

Committee media release: 20 August, 2022

Early milestone for the Panguna Legacy Impact Assessment

The Panguna Mine Legacy Impact Oversight Committee celebrated the opening of its Secretariat Office in Ioro on the 11th of August at the Ioro 2 Government Centre.

Speaking at the launch, Paramount Chief Michael Pariu welcomed community members and stakeholders. In acknowledging the challenges faced by communities living in impact areas, he stressed that the Environment and Human Rights Impact Assessment process will help us all understand the hardships faced by the community and work towards resolving them. Chief Pariu urged communities to access the office with any queries or concerns they had about the process.

The Committee also marked the occasion with the public release of the Preparatory Phase Report, which was prepared by independent company, Tetra Tech Coffey.

The Preparatory Report is based on a review of historical reports and satellite images of the mine and identifies what information already exists about the mine's environmental impacts and what new information will need to be collected during the Impact Assessment. The Report identified some key areas for Phase 1 of the Impact Assessment to focus on, including unstable mine infrastructure, water pollution and flooding risks.

The satellite images relied on in the report showed two areas of particular concern:

- The levee where Kawerong & Jaba Rivers meet. The report found that this levee is almost certain to collapse at some stage in the future due to erosion but it is unclear when this will happen and how severe the impact would be. If it does, people living on the floodplain downstream of the Jaba River would be at risk from landslides and flooding.
- Flooding of the lower Kuneka creek and Konaviru wetland area. The report found that tailings waste has built up in the Jaba River near Bato Bridge in recent years, causing the river to divert and flow into the Konaviru Wetland and lower Kuneka Creek areas. More tailings waste is likely to build up in this area, meaning further flooding risks in the future for people living in this area. It is not yet possible to predict when this will happen and whether the change will be permanent.

Because of the nature of these risks, they have been prioritised for rapid risk assessment including on-ground inspection to verify the findings through a process led by the Autonomous Bougainville Government with the support of Rio Tinto and the Human Rights Law Centre. A team of environmental and social consultants from Tetra Tech Coffey will undertake this assessment in the coming weeks and affected communities have been made aware. This rapid risk assessment has been escalated outside of the formal Impact Assessment process and will help inform the ABG on steps to address the risks.

Significant progress was also welcomed in other areas:

- A tender process is currently underway to select an independent company of environmental, social and human rights experts to carry out Phase 1 of the Impact Assessment. The Committee is expected to make a decision about which company to appoint in September, with Phase 1 of the Impact Assessment to start by the end of the year and run for around 18 months.
- The Secretariat's community-based facilitator project is due to get underway in August. This project will provide an important opportunity for community members to inform and hear about the upcoming Impact Assessment process.
- The Secretariat will also soon welcome a Project Lead, to work alongside Community Engagement Lead, Nathan Matbob and Administrative Lead, Adelyne Imako, under the direction of the Committee's Independent Facilitator, Martin Brash.

In rounding out the office launch through her key note remarks, Member for Ioro, Hon. Theonila Roka Matbob acknowledged the patience of communities. She committed the Secretariat and all stakeholder representatives on the Committee, to work together with communities to complete the impact assessment effectively.