



Uniting Church in Australia
SYNOD OF VICTORIA AND TASMANIA

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**Submission by the Pacific Islands Council of South Australia and the Uniting Church in Australia, Synod of Victoria and Tasmania to the inquiry into the *Migration Amendment (Australia's Engagement in the Pacific and Other Measures) Bill 2023* and *Migration (Visa Pre-Application Process) Charge Bill 2023*
11 April 2023**

The Pacific Islands Council of South Australia and the Uniting Church in Australia, Synod of Victoria and Tasmania, welcome this opportunity to make a submission to the inquiry into the *Migration Amendment (Australia's Engagement in the Pacific and Other Measures) Bill 2023* and *Migration (Visa Pre-Application Process) Charge Bill 2023*. The organisations support the Bills and urge their passage through the Parliament without unnecessary delay.

The Pacific Islands Council of South Australia and the Uniting Church in Australia, Synod of Victoria and Tasmania, have worked closely together for two years in supporting people from the Pacific Islands and Timor Leste working on the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility scheme.

The submitting bodies agree with the Explanatory Memorandum that a new Pacific Engagement Visa (p. 2) "will strengthen country-to-country ties; support wider mobility within the region, thereby assisting the future regional response to climate change pressures; contribute to Pacific economies; and provide opportunities for cultural, business, educational, and skills exchange." Accordingly, we are supportive that participation in the new Pacific Engagement Visa scheme will be negotiated independently with each Pacific Island and Timor Leste government.

We welcome that the Explanatory Memorandum states that the new Visa will allow the applicant to bring their partner and dependent children to Australia. However, given the importance of extended family within Pacific Island cultures, consideration should be given to allowing extended family members to resettle in Australia. The most obvious may be the parents and siblings of the applicant and their partner.

The proposed ballot system will assist in mitigating that the new Visa will take away from the Pacific Islands its most capable people. Given the small populations of many Pacific Island countries, there is a risk of detrimental impacts on Pacific Island economies if people were selected only based on the narrow financial interests of Australia. We assume that the Pacific Engagement Visa will work similarly to the New Zealand programs, where a person

selected by the ballot will then have a period to secure a job in Australia before moving to Australia.

Migration has enriched Australia, building cultural understanding within Australia. We reject the views of those who argue that the only consideration in allowing people to migrate to Australia should be a narrow selfish interest in what will benefit Australia financially in the short term.

The submitting bodies support that the amount that can be charged by the Commonwealth Government for someone to register for participation in the ballot is capped at \$100, indexed over time. We agree that some charge is needed to ensure the applicant is committed to accepting a placement if they are drawn from the ballot. At the same time, the charge should not be set so high to become a barrier to anyone from a financially impoverished situation. We note that the Explanatory Memorandum suggests that the actual charge will be \$25 initially. We hope the Commonwealth Government will discuss an appropriate fee level with the Timor Leste and Pacific Island Governments to set an appropriate fee level for each ballot, noting that the New Zealand programs have separate ballots for each country that participates. We note that the New Zealand Pacific Access Category program has a charge for people to register for the ballot, which varies by the country the person is coming from. For example, for someone coming from Fiji, the cost to register for the ballot the first time is NZ\$85.

New Zealand has had the Samoan Quota and Pacific Access Category (PAC) programs that allow approximately 1,750 people to be granted residence in New Zealand annually. The programs were suspended over the period of the COVID-19 pandemic. Registrants are selected via a random ballot process and invited to lodge formal applications for the grant of residence in New Zealand. Those chosen by the ballot then undertake a search for employment in New Zealand.¹

Half a million Pacific Islanders have bid for a quota place since it began in the 1960s.²

The New Zealand experience has been that migrants from the Pacific had high retention rates. Approximately 80% of those arriving on a PAC visa in 2005 and 70% coming on a Samoan Quota visa in 2005 were still in New Zealand in 2017. PAC and Samoan Quota migrants reported high levels of satisfaction with New Zealand. Fewer than 5% were not satisfied. Quota migrants from both programs felt well-settled in New Zealand. Over 40% of PAC and Samoan Quota migrants felt "very settled".³

Recent migrants from the Pacific Islands to New Zealand were more likely to report they felt New Zealand was their home "completely" or "a lot" (94%) compared with recent migrants overall (82%).⁴ Most Pacific Islands migrants also reported that they could speak English "well" or "very well". High levels of English language confidence and competence are critical to a successful settlement.⁵

¹ "Evaluation of the Samoan Quota and Pacific Access Category Settlement Information Pilot – Final Report", *Kantar*, December 2019, 4.

² Gill Bonnett, "Residence visas being offered to up to 5,000 Pasifika after Covid-19 hiatus", *RNZ*, June 16, 2022.

³ "Evaluation of the Samoan Quota and Pacific Access Category Settlement Information Pilot – Final Report", 12.

⁴ "Pacific Migrant Trends and Settlement Outcomes Report", *New Zealand Ministry of Business, Innovation & Employment*, December 2018, 10.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 10

Pacific Islands migrants to New Zealand were found to be well-connected socially. Two-thirds reported they belonged to at least one social group or club, compared with 59% for recent migrants overall. They were also less likely to say they were treated unfairly because they were from overseas (37%) compared with recent migrants overall (56%). In addition, Pacific Island migrants were more likely to report that they were in jobs that matched their skills and qualifications (68%) compared to recent migrants overall (58%).⁶

A longitudinal study of Tongan migrants published in 2017 found those arriving from Tonga on a PAC visa:⁷

- earned on average almost 300% more than non-migrants in Tonga;
- had better mental health;
- lived in households with more than 250% higher expenditure; and,
- had more durable assets.

It was conservatively estimated that there was a lifetime gain of NZ\$315,000 in net present value in terms of moving to New Zealand.⁸

We note that New Zealand is not the only other country to use a ballot to allocate visas. For example, the UK has the India Young Professionals Scheme.⁹

In conclusion, the submitting bodies support the Bills noting there will be considerable detail to follow about implementing the Pacific Engagement Visa. Therefore, we urge the passage of the Bills through the Parliament without unnecessary delay.

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⁶ Ibid., 10.

⁷ "Evaluation of the Samoan Quota and Pacific Access Category Settlement Information Pilot – Final Report", 12.

⁸ Ibid., 12.

⁹ Kerry Garcia, "Ballot opens on 28 February 2023 for the new India Young Professionals visa scheme", Stevens and Bolton LLP, February 27, 2023, accessed April 11, 2023, <https://www.lexology.com/library/detail.aspx?g=53896ef5-a0b2-4240-a201-49854a18c51b>; and The Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP, "New cultural exchange scheme opens to young talent in the UK and India", UK Government, February 28, 2023, accessed April 11, 2023, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-cultural-exchange-scheme-opens-to-young-talent-in-the-uk-and-india>

About Us

Pacific Islands Council of South Australia

PICSA is a not-for-profit incorporated association managed by volunteers, who are representatives of member community groups and individuals, focusing on equipping and empowering the Pacific Islands community of South Australia to become prosperous and successful communities that fully participate as Australians.

The work of PICSA includes:

- Voice of South Australian Pacific Islanders to State and Federal government;
- Fostering cohesive community initiatives;
- Community capacity building;
- Developing collaborative relationships with communities (NGOs) outside of Pacific Islands Communities;
- Partnership with NGO, Corporate, Federal and State Governments;
- Advocacy Role; and
- Social Enterprise.

PICSA Key Focus Areas

STRONG FAMILIES

Providing workshops and initiatives to support family cohesion, building capacity in parents and children to strengthen family unity. Partnering with the Department of Child Protection and local NGOs to identify and equip parents to participate in the child fostering program.

SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT

PICSA partners with the APICC ministry (Aboriginal & Pacific Islands Christian Community) and the local churches to create a platform for connection and development where Pacific Islanders and the Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander community explore, share and develop their Christian faith.

YOUTH

Providing an avenue for youth capacity building and development, physically, mentally, and spiritually

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

PICSA contributes by partnering with a local training provider to engage communities in furthering their studies or accessing employment training and partnering with employment agencies to engage Pacific Islanders in specified roles. In addition, PICSA supports international students from the Pacific Islands who are furthering their studies in South Australia.

ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION

PICSA continues to explore business opportunities and creative financial pathways to encourage the Pacific Islands Community to contribute positively to the broader Australian economy.

LANGUAGE & CULTURAL HERITAGE

PICSA provides a platform for all Pacific Islands communities, including Timor Leste, to showcase their culture and language. PICSA is also establishing the first Pacific Islands School of Language and Culture, where communities will provide language and cultural classes.

HEALTH AND WELL BEING

PICSA provides avenues to provide positive health awareness workshops, preventative approaches and well-being. PICSA provides these avenues in partnership with local agencies and NGOs. For instance, 'life be in it' Cancer Foundation, Public Health Network (PHN). Organising sports day in partnership with local governments (councils).

ARTS AND ENTERTAINMENT

PICSA engages in initiatives that promote the Pacific Islands culture through different platforms of art, i.e. musical, theatre, contemporary music, and dance

SPORT AND RECREATION

PICSA engages in sports and recreation initiatives through partnerships with local sporting bodies to provide an opportunity for the local Pacific Islands community. This includes the South Australian Rugby Union, Life be in it, and South Australian Rugby League. In addition, we are providing activities for senior citizens.

Uniting Church in Australia, Synod of Victoria and Tasmania

The Synod of Victoria and Tasmania is part of the Uniting Church in Australia, the country's third-largest Christian denomination. The Uniting Church in Australia was formed in 1977 when three congregations – the Methodist Church of Australasia, the Presbyterian Church of Australia and the Congregational Union of Australia – came together.

We are one of six Synods comprising over 500 congregations and over 60,000 members. We also have 12 schools. We worship every week in more than 40 languages. Through worship, sharing the story of Jesus, and service in the community, we witness to the belief that life is most fully found in God.

The Uniting Church in Australia has had a long association and partnership with churches across the Pacific Islands. Many Uniting Church members have lived and worked in the Pacific Islands and continue to have a connection with people living there. In addition, the Uniting Church maintains formal partnerships with several churches through its agency UnitingWorld. There are formal partnerships with:

- United Church in PNG;
- Presbyterian Church of Vanuatu;
- Methodist Church in Fiji;
- Congregational Church of Tuvalu;
- Kiribati Uniting Church;
- United Church in the Solomon Islands (UCSI); and
- Solomon Islands Christian Association (SICA).

At the formation of the Uniting Church in Australia in 1977, the Assembly of church representatives acknowledged the importance of the Uniting Church in Australia to the people in the Pacific Islands region.

In 1987, the annual meeting of Uniting Church representatives from across Victoria adopted a policy position that called on:

That the Australian Government be requested to negotiate special migration rights for those South Pacific countries for which emigration is critical.