

Vanuatu warned against Genetic Modified Organisms

by Evelyne Toa

VANUATU needs to learn about the dangers and threats caused by 'Genetic Modified Organisms or GMO ('organisme genetique modifiee'), says a New Caledonia delegation.

The delegation, who were in Port Vila this week, represent a Noumea-based NGO called 'Stop MGO Pacifique'.

Their mission is to educate the government and the people of Vanuatu and discourage them for using GMO seeds to grow on their farms for food and for commercial use.

Their visit is part of a study tour in the Pacific, to collect data and information, and to express their concerns on GMO in relation to seeds and regulation.

The Chairman of the organisation, Frederic Guerin and secretary Claire Chauvet told The Independent that they have met with some government representatives and officials.

They also met with customs and quarantine representatives from the Melanesian Speahead Group (MSG).

Before coming to Vanuatu, the team had visited the Solomon Islands, Fiji, Wallis and Futuna.

They said that the threat posed by imported genetically modified seeds to the region is very alarming.

They said there was a classic example in Hawaii which has been infiltrated with more than 500 GMO seeds and contaminated papaya.

"It is very important to keep and protect traditional seeds in order to maintain food security and food sovereignty," they said.

"It is also important to continue to use the traditional seeds to grow food rather than relying on the imported seeds from outside because these imported seeds pose dangers to our traditional seeds and health."

The delegation suggested the need to have

GMO regulations in place in order to control the import and export of GMO products.

"It is time to control GMO products in the region in collaboration with other stakeholders as a way forward to protect each countries against the danger of GMO," they said.

"Around the world, 65 countries have GMO regulations. But for the Pacific, only Tonga has a regulation in place.

"By creating a data base, the organisation they represent can be able to know the status of the region when it comes to GMO and work in collaboration with organizations, either the South Pacific Community (SPC) and or the South Paific Regional Environmental Organisation (SPREP)."

They explained that GMOs are plants or animals that have been genetically engineered with DNA from bacteria, viruses

or other plants and animals.

"Most developed nations do not consider GMOs to be safe," they said.

"Throughout history, farmers have used selected breeding to improve crops and stocks by breeding from the plants or animals that had qualities they wanted to strengthen."

They said that the main commercial GM crops are soy, maize, cotton and rapeseed (canola) and these are mainly found in USA, Argentina, Canada and China.

"However in French Polynesia, New Caledonia, and other Melanesian countries, Micronesia and Polynesia, traditional agriculture has a strong cultural dimension, the roots like yams and taro that we should protect and preserve," they said.

More information can be found on <http://www.stopogm-pacifique.org>.

Tanna education level poor: Minister

MINISTER of Education, Bob Loughman has admitted that the level of education in Tanna, TAFEA Province is very poor, and urged Principals and Headmasters to explain and find the cause.

Minister Loughman made the remarks during his official visit this week in Tanna.

In a general meeting held at the TAFEA Provincial headquarters, Loughman said the level of education academy there is not improving and needs serious consideration by teachers and principals.

Accompanied by senior officials of the Ministry of Education, Loughman was expected to return to the capital before the Easter weekend.

In another development, the Ministry

of Education through its Corporate and Planning Unit is looking at setting up an academic system that will enable Vanuatu's future children after the kindergarten phase, to ensure they have place in the primary and secondary and through the university level.

"In today's system, children or student must apply for a scholarship, and only those who meet scholarships' criterias will be selected, and for most cases in the past, with political interference, some of the Vanuatu students were selected although they have not met required criteria.

"If we have an appropriate system in place, the majority of our children will have the opportunity to go through university in future, " said a reliable source from the education department.

Wreckage threat in Fiji waters

THERE are 34 ships submerged or partly submerged in Fiji waters, a survey has revealed.

Of these, 18 are more than 15 years old.

The survey, conducted by the Marine Resource Assessment, Development and Management on ship groundings in the Pacific, states that 11 are fishing vessels, six tankers, one bulk carrier, 11 cargo vessels and five ships in the others category.

It further states that Fiji has 123 vessels between 10 and 1000 gross registered tonnage (GRT) and seven vessels greater than 1000 GRT.

The MV Na Mataisau, a government ship that suffered engine problems while

anchored in open waters off Moala in Lau, is among ships listed in the others category.

The ship ran aground during Cyclone Eric on January 18, 1985, and eventually sank hours later, killing two. The 274-tonnage cargo ferry was only seven years old when the incident happened.

Villagers of Nuku on Moala Island are now seeking government's assistance in trying to remove the wreck from their beachfront.

Nuku Village headmen Jimi Malumu claims seafood in their area is now scarce because of drums of fuel that were on board the vessel.

"We have been asking all government delegations that visit our village for assistance because we feel that this vessel is the reason why we can't get any more fresh fish and seafood. Up until now, nothing has been done," he said.

Tevita Tuikabara, of Vatoa Village in Lau, echoed Mr Malumu's sentiments, saying three foreign fishing vessels and a local vessel are submerged along Vuata Reef in Vatoa. The US freighter SS Thomas A Edison struck the reef in 1942 and the fleet tug USS Grebe suffered the same fate when it tried to salvage it.

Norwegian vessel Ragna Ringdal sank there in 1962 while the Labasa Princess fell victim to it in 1973.

Vanuatu in pictures



COME ON IN... the water's fine. Kiwi visitor Kathy Knowles sent in this pretty picture taken during her visit to Bokissa island, off Espiritu Santo. It certainly looks an inviting spot for a dip - and she said the snorkelling was great with lots of colourful fish. The Independent wants to see YOUR photos of life throughout Vanuatu - any topic you like. Send pictures (preferably in jpg or tiff format, 500kb or more) to: editor@independent.vu and we will publish the best each week.

Recrutement

Au Fare recherché son equipe de sale+ cuisine pour son ouverture prochaine.

Presentez vous les 24, 25 et 26 Avril de 9H a 11H et de 15H a 17H a Melcoffee, Fatumaru Bay (ex Azur pure water).

2 ans experience minimum + references.

Email: aupechemignon@vanuatu.com.vu