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Logging in Wawoi Guavi

Most of Papua New Guinea's five million depend on the environment for their daily subsistence. For most of these, home is the country's rainforests.

The logging industry has already acquired 70 percent of available forest resources and Malaysian logging firm, Rimbunan Hijau is at the forefront of attempts to gain access to what remains.

Rimbunan Hijau in PNG

Rimbunan Hijau is the dominant player in the forest industry in Papua New Guinea and it has significant investments in other sectors of the economy.

Rimbunan Hijau has interests in more than 60 interlinked companies that are registered in Papua New Guinea, ranging from logging to printing, travel, wholesale and retail sales, shipping, property development and a daily newspaper, The National.

Most large-scale logging operations in Papua New Guinea, including those operated by Rimbunan Hijau, are unlawful as they are in fundamental breach of a number of basic legal requirements.

Most do not have the informed consent of the local resource owners (most of whom have never even been correctly identified)¹, they have not been initiated and allocated according to the requirements of the Forestry Act, they are being operated in almost complete defiance of environmental laws and regulations and they are not sustainable, which is a specific requirement of both the PNG Constitution and the Forestry Act.²

In 2002 an independent review ordered by the government involved among other concessions, logging projects operated by Rimbunan Hijau; Wawoi Guavi, Vailala Blocks 2 and 3 and Passismanua.

The review found that the extensions to all three projects were unlawful as they breached legal requirements and had not followed due process. The review reached the *'unavoidable conclusion that there have been serious departures and breaches from due process and there are serious anomalies in the timber permits and agreements'*.³

The review also found that the original timber permits for Vailala Blocks 2 and 3 and Wawoi Guavi were unlawful and that the timber rights had never been properly acquired from the landowners.⁴

The social impacts of logging

A number of reports⁵ have documented the negative social impacts of the logging industry in Papua New Guinea. These negative impacts include:

- Loss or damage to food sources from within the forests and gardens, loss of water resources and reef systems.
- Loss of clean water supplies due to soil erosion, poor roading and waste disposal

¹ This problem was highlighted in the government's 2001 'Audit of Forestry Projects currently in process'. Of 32 projects reviewed it was found that in every case sufficient steps had not been taken to identify landowners and inform them of their rights prior to the signing of logging agreements, Independent Review Team (2001)

² These problems have been noted in a number of reports including Independent Review Team (2001 and 2003); Kocher-Schmidt (1999 and 2000), Melick (2003), Erskine (1999a and 1999b), Pwesei (2000), Greenpeace (2002)

³ Review of Disputed Allocations (2003). Covering letter to the Chief Secretary dated 25th March 2003

⁴ Review of Disputed Allocations (2003b,c & d)

⁵ EMW (1995), World Rainforest Movement and Forest Monitor (1998), Kocher-Schmidt (1999 and 2000), Erskine (1999a and 1999b), Pwesei (2000), SBS (2001), Greenpeace (2003), Melick (2003).

- Poorer health such as nutrition problems, water pollution, increased malaria, introduction of sexual diseases, intoxication, industrial injuries and loss of traditional medicines.
- Loss of local economic resources such as forest products that are traditionally traded including foods, resins, timber for construction and canoes, building materials, medicines.
- Undermining of social systems, social conflict, alcohol, prostitution, land disputes, displacement of families from forest areas and marginalisation of women.
- Increased gender burdens as women have to work longer and harder to look after their families
- And increased conflict with logging companies, forestry officials and police and between different local factions or community groups.

The environmental impacts of logging

Environmental studies⁶ indicate that logging by Rimbunan Hijau in Papua New Guinea is among the most environmentally destructive of any selective logging operations studied anywhere on the planet. Losses to the residual stand have been recorded at more than 100 trees per hectare. What is supposed to be selective logging is effectively clear felling.

In Papua New Guinea, buffer zones are not respected, logging tracks are bulldozed through streams, poor road construction wastes logs and pollutes water courses, oil and other waste pollution is endemic, standing water attracts mosquitos and increases the incidence of malaria, and undersized logs are constantly felled.⁷

Wawoi Guavi

In an unpublished report commissioned by Greenpeace, scientist Dr David Melick has studied the environmental impacts of logging by Rimbunan Hijau in its Wawoi Guavi timber concession in Western Province.

The research uncovered an extensive catalogue of breaches of PNG's Logging Code of Practice. The report identified 261 separate breaches of 18 key logging standards.

These breaches were seen to have serious environmental impacts, including injury to waterways and watersheds, severe erosion and serious pollution to soil and waterways from oil and toxic chemicals.

The study also found frequent damage to cultural sites from logging operations and the felling and removal of undersized trees.

Although Greenpeace and David Melick were in the area at the invitation of landowners, Rimbunan Hijau used the Southern Command Police Task force to try and intimidate them and to restrict access into the forest. RH also placed locked chains and logs across roads to inhibit movement in the area.

Testimonies:

The area contains an old village where her father is from, the bkari nut trees which are important to the people, and a sacred creek where an old woman is believed to live. RH surveyed the road but Kuwene met them and told them "You are not coming through here, there's some trees my father planted, you cannot build a road through here." She managed to protect the area and it is now a reserve. She tells the young people "This is your future".



Kuwene Nakeye, landowner from the Haya clan, Kosuo tribe, in a reserve she protected from logging.

⁶ Kocher-Schmidt (1999 and 2000), Erskine (1999a and 1999b), Pwesei (2000), Melick (2003)

⁷ Ibid

Sakas Aonoma's grandparents used the local Bula creek as medicine. "They would use this creek when they were sick, it would make them better. This creek has faded away. It cannot heal people because they came and disturbed the beliefs we have. It will not be the same as before. There's no fish since the company came. Before my mother and father used to do this, now there is nothing. Our medicine is not like before."

Bula creek has had a bridge put across it, and there are now silting problems and erosion which is upsetting Sakas. Sakas and his family are opposed to logging and are trying to prevent further roads from passing through their land. "By looking at that place I feel very sad and upset and frustrated about my land being destroyed".



Sakas Aonoma from Bula Creek, Middle Fly District, Western Province, PNG. Landowner Sakas Aonoma is dressed in the traditional warrior gear, used when going out fighting.

"I used to work for the company as a chainsaw operator for two years and six months. I could see that I couldn't stay with the company and talk for my people rights. I had to resign from the company and talk for my peoples rights-making reports- bringing scientists and ecologists to study the damage if I don't do this, it's going to be bad future for my family."



Emename Reserve, Elie, Middle Fly, Western Province, PNG. Alex Ubiye (24yrs) seen applying the clay used as face paint.

Life or lifestyle?

The international trade in tropical timber only exists because of the demand from the market place. The trade in illegal timber and the human and environmental suffering that it causes are the direct result of a market where the buyers of timber and timber products do not discriminate between timbers from different sources.

Of 1.85 million cubic metres of declared log exports from Papua New Guinea in 2002, 62 percent went to China and Hong Kong and 23 percent to Japan.

Sawn timber is the fastest-growing timber export from Papua New Guinea. Volumes have risen dramatically from 19,000 cubic metres in 1999 to over 46,000 in 2002. This reflects the commissioning of Rimbunan Hijau's major sawmill at Kamusie in Western Province.

Rimbunan Hijau's major markets for sawn timber from Papua New Guinea are in Australia and New Zealand/Aotearoa.

In Australia, RH controls a subsidiary named TLB Timber that operates out of Brisbane. This company sells illegal and destructively logged timber to many small companies and individuals in Australia. This timber is then turned into mouldings and other building components.

According to figures from the Forest Authority in PNG, in 2002 Australia imported 16,653 cubic metres of rough sawn timber from Papua New Guinea.

This timber is tainted with illegality, human rights abuses, environmental destruction, and damaging social impacts.

Timber harvested by Rimbunan Hijau is traded around the world — as logs, sawn timber, veneers and plywood and as finished products like furniture and ornamental blinds.

Traded and re-traded through Asian, American and European ports, the illegal timber and timber products that come from Rimbunan Hijau's forest operations have been traced into the stores of some of the world's most affluent nations.

After decades of conferences and international commitments including the Convention on Biological Diversity, Forest Law Enforcement and Governance processes, International Tropical Timber Agreement and the United Nations Forum on Forests, now is the time for action.

Rimbunan Hijau is a transnational corporation that represents everything that is wrong with the way in which forest resources are being managed. Rimbunan Hijau presents the perfect test against which to judge the resolve of the international community to deal effectively with the problems of forest crime and the trade in illegal timber.

Greenpeace calls on the international community to take up the challenge and match the global rhetoric with effective action.