

Prospects for Management of Four Islands Post-Conflict in the Aceh- North Sumatra Region

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Abstract

The resolution of the dispute over four islands—Mangkir Gadang Island, Mangkir Ketek Island, Lipan Island, and Panjang Island—between Aceh Province and North Sumatra Province marks a new chapter in post-conflict maritime governance in Indonesia. This study aims to analyze the prospects for the management of these four islands following the territorial boundary agreement reached on June 17, 2025, covering geopolitical implications, strategic potential, security stability, and opportunities for marine environmental protection. This study employs a qualitative approach using descriptive analysis through document review, spatial data interpretation based on Google Earth, and a policy review of official documents from the Ministry of Home Affairs (KEMENDAGRI), Presidential Decrees, and relevant academic literature. The results of this study identify four key post-conflict management prospects, namely: (1) collaborative management of fishery resources between the two provinces; (2) the development of marine ecotourism based on the conservation of marine biodiversity; (3) enhancing local security stability through inter-regional dialogue forums; and (4) strengthening inter-regional cooperation in the protection of coastal ecosystems and integrated marine zoning. This study contributes to the development of a post-conflict small island governance model that can be replicated to resolve similar administrative boundary disputes in Indonesia, while also strengthening a framework for sustainable, cross-provincial collaborative maritime area management.

Keywords: Territorial Conflict, Geopolitics, Maritime Management, Aceh, Sumatera Utara

1. Introduction

As an archipelagic nation, Indonesia has a vast number of islands approximately 17,508, consisting of 10,000 small islands (Sofia and Baharuddin, 2019). These small islands hold high strategic value, whether in terms of territorial sovereignty, national defense, natural resource management, or maritime economic development (Herman Edyanto, 2003). However, the administrative complexity of Indonesia's archipelago often leads to protracted boundary disputes between provinces; according to a report by the Ministry of Home Affairs (KEMENDAGRI), there are approximately 43 islands involved in territorial boundary disputes, both between districts within a single province and across provincial borders (KEMENDAGRI, 2025).

One of the most prominent territorial disputes is the dispute over four islands between Aceh Province and North Sumatra Province, namely Mangkir Gadang Island, Mangkir Ketek Island, Lipan Island, and Panjang Island. These four islands are located in

the waters off the western coast of Sumatra and are geographically closer to the mainland of Central Tapanuli Regency, North Sumatra. However, they have long been claimed and de facto administered by Aceh Province, as evidenced by various infrastructure projects built by the Aceh government since 2007 (KEMENDAGRI, 2025). This dispute reignited in 2022 after a period of relative calm, eventually reaching a resolution on June 17, 2025, through a decision by President Prabowo Subianto, which officially designated the four islands as part of the territory of Aceh Province (Muhammad Yuan Fauzil and Agussalim Burhanuddin, 2023).

The Aceh-North Sumatra maritime boundary agreement, signed on June 17, 2025, was a historic event that ushered in a new chapter in the management and administrative status of the four islands. This agreement ends a 17-year-long island dispute and provides legal certainty for both provinces in pursuing their national interests in the

maritime sector. This maritime boundary agreement has a number of important implications for both provinces. Agreements or treaties on maritime boundaries between provinces are crucial in determining territorial sovereignty, rights to natural resources, and strategic interests.

The current research gap lies in the scarcity of scientific studies addressing the prospects for the management of small islands in post-conflict regions, particularly in terms of collaborative maritime governance, the utilization of strategic potential, and sustainable development (Wijoyo et al., 2024). Most previous research has focused on legal aspects and the chronology of disputes, while the aspects of post-conflict resolution management have yet to be comprehensively examined. This study aims to fill this gap by analyzing the prospects for the management of the four islands following the agreement, covering geopolitical implications, strategic potential, security stability, and marine environmental protection as a scientific contribution to the fields of political geography and maritime governance.

The relevance of this study is all the more significant given the unique characteristics of small islands, which have vulnerable ecosystems yet are rich in resource potential; proper post-conflict management can promote the sustainable development of ecotourism, marine conservation, and the small-scale fisheries economy (Amarullah et al., 2023). Small, unconnected islands such as these four actually hold greater strategic value because they are free from social conflicts over settlements and offer broader scope for development (Sofia and Baharuddin, 2019). This study aims to: (1) identify an overview of the data on the existence of these four islands; (2) analyze the implications of the Aceh–North Sumatra maritime boundary agreement.

2. Materials And Methods

This study uses a qualitative approach that aims to explain the phenomenon in depth by collecting various data to be processed into generalizations. Qualitative research is research that produces descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words from people and observable behavior. (Margono, 2005). Qualitative research aims to understand the phenomenon in depth and comprehensively, and describe the phenomenon naturally. In this case, the data used is about the conflict between Aceh province and Sumatera Utara province in competing for four islands, namely Mangkir Gadang Island, Mangkir Ketek Island, Lipan Island, and Panjang Island. The sources obtained will be taken more from online media considering that the framework of the issues discussed is still very new and there have not been many empirical studies found after the agreement on the dispute over the four islands of Aceh-Sumatera Utara was implemented.

The data obtained will be analyzed descriptively regarding the implications of strategic potential, defense, and regional stability after the agreement is approved. This analysis method was chosen because descriptive research is research that attempts to describe a current symptom, event, or incident to analyze future possibilities. This method can be presented in the image below:

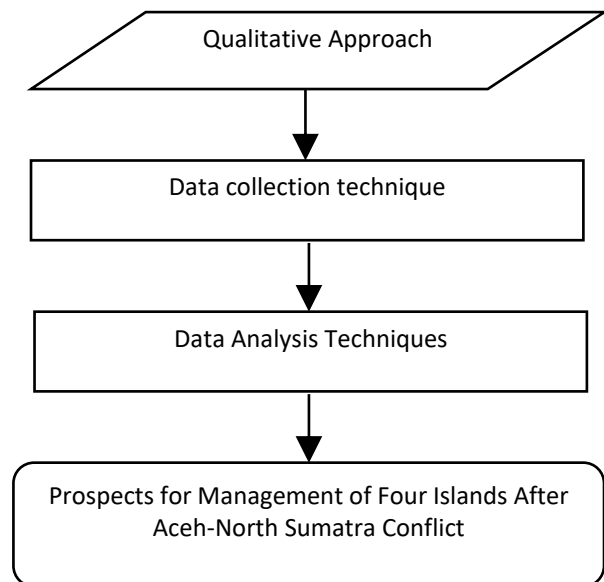


Fig 1. Research methods

3. Results And Discussion

3.1 Overview of the Data on the Existence of Four Islands

1. Mangkir/Gadang Island

Mangkir Gadang/ Besar Island has an area of ± 8.16 Ha with a distance of 1.19 KM from the mainland, namely Central Tapanuli Regency, Sumatera Utara. Mangkir Gadang/ Besar Island has characteristics, namely Uninhabited, No visible activity on the island, There is a boundary monument installed by the Aceh provincial government. The following is a picture of Mangkir Gadang/ Besar Island as follows:



Fig. 2 Mangkir Gadang Island and the regional boundary monument

2. Mangkir Ketek/ Small Island

Mangkir Ketek/Small Island has an area of ± 6.15 Ha with a distance of 0.7 miles or 1.2 km from the mainland, namely Central Tapanuli Regency. This island has the following characteristics: Uninhabited, No visible activity on the island, A monument was found built by the Aceh government in 2018 using the 2018 Fiscal Year Provincial Budget. On the monument are written the coordinates and location of the island as part of the Kampung Gosong Telaga Selatan area, North Singkil District, Aceh Singkil Regency. The following is a picture of Mangkir Ketek/Small Island as follows:



Fig. 3 Mangkir Kete/Kecil Island and the Aceh Government Monument

3. Lipan Island

Lipan Island has an area of ± 0.38 Ha with a distance of 0.9 miles or 1.5 km from the mainland of Central Tapanuli Regency, Sumatera Utara. This island is a sandy land and is uninhabited. From the results of monitoring by the Ministry of Home Affairs team, Lipan Island found data and facts that Lipan Island is a sandy plain and at the highest tide at 9.25 WIB the island is in a submerged condition so that according to the provisions of UNCLOS 1982 and Law Number 23 of 2014 concerning Regional Government (Established September 30, 2014) it is necessary to re-analyze and revise the status of the island. The following is a picture of Lipan Island as follows:



Fig.4 Lipan Island

4. Panjang Island

Panjang Island has an area of ± 47.8 Ha with a distance of 1.47 miles or 2.4 km from the main plains of Central Tapanuli Regency, Sumatera Utara. This island has the following characteristics: Uninhabited, Management has been carried out by the Aceh provincial government, as seen from the presence of a pier building built in 2015, a welcome monument built in 2007, a boundary monument (as a replacement for the PBU 007 boundary monument) built in 2012, and a prayer room built in 2012 by the Aceh government and the Aceh Singkil district government and a grave was found which according to the information of the gardener is the tomb of Aulia. There are gardener activities, namely residents of Central Tapanuli whose garden land is rented from Acehnese descendants of Tengku Daud. There is documentation from the agrarian inspection which states land management on Panjang and Lipan islands located in Singkil sub-district, Aceh Singkil district, which was published by the head of the

agrarian inspection of the Aceh Special Region in 1965. The following is a picture of Panjang Island, namely as follows:



Fig. 5 The pier was built in 2015



Fig.6 Welcome monument built in 2007



Fig. 7 Aulia's gardener & grave cultivator



Fig. 8 Halfway House & Prayer Room

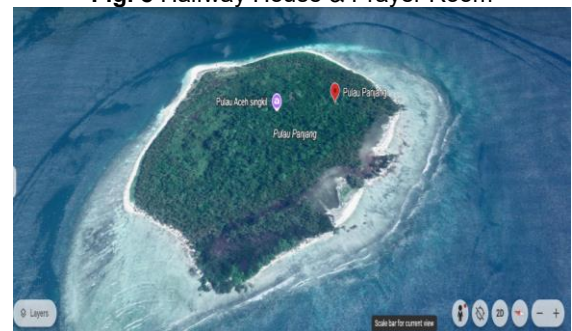




Fig. 9 Panjang island

Based on a search via Google Earth, these four islands are located close to the province of Sumatera Utara, precisely the district of Central Tapanuli. This can be seen in the image below:



Fig. 10 Location Point of four Islands

3.2 Implications of the Aceh-Sumatera Utara Maritime Boundary Agreement

The dispute between Aceh and Sumatera Utara provinces over the dispute over four islands, namely Mangkir Gadang Island, Mangkir Ketek Island, Lipan Island, and Panjang Island, has reached a mutual agreement. President Prabowo Subianto has determined that the four islands are officially part of the Aceh province. The decision was conveyed by President Prabowo while leading a meeting via video conference regarding the signing of a joint agreement between the two governors on Tuesday, June 17, 2025 (President.RI, 2025).

International Maritime Law is the main basis for the agreement on the dispute over the four islands of Aceh-Sumut by referring to the principles of UNCLOS 1982. These principles serve as guidelines in determining the legal boundaries of the sea area between the two regions. The negotiation and diplomacy process involved in the agreement on the dispute over the four islands of Aceh-Sumut shows efforts to resolve territorial conflicts peacefully. This reflects the good intentions of both parties to consider each other's interests. The division of sea areas also has an impact on the management of natural

resources in the area such as marine products, fishery potential, and mining resources (Muhammad Yuan Fauzil & Agussalim Burhanuddin, 2023).

In addition, the ongoing and protracted dispute over the four islands of Aceh and Sumatera Utara can have multidimensional impacts such as (Unida, 2025).

- Obstacles to development and public services where the unclear administrative status directly hampers budget allocation, development planning, and the provision of optimal basic services for communities in disputed areas. Investors also tend to postpone their investment decisions due to legal uncertainty.
- Potential for social disharmony where local communities in disputed areas can be trapped in an administrative identity dilemma that has the potential to trigger social tension and erosion of trust in government authority.
- Threats to territorial integrity where on a macro scale every unresolved boundary dispute has the potential to reduce national cohesion and can be exploited by irresponsible parties..

In a regional and global perspective, the agreement on ownership of four islands between the Provinces of Aceh and Sumatera Utara Provinces has broad implications. This can affect the geopolitical dynamics in the Malacca Strait region and provide an important example in resolving territorial conflicts throughout Indonesia. The agreement on ownership of four islands between the two provinces reflects the importance of peaceful negotiations, openness to mutually beneficial solutions, and respect for national and international law in dealing with territorial claims. This agreement is also a model for other regions in resolving territorial disputes. Based on this, the following are the implications of the agreement on ownership of the four islands of Aceh-Sumatera Utara, namely:

- Strategic potential on four islands (Mangkir Gadang/Big Island, Mangkir Ketek/Small Island, Lipan Island, and Panjang Island)

The strategic potential of the four islands is as follows:

- Geographical Potential, Mangkir Gadang Island, Mangkir Ketek Island, Lipan Island, and Panjang Island are four islands that are being fought over by the provinces of Aceh and Sumatera Utara. Geographically, these islands are located among the most active waters in the regional shipping lane on the west coast of Sumatra where this route is not only important for local fishermen but also the axis of commercial shipping and strategic maritime movements..
- Natural Resource Potential, In terms of natural resources, the waters around the island have quite high potential for capture fisheries. The fishermen community in the Aceh Singkil to Sibolga region have long depended on the area for their livelihood and made it part of the people's fisheries economy. The four-island area is also identified as part of a marine biodiversity corridor that is still relatively sustainable so that it can become a long-term economic value.

- c. Potential for Ecotourism and Marine Conservation, On these four islands there are no residents who live permanently, these islands are stopover and transit areas especially for fishermen but these islands are present in the daily lives of coastal communities as part of the living area, exploration space, and symbolic field. These four islands are still very natural and almost untouched so they are suitable for use as ecotourism or marine conservation destinations that have great potential
 - d. d. Tourism Potential, these four islands are geographically similar, between the borders of Bali and Lombok, West Nusa Tenggara, when viewed from the outside, so they have quite large tourism potential.
2. Improving Security Stability and Bilateral Relations

After the peace agreement regarding the Aceh-Sumatera Utara four-island conflict was reached, there were a number of indications that security stability and bilateral relations had increased, as seen from several aspects, namely: a.) the local security aspect is marked by a decrease in the risk of clashes between fishermen and spontaneous demonstrations; b.) the aspect of inter-governmental dialogue is marked by the formation of provincial dialogue through technical team facilities and the Ministry of Home Affairs; c.) the aspect of public trust increased after the final agreement from the president and administrative confirmation; d.) the aspect of economic and resource cooperation is marked by the opening of opportunities for joint management of oil and gas and fisheries; e.) regional political stability is marked by strengthening the sense of justice and cohesion between provinces so as to calm the situation.

Overall, after looking at the dialogue mechanism, technical studies, the role of political figures, and the final decision of the president, local security stability has increased and there is a strong foundation for a more constructive bilateral relationship between Aceh and Sumatera Utara. This can be an example of how regional conflicts can be resolved through legal mechanisms, dialogue, and ultimately result in long-term cooperation and in line with the principles of modern regional governance.

3. Improving Marine Environmental Protection

The case of the four islands dispute is not just a determinant of ownership but a vital case study for improving administrative boundary governance in Indonesia. This confirms that the resolution of territorial disputes cannot be based on only one data or single interpretation but requires comprehensive historical and geospatial data reconciliation in order to integrate old peta, legal documents, and modern geospatial data accurately and transparently. In addition, a firm and independent central arbitration or mediation mechanism is needed to ensure impartial decisions based on a strong legal basis. Consideration of the socio-cultural aspects of local communities is also important because it ensures that administrative decisions do not ignore the historical and social ties of the community to their territory.

The potential for peaceful and collaborative conflict resolution can encourage marine

environmental protection by considering several things, namely strengthening marine area governance, opportunities for collaboration between provinces, for example marine habitat area protection programs, post-conflict ecological awareness. However, if the conflict is not handled peacefully and collaboratively, the exploitation of marine resources can become increasingly wild and uncontrolled because each party is trying to "strengthen their claims". In addition, coastal communities and fishermen can be trapped in unhealthy competition that damages marine habitats and the absence of cross-provincial coordination causes overfishing which results in the loss of biodiversity.

4. Conclusion

This study examines the prospects for the management of four islands Mangkir Gadang Island, Mangkir Ketek Island, Lipan Island, and Panjang Island following the conclusion of a territorial boundary agreement between Aceh Province and North Sumatra Province on June 17, 2025. Based on the results of the analysis, there are three main findings that constitute this study's contribution to maritime governance and the management of small islands in Indonesia's administrative border regions.

First, dispute resolution through a mechanism of dialogue between local governments facilitated by the central government has proven effective in producing agreements that are legitimate and acceptable to both parties. This resolution model has made a tangible contribution by enhancing local security stability, as evidenced by reduced social tensions between fishermen from the two provinces, the establishment of an inter-regional dialogue forum, and the emergence of opportunities for economic cooperation and collaborative natural resource management.

Second, the four islands hold significant strategic potential for sustainable post-conflict development, including potential for capture fisheries, marine ecotourism, marine biodiversity conservation, and a strategic geographic location along the Malacca Strait shipping route. Managing this potential requires an integrated approach that balances the ecological, economic, and sociocultural interests of coastal communities in both provinces.

Third, this study contributes to the development of a replicable post-conflict small-island governance model for resolving similar territorial boundary disputes in Indonesia, particularly through transparent, evidence-based interregional integration territorial integration as a whole.

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