



MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT CONSERVATION & CLIMATE CHANGE

KOKODA TOUR OPERATORS LICENCE CANCELLED

The Hon. Simon Kilepa, Chair of the Kokoda Initiative Committee declared that his committee had instructed the CEO of the Kokoda Track Authority to cancel the tour operator's licence for Australian company, Adventure Kokoda. The committee had an urgent meeting on Friday last week to consider reports that this company had attempted to evade paying trekking permit fees to the KTA as required under PNG law.

The committee heard very disturbing reports from the Acting CEO of the KTA, Mr. Julius Wargirai, that on four occasions recently Adventure Kokoda deliberately attempted to evade payment of trekking permit fees to the KTA as required under PNG law. In February this year a tour leader for Adventure Kokoda, Mr. Lynn, wrote to the KTA informing the CEO that the company would refuse to pay the trekking permit fees to KTA. Mr. Wargirai informed Mr. Lynn in writing that to do so would be considered unlawful, as the KTA is mandated under law as the rightful authority for trekking permit fees.

The Committee further heard that a trekking group arrived at Owers' Corner on Friday 14th this month without any application for permits, or any notification to the KTA. Mr. Lynn announced to the KTA ranger that they would trek to Kokoda without the lawful KTA trekking permits. Despite being previously warned in writing by the CEO, and again advised by the KTA ranger at Owers' Corner, Mr. Lynn lead the trek onto the Kokoda Track after continual refusals to pay KTA trekking permit fees. This action was attempted again over the next three days by the same company, resulting in more than 100 tourists trekking without a valid permit from KTA. It is reported that cheques were eventually paid to the KTA after the groups had commenced trekking.

The Kokoda Initiative Committee is very disturbed that this company openly declared in writing and in its actions that they were willing to do this in contravention to the law. Given the evidence presented at the meeting the Kokoda Initiative Committee instructed the KTA CEO to cancel Adventure Kokoda's tour operator licence. The committee will consider a new licence application if a number of conditions have been agreed to including the payment of a fine, and giving reassurances that the company will abide by all PNG laws. The Royal PNG Police have been notified of this situation, and it is expected that Adventure Kokoda and its tour leaders will cooperate fully with the investigation.

The Committee acknowledged the contribution Adventure Kokoda has made to the local economy through employment and other works, and also acknowledged previous remarks and comments from Mr. Charlie Lynn and his views on how the trekking industry could be improved. But the Committee is firmly of the view that these things gave no justification for Adventure Kokoda to evade paying trekking permit fees in contravention of PNG sovereign law.


Hon. Simo Kilepa, MP
Minister for Environment and Conservation
Chair Kokoda Initiative Committee

