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SPUMS Members

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Dear Members,

I felt it was appropriate to clarify the position with regard to the SPUMS ASM in 2009. There have been a number of rumours circulating and the committee felt we should give you this interim summary of events. The final picture is not yet clear and we will advise you all when final arrangements have been made.

There have been a number of warnings to us on a personal basis that the security situation in Fiji may deteriorate before the meeting next year. At present there is a DFAT general advisory to exercise caution when travelling to Fiji and to exercise extreme caution in Suva. I am informed that our military colleagues are not permitted to travel to Suva at this time.

I have consulted widely with the committee and others in consideration of the appropriateness of SPUMS holding the ASM 2009 in Fiji. I have been advised that the situation is more likely to deteriorate than improve in the short term, and that travel for our military members may be further restricted. Whilst none of these developments is certain, the convener of the meeting (David Smart) and I have decided it would be prudent to relocate the meeting. This will avoid the possibility that a number of our members (including committee members) will be prevented from attending the meeting and any threat to the viability of the meeting. There is at this time only a minor financial penalty in changing venue, but we are approaching the time when changing the venue would be very costly indeed.

Therefore we are seeking advice on locations suitable for a meeting on the same dates in Vanuatu. The invited speakers have been aware of this possibility for some time and David is confident the academic quality of the meeting will not be affected. We will do our best to maximise the diving experience for those who intend to dive. The successful tenderers to assist us in organising this meeting (Allways Travel) have expressed confidence in finding an alternative site in Vanuatu. We will inform you of the updated details as soon as they are available.

I have also been asked to take this opportunity to inform you that David undertook a formal tender process in relation to the travel, accommodation and diving organisation for the ASM 2009. The resulting tenders were evaluated carefully before a decision was made to accept the proposal of Allways to re-visit Fiji. The relocation of the meeting reflects not at all on Allways proposal and we are pleased they are able to assist as capably as ever in arranging the alternate venue. David has recommended a similar process be instituted for all future meetings and I am personally very supportive of this approach. There are some significant hurdles to be overcome in order to achieve this aim without exposing the society to increased financial risk or problems with conflicts of interest. The committee will need to consider carefully all the implications. Once again, I will keep you informed of developments in this direction.

Mike Bennett