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## The end of Kava exports?

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The Vanuatu Government needs to quickly move on enforcing the protocols of the Vanuatu Kava Act or face the loss of kava as an export to the United States as well as the European Union.

At the Kava symposium held in Fiji last week, attended by Ruth Amos from the Vanuatu Department of Agriculture, the main area of concern was the use of two-day kava in export markets. By what participants said of the Vanuatu export kava markets it is in a dire situation teetering on possible collapse due to questionable practices by growers, exporters and overseas sellers.

Dr. Matthias Schmidt, the keynote speaker, delivered what should be taken as a warning to all those involved in the kava industry.

The export of two-day "kava" is continuing, despite the stipulations of Vanuatu's Kava Act. These plants have the possibility of causing illnesses in drinkers, and shutting down what remains of the kava market for good. The conclusion: Establishing a standard for noble kava in the CODEX with the WHO, of whom Vanuatu is now a member, which will define for the world once and for all which kava is safe, which Vanuatu has always known, and what plants should not even be called "kava."

Picture-slides were shown of "menus" from US nakamals, including one in Portland, Oregon openly selling *Isa* to drink. Dr. Vincent Lebot, perhaps the world's most famous kava researcher, has continually recommended against consuming this plant.

He took it to Hawaii for "genetic research only" from PNG, and it somehow "escaped" the greenhouse. It is now one of Hawaii's most widely grown plants. "Genetically, it is a completely different plant from drinkable, noble kava types, and research has long demonstrated this."

Another attendee was Andrew Procyk, a former academic and current US kava vendor, who has been featured in the Daily Post before. Sadly, he was the only kava vendor in attendance, and could not express enough concern at the information presented. Procyk came to Vanuatu for further research after the conference and made himself available for this article. "Clearly, there are farmers, exporters, and importers that either do not know, or simply do not care about the future of

the kava market,” he said. He is currently providing Dr. Schmidt with data for the upcoming EU court case in attempts to re-open the market after the ban. He hopes the CODEX standards will be quickly established to keep dangerous kava from being used. “Kava is completely safe, and the plants some of these sellers are peddling cannot even rightfully be called ‘kava’ at all.”

A local exporter to the New Caledonia market, spoke of exporters and villages that he knows are growing two-day kava for export, but noble kava for their own use.

Non-noble kavas grow more rapidly, allowing quicker short-term gains but jeopardizing the future of the industry. “If they will not drink what they themselves are growing for others, clearly there is a problem.”

This problem is apparently commonplace among villages in Pentecost and much of the kava exported from Santo. “There must be a way to enforce the Kava Act more stringently, or the entire kava economy could be in jeopardy.

Pacific nations have long known what good kava is. It is precisely why we have had a Kava Act for years in Vanuatu.”

Dr. Lebot also believes it is a race against time. “The EU has delayed the case, and they are simply looking for a signal from the US to justify their past actions.” If a negative event occurs in America, it is possible the US market, too, will cease to exist for kava producing nations.

With all of the kava being sold to the US market that Procyk says is “known rubbish,” the establishment and enforcement of an international standard is more important than ever. He believes that a negative event is “extremely possible” in light of the situation. As a result, he is pulling himself more and more away from his business, and hopes to devote his time to assisting research that will help preserve the kava market for the future.

“The biggest shame is that many of us are working to also save the market for the very scoundrels who are knowingly in the process of jeopardizing and destroying it.”