



*CORAL FRAGS AT WSI: MORE CORAL MASS IS ACTUALLY RETURNED TO FIJI'S REEFS THAN IS ACTUALLY HARVESTED IN THE FIRST PLACE.  
PHOTO: COURTESY OF WALT SMITH INTERNATIONAL*

# FIJI'S CORALS: FROM THE 'NOT-SO- SUBLIME', TO THE UTTERLY RIDICULOUS

Do you know what an EIA is...  
or a TOR? If you do, you are  
among the few people who are  
familiar with these abbreviations!

So, let's start by clearing up this little challenge. 'EIA' stands for 'Environmental Impact Analysis' and 'TOR' for 'Terms of Reference', but, unsurprisingly, not a lot of people know this. Such a situation would not normally raise any alarm bells with anyone, were it not for the stark, and hugely disturbing, fact that the very people who are demanding these two requirements from the Fijian industry are not sure themselves! In the meantime, the nation's live coral and live rock export sector is 'reeling against the ropes' and in danger of total collapse.

As things stand, an EIA needs to be carried out and submitted to the authorities for their consideration and evaluation before a decision as to whether or not to allow exports to resume can be taken. The EIA needs to be carried out by a scientist specifically appointed to carry out the job.

Sounds simple... but it isn't. The thing is that before any EIA can be carried out, one needs to know what the authorities are looking for in the analysis. Sadly, it appears that the Department of the Environment (DoE) responsible for demanding the EIA is unaware of what it (the EIA) requires from them! As a result, the decision to proceed is repeatedly postponed while they try to grapple with the matter, daily piling more pressure on an already stressed and legitimate industry.

But this is not all.

The DoE is also required to furnish the Terms of Reference (TOR) for the EIA to the scientist engaged to carry out the analysis. Again, this sounds simple, but, again, it isn't so.

For instance, WSI – Fiji's largest exporter – has been requesting these Terms of Reference for two years now, but the DoE has failed to deliver them. Worryingly, I learn that, on one occasion over this period, the DoE even admitted that it wasn't sure what a TOR was or how to provide it! The desperation felt within the Fijian live coral and live rock sector must therefore be unbearable.

If the authorities were to state (or knew) clearly what the EIA requires from them, and if they were to provide the TOR, then, at least, the whole process could move forward, irrespective of how reasonable or otherwise these requirements were to turn out to be. But, if the department doesn't know what is actually required of them and is, thus, unable to supply the required information, the likelihood of any progress being made is, by definition, depressingly remote.

There is yet another factor that highlights the total illogicality of the current situation.

Since hard corals are CITES Appendix II listed, it