

To the Chair and honourable Members Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs,  
Defence and Trade

Subject: Taipei Economic and Cultural Office in Australia Submission to the  
Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade:  
Inquiry into *Australia's response to the priorities of Pacific Island  
countries and the Pacific Region*

## Overview

Taiwan, Republic of China, has been a dedicated and responsible partner in the Pacific region since 1993, participating in Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) events, as well as engaging in bilateral and multilateral activities designed to address the policy priorities of Pacific Islands nations as well as the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals.

The Taiwanese government's longstanding and continuing commitment to contributing to regional security and sustainable development by sharing Taiwan's medical expertise and technological prowess has provided a significant body of insights into the needs and priorities of Pacific Islands countries – one which Taiwan is eager to share with its friends and partners, especially Australia.

In our view, Taiwan, Australia, and the nations of the Pacific region, share a three way intersection of interests, challenges, and opportunities. Taiwan and Pacific Islands nations share a great deal in terms of geopolitical pressures and public health challenges<sup>1</sup>. This, combined with Australia's longstanding prioritisation of the Pacific region, creates several opportunities to continue and enhance trilateral cooperation in meeting the multiple challenges faced by Pacific Islands nations.

The welfare, security, and development of the Pacific region is a policy imperative shared by both Australia and Taiwan, which makes Taiwan and Australia natural partners in working to better understand the region's needs and working together in a variety of formats, formal or informal, minilateral, bilateral, or multilateral, to further advance the sustainable development of a range of areas across the terms of reference of this inquiry.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://en.mofa.gov.tw/News\\_Content.aspx?n=1329&s=115922](https://en.mofa.gov.tw/News_Content.aspx?n=1329&s=115922)

## Key Challenges

Through Taiwan's long and sustained involvement with Pacific Islands allies, partners, and friends, a good understanding of the region's most pressing priorities has been gained. Throughout the remainder of this submission, we aim to list those priorities which have emerged as the most pressing, as well as highlighting actions and initiatives Taiwan has already undertaken to address these challenges.

The key challenges which our work in the Pacific region has uncovered are, in no particular order, as follows:

- Economic development
- Technological, especially telecommunications, development
- Public health
- Climate change effects mitigation
- Ocean Acidification
- Coastal Erosion
- Resource depletion
- Clean energy
- Capacity development
- National resilience
- Sustainable resource management
- Human resource development
- Food safety
- Counter foreign interference

In short, the region's priorities, as they have emerged through dialogue and Taiwan's active participation in aid and development programs, have emerged as being related to environmental concerns, especially around climate change, overall national development, especially in the areas of resilience and capacity building, and the proper development of human capital through the improvement of education and public health and the preservation of democratic governance.

## Taiwan's Bilateral Development Programs

Taiwan's International Cooperation and Development Fund<sup>2</sup> (ICDF) was established to promote international development cooperation, focusing on providing technical

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.icdf.org.tw/wSite/mp?mp=2>

assistance, humanitarian aid, and capacity building to partner countries, particularly in areas such as agriculture, healthcare, education, and infrastructure development.

Every Taiwan ICDF project is conducted in accordance with a rigorous project cycle, ensuring concrete and measurable outcomes, and is backed by mutual covenants signed in cooperation with all relevant stakeholders, addressing the strategic development goals of each of our partner countries, paying due consideration to associated regional trends, and maximising results by employing the right combination of capital and technical cooperation.

This rigorous process cycle, especially those phases dealing with discovery and the identification of needs, means that the ICDF's work is tailor-made to address the most pressing priorities of each of our partner nations.

This far, the ICDF has been engaged in projects across a variety of contemporary development issues, including agriculture, public health and medicine, education, information and communications technology, environmental protections, and the development of small to medium business enterprises.

For the committee's reference, we have included links to the ICDF's activities in Tuvalu, Palau, The Marshall Islands, PNG, and Fiji:

[ICDF General Information](#)

And the [ICDF's 2022 Annual Report](#).

## **Joint Efforts to Combat Climate Change in the Region**

The devastating effects of climate change are arguably among the most pressing challenges facing countries in the Pacific region. Some of these impacts are already being felt, to devastating effect, and the culmination of these impacts represents an existential threat to most if not all Pacific Islands nations.

With this in mind, Taiwan has pledged 10 million USD<sup>3</sup> to the establishment of the Climate Transition Fund in collaboration with Pacific allies—namely, Tuvalu, the Marshall Islands, and Palau, during the 28th Conference of the Parties of the United

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<sup>3</sup> [https://en.mofa.gov.tw/News\\_Content.aspx?n=1328&s=116190](https://en.mofa.gov.tw/News_Content.aspx?n=1328&s=116190)

Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC COP28) in 2023. This commitment is in addition to the multiple programs and initiatives Taiwan already undertakes to help Pacific Islands nations prepare for and mitigate the impacts of climate change.

This commitment aligns with the “loss and damage” fund announced at COP 28 as part of the global trend of developed countries supporting developing nations’ efforts to promote climate change adaptation, demonstrating Taiwan’s determination to make a positive contribution to the international community.

Recently Taiwan and Australia’s joint participation in the Tuvalu Coastal Adaptation Project<sup>4</sup>, designed to assist Tuvalu in its efforts to conduct large scale land reclamation, is a good example of regional partnerships which can be of great benefit to all involved. The stability and prosperity of the Pacific region depends, in large part, on the capacity of Pacific Islands nations to mitigate and withstand the impacts of climate change and rising sea levels. And it is clear that both Australia and Taiwan have a strong and direct interest in ensuring and enhancing the stability and prosperity of the Pacific region.

## **Multilateral Efforts in Support of Regional Development**

### *GCTF Activities*

In 2015, Taiwan and the US established the Global Cooperation and Training Framework<sup>5</sup> (GCTF), and later Japan and Australia became GCTF’s full partners. The international workshops held under the GCTF platform have repeatedly unearthed key Pacific Islands nation priorities, providing multiple opportunities for Taiwan and other members to contribute directly to strengthening the capacity building for these nations in their efforts.

The GCTF has highlighted issues around public health, energy security, transnational crime, and of course, climate change. Additionally, Humanitarian Aid and Disaster Relief has been a frequent area of collaboration, both in terms of the involvement of Pacific Islands nations in such efforts, as well as their need to receive such aid in the event of disasters occurring.

Further to this, concerns around the revitalisation of Austronesian languages, as part

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.foreignminister.gov.au/minister/penny-wong/speech/tuvalu-state-dinner-funafuti>

<sup>5</sup> <https://gctf.tw/en/>

of a larger set of considerations around the preservation and promulgation of the Pacific region's unique cultural heritage, have arisen in the past, with the US, Taiwan, and Japan cohosting a workshop on ways to preserve and promote these threatened languages<sup>6</sup>.

Digital threats to democracy are also an issue of major concern to nations within the region, especially as efforts on the part of Taiwan and other regional partners have contributed to greater connectivity. Workshops on media literacy<sup>7</sup> have been held with Taiwan sharing its expertise gleaned from many years as the target of intensive grey zone disinformation campaigns.

In May of 2024, the GCTF hosted a workshop on Resilience in Telecommunications and Cybersecurity<sup>8</sup>, at which Australia's Ambassador for Cyber Affairs and Critical Technology delivered an address. With increasing cyber threats coming from increasing connectivity, Taiwan is aware of increasing concerns around digital and cyber resilience from our friends and partners in the region.

### *PIF Participation*

Taiwan's longstanding and developing participation in the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) has provided with insights into the education and training priorities of Pacific Islands nations. Taiwan's involvement in the Council of Regional Organisations of the Pacific (CROP) Development Program, has helped with the provision of numerous regional development and scholarship programs.

These programs aimed to help fill skills and qualifications shortages in the areas of climate change, natural disaster response, and pandemic response, highlighting the ongoing need for support in the areas of training and education faced by our Pacific partners.

Taiwan has provided PIF scholarships to more than Pacific Islands young leaders and aims to provide many more. To our minds, the continuing support of the development of human capital in the Pacific region is one of the key areas in which the sustainable growth and development of nations in the region can be fostered and enhanced.

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<sup>6</sup> [https://gctf.tw/en/issues\\_detail12\\_0.htm](https://gctf.tw/en/issues_detail12_0.htm)

<sup>7</sup> [https://gctf.tw/en/issues\\_detail63\\_0.htm](https://gctf.tw/en/issues_detail63_0.htm)

<sup>8</sup> [https://gctf.tw/en/issues\\_detail76\\_0.htm](https://gctf.tw/en/issues_detail76_0.htm)

### *ICT Projects*

Improved connectivity with the rest of the world, especially via technology, is a strong priority for Pacific Islands nations. This connectivity is important, not only because of the intrinsic benefits at a local level, but also as a key component of all aspects of Pacific development.

As such, Taiwan has participated in a joint project with Australia, the US, Japan, and New Zealand, to plan the installation of the Tuvalu's first undersea telecommunication cable<sup>9</sup>. This momentous project will create a substantial connection for people in Tuvalu with the Pacific region and the rest of the world, and laying the foundations for the closer interconnection of the entire region with broader global networks.

This interconnection of the Pacific region with the broader world has repeatedly emerged as a strong priority for our Pacific allies, partners, and friends, and it is our belief that there is scope for many more collaborations between Taiwan and likeminded countries like Australia to contribute to the development of the region in this area.

### **Geopolitical Challenges**

International cooperation and development within the Pacific region are frequently complicated by the increasingly aggressive actions on the part of China. Our allies, partners, and friends in the region are placed under increasingly intense diplomatic and economic pressure by Chinese agents and interests, often to the detriment of their own interests within the region.

China's use of debt trap diplomacy, elite capture, and economic enticements, as well as its substandard construction projects in Pacific Island countries, have a net negative effect on sustainable development within the region. Their irresponsible flooding of communications channels with disinformation, especially just following the Taiwanese presidential elections, creates serious challenges for democratically elected governments in the region. Further to this, Chinese inducement and elite capture activities present real and significant challenges to the preservation of democratic governance in the Pacific<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.foreignminister.gov.au/minister/penny-wong/media-release/elevating-australia-tuvalu-relationship-under-falepili-union>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2024-01-30/joseph-wu-taiwan-foreign-minister-china-sarah->

The use of diplomatic and political intimidation on the part of China, especially in its efforts to prevent Taiwan's good faith participation in Pacific region initiatives and international fora, places Pacific Islands nation leaders in difficult positions, and interferes with the international community's efforts to foster improved prosperity and stability within the region.

As such, we believe that one of the greatest priorities for the Pacific region is ensuring the united and whole hearted participation of the international community, as represented by Australia, Taiwan, and our friends and allies, so as to minimise the negative and disruptive effects of actions from less responsible international actors.

## **Closing Remarks**

The Pacific Region's priorities are easily apparent to friends and partners within the region, including and especially Australia. Taiwan believes that Australia is already a potent force for good in the region, and appreciates the existing dialogues between the two. Having said that, we also believe that more can be done to combine our efforts and insights in the Pacific. Through a more institutionalised approach, Australia and Taiwan are able to coordinate and better align our visions through closer collaboration on how to utilise our resources, thereby creating a more unified and consistent framework of international cooperation, and one which is even more resilient, and upon which the nations of the Pacific can place even greater confidence.

Yours sincerely,

Representative Douglas Yu-Tien Hsu