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Web of lies revealed as Sepik SABL hearings end

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Posted by [rait man](#)

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The Commission of Inquiry into Special Purpose Agriculture business leases ended its hearings in Wewak yesterday. It heard further evidence related to Portion 144C, Sepik Oil Palm - Turubu SABL.

The Inquiry heard that following disputes over the Chairmanship of the Landowner Company Limoa Holdings, a Court order has been put in place restraining disputing parties from holding the post. The matter is yet to be resolved.

The first witness to give evidence was Provincial Customary Lands Officer, Mr Peter Francis Yakop. Mr Yakop informed the Commission that he had not physically visited the sites or conducted any land investigations prior to the granting of the SPABL to Limoa Holdings.

The Deputy Chairman of Limoa Holdings, Mr. Godfried Rausen was next to give evidence. Counsel assisting the Commission Mr Ketan asked Mr. Rausen if Limoa was the name of one clan. Mr Rausen admitted that it was indeed. He then informed the Commission that the initial idea was to have Limoa Land taken under a SABL and for the purpose of Oil Palm Planting and for the neighbouring clans to be out-growers.

The crux of the matter in the case of Portion 144C is that of misrepresentation of the facts regarding an SABL. Other landowning groups had created their Incorporated Land Groups (ILGs) thinking that they would be out-growers of Oil Palm and not because they wanted to hand over their customary land. The 55 other ILGs were then included by executives of Limoa Holdings as part of the SABL. The consequences of this trickery was that 116 000 ha of customary land was alienated without proper consent.

Limoa Holdings then went into an unbalanced partnership with a foreign exploiter, Wewak Oil Palm Limited. Wewak Agriculture Development Ltd owns 80% shares in the Sepik Oil Palm Project while Limoa Holdings owns the balance. Limoa Holdings also issued shares to over a thousand people around the country.

When asked by Mr Ketan whether he had read the lease agreement before signing, Mr Rausen said he hadn't. Mr Rausen also informed the Commission that the lease agreement was signed without legal advice.

The Commission has concluded its hearings in Wewak and its findings will be presented later this year.

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