

# SOMETHING FISHY

**“Unlike most of the restructuring announcements we deal with Sealord don’t actually value the input from staff or their union. They viewed consultation as an obstacle in the path of their right to manage.”** said SFWU assistant national secretary Neville Donaldson.

“This was clearly evident in the process they followed at shellfish last year and again this year in relation to the Vickerman Street announcement.”

Where companies like Griffins and Cadbury provide significant notice, a timely process and genuine opportunity for employee input over 18 months to two years, Sealord looked to make the announcement and conclude the entire process in less than a month.

It was with this sort of mentality in mind that Sealord announced their intention to lay off 160 staff - not because they were under financial pressure, but because they wanted to increase profit.

In addition to the loss of employment, Sealord have also demanded that staff give up \$1.8 million in wages and conditions.

All this was in the process of being announced when they attended the Government’s tripartite job summit which highlighted the importance of protection of jobs given the international recession.

As if the task was not difficult enough with the obstacles described above, the union also had to deal with the law around such matters and the right of the employer to manage their business.

This legislation was best described by National MP Nick Smith when he met with delegates at Sealord and summed up the position from his perspective when he said that the employer’s right to manage included the right to make stupid decisions and there was nothing the worker could do about it.

## So what was the proposal?

Sealord had done a business plan that indicated that they could increase profit by \$9.9 million if they moved all land based processing to sea.

Their plan was to move some to sea and to reduce land based processing by about 50% . They also planned to reduce workers’ entitlements by \$1.8 million to keep the land based operation going. Refusal to agree to the reductions in entitlements would see all workers made redundant.

## So where are things at?

- Phase one has been completed - the restructuring

of the operation to take out 130 jobs and to return to one shift in the wet fish side.

- The issue of wages and conditions is under discussion as *Our Voice* goes to print.

## What did the union do to give members a voice?

- We contacted the media to put across our side of the story, and had significant coverage on TV, radio and in newspapers.

- We involved the political parties such as Labour who sent senior MPs like Maryann Street to visit and talk to management and workers. Phil Goff also visited the site and spoke to workers and management.

- The Maori party was involved through Te Tai Tonga Maori MP Rahui Katene who was very vocal in support of workers and damning of management. (The National party sent their local MP and cabinet minister Nick Smith along to tell workers they have no choice but to accept the company position.)

- A Hui was organized by the SFWU Runanga which was held on the local Marae. Several hundred members and family attended and discussed their concerns with the Maori party representatives.

- A national petition was circulated, which gained 5000 signatures in just under a week and a public rally was organized in Nelson under the Fairness at Work campaign. Hundreds of workers and local people attended, and heard a number of speakers including Ron Oswald, General Secretary of the International Union of Food Workers based in Geneva and John Ryall, SFWU National Secretary.

The Union was also attending regular meetings with the company seeking information and input but in the view of members of the committee getting very little genuine answers or input.

Given the level of activity, organization and resources put into these issues in the very limited space of time available, you would expect an outcome that saw some level of change in position from the company but this was not the case.

“We were not surprised at the company’s refusal to change their plan. However when we found out that they had already chartered the ‘Independent 1’ and it was on its way to New Zealand while the consultation process was being followed, it became obvious that they had not been acting in good faith. The company has simply ignored the views and concerns of others and bloody mindedly pushed ahead with their plan”, said Neville Donaldson.

Will this also be the outcome of Phase two - the requirement to give up \$1.8 million in wages and conditions?

Watch this space, and find out in the next issue of *Our Voice*.

# GOING ON AT SEALORD?

## SFWU RUNANGA INTERVENES AT SEALORD



SFWU negotiating team:  
Left to right: Back row - Dave Hancox (Site President), Emma Tamati, Kathleen Page, Ed Nees, Roopu Pene, Nathan Tawhare, Middle Row - Bot Kim, Paul Suan  
Front row - Gary Griffin, Lizzie Koroi, Victor Norman, Henry Parata



Dave Hancox, Site President (left) and Emma Tamati (right)

“Sealord has closed our nightshift to process at sea, where they feel they can make a larger profit due to less production cost. The members who have elected to transfer to the boat ‘Independent 1’ have effectively been offered less money than if they had stayed on shore. They have also had their right to freedom of association curtailed, by being told they can’t remain in our union whilst working on the boat. There is also a real fear that the third option of no on-shore processing and another factory trawler will come about if we do not agree to making the \$1.8M in increased profit, by giving up allowances hard won over the last 20 years of organising this site.”

## Roopu Pene (left)

“To be asked or told to take a pay cut on an already tight budget on a week to week basis is unfair – especially from an already profitable company whose management is not willing



to share the financial pain and take pay cuts themselves! I left asking myself why would I work in a cold wet environment for the same money I would get selling TVs in a dry, warm environment. I find myself working for a company with no social conscience, obligation or mana. When asked who I work for I now find myself saying ‘Sealord’ under my breath!”

## Paul Suan, SFWU delegate (right)

“Most of the people are now uncomfortable with their job and positions. They have got high skills and (SOP) safety operating procedures in filleting, trimming and packing, and are now only doing basic jobs that a new worker would do. We feel that the company is trying to cut our pay rates by giving us jobs to do that an unskilled worker would be doing. We are not happy!”



Hui at Whakatu Marae • Sharon Patterson

The SFWU Runanga is mobilising Maori union members to ask their iwi to support the Sealords workers.

“Sealord is 50% owned by iwi and other Maori interests and should not be in the business of cutting jobs and reducing working conditions when they continue to make reasonable profits,” said Runanga convenor Muriel Tunoho.

The Runanga was outraged when Aotearoa Fisheries chairman Robin Hapi commented in the media that just because the company was Maori-owned that didn’t mean that they should behave differently to any other commercial company.

He was reported as saying that the profitability of the company was more important than creating or maintaining Maori employment.

“I facilitated a meeting of over 200 Sealord workers at Whakatu Marae in Nelson and listened to the issues that they were raising including the disrespectful behaviour of their employer,” said Muriel.

The Runanga has continued to work with Te Tai Tonga MP Rahui Katene, Nelson-based list MP Maryann Street and the Labour Maori MPs to get them in behind the union campaign to support the Sealord workers.

If SFWU Maori members want a standard letter to send to their iwi please contact 0800 UNION 1 (0800 864 661) or get a copy from the SFWU website: [www.sfwu.org](http://www.sfwu.org).