



The Pacific Network on Globalisation

PRESS RELEASE

Countries show solidarity for independent trade advisor body

(SUVA, Monday, March 21, 2011) – Forum island countries have taken another step towards their own independent body for advice on trade with the Office of the Chief Trade Advisor (OCTA) now established as a legal entity, but not without a fight.

The registering of the OCTA as a legal entity was a hot topic of discussion at last week's meeting of Forum trade officials in Palau. The island countries opted to move beyond the current interim arrangement being used to support the OCTA which is through the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat to legally incorporate OCTA Inc under Vanuatu law.

The decision by island officials comes against the preference of Australia who has expressed some concerns about the Constitution of the OCTA despite it being endorsed by all the Island countries and its governing board. Australia pushed for the extension of the current interim arrangements.

Maureen Penjueli, Coordinator for the Pacific Network on Globalisation (PANG) said that “the advantage of the approach taken by island countries in Palau ensures that FICs will have total control over the OCTA which is something that the countries have fought for. Extending the current interim arrangement under PIFS could result in destroying OCTA as an independent organisation. This is the islands opportunity to rapidly move to consolidating the long term strategic need for independent capacity in trade policy and trade negotiations for our region.”

The current funding arrangements from Australia and New Zealand for the OCTA are due to expire in less than one week's time - on March 28. Whilst Australia has indicated that it would continue to provide funding it is unclear after the Palau meeting if Australia will proceed without the incorporation of their comments on the OCTA Constitution. New Zealand is yet to commit to any further funding.

Ms Penjueli commented that, “we understand that the OCTA would have sufficient funding for two to three months, whilst far from being an ideal situation, the OCTA can now source more stable and permanent funding arrangements outside of Australia and New Zealand.”

The next meeting of trade officials will take place in Tonga on May 16 – 17, followed by a meeting of Forum trade Ministers.

-Ends-

For further information or should you wish to conduct an interview with the PANG Coordinator, Ms Maureen Penjueli - please contact Ms Reama Naco, PANG Communications Officer on phone : +679 3316722 or email : media @pang.org.fj

PANG works across the island countries of the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat - Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Republic of the Marshall Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu and has strong links with fair trade campaigning organisations in Australia, New Zealand and the European Union.

Click onto www.pang.org.fj for further information on PANG's work and follow us on Facebook