The Rt Hon PETER MANDELSON PC
MEMBER OF THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION

B-1049 BRUSSELS
+32-(0)2-298 85 90

Brussels, 27 March 2008
D/05373

The Hon Wilkie Rasmussen
Minister of Foreign Affairs and Immigration,
Health, Tourism and Cultural Development and Marine Resources
Cook Islands

Dear W Rasmussen,

I write to you following reports I have seen of remarks attributed to you at the EU-ACP Joint Parliamentary Assembly. According to the wire reports I have seen, you are quoted as telling journalists that you found it particularly difficult to negotiate in the EPA context with me especially because of my insensitivity to the issues you were raising and that you believed I had pursued a harmful strategy of divide and rule.

It may be that you have been misquoted. If that is the case, I wonder whether you might issue a public correction of these remarks? If you are quoted correctly, I should register my disappointment with your comments.

First, the comments are inaccurate. Take one example, the rules of origin on fisheries in the new agreement. This was of critical importance to the Pacific region. I and my services worked for months with our colleagues in the Commission - with little support from our Pacific partners - to deliver the most significant relaxation of rules of origin in fisheries ever introduced by the EU. This was hard work within the Commission and has not been welcomed by a number of our Member States and the European industry. But we did so specifically and only for the Pacific, in response to what you said was a decisive issue. We delivered the outcome you asked for. I do not necessarily expect the EU to be thanked for this; but nor do I expect to be accused of ignoring the interests of the region.

Second, these comments are unnecessarily offensive and at odds with the courtesies of long-standing partnership. You are perfectly entitled to take a different view from me about the conduct and content of these negotiations. But personal and public attacks on your negotiating partner are unlikely to do much to improve the prospects of strengthening our relations looking forward. You may not have got everything you wanted in the negotiation, but that is in the nature of a negotiation. It is also true that some of the things you sought were simply never going to be achievable either because they were not in the Commission's gift to deliver or because they were not consistent with multilateral trade rules. But for that, I am afraid you need to look to your own negotiators, rather than to the EU.

I hope you might find an opportunity in the near future to set the record straight. If not, I would be interested in any light you can shed on the remarks attributed to you.

Peter Mandelson

Minister of Foreign Affairs Rarotonga Cook Islands

11 April 2008

The Rt Hon Peter Mandelson PC
Member of the European Commission
European Union
BRUSSELS

Kia Orana Mr Mandelson

YOUR LETTER DATED 27 MARCH 2008 **Our ref: 2008-49**

Thank you for your letter dated 27 March 2008. I take your letter to mean two things. Firstly, you believe that my comments to the Media at the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly were incorrect. I do not agree with you but I say that my comments reflected the general feeling of the Pacific region that has dealt with you. Secondly, you say that those comments were offensive to you and were personal and public attacks on the European Commission as a negotiating partner to the Pacific region. If they were offensive and personal and public attacks I humbly apologise for that.

At the time I received your letter I was actually in a meeting in Fiji with the Trade Ministers and the PACP/Forum Secretariat and a resolution was passed at that meeting pointing out the harsh and unnecessarily domineering attitude that you had as a negotiator when Pacific Trade Ministers met with you in Brussels in November 2007. Subsequent to the passing of that resolution I informed for the record the Trade Ministers Meeting that I had received your letter and that I would in due time table it to the attention of all the Ministers and the PACP/Forum Secretariat. I am now tabling that letter including my reply to you.

So my point is that the common impression you left on all of the Pacific Island Trade Ministers and the PACP/Forum Secretariat was that you were insensitive to our protocols, issues, and the result was that division occurred between the Pacific Island countries. I can assure you that the general feeling is that Papua New Guinea and Fiji initialed the Interim Agreement because of fear that they would lose their preferential trade arrangements with the European Union.

I certainly did not mean to personally offend you, but questions were put to myself that focused on the reasons why two countries of the Pacific initialed an agreement that the rest of the Pacific were not ready for. In my experience working with the Pacific Trade Ministers and with the PACP/Forum Secretariat, the solidarity of the Pacific was our strength and you have managed to break that with your particular agenda in the negotiations.

Putting aside the negative side, I acknowledge Sir that there has been hard work from you and the European Commission team and indeed I agree with you the Pacific negotiators who were not Ministers were somewhat pedantic in their approach. The PACP/Forum officials will probably disagree with my assessment but our structure of negotiations were that they were the ones who did the ground work and we were as Ministers the people that endorsed or disapproved their recommendations.

If there is a way for us to have a middle ground and work on good terms from there on I would like to propose that we meet when I next come to Brussels so that we can establish some parameters of future negotiations and indeed develop some strategies to offer the Pacific Island Ministers about the way forward in Trade negotiations.

Kia Manuia

Yours sincerely

Hon. Wilkie Rasmussen
MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS & TRADE
CO-PRESIDENT OF THE ACP-EU JPA