

LUI BELL

EULOGY FROM SPREP - 8 December, 2012

Delivered by Mr. David Sheppard, Director General of SPREP

Dear Silila, Margaret, Rachel, Caroline, Lui Jnr. and Lars

To other members of Lui's family

To Lui's many friends and colleagues

Good Morning, Talofa

On behalf of SPREP I would like to present our sincere condolences to Lui's family at this sad and difficult time. This eulogy is on behalf of the SPREP family, many of whom are here today.

Lui joined us seven years ago and was a cornerstone of our SPREP family and was the epitome of everything that is good about SPREP. It is impossible to imagine a SPREP without Lui.

There are so many facets of Lui that it is hard to know where to start. Lui was an outstanding person in every respect. In particular, he was a deeply committed conservationist who has left a long lasting legacy of many achievements.

I will focus more on Lui's professional achievements today but one can't separate his achievements from the way in which they were delivered - always with a laugh, with a smile, and with a sense of interest in those he worked with - he made everyone feel good about themselves.

If ever a meeting at SPREP was getting too serious we could count on Lui to crack a joke and bring a refreshing sense of perspective to our deliberations. Lui taught us the value of not taking ourselves too seriously.

There was an article in the Samoan Observer last weekend about Lui, titled "the Good Samaritan". This described Lui providing invaluable, but "behind the scenes", support for Samoan families in need through the "Helping Hand Programme".

He provided this help on one condition - that his name would not be revealed. This tells us a lot about Lui - it speaks volumes about his basic human decency and humility.

His humility precluded Lui from telling anyone that he was a world expert on turtles and other marine species. But we are very happy to tell you.

Lui certainly was a world expert and his achievements will stand as a beacon for marine conservation in the Pacific region for many years to come.

Bruce Jeffries from SPREP noted that Lui's passing is like a totara falling in the New Zealand forest. The totara is a huge native tree that grows for hundreds of years. When a totara falls it signifies a great tragedy – just as Lui's passing has left a huge gap not only in SPREP but throughout the Pacific.

Lui's career was long and distinguished. His professionalism, joviality and team spirit will be greatly missed.

Before joining SPREP Lui had a long career with the Government of Samoa, working on fisheries, aquaculture and marine conservation; with the Government of American Samoa; with the Forum Fisheries Agency; with the Food and Agricultural Organisation; and for AusAID as an aquaculture adviser.

We can see Lui's legacy here in Samoa in many ways. As one example, Lui was the architect of the Samoa EEZ sanctuary - declared at Palolo Deep in 2002 when Lui was with the Samoa Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment. This is Samoa's whale, dolphin and shark sanctuary and was the first ever shark sanctuary in our region.

Lui joined SPREP in October 2005 and, at the time of his death, was working as SPREP's Marine Species Adviser. He was held in high esteem within the office and on several occasions acted as Officer in Charge of SPREP.

Lui's legacy includes Regional Action Plans for Marine Species which guide Pacific island countries in how to conserve and manage dugongs, whales, dolphins and marine turtles. The latest version of these plans are currently being published and will remain one of Lui's most important legacies. We will ensure that this landmark publication includes a major tribute to Lui and his work.

Lui was particularly chuffed, as we were, that the Pacific regional guidelines for whale watching he developed were taken to a meeting in the Caribbean and were adopted in that region

Conservation of whales and dolphins was a passion for Lui. He was the driving force behind the establishment of marine species sanctuaries in the region, including over 18 million square kilometers of whale and dolphin sanctuaries. To put this in perspective - this area is larger than Russia.

Lui's work on turtle conservation was outstanding and he was responsible for developing and implementing ground-breaking approaches for monitoring migration paths of these iconic species in the region.

The whales, dolphins, turtles, dugongs and other marine species of the Pacific have lost their preeminent champion and I'm sure they are also in deep mourning as we speak here today. There is a Samoan proverb - "la pa'u se toa, ae tu se toa" – if a champion falls let a new one arise.

Lui knew that conservation of marine species must go hand in hand with economic development of local communities. Lui's work on whale watching guidelines to support ecotourism in Tonga and his work which had just started on a regional turtle and ecotourism project underline his commitment to both nature and to people.

Lui was a people person. He was one of those rare people who could relate to everyone, whether a village community or the heads of international conventions, and achieve positive outcomes through his interaction with them. It would make no difference whether he was talking to the most junior fisheries officer in the Solomon Islands or the most senior Minister in Fiji - he would always show the deepest respect and interest in the views of others.

Clive Hawigen, a former intern at SPREP from PNG, recalls that Lui's message was quite simple - that whoever you are, no matter your station in life, you can and you must play a role to conserve and protect marine species and to respect them.

There was no sitting on the fence for Lui Bell.

Lui was also a master at fostering and developing multidisciplinary teams where people from many walks of life worked together on marine species conservation - such as scientists, government representatives, tour operators, and green activists. He brought people together, he managed difficult politics, such as those on whaling, and he never, ever lost his sense of humor

Lui was a master at making ends meet and throughout his career often achieved major conservation outcomes on very limited resources or, as they say, "on the smell of an oily rag". He was always looking for creative opportunities to advance conservation efforts. Productive partnerships between SPREP and organisations such as CI, CITES, CMS, NOAA, IFAW and many, many others provide a testament to the deep respect in which Lui was held and also his ability to "twist arms" and obtain support for worthy conservation causes.

Sue Taii from CI, formerly from SPREP, recalls that when any SPREP Member asked for help Lui would always find a way forward. Even when there was no money or clear way to help, Lui would find a creative and clever way to help Pacific Islanders achieve their conservation aims.

Lui's achievements could fill a very large book. The testaments to Lui on the SPREP website from around the region and from around the world stand in tribute to the man and his achievements. If you have a chance I urge you to read these tributes - they speak volumes about Lui's status and the overwhelming sense of loss that we all feel.

At this week's Memorial Mass, Lui's eldest daughter, Margaret, mentioned that Lui once said that no-one is irreplaceable. In Lui's case I beg to differ. There can only ever be one Lui.

Lui is so sadly missed by all his SPREP colleagues and friends throughout the region. In moving forward, we should all strive to learn from Lui's example and try to be better professionals, be better people, laugh a bit more, and think of the needs and views of others more often than our own.

In reflecting on Lui, two lines from a famous poem come to mind:

"...I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep..."

Well, we all thought that Lui had many, many miles to go, but I can assure you that SPREP will keep his promises with regard to marine species conservation that was the focus of his professional life.

As part of this commitment, based on the suggestions of many of Lui's colleagues and friends throughout the region, SPREP is considering establishing a Lui Bell Scholarship Fund to honour Lui's legacy. This would support young marine scientists and managers from Pacific island countries who plan to follow in the giant footsteps of Lui Bell.

In closing, the SPREP family offers its deepest condolences to Lui's family and will continue to provide whatever help and support that we can.

Rest in Peace Lui. Manuia lau Malaga!