
The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia

Report of the Parliamentary Delegation to the Solomon Islands

17-18 December 2003

Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade

Canberra
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Foreword

During December 2003 six members of the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade visited the Solomon Islands. The delegation's objectives included observing progress of the Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands (RAMSI) and noting the key outcomes and support provided to the Solomon Islands. The delegation met with the Prime Minister, senior Ministers of the Solomon Islands and community representatives. In addition, a range of briefings were provided by Australian Government officials.

At the same time, the delegation was able to express, on behalf of the Parliament, its appreciation for the outstanding contribution made by personnel of the Australian Defence Force, the Australian Federal Police and a range of aid and coordinating agencies.

The Solomon Islands was a failing state. Lawlessness and rampant gun use was a feature of the community. Collapsing public institutions, mired by corruption and ineffectiveness, together with a declining economy presented a bleak future for our South Pacific neighbour. Australia, together with a number of other countries in the region, responded effectively and appropriately to the Solomon Islands' request for assistance.

RAMSI halted the downward spiral of events occurring in the Solomon Islands. Law and order was quickly re-established without a shot being fired. With law and order under control, RAMSI was soon able to begin making inroads into improving the government financial framework, accountability, and ensuring that government institutions are more effective in achieving their objectives.

The delegation concluded that Australia's assistance to the Solomon Islands, through RAMSI, should continue until the Solomon Islands Government and the Australian Government are confident of developments and that there will be no decline in conditions as assistance is slowly reduced.

In conclusion, and on behalf of the delegation, I would like to thank the groups we met with in the Solomon Islands, the Prime Minister of the Solomon Islands, the Hon Sir Allan Kemakeza, Ministers, parliamentarians, and representatives of RAMSI including the Australian Defence Force, Australian Federal Police, the defence forces of other countries and a range of aid agencies.

Senator Alan Ferguson
Delegation Leader



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Membership of the Committee

Chair Senator A B Ferguson

Deputy Chair Hon L J Brereton, MP

Members

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Senator M Bishop (from 1/7/02; to 19/8/02)	Hon A R Bevis, MP
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Membership of the Delegation to the Solomon Islands

Leader Senator Alan Ferguson

Members Hon David Jull, MP Senator Sandy Macdonald
 Mr Peter Lindsay, MP Senator Marise Payne
 Hon Roger Price, MP

Secretary Mr Stephen Boyd



List of abbreviations

ADF	Australian Defence Force
AFP	Australian Federal Police
ASPI	Australian Strategic Policy Institute
CPRF	Community Peace and Restoration Fund
Defence	Department of Defence
GRA	Guadalcanal Revolutionary Army
MEF	Malaitan Eagle Force
RAMSI	Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands
RSIP	Royal Solomon Islands Police
TPA	Townsville Peace Agreement



Acknowledgements

During the visit to the Solomon Islands between 17 and 18 December 2003, the delegation was provided with excellent support and advice. HE Mr Patrick Cole, Australian High Commissioner to the Solomon Islands, and his staff are to be congratulated for planning and organising a program of meetings which more than met the needs of the delegation.

In addition, the delegation acknowledges the challenging and demanding work being undertaken by Mr Nick Warner, RAMSI Special Coordinator. In addition, the delegation acknowledges the fine contribution from personnel from the Australian Federal Police, the Australian Defence Force and from the range of other agencies involved in RAMSI. The delegation appreciates the support of the New Zealand Defence Force for the provision of helicopter transport during the visit.

The delegation extends its appreciation to the Minister for Foreign Affairs, the Hon Alexander Downer, MP, and the Defence Minister, Senator the Hon Robert Hill for supporting the visit. In addition Senator Hill's Office assisted with the provision of a special purpose aircraft.



Recommendation

Recommendation 1

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade should provide detailed information about the Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands (RAMSI) in its annual report. In addition, whilst RAMSI remains a critical part of the Solomon Islands recovery, the Minister for Foreign Affairs should make an annual ministerial statement to the House reporting progress with RAMSI (paragraph 1.66).