

Pomio landowners want logging suspended

By John Pangkatana in Pomio

LANDOWNERS from Ralopal and Pomata concession areas want logging operations suspended. Both areas situated in troubled West Pomio in the East New Britain Province, have been under the microscope over the past few days with international support of their plight arriving in the form of the Greenpeace ship Esperanza on Sunday.

The areas in question are described as Portion 196C and 197C.

The landowners have successfully brought their case to a level where a commission of enquiry is currently pending.

However, the problem now is that despite an order for logging operations to cease pending the decision, Gilford Limited continue to operate normally.

Gilford Limited is a subsidiary of Malaysian logging magnate Rimbunan Hijau, who are also the owners of daily newspaper The National.

The media hype surrounding this remote outpost basically forced a rare meeting with the Pomio District Administrator Mr. Pomaleu Langisan at Palmalmal District Headquarters this week.

This gave the opportunity for the landowners to petition their governing administrative body, ENB Provincial Government to hear their pleas for help against this foreign company.

In a petition handed to Pomio District Administrator Pomaleu Langisan at Palmalmal Government Station on Monday, landowner spokesman Philip Bailoenakia said they firmly believe that the Provincial Administration will not let allow a foreign company to come in and use **bullying** tactics.

I believe the Provincial Administration through the Pomio District Headquarters have the administrative powers to resolve the ongoing disputes through the administrative mechanisms available, **he** said.

He further acknowledged that there are ongoing disputes between rival landowners both wanting and not wanting the project, that is bordering on escalating into violence and bloodshed.

The landowners want:

- That each of Forest Clearance Authority (FCA) in respect to the concession areas be suspended forthwith, pending the outcome of the Commission of Inquiry into Special Purpose Agriculture and Business Leases
- Current and ongoing logging operations by Gilford Limited in the concession areas to cease immediately pending the findings of the inquiry
- A mediation process in respect to the disputing parties to take place on a date to be agreed as soon as possible
- The directors and representatives for Pomata Investments Limited, Ralopal Investments Ltd and the umbrella company, Memalo Investments Ltd and the representatives of the logging company, Gilford Ltd to immediately convey a round-table discussion in respect to ongoing disputes.