

Solomon Islands is Unprepared to Manage a Minerals-Based Economy



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Logging has Not Provided a Sustainable Development Base

Now that Solomon Islanders' forests have been depleted (Allen 2011; Bennett 2000) its mineral resources are being seen as a potential base for the economic development of the nation. However, in assessing this prospect from a national economic perspective Haque (2013) comes to the sobering conclusion that 'even if potential mining investment was to be fully realised, favourable economic outcomes for Solomon Islands are far from assured'.

Could a transition to a minerals-based economy build better lives for villagers? Might 'partnerships with investors ensure that resource owners receive fair financial rewards and ensure proper awareness and participation by resource owners' — a somewhat bold objective expressed in the *National Development Strategy 2011–2020* (Solomons Islands Government 2011)?¹ What does mining mean for the villagers under whose land minerals lie, and for their neighbours who will be expected to endure the downside?

If the transition to a minerals-based economy is not planned and implemented using lessons learned from experience with logging it can be expected to be simply a shift from one unsustainable, environmentally destructive and socially disruptive resource-development base to another.

This paper presents and discusses a range of factors that villagers face when deciding whether or not to allow access to minerals buried in land over which they hold customary tenure. Drawing mainly on local sources of information this paper addresses the weaknesses and uncertainty of national-level arrangements for handling foreign companies' interest in the country's minerals, some of the ways in which mining companies have manipulated the porous process of mineral development approval, and issues that villagers face regarding this option for economic development.

Still No Vision, No Plan; Just Exploitation of Natural Resources

In the years immediately following independence in 1978 Solomon Islander leaders may have had a brief chance to shape the country's future in ways that could improve village life. Yet no development plan since that time has enunciated a clear and practical vision for the use of Solomon Islanders' natural resources as a base for economic development.

Oil palm, copra and tuna were established sources of export revenue at the time of independence and forest resources were being only lightly exploited. Former officials of the colonial administration who introduced legislation designed to position the Forestry Department as an intermediary between prospective loggers and communities holding customary timber rights would have been surprised at how quickly after independence Solomon Islander politicians dismantled this arrangement, encouraging logging while weakening protection for affected communities and their environment.

The unsustainable exploitation of villagers' natural resources can be said to have begun when the late Solomon Mamaloni returned to the office of prime minister in 1981 and began a process of weakening controls over logging using the argument that landholders should be allowed to decide.² This removed protective measures that the Commissioner of Forests could have applied and so left unscrupulous loggers to directly engage with naive, or in some cases conniving, customary land group representatives. Nowhere in these 'negotiations' was there a place for a community of landholders to decide; it was always selected and malleable 'representatives' of land groups, some of whom were subsequently revealed to have no traditional right to 'represent' the trees in question.



As government officials lost power to the politicians, long-term economic planning and resource management were abandoned in favor of short-term economic expediency. At the same time the ties between foreign capital and the political elite steadily strengthened ... (Frazer 1997:41)

From 1981 logging has proceeded almost to exhaustion of the resource without any enunciated vision of a sustainable forest industry. There are many lessons to be learned from the logging experience that could inform an improvement in natural resource extraction through mining. Yet there is no indication that the current approach to exploitation of mineral resources is any improvement on that used for logging.

As a consequence of a progressive weakening of Forestry Department control its officers have difficulty in enforcing cutting licence conditions on logging companies. Legislative amendments over the years have favoured loggers, a fact clearly demonstrated by the withdrawal of a strengthened 2004 Forestry Bill that was withheld from parliament because the logging lobby³ perceived it to be against its interests.⁴

The incidence and scale of manipulation of customary land by the villagers and politicians associated with logging interests have increased greatly in the context of uncontrolled logging. Over two decades one donor (AusAID) made commendable efforts to support those Solomon Islanders who sought order and control in this industry so as to maximise benefits to the country and to minimise environmental and social harm. Sadly, the effectiveness of this support was largely negated by politicians linked with the loggers (Baines 2006). A former minister of forestry confirms this, stating: 'We no longer have power to regulate; all we do is watch as the forest resource disappears'.⁵

So, where forestry officers may have wanted to protect villagers' environment, resources and cultural landscapes, they found themselves unable to be effective. Nor, as yet, are there signs that government officers will be invested with the powers and, importantly, provided with the resources needed to enforce those powers to protect villagers from the

environmental and social damage that is an unfortunate accompaniment of mining.

The distressing history of logging and of how rural Solomon Islanders were dispossessed of their timber resources has been thoroughly and accurately analysed in a number of reports (Allen 2011; Bennett 2000; Dauvergne 1999; Frazer 1997; Kabutaulaka 2008); a situation that Allen has properly summed up as:

... a woeful tale of corruption, greed, profligacy, patronage, tax avoidance, maladministration, incompetence, and environmental destruction. The state has forgone hundreds of millions of Solomon Island dollars in potential revenue due to tax exemptions and the undervaluation and miscategorization of log exports. (Allen 2011:297)

The Mineral Development Process is Weak and Subject to Interference

Though Solomon Islands has a mineral development regulatory system based on a Mines and Minerals Act 1996 (MMA) and its accompanying Regulations (MMR), and environmental and other mining-relevant legislation, there is still no national policy to provide an overarching guide for mineral development — this, despite external assistance provided to develop a draft National Minerals Policy in 2000 and again in 2013. While formal mining policy alone does not necessarily lead to a successful mining industry, it can provide a framework, an essential guide, that points the industry in the direction the country chooses to proceed. 'Serious' mining companies of international standing seek such guidance so that they can know clearly the boundaries encompassing the sector and can demonstrate that they adhere to official policy.

In the absence of initiatives by the national government, as long ago as 1985 the government of Western Province enunciated a mineral development policy that it called on the national government to adhere to in that province:

The province wants to promote economic development but is conscious of its special obligation to help conservative rural communities to understand and to prepare for the

social and environmental changes which come with mineral development. (Baines 1985:18)

National government leaders and officials never acknowledged, let alone took up this initiative.⁶

In reference to mining an exasperated Solomon Islands High Court judge has written: ‘One could be forgiven for thinking that after three attempts at legislation⁷ and three at promulgating regulations the whole area would be problem free.’ (SMM Solomons Ltd v Attorney General [2012] SBHC 52; ACSI-CC2 58 of 2011. Ruling on Preliminary Issues)

But the mineral development approval process is anything but problem-free. Villagers are confused, mining companies need courage and determination to attempt to negotiate the complexities and uncertainties of the mining approval process, there is inconsistency in ministerial decisions and an apparent failure to make good use of the expertise of the Mines and Minerals Board. Some companies have attempted to overcome such uncertainty by manipulating their way through the process and the rules, not always successfully as revealed in the case of Sumitomo’s prospecting in Isabel Province (SMM Solomon Ltd v Attorney General; Bugotu Minerals Ltd v Attorney General [2014] SBHC 91; HCSI-CC 258 of 2011, at 79, 86, 102, 246, et al.).

Uncertainty about the effectiveness of the Solomon Islands Environment Act 1998 and how it is interpreted, and whether its protective provisions will be implemented, is underlined by the following observation in regard to a case featuring logging:

The Director [of Environment] failed to provide a full copy of Public Environment Report to the Claimant. It (is) also apparent that the decision of the Director to grant development consent 400 meters above sea level is wrong, he failed to disclose his reasons in support of his consent. In actual fact, he failed to take note of Mr. Danitofea’s recommendation who is his Senior Environment Officer, for a review of the Environment impact assessment report ... The Director was also silent about the need to comply with the key standards of the Solo-

mon Islands Code of Practice ... (Kolombangara Island Biodiversity Conservation Association Trust Board (KIBCA) v Attorney General [2013] SBHC 87; HCSI-CC 428 of 2013)

This evidence of a less-than-thorough approach also appears to characterise the Director of Environment’s dealings with mineral prospecting activities. In the cases of applications for two mining tenements in Isabel Province for which Environmental and Social Impact Assessments (ESIAs) were submitted to the Director of the Environment, the director was very quick to issue Development Consents, making no call on the applicant to rectify weaknesses in the ESIAs — despite many shortcomings having been pointed out in technical assessments submitted properly, and in time.⁸

Many of the problems that can arise with mining are familiar from the logging experience. Will mining companies, as do loggers, ‘persistently try to bend these rules in their favour?’ Will mining companies

strain state capacity to manage ... resources, pressure and entice state officials to develop policies that maximize corporate profits, construct complex corporate structures that reduce accountability and transparency, and evade taxes and ... royalties (Dauvergne 1999:524)?

On the evidence to date, it seems they will. Disturbing evidence of how a mining company, Sumitomo, was able to manipulate an obviously porous process for prospecting approvals is now a matter of public record (SMM Solomon Ltd v Attorney General; Bugotu Minerals Ltd v Attorney General [2014] SBHC 91; HCSI-CC 258 of 2011).

Corruption Colours the Picture

... a former Premier of Renbel Province Lence Tango, when questioned about a \$4 million hotel bill responded in a way that showed he was not at all concerned. When asked who was responsible to meet the incurred cost he said that the bill will be paid for by the Bintang Borneo Ltd which is interested in mining Rennell Island. ‘I was told to enjoy the privileges of the hotel. They will pay the bill.’ (Transparency Solomon Islands 31/7/2014)

The unabashed directness of this response reveals a deeper problem whereby bribery has become so mainstream that a political leader no longer recognises such a clear conflict of interest as being improper.

A recent survey in Solomon Islands (Transparency Solomon Islands 18/10/2013) reveals that 56 per cent of people claim to have paid a bribe to help with a police issue; 42 per cent made such informal payments in relation to registry and permit services; and 49 per cent did so in order to facilitate land services over and beyond what was legally required to be paid.

Even allowing that some survey respondents may have suspected that corruption exists where it does not, the 2013 figures for people's perception of the levels of corruption are very concerning. It seems that members of the public believe that 53 per cent of public officials and civil servants are corrupt; 19 per cent of the judiciary; 25 per cent of medical and health personnel; a massive 85 per cent of police; 29 per cent of education officers; and 52 per cent of political parties. Non-government organisations (NGOs) and religious bodies survived condemnation with figures of 11 per cent and 3 per cent, respectively. A startling 65 per cent of respondents were of the opinion that corruption was actually increasing (Transparency Solomon Islands 18/10/2013).

Few villagers benefit from opportunities to influence decision making through corruption. They are victims of those of their urban cousins who, aware of the opportunities and with contacts in 'the right places', trade on and misrepresent their links to land and resources in the rural communities from which they emerged.

It Will be Difficult to Improve the Mineral Development Approval Process

The Premier of Choiseul Province has spoken out strongly against the idea of mining bauxite on Wagina, an island in that province (Radio Australia 21/1/2013). Another prominent Choiseulese, Manasseh Sogavare, expressed a negative view of mining generally:

We should rule out mining unless we reform the mining sector itself to ensure that the landowners and the country benefit from the

extraction of the minerals when you offset the wealth created with the environmental degradation associated with the development in the sector. ... [T]his country can survive without mining ... (Solomon Islands Broadcasting Commission 18/8/2014)

Since the December 2014 election of Sogavare as Prime Minister, though not showing any sign of bypassing the mining option, his government has issued reforming statements such as 'An updated mining policy needs to be developed and put in place as a matter of urgency. Environmental management also remains very important, as does the social impact of mining.' (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and External Trade 2015:11).

But is genuine reform possible? The historical precedents are not encouraging. For instance, in late 1994 the then national government under Prime Minister Francis Billy Hilly, in attempting to introduce sustainable forest management measures, was overthrown and a pro-logging government installed, assisted by cash inducements from logging companies operating in the country (Allen 2013a:20). Solomon Mamaloni, the prime minister who replaced Hilly, was favoured by the loggers and refused to countenance any moves to rein in their activities (Baird 27/1/1996).

This is a stark example of the political power that can be exerted by foreign companies in a small country like Solomon Islands. They 'do not function within the bounds of state and societal rules ... persistently trying to bend these rules in their favour' (Dauvergne 1999:524). There has been no strengthening of government agency capacity, or any preparation to avoid this type of exploitation by mining companies. Solomon Islands is quite unprepared.

In an attempt to garner some international respectability, the previous government of Solomon Islands (National Coalition for Rural Advancement) in 2011 agreed to implement the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI). Yet the first audit report on payments made by extractive companies — one of the basic obligations of membership — reveals serious shortcomings. So little information was made available to the auditors that 'we were unable to verify if the issuance pro-

cess is compliant to the MMA and MMR' (Moore Stephens 2014). Perceptions of sovereign risk for investment in Solomon Islands are not eased by the weaknesses reported to the EITI, or by the unseemly legal struggle involving two companies seeking prospecting licences for nickel-prospective south-east Isabel Province, or the reported forcing of mining equipment onto unsuspecting communities in the Rennell and Wagina islands.

A troubling uncertainty about how bauxite mining rights in Rennell Island were decided has recently been clarified by an Attorney-General's report that reveals that advice and recommendations from the Mines and Minerals Board (MMB) not only had been ignored by the minister but that a mining lease had been issued to a company (APID) despite no recommendation or advice from the MMB to the minister to grant this lease (Theonomi 13/4/2015b).

Logging companies ignore the code of practice, and the Ministry of Forestry appears unable to penalise them for environmental crimes. It seems no different with mining. There are continuing uncertainties about the Gold Ridge tailings dam, the Director of Environment appears prepared to issue Development Consent for mining in Isabel Province even where ESIA reports that are prerequisite to mining approval do not address all aspects as required by the Environment Act under which he operates, and a court decision that criticised the Director of Environment for neglect of duty raises questions of competence and capacity (SMM Solomons Ltd v Attorney General [2012] SBHC 52; ACSI-CC2 58 of 2011. Ruling on Preliminary Issues).

***Mifala Tudak*⁹ – Villagers are Ill-Informed**

The Ministry of Mines and Energy holds a map of mineral exploration tenements which shows large areas of Solomon Islands customary land considered to have mineral potential — the bait that attracts both genuine miners and speculators. This is land to which rural communities have customary usage rights and yet few villagers are aware that 'someone in Honiara' has highlighted their land in this way, without consultation. The first that villagers hear of their land being coveted for its mineral

content is likely to be when a company representative arrives to being a process of persuasion.

No agency of national government has taken seriously a responsibility to explain to villagers mining, its impacts and their choices. While the Division of Mines and Energy (DME) might be expected to do this, well before a company begins pursuit of Surface Access Agreement (SAA) signatures, the only hint of an education/awareness role in the foreign model Mines and Minerals Act is section 11(b) which defines one of the functions of the MMB as 'to take such measures as it deems necessary or appropriate to inform landowners or land holding groups affected, on operations to be carried out, in terms of permits, licences or leases, as the case may be'.

An SAA is the legal device used to grant a mining company permission to enter onto customary land to assess its mineral content. This can lead on to a mining lease that authorises a dramatic alteration of land and its pattern of drainage. As is the case with logging, 'secondary' customary land rights are not considered, only land rights that are termed 'primary'.¹⁰

To ensure security of tenure for expensive investments mining companies require that any customary land which they intend to mine must be registered. Yet the basis for identifying those with rights to land covering mineral resources remains inadequate. Despite several desultory attempts by national government agencies to understand and record the principles of customary land tenure there has been no significant progress in this complex, and necessarily long-term task. It is not surprising, then, that in the application of a flawed 'western' process to access trees and minerals, errors occur and some villagers' traditional land rights are unfairly overridden. As Brown (2000) expresses it: 'the political preoccupation with the exploitation of the natural potential of the economic value of customary land heralds a radical interference with the rights of traditional users'.

Where a government agency or a mining company begins to press for access to land, differences that had long persisted beneath the surface may emerge, and morph into intractable disputes.¹¹ Forced to decide which group holds that land

under local tradition, old scars may be reopened where unstated truces are broken — truces that had ensured social relations were not hindered by an open expression of differences over land.

The Solomon Islands Office of Public Solicitor attempts to inform villagers through its Landowners Advocacy and Legal Support Unit (LALSU). It does a good job of translating logging, mining and environmental legislation into language that villagers can better understand (LALSU n.d. a, n.d. b, n.d. c). However, its brief is based on existing law so, though it translates this into lay language, LALSU has limited scope to offer advice or opinion regarding measures beyond the legislation.

The only other guidance that villagers receive comes through Transparency Solomon Islands (TSI) and other non-government organisations (NGOs) such as the Solomon Islands Development Trust (SIDT), Environmental Concerns Action Network of Solomon Islands (ECANSI) and The Nature Conservancy (TNC). Some funding for these NGO initiatives in promotion of villager awareness comes from the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank and other pro-development sources, organisations that appear to recognise that where land group representatives are not in a position to make informed decisions about mining, then mining is likely at some stage to be opposed, at wasteful cost to the companies concerned and also to national revenue.

The informed consent of a community affected by development projects, either public or private, makes good business sense. The risks created by not obtaining proper community consent are significant, as are the benefits that derive from meaningful consultation and explanation. It is obvious that free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) should have a place in the Solomon Islands mineral sector regulatory framework, and that it should apply both to landholders and to those of their neighbours who could be impacted. Proper FPIC would strengthen the position of landholders and their neighbours in the mineral sector agreement-making process, and could operate as an effective means to incorporate an important aspect of this global best practice standard into the domestic regulatory framework.

The 2014 draft of a proposed new Solomon Islands national constitution addresses this need: ‘deprivation, exploitation and development of land is permitted only — with the full, free and informed consent of the owners or, where appropriate, the users’ (art 52(d)). Of particular note is the fact that this wording appears to recognise that secondary users of customary land, currently mostly ignored, also need to be informed.

Yet current practice appears to be that the DME simply accepts whatever signatures are collected by those seeking approval to mine, so the mining regulatory agency is in no position to assess whether FPIC was obtained.¹² Nor is it able to assess the validity of signatures on SAAs. In the absence of such checks the possibility remains that the true representatives of land groups might actually have refused to allow miners access, others having signed in their place.

Villagers’ Experience with Logging Makes Them Cautious of Mining

Some of the landholders who dispute the issue of Cutting Licences for their forest resources have been able to access legal and financial support to apply for court injunctions to block logging operations. But this has often been ineffective, so members of land groups opposed to a licence issued to cut trees in an area where they share collective customary use rights have felt compelled to take direct action by hindering a logging company’s ability to land or use its equipment. This happened, for instance, where five Isabel men went to Bagahe log pond on 28 December 2012. While there, in frustration they damaged logging machinery. Police arrested and charged them. Otherwise peaceful villagers, these men had been forced into a desperate attempt to block logging after the men were not happy with the company for ‘ignoring a High Court injunction order and continu[ing] its operation on a disputed land’ (Buchanan 25/6/2014) — a court direction that police obviously had not been briefed to support.

That police expenses for attendance at such confrontations are said to be paid by those logging companies¹³ leads villagers to see the police role as being to protect companies against villagers. And

in some cases police have, perhaps inadvertently, also lent support to a company against villagers through failing to act on reports of civil disturbances arising from a company's presence, as reported in detail for an area of eastern Guadalcanal (Wairiu and Nanao n.d.:5).

The Land Advocacy and Land Support Unit (LALSU) of the Office of Public Solicitor has tried valiantly to assist villagers in such cases. Martha Manaka, head of LALSU, is reported as saying:

The criminal investigation and prosecution of environmental crime is the next challenge for this country. Where laws are not enforced our country is sending a message to international companies that this is a place where poor environmental standards and illegal practices will be tolerated ... (Transparency Solomon Islands 24/3/2014)

Transparency Solomon Islands (TSI), too, is concerned that 'Senior Police must ensure that orders to shut down illegal logging operations are enforced'. A spokesperson reported that TSI 'has learned of two logging operations ... that are continuing to fell trees despite the Ministry of Environment and the High Court ordering them to stop' (Transparency Solomon Islands 25/9/2014). 'In both cases the landowners, who are clients of TSI's Advocacy and Legal Advice Centre, believe that senior police told their provincial officers not to interfere' (Transparency Solomon Islands 24/3/2014).

Unfortunately this pattern of company sponsorship of police operations¹⁴ suggests that, where villagers face difficulties with mining companies, police are likely to feel obliged to protect those companies' interests.

Surface Access Agreements are the Key to Mining Company Prosperity

The 2014 draft of the proposed new Solomon Islands constitution, product of a decade of public debate, is an indicator of a widespread public view on ownership of mineral resources. Clause 53(3) states: 'Customary land includes the air-space above the land, and everything on or below the surface of the land down to the centre of the earth including, in particular, all minerals, petroleum and natural gas.'

Nevertheless, Solomon Islands currently operates under its 1978 constitution, and since Solomon Islands' formal law is based on English law it is to be expected that mineral resources will be treated as the property of the state, even where buried in land still under customary tenure. Villagers do not distinguish between surface land and what lies beneath so, not surprisingly, they contest this differentiation, despite the fact that they have, as yet, no legal ground for doing so. The key to mining, therefore, is to get the signatures of relevant villagers (the so-called 'landowners') on a Surface Access Agreement.

Since the formal laws that provide for recognition of customary tenure are focused on a so-called 'landowner' this means that others, including those with traditional secondary rights to use that land, are discouraged from expressing opinion on use of the land to which a mining company seeks access. It also implies the exclusion of others from benefits derived from the use of resources on and in that land even where those others may be forced to accept the costs of negative impacts arising from mining. Indeed a recent legislative change to increase to 20 per cent the mineral royalty payment to 'landowners' from under whose land minerals are removed and exported,¹⁵ may well make those 'landowners' even less likely to take note of neighbours who are not happy about mining nearby.

For most villagers the tie between their basic social group and the land with which they and their ancestors are associated remains of fundamental importance. 'Land is life, our mother, marked by our ancestors' footprints and their shrines and burial places.'¹⁶ This strong focus on land and on those who inherit rights to use it does not prevent people from sharing those land resources with others outside the land group. For instance, outsiders could be invited to work alongside landholders to harvest ngali nuts for consumption by the visitors, an action that would later be reciprocated in kind. Though the older generation still adheres to this traditional sense of sharing, among younger people (say, under 50 years of age) there has been a shift. The first step in this shift is towards an attitude of 'It's ours', where individuals still see themselves as members of a sharing group, though only within

their own land. This shift from tradition means they fail to recognise a responsibility to care for and to share with others outside their land group.

Yet some display the attitude ‘What’s in it for me? It’s mine’ — evidence of village communities’ growing exposure to ‘modern’ forms of development that emphasise the individual, that put a monetary value on natural resources and that pressure people to sell their resources for cash.

Where customary land is addressed in current legislation this focus on the individual, on a so-called ‘landowner’, is a gross simplification of the nature of customary land tenure. In village society decisions about the use of land are left to those directly associated with it; neighbours do not comment. Nor will village or other traditional leaders attempt to comment on a land-use decision taken by a group of which they are not part. In the words of Allen et al. (2013:20): ‘It is extremely difficult for members of one group to impose sanctions on or issue directions to members of another group.’

Despite the disquiet and suspicion of some villagers there are some landholder representatives willing to sign SAAs. For some of these, signing an SAA is seen as a way of clarifying and perhaps resolving a difference with neighbours about the exact location of a boundary between their respective landholdings. Others may sign because they see an opportunity to gain official sanction for their land group’s claim to that land. In some cases they are in open competition with other people who sign SAAs (SMM Solomon Ltd v Attorney General; Bugotu Minerals Ltd v Attorney General [2014] SBHC 91; HCSI-CC 258 of 2011, at 68, 69, 88), and some signatures are reportedly forced by a fear induced in those signatories that if they do not sign then they will lose access to their customary land.¹⁷

Then there are those who, failing to appreciate the significance of their signature, and who simply want the mining company that called them to a meeting to transport them back to their village, may succumb to pressure to sign an SAA simply because they are tired, hungry and want to go home.¹⁸

In regard to bauxite mining Rennell Island villagers found that ‘APID ... has used an initial micro-project at first with [which currency] \$20,000 each but then signatures obtained were

used differently, making false documents to suggest they got the support of resource owners’ (Theonomi 13/4/2015a).

A Signed SAA May Not Endure

A villager’s signature on a piece of paper can be worth millions to a logger, or even billions to a company seeking to exploit mineral resources, and there are various innovative ways to get signatures onto an SAA apart from pressuring signatories.

However, a mining company cannot be confident that an SAA signatory is the undisputed representative for that land. This places a company in a legally uncertain situation. Undeterred by this prospect one company, at least, has attempted to hasten villager acceptance of mining by manoeuvring to have land group representatives who are unwilling to sign replaced by others expected to favour that company (SMM Solomon Ltd v Attorney General; Bugotu Minerals Ltd v Attorney General [2014] SBHC 91; HCSI-CC 258 of 2011, at 74, 79, 80, 89).

Though village social protocol discourages open expression of dissent it is clear that some villagers harbour resentment where they feel their future has been undermined by leaders of land groups who have signed SAAs. People have talked about how, in some cases, and just as has so often happened with logging, those that a company needed to sign an SAA had done so only under pressure.¹⁹

Despite this, as has been the experience of some in Solomon Islands’ Isabel Province, a mining company will continue to press for signatures, saying that it has explained the concept of mining to the individuals it wants to sign SAAs. But where a company representative’s standing with that company depends on success at getting people to sign SAAs such a person is not in a position to give a balanced view of what mining does to land and to the people associated with it. There are troubling questions about the possibility of government officers, too, being compromised in favour of an applicant company, as where ‘advance of allowances by Sumitomo for DME officers when in Isabel had been adopted by the DME’ (SMM Solomon Ltd v Attorney General; Bugotu Minerals Ltd v Attorney General [2014] SBHC 91; HCSI-CC 258 of 2011, at 54). Further, where dealing with landholders Sumitomo

reportedly has adopted a practice ‘to pay only those who actually signed the SAAs’ (ibid.).

The absence of a requirement for independent proof that all members of a customary land group had all the information needed to make a rational decision and, without pressure or inducement, agreed that an SAA be signed by their representatives leaves villagers highly vulnerable to exploitation. This is one of the issues taken up by Isabelians at a Mining Forum in November 2013. From that meeting emerged a recommendation for independent oversight of the SAA signing process. It is worded:

... that all signed SAAs should not be processed further until their authenticity is first checked and proven by an independent Panel²⁰ and that this Panel also assess the interest of groups that have not signed SAAs. In its meetings with resource owner groups ensure that these groups include at least two men (one representing the so-called ‘owners’; the other representing others who have rights to use the affected land and/or sea, also two women and two representatives of youth (one male, one female); directed by the Panel to inform all with customary use rights to that land (both those of the descent line that holds the land and also those who have customary rights to the use that land). (James 2013)

The land group whose representative signs an SAA may make up only a small proportion of the population that would be impacted by a mining operation. There is no provision at all in the government’s mineral development approval process for comments and approvals from those whose land is not of direct interest to miners. The only opportunity for this is where the public is given a 30-day period in which to comment on an Environmental and Social Impact Assessment Report required as a pre-requisite to an application for a mining lease. This legally imposed deadline is quite impractical considering how long it takes for such reports to reach villagers, how obscure to them is the technical language used, how low is their level of literacy (33.9 per cent for Rennell Island, 17.5 per cent for Isabel Province, as tested by ASPBAE (2011)) and how they might, in such a short period, absorb the

mass of information provided, discuss this, formulate a written response and ensure that it is received in time by a Director of Environment who has remained in Honiara.

There are serious reasons to question the authenticity of signatures on an SAA. Even without the pressure of a mining prospect some signatures have doubtful origins. For instance, since it is difficult for a remote villager to get a Commissioner of Oaths to verify a signature (people so qualified do not live in villages) it is widely understood that some understanding Commissioners of Oaths are prepared to officially sanction a signature that they were not in a position to sight being written. They will do this on the basis that the village signatures are honest and valid, though in some cases they are not — even to the extent of fraudulent use of a commissioner’s stamp.²¹

Those prepared to take advantage of this fluidity with unchecked signatures may simply add desired names and signatures to a list of meeting attendees said to have agreed on a certain matter, should that lend authority to a written decision of that meeting. Those whose names are added without their authority may not discover such misrepresentation until a government agency issues an approval (perhaps in the form of a Cutting Licence or a Surface Access Agreement) that cites their names as supporters.²²

Another trick is said to have been used in relation to a mining company’s quest for signatures on an SAA for access to bauxite deposits on Rennell Island, where people are alleged to have been handed a blank piece of paper to sign and given the impression that this was simply a meeting attendance list (Transparency Solomon Islands 25/9/2014).

Some have even begun to use computer technology to ‘play’ with paper. An Isabel land group recently was horrified to discover that the text of a Statutory Declaration substantiating its land claim, signed by the late paramount chief of Isabel Province and properly witnessed by a Commissioner of Oaths who was present at the time, had been altered — and submitted to a court as evidence! The wording of the text had been changed to appear to support a different party as being the true landholders under local tradition. It appears the original docu-

ment had been scanned and the digitised text then altered on a computer before being printed afresh with an exact, scanned, copy of the late paramount chief's signature.²³ Now that the potential for computer manipulation of documents has been realised, this may become a new tool for land and resources manipulation and conversion in Solomon Islands, so further disadvantaging villagers.

How Villagers are Reacting to Mineral Prospecting and Mining

Guadalcanal — Gold

A gold mine at Gold Ridge, Guadalcanal, operated by Gold Ridge Mining Ltd (GRML), continues to be a major frustration for all stakeholders. Gold Ridge landholders, with some of their associates, previously resided directly on the land to be mined and had long been engaged in low-technology alluvial mining there. They have had to be resettled elsewhere.

Resettlement of these people away from the mining area remains incomplete, mine ownership has changed, and flooding and landslides have interrupted mining. Questions persist about the integrity of a tailings waste pond, and local alluvial miners have returned to the Mining Lease area to assert traditional rights that, under mining law, are now held to be illegal.

Armed civil strife in Guadalcanal resulted in this mine being closed, 2001–04, after which the International Finance Corporation (IFC) invested in its re-establishment under a new owner, St Barbara Ltd. As a prerequisite to the preparation of a Social Action Planning and Management Framework for the mine St Barbara contracted consultants to evaluate GRML's compliance with the Equator Principles, an international charter of financing accountability in social and environmental matters. The evaluation report listed a number of troubling shortcomings as, for instance:

We were alarmed to find a document entitled 'Landowner discussion completion strategy' in the company's Honiara office files, dated 26 April 2006 included offers of cash 'completion bonuses' for the 21 members of the GRCLC as well as the government-appointed Chairman of the tripartite talks (between the

company, the 'landowners' and SIG) ... for the agreements to be signed by 31 May 2006. (Burton and Filer 2006)

Unsurprisingly the Gold Ridge project was assessed by Burton and Filer (2006) as not having met the IFC Performance Standards which constitute Equator compliance 'and ... the Subsidiary Agreements are insecure to the point that they pose a serious financial risk to the company'.

In a later IFC evaluation report on the Gold Ridge project Owen and Weldegiorgios (2011) found that considerable villager dissatisfaction persisted. The people yet to be resettled:

... expressed their frustration at a lack of consultation by the company. ... [T]hey hear that those who have been relocated have been experiencing issues relating to unemployment, water supply, electricity, food shortage ... Villagers are suspicious that the company will not fulfil their expectations and claimed that they will have no choice but to go back to their original villages and continue panning. (Owen and Weldegiorgios 2011)

The leaders of communities downstream from Gold Ridge have been very vocal in organising themselves and pressing for downstream pollution control measures, and compensatory payments (Roni 25/4/1997). The mine tailings dam frustrates government hopes of this mine being brought back into production. Lowering of the water level behind the dam is necessary to avoid the risk of contaminated water overtopping the dam wall and entering the Metapona River. Yet downstream communities fear contamination by chemicals in the water that it is planned will be withdrawn from the pond and dispersed into this river (Buaoka 16/5/2014), so continue to oppose such action.

Following independent technical assessments, de-watering was approved by government authorities, but suspended in mid-August 2014 due to continuing security incidents against GRML employees and property. 'The de-watering treatment plant was subsequently damaged by trespassers, and no de-watering has been possible since then' (*Island Sun* 14/11/2014). St Barbara Ltd, owner of GRML, eventually withdrew, having sold the Gold Ridge

Project 'to a Solomon Islands company, Goldridge Community [sic] Investment Limited (GCIL), associated with local landowners, for a nominal purchase price and on confidential terms' (Solomon Islands Broadcasting Commission 5/5/2015).

However, not only has the chairman of the Gold Ridge Community and Land Owners Council publicised his refusal to sign off on the purchase (Radio New Zealand 11/5/2015) but the chair of the Kolobisi Gold Ridge Landowners Association, representing a group of downstream landholders is reported as having 'denied any involvement with the new developer for Gold Ridge mine' (Solomon Islands Broadcasting Commission 12/5/2015). The Gold Ridge saga has entered a new phase of uncertainty.

Choiseul-Isabel — Nickel

The reaction to a proposal by Sumitomo²⁴ to mine nickel deposits in Choiseul Province has encountered a determined 'no' from chiefs in villages, as represented by its chiefly Lauru Land Association. A body of Choiseulese grouped as Forum Against Mining on Choiseul (FAMOC) that functions as an advocacy group of Choiseul individuals living in-country and abroad who are members of the 'tribes' whose land would be affected by the proposed nickel mining has also made a stand against mining. Choiseul Province Premier Jackson Kiloe has supported this public opposition, citing a preference for investment 'in tourism, fisheries and agriculture for economic growth' (Lewis 13/11/2013).

Nickel prospecting in south-east Isabel is complicated by the fact that two companies, Sumitomo and Axiom KB, are competing in one area for the same mining tenement, a confused situation that has arisen from ministerial bungling under a past government as to which of the two companies was officially sanctioned to prospect in that area. This overlap has been the subject of long and expensive litigation in the Solomon Islands High Court. Though Axiom KB is currently licensed to prospect in the contested tenement this is subject to a court appeal by Sumitomo. Not surprisingly, this is having a disruptive social impact in local communities, those who support, or oppose, one or the other of the competing companies being readily identifiable.

The approaches of these competing companies are radically different. Sumitomo seeks approvals for mining first, followed by registration of land needed for mining and for infrastructure. It is opposed to the idea of land group participation. Axiom, on the other hand, has responded to the proposal by some land group representatives to allow local land group participation as partners in a prospecting and future mining venture. Accordingly, representatives of four Bugotu land groups have registered an association, Kolosori Land Holdings (KHL). KHL has joined with Axiom in a joint venture business, Axiom KB Ltd, in which 20 per cent of company equity is held by the customary land groups through KHL. The Prospecting Licence is in the name of the localised joint venture company, Axiom KB — as would be any mining lease that might in future be issued.

Partnerships can work well between equals. A partnership of a foreign business and Solomon Islands landholders is likely to be unbalanced and risky. To date KHL's advice appears to have come from a range of consultants with mining background and connections, not well positioned to provide the balanced advice needed to strengthen the landholder side of such a partnership.

Rennell and Choiseul — Bauxite

Claims from people in the small islands of Rennell and Wagina of having been unaware that bauxite mining leases had been issued for land to which they have customary rights until ships arrived there carrying mining equipment raise suspicions about how such mining approvals were granted. A spokesman for land on which the Rennell Island deposits occur, George Tauika, also secretary of the Lake Tengano World Heritage Site Association, claims that 'no forms of mining will be accepted on their land'. Mr Tauika is reported as saying the community was never consulted, that what happened was that 'company representatives and associates lured innocent and ignorant children, women, and old people of the island to sign documents they knew nothing about' (Namosuaia 21/8/2014).

Transparency Solomon Islands' investigation of the confusion over bauxite mining approvals for two different mining companies in Rennell (APID —

Asia Pacific Investment Development, and PT Mega Bintang Borneo Ltd) led it to question whether the application had been properly handled (Transparency Solomon Islands 27/9/2014). When pressed for a response, 'Minister Gharu said he could not clearly recall signing a letter which granted APID its licence' (Sasako 19/9/2014). A local newspaper reported 'the Board members were stunned when they learnt of a Mining Lease being granted by the caretaker Minister to PT Mega Bintang Borneo on 9th September, a day after Parliament dissolved' (*Island Sun* 29/10/2014). A few months later, citing evidence of illegality in the issue of its Mining Lease, a strident call was made for APID also to be removed from the island (Theonomi 13/4/2015a). Doubts about how the APID licence was issued gave cause for the minister to 'call in' its licence, too (Solomon Islands Broadcasting Commission 12/5/2015).

When the Democratic Coalition for Change Government took office in December 2014 one of its first actions was to announce the cancellation of the Bintang Borneo Prospecting Licence (Puia 31/12/2014). This statement was accompanied by an explanation that the licences issued by the previous Mines minister had been for overlapping areas, leaving the public to wonder how an overlap of licence boundaries had not been recognised earlier, and about the nature of the relationship between the minister and his advisory board, the MMB. That is, until a report by the Attorney-General cited evidence to show that the former Minister of Mines had chosen, at the time he issued the Bintang Borneo Prospecting Licence, to ignore the statutory role of the MMB in assessing applications for mining (Theonomi 13/4/2015b).

From Rennell Island emerged a call for intervention: 'Police are urged to immediately dispatch a team to Rennell Island to investigate allegation of harassment perpetuated by Bintang [sic] Mining Group.' (*Solomon Star* 22/1/2015). Bintang Borneo did not, however, give up readily. The company later was 'caught attempting to deceive Customs with a fake export and consignment permit for shipping out bauxite ore it had mined (Theonomi 13/4/2015b). The minister, for a second time, then announced revocation of its Prospecting Licence (Solomon Islands Broadcasting Commission 10/5/2015).

Villagers' Reluctance

Economic development based on exploitation of mineral resources requires rural communities to make big sacrifices. It is not surprising that some are resisting, sometimes with assistance from a more informed younger generation with access to more information on mining impacts, and concerned about degradation of land, water and sea, and the erasure of the cultural landscapes that underpin their being, and are their future.

Some villagers are fatalistic. Maybe Solomon Islands is simply too small and vulnerable to resist pressures to mine, and that this is the price that villagers are expected to pay for globalisation of economic opportunity for the benefit of the nation? Feeling that, as it was when logging was thrust upon them, mining is something that cannot be avoided, this attitude is captured here:

Many landowners think mining will be over quickly like logging. They have no idea that it will last for decades or that it will have huge and lasting impacts on their land. ... It's the same across the country — people are being asked to make choices about something they have little idea about ... (*Island Sun* 23/7/2014)

A statement by Kabutaulaka (2008) based on Solomon Islands communities' experience with logging that 'local communities are simply passive victims of global forces', is consistent with evidence presented in this paper. Perhaps Solomon Islands governments, too, are simply passive victims of global forces?

From their attempts to block logging activity that they had not approved, and where police intervened to protect loggers it is not unexpected that some villagers' view of Solomons laws and procedures is that they are designed to protect companies, not villagers. There are enough examples of police failing to enforce court injunctions against loggers to suggest that mining infringements are likely to be countered with the same indifference to villager concerns.

Villagers' experience of the concept of 'trustee' representation is another source of unease. Where customary land is registered for mining the interests of land group members are transferred to individu-

als, usually from among their number, who are declared 'trustees'. The intention, of course, is that these 'trustees' will honestly represent their kin. Under Solomon Islands law only five individuals may be so named, despite the fact that a land group might have a few hundred members with a traditional entitlement to share in the use of that land. The 'trustee' concept has been a constant source of trouble in Solomon Islands since, once 'trustees' hold legal authority over their people's land, some of those trustees begin to behave as if they own the land as individuals, marshalling most, if not all, financial benefits for themselves. As Kabutaulaka (2000:93) has said in relation to logging 'the tribe is usually marginalised and denied access to the wealth accumulated'.

In the absence of legislative guidance about how 'trustees' should perform their duties on behalf of members of a land group as a whole, dispossession is hastened, and kinship relations undermined. Physical conflict may be an immediate outcome or it may be expressed only later, once current elders are replaced by a younger and more informed generation that might then seek redress in ways that, as has often been the case with Melanesian villagers in neighbouring Papua New Guinea, lead to physical violence.

Villagers also wonder about the distribution of benefits from the extraction of natural resources such as timber and minerals. The basic unit of organisation in village communities is not the village itself but, rather, the land-associated grouping of those deemed to have 'primary' land rights, together with those who, through historical connections with those born to that land, have what might be described as 'secondary' rights. These two groups tend to reside side by side in a particular area of a village. They vote for village leaders and they accept edicts from those leaders regarding collective village actions such as cleanups, or the organisation of food and activities for visiting dignitaries. However, this village level of organisation in no way interferes with or overrides obligations to one's land group.

When landholder representatives are asked to sign access agreements for prospecting or mining this constitutes a first step in a social fracturing process since the legislation used and the proce-

dures arising from it, exclude those with 'secondary' rights. A grouping of 'primary' rights holders alone does not correspond with traditional village community organisation. Yet this is the group that the law, the government and the miners identify as the basic unit for approvals and for distribution of cash benefits.

In the case of Gold Ridge an IFC evaluation by Burton and Filer (2006) reported widespread dissatisfaction among those entitled to receive royalty payments from GRML, a grievance that was compounded by the reported failure of the national Ministry of Finance to pass those royalties on to those authorised to receive them. Five years later Owen and Weldegiorgis found that this problem remained unresolved:

... information regarding the payments, amount, and distribution of royalties to tribal accounts was not available to settlers ... Settlers raised issues about a lack of transparency and accountability from both the landowner representatives and the Solomon Islands Government. (Owen and Weldegiorgis 2011)

Land groups obviously need ideas and advice on how benefits might be fairly distributed in accordance with local *kastom*. A serious effort to develop innovative distribution models suited to how Solomon Islands land groups operate today is long overdue.

Solomon Islands is Not Ready for Mining

The reactions of villagers who perceive that their customary rights and their future have been sold off by their land group representatives may be immediate, or delayed. Comments made by Solomon Islanders accessing online social media reveal that younger people often express dissent where their land group leaders have signed approvals for logging or mining. Companies cannot then be confident that their capital investments will not be compromised by a later expression of opposition of the type experienced in neighbouring Melanesian countries: Papua New Guinea, where the Ramu mine is a continuing target of community wrath (Nicholas 7/10/2014) and New Caledonia, where

pollution from a major nickel refinery spill at Goro has resulted in continuing community obstruction (Lefort and Burton 27/5/2014). Mining companies would be unwise to interpret instances of Solomon Islands police protecting foreign logging companies as evidence that their investments can or will be protected against discontented villagers.

The preoccupations and perceptions of rural villagers in the Solomon Islands limit their capacity to anticipate extreme physical changes to their landscape or the dramatic social changes that their communities will experience where mining takes place. Over and above this, even a reasonably well-informed villager cannot be confident in a process for government mining approvals that is characterised by confusion, political interference, weak monitoring agency capacity and uncertain competence, all shadowed by a cloud of corruption.

Efforts by government to guide and control foreigners' enthusiasm to exploit mineral resources that villagers perceive to be 'theirs' have not been based on the obvious opportunity to learn lessons from logging. Too close an identification of political leaders with resource extraction companies has not served Solomon Islands well. The chance to build an economy based on sustainable timber production has been lost. And, just as government institutions have been shown to be ineffective in controlling logging abuses, so, too, their role in guiding and controlling mining is weak and compromised.

Under current arrangements for mining on customary land any benefits at local level accrue to a relatively small number of individuals who happen to hold primary rights of access to minerals in or on their land — even though the land groups of which they are members normally function as part of a bigger, and otherwise cooperative, community. To minimise social disruption all villagers potentially impacted by mining need to be involved in decisions on mineral development not just, as at present, so-called 'landowners'.

There is a need, also, to ensure that land groups approached for access approval are treated fairly and afforded some protection through education and independent oversight of their engagement in the mineral development process. Close monitoring of a company's approach to obtaining SAA

signatures is needed to ensure that no pressures are used — either negative (threatening) or positive (monetary rewards and other benefits for those who sign).

On the evidence of how the mineral development process has so far been handled, village communities may see no choice but to react outside the law against imposed prospecting and mining activities. Having suffered from or witnessed a series of resource-destructive logging episodes it is no surprise that many feel that neither they nor their government is prepared to ensure a form of mineral development that will responsibly address villager needs and concerns and would also bring lasting benefit to the nation.

There are some few signs that mining could be a better development option at a later date. There are Solomon Islanders with village links who, though largely resident in urban Honiara or overseas, give serious consideration to the future of their village relatives and their natural resources. The ideas and views of this group on topics such as mining are currently revealed largely through online social media. One theme that emerges from their online discussions is a feeling that most villagers are not ready for such a disruptive development as mining, and that this resource development option would best be kept open for consideration by a later, more informed and more adaptable generation.

Among these formally educated individuals are people to whom their village-resident relatives are increasingly turning for advice. Some can be expected to become future leaders. They are an as yet unrecognised influence on issues of social and economic development in Solomon Islands. It would be unwise to exclude them from consideration of the exploitation of natural resources to which they have customary rights; rights which as junior members of village society they must, for now, defer to their elders. They are the elders of the future and are likely to be better prepared to make major decisions about the use of their people's natural resources.

This will require political will, courage and determination of a level not evidenced in the approach to timber resource exploitation. Institutional and legislative reform will be required, and a

dramatic change in attitude towards villagers, their social and environmental circumstances, and their development aspirations.

Today, Solomon Islands is not ready for mining. Tomorrow, perhaps. Should mining be forced while governance of the mineral sector remains weak and uncertain, corruption is rife and villagers are ill-informed and uncertain, the rural population could become a potent source of dissent and obstruction, particularly in a region, Melanesia, where violence and mining seem to be partners, an inevitable conclusion of an analysis reported by Allen (2013b).

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Author Notes

Dr Graham Baines, Honorary Research Fellow, School of Social Science, University of Queensland and also Senior Associate Scholar, University of Bergen Pacific Studies Group, Norway, first engaged with Solomon Islands in 1981, initially with a national level role in environmental management, during which he became familiar with forestry and mineral resource policy and practice. He later served in development roles at provincial level, in Western and Isabel provinces. Being long married into an Isabel landholding group he is constantly learning of the nuances of practice and perception at village level.

Endnotes

- 1 This Strategy was developed by the National Coalition for Rural Advancement government that preceded that which is currently in power.
- 2 Somma, a local timber company of which Mamaloni was a Director, was one of a number of companies for tax exemptions were arranged (Dauvergne 1999:258).
- 3 Logging companies formed a representative body, the Solomon Islands Forest Industries Association.

- 4 Job D. Tausinga, Minister of Forestry in the early 2000s, personal communication, 2005.
- 5 Job D. Tausinga, Minister of Forestry in the early 2000s, personal communication, 2005.
- 6 The author was Western Province Senior Planning Officer at the time and recalls a representative of an Australian mining company pressuring him to remove the 'extra time' caveat from the Provincial policy statement.
- 7 Now, with the introduction of the Amendment of 2014, four attempts.
- 8 At least two technical assessments were sent to the Director before the closing date for objections, one from two Isabelian women resident overseas who had had a professional prepare a critique; the second submitted by TNC. Despite the failings identified and explained in these submissions a Development Consent was promptly issued by the Director. This left the submitters with the impression that either the Director had been unable to understand the weaknesses pointed out, or that Development Consent had been decided even before these submissions were received.
- 9 Solomons Pijin term; lit. 'we are too dark', meaning 'in the dark', 'unaware' or 'uninformed'.
- 10 Primary rights are defined in the Customary Land Records Act 1965 as 'the right to carry out any act on the land concerned without reference to any other person' (s2). This wording fails to reflect the fact that customary rights are rarely held by a single individual unqualified by rights to others.
- 11 Differences arise from alternative interpretations of the meanings of land histories and the genealogies of those associated with land, which is largely oral information. Ambiguities once could be dealt with by an unstated agreement to disagree. This was a feature of the old, flexible system of land tenure that is not consistent with the certainty needed for modern forms of development.
- 12 DME might argue that its officers attend meetings of affected villagers, but it is understood that these meetings usually are attended also by staff of the applicant company. Nor are DME officers qualified to deal with the genealogical complexities through which land group representation is determined.
- 13 Such instances have been reported to the author by a number of reliable villager sources.
- 14 Wairiu and Nanao (n.d.:5) also report this for logging in east Guadalcanal.

- 15 Mines and Minerals Amendment Act 2014.
- 16 Augusta Ali Seo of Kia village, Santa Isabel, personal communication, 1995.
- 17 Selwyn Riumana, MP for Kia-Hograno-Havulei 2006–14, personal communication.
- 18 When asked why they had signed an SAA put before them at an Isabel meeting organised by Sumitomo the men representing land of interest to that company reported that they were told they would not be transported back to their villages unless they signed. Selwyn Riumana, MP for Kia-Hograno-Havulei 2006–14, personal communication.
- 19 A classic form of pressure used by loggers is to isolate leaders from their land group, take them to Honiara accommodate and ‘wine and dine’ them — well away from the influence of the group of people they purport to represent.
- 20 It was suggested that this Panel be made up of representatives of the Isabel Tripod — Isabel Provincial Government, the Isabel Council of Chiefs, and the dominant church of the island, Church of Melanesia.
- 21 As evidenced from this extract from a 2005 letter sent from the Office of the Registrar of the High Court to a land claimant in Isabel, and sighted by the author of this paper: ‘it is apparent ... that someone was signing on behalf of the Commissioner of Oath [sic], a practice that cannot be accepted’.
- 22 Selwyn Riumana, MP for Kia-Hograno-Havulei 2006–14, personal communication.
- 23 The author of this paper was present at the original signing, and has examined both the original and the forged document.
- 24 The company’s formal name is SMM Solomon Islands Ltd, a subsidiary of the Japanese company Sumitomo Metals and Minerals Ltd. In Solomon Islands it is commonly referred to simply as ‘Sumitomo’.

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