



SUB-REGIONAL OFFICE FOR OCEANIA  
PO Box 24233 Melbourne  
Victoria 3001 AUSTRALIA  
Mob/+61 467070242  
[tom.reddington@world-psi.org](mailto:tom.reddington@world-psi.org)

28 June 2024

## **Submission into Australia's response to the priorities of Pacific Island Countries and the Pacific Region**

Public Services International (PSI) brings together more than more than 700 trade unions representing 30 million workers in 154 countries and territories. We are a global trade union federation dedicated to promoting quality public services in every part of the world. Our members, two-thirds of whom are women, work in social services, health care, municipal and community services, central government, and public utilities such as water and electricity. PSI represents public sector and private sector workers who work in public services.

Within the Oceania sub-region, PSI represents workers in Australia, Cook Islands, Fiji, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, and Vanuatu. Our role includes the coordination of advocacy related to issues that affect our members and the communities in which they live.

We welcome the opportunity to make this submission into Australia's response to the priorities of Pacific Island countries and the Pacific Region.

*In response to the TOR, PSI has the following recommendations:*

1.1 Quality public services are fundamental to the sustainable development of Pacific Island Countries (PICs). Australia must engage with public sector unions in PICs as a key party regarding economic, environmental and social development.

1.2 Australia should support the creation of a Labour Ministers Forum at the Pacific Island Fourm (PIF) to deal with labour issues including labour mobility and international labour standards. This meeting should use a tripartite structure.

1.3 Australia should support the Pacific Island Council of Trade Union (PICTU) call for the PIF to host a PICTU desk and provide funding for participation in the PIF. PIF should include social partners in all their activities and programs including Global Union Federation representation.

2.1 Some of Australia's official development assistance (ODA) has previously gone to privatising public services and has been channelled through Australian for-profit companies. This has damaged and reduced public services and can be seen more in the interest of Australia than PICs. Australia's ODA must support the development of quality public services in PICs which are owned and operated by the state and staffed by trained public employees.

2.2 Public services workers from PICs are migrating to Australia and this is exacerbating workforce shortages and adversely impacting the delivery of public services in PICs. Australia must provide a fair share of ODA for the development of quality public services in PICs, support PIC governments to use social dialogue to develop workforce strategies and engage with PIC public sector unions on the development of training programs.

2.3 Given the PALM schemes' expansion into the care sector, Australia should:

**[WWW.PUBLICSERVICES.INTERNATIONAL](http://WWW.PUBLICSERVICES.INTERNATIONAL)**

Public Services International is a Global Union Federation of more than 700 trade unions representing 30 million workers in 154 countries. We bring their voices to the UN, ILO, WHO and other regional and global organisations. We defend trade union and workers' rights and fight for universal access to quality public services.

PRESIDENT  
**BRITTA LEJON**  
GENERAL SECRETARY  
**DANIEL BERTOSSA**  
REGIONAL SECRETARY  
**KATE LAPPIN**



SUB-REGIONAL OFFICE FOR OCEANIA  
PO Box 24233 Melbourne  
Victoria 3001 AUSTRALIA  
Mob/+61 467070242  
[tom.reddington@world-psi.org](mailto:tom.reddington@world-psi.org)

- 2.3.1 Invite PIC public sector unions to participate in the relevant advisory group.
- 2.3.2 Place a positive emphasis and provide resources to include PIC public sector unions in pre-departure orientation.

2.4 Australia should engage with PIC public sector unions to ensure that PALM scheme is targeting youth and the unemployed.

2.5 Australia should support the transfer of the superannuation of PALM workers directly to an appropriate relevant superannuation body in the PICs.

3.1 Australia should partner with PICs to support the development of quality public services to support communities to adapt to escalating impacts of the climate crisis. Quality Public Services should be owned and operated by the state and staffed by trained public employees.

3.2 Australia should support the development of social dialogue with PIC public sector trade unions to support Just Transition and the development of quality public services that communities need to respond to the increasing risks and existential threats of the climate crisis.

3.3 Australia should support the proposal from PICs for a Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty. This is a growing call for a new international instrument to coordinate a swift and fair global phase out of fossil fuels in line with the ambition of the Paris Climate Change Agreement.

4.1 Australia should implement the commitment in the ALP platform and provide ODA for trade union development in PICs. This should include partnering with public sector trade unions.

4.2 The PSI Oceania network provides an exciting people to people link in the region. Australia should continue to engage PSI Oceania and look for opportunities to share our common values.

*Detailed response to the TOR:*

1. Identify the key priorities for Pacific Island countries and the Pacific region.

**1.1 Quality public services are fundamental to the sustainable development of Pacific Island Countries (PICs). Australia must engage with public sector unions in PICs as a key party regarding economic, environmental and social development.**

The COVID-19 pandemic, and the increasing risks and existential threat posed by the climate crisis, exposes the unique vulnerabilities of Pacific Island Countries (PICs). Sustainable development is best served by coordinated and regulated services that are staffed by skilled and dedicated staff; publicly owned and managed services, quality public services, are best placed to achieve these goals.

**1.2 Australia should support the creation of a Labour Ministers Forum at the Pacific Island Fourm (PIF) to deal with labour issues including labour mobility and international labour standards. This meeting should use a tripartite structure.**

[WWW.PUBLICSERVICES.INTERNATIONAL](http://WWW.PUBLICSERVICES.INTERNATIONAL)

Public Services International is a Global Union Federation of more than 700 trade unions representing 30 million workers in 154 countries. We bring their voices to the UN, ILO, WHO and other regional and global organisations. We defend trade union and workers' rights and fight for universal access to quality public services.

PRESIDENT  
BRITTA LEJON  
GENERAL SECRETARY  
DANIEL BERTOSSA  
REGIONAL SECRETARY  
KATE LAPPIN



SUB-REGIONAL OFFICE FOR OCEANIA  
PO Box 24233 Melbourne  
Victoria 3001 AUSTRALIA  
Mob/+61 467070242  
[tom.reddington@world-psi.org](mailto:tom.reddington@world-psi.org)

PSI participated in the recent Pacific Tripartite High-Level Dialogue on Decent Work and the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent which took place in Suva, Fiji 23- 26 April 2024. The meeting noted the ongoing Review of Regional Architecture provided by PIF Secretariat and recognized the importance of considering regional labour concerns through this process.<sup>1</sup> Reflecting on the role of labour ministries and the unique tripartite approach, the governments tasked the PIF Secretariat to lead the establishment of a regular Pacific Labour Ministers Meeting.<sup>2</sup> The discussions on the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific made it clear that social dialogue, decent work and trade union rights needed to be strengthened in the strategy. It also became apparent through the “side event” discussion on labour mobility, that it was critical that these challenges been dealt with by the proposed Pacific Labour Minister Meeting and implementation of tripartite structures.

**1.3 Australia should support the Pacific Island Council of Trade Union (PICTU) call for the PIF to host a PICTU desk and provide funding for participation in the PIF. PIF should include social partners in all their activities and programs including Global Union Federation representation.**

The ILO high level dialogue was preceded by PICTU Biennial conference which PSI also participated on 22 April 2024. PICTU resolved to call on the PIF to host a worker’s seat and provide resources for a PICTU staff member. The Pacific Island trade union movement also identified the importance of the PIF imbedding tripartite structures throughout its operations and including social partners in its activities, including Global Union Federation representation.

2. Assess Australia's engagement in the Pacific and alignment of initiatives and policies with the identified priorities of Pacific Island nations.

**2.1 Some of Australia’s official development assistance (ODA) has previously gone to privatising public services and has been channelled through Australian for-profit companies. This has damaged and reduced public services and can be seen more in the interest of Australia than PICs. Australia’s ODA must support the development of quality public services in PICs which are owned and operated by the state and staffed by trained public employees.**

Under the previous Australian Government ODA to Fiji was used to support the privatisation of two publicly owned hospitals. Australian company Aspen Medical secured a contract with the Fijian government in 2019 to privatise the Lautoka Hospital and operate the newly built Ba Hospital. This agreement granted Aspen Medical a 23-year concession term to run and operate the hospitals. The proposal has been controversial in Fiji since it was first announced, with public criticism and sustained delays even before the COVID-19 pandemic. The Lautoka Hospital is a public hospital with 350 beds and a feeder hospital serving the greater district. Health workers and communities raised concerns around the impact Aspen Medical’s takeover

<sup>1</sup> [pacific-tripartite-meeting-suva-fiji-statement-2024-en.pdf](#).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.



SUB-REGIONAL OFFICE FOR OCEANIA  
PO Box 24233 Melbourne  
Victoria 3001 AUSTRALIA  
Mob/+61 467070242  
[tom.reddington@world-psi.org](mailto:tom.reddington@world-psi.org)

would have on access to critical health care and questioned whether privatisation was appropriate in Fiji. In 2021 it was revealed in senate estimates that the AUD\$1,386,500 of ODA to Fiji was spent on the project between 2016 and 2021. DFAT claimed that the aid money was directed to the International Finance Corporation to support the preparation and tender of the Public Private Partnership, and Australia was not involved in selection process which saw the contract awarded to Aspen Medical. In April 2022, over 3 years since the initial announcement, Aspen Medical commenced management of the two hospitals.

Sustainable development is best served by quality public health systems that are universally accessible and staffed by trained public employees. The use of Australian ODA to promote privatisation of Fijian hospitals is of great concern and creates inefficiency and inequity risks.

**2.2 Public services workers from PICs are migrating to Australia and this is exacerbating workforce shortages and adversely impacting the delivery of public services in PICs. Australia must provide a fair share of ODA for the development of quality public services in PICs, support PICs government to use social dialogue to develop workforce strategies and engage with PIC public sector unions on the development of training programs.**

Public sector worker migration to Australia from PICs is creating chronic worker shortages and negatively impacting the delivery of public services in PICs. Australia who is benefitting from this labour migration has an obligation to strengthen the delivery of quality public services in the sending countries. For example, the Fiji Nurses Association is reporting an unprecedented level of chronic nurse shortages due to migration to especially Australia. This is leaving the public health system in crisis, with often highly qualified nurses leaving for lower skilled jobs.<sup>3</sup> While it can be understood why workers seek better pay and conditions abroad, Australia has a responsibility to the PICs whose public sector workers it is benefiting from.

**2.3 Given the PALM schemes' expansion into the care sector, Australia should:**

**2.3.1 Invite PIC public sector unions to participate in the relevant advisory group.**

**2.3.2 Place a positive emphasis and provide resources to include PIC public sector unions in pre-departure orientation.**

The recent expansion of the PALM scheme into the care sector has further raised concerns and it is critical that Australian government engages with PIC public sector unions as a key party to ensure this scheme does not further exacerbate workforce shortages and benefits sending countries.

**2.4 Australia should engage with PIC public sector unions to ensure that the PALM scheme is targeting youth and the unemployed.**

The payment rate in Australia for the PALM scheme workers is very attractive compared with the salaries in the Pacific sending countries including in the public service. The rate of youth

---

<sup>3</sup> [Labour schemes drawing nurses from across Pacific to lower-qualified aged care jobs in Australia, New Zealand - ABC News](#)



SUB-REGIONAL OFFICE FOR OCEANIA  
PO Box 24233 Melbourne  
Victoria 3001 AUSTRALIA  
Mob/+61 467070242  
[tom.reddington@world-psi.org](mailto:tom.reddington@world-psi.org)

unemployment in PICs is high ranging from 18-45%. There is also increasing problems of public service workers leaving their jobs suddenly without notice to join the PALM scheme. To reduce youth unemployment in the Pacific sending countries and minimize workers leaving their work suddenly Australia should first prioritize the unemployed and youth for PALM scheme. Australia should consult with PIC public sector unions as a key party on the delivery of the PALM scheme.

### **2.5 Australia should support the transfer of the superannuation of PALM workers directly to an appropriate relevant superannuation body in the PICs.**

PSI supports social protection for all workers. Workers participating in the Pacific sending countries have very limited access to social protection in their respective countries. There have been reports of workers having problems of accessing their superannuation after their contracts in the PALM scheme. To support ensuring social protection of workers in the Pacific sending countries, Australia should transfer the superannuation of workers in the PALM scheme to a relevant superannuation organization in the Pacific sending countries. Australia should also engage with PIC trade unions to facilitate this process.

### 3. Assess Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation responses in the Pacific.

**3.1 Australia should partner with PICs to support the development of quality public services to support communities to adapt to escalating impacts of the climate crisis. Quality Public Services should be owned and operated by states and staffed by trained public employees.**

**3.2 Australia should support the development of social dialogue with PIC public sector trade unions to support Just Transition and the development of quality public services that communities need to respond to the increasing risks and existential threats of the climate crisis.**

**3.3 Australia should support the proposal from Pacific Island countries for a Fossil fuel Non-Proliferation treaty. This is a growing call for a new international instrument to coordinate a swift and fair global phase out of fossil fuels in line with the ambition of the Paris Climate Change Agreement.**

The increasing risks and existential threat posed by the climate crisis, exposes the unique vulnerabilities of PICs. Australia must support the development of quality public services as the key adaptation measure in PICs. Public sector workers are on the frontline of the crisis including nurses and other health workers, local government and disaster risk reduction workers, emergency service workers, community and social workers, utility workers and national administration and planning workers. PSI has recently undertaken research into the Green Climate Fund to assess the degree to which international climate finance is supporting the development of quality public services.<sup>4</sup> This initial investigation raised important concerns

---

<sup>4</sup> <https://publicservices.international/resources/publications/towards-a-public-goods-approach-for-climate-finance-the-case-study-of-the-green-climate-fund?id=13492&lang=en>

**WWW.PUBLICSERVICES.INTERNATIONAL**

Public Services International is a Global Union Federation of more than 700 trade unions representing 30 million workers in 154 countries. We bring their voices to the UN, ILO, WHO and other regional and global organisations. We defend trade union and workers' rights and fight for universal access to quality public services.

PRESIDENT  
**BRITTA LEJON**  
GENERAL SECRETARY  
**DANIEL BERTOSSA**  
REGIONAL SECRETARY  
**KATE LAPPIN**



SUB-REGIONAL OFFICE FOR OCEANIA  
PO Box 24233 Melbourne  
Victoria 3001 AUSTRALIA  
Mob/+61 467070242  
[tom.reddington@world-psi.org](mailto:tom.reddington@world-psi.org)

on the lack of evidence to show that international climate finance was strengthening the capacity of quality public services which communities on the frontline of the crisis desperately need. PIC public sector unions along with their counterparts from the Caribbean have further voiced their concerns in this video.<sup>5</sup> In Small Island Developing States it is crucial that public sector unions are at the table in the development and implementation of climate change programs and policies, and that donor countries support social dialogue principles. This is also key to achieving a just transition and the creation of decent work in PICs. Finally, it is critical that Australia increases its ambition on climate mitigation and demonstrates global leadership. We note that the call for a new international instrument to rapidly phase out the fossil fuels and ensure a just transition has come from PICs. Following advocacy from PIC affiliates PSI has been the first global union federation to endorse the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty.<sup>6</sup>

#### 4. Strengthen People-to-People Links and Partnerships including through well designed development programs.

**4.1 Australia should implement the commitment in the ALP platform and provide ODA for trade union development in PICs. This should include partnering with public sector trade unions.**

**4.2 The PSI Oceania network provides an exciting people to people link in the region. Australia should continue to engage with PSI Oceania and look for opportunities to share our common values.**

Strengthening the capacity of trade union movements in PICs is key to decreasing inequalities and supporting prosperity in the region. The COVID-19 pandemic has hampered inclusive sustainable development. The increasing and in some cases existential impacts of the climate crisis threatens the creation of decent work and inclusive development. Prosperity occurs through secure employment, the provision of living wages and universal access to essential public services such as healthcare and training. The International Monetary Fund has recognized that higher trade union density results in lower inequality.<sup>7</sup> The International Labor Organization has found collective bargaining agreements play a key role in reducing inequality and gender wage gaps.<sup>8</sup> Australia is critically placed to use a partnership model to strengthen the capacity of the democratic union movement across PICs.

---

<sup>5</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M\\_fOx6rb86M&t=5s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M_fOx6rb86M&t=5s)

<sup>6</sup> <https://publicservices.international/resources/news/psi-joins-the-call-for-a-fossil-fuel-non-proliferation-treaty?id=13503&lang=en>

<sup>7</sup> Florence Jaumotte and Carolina Osorio Buitron(2015), "Inequality and Labor Market Institutions," International Monetary Fund, [Accessed online 30/4/2020: [file:///C:/Users/treddington/Downloads/\\_sdn1514pdf.pdf](file:///C:/Users/treddington/Downloads/_sdn1514pdf.pdf)].

<sup>8</sup> For example see; Jill Rubery and Mathew Johnson(2019), "Closing the Gender Pay Gap: What Role for Trade Unions?" International Labour Organization, [Accessed online 30/4/2020: [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed\\_dialogue/---actrav/documents/publication/wcms\\_684156.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_dialogue/---actrav/documents/publication/wcms_684156.pdf)].

**WWW.PUBLICSERVICES.INTERNATIONAL**

Public Services International is a Global Union Federation of more than 700 trade unions representing 30 million workers in 154 countries. We bring their voices to the UN, ILO, WHO and other regional and global organisations. We defend trade union and workers' rights and fight for universal access to quality public services.

PRESIDENT  
**BRITTA LEJON**  
GENERAL SECRETARY  
**DANIEL BERTOSSA**  
REGIONAL SECRETARY  
**KATE LAPPIN**



SUB-REGIONAL OFFICE FOR OCEANIA  
PO Box 24233 Melbourne  
Victoria 3001 AUSTRALIA  
Mob/+61 467070242  
[tom.reddington@world-psi.org](mailto:tom.reddington@world-psi.org)

Public sector trade unions in PICs provide a key development partner for the Australian government. Public sector trade union in PICs are foundational members of their respective union movements. They are often the most established, have large memberships and advocate for universal social protection through the provision of quality public services for all. Despite this they often lack overall capacity and technical expertise. The PSI Oceania sub-region fosters a strong people to people link between Australia, New Zealand, and PICs public sector workforce. We hold an annual face to face conference and meet online quarterly. We also foster exchange between affiliates with Australian unions hosting their PICs counterparts at conferences and other events throughout the year.

Pacific Island public sector unions have identified an opportunity for ongoing and consistent capacity building to strengthen in-country operations and impact. Australia is uniquely placed to create a new program using ODA to support this and we note the commitment in the ALP to use the aid program to support trade union development. In the Indo-Pacific region most of the ODA for democratic trade union development is focused on Asia so there is a key gap in PIC. There are already existing strong relationships between trade unions in PICs and Australia. PSI is well positioned to administer such partnerships. Trade union development is a key pillar of PSI's work globally. PSI partners with a range of mainly European agencies that administer ODA for trade union development and has strong internal capacity to meet standards, oversee project cycle, including monitoring and evaluation.

For further information on this submission please contact

Tom Reddington  
Oceania Sub-Regional Secretary  
Public Services International  
[tom.reddington@world-psi.org.au](mailto:tom.reddington@world-psi.org.au)

**End of submission.**

[WWW.PUBLICSERVICES.INTERNATIONAL](http://WWW.PUBLICSERVICES.INTERNATIONAL)

Public Services International is a Global Union Federation of more than 700 trade unions representing 30 million workers in 154 countries. We bring their voices to the UN, ILO, WHO and other regional and global organisations. We defend trade union and workers' rights and fight for universal access to quality public services.

PRESIDENT  
**BRITTA LEJON**  
GENERAL SECRETARY  
**DANIEL BERTOSSA**  
REGIONAL SECRETARY  
**KATE LAPPIN**