

Tough penalties for killing dugongs

BY ELLISON VAHI

THE Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources (MFMR) in partnership with the Ministry of Environment, Climate Change, Disaster Management and Meteorology (MECDM) has developed a new draft regulation in order to conserve and protect Dugongs.

As part of the campaign, the regulation serves to prohibit fish for and retain, be in possession of sell, buy or exporting of dugongs.

Speaking at the National Dugong and seagrass Art & Creative writing Award at the SINU School of Technology & Maritime Studies, Ranandi area, Deputy Director for the inshore Fisheries Division Mrs Rosalie Masu voiced that the regulation has been submitted to the prime minister's office for gazetting.

She said that once the regulation is passed, anyone

who breaches/break this regulation will be fined \$40,000 penalty units or 4 months imprisonment or both, thus, killing of dugongs will soon be banned. In relation, Mr Josef Hurutaru - Deputy Director -Conservation, MECDM, said that we are so fortunate to have this unique mammal in our marine waters.

He highlights that Solomon Islands is one of those countries in the region where dugong habitat and sea grass occur extensively around 10,000 hectares, thus providing an occurrences of these unique species yet an indication of our rich marine biodiversity, as we are among Pacific Range States that supports the world's largest remaining population of dugongs.

"Today, we can attest to the increasing threats in our country that contributed to declining population.

"Some of these threats are due to coastal development including human settlement, nutrient runoff and pollution from land based activities, hunting for food, medicine and artifacts and incidental by-catch and vessel strikes.

"There are also many challenges that we've faced in managing and conservation of dugong which includes lack of data and information, absence and lack of long term research, very little surveys and monitoring programmes, limited public awareness and education programmes, limited national management mechanisms to protect marine animals and their habitat and lack of resources, including accessing sustainable funding for dugong conservation."

In response to the challenges, Hurutaru said that MECDM will work in partnership with relevant ministries, non-government organisations and development partners to pursue programmes for the conservation of dugong populations.

"We will continue to explore opportunities under signed MoUs for convention and management of dugong and their habitat range. With the Wildlife Protection and management Amendment 2017 commencement, we hope to improve enforcement on dugong protection as a CITES species, and hence we are in full support of the Fisheries management regulation to stop harvesting and killing of Dugong."

To date, although dugongs have been in existence for millions of years, sadly their population is now threatened, numbers have decreased

