



Submission No 13

Inquiry into Australia's aid program in the Pacific

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Kia orana Sara,

Many thanks for the opportunity to reference my submission and make any changes.

Unfortunately, the reality is that, like most of my colleagues in the Pacific, I could not afford to spend the time that this subject deserves.

My final observations would be that it is praiseworthy for Australia to be reviewing its aid programme, especially as a means of balance and support of government's Pacific 2020 report. However, like Pacific 2020, the parliamentary inquiry was not widely promoted or advertised in the region it purports to represent. There were no advertisements in major newspapers, or on national television or radio stations. I only got to hear about it because I have (very kindly) been awarded honorary woman status and I saw an email sent to PACWIN, the Pacific Womens Information Network email list regarding the inquiry, which also led me to the Pacific 2020 report.

These omissions evidence my claims that island media - mainstream or otherwise - are routinely left out of the governance and development loop. A solution would be to move public broadcasters to the top 10 priorities for aid funding.

Again thanks for the opportunity of resubmitting but for now due to time and financial constraints I must leave it as it is. I wish members of the committee all the best with their inquiry.

Kia manuia, good fortune

Submission to the
Inquiry into Australia aid to the Pacific

From news and
information perspectives

Using case studies from the
Cook Islands

As an example given in the
Pacific 2020 report

Of a success story in a
Troubled region

June 2006

Inquiry into Australia's aid programme in the Pacific

On the 10th of March 2006, Australia's Foreign Minister Alexander Downer asked the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade for an inquiry into the country's aid programme to the Pacific.

He asked the committee to report on the programme's impact in the Pacific on human rights and security.

Subsequently, the committee invited comment from the public, giving five areas the inquiry will focus on. This submission is in response to that invitation.

Areas of the inquiry

Five areas overlap in the inquiry, particularly good governance impacting on other areas, which include:

- Strengthening law and justice;
- Improving economic management and public accountability institutions;
- Maintaining access to basic services (especially health);
- Anti-corruption good governance measures; and
- Supporting peace-building and community and civil society development

This submission addresses these areas from information perspectives. It strongly suggests aid donor recognition of the centrality of news media especially public broadcasters within information contributions towards achieving sustained – and sustainable – progress in all five.

Sourcing of this submission

It was hoped to add hyperlinks allow quick navigation of this document and checking of sources.

However, a lack of time before the 15th of June means that this submission is nowhere nears as polished as was initially planned.

This submission draws heavily from the AusAID funded report, [Informing Citizens](#), a Situational Analysis and Needs Assessment conducted by the [Pacific Communication and Media Facility](#) calling for a “confident” news media, and, for comparison's sake, the recently launched Pacific 2020 report. Other sources are also given.

Overview of this submission

For the purposes of this submission it is suggested that all five areas of the inquiry come under the broad category of good governance.

Good governance should not only be a matter of preventing, monitoring and punishing bad governance. Good governance includes measures that add to the public good. Innovative application of entry-level ICT or Information and Communication Technologies could help set new paradigms for governance efforts. As well as enhance feedback to economic management efforts, ICT can provide alternatives to existing industries, e.g. community-based sustainable arts and virtual tourism. Suggestions are also made for the concept of a National Development Council to be examined as a way of creating a focal point for raising, spreading and receiving information from all sectors of society. Use of existing ICT – including as exemplified by this [weblog](#) – could provide transformative levels of transparency.

As information experts, public broadcasters could take a lead role in applying such technologies including providing ICT training to the wider community.

A caution on ICT

Caution is needed applying ICT as a catchphrase.

Just as the Pacific complains of being the silent ‘P’ in Asia Pacific considerations, so too is Information at risk of becoming the silent ‘I’ in ICT discussions. Human hands are needed to provide information content as well as manage communication technologies. Such content is most valuable when it is independent and reliable rather than partisan and biased. It is for this reason that entry-level ICT training is suggested as best coming from public broadcasters. Early exposure to news media codes of ethics can provide a solid footing to information priorities.

Independence of public broadcasters is assumed as desirable and ways of sustaining this independence is also suggested later in this submission.

Weaknesses as strengths

Committee members will already be aware of the usual suspects when it comes to weaknesses of the Pacific region.

Like a drumbeat, these usually include high barriers of isolation, small, delicate economies, weak governance, corruption, and limited access to transformative technologies. These weaknesses can also be regarded as opportunities; as strengths.

Smallness equals the most cost-effective opportunity for the donor community to influence and support the greatest number of nations in adopting good governance initiatives.

Strengths as weaknesses

News media nearly always get ticked as “important” or even “vital” in official reports, but rarely ever more than that.

Launched earlier this month, Pacific 2020 provides an example of this approach. It mentions the media just five times, compared with six for culture, eight for courts, 21 for law, 22 for environment, 55 for business, 130 for governance, 142 for government, 222 for economic factors or the economy. As an aside, it is also interesting to note that peace, harmony, security form in the first sentence of Pacific 2020, a foreword by Foreign Affairs minister Alexander Downer, quoting the Auckland declaration by leaders at the 2004 Pacific Islands Forum. However these three values barely get a dozen mentions after that, while the arts, religion and faith get none.

With these kind of disparities, the report seems to suggest that the main source of information for regional economies – the media – is taken for granted, that sustained growth is ten times more important than sustainable growth, and spiritual needs in a region professing deep faith can simply be ignored.

Zeroing in on media centrality

In Pacific 2020, authors hint at donor-driven influence on political governance processes.

“While there are no simple answers, there are common strategies. Attempts to improve political governance must try either to strengthen the ‘supply side’ of political governance or to promote the ‘demand’ for good political governance.” (Page 96, Pacific 2020). It is strongly suggested here that the news media be recognised as playing a central role to both. Direct budget aid has been phased out to most of the Pacific. Agreeing to project aid became a prerequisite for further assistance.

Agreeing to information needs as a pre-eminent priority could benefit from similar phasing.

The reality

A quote from the AusAID funded report Informing Citizens gives the reality for Kiribati, as it does for most news media in the region.

“They used to fear about what they’re going to say and write but now they have overcome that, in compliance to the rules and laws of the land of course. I see a new sense of freedom from our journalists which I believe has to do with how the government is operating.”

Note that this is nothing to do with the independence of the news media but what government is doing. As the Cooks case study shows, that freedom can be illusory.

The bottom line

In a total current aid budget of \$766.6 million, roughly \$1 million gets spent on media priorities.

Roads are built, ditches dug, cables laid, airports opened, ports widened and satellite dishes are installed. However informing citizens about the changing world around them, and their own rapidly intensifying economies are worth barely one fifth of one per cent of the total Australian aid budget. Any one who has attended one of the small businesses courses funded by Australian aid programmes could tell the committee that the advice they are given includes at least 10% for marketing and promotion. For Australia’s governance initiatives to have any credibility, as Pacific 2020 suggests, “local legitimacy is key.” There is no better way to credibly market and promote good governance than through independently managed and local media.

Applying simple small business ratios suggests an annual aid budget of \$76.6 million for Pacific Islands media.

Dream on?

Such a figure is plainly ridiculous. Or is it?

Good governance is not just about preventing bad governance but giving people the tools to achieve economic prosperity. This means making innovative uses of ICT by, first, ensuring infrastructure is available not just in urban centres but in rural outposts as well. Pfnet in the Solomon Islands is a charmingly low-tech start, but if Australia expects island nations to compete

equally on the world stage by 2020, then it is going to have to give islanders the ICT tools to do the job in a similar timeframe.

Similarly, it is going to have to provide training to use those tools. Which is where, again, the media comes in.

Dreaming on – a Pacific vision

Sustained growth can easily be achieved in the short term by bringing in more mining, logging and fishing companies, and unsustainably stripping the Pacific of resources.

Economic and political realities may dictate this happens, again hopefully in the short term. Aid funding for public broadcasting services would help achieve a news media confident enough to tackle issues of corruption, well-informed enough to promote debate surrounding growth issues of trade and development, and professional enough to tell the difference. More strategic funding not just for news but all media would combine all three qualities into an industry that can start investigating options including those outlined in reports like Pacific 2020 – but others as well. In a world of soaring oil prices, economies relying on transport may not survive as well as those who also invest in information in an increasingly virtual world.

It would make sense, for example, for the Pacific Islands to mine rich veins of cultural heritage for export gold – just as the Irish have done with massive investment in their own arts and media scene.

The Irish example

Today, the arts are worth roughly \$4 billion to the Irish economy.

Of course they have Europe on their doorstep, and a fawning diaspora to draw upon in the rest of the world. In the South Pacific, however, it is easy to forget the sheer enthusiasm that exists in the ‘old world’ for romanticised notions of the South seas.

Given the right emphasis, there is no reason that heavy investment in ICT infrastructure, information and content creation could not avoid potentially fatal over-reliance on physical resources and oil-based industries like tourism.

Domino theory

Like the threat of communism in reverse, the Pacific Islands offer an opportunity for Australia and New Zealand to provide world leadership in good governance.

Instead of spreading two thirds of its donor programme outside of the region, Australia could reverse that ratio. From this comes Australia's contribution as a global citizen; from this comes Australia's role as a global player.

Applied in the right areas, the extra spending could recall domino theory from the 1960's as a model for spreading good governance across one country, then a sub-region, and, within a medium time frame such as suggested by Australia's Pacific 2020 plan, across the region.

Today, Nauru, tomorrow, the world ?

Nauru for example seems an ideal first choice for pilot projects of good governance based on information-driven media approaches.

Influencing one nation towards better governance might work better if it is presented in the context of achieving a regional unity on globally transformative governance – small islands save the world. It will also be easier for Australia to influence neighbours near, far, north, east and west if it cannot be pointed back in the direction of its own backyard.

In doing so, this is not an argument for or against sustainable versus sustained growth, or global warming versus climate change, as two examples, but good governance information initiatives that allow proper due process for integrating public debate from both sides of such arguments.

Defining media contributions

“Confident, well informed and professional” media organisations are envisioned by Forum Secretary General Greg Urwin in his foreword to *Informing Citizens*.

He says media are “often” the most effective way of informing citizens. This is wrong. Media are the only effective way. Outside of policy officials, and journalists, how many ‘ordinary’ citizens in the Pacific Islands actually download from finance ministry websites any budget documents? Or, for that matter, Australian parliamentary PDFs?

How many read the glossy brochures, or watch the regionally stamped videos? A fraction of a percent? Enough to be 'effective?'

Recognising the role of radio

In fact, the number one method for ordinary citizens to gain access to governance information is through one of the older technologies – radio.

Television, newspapers, magazines and websites serve small – and yes, vital – urban information elites.

Most people live in urban areas where they rely on radio to stay informed and respond through talkback to issues of the day.

Addressing media realities

Multiple news industry sources have commented on a weakening of journalistic resources globally – whether for combating left wing media bias or vast right wing conspiracies!

In the Pacific, however, there is barely any media to weaken.

A few commercial players stand out in Fiji and Papua New Guinea, but overall media capacity can be judged by the fact that even public broadcasters must snuffle around for funding – and compete rather than partner with private sector news media operators.

Background to corporatisation

In calling for greater globalisation, corporatisation and privatisation, donors have helped weaken one institution able to most effectively monitor and provide feedback.

Public broadcasting services have been downgraded by Pacific Island governments who cannot see any value in funding a service that can be accessed by their critics. Cut off from sustained funding, public broadcasters face uncertainty at each budget.

This may fit in with modern notions of project-driven funding and contestability, but when applied to public broadcasting services, national governance systems seem to lose more efficiencies than they gain.

Public service broadcasting realities

A paragraph from Informing Citizens ably describes the technical situation, and bears repeating here in whole as some small insight to public service broadcasting realities.

“None of the Public Service Broadcasting stations in either the small, medium or large countries receive sufficient recurrent funding from government for technical maintenance, equipment replacement and upgrades, technical supplies and infrastructure. PSB station equipment can be outdated, broken down, and inadequate and studios (production and on-air) are often in need of significant overhauls to make them more functional. Lack of on-going maintenance and available technical support for the studio and transmission equipment has been an issue for well over a decade. Talkback equipment, logging equipment, adequate portable equipment (handheld recorders, computers and mobile telephones), migration to digital technologies and access to transport are other areas where there are major deficiencies. For a number of stations technical and infrastructure development is at best ad hoc, as they are dependent on the availability of donor funding for assistance. These technical deficiencies impact on the quality and quantity of their production output, and the reach and quality of their transmission.”

Added to technical problems is a lack of independence from government, training and other human resource issues.

Attitudes in the Pacific towards media

Little research exists in this area but what does is compelling.

In the Cook Islands, for example, a 1998 commission of inquiry found that, of 11 institutions, only the news media commanded majority support (56%) amongst surveyed voters as being an effective control on the political process. Other institutions commanded much less confidence, including justice, audit, police, parliament, NGOs, lobby groups and even voters themselves. A recommendation by the Political Review Commission that government spend \$100,000 a year on reviewing political governance, and hold another major review in 2003 was, like most of the inquiry findings, ignored.

However government effectively sabotaged newfound industry freedoms by privatising the public broadcaster and subsidising the new owner into several years of highly destructive attacks on their critics.

The destructive effects of aid – a case study

In 1998, the author headed one of three media organisations who found favour with the public in the Cook Islands.

They were the former Cook Islands Broadcasting Corporation, daily Cook Islands News and the author's weekly, Cook Islands Press. Previously, in 1996, Cook Islands Press became the first media company from this country to win a regional award when it was co-awarded the Freedom of Information honour by the Pacific Islands News Association, along with then 126-year-old Fiji Times. However, in 1996, on applying for grant funding under an industry development scheme the author was told by diplomatic staff that the application was "politically sensitive" because of the newspaper's reporting of criticism of the government. After a two-year vetting process the paper's application for \$29,000 was whittled back and then eventually declined. The author and his newspaper collapsed in 1998 following four years of predicting then surviving an economic crisis. With it went a number of initiatives that the paper had supported including the Cook Islands Journalism Association, the Cook Islands Media Association and a voluntary complaints and standards body, the Cook Islands Media Council – all undermined by the same group favoured by government. The same group that received the maximum \$75,000 grant from the industry development scheme despite years of media coverage about conflicts-of-interest by the media group - and who promptly ditched their New Zealand partner. The industry scheme was disbanded not longer after, with the grant failure cited as part of the review. This is the same media group whose owner told an in-session regional news media association conference in Fiji in 2002 that "journalistic ethics don't make me any money." The same group also stands accused of destroying industry unity over ethics issues while using their media services to personally and professionally denigrate critics of government. In print, the same group accused the author of engaging in a "homosexual stalk" of one of their directors, of being not just a "drug dealer" but an inferior one with "ethics-for-sale." The same group also printed questions about why the wife of one of the expatriate editors of the daily newspaper kept sexual "lubricants" in the fridge, amongst hundreds of similarly personal attacks on competing journalists and critics they quoted.

In 2002, the author again applied for donor funding, this time to conduct media and political reform scoping exercises. They were rejected by officials because of "political sensitivities" – and also by one honorary consul who found aspects of the applications "ridiculous."

From hero to zero

The author's rapid descent from heading a team of journalistic heroes to media zero almost certainly reflects the growing pains of an immature industry.

From a system of tight controls, the 1989 decision by government to privatise the daily newspaper (ahead of the aforementioned broadcasting in 1996) saw journalists over-compensate for earlier repression. Criticism was laid on thicker than was perhaps strictly necessary and little was done to build political or business support for media freedoms. However the case study also illustrates the potentially disastrous effects aid can have. It reflects similar immaturity within the aid donor community in its diplomatic responses to Pacific Island problems and an urgent need for information priorities to be isolated or quarantined from no less urgent desires for political correctness. But how?

Before answering that, it is worth stating that the Cooks did have a successful news media that gained the support of much of the public. It is strongly suggested here that an answer to informing citizens *and* sustained growth lies in another failure that was also a success story.

Enter the National Development Council

In the mid-90's an opportunity was overlooked to build linkages between the media and other sectors of society.

Government created the National Development Council as a consultative body to interact with civil and other sectors of society. However because NDC meetings were closed door, invitation-only affairs, there was no interaction with or input from the media.

Shut out, the news media criticised the proceedings of the council, helping create a split between community leaders and journalists.

What worked with the NDC

Government set up the NDC after the 1994 general elections in answer to calls for more public input into governance processes (as they were yet to be known).

Community, business, NGO, church, sports and other societal leaders were invited by government to attend sessions of the

council to contribute to discussions over the budget and other processes. Sessions were held behind closed doors and their discussions and findings were to be kept confidential to government.

In fact, despite media criticism, the NDC was an outstanding and pioneering success in gaining direct input from other parts of society into government.

What didn't

As time went on, community and other leaders invited to NDC sessions got less satisfied with a lack of buy-in from government to their advice and expressed wishes.

Some community leaders went back to the media to express criticism and, after the economic crisis started in 1996, government got sick of outraged headlines in the newspapers and stopped inviting leaders to sessions. The NDC was abandoned as a concept. Before general elections in 1999, a multi-layered consultation process involving the NDC as part of multiple inputs was proposed by one of the political parties, but never took root because of political instability. It is interesting to note that despite the complexity of the proposed consultation system, there was still no part to play for the media or any freedom of information envisioned in any part of the process.

In hindsight, NDC seems viewable as an inter-generational attempt to widen informational inputs while retaining tight control at executive level.

NDC in historical context

To this day, the first act of many politicians attaining office in the Pacific Islands, and elsewhere, is to swear an oath to a queen – and an Official Secrets Act.

Against such a background, it is perhaps no surprise that politicians continue to resist any attempts to open up governance processes to freedoms of information. Last year, for example, an informal group of citizens in the Cook Islands began investigating the success and failures of the NDC as a potential means of sustaining reform and improving governance. The citizen group met with various stakeholders including the former prime minister who introduced the NDC. Where once such information might have been top secret, the politician felt comfortable enough to explain to the group – including this journalist – that his cabinet colleagues had been opposed to the

NDC concept from the start as a potential weakening of their authority – not to mention a source of constant ‘trouble’ from critics.

Such comments should be seen in light of the fact that most of today’s leaders were raised during colonial times when an atmosphere of unquestioning obedience to rulers was very much an expectation.

NDC in global context

Around the world, a variety of national development entities exist.

In name alone, four main NDCs are – councils, committees, commissions and coalitions. At least on the internet, the former appellation is by far the most popular, with 155 pages for national development **commissions**, 39,000+ pages for national development **councils** and 41 pages for national development **coalitions**. All these entities cover wide ranging responsibilities including focus areas like private sector funding for social housing, such as in the United States, and, as the names suggest, national development.

It is this latter area that is suggested as a potential role model for informing citizens and sustained growth in the Pacific.

NDC – potential roles

As above, it is strongly suggested that the potential for NDC-type entities be investigated as potential contributors towards informing citizens and sustained growth.

As before, the widest possible range of community and other leaders could be welcomed aboard such an entity. Quarterly meetings could be held to review progress on past recommendations and to make new ones with NDC becoming a one-stop shop for consultations between government, business and civil society. New potential roles for NDC could include assigning or recommending members for statutory bodies like SOE, Higher Salaries Commission, Ombudsman, broadcasting authorities, press and media councils, and other such sensitive positions. An NDC could be a part of the legislative review process, as well as providing opportunity for informing sectors about international agreements like UNFCCC, the European Union’s EPA and PACER, treaties like CEDAW and declarations like UNGASS. Sector councils within the NDC could meet more frequently – or less – as required. Heads of

ministry could be invited to attend a minimum number per year, perhaps according to a pre-agreed schedule so as to avoid delays for busy HOMs. Members of cabinet and parliament could attend as they saw fit but an invitation to attend would be as open to them as anyone else. Equally important, the NDC could be an avenue for civil and other sectors of society to suggest political, economic and governance reforms.

Most importantly, sessions of NDC would also be open to the public and the media so that opportunities – probably limited – given for ‘ordinary’ citizens to be heard making their contributions towards national development debate.

NDC potential growth path

There is no need for island communities to wait for aid driven approaches to start up their own NDC movement.

Early NDC approaches might be described as a National Development Coalition and may or may not progress on to registration as a Council under an incorporated society or even, longer term, a statutory body like a commission. Existing NGO structures, such as CIANGO and its regional counterpart PIANGO could server as secretariat resources for the NDC, with any funding being channelled through these existing organisations but subject to the final authority of the NDC.

Growth of the NDC could be assisted by the donor community in a number of ways including the secretariat level or even sitting fees.

Tourism forum – a case study

In 2002, the Cook Islands Chamber of Commerce held a tourism forum to reach consensus on industry progress.

Described initially as a “reality check” this description was later disavowed by the country’s statutory Tourism Corporation. During the forum, multiple concerns were expressed at impacts on the environmental and social fabric of the country. Chamber members formed about half a dozen informal committees and even gave timeframes to report back on these impacts. None did. This is despite members professing urgency of problems, serious enough for the islands main inbound tourism operator, then head of the South Pacific Regional Tourism Office, to support calls for a moratorium on new development. Chamber members later said they just did not have enough time to research and prepare reports. Subsequent responses were directed towards updating

the 1990 Tourism Master plan, from which emerged a document emerged heavily in favour of geo-tourism.

This too was rejected by the statutory Corporation (as were the earlier calls for a moratorium). Only the flushing effects from five cyclones last year saw critical pollution problems in the lagoons alleviated – but only after schools were closed for weeks because of what became officially known as the “Titikaveka irritant syndrome” and one boy died after swimming. There was no autopsy and his death was attributed, by a former prime minister, to the fact that he had open sores, and must have died of blood poisoning. This was in no way related to the state of the lagoon, the prime minister said at the time. Despite earlier promising to end years of inactivity and investigate any “sudden deaths” the Coroner made no comment, police did not investigate and health authorities stayed quiet, even after media stories and complaints from the public.

What could have been

Importance of the Cook Islands example can be judged from the fact that it is one of the few countries counted in the Pacific 2020 report as having a ‘success story’ to tell.

If the Cook Islands are to be used as an example, however, it will not be doing the region any favours to overlook its lessons while applauding its achievements.

What was needed at the chamber’s 2002 tourism forum was more information – and the institutions to provide research into that information.

Putting criticism in context

Before a problem can be solved, it first has to be admitted that there is a problem – and the sources of that problem.

One problem is that not enough informed debate takes place within regional mainstream media over issues and challenges facing the Pacific. One reason is that metropolitan media in Australia and New Zealand simply do not have the resources to cover the Pacific adequately. Consequently, what coverage they do give is often poorly researched. As suggested above, Australia could consider putting a million dollars into public broadcasters of each country on an annual basis as an immediate and minimum commitment to informing citizens.

Further funding could be evaluated on a per capita basis. In return, public broadcasters would agree to abandon all revenue seeking measures in favour of the private sector.

The need for information funding

This extra funding could include funding for correspondents for the ABC, working with local broadcasters, much as happens now in Auckland.

This would lead to a pool of Australian reporters with indepth knowledge of the region, it weaknesses, strengths and potentials.

While not a concern of this inquiry, similar positions probably should be considered for Radio New Zealand International and TVNZ, creating strong information dynamics between home islands and their expatriate populations in both countries – just as exists between Australia and New Zealand.

The need for institutional information capacities

Regional organisations are information rich but communications poor.

With a total budget of around US\$50 million, the SPC, for example, has 200 staff but just two or three dedicated towards informing citizens. As well as at least a dozen more Information and Communications Officers stationed internally with SPC Noumea, donors could look at funding similar positions in-country to liaise with SPC and host governments, extracting existing information for uploading to SPC, UN and other sites and building support for freedom of information policies, codes of conduct and building confidence and capacity throughout government and other societal sectors to ‘handle’ the media. Revolving through the regional headquarters would see ICOs spread much wider and deeper appreciation of governance and growth issues.

Outside of SPC, funding could also be directed towards independent think-tanks and research institutes, perhaps in conjunction with regional and development banks.

Sustained funding for information

Arguments for sustained funding for information creation including by the news media can be backgrounded by Alvin Tofler’s seminal work, Future Shock.

Tofler quite accurately explained that modern democracy did not arise out of clenched fists and cries for freedom, but a need by Victorian era farmers to get accurate and immediate information about market prices in town for their produce. Many early 'news' papers featured nothing more on their front pages than ads aimed at town traders. Eventually, as trading extended beyond the farm gate, more content was created and greater independence achieved as reliable, credible information assumed greater importance. Pamphleteers and their outrageous claims and counter claims died away – apart from at election times – and modern economies took form. Future shock, Tofler explained three decades ago, happens when increasingly efficient feedback mechanisms such as the media overload community capacity to absorb new levels of information.

In outlaying challenges and opportunities for sustained growth by 2020, for example, Australia is seeking to compress what has been a more than two hundred year process for the western world into less than two decades in the Pacific. Sustained, intensive funding for independently managed information sources like the news media is needed to balance pressures from such rapid progress – and keep citizens fully informed of what is happening around them, why, and how to deal with it.

Conclusion

It would be a mistake to claim that these viewpoints are anything more than one journalists' views and suggestions on how aid from Australia might be most effectively applied in the Pacific.

In fact, it has to be stressed that this is very much an on-the-run effort, squeezed in between missed freelance deadlines and late rental payments. There has been no time to properly source arguments as it now less than an hour before close of business on 15th June, the deadline for submissions to this inquiry.

Such shortcomings however strengthen a central argument made in this submission – that the news media is not confident, well-informed or professional enough to respond effectively to growth opportunities and challenges as envisioned in documents like Pacific 2020.