

1 One of the three core pillars of Japan's policy toward Pacific Island countries is to enhance cooperation and coordination with like-minded countries, including Australia. Australia is a very important partner in the Pacific Island region which shares a vision of a Free and Open Indo-Pacific, values, and strategic interests with Japan. Japan greatly appreciates and is very pleased with Australia's increased engagement in the region under "Pacific Step Up."

2 Australia is an important partner for Japan in defense engagement in the Pacific Island region as well. Japan and Australia together have participated in the Operation Christmas Drop in the Federated States of Micronesia, Palau and Northern Mariana Islands. Japan is pleased to note that Japan Ministry of Defense (MOD) is planning to have yet another concrete cooperation project in the region with Australia; MOD is planning to launch a new capacity-building project to enhance the Fijian defense force's ability to manage its new medical facility at the Blackrock Camp, a camp Australia is currently redeveloping.

3 As part of our efforts to strengthen Japan's relations with Pacific Island countries, MOD has increased its defense engagement with these countries. First, Japan has conducted multiple port calls by Japan Self Defense Forces' vessels and aircrafts in the region. Second, Japan is providing defense capacity building; for example, since 2015, Japan Ground Self Defense Force has been engaged in the development of the military band of PNG in the lead up to the 2018 APEC summit, and have been continuing the support. Third, MOD is strengthening its ties with defense authorities in Pacific Island countries. MOD State Minister Yamamoto has recently visited all the three countries that own military forces in the Pacific Island countries (Fiji, PNG, and Tonga) for the first time as MOD's political appointees and had meetings with each country's defense minister, aiming to promote defense cooperation and exchanges with these countries. Furthermore, MOD is planning to hold the first ministerial-level defense dialogue with Pacific Island countries in Tokyo, namely, the Japan Pacific Islands Defense Dialogue (JPIDD) 2020,

although it has been postponed due to the COVID19 situation. Japan is confident that given our increased defense engagement in the region, there will be more opportunities for Japan and Australia to further cooperate.

4 Furthermore, Australia's recently increased engagement in infrastructure development in the region through the Australian Infrastructure Financing Facility for the Pacific (AIFFP) complements Japan's longstanding infrastructure development efforts. Japan and Australia complement each other's efforts and together promote and develop quality infrastructure, which provides a foundation for sustainable development and further investment in the region. Japan welcomes Australia's increased engagement in the Pacific in infrastructure development.

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