

Masalai i tokaut

Number Twenty Nine: 24 June 2004

Forest Minister unlawfully intervenes to block National Forest Board meeting

The government's 'Bag Man', Forest Minister Patrick Pruaitch, has overstepped his powers to block a meeting of the National Forest Board.

The Minister was panicked when he heard that the Board was meeting to discuss punitive action over unlawful activities in two of Rimbunan Hijau's largest logging operations.

As well as disrupting the scheduled Board Meeting, the Minister also abused his position by directing the National Forest Service to reverse its decision to issue RH with a "Show Cause Notice".

With such a compliant Minister in place it is little wonder that RH is using its daily newspaper, The National, to rabidly back the Somare government and castigate anybody who dares raise a sniff of opposition.

Not content with destroying our forests and making slaves of our people, Rimbunan Hijau seems determined to use its cheque book and The National to control our politics as well.

The National Forest Board was scheduled to meet on the 27th of May this year.

On the agenda for the meeting was two of Rimbunan Hijau's largest logging operations, Vailala in Gulf Province and Wawoi Guavi in Western Province.

The Board was to discuss a Compliance Audit that had recently been completed on the Wawoi Guavi project that had uncovered widespread illegalities and gross abuses.

Meanwhile in Vailala the National Forest Service had been trying to negotiate a new timber permit with RH. The company had rejected all the landowner's demands and any attempt to bring the project into compliance with the Forestry Act. The Board was therefore being asked to endorse the cancellation of the Timber Permit.

The Minister was informed of the Board meeting and its agenda on the 24th of May. His staff immediately realized that the meeting could be a disaster for Rimbunan Hijau.

A hurried Minute was issued from the Minister's office directing that the scheduled meeting be deferred "indefinitely until further advice"



Minister for Forests

MINUTE

TO : CHAIRMAN- DR. WARI IAMO

DATE : 25TH MAY 2004

SUBJECT: DIRECTION TO DEFER SPECIAL BOARD MEETING # 102

Thank you for your letter of 24th May 2004 that was coupled with the Board Papers for Special Board Meeting # 102 that is scheduled for 27th May 2004.

I had the pleasure of going through your Board Papers and have noted with serious concerns the submissions relating to a Compliance Audit for Wawoi Guavi Revised Timber Permit where it has suggested amendments to Section 137 of the Forestry Act and also the paper on Vailala Blocks 2 & 3 Review negotiations where it recommended for a "Show Cause Notice" to be issued to the Permit Holder.

I have issued a direction for a ceasure of No "Show Cause Notice" and further directed that Renegotiations must commence immediately.

Hence I hereby direct you to defer the scheduled meeting indefinitely until further advice from this office.

Yours faithfully,


HON. PATRICK PRUAITCH, MP
MINISTER FOR FORESTS

CC : Acting Managing Director- National Forest Service

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However the Minister has NO power under the Forestry Act to interfere in the workings of the National Forest Board and he had no business in abusing his position to try and protect a Malaysian logging company from proper scrutiny.

The Ministers direction that the Show Cause Notice is withdrawn and negotiations be recommenced was also totally outside his powers and a gross abuse of position.

This is clearly another example of what National Court Judge, Justice Michael Sevua, has described as the 'Minister for Forests clear lack of concern for the interests of the simple village people who own the forest resources'.¹

Instead the Minister is determined; almost at any cost it seems, to protect the interests of Rimbunan Hijau and other Malaysian logging companies.

It was revealed this month in the Australian newspaper, The Age that "Pruiitch has told senior officials he needed the company's (Rimbunan Hijau's) money to meet political funding needs".²

And the Minister and Rimbunan Hijau were once again ably served by the Chair of the National Forest Board and Secretary of the Department of Conservation, Dr Wari Iamo.

Although he knew full well that the Minister did not have the power to direct the National Forest Board not to meet, it was Dr Iamo who personally cancelled the meeting once he received the Ministers Minute.



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Circular

TO : BOARD MEMBER

DATE : 25TH MAY 2004

SUBJECT: DEFERMENT OF SPECIAL BOARD MEETING NO. 102

This circular is to inform you that I have received the attached directive from the Minister, who has directed that Special Board Meeting No. 102 scheduled for Thursday 27th May 2004 be deferred for reasons as stated hence the said meeting is deferred indefinitely until further notice.

My apologies for any inconveniences caused.


**DR. WARI IAMO
CHAIRMAN**

Dr Iamo is a well known supporter and advocate for Rimbunan Hijau.

¹ Post Courier, 23 September 2003

² <http://www.theage.com.au/articles/2004/06/11/1086749874973.html?oneclick=true>

Dr Iamo was roundly criticized by the Ombudsman Commission for his role in the unlawful allocation of the giant Kamula Doso concession to Rimbunan Hijau in 1999.

The Ombudsman found that Dr Iamo was more interested in promoting the interests of Rimbunan Hijau than protecting the environment and that he was personally implicated in the unlawful allocation.³

The Ombudsman recommended that Dr Iamo be terminated from the National Forest Board but this has never been enforced. Meanwhile Iamo continues to act for logging companies and against the interests of the people of PNG and the environment.

We are calling on the Ombudsman to please act now against the Forest Minister and Dr Iamo for their latest abuses, and to ensure full implementation of its earlier recommendations against Rimbunan Hijau.

³ Ombudsman Commission July 2002. Investigation into a decision of the National Forest Board to award Kamula Doso to a subsidiary of Rimbunan Hijau.