

MEDIA RELEASE

16 June 2011



Kolombangara Celebrates Its Conservation Area

Kolombangara came out in force yesterday to celebrate and hear the Minister of Environment dedicate Kolombangara's conservation area, the largest in the Solomon Islands.

"It was an inspiring day to see everybody support our 20,000 hectare conservation area", said Donald Saepio, the Chairman of the Kolombangara Island Biodiversity Conservation Association.

The Official Ceremony was held at Ringgi, Kolombangara on Wednesday 15 June and attended by dignitaries, about 100 invited guests and a crowd of about 2,000 people.

Minister of Environment, Hon Moffat Fugui, officially dedicated the 20,000 hectare conservation area, making it the largest in the Solomon Islands. It protects the area above the 400m contour from logging and mining.

Minister Fugui said the work of KIBCA was an "outstanding example of a public-private partnership". KIBCA is an independent NGO being supported by the Solomon Islands Government, KFPL and other NGOs and donors. The Minister offered to help KIBCA in "every way possible".

The conservation area provides multiple benefits. It protects the most important cultural sites, provides clean water for all the island's villages, protects biodiversity and provides an important carbon store.

Minister Gordon Darcy Lilo, the Minister for Finance, said, "This time moves me because it is the first time Kolombangara people have come together regardless of their institutions or ethnicity."

Minister Darcy Lilo said we need to "protect the biodiversity that provides the wealth for our country" and "you cannot compromise on science or biodiversity". He pledged to be a "strong supporter of KIBCA".

Kongu Rano, the Kolombangara Crater, including its high mountains Rano and Veve, is deeply significant to the Indigenous Dughore people. Mr Saepio said, "The conservation area ensures that Kongu Rano will be managed sustainably for our next generations. Two endemic birds, many rare species of plants, bats, frogs and other wildlife are also found there."

"The KIBCA Executive decided that the question of the new name be deferred and KIBCA will do more awareness with Kolombangaran people about a name," said Mr Saepio.

Mr Saepio stated, “The people of Kolombangara are not ready for a new name. It is clear that the naming of the conservation area is a sensitive issue that has touched the hearts of the people”.

“What was reassuring during the last three months of the naming competition was that nobody on Kolombangara objected to the conservation area”.

Out of respect for the prize donors, Soltai Fishing and Processing and bemobile/Daltron, KIBCA will return the winner’s prize of three cartons of Chilli Taiyo and a mobile phone with \$500 credit.

The Kolombangara Island Biodiversity and Cultural Festival continues for the rest of the week. Today are the soccer and netball finals. The top 16 of 60 soccer teams and the top 8 of 20 netball teams will play for a total of \$10,500 and a trophy. There is also a singing and music contest tonight and a field trip to Kongu Rano on Friday.

KIBCA thanks the generous support offered to the festival by Solomon Islands Government, AVI (Australian Volunteers International), KFPL and WWF Melanesia. In particular, we thank the logistical support provided by KFPL, who held a staff holiday to mark the occasion, and the hundreds of volunteers that helped KIBCA organise for the big event.

The VIP party for the Official Ceremony consisted of Hon. Moffat Fugui, Minister of Environment, Hon. Gordon Darcy Lilo MP, Minister for Finance and Member for Gizo/Kolombangara, Pye Robert, Deputy Premier, Western Province, Tia Marsol, Deputy Director, Ministry of Environment, Climate Change, Disaster Management & Meteorology, Jointly Sisiolo, Senior Officer, Ministry of Environment, Climate Change, Disaster Management & Meteorology, Christian Mesepitu, Minister for Tourism, Sports and Culture, Western Province Government, Francis Dugan, Western Prov. Env Officer, Western Province Government, Donald Saepio, KIBCA Chairman and Douglas Hiva, Interim Chair, Kolombangara Island Council of Chiefs (KICC).

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