

Inquiry into Australia's Response to the Priorities of Pacific Island Countries and the Pacific Region

Submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade by the Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA)

INTRODUCTION

The Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade's inquiry into Australia's response to the priorities of Pacific Island Countries and the Pacific Region.

AMSA is actively engaged with Pacific maritime and regional development stakeholders to enhance inter-agency cooperation and build capacity in areas such as maritime and navigation safety, marine environment protection and search and rescue.

KEY PRIORITIES FOR THE PACIFIC ISLAND COUNTRIES AND THE PACIFIC REGION

Pacific One Maritime Framework

The 5th Pacific Energy and Transport Ministers meeting in 2023 committed to developing a one-maritime framework with appropriate plans and solutions aligned to the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent.

The Pacific Community (SPC), in cooperation with, and using funding from the International Maritime Organization (IMO) and European Union, is leading work to establish a Pacific One Maritime Framework (POMF). The framework aims to address and respond to the needs, priorities, challenges and emerging issues in the maritime sector in the Pacific focusing on safety and security, decarbonisation, environmental protection, digitalisation, and costs and access for remote communities. AMSA is represented on the drafting and steering committee for the POMF which is expected to be complete by early 2024.

Further details on this work can be found at <u>Pacific Regional One Maritime Framework |</u> SPC Geoscience, Energy and Maritime Division

IMO Regional Presence Office for the Pacific

The IMO operates a global regional presence scheme to establish capability to assist with development, coordination and delivery of technical maritime assistance to developing countries.

The IMO has agreed to establish a Regional Presence Office in the Pacific, with the office to be hosted by the Government of Fiji. Australia (AMSA) played a significant part in securing the agreement and increased IMO funding to the Pacific region.

The Regional Presence Office will deliver targeted technical assistance across areas such as legislation, maritime safety and security, marine environment protection, decarbonisation and combatting marine plastic litter.

AMSA is working closely with regional partners to help define what an effective office should achieve, and the governance and system requirements needed. This group is also

collaborating to ensure the role of the Pacific Regional Presence Office is clearly defined within the POMF.

AMSA'S ENGAGEMENT WITH THE PACIFIC

Pacific Search and Rescue Steering Committee (PACSAR)

Australia is a metropolitan member of PACSAR. AMSA held the Chair of PACSAR over 2020-2024, with a two-year term extended to four years due to COVID.

PACSAR comprises a group of search and rescue (SAR) agencies from five principal nations—Australia (AMSA), Fiji, France, New Zealand, and the United States of America—that hold responsibility for significant SAR regions within the Pacific region. Australia supports the PACSAR's biennial event and the PACSAR Working Group. In 2023 this was sponsored as part of the IMO's Integrated Technical Cooperation Program and involved 18 Pacific nations, with a focus on improvements to implementation of maritime SAR Convention requirements in the Pacific, and discussion on the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) Annex 12 SAR requirements.

AMSA remains committed to working with other partners and Pacific Island countries and territories to build regional SAR response capability.

Pacific Islands Regional Marine Spill Contingency Plan (PACPLAN)

Australia (AMSA) is the primary responder available to six Pacific Island countries under PACPLAN including Tuvalu, Nauru, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and Kiribati.

PACPLAN provides a framework for cooperative regional responses to major marine spills in the Pacific Islands region and sets out how Pacific Island countries can request assistance from Australia, New Zealand, France or the United States of America.

AMSA provided direct support to the Government of the Solomon Islands in response to an oil spill resulting from the grounding of the MV Solomon Trader in 2019 as part of the PACPLAN arrangements. This included the deployment of pollution control equipment and personnel.

APHoMSA

Australia (AMSA) is the permanent secretariat to the Asia Pacific Heads of Maritime Safety Agencies (APHoMSA) forum.

APHoMSA brings together senior maritime officials from 27 Pacific rim nations and 9 observer organisations, including the IMO and SPC.

The forum considers issues across five work streams:

- Maritime safety, including seafarer welfare.
- Marine environment protection.
- Maritime incident response.
- Regional Cooperation.
- Women in Maritime.

Achievements include championing:

- Increased funding by the IMO to the Pacific region to support technical cooperation initiatives.
- Establishment of the IMO Regional Presence Office.
- Establishment of an International Day for Women in Maritime on 18 May each year.

Papua New Guinea

The National Maritime Safety Authority of PNG (NMSA) and AMSA have a long-standing relationship as partners and neighbours in the Pacific region. The Australia-PNG Transport Sector Support Program (TSSP) is a long-term commitment to create a safer, more reliable transport system in PNG. The program, sponsored by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), delivers capacity development and technical assistance to PNG transport agencies, policy advice and strategic guidance.

Through AMSA and NMSA collaboration, this program has strengthened PNG's port State control ship inspections regime, delivered institutional improvements to the maritime rescue coordination centre, produced an updated Merchant Shipping Bill through to the consultation stage, assisted with the establishment of small craft registries, and many other achievements.

AMSA and NMSA are collaborating in a series of Capacity Diagnostic activities to identify the next 5 years of technical capacity building priorities. NMSA's strategic ambitions are a key driver for these activities, with objectives to significantly reduce assistance drawn from neighbouring countries, such as utilising SAR assets from Australia, and to develop and cement its role as a leading agency on maritime matters in the Pacific.

International Funded Students and Officers

World Maritime University (WMU)

Between 2018-2023, Australia funded 13 students from Fiji, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Papua New Guinea, Tonga and Tuvalu to undertake the WMU's 14 month Master of Science in Maritime Affairs program.

The WMU is recognised by the IMO and the United Nations General Assembly as the global centre of excellence for maritime and ocean education, research, capacity-building and economic development while also promoting the roles of women in the maritime and ocean sectors.

Australia is a strong advocate for the maritime interests in the region and we view sponsorship of students to the WMU as a significant opportunity to enhance the technical, professional and leadership skills of maritime specialists in the region.

International Maritime Law Institute (IMLI)

Ratification of international maritime conventions and ensuring their implementation in domestic legislation is a long-standing challenge for Pacific States. For example, although maritime liability and compensation conventions establish shipowner and insurer obligations with respect to liability for oil spills, some Pacific countries are yet to accede to these conventions. For those who have, many are yet to establish a comprehensive suite of domestic legislation to effectively implement them.

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In 2023, Australia (AMSA) provided funding to IMLI to support two students from the Pacific region, one each from Fiji and Vanuatu, to undertake the Master of Humanities or Master of Laws program.

IMLI is a leading centre for the training of specialists in international maritime law, with special emphasis on international regulations adopted by the IMO.

Implementation of international maritime law into domestic legislation is a common gap in the capacity of Pacific nations, and building the technical capabilities of legislative drafters in the Pacific region is fundamental to addressing these needs. IMLI's programs focus on this aspect as part of course requirements.

IMO Junior Professional Officer Program

In connection with Australia's support to establish the IMO Regional Presence Office (RPO) to the Pacific, AMSA provided funding to the IMO's Junior Professional Officer (JPO) program. Two positions were funded for one year for candidates from Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands.

Two female officers were selected, one from the National Maritime Safety Authority of PNG and one from the Solomon Islands Maritime Authority. The JPOs assisted the IMO in the early stages of establishing the Regional Presence Office.

Australia's support for the JPO program has also raised the profile of International Day for Women in Maritime, with PNG's recipient Ms Maria Dolores Biaun featuring in PNG's *The National* newspaper on Friday 17th May 2024 article 'NMSA's Junior Professional Officer to IMO Regional Presence Office'.