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NEWS RELEASE

Ombudsman, Mr. 'Aisea Taumoepeau, SC, makes recommendations after OMI on Waste Authority Ltd

(Thursday, November 21, 2019)

The Ombudsman, Mr. 'Aisea Taumoepeau, SC, has made recommendations on his own-motion-investigation (OMI) on the Waste Authority Limited (WAL) focusing on the importance of health and safety of rubbish collectors.

The Ombudsman has released his final report on his OMI following months of investigation *“looking into the operation of the Waste Authority Ltd and its waste collection processes, and adequacy of health-protection and safety measures for waste collections.”*

The OMI was launched in accordance with section 11(2) of the Ombudsman Act 2001. The Ombudsman was compelled to conduct the investigation due to frequent viewing of WAL waste collectors at work with limited protective gear and riding on top of rubbish in open trunk trucks.

The investigation was conducted with the cooperation of the CEO of WAL after meeting with the Ombudsman on 17th October, 2018. The Ombudsman then provided the scope of his investigation on 30th of October, 2018, and required WAL to provide:

- (i) Information on its waste collection processes, policies, equipment use and include any financial issues;
- (ii) Information regarding the Safety Measures polices and implementation regarding waste collectors; and
- (iii) Any other information relevant to this investigation.

The investigation findings include:

- a. WAL provides protection gears but have difficulty in the enforcement of non-complying employees in not wearing the protective gears
- b. WAL needs proper equipment but cannot finance such equipment due to its limited financial capability, thus the use of open trunk trucks for waste collection
- c. Most waste collectors work at least 60-hours six-days a week. Pick up starts at 5am and usually finishes at 5pm and sometimes much later
- d. WAL is reviewing its staff policy to include health protection measures and relevant benefits for waste collectors
- e. WAL needs to review the monthly fees charged to the public for the weekly collection of their waste. The fees have remained unchanged since 2008.

Based on the above findings, the Ombudsman made three (3) recommendations in his report, released on 6th November, 2019:

1. That WAL acquires proper compactor trucks and equipment tailor-made for waste collection and suitable for Tonga's environment;
2. That WAL provides to its waste collection employees protective gears suitable for Tonga's weather conditions, and enforce its usage;
3. That the CEO of WAL report back to the Ombudsman within two (2) months of the date this report is finalized to provide a follow-up report on the recommendations.

Released by the Office of the Ombudsman

Thursday, November 21, 2019

For further information, please contact the Communications & Media Division, Office of the Ombudsman, telephone 26980 or 26982 or email – cmd@ombudsman.to