

23 June 2021

Statement from Jubilee Australia, Caritas Fiji and Fiji Council of Social Services in relation to Amex Resources Limited advertisement

On 19 June 2021, Amex Resources Limited (ARL) published a four-page advertisement in the *Fiji Sun* entitled “Amex Resources Limited – Response to NGO’s Allegations”. The statement responds to [A Line in the Sand](#), a report published by Jubilee Australia, Caritas Fiji and Fiji Council of Social Services (FCOSS) on 26 May 2021. The report discusses the company’s black sand mining project in the Ba river delta on Viti Levu.

Jubilee Australia, Caritas Fiji and FCOSS stand by the report and its recommendations.

In February 2021, several months before the report’s publication, Jubilee Australia wrote to ARL at its Australian registered head office (and sent a copy via email to its parent company) to advise that a research report was being prepared on black sand mining in Fiji. In our letter, we sought information from the company regarding the project in Ba, particularly the environmental impacts and community consultation processes, and offered to meet with company representatives at their convenience. Unfortunately, ARL did not take up the opportunity to share information for our report, but has instead issued its own unilateral statement via a media advertisement.

Jubilee Australia, Caritas Fiji and FCOSS will review the materials referred to in ARL’s statement (where these have been made available) and, if needed, will prepare a supplement to our report detailing our findings. In the meantime, we make the following initial comments:

Environmental impacts

A Line in the Sand discusses a number of potential environmental impacts that may arise from black sand mining, drawing on a review of information published in scientific journals. In response, ARL has supplied numerous quoted extracts from a powerpoint presentation on black sand mining that appears on the website of a Philippines-based offshore mining company. The company also quotes from reports of ongoing monitoring activities undertaken by the ARL Environment Team. However, selected quotes from internal company monitoring reports, and a presentation published by another offshore mining company, do not provide sufficient information for us to revise our report’s findings regarding the environmental risks of black sand mining. We continue to have serious concerns about the ecological impacts of black sand mining in Ba.

ARL’s response also refutes concerns raised by community members interviewed for *A Line in the Sand* regarding erosion, siltation, flooding and damages to reefs and mangroves. ARL’s statement argues that these are the result of other pressures on the Ba river. Our report outlines the concerns as they were expressed to us by members of the community. We recognise the complexity of assessing these impacts and will look further into the issues raised.

ARL also refutes reports by community members of reductions in fish and marine resources by supplying accounts from two village members and company employees. This information is at odds with accounts from community members we interviewed, and is not sufficient evidence at this stage to lead us to revise our report.

A Line in the Sand recommends that a new environmental impact assessment is needed to establish the extent of siltation and fish and crab reduction reported by community members, potential erosion risks, and how the project may impact on the community’s resilience to future extreme

weather events and flash flooding. The report authors stand by this recommendation and note that, if the claimed positive impacts of black sand mining are correct, ARL should have no concerns about a new EIA being conducted by an independent expert.

Community consultation and Free, Prior and Informed Consent

ARL's advertisement reports that it corresponded with individuals from Votua Village and held three consultation meetings prior to the grant of the mining lease, one of which was in Votua. It also claims that the entire community was involved during the social income and economic assessment as part of the EIA process. The statement further claims that more than 60% of the Vanua o Votua are in support of ARL's exploration activities inland. However, ARL's statement does not indicate how many members of the affected villages attended the relevant consultations, what information was provided to them, and what questions were asked and responded to. The company has not supplied minutes of those meetings or evidence that a wide range of community members were adequately informed about the project. Its assertion that 60% of the community supports the project expansion is at odds with information we have received from community members.

As reported in *A Line in the Sand*, an Awareness Tour conducted by the Archdiocese of Suva in 2018 documented several concerns raised by Votua residents at a community meeting. These included concerns that little knowledge and awareness-raising had been done to highlight the danger and risk of black sand mining to the people of Votua and neighbouring villages and that the EIA had not been made public or known to the communities. *A Line in the Sand* also details concerns expressed by individual community members regarding the information provided and the way it was provided before the project commenced.

Free, Prior and Informed Consent requires that all members of the community are fully informed about the potential benefits and the potential negative impacts of a project, and freely give their consent to the project based on this information. ARL's response does not provide sufficient information for us to revise the report's conclusion that there are serious concerns relating to Free Prior and Informed Consent present in this project.

The report

The advertisement states that *A Line in the Sand* contains "deliberate lies" and insinuates bad faith on the part of the report's authors and community members who spoke to us in developing this report. We strongly refute this allegation and explicitly note that community members who spoke to us did so freely and received no payment to do so. The Archdiocese of Suva, Caritas Fiji and independent human rights defenders have been working with the communities surrounding the project for several years and have engaged in meetings and dialogue with a range of community members. Our report aimed to build on this work by documenting some of the issues that had been raised by community members, and highlighting potential environmental risks that require further investigation. We are glad that the report has prompted consideration of these issues by ARL, and hope the company will implement its recommendations.

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