

Submission
to
Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee
on
Australia's relationship with Papua New Guinea and the island states of the
south-west Pacific (known as Oceania or the South Pacific)

Dr Max Quanchi
School of Humanities and Human Services,
Queensland University of Technology,
Carseldine, Queensland

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School of Humanities, Queensland University of Technology, Carseldine Campus,
Carseldine, Queensland 4034 (Tel 07-38644519)

Preliminary Comment

a A note on terminology

The southwest Pacific is not commonly known as Oceania. Oceania is the preferred term, now argued for by indigenous academics, that encompasses all the island states and territories in the north and south Pacific Ocean. The Inquiry should note that Australia's engagement includes not only the island states of the southwest Pacific, but independent states and territories in the north Pacific (Guam, CNMI, Palau, FSM), the central Pacific (RMI, Kiribati, Nauru) and eastern Pacific (French Polynesia).

The inquiry should also note the exceptional case of West Papua, which over the last decade has been invited into and engaged with the political arena and agenda of the Pacific Forum and other regional linkages. Status as a province of Indonesia makes this relationship particularly complex. It should be treated as a separate relationship within the terms of the Inquiry.

The statement that "our close ties with Papua New Guinea, in particular, reflect our special relationship with the region" (Senator Hogg's Press release) is misleading. The Australia-PNG relationship has no connection with bilateral or multilateral relationships with other island states in Oceania. It is a separate, massively funded, and "colonial" relationship. Other island states know and understand that Australia's relationship with PNG is different to their relationship with Australia. The two domains, Australia-PNG and Australia-Oceania (excluding PNG) should be considered by the Inquiry as two separate relationships within the terms of the Inquiry.

Another geographical relationship that should be noted by the Inquiry is the common boundary shared by Queensland, PNG, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and New Caledonia – all within 2 to 3 hours flying time and relatively short sailing times across the Coral Sea. Cairns and Brisbane are linked by air directly to these nations as well as to Nauru and Fiji. North Queensland ports in particular are favoured by close proximity to markets in littoral Coral Sea neighbours. Brisbane is closer to these capital cities in Oceania than to Hobart, Adelaide or Perth. Australia has not fully acknowledged or exploited this proximity. These Island states see themselves ignored on the far periphery of Australian concern while observing that Australia is dominated by policy towards and obsessive monitoring of states in southeast Asia that have far fewer historical linkages than exist between themselves and Australia. Any program that emphasised the Coral Sea zone as a common boundary would go a long way towards

assuring our neighbouring island states that Australia does have a “Pacific Island” policy and commitment.

b Current state of research and teaching on Australian-Oceania relationships

i. In Universities;

From a position of leadership by Australian scholars and universities in the field of academic research and teaching about Oceania, in a report in 1989, it was noted that the epicentre of research, teaching and publishing had shifted outside of Australia. (Quanchi, 1989, 9) This trend has continued. Australia is no longer home to the cutting edge of scholarship. There is no longer a critical mass of scholars working on Australia-PNG or Australia-Oceania relationships and Oceania generally. From a position in which units were offered by most universities, there is now only one university with a committed “package” of Pacific units and only one university that offers a unit specifically on Australia-Oceania relations.

QUT offers a unit on Australia’s relations with the Pacific (HHB245) and this unit continues to attract students as a 13-week unit, or as an intensive five-week flexible delivery unit at weekends, or as a Summer School. QUT has offered a package of Pacific open to all degrees across the university since 1988 and has recently expanded its offerings. These units are;

- HHB122 Colonialism and independence in the Asia-Pacific
- HHB242 Culture contact in the Pacific
- HHB243 The Pacific since 1945
- HHB245 Australia and the Pacific Islands
- HHB248 USA in the Asia-Pacific
- HHB320 Independent Project (by fieldwork in Tonga and Samoa)

In Australia, the other notable offerings are a Masters degree program on International Relations offered by ANU, but not exclusively devoted to Australia-Oceania relations, and a proposal for a unit on Australia-PNG relations at the University of Queensland.

* *It is recommended that a nationally funded annual seminar/conference on “Australia and Oceania”, with an associated publication, be instituted to advance the teaching of Australia-Pacific and Pacific studies more generally in Australian universities.*

ii. In schools

In 1996, it was noted that “although the study of history in the Pacific is represented by a complex infrastructure of research and teaching institutions and an extensive range of book and journal publication, little has been done to prepare teachers for classrooms in which students can learn about the Pacific on a regional, subregional or individual nation basis (Quanchi, 1996, 73). There have been some significant but small gains in the Queensland and NSW curriculum since then, but it is a negative reflection on our schooling that our students know little about our most immediate neighbours.

It is also noticeable that schools in Oceania do not teach about Australia or Australia-Oceania relations. There has been an emphasis on non-Australian accreditation and

certification, geared towards New Zealand, UK, France and the USA, as well as a lack of classroom materials on the historical and contemporary linkages of our Australia-Oceania relationship. A professional development project like that that funded from Japan, (*TTPF* now known as *HistoryCops*), which attracted recognition for Japan across the region, should be funded by Australia to promote teaching and learning about Australia-Oceania links in Pacific island schools. (*Update 19*, 9-12, April 2000). In another example that could be replicated, a curriculum materials project was funded in 1995-7 by AusAID to enhance teaching and learning specifically about Australia's South Sea islanders.

DFAT might replicate the approach of DEST and fund a series of national seminars such as those conducted in 2001 (on Australian History) and 2002 (on Regional and Global history). These remarkable seminars brought together, for the first time, teachers, academics, teacher educators, curriculum experts and systemic managers and charged them with producing a set of recommendations on the respective topics. This type of annual seminar offers a national forum and facilitative process and at a low cost (at \$106000) has proved to be effective. A consortium from UQ, QUT and Griffith Universities convened the 2001 and 2002 seminars. It could be replicated to provide enthusiasm and a stimulus to the study of PNG and Oceania in Australia. It is recommended that a national seminar bringing in players from government, academia, schools and non-government sectors be established to maintain a long-term focus on Australia's relations with PNG and Oceania.

It is recommended that a national professional development project within Australia on "Australia and Oceania" be funded along the lines of the recent AusAID curriculum project on Australian South Sea Islanders. This could replicate that projects primary and secondary curriculum emphasis and the travelling exhibition that successfully raised the profile of Australia's South Sea Islander community and its history.

It is recommended that a regional professional development and curriculum materials project for schools within the Oceania region be funded along the lines of the TTPF/HistoryCOPS project to provide classroom materials for Pacific Island schools on the teaching of Australia-Oceania relationships.

It is recommended that an annual national seminar bringing in players from government, academia, schools and non-government sectors be established to maintain a long-term focus on Australia's relations with PNG and Oceania.

iii. Postgraduate research

The most successful long-term linkages develop when postgraduate students from Oceania study in Australia and on return maintain links in their professional capacities and continue to rely on Australia for further advice, study and networks. The recent decades have seen Australia's significance as a provider of postgraduate study decline as indigenous student preference and the scholarship awards priority by their governments has switched to New Zealand, Asian, European and North American institutions.

It is recommended that a major campaign be instigated to attract indigenous postgraduate scholars to Australian institutions.

It is recommended that the AusAid International Seminar Assistance Support Scheme (ISSS) be expanded and made more accessible and comprehensive.

iv. Centres and research

The number of research centres in Australia focussing on research and teaching about Oceania has declined dramatically. There is no centre focussing on contemporary Australia-Oceania relationships. The recent funding of the *Centre for the Contemporary Pacific* at ANU has had little impact as it serves primarily to promote the work of ANU. As a funding initiative to promote Australia-Oceania relations in the contemporary era, this has been an opportunity lost. Research Concentrations and Centres of Excellence on Marine Environment, Tropical Medicine, Development Studies and Literature and other fields do have Pacific programs but they are not a primary focus.

An DFAT call for tenders in 1999 for a series of national seminars on contemporary relations between Australia and Oceania, and a corresponding journal publication, is rumoured to have led to the awarding of the tender, but no action eventuated.

On the other hand, in response non-government and government initiatives taken in abnormal situations, Australian scholars are currently acting in advisory, consultation or management roles in Bougainville, Nauru and the Solomon Islands and hundreds of scholars, across the full range of disciplines, are currently actively engaged in fieldwork, publication, teaching and consultations in the region. For example, a data base of "Pacific scholars" compiled in Brisbane's four universities in 1990, revealed 124 scholars actively engaged in Pacific-related work ranging from Architecture to Law, Dentistry, Environment Management, Education, Anthropology and History. (Moore, 1990). The funding of an annual international seminar on "Australia and Oceania" (noted in (b, i.) above) to conclude in 2009 with the commemoration of the founding of the SPC, would become an international forum and focus for the dispersed, uncoordinated and little known, outside their own narrow discipline base, Australian research concentrations and would facilitate a regular exchange between Australian-based and Oceania-based scholars.

Australia universities should be funded to establish formal and institutional links with scholarly, research and teaching networks in the region. For example, an on-line teaching project now links Pacific Studies students in universities in Hawaii, Guam, Fiji, and New Zealand, but not Australia, and membership of the recent UN initiative, the International Council for the Study of Pacific Islands (ICSPI), saw both UNSW and ANU represented, but on their own institution's behalf, rather than on behalf of the larger cohort of Australian teaching and research individuals and institutions.

The research and teaching links that exist are mostly personal and on retirement or transfer, these links disappear. The failure to develop permanent cross-institution and multi-national links is explained in part by the negative impact of twenty years fully funded promotion of Asian Studies in Australia. The excessive concentration on Asian Studies has made "Pacific Studies" even more peripheral and marginal (and funding has reflected this emphasis)

Australia also lacks a Fulbright-type staff exchange scheme by which Australian scholars could work in the many new universities that have emerged in Oceania in recent decades. There are now universities in Guam, PNG, New Caledonia, Fiji, Samoa, Tonga and French Polynesia. Staff from these universities, and staff from Australian universities could create long-term links to the benefit of Australia by working in each other's institutions; say for a four-month period (a teaching semester). The scheme that now places Australians in Chairs of Australian Studies in North American and British universities could be replicated (at a non-professorial level) in universities in Oceania.

It is recommended that the seminar series recommended above (b, i.) be international in focus, and using ISSS funding, draw scholars from the region to an Australian forum on an annual basis and that this seminar series be rotated around institutions in Queensland – JCU, UCQ, QUT and UQ that have geographic proximity, a high Pacific Islanders enrolment, and existing teaching, research profiles.

It is recommended that the federal Government make a significant and symbolic statement and funding commitment to Australia-Oceania relationships. This could be done by the Prime Minister at the 2003 Forum meeting, and involve funding of schools campaigns in Oceania and in Australia, an annual international conference and publication and the expansion of postgraduate scholarships for Pacific Islanders to study in Australian institutions.

It is recommended that a Staff Exchange scheme be established and funded for the exchange of staff between universities in Australia and Oceania.

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Quanchi M, 1989, "Pacific History – the view east across the beakers", *Bulletin of the Australian Historical Association*, 61, 9-16
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Terms of reference

i. The current state of political relations

The dominant attitude among Pacific Islander leaders is that Australia has little regard for the opinions expressed within the region. This negative attitude may be traced most recently to the non-appearance of the Australian Prime Minister at the annual Pacific Forum meetings. In cultures where status, recognition and the conventions of identity are of paramount importance, the non-appearance of the Australian prime minister is a direct insult.

Pacific Island leaders have seen a distinct decline in Australian-Oceania relations. The regular and friendly relationships established by Senators John Knight and Gareth Evans, Minister Gordon Bilney and Prime Minister Bob Hawke have been replaced by posturing, absence from important regional forum and "big brother" lecturing. Viewed from Oceania, Australia has "interfered" in negotiations for the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty, made hasty and poorly conceived response to Fiji's coups, been humbled by the exclusion of High Commission staff from Vanuatu, bulldozed

the SPC into appointing an Australian as head, avoided international condemnation by buying off Nauru in an out-of-court settlement over phosphate mining rehabilitation, over-rode Forum concerns regarding Greenhouse emissions, “dumped” illegal refugees in Nauru and PNG instead of dealing with them in Australia, and after the promising creation of a portfolio/Ministry to deal with Pacific Island Affairs, later saw that Ministry abolished. This negative attitude could be alleviated in part by a regular touring program around the states and territories of Oceania by the Minister for Foreign Affairs and the compulsory attendance and fulsome engagement by the Prime Minister at Forum meetings. The failure of the current Prime Minister to visit any island states is noted.

It is recommended that the Prime Minister attend all Forum meetings, and make occasional visits to island states.

It is recommended that the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade make several and regular tours of island states.

ii. Economic relations, including trade, tourism and investment

No comment

iii. Development cooperation relationships

No comment

iv Implications for Australia of political, economic and security developments in the region

Australia has not taken economic advantage of its proximity to the southwest Pacific. In view of recent political, economic and security developments in the region, an opportunity to adopt a pre-eminent trading and commercial position and “safe haven”, in collaboration with those neighbouring states and territories, seems likely to arise if internal de-stabilising influences create uncertainty in those states. The population growth of Queensland, its existing Pacific Island population, solid economic growth and attractive investment potential identifies it as the State with the advantage of geographic proximity, “Smart State” services and the potential to attract investment, training and import-export expansion to and from the region, particularly the Coral Sea littoral states and territories. For example, PNG nationals already invest significantly in Cairns and the Gold Coast; New Caledonians already utilise Queensland’s medical services (in a \$million invisible industry), small companies in Queensland port cities already trade with Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands, and Queensland schools and tertiary institutions have significant enrolments from Oceania. That is, as Queensland continues to look more attractive as a growth State, and the Coral Sea region looks less able to meet the needs of its populations (and investors), the potential for greater economic flows, trade relations, training and education between Queensland and the region seems inevitable. This potential relationship needs a long-term plan for State development with Queensland, but also nationally.

It is recommended that DFAT investigate the potential for greater links between Queensland and the Coral Sea littoral states and territories.

Summary of Recommendations

- 1 It is recommended that a nationally funded annual seminar/conference on “Australia and Oceania”, with an associated publication, be instituted to advance the teaching of Australia-Pacific and Pacific studies more generally in Australian universities.
- 2 It is recommended that a national professional development project within Australia on “Australia and Oceania” be funded along the lines of the recent AusAID curriculum project on Australian South Sea Islanders. This could replicate that projects primary and secondary curriculum emphasis and the travelling exhibition that successfully raised the profile of Australia’s South Sea Islander community and its history.
- 3 It is recommended that a regional professional development and curriculum materials project for schools within the Oceania region be funded along the lines of the TTPF/HistoryCOPs project to provide classroom materials for Pacific Island schools on the teaching of Australia-Oceania relationships.
- 4 It is recommended that an annual national seminar bringing in players from government, academia, schools and non-government sectors be established to maintain a long-term focus on Australia’s relations with PNG and Oceania.
- 5 It is recommended that a major campaign be instigated to attract indigenous postgraduate scholars to Australian institutions.
- 6 It is recommended that the AusAid International Seminar Assistance Support Scheme (ISSS) be expanded and made more accessible and comprehensive.
- 7 It is recommended that the seminar series recommended above (b, i.) be international in focus, and using ISSS funding, draw scholars from the region to an Australian forum on an annual basis and that this seminar series be rotated around institutions in Queensland – JCU, UCQ, QUT and UQ that have geographic proximity, a high Pacific Islanders enrolment, and existing teaching, research profiles.
- 8 It is recommended that the federal Government make a significant and symbolic statement and funding commitment to Australia-Oceania relationships. This could be done by the Prime Minister at the 2003 Forum meeting, and involve funding of schools campaigns in Oceania and in Australia, an annual international conference and publication and the expansion of postgraduate scholarships for Pacific Islanders to study in Australian institutions.
- 9 It is recommended that a Staff Exchange scheme be established and funded for the exchange of staff between universities in Australia and Oceania.
- 10 It is recommended that the Prime Minister attend all Forum meetings, and make occasional visits to island states.

11 It is recommended that the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade make several and regular tours of island states.

12 It is recommended that DFAT investigate the potential for greater links between Queensland and the Coral Sea littoral states and territories.

END