

Concerns over slush funds high

THE use and abuse of Electoral Development Funds (EDF) has raised concerns among scholars and academics who want such funds reviewed by the new government, an academic has revealed.

Presenting a policy paper on political governance in the Pacific at the Australian National University in Canberra funded under the Centre for Democratic Institutions, Dr Joe Ketan said the fund had a lot of loopholes open to abuse.

In his presentation last week Dr Ketan said that only a few parliamentarians in the history of PNG politics had put those funds to good use.

Most others had misused the money and ended up in prison or escaped justice through snap resignations.

The electoral development fund was one of several "slush funds" available to PNG parliamentarians for "pork barrel" politics, he said.

"These development grants, annually handed out to 109 electorates through their MPs under various district improvement programs, have had a significant impact on electoral politics and governance in PNG," Dr Ketan said.

Such "handouts" from the state were often invested in personal networks to secure support for large scale group enterprises (business, elections, warfare, ceremonial exchange), he said. Politicians relied on localised support bases to win elections and tended to devote much of the resources at their disposal to their strongholds, to the exclusion of the wider electorate, he said.

Dr Ketan stated that under the current rural development programs, about K272.5 million had been allocated each year to districts.

Of these funds, K500,000 is meant for provincial and district support grants for each of the 109 MPs and a further K2 million each for the 89 open electorates and 20 provincial electorates under various other grants.