

Palm Oil Firm Digoel Agri Said to Clear Papuan Forest Without Indigenous Consent

By [Hans Nicholas Jong](#)

Asia-Pacific Research, March 29, 2021

[Mongabay](#) 25 March 2021

Region: [South-East Asia](#)

Theme: [Justice](#), [Society](#)

All Global Research articles **can be read in 51 languages by activating the “Translate Website”** drop down menu on the top banner of our home page (Desktop version).

After halting forest-clearing operations in 2020, the Digoel Agri conglomerate has apparently restarted its activities in Indonesia’s Papua province, raising alarms among local Indigenous communities who say they never agreed to its presence on their ancestral lands.

Satellite imagery from the first two months of 2021 shows 64 hectares (158 acres) of deforestation in two Digoel Agri concessions, those held by its subsidiaries PT Boven Digoel Budidaya Sentosa and PT Perkebunan Boven Digoel Sejahtera, according to forest monitoring platform [Nusantara Atlas](#).

Pusaka, an Indonesian nonprofit that analyzed the satellite imagery, says it has heard from local villagers that the conglomerate’s land-clearing contractor started bringing heavy equipment into the area in November 2020.

In 2019, Digoel Agri [cleared 164 hectares \(405 acres\) of forest](#), before pausing operations in October that year, when it reportedly stopped paying staff salaries.

The concessions form part of the Tanah Merah project, a vast area on the island of New Guinea [earmarked to become the world’s largest oil palm plantation](#). The project lies in the heart of the world’s third-largest rainforest, after the Amazon and Congo.

Development on the project has only just begun, but if it is carried through to completion, it will result in the clearance of 280,000 hectares (692,000 acres) of rainforest, releasing a huge amount of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere.

The project has been mired in controversy, such as [allegations of falsified permits](#), conflicts with Indigenous peoples, and the use of shell companies in offshore secrecy jurisdictions to conceal the identities of the investors behind the project, [several of which remain a mystery](#).

Digoel Agri was founded by the family of the late Ventje Rumangkang, a founder of Indonesia’s Democratic Party who died last year. They have partnered with a New Zealand property developer named Neville Mahon, who in 2018 became the majority shareholder in the Digoel Agri subsidiaries. Neither party replied to a request for comment.

[A report](#) from Pusaka includes allegations that Digoel Agri has failed to obtain the free, prior and informed consent of local Indigenous tribes.

“The ancestral forests that have important value for their livelihoods and cultures will be gone” if the project continues, Pusaka director Franky Samperante told Mongabay, adding that the group had been unable to obtain copies of permits held by Digoel Agri.

*

Note to readers: please click the share buttons above or below. Forward this article to your email lists. Crosspost on your blog site, internet forums. etc.

Featured image: Rainforest in Boven Digoel district, Papua. (Source: Mongabay)

The original source of this article is [Mongabay](#)
Copyright © [Hans Nicholas Jong](#), [Mongabay](#), 2021

[Comment on Global Research Articles on our Facebook page](#)

[Become a Member of Global Research](#)

Articles by: [Hans Nicholas Jong](#)

Disclaimer: The contents of this article are of sole responsibility of the author(s). Asia-Pacific Research will not be responsible for any inaccurate or incorrect statement in this article. Asia-Pacific Research grants permission to cross-post Asia-Pacific Research articles on community internet sites as long the source and copyright are acknowledged together with a hyperlink to the original Asia-Pacific Research article. For publication of Asia-Pacific Research articles in print or other forms including commercial internet sites, contact: editors@asia-pacificresearch.com

www.asia-pacificresearch.com contains copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. We are making such material available to our readers under the provisions of "fair use" in an effort to advance a better understanding of political, economic and social issues. The material on this site is distributed without profit to those who have expressed a prior interest in receiving it for research and educational purposes. If you wish to use copyrighted material for purposes other than "fair use" you must request permission from the copyright owner.

For media inquiries: editors@asia-pacificresearch.com