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18 July 2012

The Permanent Secretary for Lands
GCC Complex
Suva

Dear Sir

URGENT & CONFIDENTIAL

Ref: Advertised EOI for Development of State Tiri Land: Nasese Along QE Drive and Walu Bay Along Edinburgh Drive

As a traditional fishing rights owners and original landowners; in association with the people of the Tikina of Suva (Suvavou/ Waiqanake) and Tikina Vutia, we would like to express our serious concerns with the continued abuse and destruction of the natural environment in the Suva peninsula areas. We refer in particular to the permanent destruction of mangrove areas for development lease purposes and the possible alienation of these areas permanently; especially the areas identified above in the advertised EOIs. Mangroves between Fletcher Road and Raiwai have been destroyed. Others in the Lami areas have also been destroyed.

We do understand that these areas are state owned but please note that these areas were owned by the Suvavou and Rewa peoples originally. They are also subject to land claims by we the original landowners and indigenous people of Fiji (ie Kai Viti) and will continue to be so.

a) Grounds

As such we are requesting an urgent moratorium on all EOIs or development leases on tiri lands and foreshores of the Suva Peninsula Areas on the following grounds:

1. Impact on our Traditional Fishing Grounds – the role of mangrove areas in the development and sustainability of coastal fisheries areas is well documented. Mangrove degradation impacts negatively on our coastal fisheries resources. Please see Attachment 1 for a clear explanation. The tiri areas might be state owned but note that its destruction impacts on the fisheries of we the indigenous Kai Viti of the Suva Peninsula.

We emphasize in particular the following report as a result of Dr Peter Mumby's (University of Exeter Marine Biologist) study of mangroves and reef systems and as reported in the National Geographic February 4 2004:

Mangroves—forests of tropical trees and shrubs rooted in saltwater sediments between the coast and the sea—are crucial nurseries for coral reef fish, according to a new study. The finding highlights the importance of the rapidly dwindling habitats to reef communities. "Beyond showing they are important, we showed they are much more important than even assumed," said Peter Mumby, a marine biologist at the University of Exeter, England. Mumby and his colleagues found that mangroves serve as a vital, intermediate nursery as coral reef fish journey from their cribs in seagrass beds to the large coral reef ecosystems that fringe coastal communities. Coral reef fish were up to twice as abundant on reefs adjacent to mangrove forests compared to reefs that weren't, researchers found. They also learned at least one species, the rainbow parrotfish (Scarus guacamaia), depends on mangroves for its very survival.

2. Overall Impact on the Environment – the overall environmental impact of mangrove degradation is well known. This is also detailed in Attachment 1. Fiji is working on Climate Change mitigation in international forums and a clear strategy which Fiji has supported is to stop or decrease deforestation. These actions to clear mangroves is inconsistent with Fiji's international climate change mitigation commitments.
3. Destruction of mangroves denies us our customary usage of mangrove areas for traditional medicine and food gathering purposes for species such as mana and crabs;
4. Note UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (Division for sustainable Development) Agenda 21: this is attached at Attachment 2 and we request that this be observed and followed.
5. Note UN Declaration on Rights of Indigenous Peoples:

Article 25 - Indigenous peoples have the right to maintain and strengthen their distinctive spiritual relationship with their traditionally owned or otherwise occupied and used lands, territories, waters and coastal seas and other resources and to uphold their responsibilities to future generations in this regard.

Article 26 - Indigenous peoples have the right to the lands, territories and resources which they have traditionally owned, occupied or otherwise used or acquired. Indigenous peoples have the right to own, use, develop and control the lands, territories and resources that they possess by reason of traditional ownership or other traditional occupation or use, as well as those which they have otherwise acquired. States shall give legal recognition and protection to these lands, territories and resources. Such recognition shall be conducted with due respect to the customs, traditions and land tenure systems of the indigenous peoples concerned.

Article 27- States shall establish and implement, in conjunction with indigenous peoples concerned, a fair, independent, impartial, open and transparent process, giving due recognition to indigenous peoples' laws, traditions, customs and land tenure systems, to recognize and adjudicate the rights of indigenous peoples pertaining to their lands, territories and resources, including those which were traditionally owned or otherwise occupied or used. Indigenous peoples shall have the right to participate in this process.

Article 29 - Indigenous peoples have the right to the conservation and protection of the environment and the productive capacity of their lands or territories and resources. States

shall establish and implement assistance programmes for indigenous peoples for such conservation and protection, without discrimination.

We request that you observe the above Articles please.

b) Way Forward

Because of the disastrous impact on our fisheries and environment if the above EOI eventuates, we urgently request a moratorium on any further development of tiri areas in the Suva Peninsula and that a joint Fiji Govt/Rewa-Tikina Suva Committee be formed to discuss and suggest ways for the sustainable environmental management of these tiri areas around the Suva Peninsula. Possible uses could be as forest park protected wetlands with walkways. These have been tried and have been successful in Australia and other countries. Both the international donor community and international environmental protection agencies are willing to assist with the project and it will definitely enhance Fiji's standing amongst the international environment groups and from UN sustainable development perspectives. We are willing to partner with the Fiji Government and International Agencies in developing a sustainable management plan for these mangrove areas in the Suva Peninsula; without destroying them.

We would be very grateful to meet the Prime Minister and Minister of Lands to brief him on our concerns and alternative proposal.

We look forward to a positive response from the Fiji Government.

Yours sincerely

Filipe Tuisawau
Yavusa Burebasaga, Valelevu
Nabale, Burebasaga

Metuisela Mudunavosa
Tui Suva / Mata Ni Tikina Suva Vanua Nadonumai

Ravuama Lalanabaravi
Mata Ni Tikina Vutia/ Vanua Nadilo

cc Prime Minister and Minister of Lands; Commodore Voreqe Bainimarama
Director Ministry of Lands; M Tagicakibau
Permanent Secretary Ministry of I Taukei (Fijian) Affairs
Director Environment

