

## Submission to the Inquiry on the Australia-Tuvalu Treaty

I note the Treaty establishes a special relationship between Australia and Tuvalu with the "Australia-Tuvalu Falepili Union."

I believe it is incredibly important for Australia to deepen its relationship with our Pacific Ocean neighbours with both bilateral (as this treaty does) and multilateral options (such as through involvement in the Pacific Islands Forum). I also believe it is critical to take action on growing challenges in our region, such as the impacts of climate change. I support the creation of the Treaty and the many critical ways it deepens cooperation between Australia and Tuvalu, including climate cooperation, human mobility, and security cooperation.

Security cooperation in the Treaty includes several provisions where Tuvalu can request assistance, including major natural disasters, public health emergencies, and military aggression against Tuvalu. All of these are serious threats and merit deeper cooperation between Australia and Tuvalu.

Major natural disasters, such as cyclones, flooding, or other incidents, can have serious effects. This will become even more serious as climate change increases the severity, longevity and frequency of major natural disasters. This highlights the way in which security concerns are inextricably linked to environmental factors, such as the climate crisis. In the midst of such disasters, receiving aid and assistance from neighbouring states can be extremely important to quickly respond to and recover from the impacts. Climate change is a severe and even existential threat to some Pacific Island nations, which is importantly recognised as such by the Treaty. The importance of cooperation on this issue is critical, including with immediate assistance during disasters, but also preparation and adaptation to best prepare for the future.

The COVID-19 pandemic brought to stark attention the threat from diseases and other health issues, including the challenge of distributing vaccines. Given the communicable nature of diseases, Australian health and security can only be secured when our neighbours are properly protected and vaccinated too. Australian aid included providing COVID-19 vaccines to Tuvalu and other Pacific Island nations. Given the likelihood of other pandemics or other diseases occurring again, including a provision for cooperation on public health emergencies is prescient to prepare for and assist with future health emergencies.

The provision on cooperation against incidents of military aggression against Tuvalu recognises Tuvalu's sovereignty and right to live in peace without foreign aggression. While there may not be immediate foreseeable threats of military aggression against Tuvalu, it is important to uphold the principle of respect for Tuvalu's sovereignty and society against such threats -- and that Australia is committed to being a reliable security partner and regional player that will support peace and stability. This deepens the existing security relationship between Australia and Tuvalu that has been built over preceding decades. This includes Tuvalu being one of the 12 recipients to the Pacific Patrol Boat Program, a program supplying maritime patrol boats from Australia to enable Pacific Island nations (who, with their extensive maritime territories could also be described as Large Ocean States) to conduct maritime surveillance and fisheries protection in their territorial waters.

The Treaty includes provisions for easier access for Tuvalu citizens to travel to Australia for living, working or studying, with a new Human Mobility Pathway, which is a welcome way of increasing the ability for Tuvaluans to move to Australia. This strengthens the social and economic ties between the people of Australia and Tuvalu.

While the Treaty does not seem to address the issue of permanent migration, there is the depressing spectre of climate change and rising sea level giving way to so-called "climate refugees," who are no longer able to live in their home countries because of the impacts of climate change -- which, concerningly, they were often the least responsible for concerned to western industrialised countries. Climate change with the impacts of rising sea levels and extreme weather events may completely submerge some islands or severely reduce their habitability. This will raise a new challenge for international migration and refugee law and confront the responsibility of neighbouring states (such as Australia) to welcome and harbour them. Australia (as a member of the Pacific community) should endeavour to welcome and assist climate refugees. We should not give up hope that Pacific Island nations -- including Tuvalu -- can continue to live in their own country, with strong action taken on climate change to protect their right to do so. However, the question of climate refugees and human migration will be something to consider in the future.

One cannot ignore the imperative for Australia (and the international community) to take serious action on mitigating carbon emissions to prevent the worst of climate change from occurring - and giving the best opportunity for low-lying island states, such as Tuvalu, for preserving their land, culture and livelihoods. The existential threat of climate change can only be prevented by serious mitigation, which Pacific Island nations including Tuvalu have been vocal about for many years. Such

work is critical to uphold what the Treaty recognises as the "Desire of Tuvalu's people to continue to live in their territory where possible and Tuvalu's deep, ancestral connections to land and sea."

Overall, the treaty between Australia and Tuvalu is an important and welcome way of deepening the ties and cooperation between the two countries (and an example more broadly of Australia deepening its ties with its Pacific Island neighbours).

Thank you for considering my submission.

Benjamin Cronshaw.