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## Mass logging threat to PNG forests

By Steve Connor

5:00 AM Friday Mar 3, 2006

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Papua New Guinea forests are at risk of being wiped out through illegal and unsustainable logging by a timber industry mired in corruption, says an investigation by a Washington-based think-tank.

Export documents validating the timber in effect "launder" illegally logged tropical hardwood, says a report by Forest Trends, a non-profit environmental organisation.

Government-appointed inspectors verified the quantity and description of the logs to ensure export taxes were paid, but gave little heed to the legality of the timber operations. As a result the official documentation gave the impression the wood was lawfully produced when it was logged illegally.

Michael Jenkins, Forest Trends CEO, said a legal fund has been set up to fight the logging industry in the courts of Papua New Guinea.

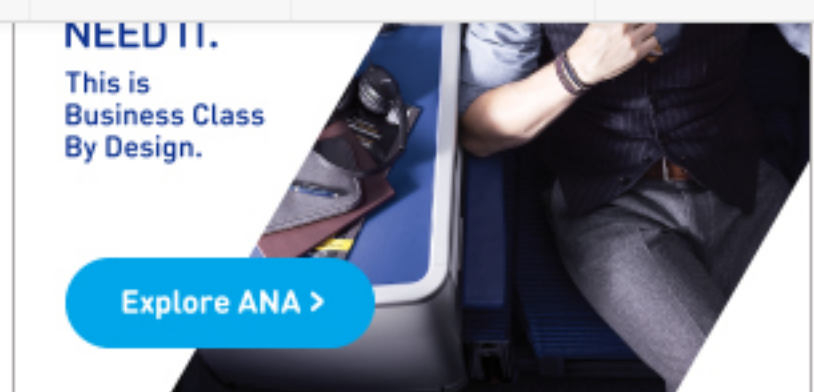
"Papua New Guinea's legal system does exist outside of political control, and the courts have a track record of ruling against illegal logging," Mr Jenkins said.

Much of the forest industry focused on harvesting natural forest areas, for exports of raw timber logs. The Malaysian-owned timber operations export the logs primarily to China, Japan and Korea, where they are processed into products destined for Europe and North America.

Mr Jenkins called on China to take a lead to ensure the timber was from lawful and sustainable operations that are free from

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The report summarised five independent reviews of Papua New Guinea forests between 2000 and 2005. It covered 14 logging operations in 3.17 million hectares with a population of 83,000. In 2004, these operations produced 1.3 million cubic metres of logs worth \$115.675 million in exports.



"None of these 14 projects can be defined as legal and only one project manages to meet more than half of the key criteria set for a lawful logging operation," Forest Trust's report says.

- INDEPENDENT

