



## **DEPARTMENT OF THE PRESIDENT & BOUGAINVILLE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**

### **OFFICE OF THE CHIEF SECRETARY**

**11 November 2018**

#### **MEDIA STATEMENT**

##### **Dismissal of Officers from the ABG Public Services**

Today I announce action that has been taken to dismiss a number of officers from the Autonomous Bougainville Government Public Service.

A decision to dismiss officers from the public service is not one that I take lightly, and as a matter of course, it is a decision of last resort. I recognise that a decision to dismiss any individual has far reaching implications, not just on the individuals themselves, but also their families. However, as the Head of the Public Service I cannot tolerate actions that defraud the Government or undermine the important work that that we do. As public servants, all of us must project a professional image and all of us have an obligation to comply with the law. Those that steal do not steal from the Government, but from the ordinary men and women of Bougainville and they must be held to account.

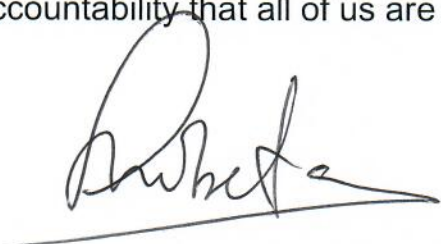
Those officers that have been dismissed were implicated in significant misconduct. Officers from the Department of Personnel Management and Administrative Services were found through the ABG Payroll Audit to have manipulated systems and processes for personal gain. Collectively, these individuals stole more than K360,000 from the public purse. This was a blatant theft and was undertaken only for personal gain. Such actions cannot go unpunished, and I can confirm that I have referred all officers implicated to the National Fraud Squad for investigation. It is my expectation that those responsible will be prosecuted, and if found guilty, held to the highest standards of criminal law.

Officers from the Department of Community Government have also been dismissed owing to a substantial fraud where large sums of money were misappropriated from the Disaster Trust Fund. Again, these matters have been referred to the police for further investigation.

My decision to dismiss these officers has followed a very detailed investigative process, which has included two independent Boards of Inquiry and audits. The legal power for dismissal rests in the *Bougainville Public Services (Management and Administration) Act 2014*, which under Section 44 provides the process to be followed. I can confirm that in all cases the procedures outlined in the Act were adhered to. All individuals were afforded natural justice and their responses were taken into full consideration in the formulation of recommendations for disciplinary action.

I take this opportunity to commit publicly to do everything within my power to rid the public service of poor and illegal practices. Whilst I am disappointed by the conduct of those individuals who have been implicated in theft and fraud, I remain confident that the vast majority of public servants seek to do their best and adhere to the law.

May these cases be a reminder to all public servants of the standards of legal accountability that all of us are held to.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Joseph Nobetau', written over a horizontal line.

**Joseph Nobetau**