

Panguna Mine Legacy Impact Assessment

Phase 1 Assessment Report
Chapter 14 – Conclusion

Panguna Legacy Assessment Company Limited



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14. CONCLUSION

The Panguna Mine Legacy Impact Assessment is the first large-scale data collection, evaluation and assessment of the environmental, social and human rights impacts of the Panguna Mine since the cessation of mining in 1989. The Legacy Impact Assessment is an independent process, overseen by the multi-stakeholder Oversight Committee which is supported by an Independent Facilitator and Secretariat. Tetra Tech Coffey was selected as the Primary Contractor to prepare Phase 1 of the Legacy Impact Assessment in October 2022, contracted to the Panguna Legacy Assessment Company Limited, an independent company set up to provide funding for the assessment and the Oversight Committee and Secretariat.

Village chiefs, clan chiefs, ward members and constituency members greatly assisted in making this study possible. Individual community members and leaders volunteered their time and contributed to a wide range of environmental and social surveys throughout 2023. The Oversight Committee (particularly the community representatives), Secretariat and community facilitators also played an important role in establishing the community support for the study.

Many of the aspects of focus for Phase 1 investigations have had very little information gathered on them for at least 30 years, sometimes longer. The information that has been gathered during Phase 1 represents the first technical investigation of the environmental and social conditions in the study area as they are today. Notwithstanding this, there are a range of constraints that have limited the nature and volume of data that can be collected to inform the impact assessment, with consequent uncertainty in results.

Data collection in Phase 1 was conducted over three field campaigns during 2023 and included collecting approximately 1,600 samples and completing more than 400 household surveys, and extensive participatory mapping and visual inspections. The data collected over the field campaigns investigated an area stretching across Bougainville Island from Arawa to Empress Augusta Bay, with particular focus on the mine area and downriver areas impacted by tailings and flooding.

Phase 1 of the Legacy Impact Assessment has identified a range of actual, potential and possible human rights impacts and risks to human health directly connected to the environmental impacts of the mine since 1989. The most serious concern is the potential impact on the right to life from unstable structures and landform collapses and flooding hazards, which have very high salience and affect multiple domains. Other human rights that are or may be impacted include the right to a clean and healthy environment, the right to health, the right to water, the right to education, cultural rights, the right to adequate food, housing, and standard of living and the associated Indigenous rights that intersect with these human rights. Not all impacts are experienced in each domain and the location and salience of these impacts varies within and between domains.

The report recommends the actual and potential human rights impacts identified are remedied and that where the impacts are well understood, future work is focussed on options analysis for the remedy of these impacts. Recommendations for options analysis to mitigate the impacts include assessment of the:

- Unstable structures and landforms that may collapse and result in fatalities in the Mine and River System domain.
- Structural, chemical and explosive hazards in the Port and Town Domain.
- Hazardous river conditions or improved access where there is no bridge to provide safe crossing in the River System Domain.
- Flooding associated with the Kuneka Creek diversion channel that impacts productive land.

Where actual and potential impacts are not well understood, or where possible impacts or risks are identified, recommendations for further investigations are made. These include work to:

- Improve the understanding of how people use water and are exposed to contaminants.
- Identify how far contaminants have spread and assess options to manage the impacts of this.
- Understand how long flood events last, and how this affects access, food, crops and water quality.
- Understand how contaminants affect growing food and crops.
- Understand if contaminants are affecting marine resources in Empress Augusta and Anewa bays.
- Determine how much people are exposed to contaminants to better understand risks to their health.

Phase 1 is an important first step in the Legacy Impact Assessment process. The nature and scope of further work will be dependent on further discussion between the Parties to the AusNCP process about the outcomes of Phase 1. The extensive stakeholder engagement throughout the Legacy Impact Assessment process to date will continue as further information is able to be shared regarding the next steps for the Legacy Impact Assessment after Phase 1.