

John Wesley Vaso

*Edited interview with Drusilla Modjeska
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John Wesley Vaso and the establishment of MICAD (Maisin Integrated Conservation and Development).

JW: My name is John Wesley. I, like many others from the village, went to school, from village community school right up to high school in Popondetta.

DM: *Did you go to the Martyrs' School?*

JW: Yes, I did. I attained a grade 10 certificate in 1970 and then my first challenge in life was taking up a job with the then ABC, Australian Broadcasting Commission, before they changed to NBC after independence. I worked in the highlands, based in Goroka. I had a two-year stint with ABC as a broadcaster going out and about educating the communities on what broadcasting is, and how radio could continue to link outlying villages using that medium. I always had this interest for knowing what goes on around the world, because I started as a young man trying to collect information and collate information and then give it out to people.

Eventually in 1973, I changed fields from a broadcaster to a banker. I took up a job with Papua New Guinea Development Bank. Now it's known as Papua New Guinea Agricultural Bank. I was there from 1973 right up to 1976, dealing with loans; it was a commercial bank, loaning out to individuals who needed capital to start up businesses. I got transferred to Rabaul and then out into West New Britain for their small-holder scheme with the oil palm. I was part of the team that helped establish the first pilot project in West New Britain under land settlement schemes with this oil palm. In 1976 we established these land settlement schemes and when settlers moved in onto the blocks, we worked with the bank in trying to ensure that the project the Government wanted to carry out on oil palm would be successfully achieved by the individual block-holders. The money was made available by the Department of Agriculture through the Bank. And then the Bank and the company involved, New Britain Palm Oil, tried to initiate how that money was to be dished out to the individuals. So I had a big task.

After that, I went to the Department of Agriculture to understudy the functions and the responsibilities of the Department of Agriculture in liaison with the oil palm company concerned. I got seconded out on a two-year base – I was working with New Britain Palm Oil - trying to see how best we could establish this

settlement scheme. Of course like everyone else, after the two-year stint, I thought the company was paying well and they wanted to hold onto me, so I stayed on. And then, when the Transport Department was looking at helping individuals in their crops and plantings, I got transferred out to their plant and breeding section, the research station in West New Britain. So from 1979 right up to 1994 when I resigned, I was attached to the research station in Kimbe.

So I had more or less a broad experience of what oil palm was doing in Papua New Guinea and what oil palm is doing to the lives of individuals who are undertaking oil palm as a cash avenue. I knew how oil palm has really divested the whole life of the people in disguise of development, I knew what has taken place, and how people are suffering. Oil palm – it's got a very small benefit, I would say. It has left people poor, poorer than they ever imagined. Their land is given away to the Government, and then the Government leases it out to private sector for development. And maybe you have an annual little bit of money that the Government pays the villages, that's basically it. Apart from that there's no major, no continued benefits.

I've seen that type of life, and for me it helped motivate the people in the village when I came back from West New Britain in 1994, and saw the pressures from outside with regards to our land in Maisin. When I learned of the Government's intentions of securing our land to plant up with oil palm, the first thing that came into my mind was, if I saw the problems in West New Britain, I might see three or four times worse if we undertake this project. Because in West New Britain I was right out in the heart of the province and apart from oil palm, there are other infrastructures that are in place that have helped the local landowners.

But here, in Maisin, are a people that has not been exposed to any bigger Western influence, like for instance development – what I mean is, some sort of a business that is going on that is helping to bring cash about to that people. That has not gone into the hearts and minds of the Maisin people. And if all of a sudden these people are exposed to this type of environment or this situation, were they ready to accept it? That's one thing that came into my mind and I'm still questioning myself. If there's such an influx of immediate cash coming right into the hands of the people, are they able to control it? Control that cash? And the effects of cash? What is going to be the end result after twenty years, ten years, when they have filled up their pockets? That one question still nags me.

There were other people coming back. There were so many of us who were educated from the area, and had been out working, and were able to see what this monster called development has been doing or is doing to the people. And we were able to help contribute, and we are still trying to allow this process for people to understand that money is not everything.

And so in 1994 amidst all the issues and concerns raised in trying to bring in help to control our land, we had to get ourselves together by creating, forming an organisation, forming a group that would speak and think for the Maisin people. So in 1994, we had a group in place called MICAD – Maisin Integrated Conservation And Development. The whole idea behind MICAD is that we want to help protect and conserve Maisin resources, be it marine, or from the bush - all resources, put together - for the individuals, stakeholders, for Maisin people, young men and women. We know our forefathers helped to protect this land, they helped to bring this resource about for Maisin people, for its young men and women. And we want to carry on that task. We want to help control it, we want to help conserve it, we want to help maintain it. So that our people can use it. It's not for the next twenty

years, but for the next hundred to two hundred, even a thousand years.

We have not come out ultimately and said no way, no development, no. We are looking at a development that is the development that must go hand in hand with conservation. Our traditional culture must be in line with the type of development that we have. As I said – and I always say – and I will say again – man is not a complete man without land. Man without habits is not a complete human being. Until those habits become his everyday way of life which then becomes his tradition. And thereupon build upon a culture. And so if a man is without land – if a man is without traditional values – there goes that identity. And when that identity goes, he loses face, either in the community or in the country, and you find a lot of these people, not knowing where they're going, not knowing what to do.

Most of the time, people think – what is there to be worried about? I've got money, I've got everything, I've got my employment. It's a pity. No, I ask people to think again. I'm not trying to tell anybody that Maisin way of life is easy and simple – no, it's not. Since I started with the organisation from 1994 – I got executive position in 1997 up till now – I have preached conservation. But if I continue preaching conservation, am I prepared to swap chairs with some of those people back in the village? If I am preaching conservation – I know conservation alone is not going to bring about what my people yearn for. We have been forced into this civilisation. And we must go with civilisation. Our children have a right to education. I need to provide the basic medical services to the people. I cannot continue to preach conservation. And at the same time, look at all those resources sitting there, and my people are still suffering. That is something that I am well-versed on. But when is it going to come about? So, we are treading slowly and hopefully towards attaining this.

When I hear the idea of carbon offset, it would go a long way in Maisin's perception of holding fast to their land. But allowing some sort of cash saving to another form – maybe this is the answer. We can continue to hold onto the land, but knowing that indirectly or directly because of holding onto the land, someone is helping us by giving us money to help continue to protect it so our children and their children can, two hundred, three hundred, five hundred years later, have land. Have land – and continue to have that identity. And maintain that culture, which, I think, is quite unique.

With regards to Maisin land, all lands before the mountains, where we make gardens, are owned either by clans or individuals or families. But any land behind the mountains, to whatever border there is within our neighbouring villages and the Maisin, all land is communally owned. All young men, young women, elderly, have right to that land. Anything that needs to be done on the land has to be discussed and a consensus reached. Maisin have always maintained that. And we will continue to maintain it. So all direct benefits that are derived from the land, or for the land, must be distributed as a common understanding amongst everybody. It may not happen into each individual's pockets – this resource, this cash, this capital should be directed to particular areas, like education, like health.

We want – Maisin people want, if we have this money – we will make sure that money can be diverted to training of our own teachers from the community so that when we have established schools, high schools, we should be able to have our own young men and women teaching in our own schools, paid for by the community from this money. We must have doctors and nurses, paid for by our own community from this money so that they can stay and help and work in and amongst the community. So those are the strategies that need to be properly put in place, so that we are not going to be dependent on the Government service. We

thought we were dependent, but services never came about. And so they could say “Independent State of Papua New Guinea” – I say Dependent State of Papua New Guinea. My forefathers knew they were independent. They were able to provide for themselves. And then when through the colonial administration, services were properly given to the people, right down to the rural areas, every young man and women saw services come through colonial administration. When Papua New Guinea took over, thinking they were going to be independent, they are now dependent on foreign aid. That is not the dream of Maisin people. We want to have money where it will help pay for our own children.

Maisin clans.

JW: There are thirty-six different clans. And those thirty-six different clans are made up of chiefly clans and warrior clans. The whole lot of those make up the thirty six different clans. I belong to a chiefly clan, but that doesn't make me a chief. No. But just because I belong to a chiefly clan, when there are issues being discussed in the community I also have a say. Everyone has a right to say.

DM: *Does the chiefly clan have more influence, or more say, or the same as the warriors?*

JW: When it comes to issues regarding everyday way of life, marriages, feasting, initiations, all those type of things, the people expect a member of the chiefly clan to say something. And when that happens, if a member of the chiefly clan says something, the others would respect it. So whether it's good or bad, they go along with it. And when it's a bad approach, they know, they all agree – knowing that it was not the right way, but they couldn't go against it. But any matters with regards the organisation, within the community, everyone has a right to say something. Then if there's a debate being thrown here and there, discussions being thrown and someone is not settling it properly, they're waiting for a member of a chiefly clan to say, okay.

DM: *When the decision's being made and things are being discussed, where do you speak?*

JW: It can be either in one of the elders' place, or it can be in the community area, where it's public so everyone can speak. Like if we went to another chiefly clan, if we went to their village, or hamlet... I belong to a clan called Gafi. Now if I went to another chiefly clan – and from within Gafi I have warrior clans also – now because we are in this other chiefly clan's place, the warriors would not speak. Because of due respect to this chiefly clan. So I would say something on behalf of the elders of the warrior clan. Or, if they really want to say something, they could come to me and speak, and they would say what they have to say. So those are the processes.

DM: *Do clans contain both chiefly people and warriors, or are some clans warriors only?*

JW: For instance for me, Gafi – that's the chiefly clan, and I have other warriors clans that are included in Gafi but have their own respective clans. But the others don't have warriors clans. They're all chiefly clans. All elders of the chiefly clans. No one chief – no one chiefly clan is higher than another. They are all on equal footing. They are all equal, that's what I'm saying. All chiefly clans are all equal.

The Maisin v Keroro Development Corporation.

JW: I only came back home in 1994. So in 1999 I was involved, but the Maisin struggle goes back long before that. But, Drusilla, I'd like to say thank you for this opportunity, because this would also help announce further to future generations of the Maisin people – to have in place a written documentation of their way of life and the resource of the Maisin people, the inheritance. And not only that, for all to know the biggest court trouble we had in the Maisin, maybe in Papua New Guinea.

Maisin struggles go back a long long time before the actual land issue came about in 1999. It goes back into the 1980s when there were other Asian companies interested in logging around the Maisin area. But from day one Maisin people never ever thought of negotiating their land for immediate cash. And they continue to maintain that. Their land is not negotiable in monetary terms. Maisin people believe their land is their birthright, it's an inheritance, and they will not part with it. Despite how much money is given, they will never part with it. They regard the forest as their birthright.

Just roughly, in 1986, late 1986, there was a multi-million company from Japan, they came into Collingwood Bay area and they particularly wanted logging done here. Collingwood Bay, together with the Maisin people, own roughly about 500 000 hectares of tropical rainforest, and of which about 250 000 hectares belong to Maisin people. And it was at the time, 1986, that people began to realize that foreigners were having interest in their resource, especially with the logging. And they made a very big issue out of it. In 1987 we pushed – the Maisin people pushed through the Post Courier newspaper their concern. And they said, do not push the villages. Man has right to choose. And that was followed by an article in the April 9 paper, also in the Post Courier in 1987, headed 'Forest danger is greater than we thought, scientists admit'. And so this is not a new thing. We were expecting it, half-expecting that someone was going to come bombarding in.

DM: *How did you win that early contest? How did you stop that first attempt at logging?*

JW: The Maisin people had a delegation into Port Moresby. They led a delegation right up to the Department of Agriculture and to Forestry, and told them to take the Maisin land away from the forest logging map, away from the possible logging on the map. And we thought the Department respected that. Until we realized later, in 1999, that the Government had not kept their word. And so the saga began to come in 1999 when a handful of people from Wanigela signed ILGs – Incorporated Land Groups – for their own respective areas. Now what basically happens is, individuals take out this ILG, they sign ILGs – Incorporated Land Groups – and then the Government recognizes those ILGs as licenses.

They are the Wanigela people who signed these ILGs. They are not Maisin. And then they signed these ILGs and they gave it to an Asian man. And then this man, knowing his way around, took these ILGs and went up to the Department of Agriculture and Forestry, and then converted, the ILGs into this lease-back agreement.

DM: *But did that cover only Wanigela land?*

JW: No, it covered all the entire Collingwood Bay land.

DM: *So these people had signed for Maisin land as well as Wanigela land?*

JW: Right. This is – talking about entire 350,000 hectares of land. Which subsequently, if allowed to go, would have only belonged to four people. Four or five people who signed these ILGs.

DM: *And did they get money for this?*

JW: They could have been paid – who knows. All this was done at our back. And we even had people – our own officers, Maisin people, working in Lands and Forestry. They never knew this. It was done secretly. I've got all the papers here. The Land Group went ahead and got registered as a company through IPA– Investment Promotion Authority. Here's the certificate. The Keroro Development Corporation. That's the land group, the people who signed for the ILGs. They took out a lease and sold it to the Government – and then the Government leased the land out to Deegold (PNG), which was the company with the money. For them to log and then to plant oil palm.

It was not until two or three weeks before the machinery landed that Lester Seri [at Conservation Melanesia] was able to find out about this. He only came about this by chance. It was when they were talking about this forestry development around Collingwood Bay area that Lester became aware that they were talking about this land. And that they were talking about agri-development in Collingwood Bay area. His land. He's a Maisin. So he came down, he mass-distributed the whole lot of these proposals to the Maisin people, and the Collingwood Bay people. It was a couple of weeks before the machineries arrived, and we said no. No way.

We had a get-together – the Maisin people – before we notified the rest of the Collingwood Bay people. We got all the Maisin people and then met in the village and we had a delegation into Port Moresby on the 11th of June 1999. There were eighteen of us. All the elders of all respective clans. We arrived at Moresby on the 11th of June 1999. And on the 22nd of June we took out this restraining order with the lawyer to stop the machinery from coming in and to stop these people, the Deegold Papua New Guinea, Keroro Development Corporation, from proceeding any further. We did that in June. When we got into Moresby we had a meeting on the 12th, which was on the Sunday, and all the Maisin people working in Moresby became aware that their land was under threat. And then a week later one of our own men, who was also a senior personnel with the Lands Department, also became aware that under his very brows, his land was taken away.

DM: *So what about Wanigela? What was the feeling there?*

JW: As I said, it's not all Wanigelans who signed this, the ILG. It's about four or five people who signed. And most of these people were not Wanigelans anyway. They were all living in Moresby. Some said they had claims over land in Wanigela in Collingwood Bay, but one comes from the Musa area. Maybe he has some claim, maybe he doesn't – as far as we are concerned, he has no land rights. And there are other people, two or three people, from Wanigela. And with all these people here, put together, they just took the land rights away from the entire Collingwood Bay people.

DM: *In the villages round Wanigela, they were angry too?*

JW: Yeah, they were. And so we invited the Wanigela people to be with us in Moresby when we got in there. And they all came up, and we told them the land situation. And they agreed that we should all work together to ensure that we get the land back. And – it says here in our minutes of issues raised – “The neighbouring villages agreed to join the Maisin people to take the matter to court.” They saw who the people were, falsely using names, those people who signed this – Wanigela people, disowning these people's rights over their land.

DM: *So they were town people?*

JW: They were town people. This is the way they earn their bread and butter. And here we were, back in the village not knowing what was going on, and people were robbing right in front of our very eyebrows. So anyway, one of our own men, a week later, two weeks later, he gets up to the office in Lands Office and says – he just goes up there and demands cancellation of the titles. And said, “You’ve done this without properly advocating, negotiating with the people as to who owns the land, and apparently this land also belongs to – I am also a landowner.” And so they demanded – he demanded on behalf of the Maisin people that this be revoked. And that eventually happened. The court revoked the title and they cancelled the lease “You are here by advised that sufficient evidence has been produced to this office that the ... state lease has been fraudulently issued and registered. I have therefore cause to cancel the registration thereof under powers vested in me and the Section 1 section of the Land Registration Act.”

DM: *We’re still in 1999?*

JW: We’re still in 1999, and it was still in June. Just see how fast this had taken place. When Maisin was hit with this land thing, we had already managed to form a group in 1994, MICAD, to protect and conserve our resources and our traditional values. And then in 1996, when CM – Conservation Melanesia – was formed as a local NGO to help village people conserve their resources, we thought it would be suitable if we asked them to help us in our cause.

DM: *And was Lester Seri already at CM?*

JW: Lester was with Department of Environment and Conservation. He wasn’t with CM then, no. And so in 1996, we asked CM to help us along. And we were lucky because we did that, and in 1999 when this land thing came about, by which time Lester was already with CM, and he helped us through with this. We had a helping hand.

DM: *So you got the cancellation quite quickly? But it went on until 2002? Why, once the lease was cancelled, shouldn’t that have been the end of it?*

JW: No. No way was it over. We had to go back, go into court. Keroro Development Corporation took the Registrar of Titles, Land Titles, back into court again to reverse the cancellation. And we went to court to ask Keroro Development Corporation to return the original lease. They were still holding onto it. And as long as they held it, for them, the land was still in dispute.

We were happy that lease was cancelled. But that was just the beginning of the iceberg. That was the beginning of the problem. I mean, these people, Keroro Development Corporation, went through their affidavits, through the court claiming that all the plaintiffs listed do not own portions of land. I will be leaving the affidavits and you can have a look at them and you will see how this has gone. Really bad. So, the lease was revoked, I think it was cancelled on the 22nd-23rd of June. And then, straight after that, Keroro Development Corporation took the Registrar of Titles of Lands to court in July. In July. Because of the cancellation. They wanted to get it reversed.

We also had problems with the executives of Deegold Papua New Guinea coming and trying to offer some of our plaintiffs to put them on the company’s payroll. There was bribery going on. But the boys said no way. I will be leaving a letter here too that told us that we should have nothing to do with Brian Brunton, our solicitor, because he’s anti-logging, and that if we – Maisin people – wanted to take the matter further, pursue the case further in court, Deegold were offering to pay, find a new lawyer to help us do this.

Keroro Development Corporation was disowning us in court, trying to tell the court that we own no portions of land, as stipulated in the developmental plan, so we still had to go to court. And we were also going into court with the Department of Agriculture, Department of Lands, Papua New Guinea Forest Authority, the Papua New Guinea Government as a whole – and with Deegold. So here were very small village people, against the multi-national multi-million company. And we stuck together. We wanted it done. We wanted to achieve what we wanted to achieve.

We vowed that we would fight till the last man dies. It's a history on its own. The village people – we took the Government to court. We took the Keroro Development Corporation. We took Deegold. And we won.

Funding a long legal battle.

DM: *So who was funding this? Conservation Melanesia?*

JW: A very good question. When we started MICAD in 1994 to help protect our culture and our resources, we started with nothing. We started with nothing – the only resource possible for Maisin people was the sale of tapa. We helped pay for this through sale of tapa. And people throughout the world, knowing our struggle, were sending donations.

And we stayed in Moresby working on the case for six months. Roughly about five and a half months. There were eighteen of us. We had wantoks, but most of all CM [Conservation Melanesia] helped in our upkeep. It helped us with our allowances, like 40-50 kina a week, just to help us. And this money was coming from generous people, outside.

Back home the scenario was very bad. People were still mourning. Man and young men, men and women, older people, all clad in mud, waiting every day. Mourning for the land. The land which was rightly theirs. The land which was their inheritance. The land which their forefathers fought for. And here, under the stroke of a pen, it has changed ownership. And it was – we were at loss as to how we were to get this land back. Because here is a multi-million company and we were just simple villagers. It's like a something that was stuck in our throat. There was fear, there were people all clad in mud – men and women and children – crying, waiting for good news from Moresby as to when the land would be returned. And the men vowed, promised to fight till the last man loses his breath. They were serious. They would really fight. And that was how it was.

Outside of Papua New Guinea, outside of the village, we had a lot of help and support from, you know, NGO, friends like Greenpeace, and there were also people in America, New Zealand, Australia. Because of our cause there were trade fairs, there were other centres in Australia which were opening up markets to sell our tapa on our behalf so that it would go towards our upkeep and help in our legal expenses. All stood up. All stood up and the success is not our own success. The success belongs to everybody who got involved, helped in the success and I think that goes down the line, for all those people who are taking on conservation. And, you know, I think together, if everyone is really going to the right cause, through the right procedure, it would make the Government realize that it is climbing up the wrong tree.

And so we had people from ABC who came in through foreign correspondents, and there was a film - Four Corners. And there was Australian Conservation Foundation who also came to see the aftermath of the land court thing. And we got people in Canada and in New Zealand and Australia and the US who helped chip in a lot of money to help toward our legal costs.

And on top of that, most important was that Maisin people stood together. We sold every possible tapa. Men, women, were working around the clock to ensure that there was tapa available to sell so that it would bring the money to help pay for the cause. And mind you this was a multi-million company. And we were just struggling, struggling. What Deegold and the lawyers wanted to do was continue to drag everything on so that they would wear us out financially. And then eventually we would submit. If you read between lines, the whole idea behind it was to prolong it, make it impossible for us to continue because of the expenses involved in the upkeeps, and the legal costs, and administrative costs. They were slow, they wanted us to strike out the case, the Keroro Development Corporation was coming up with affidavits saying that we were not rightful landowners, and the procedure of the revocation and the cancellation of the titles was not properly done.

That was how it went on. We'd wait – and they would schedule a day when there was a mention in the court and we would appear one day, one morning – just to find that in five minutes or ten minutes in the courtroom, the case is deferred until next month, or a couple of weeks' time. How frustrating that became. Here we are, we get up there to the courthouse, and after five minutes we get told to come back about three weeks' later. It was really frustrating.

But it didn't work. The more they prolonged and delayed the whole thing, it gave us, you know, it gave us more insight into it, and then we were able to let a lot of people know all over the world what was happening, and that is why all in all it goes down as a success story for the Maisin people. But then it also goes down as a success story for those that also got involved in this. Be it the lawyers, our lawyers, be it those financial contributors.

The National Court of PNG at Waigani. 9 May 2002.

JW: The day before the actual trial, in 2002, May, the lawyers for Keroro come up and file saying that they have no more interest in the case. They have come all this way – knowing that there was no case.

DM: *So you didn't get to argue it in court?*

JW: Oh, that was the sad thing. If they had given us opportunity to say what we wanted – anything that had to be said was said through our lawyers. We just sat down and swallowed our own saliva.

James Sleight, QC, barrister, came up from Sydney for us, well-versed in our case. He flew in ten minutes before the actual trial. How exact timing – precise timing! He was billing us for the time on the tarmac to the National Court.

DM: *But not the time on the plane?*

JW: Not the time on the plane. He was so generous. He said, that's the lowest I can go. And that was it. And it took him fifteen to twenty minutes to have the case over. And that was it. And when we came out, we just didn't have time with him – only to read the thank you letter to him, and then he was off. "I wish I could stay, but my staying is going to be very expensive." He was off again, on the plane going back home.

Here, this is what our lawyers [Paul Brunton and Almah Tararia] wrote.

“The matters before the Court were OS 313 and 556 of 1999, the actions initiated by you. In relation to OS 334 of 1999, the Lawyer for Keroro discontinued the action on the day of the trial.

“The State Lawyer for the State and the Registrar of the Titles applied to have the hearing adjourned, stating they needed time to prepare. Your counsel opposed this application and the Judge allowed the matter to proceed to be heard.

“The main issue at dispute at this hearing were orders seeking to restrain the Third Defendant (Keroro) and the Fourth Defendant Deegold from entering onto your lands and attempting to deal or dealing with the forest or forest produce on your lands without your written consent.

“The issues of cancellation of the purported Deeds and Special Businesses and Agricultural Leases were not disputed at hearing as far as the Third and the Fourth Defendants were concerned. Their lawyers, a few days before the trial advised us that their clients intended to withdraw from proceedings and that there would not be contest in trial.

“The State and PNGFA through their lawyers were informed of the negotiations between your lawyers and Maladinas to which no formal agreement or undertaking was reached by the time we had gone into trial on May 9, 2002.

“At trial, whilst the State Lawyer made no formal submissions, there was no dispute as to the orders seeking to have the Deeds and Special Agricultural and Business Leases ver Portion 113 and 143 cancelled...

“The Court in handing down its decision on Friday 10th May 2002, took into account all evidence filed since the inception of the proceedings. In handing down judgement The Judge found in your favour as to ownership. In his words, there was ‘abundant evidence’ that the plaintiffs are customary owners...”

[Extract from letter from Brunton Lawyers to the Collingwood Bay Landowners, 13 May, 2002. Quoted with permission]

That was basically it. For three years we were dealing with Deegold and Keroro Development Corporation, and on the very day the trial was to be, the lawyers come up saying that they were not going to take part. And then the court orders them to pay the legal costs. And we get billed by our lawyers and we are supposed to forward the same bill to Deegold and Keroro for payment. And who are we going to bill? They are ghost figures. They are ghost names. We were fighting ghosts. That’s the sad part of the story. We went to extremes to pay for this land. Through legal costs and the battle. And now we have to live with this. Our way of life, our thinking is changed. We are in fear of our land. We are in fear of our children’s future. In fear that this could happen again.

About a month ago, we had a helicopter come in. Come in and land at one of the Maisin villages. And here were people coming in here wanting to explore, to mine nickel. We had no warning.

There is a threat, and that threat is that there are companies who are interested in mining. But, you know, then again, as a leader I cannot just say, bang, stop development. Because this is going to take away all my rights, this is going to deny my people that opportunity. Now, while I talk conservation, who am I prepared to swap chairs with? For development? What type of development do my people need? That’s the big question. Who’s going to make that happen? How is it going to happen? And what type of development is it?

And then I was in Moresby on my personal thing and I was thinking about it, and I got access to CM's computer. I sat there for two weeks, and I was drumming up some ideas. I mean, if the Maisin people oppose logging, and they also oppose mining, what's the alternative? What's the alternative? Now they're talking about carbon offset. But then I was also thinking on a research center – ecological research center, ecological institute, through this there could be studies conducted on wildlife, ethno-biodiversity survey of the flowers and plants. But most important would be the study of plants and herbs. And maybe that would be the option I was thinking. If people don't want to destroy their forest, their land, then maybe indirectly people could benefit so much through a research center, establishing our medicine.

I don't really understand carbon trading, but it would be really good if you could get money for keeping the forests and if you'd lose money by having them cut down. That would make a difference.

That's the thing that, as a leader, or as leaders in the Maisin society, or in Collingwood Bay, people need to know about. People need to know.