

*the unified voice of NGOs in Belize*



## PRESS RELEASE

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### **BNN Urges Transparency and Reform in Long-Term Logging Concessions in Belize's Forest Reserves**

The Belize Network of NGOs (BNN) joins the calls for transparency regarding the issuing of long-term logging concessions/licenses in Belize's forest reserves, national natural patrimony of the Belizean people, and calls on the Ministry of Sustainable Development responsible for the Forest Department to conduct an independent examination of the current regulatory framework towards identifying necessary changes to the process of granting and managing these concessions. Our conclusion follows a review of the related and relevant legislation and policy environment, which reveals that although there is a standard system of planning and monitoring of harvests in place in furtherance of sustainability, there is:

- a) A lack of much-needed environmental clearance process requiring environmental impact assessments and public consultation as a requirement to license approvals. This undermines comprehensive assessment of the viability of the concession while maintaining the integrity of the good and services, such as water services, provided by these forest reserves to Belizeans.
- b) A lack of reduced impact logging experience and track record requirements, and training requirements for license approvals, including for such requirements for contractors involved in logging in these concessions.
- c) A lack of resources of the Forest Department to ensure consistent monitoring beyond pre- and post-harvest assessments and ensure compliance with all the conditions of the licenses, including allowing for compliance and monitoring activities that may fall outside of regular hours.
- d) A lack of specified standard monitoring mechanisms and independent party involvement in monitoring to evaluate impacts on wildlife, water quality, cultural heritage features and other impacts beyond those on timber species, except in cases where the concession is certified by an international body such as the Forest Stewardship Council. This undermines the consistency and transparency required in monitoring efforts, especially in key biodiversity areas.
- e) A lack of information sharing regarding regulatory changes that is creating confusion. For example, on a recent media show, government officials asserted that logging concessionaires can venture into tourism in forest reserves. But reviews of management frameworks, the National Protected Areas Systems Act, the Forest Policy, or the Forest Act do not reference this.

The BNN calls on the Ministry of Sustainable Development and the Forest Department to meet with protected area co-managers, community representatives and other stakeholders as a matter of urgency to inform on the process governing long-term logging concessions/licenses and to field questions and address concerns raised therefrom, especially since these licenses are granted for as much as 40 years.

BNN maintains that forest reserves are integral to our national estate. It is in the public interest that these logging concessions are issued under a transparent, inclusive, and accountable decision-making and environmental

clearance processes like any other profit driven development to safeguard shared national benefits from our natural resources.

ENDS.

### **About BNN**

*The Belize Network of NGOs is a non-profit organization that seeks to be the unified voice of non-governmental organizations in Belize advocating for good governance to achieve sustainable human development. BNN was founded in 2017 alongside the establishment of the 13<sup>th</sup> Senator of Belize, who represents the interest of the NGO community in the national assembly. BNN aims to create good governance through avenues such as advocacy, position statements, and the representation of the NGO community through the 13<sup>th</sup> Senator and national committees.*