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MEC told to drop 'price gouging' Mobil

Kessai in PNG for Forum

By GIFF JOHNSON

The Marshall Islands government is accusing Mobil Oil Micronesia of "price gouging" and has directed the Marshalls Energy Company to switch fuel suppliers.

In a letter to Guam-based Mobil officials last Friday, Chief Secretary Bobby Muller told Mobil that the oil company "has taken full advantage of its de facto monopoly in fuel products in our region by using exploitive and price gouging tactics in providing essential fuel products to our nation."

Muller told Mobil that because of this situation, the RMI government has instructed MEC to seek alternative sources of fuel.

Mobil has been the sole supplier of fuel to MEC for 14 years.

Muller also called on the US government to investigate Mobil's actions in negotiations with MEC (see story page 6).

MEC general manager Billy Roberts confirmed that MEC has reviewed offers from five different fuel suppliers, and is likely to make



Call for US to probe Mobil: See page 6

a decision about switching from Mobil at a board meeting scheduled for late Wednesday as the Journal

was going to press this week. "If we don't make a decision at this week's meeting, it will be made in the very near future," Roberts said.

About the imminent switch of fuel suppliers, Roberts said: "It's nothing

against Mobil. My job is to get the best price." Roberts also announced another electric rate increase at two cents across the board, following another world market rise.

Muller told Mobil that it was obvious "the current

arrangement is not working" and that action needs to be taken to fix the situation.

Muller praised Mobil as being "an important part of the RMI economy for a long time," and added he hoped that Mobil and the Marshall Islands "can work together through these current problems toward a more mutually beneficial relationship."

In addition to providing diesel fuel to MEC, Mobil also imports gas, diesel and jet fuel that it sells to local gas stations and air carriers from its two fuel depots.

President Kessai Note and a delegation leave for Papua New Guinea on Thursday this week to attend the annual Pacific Islands Forum heads of state meeting.

Foreign Minister Gerald Zackios, who will accompany Note, said that top issues on the RMI's agenda for discussion with Pacific leaders include the request from the RMI to get the University of the South Pacific to build a north Pacific campus in the RMI, nuclear testing issues and concerns about energy and fuel.

The Forum will also be receiving a final draft of the "Pacific Plan" for review and approval. This plan has been developed over the last year in consultations with governments and non-governmental organizations in the region. It aims to increase regional cooperation for development and security in the Pacific.



President Kessai Note

Saeko on watch at MWSC

Saeko Shoniber is Majuro Water and Sewer Company's new fiscal officer.

The former long-time Secretary of Finance took up her new post at MWSC on Monday this week, according to

Marshalls Energy Company general manager Billy Roberts. He indicated that Shoniber would likely also assist with financial work at MEC in the future. Shoniber was Finance Secre-

tary until mid-2005, when Jefferson Barton was named by Minister Brenson Wase to take over the post. Shoniber's "consulting" contract with the Ministry ended on September 30.



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