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

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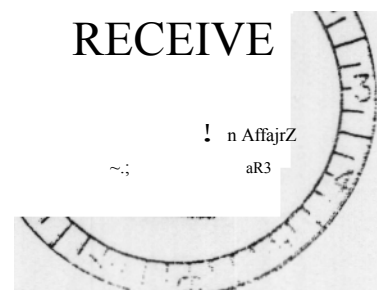
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The Chairman  
Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade

Inquiry into Papua New Guinea

Dear Mr Chairman



This letter is my submission to your Committee's inquiry into Australia's relationship with Papua New Guinea.

Personal Background. I had a deep personal involvement in the affairs of Papua New Guinea during the period 1954 -74. I began as a Cadet patrol Officer in 1954. I served in the Manus and Eastern Highlands Districts from 1954 to 1961. I served in the Departments of Trade and Industry, and Transport from 1962-1974. I studied Development Economics at Cornell University graduating Master of Science in 1967. My thesis was entitled *The Economic Development of Papua and New Guinea*. A note summarizing the theoretical core of that thesis was published in *The Economic Record* of September 1972. Beyond all that I had a continuing role as a simultaneous translator during sessions of The House of Assembly. That activity provided a superb vantage point to view the march to selfgovernment.

The Terms of Reference would seem to imply that 'Papua New Guinea' is in some sense a discrete socio/political entity. This is not the case. A distinction has to be made between the government and the people of Papua New Guinea. America's current difficulties in relating to both the despotic government of Saudi Arabia and its restless proletariat may well be relevant to the problems that lie ahead in Australia's relationship to Papua New Guinea. The thrust of my submission is that, whilst formal government to government relationships will have to continue, Australia should even now be seeking to open up direct but informal lines of communication to the people of Papua New Guinea proper.

The Fundamentals. I may be out of touch with contemporary PNG but my direct exposure to its development which extended virtually from the stone age to political independence is broader than that of any contemporary Australian observer or indeed most of the current PNG population. Fragmentation. Papua New Guinea is notable for its 700 languages but it is too little appreciated that the geographical parameters that generated that diversity are essentially intact. Port Moresby has a magnificent harbour and a providential proximity to Australia but there it ends. It has a road system that leads virtually nowhere. It is located in a sterile rain shadow. It cannot serve as an outlet for much in the way of exports but it does absorb most of the imports. Its remoteness from Bougainville's copper became the foundation of a political tragedy.

Village Life The New Guinea Highlands that I worked in were in the throes of a Cultural honeymoon. Steel, penicillin and the Pax Britannica had remade their lives and the people were desperate for more of the same. That honeymoon was far from spent by the time self-government was mooted in the 1970s. My favourite image of the run-up to selfgovernment was the old lady at Gumine in the Eastern Highlands who told Michael Somare and an assembled multitude that self-government 'now' was just like throwing the whole country into the River Wahgi-a reference to her people's preferred way of committing suicide.

At the other end of the spectrum different pressures were at work,. I recall the African diplomat who felt that political independence would unleash so much energy and idealism that the Australian Administration had a duty to goad the people into demanding it. The Whitlam Government had two other problems. The first was money. Independence and Bougainvilles's copper just might get Australia off the financial hook. More important ,however, were the ,matters of race and colonialism. Whitlam did not want Australia's position on the world stage to be tarred with either brush. World opinion mattered to Whitlam far more than Papua New Guinea opinion.

At about that time a Commission of Inquiry into Constitutional Development found that there was no demand for political change but change there had to be. The result was a fully 'representative' House of Assembly. 'Representative' only in the sense that there were no appointed members. A truly representative House of Assembly would have voted overwhelmingly for continued Australian tutelage but the 'newly elected' were fish out of water. The first meeting of the new house was scheduled for a Monday.

Incumbent conservative members, black and white, took their continued numerical superiority so much for granted that they chose to arrive in Port Moresby only on the preceding Sunday. The small group of radicals making up the PANGU faction chose to arrive on the preceding Friday so that they could meet, greet and seduce each fish out of water as he stepped of the plane. I was amazed to discover that the Member representing the people around Mt Karimui whom I had helped rescue from tribal fighting, cannibalism and tropical ulcers only 17 years earlier had thrown in his lot with the PANGU party.

That fateful weekend has left a mark on the government of Papua New Guinea that I see as analogous to the enduring imprint of corruption made by the New South Wales Corps. There was no room for Puritanism in those days either. The current state of the governance in Papua New Guinea does not have Melanesian origins. It is a monument to the political ineptitude of the Whitlam Government. Nationhood should be seen as handiwork of folk heroes like Ghandi and Jefferson. Instead Australia created a government endowed with all the legitimacy of Vichy France.

When it comes to dealing with a national government that was decadent before it was even born I would not know where to start. I knew Mekere Marauta as an under graduate and had hoped that he represented a rock of intelligence and integrity upon which a legitimate government might be built. I do not expect as much of Prime Minister Somare Mark III.



I feel that somehow Australia has to find away out of the corrupt and decadent loop that the present Port Moresby regime represents. Two elements born of my past experience may be relevant.

**Village Development** One of the main themes of my thesis was the potential for **development** to be found in the subsistence sector. In the New Guinea village a working week of about fourteen hours was sufficient to provide for food and shelter, and in pre-contact times the balance of waking hours could be devoted to art, ceremony, pigs, fighting and women. In the post-contact era village life became excruciatingly dull. The result was an exodus to Port Moresby that brutalized the emigrants and impoverished the villages.

I could see that if modern technology could only be adapted to the specifics of the resource base of the New Guinea village a very high standard of living could be achieved at a very modest cost. In those days my vision of the future was a \$200 a year Utopia .Today some allowance would have to be made for inflation. The remedy for boredom could only be television. That would require power. Power would lead to an armoury of gadgets that could improve the quality of village life. That vision is less than Utopian in today's world. Satellite communications are as if made to order for the isolated New Guinea village. Local sources of power -- solar, wind hydro or biomass-- are today intuitively acceptable to public opinion in the West. The opportunity to spend on productive artifacts would create a demand for money that could double the volume of cash cropping. Involvement in the cash economy might pass a critical threshold and self-generating economic growth would be under way. This sort of approach was canvassed in my thesis and it did generate some islands of approval but it was too unfamiliar and adventurous for a layered hierarchy of risk avoiding Australian bureaucrats.

But in today's context I do know where to start. Let Australia, preferably through a private institution, establish a 'Nobel Prize' for village development. That innovation would focus public attention on the problems and opportunities implicit in a rural life style in Papua New Guinea. The check-list the judging panel could use in appraising village innovations could read something like this: Food

- Clothing
- Shelter
- Fireplaces
- Television
- Football
- Health
- Trade stores

The climate for this sort of approach is far better today than it was in the 1960s. Economies of scale are no longer the only economic imperatives and to some extent the world has come to accept Schumacher's doctrine that small is beautiful. Some other more recent developments have surprised me. The wartime isolation of Bougainville seems to have precipitated a wide variety of spontaneous innovations in village technology. The flowering of the greens in Australian politics constitutes a ready a made interest group to push my approach internationally.





There was once a Senator Fullbright who gave his surname to the language by using surplus aid funds from the US to create his own version of Nobel prizes in the form of fellowships for the best and brightest from abroad to study in America's finest universities. Surnames apart, Australia's Senator Bob Brown would seem to me to be admirably equipped for a similar role, I suggest a prize of \$2,000,000 to be awarded every two years. That might seem a lot but it would be a small price to pay in terms public relations. The winning village would become a prototype for villages, governments and NGOs that wanted to do something conspicuously useful for the third world.

Brown Australians. One of my lasting impressions of the colonial twilight was the emergence of a vanguard of Austrian educated indigenes who had crossed the caste barriers of the colonial Raj. They were taking their place in government and given time would have become as familiar with the ways of an Australian bureaucracy as I was. The time frame, however, was all wrong. Given another five years they could have taken over as departmental heads and gained enough confidence and experience to hold their own with their political master's. As it turned out power gravitated to the elected members of the House of Assembly. There was high intelligence and some remarkable personalities amongst that membership but the members lacked literacy and English language skills. Perhaps more importantly, whilst the, I found it easy to adopt the rhetoric of 'national unity' and all that, they were Melanesian Big Men who appreciated far better than I did that at village level votes were won by personality and local allegiances rather than national issues. Their vision of PNG's future, if any, was not mine.

It occurs to me, however, that if the Australian Government were to set up a system of "Rhodes scholarships" to send elite indigenes to elite Australian schools and universities it could create a new generation of brown Australians. Just where the graduates of such a programme would end up when they returned to their native Melanesia is impossible to predict but I venture two generalizations. Their command of English, and their intuitive grasp of Western culture would be so scarce and valuable that they would have to become influential figures in their country of origin. They would also have a ready made Australian network which would provide many informal lines of communication that could link the Australian Government to the PNG people.

Sir Mekere Marauta is not a 'brown Australian' although he comes very close to it. Put a hundred men of his caliber in key positions and there just might be some hope for the country.

National Sovereignty. I have invoked the names of Nobel, Rhodes and Fullbright because none of the institutions implicit in these names can be seen to have undermined the sovereignty of the recipient countries. Australia cannot afford to offend the Port Moresby Government and this aspect of my proposals is important.

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