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Submission

Inquiry into Australia's response to the priorities of Pacific Island countries and the Pacific region

Department of Pacific Affairs
College of Asia and the Pacific
Australian National University

5 July 2024

Hon Shayne Neumann MP
Committee Chair
Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

**Re: Australia's response to the priorities of Pacific Island countries
and the Pacific region**

Dear Hon Neumann,

Please find enclosed a submission by the ANU Department of Pacific Affairs to your committee's inquiry into Australia's response to the priorities of Pacific Island countries and the Pacific region.

With the support of the Australian Government's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, I am very proud of the contribution DPA makes to evidence-based policy making in the Pacific, and to the expansion and enhancement of Pacific capability in articulating and solving Pacific challenges. In this submission we make four key points: first that our research has continuously supported the articulation of Pacific priorities; second, that our research shapes and steers policy and programming in Australia and the Pacific; third, that Australia's comparative advantage has always been, and will continue to be, in our ability to foster and maintain trusting and inclusive relationships with Pacific partners; and finally, that this work continues to require funding.

Our submission is complimented by that made by the ANU Institute for Climate, Energy and Disaster Solutions (ICEDS), which has similarly facilitated world class integrated research, teaching and policy engagement in their specific fields of expertise.

We are delighted to see the committee engage with these issues and would be happy to provide more information if required.

Sincerely,

Associate Professor Sonia Palmieri
Head of Department

Background

The Department of Pacific Affairs (DPA) at ANU is the lead partner in a consortium responsible for the delivery of the \$20million Pacific Research Program (PRP), currently in its second phase of implementation (2022-2026). With the Development Policy Centre (also at ANU, DevPol) and the Lowy Institute, we co-design a range of research and education activities, including capacity building across the region, under an overarching theory of change that seeks '*to deepen Australia-Pacific research & education partnerships that support evidence-based policy-making for the Pacific*'. It does this across five research thematic areas:

1) Gender, disability and social inclusion (GEDSI)

Our inclusive, intersectional lens captures Pacific diversity across gender, age, ethnicity/race, sexuality, disability, geography, culture and religion. Subtopics within this program of research include:

- Safety and security
- Health and security
- Inclusive leadership and political participation
- Education and inclusion

2) Pacific migration and integration

Examining temporary and permanent migration to and from the Pacific region is an important area of our work. Our research has focused on Pacific labour schemes such as New Zealand's Recognised Seasonal Employer scheme (RSE) and the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) schemes since 2007. Subtopics within this program of research include:

- Understanding economic and social impacts of temporary migration
- The impact of Pacific migration on Australia
- Sustainable pathways: the future of Pacific integration

3) Papua New Guinea including Bougainville

Pacific states and their institutions are being actively shaped by political economy factors, including the way natural resources are exploited, land is acquired and used, and the environment is affected. Subtopics within this program of research include:

- Decentralisation, service delivery and sub-national governance
- Political economy of PNG
- Future political status of Bougainville
- Crime, justice and safety
- Digital PNG

4) Politics, governance and economic resilience

This thematic area further building on an extensive record of research into politics, governance and economic resilience within and across the Pacific. Subtopics within this program of research include:

- Decentralisation, service delivery and sub-national governance
- Elections and electoral politics
- Political attitudes
- Political participation
- Economic development and economic resilience

5) Security, regionalism and geopolitics

Our research seeks to understand Pacific responses to these trends, and the ways they play into relations with both traditional and emerging partners, and into Pacific regionalism. Subtopics within this program of research include:

- New understandings of Pacific security
- Pacific regionalism
- Diplomacy in the Pacific

PRP research is based in trusted partnerships with a range of Pacific institutions and individuals built over many years.

In this submission, we present our ways of engaging with Pacific partners to meet Pacific research priorities, interests and needs, and to ensure that Pacific voices are heard in national, regional and international forums. In doing so, we specifically address terms of reference 1(a), 2(a) and 4. We draw the Committee's attention to (and commend) the submission by the ANU's Institute for Climate, Energy and Disaster Solutions in relation to TOR 3.

This submission builds on previous work submitted to predecessors of this committee, as well as other Australian parliamentary committees, notably:

- Submission 40, Associate Professor Julien Barbara and Kerry Baker, to the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade on matters related to supporting democracy in our region (year);
- Submission 18, DPA, to the JSCFADT into the human rights of Pacific women and girls (2021);
- Submission 11, ANU to the Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade into funding for public research into foreign policy issues (2021).

Key messages

1. Australia has a critical role in facilitating the articulation of – but not defining – the policy priorities of Pacific institutions and Pacific Islanders. Australian Government funded research provides an excellent opportunity to support Pacific Islanders in this policy articulation process.
2. Australian funded research – and specifically the Pacific Research Program – has played a key role in providing policy makers both in Australia and the Pacific with the evidence to design and evaluate effective and responsive policies and programs.
3. Australia's geopolitical 'competitive advantage' fundamentally relies on Australia's ability to work alongside Pacific Islanders with humility and an openness to listening and learning.
4. High-quality, policy-focused and impactful research, and the sustained regional partnerships that underpin it, require continued support from the Australian Government.

1) Australian Government funded research supports the articulation of Pacific priorities

Our research identifies the aspirations and concerns of people in the Pacific region. Given the complexity, richness and diversity of lived experiences across the region, research is needed that examines economic, social and environmental issues at various levels of analysis. Throughout the PRP, we have worked collaboratively with Pacific Islander researchers to a wide range of settings, that includes in-depth and longitudinal studies in village and urban settings, and at a local, national and regional level. Our research is always conducted in partnership because this brings Pacific credibility and legitimacy to our collaborative analysis.

Through this partnership model, PRP has supported the articulation of national-level Pacific priorities, captured in a range of reports including:

- Pacific Attitudes Survey (PAS): [Samoa \(2022\)](#) and [Vanuatu \(2024\)](#)
- [Solomon Islands](#) Election Observations ([2019](#), 2024 forthcoming)
- [PNG](#) Election Observations (2012, [2017](#), 2022 forthcoming)

Below, we present a selection of findings from this research that relates specifically to the key considerations of the Committee (economic, environmental and social development priorities).

Economic priorities in the Pacific

The **PAS Samoa (2022)** asked Samoans what they would prefer if they had to choose between 'reducing economic inequality' or 'protecting political freedom', 61% of respondents said 'reducing economic inequality' was more important than 'protecting political freedoms'. When asked 'what is the most important problem facing this country that government should address?' economics (38%) and health (37%) were the two biggest areas of concern for respondents. Specifically, the largest responses were for disease control, general health expenditures, economic management, and wages and incomes.

Respondents were asked which country should serve as a model for Samoa's economic development (Figure 23). Both New Zealand (36%) and China (33%) ranked highly as models for development, suggesting substantial polarisation in views on this question. This contrasted with lower support for Australia (17%) and the United States (12%). A related question (Figure 24) gauged respondents' perceptions of the key motivations behind foreign aid to Samoa. Overwhelmingly, 'economic development' (43%) was listed as the primary reason, while 'gaining influence' (28%) was listed second. New Zealand (95%) and Australia (92%) stand out as countries perceived to have the most positive influence on Samoa, while perceptions of China's influence (57% positive) were more mixed. While a majority of respondents perceived China's influence in a positive light, negative perceptions of China's influence (43%) substantially exceeded those of New Zealand (5%), Australia (8%) and the United States (19%).

Research surveys have also been deployed through the PRP on **Pacific attitudes to China** with collaborating partners in PNG and Solomon Islands to explore what people in the Pacific think of China's expanding interest and engagement in the region. A summary of these survey results was published in [this piece](#) on The Conversation.

The **PAS Vanuatu (2024)** found that there was widespread support for labour mobility schemes, although there are concerns about the impact on families. A significant majority of respondents

agreed that Pacific labour schemes have been both a positive for the nation (85%) and for their community (76%) overall. The biggest benefit participants noted was an “improvement to their household income” (64%) while 60% believed that “worse family relations” was the biggest negative consequence of participation in labour schemes.

On the question international influence, results show a majority (42%) of ni-Vanuatu respondents regarded China as the country with the most influence in the Pacific, followed by Australia (35%) and then the United States (13%). Australia (95%), New Zealand (91%), China (90%) and France (87%) stand out as the countries perceived to have the most overall positive influence on Vanuatu, followed by the United States (81%) and the United Kingdom (71%).

Environmental priorities in the Pacific

The **PAS Samoa (2022)** found that a narrow majority of respondents identified climate change as either an ‘urgent problem that needs to be addressed’ (43%) or an issue that is ‘not yet an urgent problem but will be addressed in the future’ (10%). A further 9% acknowledge climate change is an urgent problem but ‘there is little we can do about it’. Tertiary-educated respondents were more likely to believe that climate change is an ‘urgent problem that needs to be addressed’ (57%) than were the secondary- or primary-educated (39%). Urban respondents (56%) were significantly more likely to identify climate change as ‘an urgent problem that needs to be addressed’ than rural respondents (39%). Conversely, the 39% of respondents agreeing that ‘it will never be necessary to address climate change’ were significantly more likely to come from rural (42%) than urban (23%) areas.

The **PAS Vanuatu (2024)** found that climate change is perceived as a lived reality and urgent issue in Vanuatu. An overwhelming majority of ni-Vanuatu believe that climate change is an urgent problem that should be addressed (81%). From the survey results, we see strong and clear expectations that large emitters should compensate the most affected nations; that the national government should actively manage adaptation efforts; and that communities have a responsibility to accept displaced people from other areas.

Social development priorities in the Pacific

A wealth of data on citizens’ attitudes to women leaders and the experiences of women voters and women candidates in the **2022 Papua New Guinea general election** was collected through DPA’s election **observation study** and its work in implementing the Papua New Guinea Women in Leadership Support Program (WILSP). The WILSP report was submitted to DFAT in June 2024.

The **PAS Samoa (2022)** found that the view that the ‘the government should consult the Church when making laws’ was supported by nearly three quarters (74%) of respondents. When asked whether ‘it is important to respect tradition and culture even if it goes against the law’, some 85% of respondents agreed. The statement that ‘government should recognise the traditional way of doing things’, attracted even stronger agreement from respondents (97%). When asked about the five women MPs in Samoa’s parliament of 51 at the time of the survey, 56% of respondents believed there were ‘too few’ women represented in parliament.

The **PAS Vanuatu (2024)** found a strong majority of respondents agreeing that the government should consult the Church (91%) and the Council of Chiefs (94%) when making laws. When asked

about women's representation in Vanuatu's parliament, 82% of respondents believed there were 'too few' women represented in parliament.

Research continues in *Investigating the meaning of personal and community safety to women from a range of Pacific Island countries*. This pilot study seeks to uncover the meaning of personal and community safety to women from a range of Pacific Island countries, which includes their perceptions of risk and how they seek to reduce or prevent harm.

2) Australian government funded research provides the evidence to design and evaluate policies and programs

Impact on Pacific policies

Papua New Guinea conducted its tenth national election during July-August 2022. Following the election, Papua New Guinea's Leader of Government Business Rainbo Paita announced the establishment of a special parliamentary committee on the 2022 election. He provided that the committee would consider a range of issues, including the powers, functions, and responsibilities of the PNG electoral commission; the electoral roll; campaigning, voting, counting, declarations, and disputed returns processes; provision of security and expenditure of electoral funds. DPA led a large-scale observation study of the 2022 election. The post-election parliamentary committee provided an entry point for DPA researchers (Haley and Baker) to contribute insights based on the 2022 observation and long-term study of PNG elections.

Research conducted in partnership between PRP, Balance of Power and the USP Student Association (USPSA) to understand USP students' perceptions of women's leadership resulted in the USPSA implementing a 40 per cent quota for women for elections to its federal council. This policy change was an unintended, but very welcome, outcome of the research which began with a strong desire to establish a stronger relationship between BOP and USP. The roll out of this policy continues to be supported by BOP, with BOP staff attending the USPSA general meeting 24-27 June 2024.

Impact on Australian policies and programs

PRP has an established record of supporting program implementation by working directly with implementing partners to undertake research intended to foster deeper understanding of implementation contexts, including baseline conditions, and to shape future, evidence-based program directions. PRP has served as a research partner to DFAT Pacific programs through a range of models. For example:

- DPA was engaged as the research partner for the first phase of the Cardno managed Women's Leadership Initiative and undertook research that informed key parameters of the WLI's second phase, notably the importance of supporting women leaders on return from scholarship and the inclusion of men to support their leadership.
- Devpol, for the last three years and continuing through the Technical Working Group, has regularly met with and briefed DFAT and PLF on its labour mobility research, analysis, and

emerging thinking, including most recently in designing the Pacific Engagement Visa and thinking through family accompaniment arrangements, and providing bespoke data from the Pacific Labour Mobility Survey to assist in internal analysis and modelling.

- DPA is currently conducting research with the DFAT-funded Balance of Power program on voter attitudes in Vanuatu. This research, which is expected to inform BOP's future programming in Vanuatu, is being undertaken in partnership with BOP staff and with funding support provided through the PRP.
- As an example of its work in bringing evidence to bear on the design and implementation Pacific investments, in 2021-22 DPA undertook research (published in a report by researchers Dr Judy Putt and Dr Sinclair Dinnen, Vanuatu-Australia Policing and Justice Services Study), which formed a baseline for the Australian government supported Vanuatu-Australia Policing and Justice Program. The report includes a number of key findings and recommendations that emerged from the study. Those key findings have been directly communicated to key actors in the justice sector in Vanuatu and met with demand for more discussion on the implications of the findings. The research was funded outside of the PRP grant although publication of the report was supported by the PRP.

3) Australia's geostrategic 'competitive advantage': people-to-people links

The 2017 Foreign Policy White Paper acknowledged "(a)n increased focus on skills and education will be vital if the Pacific is to realise its economic potential" and highlighted strengthening people-to-people links, skills and leadership as a key priority of its engagement in the Pacific.

In three specific ways outlined below, the PRP continuously works to support people-to-people links across Australia and the Pacific: first, by convening forums in which researchers can interact with diverse policy actors in the Pacific; second, by enhancing the research capability of Pacific Islanders through bespoke training courses; and third by providing employment opportunities for Pacific Islanders.

Convening researchers and key policy actors

PRP partners regularly convene or contribute to policy dialogues involving experts on a range of development and policy issues related to the Pacific and policymakers from Australia and the region.

In 2019, the PRP worked with DFAT to develop and host an invitation-only dialogue on **Security in the Pacific** between officials and academics from the US, NZ and Australia held at ANU in June 2019. The 1.5 dialogue, the first of its kind under the PRP banner, which involved 80 participants, was designed to address a range of questions about geostrategic developments in the region.

In 2021, the Pacific Community (SPC) and DPA co-convened a virtual 'Symposium on family protection orders in the Pacific region'. The symposium brought together expertise from across the region, including from the Cook Islands, Fiji, Samoa, Palau, Papua New Guinea (PNG), Solomon Islands, Timor Leste, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. A [report on the symposium](#) was published in December 2022. The chapters of this publication published in December 2022 are based on the

presentations that were given at the event and provide insightful accounts of how family protection orders and domestic and family violence (DFV) response systems are working across the Pacific. The speakers contributed a rich array of expert perspectives and included lawyers, judicial officers, academics, police officers, government officials, and representatives from specialist DFV services, regional bodies, and aid projects.

In 2022, DPA hosted a workshop focused on conceptualising the **political consequences of climate change within Pacific nations**. The workshop discussions helped to inform the development of a conceptual research framework and a collaborative research program. It is also hoped that this research program will help inform adaptation efforts and elevate consideration of the political consequences of climate change.

DPA's **Climate Change Diplomacy** project continues to support Pacific Island leaders and negotiators in climate change negotiations, and collaboration with officials and negotiators in DFAT and DCCEEW. Under a special invitation from the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Program (which is the head of the One CROP Plus mechanism that brings together regional intragovernmental and UN organisations in the Pacific), DPA's George Carter provides technical negotiations and training support for PSIDS countries in the negotiation agendas of Article 6 (Carbon Markets), Gender and Social Inclusion, Youth, and Local Community and Indigenous Peoples, among others. Starting from 2014 in the making of the Paris Agreement, the project has gained momentum since COP26 Glasgow to present negotiations. More recently, the Australian Government's engagement in climate change with the Pacific has seen the expansion of the Climate Change Diplomacy project beyond negotiations. For example, the Australia- Pacific climate diplomacy project helped facilitate and advised on formal informal dialogues with DCCEEW and DFAT, and Pacific climate officials, First Australian and Pacific communities on indigenous and traditional knowledge. This collaboration and provision of strategic advice have been essential in the securing and promotion of the proposed Australia-Pacific COP31 bid. The project has also involved the facilitation and delivering of climate change technical courses for officials in Australia and the Pacific as well as continued research and training for officials on climate change and security nexus, or climate security.

In 2022, DPA researchers supported a critical dialogue in **Fiji on the state of its democracy**. From 14-16 August 2023, leading political and civic society actors in Fiji came together for a symposium entitled *Democracy Reimagined: Charting the Course for Fiji's Political Future?* This two-day symposium provided a platform for discussion and debate on Fiji's ongoing political transformation following its historic December 2022 election which saw a change in government after 16 years. The symposium focused on proposed constitutional and legislative reforms and their implications for Fiji's democratic future. In those debates, gender mainstreaming and inclusivity were prioritised, ensuring that diverse perspectives were considered. In a dynamic and inclusive dialogue over two days, a diverse cross section of Fijian society shared their ideas, experiences and aspirations for a revitalised democratic polity, mindful of the continuing challenges and opportunities that lie ahead, and the importance of fostering an inclusive approach in policymaking and implementation.

A PRP flagship event, the **State of the Pacific (SOTP)** conference brings together leading academics, policymakers, business leaders, civil society representatives and the media to present on, discuss and debate current issues of interest concerning the Pacific Islands region. To be held on 4-5 September 2024, SOTP will involve the presentation of new research and analysis from prominent Pacific figures and scholars and others deeply interested and engaged in the Pacific. The theme of this year's conference, *The Pacific's Place in the World*, seeks to engage with evolving narratives constructed both within the Pacific, and by those outside the region, in terms

of its own identity and its contribution to the defining global debates of our time: self-determination and decolonisation, climate resilience, migration and integration, and the elimination of inequality. Two keynote addresses will focus on particular self-determination journeys in the Pacific: one by President Moetai Brotherson of the government of French Polynesia, and the other by Theonila Roka Matbob, one of five female members of, and a minister in, the Autonomous Bougainville Government. In 2024, the conference will be opened by the Hon Pat Conroy MP, Minister for International Development and the Pacific.

Enhancing Pacific research capability

DPA's **Pacific Research Colloquium (PRC)** has contributed to enhancing research capability in the Pacific and the forging of new links between Pacific and Australian researchers. The PRC, a social science research skills training program mentoring early career researchers, has been run each year since 2007 (except 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic). The program brings 20-30 researchers from the Pacific to Canberra for a two-week intensive workshop to develop social science research skills and present a research paper on current or proposed research. Participants have the opportunity to submit their papers for publication in DPA's publications series and to receive editorial support. Since 2021, participants have been offered an opportunity to have their assessments accredited towards ANU qualifications such as the Graduate Certificate of Pacific Development and the Master of Pacific Development. The topics covered have also evolved considerably since its first iteration in 2007 with increasing focus on Pacific Research Methodologies, taught by Pacific Islander faculty at DPA. Successive cohorts of participants have been increasingly diverse, with young researchers coming from all parts of the region Cook Islands, FSM, New Caledonia, Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Samoa and Tonga.

The **Oceanic Diplomacy** project explores the unique and diverse indigenous diplomacies from across the Pacific Ocean, including Indigenous Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. Oceanic Diplomacy brings together a community of scholars who have contributed to a manuscript now under review with a publisher. The project is a collaboration between ANU and University of the South Pacific and is comprised of writings by royal family members, prime ministers, diplomats and academics from across the Pacific. These texts highlight the distinctive diplomatic practices and principles which come out of the long history and diverse cultures of the Pacific Islands. These longstanding systems remain relevant and important in the conduct of diplomatic relations among tribes and clans within the postcolonial states of the Pacific. These principles, practices and protocols work alongside Western diplomatic practices in the performance of modern diplomacy by Pacific Island states and are sometimes employed in the region's diplomatic approaches to the global arena.

The **2024 Solomon Islands Election Observation** involved a collaboration with researchers from the Solomon Islands National University (SINU) who were deployed across the provinces observed for a full month pre-, during and post-election (April 2024). In June 2024, the SINU researchers participated in a two-week writing workshop held in Canberra, to work through the draft report of the election observation.

The **Vanuatu voter motivation research** involved a research team with diverse experience in 'formal research'. Throughout 2023, the team – consisting of local BOP research, administrative and managerial staff as well as a representative from the Department of Women's Affairs and a DPA researcher – travelled to four provinces to collect data through surveys, facilitated community forums and semi-structured interviews. In each community, data collection was

supported by young people who received 'research 101' training beforehand. The full research team participated in a collective data analysis workshop in December 2023, and a writing workshop in June 2024 that produced a first full draft report. Ni-Vanuatu research team members will run a data validation workshop with a selection of research participants in June 2024 and the report is expected to be finalised in September 2024.

Creating employment opportunities for Pacific Islanders researchers

Since 2008, DPA has also offered 12-18-month Pacific Research Fellowships, awarded through a competitive process, to researchers from the Pacific to pursue research and writing at ANU. The fellowships provide established academics or promising early career researchers with time and space to write, away from busy teaching and administrative schedules at home institutions. Two fellowships have been awarded during the PRP period. In addition to these longer fellowships, DPA runs a short-term Pacific Visitor program, supporting Pacific researchers for 6-12 weeks to advance research and writing.

The efforts help to create strong links between Pacific scholars working in and on the region and also to develop the next generation of researchers who can work to influence the development of evidence-based policy in Pacific countries.

4) Continued funding required

PRP partners conduct research intended to inform the work of development partners, programs and initiatives directly funded by DFAT and part of Australia's broader engagement in the region. These initiatives include the Australia Pacific Security College, the Pacific Fusion Centre, the World Bank, Pacific Labour Facility, Balance of Power, the Australian Electoral Commission, the Justice Services and Stability for Development (JSS4D) Program, Pacific Women, and the Australia Awards Women's Leadership Initiative.

PRP researchers have also worked with the DFAT-funded Pacific labour facility in the development of a number of survey tools, including a pre-departure baseline worker survey and an employer survey and other instruments. PRP researchers have also facilitated processes intended to increase awareness of impact evaluations in PNG and the Pacific, specifically the types of impacts evaluations used in the Pacific and the potential for greater use of the approach.

PRP experts have conducted on average 300 briefings each year of the program, including on the record, background and Chatham House for a range of key stakeholders, both in person and online. Australian stakeholders briefed by PRP experts include government and opposition frontbenchers; several DFAT staff in Canberra including new Pacific HOMs Designate, and staff from the Department of Education, Skills and Employment; Prime Minister & Cabinet; Australian Federal Police; Australian Civil-Military Centre; ONI; Department of Defence; and Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications.

This level of engagement – and impact – in both Australia and the Pacific region remains reliant on government funding.

Support for quality research intended to inform future foreign policy related to the Pacific should focus on providing researchers with the scope to consider and develop forward-looking research

agendas focused on emerging issues, for example climate change politics and digital democracy. This involves providing core support for research institutions that affords researchers time to investigate these issues and provides research career pathways for researchers undertaking applied, policy-relevant research focused on foreign policy issues.

Ensuring that research agendas remain current and responsive to the needs of the Australian Government and partner governments in the region requires supported support to be delivered in a way that promotes research partnerships and collaborations across the region through which researchers can identify emerging areas of policy interest.

Both phases of the PRP show that there is a demonstrable return on investment for government in funding long-term research partnerships on issues of national importance. Provision of funding to research institutions on a long-term basis is a highly effective way to build and strengthen relationships that co-design and support innovative solutions to seemingly intractable development problems in the Pacific.