October 2011

Submission of Christine Hutana
To the Ministerial Inquiry into
Foreign Charter Vessels

For more information contact:

Christine Hutana,

I support the submission of the Service and Food Workers Union Nga Ringa Tota (SFWU).

Below is my personal submission. I wish to appear before the Ministerial Inquiry when it hears personal submissions in Nelson.

I am of Ngati Kahungungu descent and I make this submission as a Maori worker, who has worked in the industry for 16 years. I am a union delegate at the Sealord Nelson processing plant.

The issue I wish to bring before the Inquiry is the issue of the impact of change and loss of employment for workers, and Maori workers in particular.

This industry has traditionally been the source of employment for hundreds of Maori workers, providing not only jobs, but real career paths.

I am employed by Sealord Ltd in the Nelson factory. The history of how this company was formed was based in part on the settlement of treaty breaches and to address the loss of work through the introduction of the quota management system, and the resulting devastation of employment of Maori in the inshore fishing industry.

Sealord is 50% owned by Maori. Sealord obtained most of their quota due to a Tiriti o Waitangi settlement and the purchase of Sealord as a company by Government. The other 50% is owned by Nissui.

At the time Sealord as purchased there was a promise that as a minimum 800 new jobs would be created and that a policy of positive discrimination favouring Maori workers would apply. This was part of a public media statement at the time.

That promise has not been delivered. Instead we have had broken promises and broken agreements and a significant loss of jobs in the seafood industry.

That has been because companies such as Sealord have been able to contract foreign charter vessels instead of using New Zealand owned and crewed vessels.

Although they first brought in the large fishing vessels to give us knowledge of deep sea fishing, I believe that, through greed another promise was broken by keeping the foreign charter vessels in business and selling our local boats.

It is my belief that Sealord undermined the terms and conditions of New Zealand workers on their vessels until New Zealand workers would no longer work on or apply for work on their vessels. It is my belief that they then used the lack of available labour in New Zealand to justify employment of foreign labour or selling off their vessels and contracting foreign charter vessels.

In my many years of working for Sealord in both Dunedin and Nelson I have personally experienced and witnessed the loss of hundreds of jobs because of the ability of the industry to exploit the vulnerability of foreign workers in countries where workers have no or very little employment rights.

Currently Maori unemployment in New Zealand is at an unacceptably high 16%, with Maori youth unemployment around 28%. The fishing industry has traditionally been the source of jobs and career paths for Maori and still, with the right management, the industry can provide skills and employment opportunities that are currently being offered to and taken by foreign workers in foreign countries.

It was also an industry that promised to create jobs and careers for Maori workers which have never been delivered. In fact the small groups who have control over Iwi quota has not only exploited foreign workers but also seriously disadvantaged their own people by undermining employment and also conditions of employment for Maori workers in New Zealand.

As a Maori worker it does not make sense to me that the very groups who claim to represent the best interests of Maori are the greatest exploiters of our people and foreign peoples in the seafood industry.

With the rights of ownership of quota through the treaty settlements should also come the responsibilities for Iwi quota holders to deliver the benefits to our people, which must include the right to work in this industry.

I do not know or understand why we allowed foreign vessels to take over fishing in our own waters in the beginning, but it is not too late to ensure the promises of jobs and career paths for Maori workers are fulfilled.

It is also not too late to create hundreds of jobs throughout New Zealand by regulating the industry, as clearly under the present system neither New Zealand nor New Zealand workers are valued by the industry.

Our seafood resources in New Zealand waters are not for the benefit of a few. They are resources all New Zealanders should be sharing in, now and into the future.

The best way of delivering this is through regulation and the requirement to add value to the resource in New Zealand.

I wish to appear before the Inquiry and elaborate on my submission and answer any questions.