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COAL COMFORT: PACIFIC ISLANDS ON COLLISION COURSE WITH AUSTRALIA OVER EMISSIONS

Uniquely vulnerable to the impacts of a warming world, Pacific island countries have long been considered the front-line of climate change, so it's not surprising that they are also leading the fight to tackle the problem. These tiny nations have vowed to challenge major polluters to cut emissions and, this year, they have coal exports from their biggest neighbour firmly in their sights.

For the first time, a Pacific island country is head of global negotiations aiming to limit *dangerous interference* with the Earth's climate system. Fiji has vowed to use its presidency of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) to make the world sit up and take notice.



Fiji's Prime Minister Voreqe Bainimarama has labelled Australia a prominent member of the *coalition of the selfish* – a group of industrialised nations that put the welfare of their carbon-polluting industries before the environment, and even the survival of Pacific island countries.

Far from scaling back on coal as part of global efforts to reduce emissions, Australia is currently planning public subsidies for new coal mines and considering financing new coal-fired power plants. Australia's aggressive promotion of coal has angered Pacific island governments, who have repeatedly called for a global moratorium on the development of new coal mines.

Wary that Fiji and other Pacific island countries will again target Australia at the COP23 climate negotiations in December 2017, Australian Ambassador for the Environment, Patrick Suckling, was dispatched to island capitals in February 2017 to promote Australia's climate change 'credentials'.

Suckling's island tour and his support for coal sparked outrage from Pacific island civil society and church groups, who penned [an open letter to the ambassador](#) calling on the Australian government to do more to reduce emissions.

Fiji has vowed to use its UNFCCC presidency to maintain the momentum that was established by the 2015 Paris Agreement. But first, they must continue to shine the spotlight on their recalcitrant neighbour, and take care to avoid being muzzled by Australia's 'climate diplomacy'.

Sources: [Coal comfort: Pacific islands on collision course with Australia over emissions](#), *The Conversation*, Wesley Morgan, 1 March 2017 | Photo: Pacific island countries are uniquely vulnerable to changes wrought by global warming © Jason Reed/Reuters | Edited by Kendall Benton-Collins.

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TAKING ON PAPUA NEW GUINEA'S LOGGING PIRATE

Papua New Guinea (PNG) is home to the third largest area of surviving tropical rainforest beyond the Amazon and Congo. Within these forests are more than 20,000 species of plants, 2,000 species of trees, and 700 species of birds. According to World Wide Fund for Nature, Papua New Guinea alone harbours an estimated 6% of the world's species. These precious and unique resources are under substantial threat from illegal logging.

In a newly released report - *Taking On the Logging Pirates* – the Oakland Institute, an international non-governmental organisation, claims that foreign logging companies continue to operate in parts of PNG where the practice was supposed to have stopped.

In recent years, Special Agriculture and Business Leases ([SABLS](#)) - a government scheme - has been instrumental in fuelling land grabs all over the country, with over 5.5 million hectares given away to foreign companies. Considering the pre-existing logging concessions, now more than one-third of the country is in the hands of foreign firms.



“The context in which we release this report is one of complicity and inaction by the PNG government in the face of a massive fraudulent scheme that deprives people of their land and livelihoods,” said Frederic Mousseau, Policy Director at the Oakland Institute. “These first-hand testimonies detail the theft of land and share a poignant account of people’s resistance, whereby those challenging land grabs face repression and harassment,” he continued.

Three years after an official investigation identified many flaws and irregularities with the SABL scheme, and pointed to widespread corruption and illegality of the land deals, the government has failed to take any action to remediate the situation. In the meanwhile, the country has surpassed Malaysia in becoming the world's top exporter of tropical wood.

Taking On the Logging Pirates follows two previous reports and [a film by the Oakland Institute](#), that have documented land grabbing and widespread tax evasion by a handful of Malaysian firms, including the multi-industry conglomerate Rimbunan Hijau.

Sources: [International NGO releases report on illegal logging in PNG](#), *Pacific Beat*, Bruce Hill, 1 March 2017 | [Taking On the Logging Pirates](#), *The Oakland Institute*, 27 February 2017 | [Remarkable PNG](#), WWF-South



Pacific, Accessed: 8 March 2017 | [Deforestation in New Guinea](#), WWF International, Accessed: 8 March 2017
 / Photo: Logging concessions in Pomio © Paul Hilton /Greenpeace | Edited by Kendall Benton-Collins.

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EUROPEAN COMMISSION REMOVES SOLOMON ISLANDS 'YELLOW CARD'

The [European Commission](#) has recognised the significant progress the Solomon Islands has made in the fight against illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing. IUU fishing takes place where vessels operate in violation of the laws of a fishery. This can apply to fisheries that are under the jurisdiction of a coastal state or to high seas fisheries regulated by regional organisations. IUU threatens global fish populations, damages the marine environment and affects socio-economic conditions. The global value of IUU fishing is estimated at approximately 10 billion euros per year, up to 15% of catches worldwide.

In December 2014, the Solomon Islands received a 'yellow card' from the European Commission for not taking adequate action to combat IUU in their region. Since then, the Solomon Islands has undertaken a series of reforms to bring their fisheries legal and administrative frameworks in line with international law. Working closely with the European Commission, they have strengthened their sanctioning system, and have improved monitoring and control of their fleets.

EU Commissioner for Environment, Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, Karmenu Vella, said: "This is a good day for... [the] Solomon Islands, and good news for sustainable fisheries around the globe. Countries worldwide have a shared duty to fight illegal fishing, protect law-abiding fishermen, and keep our oceans healthy."



Sources: [Fighting illegal fishing: Commission lifts 'yellow cards' for Curaçao and Solomon Islands](#), European Commission, Last updated: 8 March 2017 | [Commission lifts 'yellow cards' for Curaçao and Solomon Islands](#), European Commission, 28 February 2017 | ['Yellow card' lifted](#), Solomon Star News, Ronald Toito'ona, 24 February 2017 | [European Commission removes Solomon Islands 'Yellow Card'](#), Solomon Times, 23 February | [Definition of IUU Fishing](#), Greenpeace International, 14 October 2010 | Photo: [Tackling illegal, unreported and unregulated \(IUU\) fishing](#) © European Commission | Edited by Kendall Benton-Collins.

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DEEP SEA MINING: A GROWING THREAT TO THE PACIFIC

Extinct hydrothermal vents are future targets for deep sea mining. Deep sea hydrothermal vent ecosystems were first discovered in 1977 at the Galapagos Rift, and stunned the world of science, as these vent systems rely entirely on energy taken from chemicals rather than from the sun - the first ever known. This and their isolation from one another in the manner of small oceanic islands means vents are host to many distinct and rare species. It is estimated that perhaps only 500 - 5,000 may exist, making this **one of rarest ecosystems in Earth's biosphere**.

These extinct vents become massive sulphide systems with deposits of **copper, gold, zinc, and silver**. Due to their nature, vents are typically found within the 200 nautical mile exclusive economic zone ([EEZ](#)) of Pacific island countries.

Canadian company Nautilus Minerals is the closest to making mining massive sulphide systems a reality and they have their sights set on Solwara 1, a site 29 kilometres off the coast of Papua New Guinea (PNG). They plan to begin mining operations at the site by 2018. **This would be the first commercial deep sea mining project in history.**

Jeff Drazen, the chair of the Biological Oceanography Division at the University of Hawaii argues, "Right now, the impression I get is a lot of mining companies are taking advantage of the poverty in developing Pacific island nations and exploiting them for what will be long-lasting environmental harm for these countries."

While the PNG government is on board with a 15 percent stake (approx. \$US124million) in the project – local community members and civil society organisations are very concerned. Jonathan Mesulam from the [Alliance of Solwara Warriors](#) says, "Nautilus does not have the consent of local communities. We still don't know what the impacts of this experimental mining will be. Furthermore, the Solwara 1 site is right in the middle of our traditional fishing grounds. We are united in our fight against any destruction of our seas, culture and livelihoods."

Sources: [Plucking minerals from the seabed is back on the agenda](#), *The Economist*, 23 February 2017 | [Deep Sea Mining off the Coasts of Pacific Islands: A Different Ballgame](#), Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting, Sarah Fahmy, 7 December 2016 | [Call for transparency around PNG seabed mining project](#), Radio New Zealand, 24 November 2016 | [Deep Sea Mining a New Ocean Threat](#), *The Huffington Post*, Richard Steiner, 20 October 2015 | Edited by Kendall Benton-Collins.

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