a shift from a retributive model that relies too heavily on imprisonment toward a more substantive, proportional, and rehabilitation-oriented approach to law enforcement. This direction is crucial because punishment that is purely retributive often fails to address the real need for restoration, particularly when the perpetrator is a corporation with a complex organizational structure.

In the same vein, the 2023 Criminal Code (KUHP) establishes that corporations are subjects of criminal liability. This clarification holds strategic significance because, for a long time, Indonesian criminal law has tended to more readily prosecute individual perpetrators rather than business entities, which are the ones actually reaping the primary benefits from unlawful acts. Thus, the revision of the Criminal Code effectively opens the door to redefining how the state views corporate criminal liability, including the types of sanctions that should be imposed on them.

The urgency of such regulation is particularly acute in the context of environmental crimes. Environmental crimes involving corporations generally have far-reaching, systemic, and long-term impacts. The harm they cause extends beyond economic losses; they also damage ecosystems, endanger public health, erode the living spaces of surrounding communities, and impose burdens on future generations. Therefore, in environmental matters, the measure of the success of law enforcement is not limited to the presence or absence of a guilty verdict, but also to the extent to which the law is capable of halting damage, restoring the environment, and compelling changes in corporate governance.

Normatively, Law No. 32 of 2009 on the Protection and Management of the Environment (“Law 32/2009”) has actually established corporate criminal liability. If a criminal offense is committed by, for, or on behalf of a business entity, sanctions may be imposed on the business entity and/or the person who issued the order or the “ ” of the activity. This law also provides for additional criminal penalties or administrative measures such as forfeiture of profits, closure of business premises, the obligation to remedy the consequences of the criminal act, the obligation to perform what was neglected, and placing the company under receivership. In terms of legislative content, these provisions appear progressive as they go beyond mere imprisonment and fines.

However, upon further analysis, the configuration of environmental criminal sanctions against corporations still leaves serious issues unresolved. First, the orientation of criminal punishment remains predominantly retributive and has not placed ecological restoration as the primary focus. Second, the relationship between criminal penalties and restorative measures has not been established in an integrated manner.

Literature examining corporate criminal liability indicates that these weaknesses are not merely theoretical issues. Rather, as emphasized in a journal article by Eddy Rifai, in practice, law enforcement officials are often reluctant to prosecute corporations because the available sanctions are perceived as merely fines and do not carry the same deterrent effect as imprisonment for individuals. Furthermore, proving a corporation’s “guilt” is far more complex due to ongoing debates over how to establish criminal intent and liability for a corporation. A similar point is raised by Lu Sudirman and Feronica, who note that although corporations

have long been recognized as criminal subjects, the practice of proving their guilt in Indonesia remains relatively difficult. At a minimum, to prove an environmental crime committed by a corporation under Law No. 32 of 2009, the following must be established:

1. A business entity can only be prosecuted if the environmental crime was committed by, for, and on behalf of the business entity.
2. Criminal sanctions imposed on a business entity are represented by authorized officers who act on its behalf both in and out of court in accordance with applicable laws and regulations.

Thus, it must be proven that the environmental crime was committed by, for, and on behalf of the business entity, whereas the criminal act carried out by the business entity is not entirely the will and fault of the business entity itself but rather the will and fault of the person managing the business entity with malicious intent.

This situation demonstrates that environmental criminal liability for corporations remains trapped in an unfavorable situation. On one hand, the law seeks to maintain its coercive power through severe criminal penalties. On the other hand, when dealing with complex corporate crimes, the available sanctions are not always effective in swiftly and tangibly restoring ecological environmental damage. Under such circumstances, criminal proceedings often result in lengthy, costly trials that do not automatically lead to concrete restoration of environmental damage.

Furthermore, given these conditions, the concept of DPA becomes a relevant and compelling idea to explore. Citing the definition of DPA by Dr. Febby Mutiara Nelson, S.H., M.H., it is a negotiation conducted by the prosecutor and the defendant—or the defendant’s lawyer—where the defendant is a corporation, aimed at diverting prosecution from the judicial process through administrative or civil procedures. DPA is viewed as an innovation that provides a faster, more effective, and proportionate alternative, while offering legal certainty in prosecuting corporations for economic crimes, corruption, and environmental destruction.

Nevertheless, the implementation of the DPA is not without criticism. In a study of corporate law, John C. Coffee, Jr. asserts that the criminalization of corporations ultimately only “punishes the innocent,” such as shareholders and other stakeholders, and that the law enforcement system is actually too weak due to the existence of Deferred Prosecution Agreements (DPAs), Non-Prosecution Agreements (NPAs), and sentence reductions for failed corporate compliance programs. A system that grants excessive leniency through DPAs, NPAs, and sentence reductions for corporate compliance programs ultimately reduces criminal sanctions to mere transactions rather than law enforcement that serves as a deterrent against recurrence. In such a situation, criminal fines are easily treated as business costs, corporate reputations are better protected, and the criminal process loses its integrity in providing a deterrent effect. This perspective is important because without strict design, DPAs risk diminishing the weight of the criminal threat against environmental destruction. Consequently, for corporations, there is a shift from a criminal system that imposes a threat to a transactional criminal system.

Therefore, the central issue of this paper is not merely whether DPAs are good or bad, but how to properly position them within the architecture of Indonesia’s environmental criminal law. With the enactment of the 2023 Criminal Code, the question then becomes: can the DPA be used as a model for reconfiguring sanctions so that environmental criminal law is more effective in restoring ecological damage and improving corporate governance, without simultaneously abandoning the principle of criminal liability?

2. Research Method

This paper constitutes a normative legal study. Primary legal sources include Law No. 32 of 2009 and the 2023 Criminal Code. Secondary legal sources consist of legal texts, journal articles, and scholarly writings

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relevant to corporate criminal liability, restorative justice, and the DPA.

The approaches employed are the statutory approach, the conceptual approach, and, to a limited extent, the comparative approach. The statutory approach is used to analyze the structure of sanctions in Law No. 32 of 2009 and the 2023 Criminal Code. The conceptual approach is used to examine the theory of corporate criminal liability, restorative justice, and the meaning of DPA in modern criminal law. Meanwhile, the comparative approach is utilized to compare the application of DPA as it has developed within the fields of corporate law and anti-corruption law.

Data is analyzed qualitatively and through descriptive-analytical methods. Using this approach, legal materials are categorized, compared, and interpreted to address the two research questions outlined above. Conclusions are drawn deductively—from general norms and established doctrines toward more specific formulations regarding the configuration of sanctions and the potential application of DPA in corporate environmental crimes.

3. Results and Discussion

Configuration of Sanctions for Corporate Environmental Crimes Under Law No. 32 of 2009 and the 2023 Criminal Code

Provisions on environmental protection and management have established a sufficiently clear basis for the criminal liability of corporations as legal entities. The inclusion of business entities as perpetrators, coupled with the possibility of imposing sanctions on those who issue orders or lead the activities, indicates that Indonesian environmental law is no longer solely focused on individual perpetrators. Furthermore, the additional provisions in Article 119 of Law No. 32 of 2009 have opened the door to additional measures or obligations directly aimed at remediation, such as forfeiture of profits, the closure of all or part of a business premises, remediation, rectification of omissions, and placing the company under receivership.

The concept of environmental protection and management can be understood in line with the spirit of the 2023 Criminal Code, which adopts a *dual-track system*. This means that criminal liability () for corporations encompasses not only principal penalties but also additional penalties and measures, as stated by the Deputy Attorney General for General Criminal Cases (Jampidum), Prof. Asep Nana Mulyana, at the National Seminar on Assessing the Application of DPA in Corporate Corruption Cases: "Effective Solutions for the Recovery of State Losses or Forms of Erosion of Criminal Liability," Master of Law (Jakarta Campus), Gadjah Mada University, on February 21, 2026. However, a more in-depth analysis reveals that these remedial measures have not been positioned as the core of the criminal sanction design. In practice and within the legal framework, imprisonment and fines continue to represent the core of criminal penalties, while restitution measures appear more as an alternative, supplementary measure due to the use of the word "may" in Article 119 of Law No. 32 of 2009. Yet, in environmental crimes, the damage that must be restored is precisely the core of the issue. This differs from many colonial-era criminal offenses, where a guilty verdict could be considered the final form of restoration of the legally protected interests.

Furthermore, the configuration of sanctions for environmental crimes lacks consistency regarding the imposition of criminal penalties and who is held criminally liable—whether corporate officers or the corporation itself as the primary perpetrator, or both combined to face criminal penalties. This inconsistency in how environmental criminal sanctions are viewed creates legal uncertainty and complicates the prosecutor's ability to construct appropriate charges and evidence. Furthermore, according to Eddy Rifai, this issue directly impacts courtroom practice. Prosecutors tend to be more comfortable charging individuals rather than corporations because criminal penalties against corporations are considered not sufficiently "severe" and proving their guilt is extremely difficult. As a result, corporations that benefit from criminal acts

often remain behind the scenes, while specific individuals acting as the driving force of the business entity are prosecuted as the primary perpetrators in court. In the realm of environmental crimes, this is dangerous because it can sever the link between corporate policy, corporate work culture, and the environmental damage that occurs on the ground.

Nevertheless, the 2023 Criminal Code has provided a clearer foundation for reform. The Ministry of Law states that Article 45 of the Criminal Code reaffirms that corporations are subjects of criminal liability, and their scope of liability encompasses actions taken for or on behalf of the corporation, including when there is effective control by directors, those issuing orders, or beneficial owners. Here, it is evident that the reform of criminal law seeks to close long-standing loopholes that have made it difficult to attribute liability to corporations.

The issue is that clarity in attribution does not automatically resolve the problem of environmental restoration. Sanctions that rely too heavily on fines often fail to deter large corporations, as such costs can be viewed as part of business operations. Coffee Jr. also emphasizes that corporate fines often do not significantly impact a company's financial structure and can be treated as *a cost of doing business*. In environmental cases, this weakness becomes even more severe because what is needed is not just payment, but concrete restoration actions and measurable monitoring.

Thus, the current configuration of sanctions still faces three concurrent issues. First, a design issue, as sanctions have not been positioned as the core of the criminal justice system's design. Second, an evidentiary issue, as it must be proven that the environmental crime was committed by, for, and on behalf of the business entity, distinct from criminal acts entirely driven by the will and fault of the individuals managing the entity with malicious intent. Finally, there is a disconnect between corporate policy concepts, corporate work culture, and efforts toward swift and concrete environmental restoration.

The Appropriate DPA Model to Reconfigure Corporate Environmental Criminal Sanctions Without Compromising the Principle of Criminal Liability

In existing literature, the application of DPA in Indonesia is viewed as a potential alternative that can bridge the gap between the need for law enforcement and the interest in restoration. In his journal, Ahmad Iqbal views DPA as a possibility for the suspension or postponement of prosecution under certain conditions that the corporation must meet to ensure the resolution of the case remains effective and beneficial. Furthermore, according to Januarsyah, Gunakaya, and Mulyana in their journal, DPA can be positioned as a restorative approach that does not simply eliminate the criminal nature of the offense but rather changes how prosecution addresses corporate crimes.

DPA is considered capable of enhancing the effectiveness and efficiency of environmental criminal law enforcement, as its focus is not only on proving guilt but also on restoration orders, compliance reform, and the corporation's tangible accountability to the affected community. Theoretically, this aligns with the direction of the 2023 Criminal Code reform, which prioritizes corrective, restorative, and rehabilitative justice. While corrective justice focuses on the perpetrator, restorative justice on the victim, and rehabilitative justice on more comprehensive restoration, in environmental cases, all three can be reconciled. Corporations, as perpetrators, must be corrected through governance reforms and internal oversight; the environment, as the harmed object, must be restored; and the relationship between corporations, the state, and the surrounding community must be repaired.

To ensure that the DPA does not undermine criminal liability, there are at least five key requirements. First, the corporation must formally acknowledge the existence of governance failures related to the corporate criminal offense. Second, there must be a measurable, monitorable, and verifiable environmental restoration

obligation by independent experts. Third, affected communities must receive concrete restitution, whether through compensation, health rehabilitation, or livelihood recovery support. Fourth, all illicitly obtained profits must be returned. Fifth, the corporation is required to implement compliance reforms, environmental audits, and internal oversight restructuring.

With this framework, it becomes clear that a DPA is not synonymous with a reduction in penalties. In many cases, a DPA can be a substantively harsher alternative to a standard fine, as the corporation is compelled to pay, rectify, submit to oversight, and open its internal structures for reform. In other words, the restructuring offered by a DPA is not a reduction of criminal liability, but rather a shift in the focus of sanctions from formal punishment alone toward a combination of criminal penalties, ecological restoration, and corporate reform. Especially in cases of environmental crimes, the measure of justice does not end with who is punished, but must extend to the questions: has the environment been restored, has the community been rehabilitated, and has corporate governance been reformed?

4. Conclusion

Based on the discussion of the first research question, it can be concluded that the configuration of sanctions for corporate environmental crimes under Law No. 32 of 2009 and Law No. 1 of 2023 on the Criminal Code has provided a normative basis for corporate criminal liability, but has not yet fully established an integrated penal system that balances punishment and restoration. Law No. 32 of 2009 has indeed opened the door to supplementary penalties and corrective measures, such as remediation of the consequences of the criminal act, forfeiture of profits, and placing the company under receivership. However, these measures are still positioned as supplementary elements, not as the central focus of criminal sanctions. Consequently, the current system still reflects the dominance of a retributive paradigm and has not optimally prioritized ecological restoration as the primary objective.

Furthermore, the current configuration of sanctions also leaves unresolved issues regarding the burden of proof and the consistency of law enforcement. Corporate liability in environmental cases is not easily proven, as it must be demonstrated that the criminal act was committed by, for, or on behalf of the business entity, while the actual actions on the ground are carried out by individuals working within the corporate structure. In practice, this situation leads law enforcement officials to more frequently target individuals rather than corporations as the primary beneficiaries of sanctions. Although the 2023 Criminal Code has strengthened the recognition of corporations as subjects of criminal offenses and clarified the scope of criminal liability attribution, these reforms have not, by themselves, addressed the need for swift, concrete, and measurable environmental restoration.

Based on the discussion of the second research question, it can be concluded that a Deferred Prosecution Agreement (DPA) can be considered as a model for reconfiguring criminal sanctions for environmental offenses against corporations without abandoning the principle of criminal liability. This is possible because a DPA, if strictly designed, does not eliminate the criminal nature of the corporation's actions but shifts the focus of the legal response from mere formal punishment toward ecological restoration, the return of illicitly obtained profits, and corporate governance reform. In the context of environmental crimes, justice is not merely measured by the presence or absence of a guilty verdict, but also by the success in restoring environmental damage, rehabilitating affected communities, and preventing recurrence through internal corporate reforms.

Therefore, an appropriate DPA model must include at least five key requirements. First, the corporation must formally acknowledge the existence of governance failures related to the corporate crime. Second, there must be an environmental restoration obligation that can be measured, monitored, and verified by

independent experts. Third, affected communities must receive concrete restitution, whether through compensation, health rehabilitation, or livelihood recovery support. Fourth, all profits obtained unlawfully must be returned. Fifth, the corporation is required to implement compliance reforms, conduct environmental audits (), and restructure its internal oversight. With such a design, the DPA cannot be viewed as a form of compromise that weakens criminal penalties, but rather as a legal instrument that establishes corporate accountability in a more substantive form and one that is better aligned with the characteristics of environmental crimes.

The application of DPAs in environmental cases must be carried out with a high degree of caution. Ideally, DPAs should only be applied to cases where tangible and measurable environmental restoration is still possible, not to cases involving severe, repeated violations, or those committed with a very high degree of intent. In other words, the DPA must not become a gateway to corporate impunity, but rather a means to enforce more concrete accountability.

Furthermore, law enforcement officials also need to strengthen the evidence of corporate criminal liability in a balanced and consistent manner, particularly in tracing the relationship between internal policies, command/assignment structures, economic benefits, and the resulting ecological environmental impacts. Without such strengthening, the revision of norms in the 2023 Criminal Code as well as the potential application of DPA will be difficult to effectively realize.

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