

Forestry, Public Land, and the Colonial Legacy in Solomon Islands

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Discontinuity with the colonial past is a conscious aim in many areas of government.

JAMES FINGLETON, *Assistance in the Revision of Forestry Policy . . .*

The Solomon Islands at independence in 1978 inherited 1176 square kilometers of public land, intended for the "forest estate." In the light of the relatively late establishment of a forestry department and the conservative views that Solomon Islanders, since World War Two, have increasingly demonstrated toward land alienation, the creation of these public lands was a major achievement for the colonial government. Before and since 1978, this land has been the site for government reforestation programs, because it consists of the areas logged from the 1960s. Today, debate regarding its ultimate disposition is increasing as provincial governments and former owners pressure the national government for control. By 1991, over 40 percent of this land had passed from state ownership. Since about 1980, logging has been concentrated on Solomon Islanders' customary land. In that time the conduct of the logging industry has done little to eliminate suspicions of government inherited from colonial times among the resource owners, the rural Solomon Islanders who make up about 84 percent of the population. Logging contributes about 60 percent of the country's export earnings and, if it continues at the frantic rate of the last few years, the forests will be worked out by 2000. Some of the forestry division's replanted lands will soon be ready for logging, so it seems likely that the conflict of state and individuals'

rights to remaining land and trees could become a significant political issue, one that is as fundamental now as it was in colonial times. The major difference is that Solomon Islander politicians and bureaucrats who vociferously opposed the assertion of the colonial state's rights are now in a position where they and their successors may have to defend, rather than attack the proposition, if not on a national level, then on a provincial one.

TOWARD A COLONIAL FOREST POLICY

In the colonial Solomon Islands, the concept of a "forest estate," implying permanent or long-term dedication of land to forest use, was part of post-World War Two forest policy. Although some logging had occurred earlier in a few isolated places, the war threw a spotlight on the potential of Solomons forests. The urgent need for wartime construction introduced several Allied sawmilling units to the local timbers. As the Japanese retreated, a number of inquiries from Australia, New Zealand, and the United States reached the administration of the British Solomon Islands Protectorate.

Following the 1940 Colonial Development and Welfare Act, signaling a policy shift from the maintenance of law and order to economic development, the British funded a forest survey, one of several resource studies in the protectorate. F S Walker's *The Forests of the British Solomon Islands Protectorate*, published in 1948, contained description of forest types and tree species, along with climatic, topographic, and social information, and suggested future forest policy. In line with policies in most of Britain's tropical colonies, Walker recommended legislation "to control the utilisation of forest resources on the broadest grounds for the future welfare of the Protectorate, by protection of water supplies, prevention of erosion, and exploitation of timber and other forest produce in such a manner that the productivity of the land is not impaired but improved" (Walker 1948, 59).

"To achieve these objects, Government must assume a large increase in power" (Walker 1948, 60). The right of the government to control natural resources was a British colonial assumption, founded on policies evolved in older colonies such as India and on Crown rights under the protectorate's existing mining regulation. Walker recommended that "unoccupied land" be administered by a trust board (like the Fijian

Native Lands Trust). Forest reserves could be declared on Crown land or on Native land, and the revenue derived from logging the latter would accrue to the local government council concerned, less the board's costs. Walker realized there could be resistance to the declaration of reserves and recommended compulsory government purchase in such cases (Walker 1948, 60–62).

Although Walker had seen many unoccupied areas in the 28,000 square kilometers of the protectorate, with its population of about 100,000, he was told the reason "that ownership has not been made manifest in a more definite . . . manner is simply because there has not been any real need for it to be so."¹ In much of the archipelago, the ownership of particular land was the prerogative of the clan, or descent group, whose ancestor first made gardens there, though long-term residents were usually incorporated as kin. Membership of such a group entitled individuals to use the land for gardening and other subsistence purposes. Practice varied, but land rights were inherited either matrilineally or ambilineally, often with a patrilineal bias. Less common mechanisms for gaining rights to land and resources included permission and gift or sale from the original holder of use rights. Recognized big-men, chiefs, or land managers who had specialized knowledge of clan histories were instrumental in defining various individuals' rights to a range of land uses. Use rights to land and its associated resources could be several, though clear distinctions were made as to who held the strongest claim to make gardens because these were the essential basis of livelihood. Individuals who planted or cultivated trees usually had first claim to them, like their garden lands, while other trees were considered the property of the entire clan (Heath 1979, 1–47; Allan 1957, 136–142). A simple technology, shifting slash-and-burn gardening, and myriad small sociopolitical groups meant there had been little production for trade or surplus accumulation, and most islands were neither cultivated nor populated intensively, at least in the late nineteenth century.

In a postwar world where trusteeship and colonial development went hand-in-hand, the government would not consider any new large-scale exploitation of the forests until suitable legislation was enacted and a forestry department established. Coinciding with the publication of Walker's report, "political difficulties" (Trenaman 1959) contributed to the government's allowing only one new operator into the Solomons to log the Tenaru area on Guadalcanal, under license from Levers Pacific Planta-

tions Limited, who owned the land.² The “difficulties” had been created by Maasina Rulu, a political and cultural movement based on Malaita, with supporters on Ulawa, Makira, Guadalcanal, and parts of Santa Isabel and Nggela. It originated mainly in resentments toward the prewar colonial order, but its catalyst was Solomon Islanders’ intense interaction with American troops. After the war, its members refused to obey the government and to pay taxes, staged a labor boycott, and set up their own council on Malaita. The government imprisoned its leaders for sedition, but released them in 1952, after they agreed to cooperate with the government (Laracy 1983; Bennett 1987, 292–310). The movement’s rejection of the government-sponsored local councils seems to have reduced the government’s confidence in the councils, and so it confined their revenue base to the head tax or rate, minor trading licenses, fines, and direct grants (BSIP 1950–1970). The government rejected Walker’s idea of a trust board that would return a proportion of revenue from future logging on forest reserves to the councils concerned. Local administration and real power were to remain largely in the hands of the Department of District Administration directed from Honiara, the capital, until the early 1970s (Bennett 1987, 317–327).

In 1952, the government appointed J Logie to initiate the Forestry Department and commence drafting legislation. Logie again emphasized the need for the government to have greater control over the forests. He left the department in 1955 and was replaced by K W Trenaman the following year. Trenaman’s priority was the establishment of a productive forest estate on about 10 percent (about 3000 square kilometers) of the estimated area of the protectorate and, in due course, the reservation of tracts of forested land for soil and water conservation (BSIP FD 1956–1958, 1963). Trenaman believed that the productive sector of the estate should be on public or government land because customary landholding with its several layers of use rights, fluid and uncertain, would pose serious management problems, especially when it came to reforestation after logging (1962, 1963).

LEGISLATION, FORESTS, AND LAND

Developments in forestry legislation were as bound to land policy and legislation as trees are rooted in the soil (Larmour 1979). As part of their postwar inventory of resources, British colonial authorities had set up the

Lands Commission to examine indigenous tenure and how it might react to various “developmental” activities. Commissioner Allan’s report of 1957 made several recommendations that had a bearing on forestry. He urged the government to gradually register certain customary lands and to introduce a specialist land tenure officer to interact with it and the Solomon Islanders, mainly through new bodies, the local land committees. These were to be nominated bodies, quite apart from the local government councils, soon to be fully elected. Representing the people of a particular area, they were to interpret land tenure views to the government and vice versa, and “to recommend areas for adjudication and registration of title and to assist in the execution of this work” (Allan 1957, 300). They were to consist of local people well versed in customary tenure, “progressive land users” (Allan 1957, 300), and competent and respected Solomon Islanders in relevant government departments. The district commissioner was to be chairman. The committees were designed to assist the transition of tenure from a “traditional” form to one able to incorporate capitalist development, including forest use. With external checks to counter bias and favoritism, which Allan saw as inherent in the councils, the committees had the potential to settle land disputes and, over the years, develop a regularized tenure system, accommodating a variety of land use practices.

Allan also recommended declaring tracts of land “vacant of interests”; these would then become public land administered by a single trust board, having Solomon Islanders as full members. This “vacant” land was native customary land (ie, unalienated land) that had not been occupied, cultivated, or leased for the twenty-five years preceding 1958. Its status as vacant was subject to adjudication. As well, customary land leased to non-Solomon Islanders and lands under certificates of occupation were to come under the board’s control. Certificates of occupation provided a form of title under the Waste Lands Regulations of the early 1900s. At the time, the government had alienated over 1012 square kilometers that it “believed” to be vacant, unused, and unclaimed. The government’s Land Commission of 1919–1925 resulted in the return of 508 square kilometers of the “waste lands,” mainly from the copra producers, Levers Pacific Plantations, to the original claimants, but it had been a piecemeal affair that failed to admit any claims originating after 1919. The waste lands remained a cause célèbre with Solomon Islanders. Putting this land, which was still largely unused and vacant, into the

board's hands had the potential to mollify indigenous resentment (Allan 1957, 288–302; Heath 1979, 311–312; Bennett 1987, 342–343).

Although the government gutted many of Allan's recommendations, it did incorporate the vacant land concept and an emasculated trust board into legislation (Heath 1979, 311–325). Trenaman's hope was that much of the vacant land would constitute the bulk of the forest estate.³ An important clause of the draft land legislation (section 53), following earlier regulations, precluded dealings in customary land between Solomon Islanders and anyone except the government. An incidental effect was that companies could not deal directly with Solomon Islanders for timber rights, but only with the government.

In 1958, under the draft forestry legislation, land could be allocated to permanent or long-term forest use or, less commonly, for conservational purposes, by the declaration of "forest reserves." The legislation provided for the declaration of "forest areas" over valuable forest tracts "to protect land pending a decision on its eventual use," as part of the forest estate or otherwise (BSIP FD 1958).

Although the Lands and Titles Ordinance was enacted in late 1959, it could not be fully implemented, or the trust board operational, until the government employed a registrar of titles in 1961 (Heath 1979, 311–17). Loggers were showing interest in Solomons forests, but the government would not grant them logging rights until enforceable legislation was in place (BSIP FD 1960). The Forestry Department could get access to large tracts only under the earlier King's Regulation XII of 1922, which necessitated payment as compensation to Solomon Islander claimants. Such payment would constitute a recognition of active native interests in customary land and would be antithetical to the intent of the new Lands and Titles Ordinance and its vacant land provisions.⁴ By the time the mechanisms were in place to administer the ordinance in the early 1960s and introduce the vacant land provisions, elements within the government were apprehensive about its application, anticipating that Solomon Islander reaction would be such that it would not be a "political feasibility."⁵ They were right. With the failure to realize trust board control of the "waste lands," there was little possibility of dispelling resentment toward the government and occupiers of this land, notably Levers (Bennett 1987, 125–149; Heath 1979, 207–208). At the time of Allan's inquiry, Guadalcanal big-man Jacob Vouza had asserted, "I want to make clear that there is no waste land here. Every bit of land belongs to someone" (cited in Allan 1957, 287).

SOLOMON ISLANDERS AND THE PURCHASE OF PUBLIC LANDS

Realizing that the vacant land provisions were “a hot potato,” Trenaman supported the suggestion of the lands commissioner in 1961 that native land be bought for forestry use and, where this was not possible, leased for ninety-nine years or more.⁶ Trenaman wanted control of tracts of forested land for both exploitation and reforestation. Reforestation by the government or even private enterprise would be a risky investment on customary land, because trees could be destroyed or access denied by native owners (Trenaman 1962).

Negotiations to acquire areas for the forest estate began. During 1961–62 the government purchased land on the islands of Rob Roy (Vealaviru), Vaghena, Tetepare, Baga (Mbava), and Alu (Shortland Island)—all of which had been alienated previously and thus could be purchased from non-Solomon Islanders. In 1963–64, the government made substantial purchases from Solomon Islanders of tracts on Vangunu, at Allardyce Harbour, Santa Isabel, and between Viru Harbour and Kalena Bay, New Georgia. These purchases amounted to about 777 square kilometers, about a quarter of the area Trenaman aimed to acquire eventually for the estate. The terms of these transactions appeared favorable to vendors because these lands were largely unoccupied and unused. The main features were:

- an initial payment at the time of completion of the land transfer transaction, at 10 cents an acre;
- payment of 10 percent of timber royalties during each year in which timber working takes place—this payment to apply to the timber standing at the time of the agreement and for a maximum of twenty-five years;
- the grant to the former owners, indefinitely, of certain use rights within the tract; and
- reversion to the former owners of stated acreages after the felling of timber thereon, but in any case within a stipulated period.⁷

These purchases mark the government’s abandonment of the concept that, in many uninhabited areas, Solomon Islanders had only limited rights over the land (Allan 1957, 132–135). By 1964, public pressure was such that vacant land and the trust board disappeared from the statute book. Customary land was thereafter any land “owned, used or occupied by a person or community in accordance with customary native

usage." In terms of disposing of them to non-Solomon Islanders, rights were equated fundamentally with ownership (Heath 1979, 317-320; BSIP 1964).

Despite the colonial government's efforts to create a national asset, demands were mounting for priority to be given to individual, clan, and local interests; some of these demands were stimulated by the government itself. Attempts to purchase land were increasingly frustrated. By 1963, the registration of alienated lands under the Lands and Titles Ordinance was under way and often rekindled resentment toward earlier transactions. Moreover, Solomon Islander politicians had moved into the spotlight of national politics when the Legislative Council became a partly elected body in 1963, and land issues were an obvious common grievance that could win them easy points among their constituents at the expense of the colonial government (Heath 1979, 342-343).

Of greater importance, however, was what Solomon Islanders saw happening from the Shortlands to Guadalcanal, where logging had commenced on government and alienated land. In the western Solomons in 1963, the British Solomons Forestry Company started operating on Baga, and Levers Pacific Timbers Limited were working their privately held land on Gizo, with plans to log their large holding on Kolombangara. A year later, the Allardyce Lumber Company began operations on Santa Isabel (SI FD 1963). In April 1963, R T Kera, a Solomon Islander working as a ranger in the Forestry Department (later its head), asked Trenaman if the people of the Western District could get a license to sell their logs to the British Solomons Forestry Company Limited.⁸ When that same company showed interest in Vangunu, Simeon Nano of Vura advised Trenaman in January 1964 that his chief, Sarere, wanted to sell it logs as "we may be able to earn money if we cut the logs from Gatukai."⁹ The department pointed out that under section 53 of the Lands and Titles Ordinance (1959), non-Solomon Islanders could not negotiate directly with Solomon Islanders to obtain timber rights on unregistered land (native customary land). However, Solomon Islanders were beginning to exploit a legislative loophole by selling trees growing on customary land to small expatriate sawmilling concerns. The distinction between the sale of individual trees and dealings in timber-cutting rights was a fine one, in terms of ease of circumvention by "speculative companies" and willing Solomon Islanders.¹⁰

The government fell victim to its own development propaganda. To

persuade customary rights holders to sell some of their lands, it had highlighted the expected employment and infrastructural benefits in the form of “roads into the forest,” “schools and medical facilities” that would flow from the timber industry.¹¹ However, the market for logs weakened from 1964 into 1966, and royalty payments did not materialize. Most companies had severe establishment problems, dealing with unfamiliar tree species, trying physical and climatic conditions, and the lack of skilled local labor. This perceived lack of “development” did little for the government’s credibility.¹² Already disputes had arisen among people in New Georgia about who had held rights in the Viru land bought by the government and a general feeling that “the people should be able to dispose of their trees to timber Companies without Government mediation, . . . so as to realise the full stumpage value of the trees.”¹³

The government policy to change customary land tenure also threatened to undermine its control of the timber resource, weakening the effectiveness of section 53 of the 1959 ordinance. Its “land settlement” scheme began with a pilot project in the New Georgia group in 1966, followed by a bigger one on Malaita in 1967. The “land settlement” scheme, based on Allan’s recommendations, was designed to facilitate the individualization of ownership of customary land. It was premised on the questionable assumptions that this form of tenure was not only essential to intensive cash-crop agriculture and economic development, but was also accelerating an existing trend. As land became registered, it was outside the reach of section 53. Because the government could then no longer prevent Solomon Islanders from dealing directly with timber companies, the potential forest estate and inherent controls on its use and reforestation would be lost. At the time, the government believed that timber companies would not want to deal with Solomon Islanders because of the difficulties in untangling timber and multiple land use rights, as well as the probable uncertainty of performance of any contract.¹⁴

With logging well under way by late 1966, Trenaman realized that the four existing timber companies and one major milling company were licensed to extract up to 283,000 cubic meters of logs annually until about 1970. At this rate, they would log all the available government and alienated land in ten to twenty years. Even with extra areas, on customary land, the resource would be worked out in about thirty-five years. This realization resulted in the department’s reforestation programs and also influenced Trenaman’s conclusion that the best of the “uncommitted

timber stands” should be brought under the department’s control with a view to future logging, so encouraging greater foreign investment and perhaps even local processing (BSIP FD 1967).

One company courted by the government was Levers, who held about 558 square kilometers on Kolombangara under Certificate of Occupation for 999 years. Encouraged by the government in 1961 to examine timber prospects on its idle land on Gizo and Kolombangara, Levers began logging in 1963. In return for promises of a wood-processing factory and the reversion to the government of approximately 457 square kilometers of land after logging, the government guaranteed Levers perpetual title to 101 square kilometers and the first option of timber rights on customary land on Kolombangara. The rights holders concerned knew nothing of this arrangement. Levers also wanted first option on north New Georgia. When Levers decided not to set up a processing plant, the government withdrew the New Georgia option, but in 1966 completed the agreement in relation to Kolombangara. Anxious to encourage a major revenue contributor and potential large employer in the western Solomons, the government in 1967 renewed its offer to use its best offices for first option on north New Georgia because Levers were planning to invest over half a million pounds in roading and plant on Kolombangara.

In 1966 the government designated Kolombangara land a “Forest Area,” to become effective in 1967, as a prelude to its passing into complete government control as public land. Through a similar process, the government obtained former Levers land on Gizo and arranged the exchange of developed land for a forested tract in Alu (Shortland) in 1967.¹⁵

DECLARATION OF FOREST AREAS, 1968

As there were no more “special cases” like Levers that would supply vast tracts for public land, Trenaman looked to legislation. The possibility of declaring forest reserves had been considered, but this category implied their “management solely on behalf of the owners” and could mean the government was obliged to reforest, even if the lands were unsuitable.¹⁶ The department’s difficulties could be overcome by invoking sections 23 and 24 of the Forests and Timber Ordinance (1960) whereby customary land could be declared a “forest area” and set aside “until timber working arrangements were needed therein.” The declaration of forest areas

would also give the government more time to negotiate purchases for public lands. Outside the forest areas, Trenaman thought customary owners should be allowed unfettered exploitation of trees as “wasting assets,” even if it meant amending the law—as long as the public lands of the estate were safeguarded.¹⁷

In May 1968, seventeen areas were declared, totaling 1968 square kilometers, mainly on Santa Isabel and New Georgia, as well as on Alu and inland Guadalcanal (Figure 1). These declarations gave the government power to control the use of the land. Although provisions were made for local peoples’ use rights, other than for “timber and forestry purposes” and the return of some or all of this land to owners’ use for subsistence purposes and “development,” the expectation was that eventually, if the timber stock were economic, the government would purchase the land. In its public notice, the government stressed “that the Forest Area declarations do not affect or alter the ownership of the land and have nothing to do with land acquisition. Any land purchase proposal by the government will be made quite separately.”¹⁸

Reaction was immediate and resounding. Solomon Islanders saw it as a massive land grab by an unjust government. Considerations of the forest as a future national asset were lost on villagers. Many did not believe the government’s statements about the public good and most rejected the concept as foreign. As knowledge of comparative returns from log sales spread, Solomon Islander pressure continued to mount for direct dealing with timber companies. For individual logs, Levers paid owners an average of 23 cents per cubic foot, while the government paid former land rights holders a royalty of a mere 0.125 cents per cubic foot, representing 10 percent of all royalties collected. Even with 10 cents per acre paid for the original purchase of natural forest, the contrast in returns was astounding,¹⁹ and was expressed by the People’s Protection Party when it demanded,

Do we own the land? If so, don’t we own the timber? Why can the government steal our timber and our land in this manner? Government has told us that they are not confiscating our land, but Section 25 [of the Forests Ordinance] contains a provision that the Chief Forestry Officer may order the people who work the timber on our land to replant. This could go on forever. Isn’t this the same as stealing our land? . . . What moneys have the government ever spent in the past on the areas being expropriated? Can we trust the Government to spend the royalty for our benefit? Why can’t we make our own

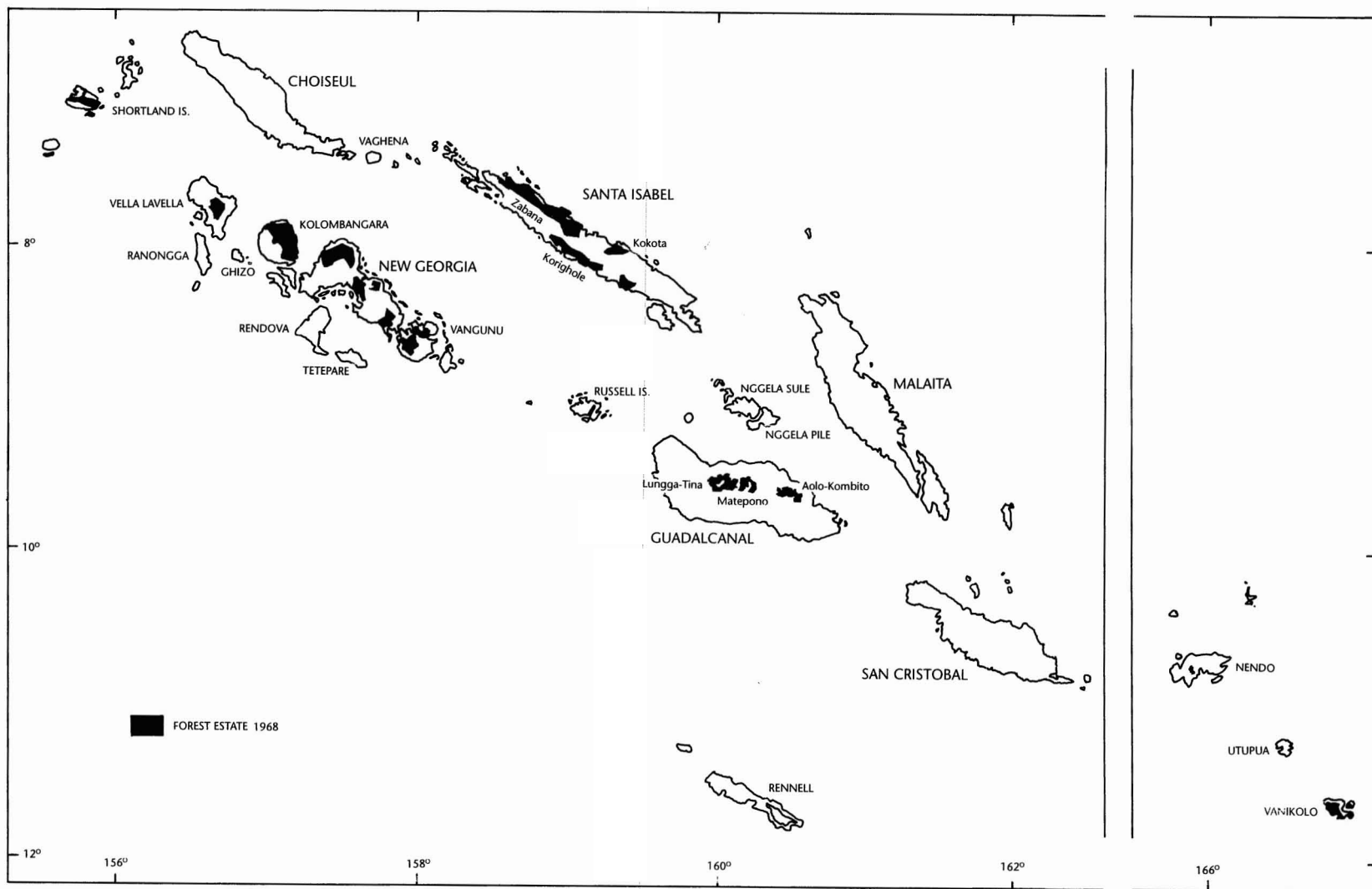


FIGURE 1. Forest areas declared in 1968 in Solomon Islands, exclusive of land purchased by the government.

contracts for the sale of timber in what is unquestionably our forest country? Is it because Government thinks we are not a fit and proper people to make such contracts?²⁰

Their constituents in uproar, the elected members of the Legislative Council objected to the declarations, even though some had served on the select committee appointed by the then Governing Council to draft a White Paper on forestry in which forest areas had featured. On receiving the committee's report in August 1968, the Legislative Council, half its members now elected, discarded the concept of forest areas. This rejection threatened the existence of the White Paper, which incorporated principles and policies vital to the future direction of forestry and the department. Both the council and the department urgently sought an effective legislative compromise to control forest use.²¹

The result was the abandonment of the forest area declaration mechanism and the adoption of a system of control by license: "in order to make timber cutting rights available in future from the major tracts, the Government will first seek either purchase or lease of the areas concerned from the owners, and subsequently grant timber cutting rights under licence" (BSIP 1968, 25). Customary use of trees—for firewood, poles, canoes, and artifacts—needed no license, but mill licenses were required by operators for the milling of timber in areas normally outside land owned or leased by the government. The mill licensee could negotiate directly with the owners of the trees.

Under the new legislation (BSIP 1969), state forests replaced forest reserves—that is, they could be declared only over lands owned or leased by the government for forestry purposes. A "controlled forest" could be declared over any land when "it is necessary or desirable to protect the forest or other vegetation in a rainfall catchment area for the purpose of conserving water resources" (BSIP FD 1969).

The same legislation introduced a levy payable on all timber working, whether for domestic use or export, on all land. The government revoked the export duty on timber, but timber royalties (or stumpage) remained applicable as due payment to owners of standing timber cut, be they government or otherwise.²² The levy was instead of a reforestation requirement on timber companies, to establish the principle that, as reforestation on public land created a national asset, it was a national responsibility.²³

The Forestry Department had revised its estimate of the desirable area

of public land for reforestation, a consequence of closer survey of predicted yields. Trenaman calculated in 1970 that about 842 square kilometers were needed, the estimated suitable area in public hands at this time being around 648 square kilometers, as precise boundary surveys had yet to be done (Figure 2).²⁴ The costs of reforestation were high, and a database was essential. In the 1960s, the department had concentrated on research on timber characteristics, forest stock surveys, appropriate plantation species, different methods of clearing, and spacing of replanted trees (BSIP FD 1960–1970). Although major reforestation aid programs were planned as part of Britain's policy shift to funding projects that would give a long-term economic return, by 1970 the department had reforested only 24 square kilometers. Politically, it could not easily justify immediate acquisition of further tracts of land, although this remained a long-term goal.²⁵

There were other pressures on the department. In 1970–1971, the timber industry attracted 24 percent of the country's export earnings and contributed almost 6 percent to the gross domestic product. It had assisted export diversification and was a sector capable of further growth (Watt 1973; Wood and Watt 1982, 7–11). Accordingly, in the development plan for 1971–1973, the government emphasized expanded timber production (Larmour 1979, 109). At least three-quarters of the country's then-estimated exploitable timber remained in customary ownership. Although it was under control through the licensing system of 1969, it was not securely available for expanded timber working. Trenaman's solution was a system of buying the timber rights or "profits" from the owners of customary land (BSIP FD 1970, 2–3; Larmour 1981, 137).

Negotiations for timber rights over much of sparsely populated Santa Isabel were almost completed in 1972 and the Allardyce Lumber Company was all set to begin logging when Cyclone Ida decimated the stands, estimated at almost 40 percent of the protectorate's timber resources. On New Georgia, disputes regarding who held the timber rights and who should be trustees dragged on for years, delaying agreement for one of the biggest contiguous areas of forest in the Solomons, which the government had planned to allocate to Levers for logging. The only (and final) addition to public land for the estate occurred in 1972, when, after extended negotiations, owners of kauri (*Agathis macrophylla*) and mixed forest on Santa Cruz sold the government about 26 square kilometers.²⁶ By 1975, it was apparent that the aim of the government to secure additional timber rights over customary land had made little progress.

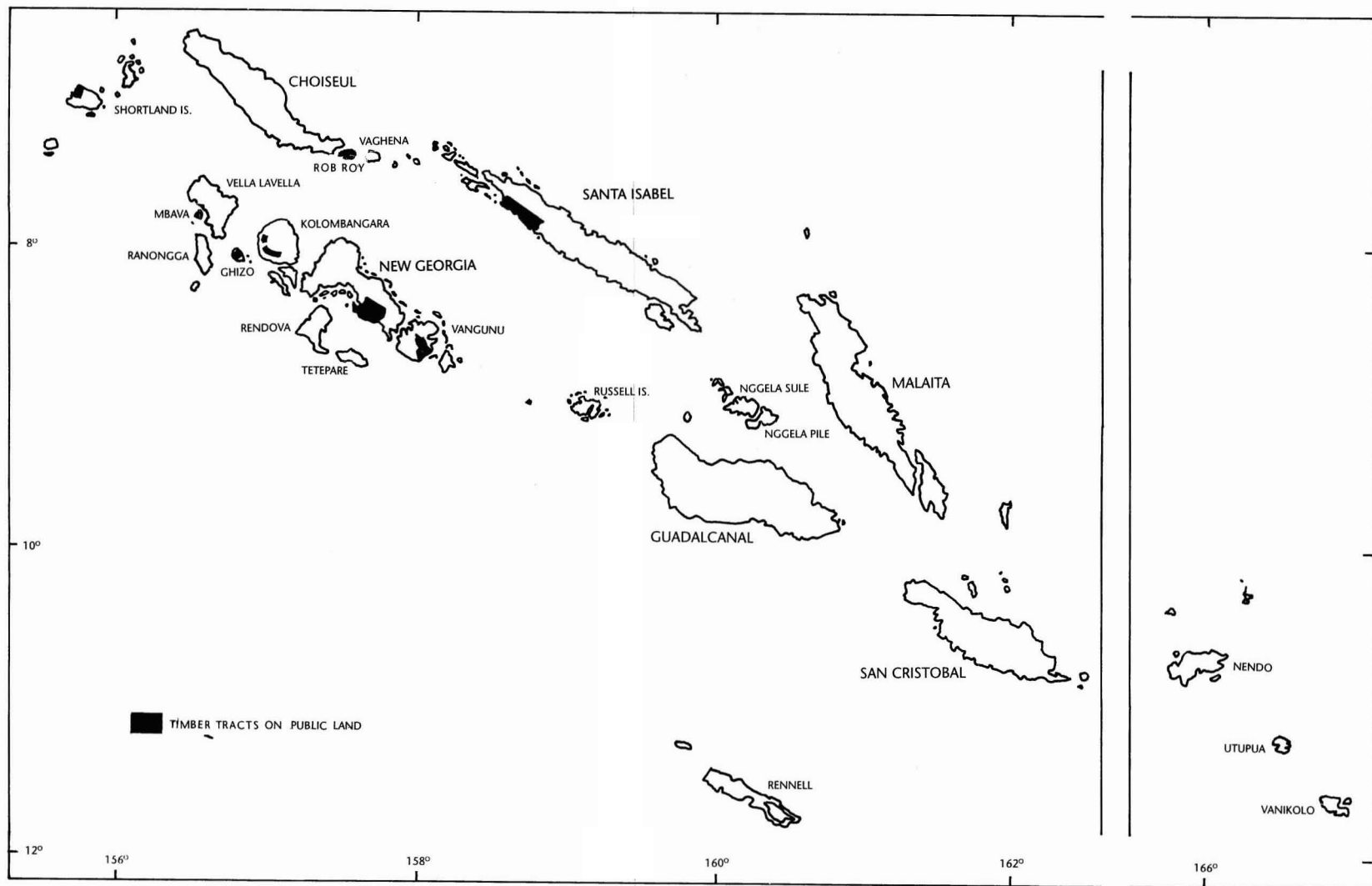


FIGURE 2. Timber tracts on public land of Solomon Islands, 1968, exclusive of declared forest areas.

OF COMMITTEES, NATIONAL AND AREA

Following the directions of the White Paper of 1968, forest policy was due for a major review in the early 1970s. However, by 1974, the Legislative Assembly, under a ministerial system headed by a chief minister, replaced the Governing Council, and a timetable for independence was put in place. Outside the areas being logged, there was lobbying for local participation in the economic benefit, especially as the government's devolution policy was giving political significance to the district councils. For example, some villagers on Makira as well as a development body on Malaita, headed by David Kausimae and Mariano Kelesi, wanted their timber resources assessed, and a drive began for the introduction of local sawmilling projects as well as local processing of logs by foreign companies. Nonetheless, Solomon Islanders feared that if the government reforested customary land then it could claim ownership of the trees, as was the custom in Solomons societies. Consequently, the Legislative Assembly appointed a Forestry Policy Review Select Committee to investigate these and related matters. The committee recognized that land disputes had held up the government's negotiations for timber rights and recommended in its 1975 report that area committees resolve the question of ownership.²⁷ These area committees had come into existence as the former thirty-two small local government councils were replaced in the mid-1970s by eight larger, district-based ones. The areas were council wards. Although elected, committee membership varied according to local practice, but the elected councillor from each ward was always a member. In theory, chiefs and big-men had consultative roles, but frequently members were not specialists in local land knowledge (Bennett 1987, 326).

Other committees of inquiry touched on matters relating to land and forest rights. The 1971 Committee on the Registration of Customary Land, chaired by GNazareth, held that disputes over land were better settled in a district customary land court, apart from the existing Native Courts. These land courts would consist of local assessors respected for their knowledge of land interests plus an independent administrative officer who was a magistrate and would control tendencies to partiality that could lead to protracted cases in superior courts. The committee's criticism of "land settlement" and cadastral boundary surveying resulted in the colonial bureaucracy effectively gagging debate in the Governing

Council. Nonetheless, Customary Land Appeal Courts were established in 1972, coming into effect in 1975 (BSIP CRCL 1971; Heath 1979, 400-407).

The Committee of Inquiry into Lands and Mining, in 1976, was more radical than both the Nazareth Committee and the Forestry Committee, advocating the abandonment of "land settlement" except where land-holding groups, as distinct from individuals, were concerned. Although the committee urged the nonadversarial area committees to settle customary land matters, the government adopted the new appeal courts for this purpose. The committee also recommended return to the vendors of all alienated land, including that recently purchased for forestry purposes, but with the possibility of it being leased by the government. In this atmosphere, with independence pending, any hope that the government could purchase timber rights or land vanished (BSIP CLM 1976).

"A FIT AND PROPER PEOPLE TO MAKE CONTRACTS"

On the eve of independence, British negotiators continued to believe, not unreasonably, that Solomon Islands should use its own resources instead of being a burden on the British taxpayer. The public lands for the estate were part of Britain's plan to create a viable economic portfolio for the future independent Solomons. Britain, through its Overseas Development Administration, was funding a large reforestation program on the public lands to the tune of A\$2.8 million, which would have been threatened by a precipitous return of these lands to former rights holders. Besides the potential value of the future forest, the flow-on effects of such aid were vital to the fledgling government. Although Solomons politicians had to recast their thinking in the face of this program, the departing colonial government could not moderate all their demands. An amendment to the Lands and Titles Act (1977) introduced in November 1977 to the Legislative Assembly by Minister of Natural Resources Paul Tovua and supported by Chief Minister Peter Kenilorea, lessened the demand for wholesale return of lands. Privately held alienated freehold became leases from the government for seventy-five years, but the government held on to its lands for forestry.²⁸

As a result of the same amendment, the forest resource owners could now negotiate *directly*, without the government as intermediary (SIND, 25 Nov 1977). Area committees were to adjudicate on claims to trees,

becoming the body which certified who owned the timber rights. An aggrieved party could appeal to the Customary Land Court, but an appeal could be set aside by application to the High Court, so introducing an adversarial element. Logging companies had to obtain the permission of the conservator of forests to begin negotiations with owners, and the conservator could veto agreements if purely procedural matters had not been followed before logging commenced. The conservator could then recommend to the minister of natural resources that the agreement be approved. Although the minister had the power to make regulations, it too was largely confined to procedural matters. Customary owners could seek the conservator's advice. However, his powers to control loggers, in relation to the agreements and logging methods once extraction had begun on customary land, were virtually nonexistent. Sanctions for breaches of the legislation were not stipulated (BSIP 1977).

Independence, in July 1978, brought no sudden shift in the Forestry Division's direction, and the review of 1975 continued to provide policy guidelines. But the division had to deal with rapidly changing forest use as the Asian market for hardwood burgeoned, particularly from 1981, when Indonesia restricted log exports (BSIP FD 1975-1981; Laarman 1988, 155-156; Lindsay 1989).

Following the commencement of direct negotiation between resource owners and logging companies, a dramatic and predictable shift in the locus of logging occurred. Whereas the decade before independence saw most logging on government land (about 9 percent of total land area) with firm control able to be exercised over a handful of overseas companies, the decade after saw 90-95 percent of all logging on customary land (about 87 percent of total area) with little effective control, eventually, over 14 logging and 19 sawmilling companies (BSIP FD 1980-1989; World Bank 1993, 8).

Problems developed as new companies entered the country. In 1982, Permanent Secretary of Natural Resources Leonard Maenu'u expressed concern that companies were approaching timber resource owners before obtaining the consent of the commissioner of forests, because "the land-owners are easily exploited," yet "get very irate if government tries to interfere" (*Sun*, Aug 1982). That year, the courts found that Minister of Forests Peter Salaka and two public servants were involved in issuing an illegal license to Solmac to log on northeast Malaita, after Maenu'u and Commissioner Sam Gaviro had refused consent (SS, 29 Oct 1982). Com-

plaints were made that Solmac had “fooled the uneducated landowners,” and the question posed was: “Is this the seed of development the present government is sowing in the rural areas?” (SS, 8 Oct 1982). Nevertheless, Prime Minister Solomon Mamaloni maintained his well-known disdain of the “paternalism” of the colonial past, seeing it manifest in official interference in deals between landowners and loggers, an attitude that appeared to become more robust as the country’s need for revenue increased throughout the 1980s (confidential sources). Mamaloni also had a commitment to the devolution of several central government powers to the new provincial governments. These included forestry, at this stage by name only, the extent of the power being undefined. More specific, in 1981, the provincial governments had transferred to them the function of the minister of natural resources in relation to approval of agreements between loggers and customary owners, but only after the central legislature passed the devolution order (Fingleton 1989, 4, 32).

Despite the 1981 fiat, the provinces were in no position to implement it—they had no sources of revenue, limited infrastructure, virtually no trained labor, and not even the lawyers to draft the requisite legislation. Much the same could be said of village communities. Many rural people genuinely believed that companies could bring them what their national government was failing to deliver—schools, clinics, and roads. Provinces and many communities saw the companies as opening a door to development, as had been the case with Levers’ Ringgi Cove operation on Kolombangara in the 1970s. Where individuals and groups did not, they faced social pressure. As well as promising seemingly high royalties and various facilities, companies offered “gifts” or, in the local parlance, “sweet sugar” to individuals, communities, and even provinces, a practice that fitted Melanesian cultural practice, but obligated, if not demanded, reciprocity.

Multitudinous problems with direct negotiations emerged as the expanding Japanese and Korean markets drew more Asian loggers to Solomon Islands. The courts were choked with appeals against timber rights rulings of the area councils, which often had been coerced by dominant cliques or beguiled by “educated” promoters. Loggers who had damaged the soils and watercourses, bulldozed sacred sites, or subcontracted licenses were denounced, as were those who did not pay enough in royalties, or did not provide schools, clinics, and roads for any longer than the life of the extraction operation (*PIM*, Aug 1989). Many commu-

nities learned the hard way “that ‘Development of Rural Areas’ is not the business of commercial logging companies” (SI OO 1991, 15).

The area councils, as the committees became known after independence, parochial in essentials, had neither the expertise nor often the legitimacy to negotiate with logging companies. Some were even negotiating with the landowners *on behalf of* the company. With their responsibility to decide who owned the timber resource, these elected “honourables” were in fact exercising judicial functions, a conflict of powers that left the way open for bribery by logging companies and near-compulsion by other interested parties (Andrew Nori in SI Parliament, May 1990, 415–416). Disgruntled resource owners focused their indignation on the Forestry Division for not having protected their “rights,” despite their own failure, in most cases, to consult the division before inviting loggers in. Often, when they had tried, the division simply did not have sufficient staff available. Moreover, the commissioner had no legal power to intervene if proper procedures had been followed; he had enough on his hands with a government anxious, if not desperate, for revenue from levies and duties on exported logs, but unwilling to give him the trained staff to control underenumerated shipments being spirited out of the country from 1980 on (SI FD 1980; SS, 20 Sept 1983, 2; 27 Sept 1984; SI OO 1989, 25–52).

In part, the problems were attributable to the unequal power relationship between a large foreign logging company, often a multinational, and rural people and to the uncertainty of the law, because of the failure of the Solomons government to overhaul the relevant acts to deal with the great changes in the location, intensity, and extent of logging after independence. The existence of different procedures at the local level for settling disputes over land and timber rights, respectively, created enormous inconsistency and resentment, and the courts were overloaded with cases (Fingleton 1989, 34). The Forest Policy Review Committee set up in 1981 might have acted to prevent these problems, but a change of government, with Mamaloni as the new prime minister, had seen its dissolution (SI FD 1981–1983). With new species being taken, and revised data on regeneration rates, no one was really sure of the extent of the resource, a resource that was being exploited with great rapidity. As early as 1980 it was predicted that at current rates of extraction the resource, which then produced 10 percent of the gross domestic product and employed fifteen hundred people, would be exhausted by the year 2000 (SI FD 1981–1983; Wood and Watt 1982, 1).

The central government declared a two-year moratorium on the issuing of new logging licenses that went from April 1983 to March 1985, then extended it, in order to give the Forestry Division a chance to conduct an inventory of forest resources (which they finally began in 1990 with Australian aid). But the constraints on area council members were mirrored and magnified at the national level, resulting in parliamentary exemptions from the moratorium. In January 1986, for example, Malaitan provincial and national politicians pressed Minister Daniel Sande and the commissioner to declare Malaita exempt from the moratorium so that Kayuken Pacific Limited could extend in West Kwaio. The minister finally agreed, accepting the delegation's beguiling logic that, as the small extent of forest left on Malaita would soon be cleared for subsistence and cash crops, it might as well be logged commercially.²⁹ Similarly, before the anticipated lifting of yet another moratorium in 1994, Minister Joses Tuhonuku claimed he was offered a cash bribe by a representative of Berjaya, a Malaysian conglomerate, to facilitate the issuance of a logging license (SS, 18 Mar; 20, 27 July; 3 Aug 1994).

THE INDEPENDENT STATE AND FOREST USE

Having at independence and before championed the rights of the landowners, Solomons politicians were unwilling to reconsider the central issue of whether or not the state's rights were paramount in the control of the forest resource. Instead, the government introduced "a very tough policy" that was in fact a bureaucratic and legal smoke screen that would confuse and ultimately deter both companies and owners from reaching a valid and reliable agreement. Minister Ataban Tropa assured parliament that the amendment in 1984 had been "drafted and redrafted over again under my close supervision" (Tropa in SI Parliament, May-June 1984, 510-511; Fingleton 1989, 41). Despite his assertion, the amendment included a poorly drafted standard logging agreement of some technical complexity, much of it unenforceable with the existing staffing levels in the Forestry Division (Fingleton 1989, 40-42). Procedures were altered—potential loggers had to apply to the government's Foreign Investment Board, which evaluated the project and notified the provincial government concerned. If all were well, the company then had to apply to the commissioner, who would then send the application to the provincial government and the appropriate area council. Through a long series of

set, but complex, procedures, the area council was to attest to the ownership of the land concerned and advise the commissioner, who could then recommend to the minister that approval be given. However, the standard logging agreement was not gazetted until 1987. By then, the Forests and Timber Act was undergoing more amendments as various inconsistencies became evident (Figure 3; SI FD 1984-1986; Mamaloni 1988, 135).

Although a cogent forest policy statement had emerged in 1984, it had not been implemented by 1989, because, as Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Natural Resources S Danitofea phrased it, of "shortcomings in the forest legislation, institutional weakness and lack of public awareness" (SI 1989, 5; SI FID 1984, 23-26). "Institutional weakness" was the consequence of the government's underfunding of the expanding responsibilities of the Forestry Division. Forestry-based revenue was diverted elsewhere. In 1989, 93.2 percent of the division's budget was derived from aid, as had been largely the case for twenty years. Yet, total government earnings that year from forestry (royalties, levies, duties, and fees) exceeded total expenditure of the division by 165 percent (Thorpe 1994, 22).

Permanent Secretary Danitofea published a revised statement in August 1989 to raise public awareness as a step toward new legislation to control forest exploitation. The situation was grim, with licenses issued for 924,000 cubic meters per year, double the maximum annual permissible cut of 400,000 cubic meters.³⁰ Replanting could not keep up with this frenzy of logging. Although the division had replanted about 10 percent of all public land, almost 242 square kilometers, by 1990, the big issue remained how to encourage and, in the final analysis, control reforestation on customary land (SI Parliament, July-Aug 1987, 225-227; June-July 1988, 167-171). A conservative estimate is that the area logged from 1964 to 1991 was between 1553 and 1941 square kilometers, or 61-76 percent of the 2540 square kilometers of the suitable forested land available. The division has replanted only some 16 percent of all logged land, though the likely return could be three times that from the natural forest (BSIP/SI FD 1964-1989).

The 1989 policy statement showed a growing emphasis on "national economy and the welfare of the people," "the long-term national interest," and "a common purpose in the interests of all Solomon Islanders." Reflecting a growing Pacific regional consciousness of environmental concerns, the document, for the first time, outlined the objective of "set[ting]

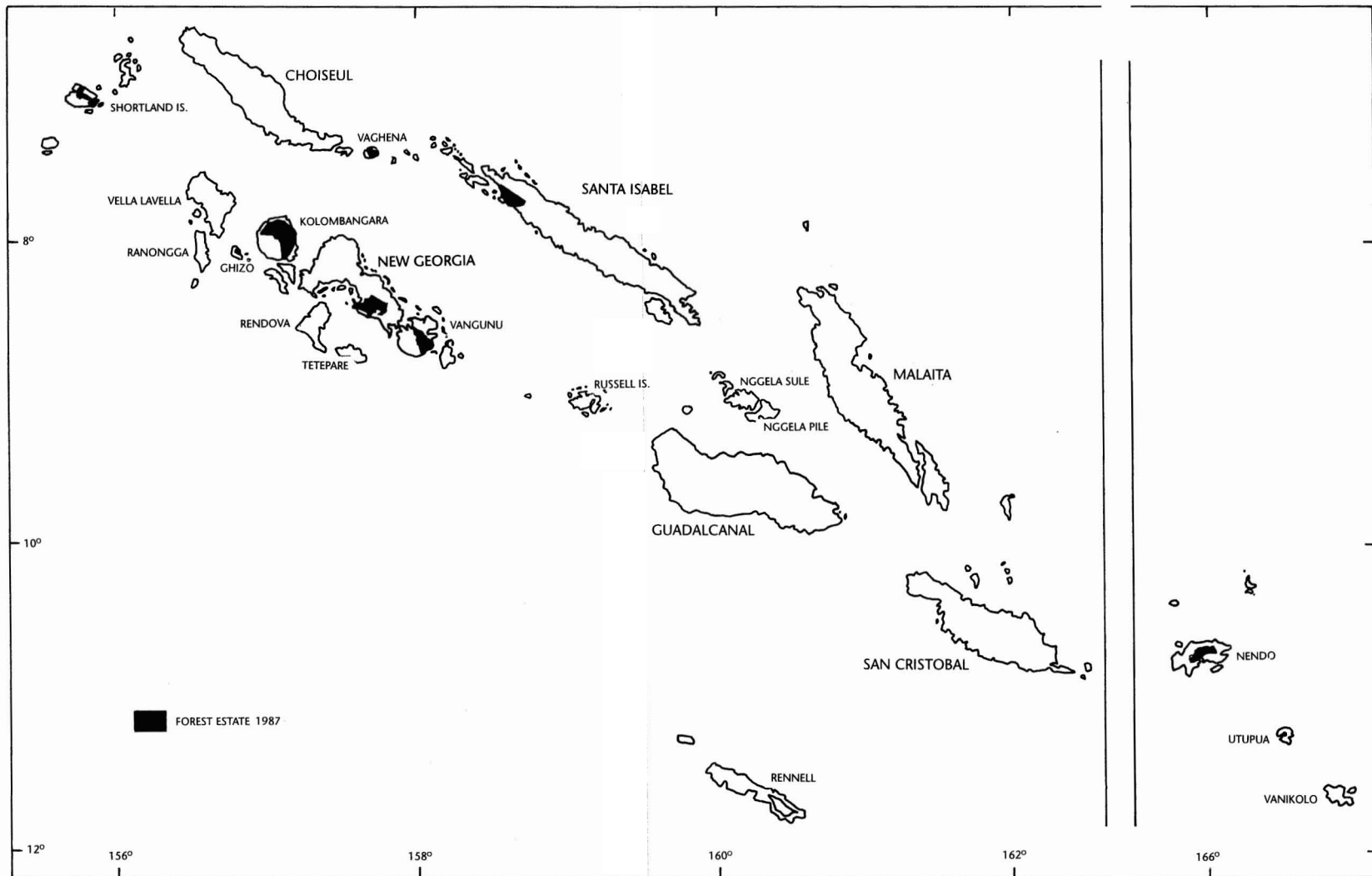


FIGURE 3. Solomon Islands forest estate, 1987, on land owned by the government.

aside areas for environmental, ecological, scientific and heritage reserves” (SI 1989, 7, 15; see SS, 15 Mar 1985, 24 Feb, 1 Sept, 1 Dec 1989). The new emphasis could be interpreted as a prelude to the reassertion of the state’s interest in the forest resource, virtually renounced in 1977 and ratified by the early independent government. However, in late 1994 the Mamaloni government seemed more disposed to extricating itself from a tight corner by devolving “control” of logging licensing and reforestation on customary land to the provinces in the hope that they, in theory closer to the “treeroots,” will somehow convince people of the desirability of conservation and sustainability. The outcome is likely to be just the opposite, with a further intensification of logging in quest of provincial revenue (SI 1989, 14; World Bank 1993, 32).

What of the public lands designated for the forest estate? In the twilight of the colonial period the estate remained largely intact as Solomon Islanders’ desire for more land with commercial potential was met by the government’s redistribution of formerly alienated lands as their leases lapsed (Scheffler and Larmour 1987, 319–320). In the early 1980s, the government was under increasing pressure to return lands where no “development,” that is, no reforestation, had taken place, which was over 80 percent of the area of the forest estate. The definition of the boundaries of public lands began in 1985, with the central government prepared to return small tracts where there was need. On Santa Isabel for example, the government has given 42 hectares for the site of a provincial secondary school and more than 7000 hectares to the provincial government, returned 600 hectares to a former owner, and retained 20,000 hectares of the Allardyce tract. Solomon Mamaloni, when leader of the opposition in 1986, suggested that a percentage of duties collected by the central government from logging in state-owned forests go to the relevant provincial government, but not that the state relinquish control of these forests (confidential source). However, by 1990 provincial governments were moving to obtain control of all state-owned land, to obtain some source of funding (ST, 12–17 Feb 1990). Prime Minister Mamaloni, fearful of a “Bougainville” in Solomons, moved quickly to divest the government of its lands on Kolombangara, though retaining ownership of its replanted trees for the time being. Almost one-third of the public lands of the forest estate went in trust to the disputatious land claimants, not to the province (Thorpe 1994, 93–94).

Elsewhere, the central government still seems ambivalent on this issue.

In 1990, the timber industry contributed 8 percent to government revenue and 34 percent of export earnings, in comparison to earnings from fish at about 30 percent, palm oil at 10 percent, and cocoa and copra each at about 6 percent. As the national deficit increased, log exports increased, licenses being issued for the extraction of an astonishing 1.3 million cubic meters in 1993–94. In 1993, earnings from timber were up to 60 percent of export revenue, so the state's incentive to preserve control of public land is not especially strong; however, if extraction from customary land continues at more than double its World Bank–recommended sustainable level of 300,000 cubic meters annually, that attitude could change. Further stimulus may come from the World Bank and Australia (as a member of the Pacific Forum), both of whom have recently signaled that neither loans nor aid packages will continue to be provided to compensate for the national government's resource mismanagement and failure to collect revenues on undervalued logs.³¹

Although the central and provincial governments claim they have a legitimate interest in the public lands of the estate, the villagers, their status affirmed as “resource owners,” have not greatly altered their views on who should have this land. They are more intransigent than ever, particularly as the population of about 367,400 continues to increase at 3.4 percent annually, requiring more subsistence land. Moreover, at least 38 percent of Solomon Islanders remain illiterate, limiting their ability to participate in diversified economic enterprise, beyond the growing of such cash crops as coconuts and cocoa where they have suitable land.³²

The main hope for the survival of the forest estate lies in plans for reforestation in some combination with selective logging and natural regeneration of the forest on customary lands. Various joint ventures between local groups or provincial governments on the one hand, and the central government or government-related agencies on the other, funded as usual by overseas aid, have started to use these public lands as demonstration and experimental plots and as seedling banks. The New Zealand government has funded a reforestation project on north Malaita customary lands degraded by either excessive gardening or logging, and has recently extended the project to logged land in Guadalcanal and Western Province. The Commonwealth Development Corporation (a British public corporation, funded by loans from that country's aid program), in association with Kolombangara Forest Products Limited, Western Province, and the central government have finalized respective commitments

to a project for sustainable plantation development and logging of the exotic *Gmelina arborea* and other species for wood-chip and sawn timber on Kolombangara. This project has the potential to be a great revenue earner for the government and a major employer of Solomon Islanders, as well as to facilitate reforestation of the logged adjacent islands, including north New Georgia. Moreover, aid agencies such as the Australian International Development Assistance Bureau and the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, working under the guidance of the commissioner of forests and his staff, are attempting to remedy the first two problems outlined in the 1989 *Forest Policy Statement* of "institutional weakness" and "shortcomings in the forest legislation." These efforts include a National Forest Inventory Project completed in 1993, an expanded Timber Control Unit in operation, and the drafting of a new forestry bill, still in process because of the need to define national and provincial powers (A Paul in SI Parliament, May 1990, 427). "Public awareness," the third problem area outlined in the 1989 statement, has been heightened by the rural-based campaigns of overworked nongovernment organizations, as well as publicity by the Forest Inventory Project, the Timber Control Unit, and the extension services of the Forestry Division.

CONCLUSION

The colonial and independent governments have both been shortsighted regarding control of the forest resource. The colonial government failed to understand the desire of its subjects to deal directly with outsiders for the sale of their resources. The independent government failed to appreciate what would happen when they did. Although the British began with the principle of the state's right to control the use of the forest resource for the national good, its preoccupation with the creation of the estate on public lands caused it to make compromises that weakened this principle. The acceptance of rights to customary lands as an equivalent to full ownership and the admission that areas unwanted for public lands could be the subject of direct dealing in timber rights as wasting assets, implied that the state's rights were not paramount. Some would see the abandonment of the forest areas in the face of Solomon Islander opposition in 1968 as another nail in the coffin of the state's rights to control customary land for the public benefit (eg, Fingleton 1989, 10-11, 37-39). Yet

the 1969 legislation introduced a licensing system that had not existed before to control the felling of trees for milling on customary land. It also legitimized the principle of direct dealing, allowing Solomon Islanders to negotiate to sell trees on license from their customary lands. From there, it was but a short step to direct dealing in timber rights with logging companies in 1977. The wonder is that Solomon Islander politicians did not force the legislation through earlier. By 1977, it was too late to remedy the institutional weaknesses in dealing with land tenure, resulting from the failure to set up a lands trust board as had been suggested in the late 1940s and late 1950s. A statutory board might have been able to put some distance between the volatility of national politics and decisions for the wisest long-term use of the forest for landholders. Similarly, Allan's land councils could have developed a rights adjudication process, with checks and balances, well before the rush on forests after independence, thereby preventing venal individuals from suborning area councils.

Partly in reaction to colonial paternalism, the Solomon Islands government has thrown out the baby with the bathwater, allowing their country's unsophisticated rural dwellers to enter negotiating situations in which they are grossly disadvantaged. In many ways, the colonial government was deaf to its subjects, but the independent government has been overwhelmed by the clamor of its citizens, a clamor that should not be underestimated. From the mid-sixties, for Solomon Islanders and their governments, the unquestioned dogma has been "development"—in the visible form of roads, schools, and clinics and viable commercial ventures like sawmilling or cash-crop production and what these can earn. The colonial government offered development as the inducement to the villagers to register and cultivate their lands and open their forests, along with other resources. By independence, steady, if gradual, development was evident, but aspirations and population growth outran it, as Solomon Islanders in government, business, and the professions in the well-serviced towns became models for those in the remote villages. To these people, and sections of the government, the advent of logging companies appeared to be a way to short-circuit the slow progress to material development when government resources were in short supply. The same clamor may force the dismantling of the public lands of the forest estate. Whether or not the state tries to retain them will depend on the government's perception of them as a legacy for future generations or a liability in its relationship with the provinces and its strong-minded citizens.

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Notes

- 1 BSIP F28/12-1: Kleran(?) to Sec to Govt, 17 Dec 1945.
- 2 BSIP F 28/18: Tenaru Timbers Proprietary Limited 1951-1952, and encls.
- 3 BSIP 1959; SI FD 1959-1978: For 1/8, vol 1, Trenaman to Dun 26 Oct 1959 and encls.
- 4 Trenaman 1962; SI FD OF F32: Memo for a Government House meeting 26 Mar 1964 and encls. See also Heath 1979, 150-219, 319-320.
- 5 Trenaman 1962, and pers comm, Sept 1994.
- 6 SI FD OF F32: Memo for Government House meeting 26 Mar 1964.
- 7 BSIP FD 1963; SI FD OF F128: Jack(?) to Munro 28 Dec 1968. Vaghena was allocated to Gilbertese resettlement in 1963.
- 8 BSIP FD OF F216: Bengough, A Brief Summary of British Solomons Forestry Company's 1965 Survey of Vangunu, May 1965; OF F107: Alisae to Chief Forestry Officer 4 June 1963; OF F128: Commissioner of Lands to DC 12 Nov 1963; OF F32: Kera to CFO 9 Apr 1963.
- 9 BSIP FD OF F128: Nano to Trenaman 22 Jan 1964.
- 10 BSIP FD OF F189: Melhuish, minutes of meeting, Financial Secretary's office, 1 Nov 1965; OF F32: Trenaman to Chief Secretary, 17 May 1966.
- 11 Trenaman 1963. See also BSIP FD 1963, 14.
- 12 BSIP FD 1963-1967; SI FD OF F128: Jack(?) to Munro, 28 Dec 1968.
- 13 SI FD OF M 21/1/1: Trenaman to Chief Secretary, Acquisition of Viru Land, 18 Oct 1965.
- 14 SI FD OF F32: Memo for and minutes of a Government House meeting, 26 Mar 1964, and encl; Trenaman to Chief Secretary, Land for Forestry 15 Apr 1965.
- 15 SI FD OF F139: Brief for Thorpe, Collins, and Walton 28 Feb 1967; OF F209: Thorpe to Forster 15 June 1967; Bennett 1987, 332-333; Eresi in SI Parliament, Mar 1980, 189-190.
- 16 SI FD OF F32: Minutes of a Government House Meeting, 26 Mar 1964.

17 SI FD OF F32: Trenaman to Chief Secretary, 17 May 1966; [Trenaman], Aspects of Forest Policy, encl, 26 Mar 1964; OF F209: Thorpe to Foster 15 June 1967.

18 SI FD OF M22/1/1: Public Notice 77/68, 21 June 1968.

19 SI FD OF F306: Tagoa to Committee 6 Aug 1968, Bosa to Russell 13 Aug 1968; OF F212: Balesi to [Trenaman] 13 Nov 1968; OF F209: Collins to Landholders 20 Oct 1968; OF F129: Jack(?) to Munro 28 Dec 1968.

20 SI FD OF F306: Bryan, Tagoa, Taria, Kaomaue, Mali, Bosa, Bula, Mau, Cook, Golagola, Pirua, Tago, Ronouania, to Russell 16 July 1968.

21 SI FD OF F306: Pepys-Cockerell to Brown 10 Mar 1969; Select Committee on Forestry, encls; BSIP LC 1968a, 1968b, 6 June; BSIP FD 1967-1969; K Trenaman, pers com, Sept 1994. See also, SI FD OF F32: Trenaman to Chief Secretary 17 May 1966.

22 BSIP FD 1969; SI FD OF F72: Trenaman to Wyatt-Smith 1 July 1970.

23 SI FD OF F139: Notes, Government House 24 Nov 1962; Notes, Acting High Commissioner's Office 14 Apr 1964; OF F32: Memo for Government House meeting, and encls, Minutes of meeting 26 Mar 1964; BSIP FD 1965: OF For 1/8, 25 Vol 111: Trenaman to Spence 26 July 1966, Annual Summary Report FD 1968.

24 SI FD OF F306: Trenaman to Financial Secretary 13 July 1970; BSIP FD 1965-1970.

25 SI FD OF F72: Trenaman to Wyatt-Smith 1 July 1970; BSIP FD 1970; BSIP 1968, 14.

26 BSIP FD, 1970-1974; SI FD OF F72: Trenaman to Wyatt-Smith 11 July 1973; OF F2/3 and F306: Trenaman, Background Paper for Forest Policy Review Committee.

27 SI FD OF F192: Trenaman to Manager 27 Mar 1973 and encls; OF F112/1/1: Trenaman to District Commissioner, Malaita 19 Apr 1973 and encls; OF F441/1/15: Mamaloni, Public Meeting of Governing Council Nov 1972, encl; BSIP FD 1970-1975; SI FD OF F32 and F306: Gauwane and others, BSIP FPRC 1975 and encls; BSIP CLM 1976, 12; Heath 1979, 400-413.

28 BSIP CLM 1976, 25-28; Scheffler and Larmour 1987, 316-317; SI FD OF F7/4: Visit of Forestry Advisor to SI 19-26 May 1977; BSIP FD 1978.

29 Confidential source; SI OO 1988, 1991.

30 SI FD 1989; Kenilorea in SI Parliament, Feb-Mar 1987, 234-235; SI 1989.

31 Hughes 1991, 23; AIDAB 1991, 31; World Bank 1993, 9, 31-32; PIM, Mar 1994; Fingleton 1994, 19-20; SS, 9, 18, 25 Mar, 3 Aug 1994; APN, 28 Oct 1994.

32 Mamaloni 1988; AIDAB 1991, 46; World Bank 1993, iii; Haberkorn 1994, 64; Wate 1993, 424.

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Abstract

Independent Solomon Islands inherited lands that the colonial state had acquired and dedicated for forest use. Solomon Islanders became increasingly wary of the government's intentions regarding control of these lands and, by the late 1960s, as political consciousness increased, resistance grew to government purchase and reservation through legislation. Pressure by Solomon Islanders caused the colonial government to limit its attempts to control the forest resource for the public good, a process that accelerated after independence in 1978. Since then, in the face of an expanding Asian market for timber, the claims of resource owners and a revenue-seeking central government have seen frantic logging of customary land by mainly Asian logging companies, with little tangible return to Solomon Islanders. Provincial governments and rural communities are already demanding control of public lands, a demand that may be resisted by the central government as timber on customary land is worked out and plantation forests mature.

KEYWORDS: central government, colonial state, forest resource, land, provincial governments, public land, resource owners, Solomon Islands