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# **NCCA Submission to the Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee**

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## **Inquiry into Australia's relationship with Papua New Guinea and other Pacific island countries**

**July 2002**

*This submission is one of two submissions by the National Council of Churches in  
Australia.*

*The other submission is presented by the National Programme on Refugees and Displaced  
People and speaks specifically to issues relating to refugees, asylum, settlement, access  
and equity.*

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**SENATE FOREIGN AFFAIRS, DEFENCE AND TRADE REFERENCES  
COMMITTEE INQUIRY INTO AUSTRALIA'S RELATIONSHIP WITH PAPUA  
NEW GUINEA AND THE ISLAND STATES OF THE SOUTH-WEST PACIFIC**

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**Submission to the Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade  
References Committee Inquiry into Australia's Relationship with PNG  
and the island states of the south-west Pacific**

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## **Introduction**

The National Council of Churches in Australia (NCCA) welcomes the opportunity to submit its views to the Senate References Committee, as it enables the NCCA to contribute the insights it has gained from its involvement in the Pacific since 1948.

The NCCA is comprised of fifteen major Christian denominations working together to strengthen relationships and understanding of each other and to fulfil common witness, mission and service. Through the NCCA, member churches come together to break down the structures that create and perpetuate poverty, oppression, injustice and division. As a representative body, it is inclusive of a large percentage of the Australian population.

The NCCA has a long history of participating in the Pacific working through and with partners to advocate and support the national concerns of the respective countries. The International Programmes Unit operates under the Christian World Service Commission of the NCCA, through a rights based approach to development, which identifies and responds to the causes of people poverty and displacement.

### *International Programmes works in partnership with*

- Australian non government organisations (NGOs) as a member of the Australian Council for Overseas Aid (ACFOA), through the Pacific Working Group
- In-country NGOs and government ministries and departments
- National Councils of Churches in the Pacific
- The Pacific Conference of Churches

### *International Programmes*

- nurtures relationships with partners and organisations overseas supporting their work of emergency relief, development, human rights, advocacy and the environment.
- has a leadership role within the NGOs and the broader community in undertaking and facilitating advocacy and lobbying.
- raises awareness in the Australian community regarding poverty, injustice, ecological damage, acknowledging the shared responsibility of society to respond.
- supports and facilitates national, regional and intra-regional networks
- provides social, political and economic links with Australia.

### **Current Priority Areas and Programme Criteria**

- Safeguarding land and traditional communal land ownership
- Cultural identity, indigenous self-determination and decolonisation
- Environmental fragility and exploitation
- Economic exploitation and inequality vs. sustainable appropriate development and social justice
- Rapid modernisation, urbanisation and migration
- Social and political development (peace, democracy and justice) vs. political weakness, corruption and militarisation

It is within the context of these relations and concerns that the NCCA makes the following submission on Australia's relationship with PNG and the island states of the southwest Pacific, with particular reference to the nations of Papua New Guinea (PNG) and the Solomon Islands. It could apply equally to many Pacific island countries. The submission speaks specifically to the Senate Committee terms of reference:

- (a) the current state of political relations between regional states and Australia;
- (b) *economic relations, including trade, tourism and investment not addressed in this submission;*
- (c) development cooperation relationships with the various states of the region, including the future direction of the overall development cooperation program;
- (d) the implications for Australia of political, economic and security developments in the region.

# **1. The Work of the NCCA in the South-West Pacific**

## **Churches in Melanesia**

In these predominantly Christian countries, over 95% of the population are involved in the life of the church. The churches remain alive and dynamic as society faces many social and civil challenges. They are an accurate representation and reflection of communities at a time when other institutions face decline and collapse. It is therefore an imperative that they be recognised as such.

Churches play a spiritual and a social role in the fabric of society. They are one of the primary means for providing spiritual, social assistance and corporate unification in local communities. Churches have established regional and national networks and sectoral services through national councils, youth and women's groups. Church agencies have a long history of providing health, education, aid and development services to both complement and supplement government services. In the last two decades the church has recognised its responsibility and role in civil society to both assist and advocate on issues of social and human justice with national governments and international bodies. Church agencies are increasingly utilised for their capacity to facilitate and mediate peace issues, address areas of injustice, provide counseling, and assist in strategic policy development.

## **Papua New Guinea Council of Churches**

The primary partner of the NCCA in Papua New Guinea is the Papua New Guinea Council of Churches (PNGCC). The PNGCC was formed in 1965 with the coming together of the mainline Christian churches – Baptist, Evangelical Lutheran Church, Roman Catholic Church, The Salvation Army, and The United Church. The NCCA supports the PNGCC through supporting the operation and capacity of the organisation and their various programme activities:

- Collaborating with the National and Provincial Governments in nation building and policy consultancy, the development of indigenous leaders and other trained personnel.
- Campaigning against nuclear testing and militarisation, economic/political exploitation of the poor, support for solidarity with women and young people.
- Advocating human development through projects for economic self-help, awareness raising, overcoming poverty, building community, promoting peace and justice and strengthening leadership and contributing towards the improvement of living standards and health.
- Justice – peace building, rights of the child, overcoming violence, environmental issues, globalization, self determination, migration, asylum seekers, global warming, human rights, HIV/AIDS, drugs and alcohol abuse.
- Capacity Building – training, communication, personal viability, social empowerment, leadership development, sharing resources, office capability and management.

- Disaster response – disaster preparedness, crisis management, rehabilitation and reconstruction.

### **Solomon Islands Christian Association ( SICA )**

The primary partner of the NCCA in the Solomon Islands is the Solomon Islands Christian Association (SICA). SICA formed in 1967 and its first aim is to consult together in finding ways of Christian service to the community and people of Solomon Islands. The SICA Executive consists of the heads of churches of the primary denominations – Catholic, Church of Melanesia, Seventh Day Adventists, South Seas Evangelical Church and the United Church. The NCCA operates in partnership with the programme arms of SICA –

1. Resource Desk,
2. Youth Desk
3. Federation of Women
4. SICA Peace Office Secretariat.

The primary programme activities are:

- Village education training courses in AIDS/HIV, sexually transmitted infection, family planning, teenage pregnancy and domestic violence, breast feeding project.
- Relief and rehabilitation for displaced people through the provision of basic domestic materials, resettlement and small income generating activities.
- Peace and reconciliation programmes: 1. Counseling and conflict resolution programme workshops. 2. Workshops for youth leaders to address social issues, defuse and restore peace and provide rehabilitation for militants. 3. Local community workshops on peace and reconciliation for affected families and youth in ethnic tension hotspots.
- Assist with the development of a mechanism for restoration for victims of crime through the conviction of leaders to assist in “healing within society”.
- Facilitate the involvement of the Church in the reform of the police.
- Encourage member churches to assist in the collection of firearms from their communities.
- Development of a network of key people and bodies from various sectors in the task of envisioning the future.
- Promote the civil society network through the country to engage in national and regional issues of the peace process, governance and national development.

## 2.

### **(a) The current state of relations between regional states and Australia and New Zealand**

Few will disagree as to the current state of failure that is indicated by the violence, economic decline, corruption and institutional decay in PNG and the Solomon Islands. There is however no great cohesion as to the nature of Australia's engagement in the affairs of the South-west Pacific. What has the pattern of these relationships been? What type of engagement is effective and appropriate for both stakeholder and recipient?

In Melanesia relationships are intrinsic to all contexts of human interaction. Relationships will vary in their level of trust and the extent to which they are mutually beneficial. They will however consistently feature ongoing dialogue and obligation. When the key elements of relationship are not present then it will be vulnerable to being dysfunctional.

The relationship between PNG and Australia is not characterised by a Melanesian style of interaction. Current calls for greater inputs of Australian human and financial resources into the Pacific are not con-current with the perspective of recipient governments. PNG society is indicating discontent and resistance to the presence of the Australian Government and media. As a beneficiary of significant external aid and development funding, PNG is becoming increasingly sensitive to the requirements of tied assistance. The reaction to perceptions of paternalism, arrogance and disrespect by Australia are being exacerbated with the absence of dialogue and collaboration between governments.

A process of dialogical engagement is critical to ownership, empowerment and defining parameters in order that the recipient feels they are acting in response to relationship. The minimisation of relationship disengages responsibility, accountability, goodwill and openness. The opportunity to operate outside of the parameters of partnership is then provided. This environment fosters and self-fulfills corruption and misappropriation. This contrasts with the sense of obligation and accountability that is possible in the Melanesian relationship context.

While the Australian Government has the responsibility to be accountable to its own constituency the process of transferring resources requires the mutual consent of the recipient. A long established pattern for self-fulfilling bad management has become engrained. While the Australian Government is serious about its role in the Pacific it must meet its partners as equals and be prepared to commit to establishing the dynamics of good relationship, addressing root causes and critical issues and not relying on programme and contract timeframes.

PNG and the Solomon Islands church umbrella organisations recognise the NCCA as a significant relational link and conduit between the South-west Pacific and Australia. The NCCA appreciates this role both as a privilege and serious responsibility. Our ongoing communication, relationships and networks enable the NCCA to be a crossover body between Australia and its neighbours, providing representation between the various sectors, governments and NGOs. The potential and opportunity for the NCCA to be a reference, a representative and relational linkage for Australia has not yet been fully utilised.

## **Recommendations**

*We recommend that:*

1. Australia remains committed to sound and meaningful relationships with the PNG and Solomon Islands governments and pursues those relationships in real and meaningful ways.
2. Australia takes concrete steps to ensure and maintain practices of open and honest dialogue with the PNG and Solomon Islands Governments that maximise the potential for mutual agreeance and collaboration.
3. the Australian Government act on the relevant information that is available on the in-country situation.
4. the respective governments provide an action plan indicating how they will ensure ongoing communication with their constituencies that demonstrates the operation of collaborative and consultative processes in order that accurate perceptions are achieved and resistance to change and reform is minimised.
5. the Australian Government utilise the NCCA in its capacity to provide relational and functional linkages and assistance within and between States with governments, NGOs and society.

### **(b) Economic relations, including trade, tourism and investment**

*Not addressed in this submission.*

## **3.**

### **(c) Development cooperation relationships with the various states of the region, including the future direction of the overall development cooperation program**

There are definite perceptions regarding the current nature of development cooperation relationships between Australia and the Melanesian states.

- There is concern among in-country practitioners that the development strategies that are being defined by the Australian Government do not accurately reflect the relative circumstances or need of the donor country. Agendas and strategies are perceived as not being arrived at through consultation with in-country practitioners. Some in-country practitioners feel they are working within a structure where they are applying for financial assistance to achieve externally defined aims and objectives that deviate from the real needs and situation.
- There is a perception that the analysis of in-country situations by the Australian Government to the media and public does not necessarily make accurate links to either the real source of the problem or the appropriate response that is required. Descriptions and solutions would appear to be minimised to prevent offence or



antagonism. While it is important to project an optimistic outlook this must be done in relation to the ultimate source of the problems. Otherwise reform is superficial and has the capacity to reflect change that is both qualitatively inaccurate and misleading. Consideration of diplomatic ties should not be at the expense of quality development.

- It is becoming increasingly evident that sustainable technological and physical development requires long term financial and maintenance inputs. This is inclusive of operations that would have previously (and successfully) utilised labour intensive inputs. Critical public services appear to be increasingly dependent upon external contracts and finance. “Maintenance” of externally funded projects would appear to occur through the complete replacement of that service or facility, once deterioration or failure has occurred. Once a development activity is externally funded and provided, internal infrastructure is further decapitated. This becomes an expectation of the recipient. Contracts must therefore consider the parameters beyond the initial implementation phase.
- There is a high level of potential for the streamlining and consolidation of work between NGOs and government agencies. NGOs in the Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea have effective “working groups” that are largely achieving this goal. There is a comparative disparity when considering the working relationship of government agencies and NGOs. This is also contextual to Government/NGO funding partnerships. Ongoing working relationships and networks are required for strategic cooperation on in-country situational and impact analysis, short-term developments and programme activities.

To date, mutual acknowledgement and cooperation seems to be optional rather than imperative. Effective, quality work by funding agencies and practitioners requires an interdependent approach in a truly relational and accountable environment. The synergy and capacity is there. This however needs to be demonstrated with clear terms and indicators of actualisation.

- The Australian government has failed to recognise that churches are also social organizations with effective operational networks. These networks act as vehicles and infrastructure for social change in civil society. Churches are not only societal benchmarks for truth and justice but are well established as practitioners. Due acknowledgement of them as major stakeholders is not reflected in policy and strategy. In Melanesia the churches are the only primary organization that currently reflects and maintains the operational integrity, stability and capacity that is required at this fragile time in the South-west Pacific.

## **Recommendations**

*We recommend that:*

1. Australia ensures that situational and contextual analysis involves consultation with both in-country practitioners and potential recipients.

2. the strategy and planning process incorporates both practitioners and recipients to ensure positive feedback and endorsement of resulting proposals.
3. independent impact studies be conducted to adequately assess the effectiveness of the scope of development programmes and works in the context of sustainability and quality.
4. the Australian Government and NGOs implement standards and policy for cooperation and working together.
5. Australia recognise the representative and functional role of the church in the South-west Pacific, as is indicated by the church's role in Melanesian society.
6. the comprehensive capacity of church organisations be fully utilised as practitioners who are engaging in all areas of societal concern.

#### **4.**

#### **(d) The implications for Australia of political, economic and security developments in the region**

##### **Papua New Guinea**

PNG is becoming increasingly ripe for overt anarchy. An underlying breakdown of civil society has been increasingly evident in the last year with the national failure of the law and order system and the decreasing deterioration of health and education services. Incidents related to the current election have demonstrated the possible failure of democracy through ongoing disruption to the electoral process which further exacerbates the instability of the parliamentary system.

Capacity building activities related to health, education, social issues and environmental management are all structurally dependent. Such activities become largely irrelevant and ineffectual without relevant structural mechanisms. Until good governance, reform and self-determination are taken seriously, anarchy in all its forms, will continue to have free reign. Past governments, while acknowledging the need, have not been willing to address democratic reform but postponed it as the agenda of future governments.

The terms of conditionality of the Australian Government and other international financiers have been sensitive to this position, primarily requiring economic and regional reform. The choice to avoid issues of national governance is no longer optional for PNG or the neighbouring supporting states.

##### **Solomon Islands**

The Solomon Islands is facing many issues in the post-ethnic conflict period. The nation is challenged at the most fundamental level in its capacity to:

- uphold its Constitution
- demonstrate uncompromising and transparent Government

- provide law and order services (including the investigation of fraud)
- fulfil the oversight of the reconciliation process through facilitating and demonstrating repentance and restitution
- address human rights issues related to the recent ethnic tension.

## Summary

Discussions based on capacity building do not appear to openly acknowledge the factors that are debilitating to a given issue. The extent to which such issues are addressed underpins and ultimately determines outcomes at a micro and macro level. Both countries are ultimately facing decisions that can be significantly influenced by political will. Political will determines the type of leadership, public example and analysis that is communicated to society and the region. The direction that these determinates take has obvious implications for the Australian Government. Any deterioration of either state calls for further political, economic and development responses from the Australian Government. The instability or collapse of these nations potentially compromises other regional states. The level of repercussion and intervention can be minimised through appropriate but greater assertion of Australia's position for effective long term transparent reform.

## Recommendations

*We recommend that:*

1. Australia seek open dialogue with respective governments in seeking to first and foremost address issues that are debilitating in nature and consequence in a manner in which they can be most constructively and effectively treated.
2. Australia endorse the counsel and engagement of civil society networks in a whole of society approach.
3. for the Solomon Islands, following the model used in East Timor, a similar commission be established to achieve reconciliation and justice with three primary functions:
  - Seek the truth regarding human rights violations since 1998 for victims and perpetrators to describe, acknowledge and record human rights abuses.
  - Facilitate community reconciliation by dealing with past cases of lesser crimes. A Regional Commissioner and community leaders would mediate between victims and perpetrators to reach agreement on an act of reconciliation by the perpetrator. Evidence of serious crimes would be referred to the Office of the General Prosecutor while remaining under the supervision of the Commission.
  - The Commission report on its findings and make recommendations for further action on reconciliation and the promotion of human rights.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> ( This recommendation is based on initiatives in East Timor: [www.easttimor-reconciliation.org](http://www.easttimor-reconciliation.org) )

4. the NCCA and respective church umbrella organisations in the South-West Pacific be fully utilised in their capacity to provide consultation in the development of policy and strategy. communication, mediation and the engagement of relief and development services.

The NCCA welcomes the opportunity for further input into this inquiry and future opportunities to assist the Government.