

More landowners called before Col

By John Pangkatana

MANY unanswered questions were believed to have forced an extension to the Commission of Inquiry (Col) into the acquisition of Special Agriculture Business Leases (SABL) in West Pomio, East New Britain Province.

This is due to revelations about forged signatures and lack of consent by women witnesses at the close of the inquiry at Vunapope, Kokopo on Friday.

Up to 34 witnesses, majority being women, are now expected to arrive by ship MV Vanmark today from Pomio to back up testimonies of women landowner representatives Scholar Pames and Mary Bailoenakia made last week.

On top of what are deemed to be irregularities during the inquiry as well, these have now opened the door to allow for more landowners to clarify their claims.

This stems from admittance by landowner company directors that they did not know the full consequence of signing the leases and some did not have an Integrated Landowner Group (ILG) among a number of other anomalies that were revealed during the Friday session.

The Col, headed by commissioner Alois Jerewai, is expected to reconvene on Wednesday and into Thursday as well to clear all matters pertaining to SABLs leased to Pomata Investments Limited, Nakiura Investments Limited and Ralopal Investment Limited.

There is still cloud of uncertainty in the setting up of the landowner company, the land investigation report and unanswered questions relating to the developer Gilford Limited, a subsidiary of Malaysian logging magnate Rimbunan Hijau.

So far, the inquiry has heard accounts from ENB provincial administrator Akuila Tubal, provincial customary lands officers Ismael Puipui and Mary Dadatliu regarding the lands investigation report.

Also called up were the chairman of the umbrella landowner company Memalo Holdings Limited John Parulria, its directors of the landowner companies Pomata Limited (James Leleua), Ralopal Investment Limited Bruno Tevolman, Nakiura Investment Limited Mathew Lila and Parulria for Unung-Sigite Limited. A representative from the Gilford Limited camp was also called up.

The aim of the inquiry is to determine the legality of the SABL process, the role of the relevant government departments in the approval of the SABLs, Forest Clearing Authorities (FCAs) and environmental permits.

The commission is also tasked to audit all SABLs issue to date, with particular regard to the legality of FCAs that have been issued with leases.