



PARLIAMENT
OF AUSTRALIA

Australian Parliamentary Delegation

New Caledonia and Fiji
28 August – 1 September 2023

REPORT | NOVEMBER 2023



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Members of the Delegation

Leader of the Delegation

- Ms Louise Miller-Frost MP
Member for Boothby, South Australia
Australian Labor Party

Delegates

- Mr Luke Gosling OAM, MP
Member for Solomon, Northern Territory
Australian Labor Party
- Dr Anne Webster MP
Member for Mallee, Victoria
The Nationals
- Mr Terry Young MP
Member for Longman, Queensland
Liberal National Party of Queensland
- Ms Dai Le MP
Member for Fowler, New South Wales
Independent

Officials

- Ms Charlotte Fletcher
Delegation Secretary

Introduction

This report gives an account of the bilateral Parliamentary Delegation to New Caledonia and Fiji from 28 August to 1 September 2023.

With respect to New Caledonia, the delegation's aims and objectives were to:

- foster links with the Congress of New Caledonia and the Government of New Caledonia, and gain an insight into the operation of the Customary Senate;
- gain an insight into the potential inclusion of New Caledonia in the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) scheme;
- learn about environmental protection, climate resilience and energy transition efforts in New Caledonia; and
- gain an insight into bilateral trade relations and ways to strengthen them.

With respect to Fiji, the delegation's aims and objectives were to:

- continue to strengthen Australia's links with the Parliament of Fiji;
- gain a deeper understanding of Australia's bilateral relationship with Fiji, including Australian initiatives and programs in Fiji, and ways to continue to strengthen this relationship;
- acknowledge the work of the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF), noting that the delegation coincided with the second PIF Women Leaders Meeting in Suva;
- gain further insight into the operation of the PALM scheme, and the experiences of workers who participate in it;
- gain insights into the impacts of climate change in Fiji and the actions being taken by Fiji, and what Australia is doing to provide support in this regard, including under the Australia Pacific Climate Partnership;
- gain an insight into strengthening people-to-people connections through sport.

Acknowledgements

Prior to departure, the delegation received a helpful and informative briefing from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT).

In New Caledonia, the delegation was accompanied by officers located with the Australian Consulate General, led by Consul General Ms Annelise Young. The Consul General provided comprehensive briefings and logistical assistance throughout the visit, in particular the provision of excellent translation support. The delegation is greatly appreciative of the effort made to accommodate its needs and to ensure a successful visit.

In Fiji, the delegation was accompanied by officers located with the Australian High Commission in Fiji, led by Deputy High Commissioner Mr Stuart Watts. The Deputy High Commissioner and his staff provided comprehensive briefings and excellent logistical assistance throughout the visit. The delegation is greatly appreciative of the support provided to ensure a successful visit.

Further, en route from New Caledonia to Fiji, the delegation stopped over in Vanuatu for a brief period. While there, the delegation was supported by officers of the Australian High Commission. The delegation greatly appreciated the logistical support provided during this stop over.

The delegation particularly wishes to thank:

- Mr Calum Logan, Deputy Consul-General of Australia in New Caledonia;
- Ms Scarlet Mitram, Policy Officer, and Ms Julia Trinson, Research and Public Diplomacy Manager (New Caledonia) who provided translation services during the visit;
- Ms Rebecca Brown, First Secretary, Governance at the Australian High Commission in Fiji, who developed the Fiji visit program and provided support during the visit; and
- Mr Peter Wilson, First Secretary (Development) at the Australian High Commission in Vanuatu, who provided support during the delegation's stop over.

Finally, the delegation thanks all the individuals and organisations that graciously gave time to meet with the delegation and expresses appreciation for the warm welcomes and hospitality received.

Louise Miller-Frost MP

Delegation Leader

Report of Activities

Sunday, 27 August 2023

The delegation travelled to Nouméa on Sunday, 27 August 2023.

Monday, 28 August 2023

In the morning, the delegation met with the Consul-General, Ms Annelise Young who gave the delegation a briefing on the history of Australia's bilateral relationship with New Caledonia and outlined current events, including a series of referendums relating to independence, that were likely to be raised with the delegation during its visit.

Meeting at the French High Commission in New Caledonia

The delegation met with Mr Remi Bastille, Prefect of the French High Commission in New Caledonia. At this meeting, Mr Bastille gave an overview of recent key historical events in New Caledonia (including the development of the Nouméa Accord in 1998) and outlined the role of the French State in New Caledonia.



The delegation with Mr Remi Bastille, Prefect of the French High Commission in New Caledonia

Meeting with the Congress of New Caledonia

The delegation travelled to the Congress of New Caledonia to meet with the President of the Congress the Hon. Roch Wamytan and several other members of Congress. The delegation participated in a *coutume* in the Congress chamber, an exchange of gifts as a mark of humility and respect.

At this meeting, President Wamytan provided an overview of the role of the Congress and outlined its relationship with the Customary Senate. Members of the Congress also discussed the significance of regionalism, and noted the close connections that New Caledonians have with Australia.

Following the meeting, the delegation had lunch together with the President and First Vice-President of the Congress, the Hon. Caroline Machoro-Reignier.



The delegation with the President of the Congress of New Caledonia, the Hon. Roch Wamytan, and First Vice-President of the Congress, the Hon. Caroline Machoro-Reignier

Meeting with the President of the Government of New Caledonia

In the afternoon, the delegation met with the President of the Government of New Caledonia, the Hon. Louis Mapou. The delegation again participated in a *coutume*.

President Mapou and the delegation discussed a variety of issues, including:

- Australia's long relationship with New Caledonia;

- the representation of Indigenous Kanak people in New Caledonia, including through the Customary Senate;
- the New Caledonian system of government as a collegial model; and
- regional considerations including the PALM Scheme, global warming and mining.

Meeting with the Customary Senate

The delegation then travelled to the New Caledonian Customary Senate, the assembly of the traditional councils of the Kanaks, with jurisdiction over proposed laws concerning the Kanak identity.

The delegation participated in a *coutume* in the Customary Senate chamber and met with President of the Customary Senate, Mr Victor Gogny, spokesperson and Senator of Xaracuu customary area, Mr Yvon Kona, Senator of Ajie Aro customary area, Mr Adrien Diroua, and Senator of Iaai customary area, Mr Calixte Sivitongo.

The representatives of the Customary Senate outlined the formation and role of the body and discussed recognition of the Kanak identity in the French Constitution. They also discussed with the delegation some challenges facing Kanak peoples, including higher rates of incarceration and the loss of some traditional languages.



The delegation with representatives of the Customary Senate in New Caledonia

Cocktail reception at the residence of the Consul General

The Consul General, Ms Annelise Young, hosted a cocktail reception with delegates and numerous guests including members of Congress and members of the Government at her residence.

Tuesday, 29 August 2023

Military briefing from the French Armed Forces in New Caledonia

In the morning, the delegation travelled to the Patrouilleur d'Outre-Mer (POM) Auguste Benebig, a new ship belonging to the French Armed Forces in New Caledonia (FANC).

Captain Denis Camelin, Commander of the Maritime Zone of New Caledonia, and his colleagues provided an overview of the role of the French Armed Forces in New Caledonia, including with respect to maritime security, environmental protections, and patrols to prevent illegal fishing and other illegal activities. Captain Camelin also noted New Caledonia's French cadet program, for which young people may apply to receive training provided in Metropolitan France.

The delegation then received a tour of the new vessel where delegates admired the vessel's features, including its hybrid electric and diesel engine.



The delegation aboard the POM Auguste Benebig

Tour of Pacific Community (SPC) and meeting with Director-General

The delegation then travelled to visit the Pacific Community (SPC), the largest scientific and technical organisation in the Pacific, where it met with Director-General Dr Stuart Minchin and other representatives.



The delegation touring the SPC marine research lab



The delegation at the SPC headquarters

The delegation received a tour of the SPC marine research lab, including an overview of the types of fish that were being researched. The delegation was provided with an overview of SPC's key strategic priorities, as well as SPC's financial and capability requirements in future.

The delegation also heard briefings from specialised staff members relating to:

- Climate change research and climate financing in the Pacific;
- Gender equality and gender responsive budgeting; and
- Recent work supporting disability accessible election processes in Fiji.

Lunch with Consulate General staff and tour of Australian Consulate

The delegation then visited the Australian Consulate where they were provided with a tour of the facilities by Consul General Ms Annelise Young and had the opportunity to share lunch with staff members.

Roundtable on climate change and energy transition

The delegation then returned to their hotel where they attended an energy roundtable with Mr Jeremie Katidjo-Monnier (Member of the Government of New Caledonia, in charge of sustainable development, environment and ecological transition, management and development of the Coral Sea Natural Park, climate change mitigation and adaptation plan, water policy and food transition) and Mr Christopher Gyges (Member of the Government of New Caledonia, in charge of the digital and maritime economy, energy transition and the development of renewable energy, social dialogue and monitoring free trade zones).

The delegation discussed a range of issues, including:

- New Caledonia's energy transition efforts, and those in the broader Pacific region;
- The take up of renewable energy sources, including domestic solar panels, in New Caledonia; and
- Bushfire risks and fire fighting efforts in New Caledonia;

Visit to Tjibaou Cultural Centre

Mr Gosling MP then travelled to meet with Mr Adolphe Digoué, Member of the Government of New Caledonia, in charge of trade, agriculture and fisheries.

Other members of the delegation travelled to the Tjibaou Cultural Centre and took a guided tour of the facility. The delegation was impressed by the design of the large modern centre inspired by traditional Kanak huts, as well as the traditional huts located on the grounds of the Centre.



Members of the delegation touring the Tjibaou Cultural Centre

Wednesday, 30 August 2023

On Wednesday, 30 August 2023 the delegation departed New Caledonia for Fiji, and, because of limited flights, had a short stopover in Port Vila, Vanuatu. During this stopover the delegation had lunch with staff from the Australian High Commission in Vanuatu and took a short tour of the Port Vila foreshore and local markets.

The delegation arrived in Suva late on Wednesday evening and were escorted by Deputy High Commissioner Mr Stuart Watts and staff from the Australian High Commission to their hotel.

Thursday, 31 August 2023

In the morning, Deputy Commissioner Watts and staff from the Australia High Commission provided the delegation with a briefing on Australia's bilateral relationship with Fiji, and outlined current events, including the recent national election, that were likely to be raised with the delegation during its visit.

Meeting with Speaker of the Parliament of Fiji

The delegation then travelled to the Parliament of Fiji, where they met with the Speaker of the Parliament of Fiji, the Hon. Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu. Also in

attendance was the Secretary General of the Parliament of Fiji, Ms Jeanette Emberson, Deputy Secretary General, Mr Abele Sakulu, and other senior parliamentary staff members.

The Speaker spoke about a range of issues, including the importance of exchanging knowledge about the Parliament and its operation, including with respect to standing orders and legislation, and the development of induction programs for new parliamentarians. He noted Australia's close relationship with the Parliament of Fiji, highlighting his recent meeting with the Speaker of the Australian House of Representatives, the Hon, Milton Dick.

The Speaker, his staff and the delegation discussed a range of issues, including:

- Parliamentary sitting calendars, and finding the balance between sitting, and undertaking committee work and electorate work;
- The challenges that new parliamentarians can face in familiarising themselves with their new roles; and
- The importance of transparency in registering members interests.

Talanoa roundtable with chairs of parliamentary committees

The delegation then participated in a roundtable with the chairs of Fiji's six standing parliamentary committees, led by the Hon. Viliame Naupoto.

The committee Chairs and the delegation discussed a range of issues, including:

- Comparing experiences of committee work, including holding of committee meetings publicly and private;
- The types of issues that committees in Fiji and Australia may examine, including with regard to issues of climate change;
- The mechanisms by which matters are referred to committees; and
- How chairpersonship is determined, and how chairs are remunerated for their additional role.



The delegation with committee Chairs of the Parliament of Fiji

Lunch with Australia Awards Alumni in the Fiji health sector

In the afternoon, the delegation then travelled to a local restaurant to share lunch with Australia Awards Alumni working in the Fijian health sector. The alumni shared their perspectives on undertaking study in Australia, and outlined how they used their skills in Fiji, including in relation to vaccine studies and in providing birthing support in remote parts of Fiji.

Visit to Maritime Essentials Service Centre

The delegation then travelled to the site of the Maritime Essentials Service Centre, a development under construction through an Australia-Fiji partnership. The delegation was provided with a briefing on the facility, led by Australian Captain Ben Carruthers, 19th Chief Engineer Works, Australian Army.



Captain Carruthers displaying a model of the completed design

Captain Carruthers advised that the facility will be home to the Republic of Fiji Navy Headquarters, the Rescue Coordination Centre, Suva Radio Coastal Radio Station and Fiji Hydrographic Office. The delegation was impressed by the scale of the development and the progress in its construction.

Visit to Pacific Building Solutions

The delegation then travelled to Pacific Building Solutions and met with Mr Michael Fairfax and Mr Rob Semaan (Directors) and Mr Peter Rankin (Architect from Architect Asia Pacific Inc Design). The delegation received a briefing on PBS' work prefabricating school infrastructure for Australia's cyclone recovery program in Vanua Levu and inspected parts of these buildings in the warehouse. The delegation appreciated the detailed information provided about how these school buildings were designed to suit their local environment, and the impact that their delivery has had on small communities.

The delegation was interested to hear about how many local workers Pacific Building Solutions employed, but also noted the view that the PALM Scheme could mean that skilled workers in the construction industry were less available in Fiji because many elected to travel to Australia to work.

Formal reception at the Australian High Commission in Fiji

In the evening the delegation travelled to the Australian High Commission in Fiji for a formal reception hosted by His Excellency Mr Ewen McDonald, High Commissioner. This reception coincided with the 2nd Pacific Islands Forum (PIF)

Women Leaders Meeting in Suva. Consequently, the delegation was pleased to also meet at this reception with Senator the Hon Katy Gallagher, Minister for Finance; Secretary-General of the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, Mr Henry Puna; and the Hon. Lynda Tabuya, Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation in Fiji.



The delegation with High Commissioner Mr Ewan McDonald and Deputy High Commissioner Mr Stuart Watts

Friday, 1 September 2023

Tour of Nausori Municipal Markets

The delegation travelled to Nausori to tour the Nausori Municipal Markets, and the adjacent Women’s Accommodation Centre. This tour was hosted by Fiji Minister for Local Government, the Hon. Macui Nalumisa. The delegation noted that the new accommodation centre was developed together with United Nations Women as part of the Markets for Change project with the support of the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

The delegation was impressed by the size of the markets, noting that over one thousand (primarily female) vendors sold their produce and handicrafts at this site. The delegation received an overview of the project from representatives in the accommodation centre, and was particularly grateful to hear personal stories from women vendors about the positive impact that this accommodation facility had had on their ability to market their wares in safety.



The delegation in the common space of the accommodation centre

Visit to Nausori Primary School

The delegation then travelled a short distance to Nausori Primary School where over fifty school children were gathered to participate in a Team Up Get Into Rugby PLUS Clinic, a sports for development program forming part of the Australian Government's sports diplomacy strategy.

The delegation joined in as two groups of school children participated in the rugby clinic, which combined developing rugby skills and critical thinking and reflection around issues of respectful relationships, gender stereotypes and violence. The delegation then heard from the coaches about the development of the program, and the positive impacts they were observing in the children participating.

Lunch with returned PALM workers

The delegation then returned to the Australian High Commission where they were met by the Minister for Local Government, the Hon. Macui Nalumisa and several returned PALM scheme workers. Over lunch, the delegation heard stories from

these returned workers about their experiences of working in Australia, and the impact that the scheme had on their lives and those of their families. Workers explained that their ability to participate in the scheme was positive, as it provided access to much higher paying jobs than they could access domestically. However, it was also noted that some workers felt they had experienced racism in Australia.



The delegation at the Australian High Commission in Fiji

The delegation then departed Suva for Australia. During this transit, the delegation was pleased to briefly meet the Prime Minister of Fiji, Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka.

The delegation takes this opportunity to again thank the Consulate in New Caledonia, and the High Commission in Fiji, their staff and all the organisations it met with for their time and hospitality during what was an informative and successful visit to New Caledonia and Fiji.

Delegation Program

Sunday, 27 August 2023

- 10.50 Ms Dai Le MP and Ms Charlotte Fletcher arrive in Tontouta Airport, Nouméa
Check in to hotel, Chateau Royal
- 22.35 Ms Miller-Frost MP, Dr Webster MP, Mr Gosling MP, Mr Young MP arrive in Tontouta Airport, Nouméa
Check in to hotel

Monday, 28 August 2023

- 8.00 Briefing with Australian Consul-General, Ms Annelise Young
- 8.30 Transfer to French High Commission in Nouméa
- 8.45 Meeting with Mr Remi Bastille, Deputy Prefect, French High Commission in New Caledonia
- 9.45 Transfer to the Congress of New Caledonia
- 10.00 Roundtable with the Congress of New Caledonia, hosted by President the Hon. Roch Wamytan
- 11.45 Lunch with President the Hon. Roch Wamytan
- 13.30 Transfer to the Government of New Caledonia
- 13.45 Roundtable with members of the Government of New Caledonia, hosted by the President of the Government the Hon. Louis Mapou
- 15.30 Transfer to the Customary Senate

- 15.45 Roundtable with the Customary Senate, hosted by President of the Customary Senate, Mr Victor Gogny
- 16.45 Transfer to hotel
- 18.00 Transfer to residence of the Australian Counsel General
- 18.30 Cocktail reception hosted by Australian Consul General Ms Annelise Young
- 20.30 Transfer to hotel

Tuesday, 29 August 2023

- 8.30 Transfer to French Armed Forces in New Caledonia
- 8.50 Military visit, aboard the POM Auguste Benebig
- 10.00 Transfer to Pacific Community (SPC)
- 10.20 Meeting with SPC hosted by Director-General Dr Scott Minchin, and tour of SPC headquarters
- 11.20 Transfer to Australian Consulate General
- 11.35 Lunch with Australian Consulate General staff and tour
- 13.15 Transfer to hotel
- 13.30 Roundtable on climate change and energy transition with members of Parliament
- 14.45 Transfer to Tjibaou Cultural Centre
- 15.10 Visit of Tjibaou Cultural Centre and media segment

17.30 Transfer to hotel

Wednesday, 30 August 2023

6.00 Check out of hotel

Transfer to Tontouta Airport, New Caledonia

8.50 Depart for Port Vila, Vanuatu

10.25 Arrive in Port Vila

11.00 Travel to lunch

11.30 Lunch in Port Vila with staff from the Australian High Commission in Vanuatu

13.30 Tour of Port Vila foreshore and local markets with staff from the Australian High Commission

15.00 Arrive at Port Vila Airport

15.55 Depart Port Vila

21.00 Arrive at Nausori Airport, Suva, Fiji

Transfer to hotel, Grand Pacific Hotel

Thursday, 31 August 2023

8.45 Briefing from Australian Deputy High Commissioner Mr Stuart Watts and High Commission staff at the hotel

9.45 Transfer to Parliament House, Suva

10.00 Meeting with Speaker of the Parliament of Fiji, the Hon. Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu

- 11.00 'Talanoa' roundtable with chairs of committees of the Parliament of Fiji
- 12.00 Transfer to hotel
- 12.45 Lunch with Australia Awards Alumni in the Fiji health sector
- 13.45 Transfer to Maritime Essentials Service Centre
- 14.30 Visit to Maritime Essentials Service Centre
- 15.30 Transfer to Pacific Building Solutions
- 15.45 Tour of Pacific Building Solutions
- 16.30 Transfer to hotel
- 18.15 Transfer to residence of the Australian High Commissioner
- 18.30 Reception at the Australian High Commissioner's residence
Hosted by Australian High Commissioner, HE Mr Ewen McDonald
- 20.30 Transfer to hotel

Friday, 1 September 2023

- 4.15 **Mr Gosling MP transfers to Nausori Airport for departure to Australia at 6.00**
- 8.45 Transfer to Nausori
- 9.30 Visit to Nausori Municipal Markets
- 10.15 Transfer to Nausori Primary School

- 10.30 Visit to Nausori Primary School
Get Into Rugby PLUS Team Up clinic
- 12.00 Transfer to Australian High Commission
- 12.30 Lunch with returned PALM workers
Hosted by Deputy High Commissioner, Mr Stuart Watts
- 14.15 Transfer to hostel
- 15.00 Transfer to Nausori Airport
- 17.30 Depart Suva for Australia