



New Ireland's plans on deep sea mining lacks society's consent and scientific integrity

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Civil Society Organisations welcome the recent announcement by Prime Minister James Marape at the 3rd UN Ocean Conference in France, stating that his government will stop deep sea mining operations within PNG's national waters in absence of robust scientific evidence and proper environmental safeguards.

Prime Minister Marape's stance on deep sea mining (DSM) comes on the back of growing national and international concerns at the recent interest by the New Ireland Provincial Government's (NIPG) decision to support the NIU Solwara 1 DSM Project.

The collective of civil society organisations says the NIPG must not ignore important lessons of the recent past. In 2019, Nautilus Minerals filed for protection from its debts in a Canadian court, resulting in significant financial losses for PNG. The Minister for State-Owned Enterprises reportedly described that over \$120 million of government funds had been "sunk into the ocean," while the current Prime Minister described the agreement with Nautilus as "a deal that should not have happened."

According to Jonathan Mesulam, co-founder of the Alliance of Solwara Warriors, "the People of New Ireland must be consulted to ensure that there is free, prior and informed consent before the Governor and his administration plans to favour deep sea mining."

Unfortunately, the opposition to this project, grounded in clear democratic principles as well as scientific and economic arguments, is being dismissed by the NIP Governor. "Words such as 'fear mongering and unqualified individuals' limit opportunities to have a respectful discussion based on scientific facts, what the law requires and what the people desire, ultimately for people's livelihood and ocean life." said Mesulam.

Civil society organisations are calling for proper and transparent Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) process, in line with the decisions of the PNG Supreme Court, which articulate the requirement for project proponents to obtain landowners' "free and informed consent and approval, and ultimately, their social license to operate."

Recent positions of the PNG Government should be upheld. In 2019, Prime Minister Marape, following his return from the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) meeting, stated: “We issued a moratorium, including for PNG waters, that there will be no deep-sea mining until further evidence suggests otherwise.”

Prime Minister Marape has stated that this resolution aligns with other Pacific nations on the issue. In 2023, PNG also endorsed the Udaune Declaration of the MSG, which called for a moratorium on DSM in Melanesia. Most recently, at the UN Ocean Conference held last week in Nice, France, he reaffirmed that his government will prevent DSM operations within PNG’s national waters.

DSM remains highly controversial, [with 37 states currently calling for a moratorium, precautionary pause or ban](#). Negotiations on seabed mining in international waters are ongoing at the International Seabed Authority, an intergovernmental body based in Jamaica. Meanwhile, efforts by the DSM industry to secure mining licenses under the Trump administration have resulted in strong international condemnation.

“Unilateral actions to accelerate the start of deep-sea mining show the true colours of this industry and are fundamentally disrupting the delicate balance in areas beyond national jurisdiction, thereby not only corroding United Nations Conventions on Law of Oceans and Seas (UNCLOS) foundations, but also deeply affecting the stability of the international system, cooperation, and peace. The people and planet have shown tremendous will to continue to oppose such unilateral actions without a democratic process,” said Joey Tau, Coordinator of the Pacific Network on Globalisation.

The collective of civil society organisations is also highlighting several procedural and legal issues surrounding the Niu Solwara 1 project. These include the need for an Environmental Impact Statement that allows input from all stakeholders, as well as questions regarding the legality of the license transferred to Niu Solwara, which was previously held by Nautilus Minerals.

“The Marape/Rosso government must revisit existing policies, including the Mining Act, which is under review, address outstanding legal issues related to the Niu Solwara 1 project, and ensure that offshore mining activities in PNG waters align with national, regional and international commitments of ocean protection,” said Peter Bosip, Executive Director of Center for Environmental Law and Community Rights PNG.

People across the Pacific region, including Papua New Guineans from outside the area, are standing in solidarity with the communities of New Ireland, Duke of York, and other neighboring communities to condemn this decision. Marine ecosystems, like all natural ecosystems in PNG, not only shape cultural practices but also form the economic backbone of local communities. The innate spirituality of Sea and Ocean dwelling creatures also requires a physical world to dwell in with peace. There are no social, economic or environmental grounds to justify the authorisation of DSM in PNG waters. The NIU Solwara 1 must be rejected.

The collective of CSOs is now calling on the Marape/Rosso Government to:

- Acknowledge the MSG Udaune Declaration of 2023 - Committing PNG to the Melanesian moratorium.
- Ensure the review of the Mining Act 2025's offshore policy is consulted widely and engages civil society.
- Cancel all existing exploration and mining licenses. No further issuing or transfers of licenses in the absence of proper legislation and policy.
- Conduct an independent commission of inquiry into the Nautilus Minerals Solwara 1 project, ensuring all reports relating to the finances, and environmental impact study are made public.
- Consider supporting a global moratorium on deep-sea mining in areas beyond national jurisdiction which aligns with the call for robust "science-based" and "precautionary" approaches.

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