

Corruption scandal rocks Solomons health ministry

by Ashlee Betteridge
25 September 2013

Eight public servants **have been sacked** after fraud estimated at \$10 million Solomon Islands dollars (approximately \$1.5 million AU) was discovered within the Solomon Islands Ministry of Health and Medical Services. No charges have yet been laid.

The Solomon Star has alleged that the irregularities were detected in transactions relating to the Health Sector Support Program funded by AusAID during routine risk assessment activities undertaken by the country's Ministry of Finance. It is alleged that contractors grossly inflated freight service charges and shipping charters for the project. The contractors were allegedly from middle-man companies and charged around three to four times the normal price.

The revelation comes amid broader public concern about rising corruption in the Solomons, with a Joint Civil Society Group **preparing to submit a petition** "to bring to light breaches of parliamentary processes and laws governing the national budget and development funds committed under [PM Darcy] Lilo's leadership," its leader Barnabas Henson said.

In an **interview** with Radio New Zealand, Henson said there was worry that the fraud could impact on Australian aid to the country.

"This is affecting health services, health service delivery, the funds for health infrastructure, building of clinics and hospitals," he **said**.

Despite these allegations, Lilo was talking tough in the wake of the scandal.

"Any rip offs and potential frauds involving Government and donor funds will not be tolerated," he told the Solomon Star newspaper.

He said that the investigation was a testament to the benefits of the public financial management reform efforts, supported by donors such as Australia.

In a **statement to Radio New Zealand**, AusAID said that the Solomon Islands government had undertaken to repay any amount lost.

Note: This story was updated to clarify the currency as Solomon Islands dollars.

Author/s:

Ashlee Betteridge

Ashlee Betteridge was the Manager of the Development Policy Centre until April 2021. She was previously a Research Officer at the centre from 2013-2017. A former journalist, she holds a Master of Public Policy (Development Policy) from ANU and has development experience in Indonesia and Timor-Leste. She now has her own consultancy, Better Things Consulting, and works across several large projects with managing contractors.

Link: <https://devpolicy.org/corruption-scandal-rocks-solomons-health-ministry-20130925-1/>