

**SENATE FOREIGN AFFAIRS, DEFENCE AND TRADE  
REFERENCES COMMITTEE**

**INQUIRY INTO PAPUA NEW GUINEA AND THE  
ISLAND STATES OF THE SOUTH-WEST PACIFIC**

**SUBMISSION**

**Submission No:** 5

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**Attachments:** No

Senate inquiry into Australia's relationship with Papua  
From: Holmes, Brenton (SEN)  
Sent: Thursday, 30 May 2002 3:54 PM  
To: Olsson, Kerry (SEN)  
Subject: FW: Submission to Inquiry

For the usual processing

-----Original Message-----

From: Basil Atkinson [mailto:golliegoshbooks@ozemail.com.au]  
Sent: Thursday, May 30, 2002 2:21 PM  
To: fadt.sen@aph.gov.au  
Subject: Submission to Inquiry

To: Chairman and Members of the Senate Committee of Inquiry:

Senate inquiry into Australia's relationship with Papua  
New Guinea and other South Pacific countries

I am Basil Atkinson AM of 39 Halifax Street, Brighton, Victoria 3186 and I write in support of the submission of Mr Ian Kennedy of Ian Kennedy & Associates on the importance of tourism as a means for Australia to assist the development of Papua New Guinea and other South Pacific countries. At the same time, we will be helping ourselves.

Such a programme of tourism assistance will give PNG and South Pacific countries a greater capacity to receive visitors and so improve their economies and provide employment and offer attractive new careers in a range of services which will follow. It will also add to the region's strength as an area of considerable international appeal and all countries in the region, including Australia, will benefit by more visitors from longer-haul markets being attracted here. As well, the stronger economies will increase intra-regional travel with a subsequent better understanding between peoples. An important and desirable further corollary is that initiatives we undertake as a helpful and concerned neighbour will draw us closer to them and so win us goodwill and cement our place as the region leader. From this will flow greater business and investment opportunities in areas in which we specialise (transportation, accommodation, the development of attractions and training and consultancy services, to name only a few).

Through our own experience, we are in the best position to give sound advice to ensure new developments in tourism are in harmony with the region's unique environment and any harm to cultures is minimised. To the contrary, by prudent planning and involving the local people in a responsible and dignified way, we can have them enhanced. Australia is in a special position to supply such needed expertise. By encouraging local populations to take greater pride in what their country can offer and having them involved in what for many is a new industry will give them a fresh outlook for what can be their future and discourage them from wanting to migrate to New Zealand or Australia.

Mr Kennedy has qualifications second to none to advise the Australian Government on the best means for us to assist countries in the region on sound tourism growth. His 20 years with the Australian Tourist Commission and its predecessor from 1961 to 1981 and his work since then as Vice-President of the Pacific Division of the Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) have given him the closest knowledge of people and places in Melanesia, Polynesia and Micronesia and their potential as well as world markets and developments that are needed. He is a strong "people person", is well known and respected in the area and has a strong understanding of the different cultures.

My experience has been similar to Mr Kennedy's but he is still of an age where he can make a worthwhile practical contribution. Although a septuagenarian, however, I am well qualified to make a judgment on people and needs for the area. I was General Manager of the Australian National Travel Association and Publisher and Managing-Editor of Walkabout magazine (which took in the South Pacific as well as Australia) from 1957 before becoming the founder Chief Executive of the Australian Tourist Commission in 1967. After seven years in the ATC, I accepted an appointment as Director-General of Tourism in the Bahamas. After returning to Australia, I was a foundation member of the Western Australian Tourism Commission and its Deputy-Chairman for five years in the 1980s and a Board member of the ATC from 1985-87.

Regional and global tourist organisations have been an important part of my life. I was a pioneering Board member of the Pacific Asia Travel Association in the 1950s soon after its foundation and its Vice-President and President-elect in 1973-74. While in the Bahamas I was also a Board member of the Caribbean Travel Association. That experience made me appreciate the effectiveness and unity of PATA.

At the global level, I represented Australia in the 90-nation International Union of Official Travel Organisations from 1957 to 1974. From 1963-65, I was its President, the first to come from the Southern Hemisphere. IUOTO became the present World Tourism Organisation in 1975. I then represented the Bahamas in this new body which had a closer affiliation with the United Nations. As a tourism consultant in the 1980s, I carried out a number of country and regional studies in South Asia and the Caribbean for WTO and the UN Development Programme before undertaking a three-month WTO/UNDP assignment as Tourism Management and Operations Trainer in Tonga in 1988.

From there, I was based in Fiji as Chief Technical Adviser and Development Planning Specialist for the final two-year phase (1988-90) of the ten-year UNDP's South Pacific regional tourism development programme with WTO acting as its executing agency. Against my recommendation, the programme was then discontinued for the new UNDP cycle. Major factors in that decision were problems in finding adequate UN funding, the relatively small populations of the 13 countries in the project and the larger funds then being supplied by the European Union for its programmes in the region being carried out by the Tourism Council of the South Pacific. Subsequently, this EU funding has been substantially reduced. It is now being executed through the South Pacific Tourism Organisation but it seems unlikely this will be a permanent arrangement as Europe's interest in the region is only marginal.

As I see it, this provides Australia with a great opportunity to show its leadership of the region by filling a growing vacuum. What is needed is specialist guidance and advice with appropriate training programmes and funding under the supervision of an experienced person like Mr Kennedy. Some of the training could be carried out at Australian institutions (like the South Pacific Fellowship Programme for middle-management tourism staff I initiated at James Cook University for 1988-89 but discontinued in the next UNDP/WTO cycle).

The ideal would be for WTO, as the global body and through its close connections with UNDP and other aid agencies, to begin an all-embracing new programme in association with PATA and the South Pacific Tourism Organisation and leading tourist countries in the area, like it does in other regions of the world. However, this is unlikely because Australia is no longer a member of WTO and nor are the South Pacific countries.

As a founder of WTO, it is a matter of much regret and sadness to me personally that mainly for reasons of cost Australia has resigned from the organisation and, despite frequent invitations, has not rejoined. In my view, not only have we abdicated our responsibility to play our part to assist globally in the sound development of a rapidly-growing business -- the biggest in the world -- but we are failing to cultivate the opportunities the industry represents to create better international understanding and goodwill. Close monitoring of tourism's progress is needed not only to overcome hindrances and restrictions on travel but to guard against the damaging effects of the industry. Done right, it creates enormous goodwill and benefits for a country. Done wrong, it can be the opposite with resultant illwill, bitterness and their dangers. Also, I feel it is improper for Australia to be receiving a "free ride" from the work WTO does as the world statistics-gatherer, post office and assessor of tourism. We do not have the same need for its technical aid as developing countries but we have a duty to help where we can. Critics of WTO refer to its politicisation and often frustrating and inefficient bureaucracy but I believe we should be trying to fix what is wrong instead of withdrawing from it.

A condition of our rejoining WTO could be a commitment it would again conduct a regional assistance programme in the South Pacific in conjunction with Australia. Special aid assistance might also be forthcoming from Japan. I was able to arrange such funding for hotel training projects in 1988-90 and the indications then were that with Japanese specialist involvement as a condition, more of similar-type support would be possible.

Many of the South Pacific's difficulties in developing tourism are related to the paucity and cost of air services. The overflying of destinations like Fiji brought about by continent-hopping, long-range jets in the early 1970s meant the islands were no longer stepping stones and left them isolated. This had a stultifying effect on their tourism. Progress since for numerous reasons has been minimal. Special attention needs to be given as to how air services can be more regular and competitive.

Australia is best placed to provide solutions to the South Pacific's problems and to work with island-countries not only to assist services and their tourism appeals and sound development but to make the region as a whole more attractive as a place to visit. Thus, we will all benefit from combined marketing campaigns to give us a larger proportion of the world's global share.

But to achieve such a desirable end, we need to take the initiative and show our leadership by establishing a programme for regional tourism development using the experience and knowledge of an Australian-South Pacific expert like Mr Kennedy.

Basil Atkinson

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30 May 2002.