
Papua New Guinea: moratorium on new logging announced

The Papua New Guinea (PNG) Prime Minister Mekere Morauta has announced the intention of the new government to impose a moratorium on new logging, and to review existing logging concessions, many of which are thought to have been improperly granted and implemented. The announcement was well received by environmental NGOs, which consider that it is time to halt any new large-scale logging concessions in the country. The previous government had adopted a policy of granting concessions to foreign companies -especially from Malaysia- and not controlling illegal logging, which had been severely criticised by environmentalists since it was leading to the complete destruction of one of the world's largest remaining closed rainforests, taking into account that PNG contains the largest intact tropical ancient forest in the Asia Pacific region and the third largest in the world.

The PNG Eco-Forestry forum reminded that between 1975 and 1996, PNG lost more than 10% of its forests because of large scale logging. Very little of the profit from the exported logs was retained by the country or the landowners. Not to mention the indigenous peoples -as is the case of the Kosuwa and Kamula natives- whose ancestral lands were invaded by the loggers (see WRM Bulletin 26). The new approach that the government is seemingly up to adopt from now on has to be based on an alternative forest management paradigm, on which PNG civil society has been working over the last decade. Community forest management, indigenous peoples rights and environmental sustainability are at the core of such viewpoint. Regarding the logging industry, the Eco-Forestry forum considers that small-scale saw-milling is the best way to use the country's industrial forest resources in order to conserve the environment and for rural community welfare.

Those interested in expressing their support to this recent step can address PNG Prime Minister, underscoring the importance that the moratorium is actually implemented, and not undercut with exceptions or weak implementation, as has happened with a previous moratorium in the early 1990s:

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