

Drowning not waving: an update from PNG's Taskforce Sweep

By Grant Walton

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On Friday 13 November, PNG's Investigation Taskforce Sweep (ITFS) launched a 'Progressive Update' report which provides a summary of the anti-corruption agency's achievements since its formation in August 2011. You can download the report [here](#) [pdf].

The report states that ITFS has registered more than 350 cases of corruption over the past four years. It notes that, thanks to its investigations, 25 million kina of missing funds have been paid back to the Internal Revenue Commission. The report claims ITFS has identified a further 200 million kina for recovery. Having initiated 93 criminal cases, the report lists ITFS's 12 successful prosecutions, which include MPs, businessmen and public servants.

It's heartening to see the report noting that Australian authorities have been freezing bank accounts on the back of ITFS investigations. Australia may yet lose [its title](#) as the 'Cayman Islands of the Pacific'.

The report is likely one of the last gasps from this briefly successful agency. Unsurprisingly, given its role in the attempted arrest of current Prime Minister Peter O'Neill, it has not been allocated any funding in the 2016 national budget.

The agency has not only been under attack from the PNG Government. Earlier this year Kristian Laslett from the International State Crime Initiative accused ITFS of numerous failures around investigating Australian businessman, Gudmundur Fridriksson (see pdf [here](#)). His report questioned the agency's rigour, integrity and professionalism and recommended an "arms-length inquiry be conducted into the ITFS investigation by a judicial authority of high standing" (p. 9).

Whatever the merit of these claims, it's hard to see an inquiry into ITFS operations not being politicised. Such an inquiry would no doubt be welcomed by the current Prime Minister.

As the most recent ITFS report shows, an investigation into ITFS will likely be of little use to it or other anti-corruption agencies. ITFS is sinking and soon there will be nothing left. Given that the ITFS report claims that the proposed Independent Commission Against Corruption has not been allocated funding in the 2016 budget, there may be no other effective organisation to take its place.

About the author/s

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Grant Walton is an associate professor at the Development Policy Centre and the author of [*Anti-Corruption and its Discontents: Local, National and International Perspectives on Corruption in Papua New Guinea*](#).

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