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Lawyer shocks SABL inquiry on Bewani

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Posted by [rait man](#)

By **Luana Paniu**

A LAWYER registered by Investment Promotion Authority (IPA) as an executive for an investor company over a controversial SABL in Vanimo appeared Wednesday with absolutely no information about the SABL, reports the Post Courier.

Tom Sirae, who is currently registered as Company Secretary for Bewani Palm Oil Limited appeared before a panel of three Commissioners, Chief John Numapo, and Commissioners Nicholas Mirou and Alois Jerewai only to admit that he had long since ceased work with the company although he remained on record as a company executive.

The news came a shock because it was revealed that Mr Sirae has a statutory duty pertaining to the ownership of property held by Bewani Palm Oil Limited and in this case, the land title over portion 160C in the Milinch of Oenake (SW) and (SE), Bewani (NW) and (NE) and Fourmil of Vanimo in the Wes Sepik Province.

The 99-year SABL covers a massive 139,909 hectares of land. The lawyer has been summoned to inform the Commission of Inquiry about whether there were any public hearings held to obtain landowner consent both to establish a preferred development partner and SABL sublease holder.

He was also called to provide details on the sublease arrangements by which logging operations are currently taking place. Mr Sirae told the commissioners that he had only been of personal assistance to the landowners and no longer held an active role in the position which was the reason why he did not have the necessary documents required by the commission.

When asked by Assisting Commissioner, Alois Jerewai about whether he could name the project developers involved in the Project Agreement, Mr Sirae said that he could not recall any information.

Mr Jerewai then queried: "How can you not recall when this is a major, major project and you assisted with the project agreement?"

Mr Sirae responded by stating that: "There are other shareholders and I had left quite a while back which is why I cannot recall, I was a personal assistant to help along and I should've resigned from the position a long time back... so that is why I cannot produce what you are asking."

Mr Jerewai then said that should the information not be furnished to the Inquiry then powers under the CoI Act (Section 11 and 12) could be enforced for the necessary information to be obtained.

"I should put it to you to not only seek your assistance but enforce powers to enable you to provide information necessary to the Inquiry," he said.

Under the Act, a witness could be held in contempt of court for withholding vital information from the Inquiry and carried with it a fine of up to K2000 or a prison term of two years.

Mr Jerewai further said that company records with the IPA also showed Mr Sirae holding positions in several landowner companies in more than one capacity and he would have to be recalled to the inquiry where a checklist will be used to determine if he had the necessary information required.

Mr Sirae is expected to return on the 21st of this month at which time he will produce relevant documents to the commission.

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