



Parties to the Nauru Agreement

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Media release

The actions of a desperate Man – an attack on the Pacific Island Nations.

The global tuna trade is a multi-billion dollar sector and the small PNA island nations whose waters deliver half the globally supply of skipjack tuna for canning have been constantly attacked because of the commercial interests of 1 person. He is sponsoring the opposition against the development aspirations of our islands, for his personal gain.

This occurs when PNA is having the only tropical fishery which has all stocks healthy and in the green, achieved the first and largest MSC certified free school tuna fishery in the world, trades the MSC certified catch globally with the PNA region's Pacific Geographical indication on each can, and all backed with 100% observer coverage at sea. Our small vulnerable island economies take sustainability very seriously with few other options to them and maintain the highest social standards within our fishery. This is an area where there is zero tolerance for abuse.

In recent years tuna products from our small islands have penetrated the Australian, UK and EU markets where there is increasingly demand for sustainably sourced and certified tuna at realistic prices.

Obviously this has impacted traditional suppliers to these markets, like Mr John Burton CEO and main shareholder of World Wise Foods, in UK, who build a trading empire, upon supplying Pole & Line caught tuna from the Indian Ocean. Ironically these are fisheries in an ocean where today yellowfin is declared over-fished and where there are worries over skipjack. Most of this pole and line fishing is premised upon FADS targeting juveniles, it relies on bait fishing practices which are widely considered unsustainable, and which sees many associated crew deaths. This is a fishery with little or no observer coverage at sea, and in a region where domestic human rights abuses are common place according to the Human Rights Watch.

It is therefore ironic, that in our region, where he has no ongoing business, we are continually targeted by groups or people associated with Burton. It can be through lawyers, Queens counsels, journalists, politicians, media consultants, celebrities, media and associated NGO groups like International Pole and Line foundation [IPLNF], On The Hook [OTH], Make Stewardship Count [MSC], etc. These are all perhaps naively supporting, the ongoing smear campaigns, clearly targeted to disrupt and discredit the PNA nations, their aspirations and initiatives.

Examples:

- IPLNF sponsored a Queens counsel to challenge the PNA MSC re-certification in an adjudication hearing in New York, where all 24 allegations were dismissed.
- Sponsored questions in the UK parliament, leading to a select committee. The mis information had Ministers understanding that the PNA was a corporation, rather than a grouping of small Pacific island nations. All but 3 countries are under the British Commonwealth, with several nations having less than 10,000 people. It is encouraging that this hearing asked pertinent questions over the sources of funding and the commercial interests of the sponsor.

- Challenges to eco-labeling on canned tuna in Holland when the leading brand “Princes” swapped from pole and line to the more affordable Pacifical MSC certified tuna. The advertisement board of the Netherlands finally overturned his objections and the tribunal dismissed the case.

The latest move after several years of commercially motivated threats and extortion, directly targeting retailers, brands, MSC, and others working with our islands region, is in our view absolutely disgraceful, totally unacceptable and clearly the action of a very desperate man.

A new attack this time riding upon the recent untimely death of an observer from Kiribati on duty at sea. A death which is still under formal investigation by the coroner. The last few days we have been confronted with an “information paper” that was circulated. This paper is full of mis-info and distortions of facts over various deaths over many years and other allegations. Some of them did not even take place in our PNA region. These aspersions have been sent to leading retailers, brands and NGOs globally, in effect black mailing and threatening them and their image, should they continue to support PNA Pacifical MSC.

Parallel to this, this group has openly seen fit to sponsor an independent investigation by the UK organization Human Rights At Sea (HRAS) into this recent observer death. Drawing upon media and often out of context NGO commentaries, and surprisingly even before the police investigation has been concluded.

We welcome and support any genuine initiatives to help our people. However we note there are other regions globally where there is much more serious concern in regard to sustainability and social issues within the tuna fisheries, and where observers are still lacking on vessels.

In conclusion we treat with disdain the vile and unethical tactics of Mr John Burton. ‘Someone who has seen it fit to interfere in our regions affairs and disrupt our people’s aspirations and our children’s future. Clearly this is being driven by his own commercial interest and personal gain, not the care for our people.

I wish to conclude in saying that the likes of Mr John Burton and associates have no role in our region and are not welcome! .

Ludwig Kumoru
CEO PNA
3rd July 2020