

Mr Chairman

“Fishing is Everybody’s Business” In St Helena that is not a slogan – that is a fact.

It has taken a considerable length of time for EDC to engage on the Petition item, but that time has allowed me to be informed and be fully satisfied with my considered opinion and my proposal.

I cannot support Option 1, because I do not believe by doing so is in the best interests of the people of St Helena.

I can support Option 2 but not without the inclusion of my proposal as a recommendation for Executive Council to consider.

As we seek to establish a sustainable and successful fishing industry for the people of St Helena, the continued input into the process from the St Helena Commercial Fishermen’s Association has been essential in my opinion. The Petition organised by the Association is clearly based on their determination to contribute to the creation of a viable, sustainable and ultimately successful, local fishing industry that the people of St Helena can consent to.

Through various forums and engagements with members of the Commercial Fishermen’s Association I have been reassured by the supreme wealth of relevant local knowledge and experience of the members. The people who signed the Petition and the local community in general, cannot afford to have such valuable local knowledge, experience and energy struggling to input from the side-lines and not be represented at the very heart of developing a sustainable and successful local fishing industry.

The Fishermen’s Association has convinced me that members are for working in the very best interests of the people of St Helena and they are not just focused on the present or the medium term. The Association is also about representing and protecting the interests of future generations of St Helenians.

I have satisfied myself that the unrelenting persistence of the Commercial Fishermen’s Association is not driven by sour grapes of NEWCO. The Association is a major stakeholder in the local fishing sector and therefore a representative of the Fishermen’s Association must be given the option to be involved in the senior management of St Helena’s fish resources and all of the related business operations.

Unlike many communities throughout the world who are regretting the consequences of unsustainable fishing, the true potential of St Helena's fish resources has yet to be realised.

The island's fish resources belong to the people of St Helena. The sustainable exploitation of the people's fish resources cannot just benefit the fishermen or the inward investors and their shareholders. The precious fish resource we have at our disposal must benefit all the people of St Helena.

The controversial decision by Executive Council to commit the grant of £500,000 for upgrades to the fish processing factory and equipment has caused serious contention. The seemingly delayed decision by SHG officers and Executive Council to provide PQ Trading with a £500,000 grant, after the bidding process, has only served to reinforce suspicions of the entire bidding and selection process that was carried out by SHG.

However, we must acknowledge that the generous £500,000 grant will maintain full local ownership of the SHG assets in Ruperts and protect the best interests of the local fishermen. Indeed, I believe the decision to change from a loan to a grant was made in good faith by the Executive Council with the sole purpose of assisting the local fishing sector.

I say a generous £500,000, because I am acutely aware of the current financial difficulties local government has to contend with. Elected members are expected to enhance the social and economic development of the local community with serious financial constraints. Whether it be the agriculture, construction, commerce or fishing sector, the workers who are directly involved must make a special effort to understand such financial realities and be prepared, if it is necessary, to change their mindset, their business mindset, accordingly.

This flyer is self-explanatory.....

A sustainable and successful fishing industry will require collaborative working by all stakeholders, a dependable approach by all stakeholders, and a reliable and consistent supply of the raw resource.

The investment proposal submitted by PQ Trading includes the provision of three additional fishing vessels to help achieve the island's objectives. The additional expertise and the combined local knowledge and experience will be crucial to successful outcomes.

Mr Chairman, my proposal is for you to consider recommending that Executive Council task SHG officers to revise their approach to finding a fish processing and sales model, and include in the Fisheries working group a representative from the St Helena Commercial Fishermen's Association.

I believe it will be a step in the right direction if a representative of the Fishermen's Association is willing to serve in the Fisheries working group, along with a representative from the group who supports the development of the St Helena Fisherman's Co-Operative.

I know the current Fisheries working group has already carried out some preliminary work. The enhanced Fisheries working group will work constructively on the constitution, financial management and resource management; estimations and marketing; fish processing liabilities, possible revenues, expenditures and potential incomes; tax obligations, returns adequately aligned to inward investments and local investments; and fair profit margins for all within the fishing industry.

Accordingly, I propose you consider recommending that Executive Council arrange for such a working group to establish a sound foundation for the development of a sustainable and successful local fishing industry; preferably without applying preconditions on the two local representatives.