

Vanuatu Government seeks views of the people on deep sea mining

Written by Administrator

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Tuesday 14 October 2014, Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC), Suva, Fiji: Last week in Port Vila, the Republic of Vanuatu commenced on a national consultation on a draft Deep Sea Minerals Policy. This is the first in a series of consultations to be held in every province.

Past studies in Vanuatu's waters revealed the presence of seafloor massive sulphide deposits within its exclusive economic zone, which could contain significant quantities of copper, gold, zinc, silver and other commercially viable minerals. The presence of such minerals could present a potential economic opportunity for Vanuatu if deep sea mining activity is properly conducted and balanced with appropriate environmental, legal and financial management.

The draft Policy sets out Vanuatu's vision and strategic goals in relation to its deep sea minerals, and will form the basis for future drafting of laws in line with the policy. The draft Policy has been prepared by the Ministry of Lands with advice from the Deep Sea Minerals (DSM) Project: a partnership between the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) and the European Union (EU).

The DSM Project works to assist 15 Pacific Island countries to improve governance and management of their deep-sea mineral resources, including through the development of national policies and laws.

The DSM Project places great emphasis on the importance of a consultative approach, and encourages all Governments to involve concerned citizens in decisions that may affect natural resources and the environment. The DSM Project is providing technical and financial support to the Government of Vanuatu to conduct this important consultation exercise and will continue to

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work with Vanuatu's multi-stakeholder National Offshore Minerals Committee, which includes the Vanuatu Association of Non-Governmental Organisations (VANGO), as they progress this work.

Ms Alison Swaddling, Environment Advisor for the SPC-EU DSM Project, participated in the consultation that took place from 7 to 9 October. The workshop was an opportune time for all stakeholders in Vanuatu to discuss issues and ways forward, pertaining to deep sea minerals.

The SPC-EU DSM Project commends Vanuatu for approaching the development of their deep sea minerals policy in an open, transparent and fully participatory way. The draft of the national Deep Sea Minerals Policy is publically available on the Ministry of Lands website (<http://mol.gov.vu/>), and invitations have been extended to the wider public to attend the consultation meeting.

'The EU congratulates the Vanuatu Government and the DSM Project for all this progress. The Government must be particularly commended for initiating an open and inclusive process whereby Vanuatu citizens can engage in and influence the country's Deep Sea Mining Policy via the newly established committee. This process is very important and something that the EU encourages, particularly on such a sensitive issue like deep sea mining. We urge citizens, civil society, the media and indigenous communities of Vanuatu to be well informed about deep sea mining and to constructively work with the Government to develop a credible Policy that must be implemented, enforced and monitored properly,' said Mr Leonidas Tezapsidis, EU Ambassador to Solomon Islands and Vanuatu.

The SPC-EU Deep Sea Minerals Project has been providing assistance to Vanuatu since its inception in 2011, including a 2012 National DSM Stakeholder Workshop at which the need for a policy was identified, and through sponsoring attendance by Government and NGO representatives at regional technical DSM training workshops. These included a regional workshop held by the DSM Project in Vanuatu in 2013, opened by Vanuatu's Minister for Lands and Natural Resources, where 75 participants, representing Government, civil society and private sector from 18 countries met to discuss concerns about the potential social impacts of deep sea mining, and the importance of public participation in policy development and decision-making about the sector.

For more information, visit www.GSD.org/dsm or contact dsmproject@spc.int .

Photo caption: Participants at the Consultation meeting for the draft Deep Sea Minerals Policy in Port Vila, Vanuatu, 7th October 2014.