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Call to pay forest owners

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Paying forest land owners is an important mechanism for conserving the nature, says conservationist and vice-chair of National Trust of Fiji, Dr Robin Yarrow at the Conservation Science Forum yesterday.

Fiji's forests are the home of all endemic bio diversity and the conservation of these forests was the most important responsibility for Fiji by becoming a member of the Convention on Biological Diversity.

"Yet their conservation will remain a distant dream if we are unable to interest the forest landowners," said Dr Yarrow.

Due to Fiji's current economy status, landowners' interests were determined largely by income requirements.

According to Dr Yarrow, forest conservation, either formal or informal, should be a 'recognised and economically rewarding land use'.

"In the past and currently, the only forest land uses which are beneficial for landowners are inherently destructive -- poorly controlled short-term logging and conversion to the likes of mahogany, coconut, cocoa or other farming enterprises.

"Forest owners are denied any rewards from the environmental services their forests supply," said Dr Yarrow.

Forest custodianship should be a recognised land use and those landowners who were willing to maintain quality forest should be rewarded, he added.

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