The Editor  
The National Newspaper  
Port Moresby  
PNG  

15 November 2006  

Dear Sir/Madam,  

I am writing in reference to the article ‘Australia rejects calls to ban PNG forest products’, (The National, 5 November 2006).  

Firstly, WWF would like to categorically refute allegations that we have called on the Australian Government to ban timber imports from Papua New Guinea and other Southeast Asian countries. These claims are completely false and unfounded. WWF has never advocated a ban on wood imports from these countries. WWF’s policy is that timber importers should support legitimate forestry by ensuring that timber is independently certified as coming from a legal source.  

A recent World Bank report estimates that a staggering 70 per cent of PNG’s log exports come from illegal sources. In reality, this results in the PNG government losing millions of dollars in tax revenue each year. Revenue that our country could clearly use to further our economic development.  

Sadly, there are no certified forests in PNG. It is unbelievable that the PNG logging industry still practices a type of logging which the modern forest industry around the world agrees is unsustainable, highly destructive and giving little economic return in the long run. So bad is illegal logging in PNG that in June this year, the UK timber industry - the fourth largest importer of timber products in the world - issued a statement saying they considered wood from PNG to be too risky due to the lack of credible evidence of legality.  

At present, thirty one per cent of PNG forests have been marked for commercial use. Forest clearance of this size, logged unsustainably, would destroy an area of forest more than five times the size of the World Heritage Listed tropical rainforests of Queensland. This is the last great rainforest in the Asia Pacific. It rivals the Amazon for its extraordinary wildlife, harbouring creatures such as the stunning birds of paradise. More importantly this forest is one of the most important chances our country has for long term export income – but only if it is managed sustainably.  

WWF works successfully with over 300 major logging and timber consuming companies worldwide. This partnership helps to conserve the world's forests whilst also providing economic and social benefits for the businesses and people that depend on them. The companies we work with employ 1.5 million people globally and have annual forest product sales exceeding USD $48 billion per year. The demand for sustainable forestry is without doubt large and growing.  

Yours faithfully,  

Mr Michael Avosa, WWF PNG Country Programme Manager