



MEDIA STATEMENT

Pelican Paradise Sets the Record Straight on La'o Hamutuk Statement

8 April 2026, Dili, Timor-Leste — Pelican Paradise has reviewed the statement issued by La'o Hamutuk on 2 April 2026. The statement contains factually incorrect claims and material omissions that together present a misleading picture of the project, and was published without any attempt to contact Pelican Paradise for comment or verification. For an organisation that values transparency and accountability, this is a serious omission. We set out the correct facts below.

1. On the project timeline

The initial project agreement was signed on 16 October 2008 between Datuk Edward Ong and then-Prime Minister H.E. Xanana Gusmão. La'o Hamutuk refers to 2009, which relates to Government Resolution No. 17/2009 that formally approved the project after the original agreement. The legal relationship between the investor and the Government of Timor-Leste began in 2008. This is publicly recorded.

2. On the discovery of skeletal remains at Tasi Tolu and the voluntary return of land

Nine sets of human remains were discovered by Pelican Paradise during its own site survey and excavation works. The company immediately worked with the International Forensic Team from the Victoria Forensic Institute in Australia, together with local police, to carry out a proper investigation. This took place from February 2010 to August 2011 and followed official procedures.

What was not reported is what happened subsequently. Datuk Edward Ong decided, even though there was no legal requirement, that the land with such historical importance should not remain under private ownership. As a result, Pelican Paradise voluntarily returned 56.77 hectares of land to the Government of Timor-Leste. This included the lake areas and the Pope John Paul II Commemorative Memorial site. This return is officially documented in correspondence from 2015.

Pelican Paradise also prepared a full public park design and flythrough video at no cost to the state, so the area could be preserved as a public space that honours Timor-Leste's history.

We did not publicise this at the time, as it was done in good faith, and our focus was on progressing the project. We are now setting the record straight. This action, taken voluntarily and without legal obligation, is inconsistent with the picture of bad faith that La'o Hamutuk seeks to portray.

3. On the golf course

The claim that an 18-hole golf course is being developed on the site of the skeletal remains is incorrect. The 56.77 hectares of land, including the lakes and heritage site, were returned to the Government. Pelican Paradise no longer owns or controls this land and has no rights to develop it.

The planned golf course is located within a separate commercial area retained by Pelican Paradise. It is next to, but not on, the returned land. This is clearly shown in the project's master plan and environmental documents submitted to the authorities.



4. On project progress and the State's obligations

The claim that the investor made no progress for fifteen years is not accurate.

The Special Investment Agreement (SIA) was only formally signed on 3 January 2022, fourteen years after the original agreement. The delay in securing formal land rights was outside the investor's control. During this period, Pelican Paradise had to redesign the project multiple times due to Government changes. These included:

1. Delays in removing sewerage ponds from the proposed hotel site, which held up the initial lease until late 2012
2. A new ADB highway alignment in 2013–2014 that cut through the original hotel location, requiring a full redesign
3. Government Resolution 36/2017, which removed land originally planned for a school and hospital after it was found to be privately owned, requiring another full redesign

Once the SIA was signed, Pelican Paradise moved forward quickly. A full consultancy team was appointed, and surveys were completed by February 2022. A groundbreaking ceremony was held on 25 November 2022, and physical works began on 18 April 2023.

Progress then stopped because the Government did not provide water and electricity as required under Clause 3 of the SIA. At a technical meeting on 3 May 2024, the Director of EDTL confirmed in official minutes that there was no budget in 2024 to connect electricity to the site. The project did not stall because the investor failed to act. It stalled because basic infrastructure was not delivered as outlined in the Special Investment Agreement signed between Pelican Paradise and the Timor-Leste Government.

5. On community rights

The claim that Pelican Paradise violated community rights is unsupported by the facts.

At a Government working group meeting on 30 January 2019, Pelican Paradise clearly opposed forced evictions. Official meeting records show the company stated that land sharing should be applied, meaning communities should not be removed but instead accommodated within the development.

Under the SIA, it is the Government's responsibility, not the investor's, to clear the project site. This responsibility is clearly stated in the agreement. The claim wrongly places this responsibility on the investor.

Pelican Paradise takes the rights and well-being of local communities seriously. The factual record bears this out.

6. On the international school

Pelican Grammar School was registered on 20 November 2023 and is currently operating, serving students in Timor-Leste. It was intended as part of the broader development in Phase 2. As of 1 April 2026, the school has been formally separated to ensure it remains independent.

However, it is incorrect to suggest that this school is the only visible investment made by Pelican Paradise.



After the SIA was signed in January 2022, the company appointed consultants, completed surveys, held a groundbreaking ceremony, and began physical construction. This included earthworks, road construction, and building a Show Unit Gallery.

These works were funded privately using generators and water trucks, as the Government had not provided the required utilities.

These are real, documented investments on the ground.

Regarding the USD 180 million deposit, this was proposed to the Government as part of a deal to secure funding for the development, and it was suggested that the deposit would be placed with an internationally recognised financial institution at attractive interest rates and returned to the Government after five years, upon completion of the construction of the proposed infrastructure. Access to the USD 180 million was only possible with the agreement of the Government, and its purpose was to serve as collateral because the Government had already stated it could not fund the required infrastructure. This arrangement was proposed to bridge a specific infrastructure funding gap identified by the Government itself, and was structured to protect the State's financial interests throughout.

7. On transparency

Pelican Paradise has consistently sought clear and documented communication with the Government over the past 17 years to ensure accountability, especially as personnel changed.

In a letter dated 25 November 2019 to TradeInvest, the company requested that all technical issues be put in writing to avoid repeated clarification due to changes in officials. The company has maintained a strong and consistent documentary record.

Seventeen years, we are still here.

The official Government record shows that the investor reported the discovery of human remains, voluntarily returned land of historical importance, opposed forced evictions, and continues working with the State for over seventeen years despite repeated issues that were not caused by the investor.

This record should be presented accurately. Civil society organisations that speak on public issues have a responsibility to check the facts. We urge La'o Hamutuk to apply the same standards of accuracy and accountability that it expects from others. Public statements on serious matters like this should be based on verified facts.

We invite La'o Hamutuk to engage with us directly. We share the same commitment to transparency, accountability, and the long-term development of Timor-Leste. We welcome this discussion and are ready to share evidence that supports this statement. We also ask for clarity on the sources used by La'o Hamutuk in making its claims. If these claims cannot be supported, we call on La'o Hamutuk to withdraw them.

Pelican Paradise notes its right to respond to false or defamatory statements through appropriate channels and reserves all legal rights accordingly.

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