

This submission is made by the following Blue Pacific citizens and PhD candidates from the Department of Pacific Affairs of the Australian National University (ANU), namely: Natasha Turia Moka, Akka Rimon, Michael Kabuni and Jope Tarai.

We welcome and endorse the necessary legislative changes into the Migration Amendment (Australia's Engagement in the Pacific and Other Measures) Bill 2023 and the Migration (Visa Pre-application Process) Charge Bill 2023 for a Pacific Engagement Visa (PEV). We also put forward the recommendation to consider the application of a Pacific Mobility Index (PMI) to further strengthen the delivery of the PEV that can be used at the discretion of the Minister for Immigration, Citizenship and Multicultural Affairs.

The comments and views expressed in this submission are only that of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the individual countries of which we originate from or the institution we are affiliated to. Nor do we claim to reflect the wider regional views of the Blue Pacific continent. It is our interpretation of the Blue Pacific strategy as the guiding principle that promotes transformative engagements in the region as citizens of the Blue Pacific continent and indigenous Pacific scholars.

Position

This submission addresses two key elements of this Bill and its implementation in the Blue Pacific continent:

1. Our support of the Bill in advancing and strengthening Australia's relationship in the Pacific through greater open and fair permanent migration access schemes delivered through a "visa pre-application" or ballot process for a PEV.
2. Provision of additional guidance regarding any discretionary powers that may otherwise be used by the Minister for Immigration, Citizenship and Multicultural Affairs, through an index that we are introducing as the **Pacific Mobility Index (PMI)**.

Blue Pacific narrative

How Australia chooses to navigate itself in the Blue Pacific continent amid the geo-political pressures, will lie solely on its ability to demonstrate that it is indeed part of the Pacific family. "Pacific diplomacy" through established channels of consultation that promote the interests of Pacific Island countries with Australia must be at the fore. Australia's proposed PEV would be a historical opportunity to demonstrate such sincerity and recognition of the diverse cultures, peoples, histories and environments of the Pacific. This diversity provides significant challenges and opportunities.

Australia's tied relationship with the Pacific is underpinned by its geo-graphical proximity, historical engagements and ongoing partnerships. Advancing Australia's relationship in the Pacific has now reached a new level of engagement with the issue of mobility. Fundamental to this emerging agenda, is the need for collaborative participation and engagement between Pacific stakeholders and Australia. Further consultation is required with the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, South Pacific Regional Environment Program, and the South Pacific Commission.

Pacific Mobility Index (PMI)

Reaffirming the Australian Government's priorities and commitments to the Pacific, we introduce and put forward a PMI that reflects the competing priorities of PICs that can be administered through the Minister's general powers. For the purposes of this submission, we introduce only the first three key indicators: **climate vulnerability, diaspora population and historical ties**. This builds on the need for Australia to be more selective in how it distributes

the PEVs¹ where the narrative for new regional compact ² is dawning. Upon careful and respectful administration of the PMI through an algorithm that enables scoring and ranking against each of these indicators³. Australia will be able to achieve a fair and proportionate distribution of PEVs across the region. This is a proactive response to the competing priorities experienced by countries in the Blue Pacific continent. We strongly believe that by providing this additional guidance through a PMI, it will help address the *“primary and immediate purpose of the Bill”*, which is stated to *“strengthen country to country ties; support wider mobility...assisting the future regional response to climate change pressures...”*

1. Climate vulnerabilities

Climate change is the single greatest threat in the Blue Pacific continent. According to the 2023 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Synthesis Report, climate change is accelerating at a rate and frequency higher and more intense than before. The report confirmed that the world is 1.1 degrees warmer meaning there is a very thin margin between where we are now and the desired 1.5 degrees level that the Pacific has widely advocated for, but also more critically the overshoot that we are likely to cross over, if the world fails to act now. While climate change is a global phenomenon, its impacts are inequitable, it is exacerbating existing vulnerabilities in the Pacific, raising the question of climate justice for Pacific Island communities.

Legislating this Bill would demonstrate Australia's commitment in advancing the BOE Declaration and the 2050 Pacific Strategy to creating a prosperous, safer, and secure Blue Pacific Continent. Our proposed PMI recognises climate vulnerabilities and the wide ranging experiences it has among PICs in establishing a system that justifies re-allocation of PEV at the discretion of the Minister.

2. Diaspora population

The Pacific accounts for around 1% of the diaspora in Australia compared to China, England and India that rank in the top 10 of the diaspora population⁴. If Australia genuinely desires to be part of the Pacific family, there should be a strong and vibrant Pacific diaspora who are able to contribute meaningfully to both the Australian economy and their own home economies through remittance. Conventional migration schemes from Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) (even while undergoing significant reforms) and other pathways through family, work and refugees' status, have not proven successful in significantly increasing the Pacific diaspora. Australia can look to other successful permanent migration schemes such as the Diversity Visa program or commonly known as the “green card lottery” (United States of America) and Pacific Access Category (New Zealand) to strengthen their own PEV. Both the USA and New Zealand schemes aim to encourage permanent migration from nationalities who are underrepresented in their countries, and this is the case that Australia can redress by legislating the PEV, guided by our proposed PMI. It has the potential to increase the Pacific diaspora and strengthen Australia's commitment to the Pacific family.

3. Historical ties

Australia has a long-shared history and connection with the Pacific. This history includes its role with the Pacific in World War II, its colonial ties and the historical legacy of its commercial interests (extractive industry). Our PMI acknowledges and reflects the historical ties that Australia holds with the Pacific by ranking the extent to which its relationship with individual

¹ <https://devpolicy.org/pacific-engagement-visa-quotas-need-to-be-set-strategically-20220722/>

² <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/1467-8462.12468>

³ A scoring algorithm to rationalise and justify the results for rankings of each PIC in lieu of PEV is under development to ensure that visa quotas are fairly distributed

⁴ <https://devpolicy.org/pacific-islanders-in-australia-census-results-20230331/>

PICs has evolved over time. Additionally, the legacy of Australia's commercial interests in the extractive industry as epitomised in the historical impacts of the extractive expeditions in the Pacific.

Most notably after World War II, Australia's (and New Zealand) involvement in mining phosphate in Nauru and Banaba through the Pacific Phosphate Company⁵ resulted in forced migration of the people of Babana to Fiji, environmental destruction and health issues in Nauru. Similarly in PNG's autonomous region of Bougainville⁶, an Australian mining company's operations instigated a ten-year civil war which has decimated infrastructures and loss of lives.

These important and sensitive historical experiences of PICs and their relationship with Australia can be captured in how each country is scored and ranked in the PMI to inform the PEV. It will provide an opportunity for Australia to transform its historical ties to the Pacific, into a vibrant investment that prioritises the people of these Pacific countries, who share these connected histories with Australia. It provides a conduit for strengthened people-to-people relations through which both Australia and the Pacific have potential to dispense win-win benefits and greater understanding and security.

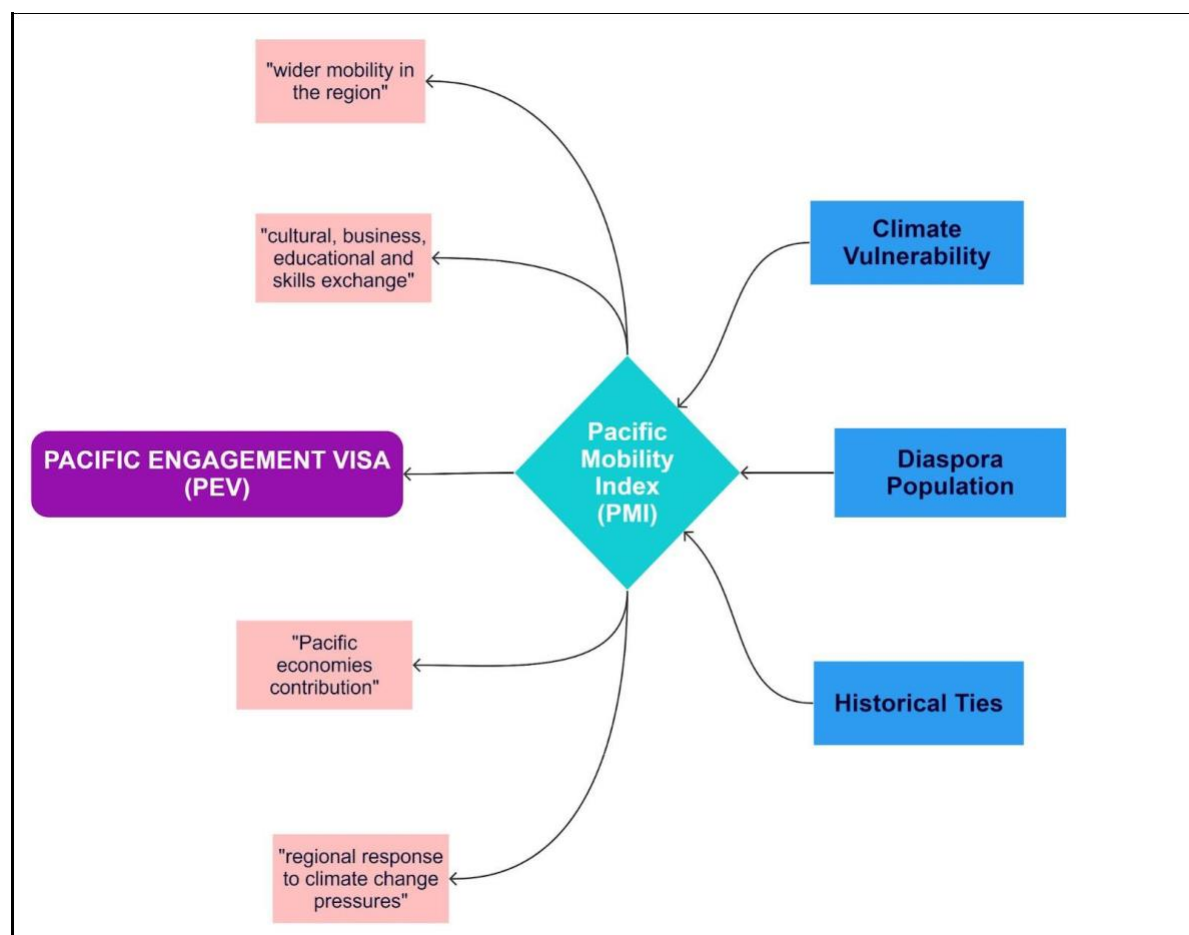


Diagram 1: Simplified flowchart of the PMI

The infographic above, outlines the initial three indicators of the PMI, and the four intended outcomes of the Bill in informing the fair and proportionate delivery of the PEV in the region. The full schematic outline and detail of the PMI is currently being developed for later

⁵ Informed by Professor Katerina Teaiwa's work on phosphate imperialism and extraction in the Pacific - <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/1031461X.2015.1082609>

⁶ Rio Tinto, Panguna Mine and the complaints lodged with the Australian government - <https://www.hrlc.org.au/news/2022/4/4/devastating-impacts-of-rio-tintos-former-mine-going-under-the-microscope>

publication. While we have not discussed the issue of brain drain, this is a dimension that can be incorporated into the PMI. Each of these Blue Pacific scholars have varying lived experiences that are embodied in these indicators, as they have worked, lived, and continued to survive in the Blue Pacific. As such, the intellectual labour and commitment in the PMI and the wider Pacific-Australia relationship is an embodied Blue Pacific contribution.

Conclusion

We, the Blue Pacific scholars, support and endorse the Bill for a ballot system to select eligible PIC citizens for the PEV. We also recognise the discretionary powers of the Minister for Immigration, Citizenship and Multicultural Affairs as stated in the Bill (page 4):

“The Minister’s general power allows the Minister to make administrative arrangements concerning the conduct of the ballot including, in particular, arrangements for the random selection of registered participants and the numbers of registered participants to be selected, having regard to the Australian Government’s priorities.”

The PEV would mark a historic step forward for Australia in forging its relationship with the Pacific as a family member who does not restrict pathways to permanent migration. The PMI informs the delivery of a fair and proportionate allocation of PEV across the Pacific, and we recommend its application by the Minister.

We stand on the shoulders of our Blue Pacific forebearers who have worked alongside generations of Australians in the recent past. We continue with this relationship by contributing this submission, in the hope that it will be considered to strengthen our forged relationship into the future.

Blue Pacific scholars

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