

 EDITORIAL

# No mining on Wagina

It maybe sometime yet before this country would be ready for mining. That is the scenario now. Already we've seen groups opposing mining in their provinces. Isabel and Choiseul have indicated and made their intentions clear that they opposed any mining operation in their provinces.

East Choiseul MP Manasseh Sogavare is the latest person to have expressed his opposition when he issued a warning in Parliament against any government plans to mine Wagina Island in the Choiseul Province unless the sector is reformed with maximum benefits.

He uttered this in Parliament

during the debate of the Business Names Bill 2014. Mr Sogavare's warning should not be taken lightly as it is obvious a lot of Choiseul people opposed mining in their province.

The MP revealed on the floor of Parliament that he heard of some news and warned that any moves by the Government and the so-called developer to force their way into Wagina Island will not be taken lightly.

How things are unfolding shows the mining industry in Solomon Island may never reach its full potential.

Such a warning from an influential leader should not be taken for granted because as he

puts it...the Solomon Islands Government and anyone else will be committing a big mistake if they try to take a tough line on this matter using the alienated status of that island."

Wagina Island has contributed enough to the development of the country by supporting the biggest seaweed industry in the South Pacific and the Government cannot risk destroying it through mining.

It is therefore imperative that the government drop any plans it has to mine Wagina unless the sector is reformed to ensure maximum benefits for the county.

Sogavare's sentiments clearly

shows that people will only accept mining if the sector is reformed to ensure benefits trickle down to landowners.

The East Choiseul MP's concluding remarks showed the leader is 100 percent against mining. He believed Solomon Islands can survive without mining.

If his words are anything to go by then, the government of the day must take heed of his warning. We do not want a repeat of Bougainville crisis in our country.

The lesson learnt from that crisis is an ugly reminder that mining has the potential to create conflict if not handle properly.

 NEWS

# Funding for Pacific dugong conservation announced

Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands are part of a USD 6 million dollar project spanning five years, to conserve dugongs and sea-grass across the Indian and Pacific Ocean basins.

This was announced at the Pacific Joint Preparatory Meeting to the Convention of Biological Diversity COP12, Convention on Migratory Species COP 11 and Ramsar COP 12 in Nadi, Fiji last week.

Endorsed last month, this ambitious undertaking will be led by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) CMS Dugong MOU Secretariat and is funded by the Global Environment Facility. The programme will support 40 projects to enhance the effectiveness of conservation of dugongs and the seagrass ecosystems on which they depend.

The Convention on Migratory Species aims to conserve terrestrial, aquatic and avian migratory species throughout

their range. It currently has seven parties from the Oceania Region with Fiji being the newest parties.

"Dugongs are friendly animals and they play an important role in our traditional cultures, they are featured in oral stories and songs that have been passed down," said Trinison Tarivonda the Senior Education and Information Officer for the Department of Environmental Protection and Conservation of Vanuatu.

"In our country people respect them, and they are fully protected."

In 2010 in the Solomon Islands a questionnaire-based survey of dugong distribution and abundance was carried out consisting of 98 interviews were conducted at 24 locations.

The key results showed 300 dugongs were reported, comprising of 248 adults and 52 calves. Over a ten-year period, 742 dugongs were recorded but there is no recorded trend.

Of concern was the finding that a total of 56 dugongs were reported stranded from nets from both accidental and intentional netting.

"Through the survey, we know there is still much more information needed about the abundance, status and trends of dugongs in the Solomon Islands. We do know however that dugongs form part of the main diet for some parts of the country, especially for special cultural feasts. They are also highly respected in other parts and are featured in traditional cultural tales of Solomon Islanders," said Rose Babaua, the Senior Conservation Officer for the Ministry of Environment, Climate Change, Disaster Management and Meteorology of the Solomon Islands.

"We also learnt from the survey about how special and vulnerable these animals are. Dugongs are highly territorial, they lay claim to their own areas that include their habitats and feeding ground. We now

know that more conservation measures need to be adopted to protect our dugongs. There can never be enough done to protect and conserve these creatures."

The Memorandum of Understanding on the Conservation and Management of Dugongs and their habitats throughout their range entered into effect through CMS in 2007. The MoU aims to promote internationally coordinated actions to ensure the long-term survival of dugongs and their seagrass habitats throughout their extensive range.

Also known as the sea cow, the dugong is the only herbivorous marine mammal. While Australia has the largest global population, it is also found in the Pacific islands of New Caledonia, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, all of which are signatories to the MoU on the conservation and management of Dugongs and their habitats.

"It's an indication of

environmental leadership that all Pacific dugong range states signed on to this MoU within three years of its coming into effect. That has been taken a step further through national initiatives such as Palau whose marine sanctuary specifically includes dugongs," said Penina Solomona, the Pacific CMS Officer for the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP).

"The upcoming national efforts and projects in the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu will be a positive step toward the conservation of these creatures, which face many threats and challenges."

Dugongs grow slowly, mature late and have lengthy reproductive cycles, which makes them highly vulnerable to both chronic and acute threats. Additionally dugongs feed exclusively on seagrasses, which are restricted to shallow coastal waters and are frequently the target of industrial developments or pollution.

These marine mammals are classified as "vulnerable to extinction" on the International Union for Conservation of Nature's (IUCN) Red List of Threatened Species, indicating that there is a high-risk of extinction.

The Pacific Joint Preparatory Meeting to the Convention of Biological Diversity COP12, Convention on Migratory Species COP 11 and Ramsar COP 12 is held in Nadi, Fiji from 11 to 15 August.

Countries represented at the one week conference are the Cook Islands, Fiji, Federated States of Micronesia, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, New Zealand, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. Partners and stakeholders from the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, United Nations Development Program, WWF Pacific, UNEP, CBD, CMS, Convention on International Trade on Endangered Species (CITES).

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