

# Masalai i tokaut

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## Iamo under fire from all sides: illegal logging added to charges of incompetence

*The suspended Secretary of the Department of Environment and Conservation is under fire from all sides as his involvement in a number of illegal logging deals is uncovered.*

*Already charged on 8 counts by his own Minister for his incompetence in managing his Department, Dr Iamo has now embarrassed the Minister for Forests by deceiving him into issuing illegal logging permits.*

*This has angered both the Prime Minister and the World Bank, as the illegal logging puts the government in breach of its agreement with the Bank for the Forest and Conservation Project.*

*The PM has publicly endorsed the FCP but the revelations about Iamo's duplicity have now endangered the future of that programme and further World Bank funding for projects like the Highland Highway rehabilitation.*

*The suspended Secretary was also condemned in last year's Ombudsman Report on Kamula Dosa that recommended his removal from the National Forest Board.*

*With the suspended Secretary clearly implicated in facilitating illegal logging and the Minister for Forests, Minister for DEC, Prime Minister, the Ombudsman and the World Bank all with serious concerns, the Government must surely act if it is to maintain its commitment to integrity and good management in the public service.*

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## **Complicity in Illegal Logging**

An independent review ordered by the government states that in the last 12 months Dr Iamo has played a pivotal role in two illegal logging deals.

In his role as Chair of the National Forest Board, Dr Iamo '*seriously misled*' the Minister for Forests and facilitated an amendment to the West Gadaisu timber permit that was '*improper and in breach of the Forestry Act and Forest Policy*'.

Effectively Dr Iamo lied to the Minister for Forests in July 2002 when he told the Minister that the National Forest Board had considered and approved an amendment to the West Gadaisu timber permit to include logging of Bonua Magarida.

The truth is that the Board did not consider the matter until September, two months after the Minister had granted the amendment.

The amendment was in any event totally illegal as it ignored numerous different requirements of the Forestry Act and did not have the consent of the resource owners.

What is even more alarming and nails Dr Iamo as having been involved in some sort of conspiracy to facilitate illegal logging is the fact that the logging company application for the amendment to the timber permit was submitted on the same day as Dr Iamo gave his brief to the Minister recommending the amendment and stating the Board's approval. How could anyone believe that a logging company could apply for a substantial amendment to its permit and on the same day the National Forest Board meet, consider and approve the amendment without any input from the National Forest Service or the Provincial Forest Management committee.

According to the government review this is not an isolated incident

In addition, in July 2002 a 10-year extension was granted to the logging permit for

Vailala in Gulf Province. The Minister granted the extension on the basis of a form signed by Dr Iamo stating that the National Forest Board had considered and approved the extension. This was simply untrue.

The Board did not meet and consider the matter of the extension until September.

In any event the extension was completely unlawful as it was granted in breach of the Forestry Act and as correct procedures were not followed and there was no landowner consent.

In both cases, Bonua Magarida and Vailala, Dr Iamo has been exposed as lying to his Minister in order to secure illegal timber rights for logging companies.

## **Dr Iamo puts the government in breach of World Bank agreements**

The illegal amendment of the Timber Permit for West Gadaisu and the illegal extension of the Vailala logging project put the government in the embarrassing position of being in clear breach of their contract with the World Bank for the Forestry and Conservation Project.

This US\$35 million Project to strengthen government departments and improve management procedures is contingent on the government ensuring that all new logging projects are lawful.

If the government cannot deal quickly and effectively with Dr Iamo and his illegal logging deals, then the World Bank is likely to be forced to not only close the FCP but to withdraw all funding support. This would include a promised US\$80 million for the rehabilitation of the Highlands Highway.

## **Dr Iamo and the robber barons**

According to an NEC submission prepared by the Minister for Forests, the government review of Dr Iamo's illegal logging deals has concluded that:

***'The "robber barons" (logging companies), as referred to in the Barnett Inquiry in the late 1980s, not only continue to roam as freely as ever, but are encouraged to do so by persons whose proper role is to exercise control over them'.***

The report identifies the people who are encouraging the robber barons as being Dr Wari Iamo and two former National Forest Service Managing Directors, Thomas Nen and David Nelson.

## **The Ombudsman Findings**

But this is not the end of Dr Iamo's wrongdoing.

In its report on Kamula Dosa published in July last year the Ombudsman Commission found that Dr Iamo had

**‘Failed to live up to the standard demanded of him as the chief conservator and the head of the body responsible for environmental matters’ and that he had showed himself to be ‘unable to adequately perform his duties’**

The Ombudsman recommended that Dr Iamo be removed from the National Forest Board.

The Minister for Forests must now be regretting his failure to act earlier on the Ombudsman findings as the removal of Dr Iamo from the Forest Board would have severely restricted his ability to facilitate illegal logging deals.

Interestingly the Kamula Dosa scam involved exactly the same logging company that is responsible for the illegal logging at Vailala – Rimbunan Hijau.

## **Charges of mismanagement and incompetence**

In the light of his complicity in illegal logging deals, his assistance to the robber barons and his jeopardising of the Forestry and Conservation Project, it is important to remain focussed on the fact that that Dr Iamo is also facing 8 quite separate charges of incompetence and mismanagement in his leadership of the Department of Environment and Conservation.

According to an NEC Submission that will be presented later this month:

**‘The Department of Environment and Conservation has become totally ineffective in fulfilling its statutory role of overseeing good environmental stewardship.**

**Dr Iamo has been the Secretary since 1998. Since his appointment the Department has declined to a point where it is incapable of monitoring the environmental performance of large-scale industrial developments and has no capacity to advise on policy matters or implement government directions’**

Eight specific charges have been laid against the Secretary, each one of which constitutes a ‘serious disciplinary offence’ within the meaning of the Secretary’s contract and gives rise to the power to terminate his employment

**The Charges that have been laid are that the Secretary has been:**

- Inefficient or incompetent in his management of DEC
- In breach of the Constitution and Statute by failing to take any or any reasonable steps to ensure the sustainability of large-scale logging operations.
- Inefficient or incompetent in failing to take any or any reasonable steps to ensure the implementation of the Environment Act (2000)
- Inefficient or incompetent in failing to take any or any

reasonable steps to implement the Forestry Action Plan approved by the NEC in Nov. 2001

● Inefficient or incompetent as Chair of the National Forest Board in failing to ensure the PNG Forest Authority implemented the Forestry Action Plan

● Inefficient or incompetent and in breach of Statute in failing to prevent or overturn numerous unlawful logging permits and extensions.

● Inefficient or incompetent and in breach of statutory duties in failing to act on Environmental Assessment Reports

● Inefficient or incompetent in allowing DEC to spend over K150,000 on catering within 9 months when the Department was extremely short of funds.

Where does it end?

Illegal logging deals, deceiving the Minister for Forests, incompetence and mismanagement, breach of a major government contract, the wrath of the Prime Minister and the World Bank and condemnation from the Ombudsman Commission. These are grave issues.

This is the test that our political leaders now face. We have heard much about the need to clean up on corruption, the need to improve the public service and ensure the highest standards of management and accountability. Is the Prime Minister going to live up to these commitments; are his Ministerial colleagues going to back him?

The onus is now on our political leaders to bring justice back to the halls of power.

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