

Land status halts Oro agri projects

THE PNG Forest Authority has put the Wanigela FCA project on hold due to landownership status. This was the response from PNGFA managing director Kanawi Pouru following recent media reports over development of two separate agricultural projects approved by the National Forest Board in the Tufi-Wanigela area of Oro Province.

Mr Pouru in a media statement said that he wanted to make this clear for the benefit of the landowners in the Tufi-Wanigela region.

The National Forest Service (NFS) intends to clarify the issues and confusions that surround the development of:

n Portions 135, 136 and 137 (referred to as Tufi-Wanigela), under State Lease to Victory Plantations Limited

n Portions 113 and 143 (referred to as Wanigela), under State Lease to Keroro Development Corporation Ltd, and subsequently leased to Ang Afro Forest Management Ltd.

Mr Pouru stated that the two projects were large scale agriculture developments that were processed and approved by the National Forest Board in accordance with sections 90A and 90B of the Forestry Act 1991 as amended.

He said these projects had been sanctioned and endorsed by the Department of Agriculture and Livestock, Department of Lands and Physical Planning, the Department of Environment and Conservation and the Oro Provincial Forest management committee.

This was prior to the Forest Board approving and granting the Forest Clearance Authority (FCA), he clarified.

◆ In terms of approval, the Victory Plantations Ltd project was approved in April 1008 and was granted FCA 5-01, whilst the Ang Agro Forest Management Ltd Project was approved in January 2010 and was granted FCA 5-02, ◆ he said.

He clarified that the Forest Authority has approved the plans of Victory Plantations FCA 5-01, but not the Ang Agro Forest Management FCA 5-02, which were yet to be submitted and considered by the Forest Authority.

Mr Pouru further confirmed that logging or operational plans for FCA 5-02 by Ang Agro Forest Management Ltd had not been approved by the Forest Authority until the land issue referred to by the Collingwood Bay Conservation and Development Association was completely sorted out.

He said it was important to note that the issue on the project emerged after the National Forest Board had considered the application and granted the FCA.

Mr Pouru also confirmed that the barge loaded with machineries at Oro Bay would not move until the land issue was sorted out.

He said that he wrote to the Commissioner of Customs in August requesting the equipment to be held in a neutral area until the land issue was sorted out.

Mr Pouru said Customs had agreed to this.

He said he also informed Ang Agro Forest Management as well and requested them to provide further evidence of land leases and if they were aware of a National Court judgement over the said land declaring it to be customary land.

◆ So until the land matter is resolved, the Forest Authority will not approve any operational plans for timber harvesting or land development, until the exact status of the landownership is known, ◆ he said.

Mr Pouru said that claims by an NGO that the Minister for Forest had overridden the decision of himself and the Forest Board is false and misleading.