

# Exploitation of virgin indigenous forest

HANDS UP those who have furniture or boats made from Fijian kauri! I don't blame you. It is not hard to obtain, it is probably not as expensive as New Zealand kauri, and it is very attractive and workable, just like our own beloved timber. Its very availability, however, illustrates one of the sad ironies of forest exploitation in the Pacific region.

With the failure to husband kauri properly in the early days of logging, whatever potential there may have been for sustained yield harvest of our own resource has been all but lost, with the result that the demand for such timber has shifted to the Islands. In fact, New Zealand is one of the biggest customers for Fijian kauri or dakua (*Agathis vitensis*).

In many areas, clearing and "timber mining" are occurring at a rapid rate, and virgin indigenous forest is disappearing, as illustrated by the following two examples, one from Fiji and the other from the Solomon Islands.

### Plea for reserve

According to a recent article in the *Fiji Times*, the National Trust for Fiji has, with difficulty, been trying to raise the \$50,000 needed to secure reserve status over what could become the last remnant of virgin dakua forest on Vanua Levu, Fiji's second largest island. The size of the area proposed, a mere 120 ha, shows the nature of the conservation problem in these islands.

Timber concessions are held

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By Rod Hay

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over vast areas of tribally owned land, and conservation proposals such as this one must entail payment to the landowners of considerable compensation for the loss of logging royalties. In this case the payment will entitle the Trust to lease and control the reserve with the conditions that the landowners can revoke the lease at any time and that signs are erected advertising the contribution the company has made in forgoing their cutting rights.

It certainly seems that conservation is bearing all the expense for a very small reserve, but under the system of land ownership in Fiji that is the best that can be done at the present time.

Notwithstanding all this, the project is an important and urgent one, as the Trust still has a shortfall in the money needed, and the timber company and the landowners may withdraw from the agreement. Contributions can be sent to the secretary of the National Trust for Fiji, P.O. Box 2089, Government Buildings, Suva, or to head office of the Society, P.O. Box 631, Wellington.

Conservation of areas of Fiji rain forest are essential if species such as the long-legged warbler (*Trichocichla rufa*), red-breasted musk parrot (*Prosopiea tabuensis*), orange dove (*Ptilinopus victor*), and silk-tail (*Lamprolia victoriae*) are to survive.

The curious endemic silk-tail is particularly endangered on Vanua Levu.

### Solomons logging

In some parts of the Pacific apparently large areas of rain forest habitat still exist, but not for long if an extension of the American logging industry heralded by Howell Enterprises continues.

Dave Howell has shifted out of the Pacific north-west and obtained timber rights to the whole of San Cristobal Island (112 by 32 km) in the south-east Solomons. He has these rights for 20 years, and 5 per cent of the gross income from them will be paid to the Government, which will then be responsible for any re-forestation.

Some of the wood will be processed in the Solomons, but it appears that most will be exported directly. It is not difficult to imagine what San Cristobal will look like after the loggers have been. Howell states that they are "there to provide jobs as well as an inflow of money". It is hard to see, however, that the Solomons Islanders will gain much from such an enterprise.

Think twice before ordering that timber from the Islands!

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