

Mark Davis' deportation from PNG: questions for Australia

by Ashlee Betteridge and Stephen Howes
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Here on Devpolicy, we've been reporting on recent threats to [media freedom in PNG](#). We've also been covering the complex but disturbing case of the [Government's expropriation in September of Ok Tedi](#), the country's largest mine, and its attempted takeover of the Singapore-based trust fund and former Ok Tedi majority owner, the Sustainable Development Program (SDP).

The two stories collided last week with the deportation on Thursday of an Australian media adviser to SDP.

Speaking to the Post Courier, Mark Davis told the newspaper that he believed the sudden deportation order was sparked by the press releases he had been issuing on behalf of the trust fund (see the four "public statements" at the bottom of [this page](#)). SDP is currently [at the centre](#) of a legal battle with the PNG government.

Mr Davis [told EMTV](#) that he attended an interview where he was told he was being deported. He alleges he was then driven around the capital by two armed policemen for four hours before being flown to Brisbane without his belongings. Police told EMTV that they were unaware of the episode.

PNG's foreign minister said that Mr Davis had his visa cancelled because he had become involved in politics, which was in breach of his visa conditions.

In a robust editorial on Friday, the Post Courier challenged the government to explain the sudden deportation and questioned the legality of the action, labelling it an "embarrassment". The paper accused the government of not following due process, asking whether he was "deported because the government did not like the press releases he was distributing on behalf of the PNGSDP". The item also led PNG news bulletins on Friday night.

In further coverage today, SDP chairman and former Prime Minister Mekere Morauta [wrote for the Masalai blog](#), stating that people in PNG did not feel free to speak their mind in the current political environment and that social media was one of the few avenues for expression that people had. Morauta's post also shared more detail on the deportation, alleging that it circumvented immigration and border protection laws, and stated that Mr Davis' only crime had been to work for SDP and

to issue press releases on behalf of Morauta and the board.

The move followed reports last week that several senior journalists at PNG's national broadcaster had been **demoted** after critical coverage of the Ok Tedi takeover. The chairman of the Pacific Freedom Forum **told Radio NZ** that there was now strong pressure on news organisations from the PNG government and concern about where the industry may be heading. Reporters Without Borders has also **condemned these moves**.

Implications for Australia

Mr Davis is an Australian citizen. His deportation will raise significant issues for the Australian Government, especially given the broader context in which it occurs.

Apart from the need to defend the rights of Australian citizens, Australia may find it increasingly difficult to defend its asylum-seeker deal with PNG in the context of a violation of due process and restrictions on media freedom.

Foreign Minister Julie Bishop did **raise** the Ok Tedi issue with her PNG counterpart at the APEC meetings in October, but is yet to make any comment on Mr Davis' deportation.

*Note: Julie Bishop has now **registered Australia's concerns on the deportation of Mr Davis** and the high commission has made a request for further information from PNG authorities.*

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Link:

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