

Pacific CSO statement of concern

on accelerated seabed mining developments within the Pacific Islands territorial waters and associated links to the role of European Union development assistance

Bremen, 19. Mai 2014

Pacific Civil Society groups including churches, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), feminist groups, indigenous customary landowners and community groups have a well established and firm stance on the issue of seabed mining – stop all seabed mining activities – for several reasons.


The purpose(s) for, and developing practices of, seabed mining are clearly in breach of fundamental moral and ethical principles. Pacific islands governments are persuaded to progress seabed mining in the Pacific on the false basis that it is a viable development option – our economies will grow and thus revenue, jobs, foreign investments are the primary basis for support.

Proponents of seabed mining in the Pacific have placed importance on prudent fiscal policy and fiscal stability to ensure seabed mineral revenues do contribute to sustainable economic growth. Further emphasis is accorded to GDP as a central measuring tool in the design of action strategies for the management of seabed mining revenues. However, Pacific Civil Society argues that GDP is an inadequate tool on its own to measure wealth given that wealth is purely financial and disregards all other manner of value that make up a country's wellbeing. This unfortunately reflects that the current language used to advocate for seabed mining developments, and therefore the process adopted for the pursuit of these developments, is not neutral.

Unless current discussions are opened up to include the non-financial value of our marine environments, which includes but is not limited purely to the financial aspect and/or revenue, the wellbeing of our peoples and our environments will remain at risk of being reduced to mere financial considerations. A country may very well succumb to the dreaded resource curse despite favourable GDP indicators that seabed mining is supposed to improve.

Already, Pacific Islands societies are experiencing situations of conflict even before actual seabed mining activity has commenced. And, mining history in the Pacific (and elsewhere) very clearly show that the associated costs to the environment, to livelihoods and human life in directly affected communities far outweigh the benefits. The Bougainville civil war is poignant.

Pacific Civil Society groups therefore oppose seabed mining in deference to and solidarity with our communities, particularly in Papua New Guinea, that have stood up against the onset of the first-ever commercial-scale mining operations for seabed minerals. Indeed,



seabed mining has never been undertaken anywhere in the world; if pursued now in the Pacific, our nations will once again be the 'testing ground' in much the same way as they were for the nuclear industry.

In addition, the deep-sea environment is a unique and diverse realm that has not been extensively researched and is not well understood. The associated unknown impacts of seabed mining on the complex interrelationships between marine biodiversity, ecological and human wellbeing as well as the grey area of irreversible damage pose significant risks and uncertainties that demand strict application of the precautionary principle. Little is also known about seabed mining technology, which is built in Europe and can only be prototypes given the unprecedented nature of the industry. These uncertainties warrant unprecedented caution, hence our call to support the halt to all seabed mining activity in the Pacific ocean.

Moreover, our own governments and regional institutions have not ensured free and prior informed consent of our peoples to proceed with seabed mining in the respective Pacific jurisdictions. For instance, in 2013, the Minister of Lands and Minerals in Vanuatu made the discovery that over 140 exploration licenses had been issued without the knowledge of successive governments, parliament let alone the knowledge of the Vanuatu people. National consultations are typically held after national governments have issued exploration licenses raising tension amongst communities. This situation is very similar across many of our Pacific island nations.

Finally as Pacific civil society groups we contend that seabed mining will not lead to broader stability in our region. As Pacific civil society organisations we will continue to strive to open up seabed mining discussions and policy-making processes at the national, regional and international level including with the European Union to consider the moral and ethical issues that should rightfully be addressed but have so far not been given due space, let alone recognition and respect. For any party, whether it be civil society, private, governments and inter-governmental agencies, or development aid donors such as the EU, to strive for anything less would be to seriously risk complicity with an industry that perpetuates ongoing environmental degradation, economic colonization and exploitation, accumulation of wealth in the hands of only the few, and polarization and conflict within/amongst communities and people in the Pacific.

Signed by:

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