

# Loggers threaten track

## Million-kina offers shock trail friend

By ALEX RHEENEY

PAPUA New Guinea icon — the Kokoda track — is said to be threatened by loggers intent on chopping down trees in the untouched jungle that was the scene of fierce fighting in World War II.

Australian Charlie Lynn, a New South Wales parliamentarian, told the *Post-Courier* yesterday that loggers have approached villagers living along the famous track with cash inducements of between K10 million and K20 million in exchange for timber concessions to the area.

"I was shocked; it was just my worst nightmare," said Mr Lynn who chairs the Kokoda Track Foundation, which has sponsored education and health projects and programs in villages along the track.

"Loggers have to be made accountable to the Papua New Guinea people; you can't just walk in and take away their land; its their life and culture."

However, he showed statements signed by community leaders from the Iorabaiwa, Nauro, Monari, Ua Ule Creek, Efogi 1, Efogi 2 and Naduri villages, vowing to protect the track from logging companies intent on "destroying" it by felling trees.

Mr Lynn, who started the foundation which aims to promote education, health and sporting initiatives firstly for Kokoda villagers and later Papua New Guineans, said he would join community leaders from the area to write to the National Forest Authority to stop timber concessions being given to logging companies. Emphasising the benefits of a self-sustaining eco-trekking industry along the track that saw Australia suffer over 6000 casualties between 1942 and 1943, Mr Lynn said logging posed a threat to eco-trekkers and the foundation's objective of having it declared as a national memorial park.

Mr Lynn, who has been walking the Kokoda track



APPALLED: Charlie Lynn with the anti-logging petition from the local people.

## Meeting turns rowdy

By MALUM NALU

A MEETING of major operators and stakeholders of the Kokoda Trail turned rowdy yesterday when Koiari and Kokoda landowners expressed their anger at funding and road issues.

They particularly expressed their anger at Australian tour operator Ruth Dicker holding on to about K80,000 in trekking fees collected over the last two years.

The money is from K100 individual trekking fees collected by Mrs Dicker's company, Niugini Tours in Sydney.

The landowners argued at the Gateway Hotel meeting, organised by the Tourism Promotion Authority, that all monies collected by Mrs Dicker be given to the newly created Kokoda Track Authority.

release the funds on the basis that the Kokoda Track Authority gave her a letter of indemnity saying that in future, if some landowners complained about not getting funds Ruth had been collecting, they would be referred to the Kokoda Track Authority to deal with," said Mr Bartlett.

The management committee of the KTA will meet next week to further discuss this issue.

Koiari landowners also gave an ultimatum that unless a commitment was given to the Owners' Corner to Sogeri Road, made within two weeks, they would put up a boom gate and charge all tour operators bringing in tourists.