



- Bougainville's Presidential Election
- Mutton Flaps Banned in Tonga
- Covid-19 and its Impact on the Tuna Industry in the Pacific Islands

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**"The future depends on what we do in the present."**

**~ Mahatma Gandhi**

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## **BOUGAINVILLE'S PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION**

At the end of 2019 Bougainville held a referendum, and 97.7% of the 85% voter turnout chose independence from Papua New Guinea (PNG), in favour of remaining part of PNG.

This follows on from the 2001 Bougainville Peace Agreement, which ended the nine-year civil war (1988-1997). The peace agreement established the Autonomous Bougainville Government, and stipulated that a referendum would be held which enabled independence 'subject to the final decision-making authority of the National Parliament.'

From 12 August to 1 September Bougainville has held its presidential elections, and whoever wins the presidency will be negotiating with the PNG Government regarding Bougainville's future as an independent country.

For the PNG Prime Minister James Marape the stakes are high, because honouring the result of the referendum may destabilise other regions of PNG, such as New Ireland, Enga, East New Britain and West Papua, which are all seeking greater autonomy.

The Autonomous Region of Bougainville is a chain of islands 959 kilometres northwest of PNG's capital, Port Moresby. Currently, it only derives 14% of its revenue from internal sources, and the rest comes from PNG and foreign aid. If Bougainville becomes independent the next president will look at fisheries, once the new nation's 200-mile Exclusive Economic Zone is created, to make the newly-formed country self-reliant.

Another revenue source is mining. It is estimated that the Panguna Mine, the conflict over which started the civil war in the 1990s, retains about \$58 billion worth of copper and gold, so re-opening it would have enormous financial benefits. However, that needs to be done in a way that takes both the needs of the community and environmental impacts into consideration. Also, given 20,000 people died in the civil war, it would require great sensitivity.

In 2019, three bills were introduced by the Autonomous Bougainville Government to amend Bougainville's mining laws. The research paper, *Blank Cheque*, released by Jubilee Australia Research Centre in June 2020 found that the proposed legislation is unclear as to the financial benefits available to landowners; ambiguous about the environmental assessment process and risks the establishment of a virtual monopoly where one mining company controls most of the mineral leases.

A report in April by the Human Rights Law Centre, *After the Mine*, identified significant and ongoing environmental damage at the abandoned Panguna site, including contaminated water sources, land and crops flooded by toxic mud and health problems ranging from skin diseases and respiratory problems to pregnancy complications.

Bougainville's 250,000 population has a median age of only 20. Thirty-year-old, Augustine Teboro, who heads a Bougainville youth federation, said that it was time to dispense with the "old view" that Bougainville's future relied on reopening Panguna when it should be making use of its physical and natural beauty by cultivating its tourism, agriculture and fisheries industries. "Our hope is that this generation will transform our society and not be a generation that will make the same mistakes of the past," said Teboro. "We are looking for a civilian leader with integrity."

Presidential candidates include former president, James Tanis, government-backed candidate Thomas Raivet, former PNG parliamentarian Fidelis Semoso, lawyer Paul Nerau, businessman Peter Tsiamalili Junior, health care professional Ruby Mirinka and former Bougainville MP Magdalene Toroansi. Vote counting runs until 14 September, but what is certain is that the next Bougainville government will be talking to the national government about independence.

*Sources: 'Bougainville has voted to become a new country, but the journey to independence is not yet over' by Anna Powles, The Conversation, 13 December 2019 / 'Bougainville Prepares for Presidential Election' by Grant Wyeth, The Diplomat 1 July 2020 / 'Blank Cheque' Jubilee Australia Research Centre, 10 June 2020 / Bougainville News, 12 August 2020 / Edited by Rosamund Burton.*

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## **MUTTON FLAPS BANNED IN TONGA**

From 1 July mutton flaps have been banned in Tonga, as part of the Government's effort to fight against non-communicable diseases like diabetes and obesity and to promote healthy living.

Tonga is one of the countries with the highest level of type 2 diabetes in the world, and one of the causes of this is attributed to the consumption of mutton flaps, a cheap and fatty cut of sheep's meat. Mutton flaps are the low-quality end of a sheep's rib and every 100g has approximately 40g fat, half of which is saturated fat. The traditional diet for this island is fish, root vegetables and coconuts, Mid-20th century, offcuts of meat began arriving in the Pacific islands, including turkey tails from the US and mutton flaps from New Zealand and Australia. They were cheap and became hugely popular.

"People think something imported is superior," said then 82-year-old Papiloa Bloomfield Foliaki, when she spoke to BBC News about the issue back in 2016. She was a former nurse, activist and politician, and one of few Tongans over the age of 80.

"And you have a situation where fishermen spear their fish, sell it, and go and buy mutton flaps. People don't have the education to know what is bad for their health."

Sunia Soakai, a health planning officer for the Secretariat of the Pacific Community, said it's not unusual for a Tongan to eat 1kg of mutton flaps in one sitting. He did so himself in days gone by. "Over the years, I got quite big, I probably tipped the scales at 170kg" he says.

But Soakai eventually changed his ways and shed 70kg.

"I have a five-year-old son," he explains. "If I continued my lifestyle I would orphan my son. The second trigger was that I work in the health sector; it became an issue of credibility. And I was diagnosed with diabetes."

Some scientists believe Tonga's problem is partly down to genetics, as Pacific islanders in the past had to survive long periods without food so their bodies are programmed to cling on to fats. But size and status in Tongan society have often gone together and there is also a tradition of feasting. "Good food, in a Tongan sense, is lots of food," says the Rev Dr Ma'afu Palu, a minister who is making it his mission to preach healthier eating. He's among many who criticise church leaders for failing to set a good example to their parishioners. Ministers are authority figures in this deeply religious society and according to Palu, 85% of them are obese, thanks partly to the regular feasts they take part in.

The obesity epidemic is not solely down to mutton flaps and turkey tails. In 2000, Fiji banned the importation of lamb and mutton flaps and Samoa banned the importation of turkey tails in 2007 but, according to the anthropologists Deborah Gewertz and Frederick Errington, a singular focus on the kinds of meat consumed in the Pacific is unlikely to reduce the high incidence of obesity in the region. They say that it is not necessarily the case that eating fatty meat contributes significantly more to lifestyle diseases than eating the equivalent calories in refined starches and sugars, such as rice, instant noodles, biscuits and soft drinks.

The country of 100,000 struggles to cope with the consequences of this diet. Life expectancy, which was once in the mid-70s, has fallen to 64. Seventy-four per cent of adult deaths in Tonga, according to the STEPS report, produced by the World Health Organisation and the Tongan Ministry of Health are due to non-communicable diseases (NCDs), and the prevalence of type 2 diabetes in Tonga has almost quadrupled over the last 40 years.

*Sources: 'Flap Food Nation in the Pacific Islands' by Deborah Gewertz and Frederick Errington [DATE] / How mutton flaps are killing Tonga by Katy Watson and Sarah Treanor BBC News, Tonga, 18 January 2016 / Meat Flaps and Turkey Tails Are Fatty, Cheap Cuts of Meat and the Cause of Obesity in the South Pacific? by Mervyn Piesse, Research Manager, Global Food and Water Crises Research Programme, 29 October 2019 / Edited by Rosamund Burton*

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## **COVID-19 AND ITS IMPACT ON THE TUNA INDUSTRY IN THE PACIFIC ISLANDS**

Approximately 60% of tuna for the global tuna canning market comes from the Western and Central Pacific Ocean. Pacific island countries are dependent on revenues from the licensing of fishing vessels, but due to COVID-19 they have closed their airports and ports. Foreign vessels are now required to spend up to 14 days quarantined at sea before going into port. And some carrier vessels that originated in, or transited in, countries that have COVID-19 cases have been prohibited, which has disrupted fishing, said Dr Transform Aqorau, in an April 2020 Devpolicy blog.

The member states of the PNA have an observer on board every one of the licenced purse seine fishing vessels in PNA waters. The observers are independent and monitor what happens at sea, which helps ensure that vessels comply with PNA conservation and management rules. However, due to the difficulty of transporting observers, because of concerns for their health and safety, as well as airport closures, Pacific island governments have suspended the requirement to have the usually mandatory observers on purse seine vessels.

Ensuring the right balance between maintaining the integrity of the conservation and management measures, while allowing flexibility for fishing vessels to maintain production is not easy, Aqorau explained. FCF Fishery Company Ltd of Taiwan (FCF) is the largest tuna trader in the world. FCF has seen strong demand for their canned tuna products because of consumers stocking up to meet the need for physical distancing during COVID-19. But its purse seine vessels, which catch large quantities of young small-sized tuna for canned products, have waited, sometimes for over a week, to get authorisation to operate without an observer, which cost them, in lost fishing time, between US\$50-60,000 per vessel per day.

FCF's interests also include a processing plant at Wewak in PNG's East Sepik, which employs 10% of the local population, half of whom are women. But because of PNG's States of Emergency the processing plant has reduced productivity due to labour shortages. And the closure of airports in Fiji, Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia and Palau has affected the FCF's local longline fleet, which fish for the high-quality large-size fish, so staff have been laid off.

But despite these hurdles the fishing in the tuna-rich PNA waters has not been significantly impeded by the COVID-19 crisis, according to a report prepared by MRAG Asia Pacific, an Australian-based consultancy. Focusing on the purse seine fleets the report looked into the changes in fishery and market dynamics of the PNA member states —Federated States of Micronesia, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Tuvalu — in the period of January to April 2020, as the pandemic took hold.

In an article by Bernadette Carreon on 20 July in *Seafood Source*, the CEO of PNA, Ludwig Kumoru, said,

“Business hasn't slowed down. Boats are still taking up the same number of days.” The Vessel Day Scheme (VDS) dictates the number of days fishing vessels are licenced to fish in the PNA Exclusive Economic Zone per year, and the VDS pays about US\$500 million annually to the PNA member states.

However, the MRAG report noted that with restaurants in Asia and North America having periods of shutdown, or seeing dramatically reduced clientele, demand for sashimi tuna— which is generally caught by the longline fleet — has dropped sharply. Along with port closures and travel restrictions this could result in lower demand for fishing days under the VDS.

*'COVID-19 and its likely impact on the tuna industry in the Pacific Islands,' by Transform Aqorau, Devpolicy, April 27, 2020 / 'Report indicates Pacific tuna fisheries weathering COVID-19 well' by Bernadette Carreon, Seafood Source, 20 July 2020 / Edited Rosamund Burton*

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