



Concept Note

Provincial Stakeholders Consultation and Updates on the Seabed Mining Issue in New Ireland Province

Background

Papua New Guinea (PNG) holds a unique place in the global discourse on seabed mining. It was the first country in the world to attempt to commercialize this form of mining through the Solwara 1 project, a joint venture between the PNG Government and Canadian mining company Nautilus Minerals. That initial attempt collapsed in 2019, leaving the country with over K375 million in debts and widespread public criticism. While the first Solwara project failed, the risk it represented remains very much alive.

The seabed mining industry is a very real threat, particularly in the Pacific. In PNG, a troubling inconsistency continues between the Government’s declared international commitments and its investment in and facilitation of the Solwara 1 project in the Bismarck Sea. Prime Minister James Marape announced a 10-year moratorium on seabed mining in 2019, signed a Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) resolution adopted in 2024 which included a moratorium on DSM, and at the United Nations Oceans conference in June 2025 declared his opposition to DSM until studies show it can be done in an environmentally sensitive manner. However, the National Government is revising the Mining Act so as to enable seabed mining and last year permitted the destructive test mining of a large area of the Bismarck Sea.

In New Ireland our Provincial Government through the Provincial Executive Council (PEC) is supporting the Seabed Mining Project, however, there is strong outburst and locals have spoken strongly against the Provincial Government’s decision.

Deep concerns persist around the lack of regulatory safeguards. While seabed mining is a new frontier, the extractive model it follows is familiar—and its dangers well documented in PNG’s long history with terrestrial mining. The urgent need for transparent, inclusive, national-level conversations has never been greater.

Over the last decade, civil society, Indigenous and cultural leaders, churches, and scientists have successfully slowed seabed mining across the region. More than 30 countries, along with numerous corporations and financial institutions, support a moratorium, or pledge not to use minerals sourced from seabed mining. Yet pressure from industry and government interests continues to mount and so too do the threats to ocean ecosystems, customary governance, and Pacific peoples' future.

Introduction

This concept note outlines a proposed framework for New Irelanders through this 3 days Provincial seabed mining consultation and update for all stakeholders scheduled on these following dates;

Program Date & Venue

Dates	Location	Venue
04 th July	Kavieng District	Torot Hall
09 th July	Sentral Niu Ailan LLG	Kono Village
11 th July	Namatanai District	Stemper Hall

Consultation targets groups;

1. Provincial Politician (Governor, District MPs, LLG members)
2. Provincial, District & LLG Public Servants
3. Church Leaders, Community Leaders, Village Chief
4. CSO, FBOs, CBOs
5. Youth, Women and SME leaders
6. Teachers and Students
7. Local Communities, Concerned NIP Citizens, Educated Elites

The consultation seeks to:

- Present updates on the history of campaign against seabed mining over the last 15 years
- Deepen shared understanding of seabed mining in PNG.
- Strategize responses to recent developments and emerging threats.
- Shape a Provincial position that reflects the aspirations, rights, and responsibilities of New Irelanders and aligns with PNG's National Goals and Directive Principles.

This moment is a critical opportunity to respond to several pressing developments:

1. Renewed activity by MV Coco, a vessel operated by Deep Sea Mining Finance Ltd, observed in the Bismarck Sea between May and July 2024, indicating recommencement of exploration efforts.
2. Ongoing investment from the government and corporations in reviving the Solwara 1 project, now potentially supported by new legislative amendments.
3. Reconciling these actions with the growing global momentum toward a moratorium on seabed mining, and PNG's commitments under regional and multilateral environmental agreements.
4. Rebuttal of statements presented by the New Ireland Provincial Executive Council

Consultation Outcomes

The provincial consultation aims to achieve the following outcomes:

1. Collect all signatures for the presentation of reports, complaints and petition demanding State Authorities concerned and New Ireland Provincial Government to cancel all dealings in regard to Seabed mining in New Ireland & PNG as a whole
2. Produce a Media statement and short video interviews through collective New Irelanders indigenous voice
3. Build alliances, both within New Ireland & PNG and across the Pacific, to amplify impact.
4. Engage Provincial and Local Level government, churches, CBOs, communities, concerned citizens and other stakeholders through informed, strategic, and meaningful dialogue.
5. Documentation of views and feedback to present during National Consultation and Lobbying in Port Moresby

Tentative Outline of Agenda

Time	Activity	Facilitator/Presenter
08:00 – 08:30	Registration	Lydia Tioti/Ayesha Gabby
08:30 – 09:30	Float around Town	General Public, Police
09:30 – 09:50	Opening Prayer	Vicar General Fr Joe Okas
09.50 -10.00	Opening Session – Reason for staging this one day information session	Ruthy Watlen
09:30-10.00	Break (Group photo)	
10:00 – 10:20	Introduction and Program Overview	Isaac Boski
10:20-11:00	<p>Session 1: History of Seabed Mining Project and activities over the last 15 years.</p> <p>Guiding Question: When was SBM started? How many communities visited? Who was involved? What are the challenges? How are the partners engaged? Why it is still a concern? What is the way forward? Who has been leading this fight? Who is on our side? What are some achievements? What can you do to support the fight? What are the alternatives? What are the economic analysis and benefits of SBM against sustainable projects Agriculture, Fisheries and Tourism? Where are the current royalties of Lihir & Simberi Gold mine?</p>	<p>Jonathan Mesulam</p> <p>John Momori</p>
11:00 – 12:00	<p>Session 2: National policy and legal landscape: where does our concern fits in?</p> <p><i>Guiding question: How is this issue currently being addressed in laws and policies? What gaps need to be urgently addressed? Is there any legal case? Are there possibilities of taking further legal actions? Are the decisions by the PEC legal? What is the legal standing of the new agreements? Are the FPIC process followed? Who was consulted? Will there be any warden hearings?</i></p>	<p>CELCOR Lawyers</p> <p>Government Lawyers</p> <p>Private Lawyers</p> <p>Magistrate</p>
12.00-13.00	Lunch Break	
13.00-14.40	Session 3: Open Discussion and Responses from Stakeholders including Government Officials	Acting Governor, Kavieng MP, Provincial Government Officers/District & LLG Officers/ Other Stakeholders
14:40-15.00	Afternoon Break	
15. 00-16.00	Way Forward - Next Course of Action	Isaac Boski
16:30 – 17: 00	Official Closing of the Program	UC Bishop
<i>The program remains the same, however, there will be slight changes in the facilitators/presenters for Kono & Namatanai</i>		

Conclusion

This consultation is not just a workshop—it is a call to action. It is a space to unify voices, sharpen strategies, and build an unwavering civil society response to the threat of seabed mining in Papua New Guinea. It offers a platform to ensure that our ocean governance is rooted in justice, sovereignty, and the wisdom of our people.

Together, we rise in SOLIDARITY!