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Environmental Groups Claim Victory Over PNG Government

By [Alex Rheeney In Port Moresby](#)

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Environmental groups have claimed victory after an International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO) investigation team to Papua New Guinea concluded that the PNG government and timber industry failed to demonstrate acceptable forest management practices.

International environmental group Greenpeace and PNG NGO umbrella group PNG Eco-Forestry Forum say the findings confirm their concerns, which has led to confrontation with the PNG government and the timber industry in recent years.

An ITTO diagnostic mission, made up of three international and two national consultants, visited PNG between February and March this year and made field visits besides talking to government agencies, NGOs, landowners and forest industry representatives.

Compiling a report of their visit, the mission concluded that the PNG government and the timber industry failed to demonstrate integrated, economically viable, ecologically compatible and socially acceptable forest management practices in line with the ITTO criteria and indicators.

While acknowledging that PNG had solid laws and legislation to govern the K400 million forest management practices, the mission said implementation was a problem due to administrative and governance constraints.

The environmental impact of logging operations was also highlighted as a problem area that needed addressing.

“The environmental impacts of timber harvesting decisions and operations are poorly addressed and the regulatory framework is not being enforced due to inefficient collaborative efforts of PNG Forest Authority and DEC (Department of Environment and Conservation) in field monitoring and control. The landowners constantly complain about lack of involvement in all government decision making processes related to forestry,” the ITTO diagnostic mission said in its report.

The report will be tabled at the 42nd International Tropical Timber Congress (ITTC) that began in Port Moresby yesterday.

PNG Eco-Forestry Forum chairman Damien Ase said the PNG government and the timber industry could not run for cover any more.

“At long last the lid has been lifted on government and industry lies and misinformation. The PNG government cannot hide from these findings as they invited the ITTC to send this diagnostic mission and the ITTC has 59 member countries representing 80 percent of the world’s tropical forests,” Ase said.

Greenpeace forest campaigner Sam Moko – who unfurled a huge banner condemning illegal logging on the seventh and eight floor of Port Moresby’s Crowne Plaza hotel where the ITTC is being convened – said the ITTO diagnostic mission’s report confirmed what NGOs and the World Bank had been saying about the PNG timber industry.

“This report confirms what NGOs and organisations like the World Bank have been saying for some time now – that there are serious problems in the PNG forestry sector and that government and industry are doing nothing about it. We want the ITTO to help PNG by taking immediate steps to address these problems,” he said.



Greenpeace at the ITTO meeting yesterday.

Yesterday PNG Prime Minister Sir Michael Somare said NGO campaigns were forcing developed economies to impose non-tariff barriers, in contravention of World Trade Organisation obligations.

“However, of growing concern to the Government of Papua New Guinea and other governments in the region are the many allegations, often unfounded, of illegality in the trade of tropical wood products. Under pressure from environmental activists, and some importing countries – remote from the realities of developing economies – increasingly resort to the imposition of non-tariff barriers to trade. Such actions are not consistent with obligations under WTO,” he said.

The ITTC, which has attracted 40 of the ITTO’s 60 member states, ends on Saturday.

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