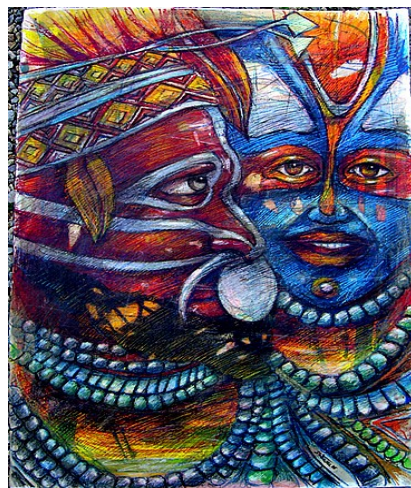


## Executive Summary

# A National Strategy for the Study of the Pacific



This is a summary of the forthcoming full report to be published by  
the Australian Association for the Advancement of Pacific Studies

2009

## The origins of the National Strategy Report

At a national planning meeting in Canberra in 2004 and at the subsequent conference of the Australian Association for the Advancement of Pacific Studies (AAAPS) in Brisbane in January 2006, a malaise was identified in Australia in teaching and research on the Pacific.

A program was designed to revive and enhance the excellence in teaching and research that had once marked Australia as the leader in the field. AAAPS also acknowledged the increasing concern in Australia about security, good governance, stability and development assistance in the neighbouring region.

A plan to develop a national strategy to expand teaching and research in the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences in universities, archives, libraries, galleries and museums was the outcome.

AAAPS also ran a series of workshops, started up a website, a newsletter and an online eJournal *PacifiCurrents*, held its second national conference in Canberra in April 2008 and started planning for a third conference in Melbourne in 2010.

The objectives of AAAPS, a not-for-profit incorporated association, are outlined in its Constitution.

(See < [www.aaaps.edu.au](http://www.aaaps.edu.au) >)

## Why we need a National Strategy for the Study of the Pacific.

- Australia has a long and deep historical engagement with the Pacific.
- Australia has rich resources for the study of, teaching about, and research on the Pacific but they are under-utilised.
- Australia needs greater collaboration with scholars and colleagues in the region and with the expanding Pacific Islander communities.
- Funding and national coordination is necessary to
  - expand teaching
  - expand research
  - expand collections and provide greater public access
  - promote Pacific Studies in schools
  - develop public awareness of our engagement as part of the Pacific Islands region.

## Key Recommendations: Highest Priority.

The following are the ten highest ranked of the fifty-three Recommendations listed in the full AAAPS National Strategy Report.

Those identified as “High Priority” are considered the most desirable and able to be costed readily, accountable and measureable in relation to advancing teaching and research on the Pacific in Australia’s universities and institutions.

Each recommendation calls for immediate action, based on evidence presented in the Report.

- That Australian universities develop undergraduate units/subjects that specifically examine Australia’s role in the Pacific Island region.
- That the Commonwealth government fund and establish a *Centre of Excellence in Pacific Studies* for a ten-year period, located in a State or Territory capital, to support, emphasise and facilitate the national spread of inter-institutional teaching and research on the Pacific.
- That the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade fund for a ten-year period, a *Council on Australia Pacific Island Relations*, located in a university in a State or Territory capital or major centre.
- That Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade fund for a ten-year period, an *Australia-Papua New Guinea Institute*, located in a university in a State or Territory capital or major centre.

- That the Australian Research Council declares the “Pacific Islands” a priority area for ten years.
- That the Commonwealth government allocate funding for emerging scholars through tagged appointments and salaries to ensure talented postgraduates remain in the Pacific Studies field, and remain in Australian institutions.
- That the Australian Vice-Chancellors’ Committee (AVCC) review all tertiary institutions regarding their contribution to research on the Pacific, and declare the ‘Pacific Islands’ a priority in teaching and research over a ten-year period.
- That the Commonwealth Government funds a national project to catalogue all Pacific Island collections in Australia.
- That the Commonwealth government funds a national report on the social, cultural, political and economic status of and contribution of Pacific Islanders to Australia.
- That the National Curriculum Framework include specific reference to the study of Australia’s relations with the Pacific Islands, Australian South Sea Islanders and Australia’s Pacific Islander communities.

## Teaching about the Pacific

Individual ‘lighthouse’ units that provide exemplars are being offered, but are now solo performances and single subjects scattered thinly across the undergraduate domain.

ANU’s new Major in Pacific Studies could be a model and lead the way in a revitalised undergraduate teaching sector.

The full Report offers strategies that nationally by 2029, would mean a new cohort of undergraduates will have completed ‘Pacific Studies’ as a core element of their first degrees.

## In the National Interest

Australia through DFAT has funded Foundations, Institutes and Councils for many nations and regions but not for promoting understanding and linkages within Australia and with the Pacific Islands region.

For example, in April 2009, the government called for proposals by universities to establish a “Centre of Excellence” with funding of \$8m to “showcase innovation and best practice”, collaboration and linkages, and to offer “strategies that are practical, implementable and affordable”. But, the April 2009 invitation was for a *Centre of Excellence in Local Government*. These are the same goals as detailed throughout this Report

What Australia clearly needs now is for the government to initiate the establishment of a *Centre of Excellence in Pacific Studies*.

In March 2009, applications were sought for a DFAT-funded Council on Australia’s relations with a particular Asian nation, to improve bi-lateral relations and “research, professional

development, language and cultural studies” and facilitate “increased public awareness” and the “development of partnerships”.

The AAAPS Report seeks a similar government scheme of support, not only to enhance existing research on the Pacific Islands, awareness of and partnerships with the Pacific Islands, but also to urgently expand the level of engagement by Australian researchers with matters of national interest, common concern and regional development.

## The need for national coordination

A nationally-financed coordinating body will fund, direct, stimulate and manage Pacific Studies teaching and research synergies across States and institutions, in the same way that DFAT-funded Councils, Institutes and Foundations do for Latin America, Arab Relations or for Korea, Malaysia and Thailand.

The AAAPS Report identifies two levels of funding—a national Centre to expand and promote of excellence in teaching and research in universities—and two Councils or Institutes to promote public awareness, international linkages and study in schools.

A *National Centre for Excellence in Pacific Studies* in a State or Territory capital would promote national linkages and liaison across all States and Territories. Its budget over a ten-year period would include the following specific commonwealth-funded projects, identified as “recommendations” in the AAAPS Report.

- Scholarships for emerging scholars (Recommendation 11)
- Scholarships and research grants on Pacific Studies (Recommendation 13)
- A catalogue of all Pacific collections in Australia (Recommendation 18)
- A bibliography of all Australian theses on the Pacific since 1900 (Recommendation 12)
- Promotion of Pacific Studies, Pacific Legal Studies, Pacific Literature, Pacific Development Studies and regional placements for teacher trainees (Recommendations 1, 3, 4, 5, 27, 30, 31)
- Conduct an annual postgraduate forum (Recommendation 10)
- Liaise with the ARC and Deans of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences (Recommendations 1, 9, 14)
- Liaise with DFAT and other government agencies (Recommendation 45, 46, 47)
- Promote increased liaison and collaboration between galleries, museum, libraries and archives and their Pacific communities (Recommendations 15, 17, 18, 19, 20 and 21)
- Coordinate a regional national history-writing project (Recommendation 22)
- Liaise with AusAID and State and Territory education departments to produce school materials (Recommendation 31, 49 and 50)

The Centre should be located in Brisbane, Sydney or Melbourne. They are already noted for university teaching and research on the Pacific and have a good record of postgraduate research, and host think-tanks, archives, galleries, museums and libraries and have significant Pacific Islander communities, and this would demonstrate clearly the national focus of teaching and research in Australia.

A *Council for Australia-Pacific Relations*, and an *Australia-Papua New Guinea Institute*, would include in their budgets over a ten-year period, the following specific commonwealth-funded projects:

- A report on the social, economic and cultural status of Pacific Islanders in Australia (Recommendation 43)
- Conduct an annual “Pacific Youth in Education Forum/Program” (Recommendation 6)
- Fund specific research projects on Australia-Pacific relations (Recommendation 13)
- Fund a staff exchange program with the Fiji and PNG Law Schools (Recommendation 4)
- A national report on the repatriation of Pacific artefacts (Recommendation 19)
- An annual prize to schools with the best Pacific programs (Recommendation 42)
- An annual Pacific Islands performing arts tour of Australia (Recommendation 44)
- An annual prize for Pacific fiction, documentary film, or online access and a travelling writers fellowship (Recommendations 32–36)
- An online site on Australia’s Pacific Islander communities (Recommendation 29)

The proposed *Australia-Papua New Guinea Institute* would be best located in Canberra, as ANU is a leading university in the world in research on PNG and already hosts other Melanesian centres and programs.

The proposed *Council for Australia-Pacific Islands Relations* should be located in one of the three capital cities noted above, and would carry out the roles already funded and identified for the other DFAT-funded councils, institutes and foundations.

**Note: The full report will be distributed to all universities and institutions, Commonwealth parliamentarians, Pacific Island consulates and embassies, and will be available online at the AAAPS website**

## The Nations, Territories and Regions of Oceania

*American Samoa, unincorporated  
territory of USA*

*Australia*

*Banaba (Ocean Island), within Kiribati*

*Commonwealth of the Northern*

*Mariana Islands, territory of the  
USA*

*Cook Islands, independent in association  
with New Zealand*

*Easter Island (Rapanui) Province, Chile*

*Federated States of Micronesia,  
independent in association with  
USA (includes Yap, Chuuk,  
Pohnpei and Kosrae)*

*Fiji*

*French Polynesia, an overseas territory  
of France*

*Guam, unincorporated territory of USA*

*Hawai'i, State of USA*

*Kiribati*

*Loyalty Islands, within New Caledonia*

*Marshall Islands, independent in  
association with USA*

*Nauru*

*New Caledonia, an overseas 'country' of  
France*

*New Zealand (Aotearoa)*

*Niue, independent in association with  
New Zealand*

*Palau, independent in association with  
USA*

*Papua, Province, Indonesia*

*Papua Barat, Province, Indonesia*

*Papua New Guinea*

*Pitcairn Island, territory of United  
Kingdom*

*Samoa*

*Solomon Islands*

*Tokelau, a territory of New Zealand*

*Tonga*

*Torres Strait Islands, within  
Queensland, Australia*

*Tuvalu*

*Vanuatu*

*Wallis and Futuna, an overseas  
territory of France*

**Cover illustration:**

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**“Looking Straight (Future); Looking Sideways (Surroundings)” 56.5 x 75.5cm**