

# Proposal

## PACIFIC REGIONAL TRAINING INSTITUTE

An Australian sponsored regional training initiative to accelerate  
the development of governance, sustainability and self-reliance  
in Pacific and adjacent nations

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

This proposal has been prepared in response to the Terms of Reference of the Inquiry by the Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee into the economic and security challenges facing Papua New Guinea and the island states of the southwest Pacific. The paper has specific reference to *Clause b (i)*: "The inquiry to include an examination of the following: (i) employment opportunities, labour mobility, education and skilling".

The proposal seeks to establish a Brisbane-based Pacific Regional Training Institute [Pacific Institute] to develop governance, sustainability and self-reliance among the nations of the South Pacific and Timor-Leste.

The Pacific Institute will provide a significant educational and intellectual input to increasing Australian involvement in the region, and address issues related to changing security,

political, economic, governmental and environmental conditions, and the need – in such circumstances – for a closer and more collegial relationship.

In the foundation period, the proposal focuses on the Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea, but, beyond this, it will address the need to strengthen relationship with all nations in the region.

Initially it is intended that the Pacific Institute concentrate on public service and agricultural training and offer high level short-term programs to deal with a range of critical regional issues.

## 2. CONTEXT

Australia's involvement with the Pacific, and especially with the Melanesian nations of Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea, is based on geographic proximity, shared history and security considerations. In addition, in the context of building and maintaining good regional relationships while combating poverty and underdevelopment, Australia also has a responsibility to assist its neighbours with issues related to governance, education, law, policing, health, water resources management, transport, economic development, the environment and nutrition.

Australia's interest in maintaining regional security is partly related to international terrorism but also flows from political and economic instability in our immediate region that has led to four coups in Fiji, one in Solomon Islands, urban riots in Tonga and Solomon Islands, instability in Vanuatu, governance issues in Papua New Guinea, and economic mismanagement in Nauru and Solomon Islands. There are also potential difficulties associated with outside influence in the Pacific region and climate change.

Australia spends about \$1.1 billion in development aid in the region each year,<sup>1</sup> with a concentration on Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Timor-Leste. Much Australian aid revolves around security and the maintenance of human and physical infrastructure.

In Papua New Guinea the relationship has an historical origin, including a significant colonial connection that ended in 1975. Since World War II, the relationship has been a major priority for Australia and has involved substantial levels of funding.

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<sup>1</sup> AusAID figures show current annual spending (rounded) of \$390 million in Papua New Guinea, \$236 million in Solomon Islands and \$96 million in Timor-Leste of a total Pacific and Timor-Leste aid budget of nearly \$1.1 billion.

In Timor-Leste and Solomon Islands, the relationship has most recently grown out of political instability and civil unrest that necessitated Australian military and police involvement, accompanied by a corresponding increase in development activities.

Since the change of government at the 2007 Federal election, the Commonwealth is now reconceptualising its involvement in the Pacific, including placing an obligation on Pacific nations to respond to Australia's initiative with reciprocal commitments of their own.<sup>2</sup>

### 3. STRATEGIC INTEGRATION OF EFFORT

Though a large amount of money is being spent annually by Australia, there seems to be a large degree of waste and no clear evidence of a permanent transfer of skills to Pacific peoples, such as would create economic sustainability and national self-reliance.<sup>3</sup>

Much of what Australia does is admirable but piecemeal: often a reaction to specific political, social and economic circumstances. There is a need for an embracing strategy and long-term re-conceptualisation. The Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands [RAMSI] is a good example where Australian involvement was necessary but, after five years, with initial stabilisation accomplished, there seems to be no clear direction, signs of policy drift and feelings of disengagement by Solomon Islands leaders.<sup>4</sup>

This complaint from Solomon Islanders, however much they appreciate what RAMSI has accomplished, is symptomatic of the lack of a more comprehensive strategy that would represent a shared future vision of how Australia and the Solomon Islands might better work together on shaping and implementing effective policy responses to development issues.

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<sup>2</sup> Amongst other things, the Port Moresby Declaration of 6 March 2008 said "the Government of Australia is committed to beginning a new era of cooperation with the island nations of the Pacific... The Government of Australia proposes to pursue Pacific Partnerships for Development with our Pacific island neighbours. These Pacific Partnerships for Development will provide a new framework for Australia and the Pacific island nations to commit jointly to achieving shared goals.... Under the Pacific Partnerships for Development, the Government of Australia will be prepared to provide increased development assistance over time in a spirit of mutual responsibility embracing commitments by the Pacific island nations to improve governance, to increase investment in economic infrastructure, and to achieve better outcomes in health and education"

<sup>3</sup> "The question which Australian taxpayers will legitimately ask is: What return have they got for the more than \$11.2 billion their government has spent on the neighbourhood? By and large the economic indicators are heading in the wrong direction. Many of the social indicators are heading in the wrong direction. And so too are the security indicators.... That's why we believe the time has come for a fundamental rethink of the direction of Australia's development assistance strategy in the region." Kevin Rudd, 'Fresh ideas for future challenges: a new approach to Australia's arc of instability', Speech to the Lowy Institute, 5 July 2007

<sup>4</sup> "The five years of RAMSI mission in Solomon Islands has achieved much that is of great value to the current government and people of Solomon Islands. However, this positive impact has been counter-balanced by local perception rightly or wrongly, that this assistance has been at the expense of local ownership and that the partnership has been unequal... all reviews so far carried out on the mission have been done by external organisations and bodies." Prime Minister, Dr Derek Sikua, Speech to Solomon Islands Parliament, Radio Australia, 25 July 2008

Too often, it seems, Australia dispatches to the Pacific personnel who are under-prepared for their role.<sup>5</sup> The contributions these people make to national public services are frequently ineffective and may leave a residue of resentment amongst nationals whose high expectations were unrequited.<sup>6</sup>

On the other hand, anecdotal evidence suggests that many Pacific Island public servants, although equipped with university degrees, find difficulty in operating efficiently because an 'idealised' or culturally inappropriate education in developed countries has not equipped them appropriately for the realities they face back home.<sup>7</sup>

The foregoing examples all point to a "strategic imbalance" in the relationship between Australia and Pacific island nations at the point at which planning transforms into delivery. This imbalance derives from a mismatch between the intentions and expectations of development aid and the realities of its implementation.

#### 4. PREVIOUS INITIATIVES

From 1947-73 the Australian Government operated the Australian School of Pacific Administration [ASOPA] at Mosman in Sydney. ASOPA's main function was to train Australian patrol and education officers to work in Australian territories, primarily Papua New Guinea and the Northern Territory. A core attribute of the training was to equip these young

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<sup>5</sup> "The sight of an Australian sitting and just listening is still too rare in the Pacific. One of the leaders of our journalistic clan in the region, Mary-Louise O'Callaghan, says there should be a basic induction lesson for every Australian arriving in the Solomon Islands to help run RAMSI, the Regional Assistance Mission. The Australians should be taken to a room in pairs and then made to sit and look at each other in total silence for five minutes. Then, she says, they need to be told that sitting in silence for that long with a Solomon Islander is quite acceptable, and they might end up hearing something important." Graeme Dobell, 'Australia and the Pacific's Lost Generation', *Quadrant*, Volume LI Number 3, February 2007

<sup>6</sup> "Even when the figures didn't look good, the consultants fell back on economic theory to say free trade was still a good idea. The most outrageous example was the Australian consultants' report that said the Islands would benefit most from an agreement that included Australia and NZ. The modeling actually predicted that only the Cook Islands, Fiji and PNG would make significant gains... That left eight countries - Marshall Islands, Kiribati, Niue, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tuvalu, Tonga and Vanuatu - which the modeling said would suffer significant revenue losses.... Logic would suggest that an agreement which is predicted to leave 8 out of 14 countries worse off is a bad idea. Instead, the report claimed that even those countries could benefit because: *'Economic theory tells us that open, outward looking economies can deliver higher living standards than protected, inward looking economies.'*" Professor Jane Kelsey, 'A people's guide to PACER: the implications for the Pacific Islands of the Pacific Agreement on Closer Economic Relations', Commissioned by the Pacific Network on Globalisation, Final Report, August 2004

<sup>7</sup> "Despite much training in public administration over the past 20 years there has been little improvement in public service management in the Third World. This was anticipated in Schaffer's critical notion of 'trainingism'. This concept, when applied to Papua New Guinea, helps us to understand why training has been unable to produce dramatic changes in public service performance. Training has been used to perform latent functions and has not been evaluated. The situation is currently under review as new initiatives are taking place to improve training's contribution to public service efficiency and effectiveness." Dr Mark M Turner, 'Trainingism revisited in Papua New Guinea', *Public Administration and Development*, Volume 9 Issue 1

Australians for the precise cultural and physical environment in which they would have to deliver the desired public policy outcomes.

In 1973, with independence looming in Papua New Guinea, ASOPA was integrated into the structure of the Australian Development Assistance Agency/Bureau as the International Training Institute. It trained people, generally at the level of middle management, from developing nations in the Pacific, Asia, Africa and the Caribbean generally in three-month programs in areas such as human resource management, industrial relations, health administration, communications development, educational administration etc. ITI was disestablished in 2001.

The learnings of current relevance that can be derived from the cases of ASOPA and ITI are:

- Specific training to equip professionals to engage knowledgeably with the cultural and social environments in which they will be operating in the Pacific.
- The beneficial effect of comparative country experience brought to the training process by participants themselves.
- The need for role equalization between sponsors and participants to avoid any suggestion of paternalism (top-down direction or 'we're helping you' intimations).
- The greater benefits that can occur from facilitated dialogue (including expert contributions) among people of influence in their own countries interacting, addressing issues and sharing knowledge with people of influence from other countries.

## 5. PACIFIC REGIONAL TRAINING INSTITUTE

The central thesis of this paper is that an important consideration in the challenge of achieving the strategic integration of effort in the Pacific lies in a new approach to education and training to reformulate them in a structure that will better meet regional needs and overcome observed deficiencies in the delivery of development aid. This can happen through the establishment of a suitable institution, a Pacific Regional Training Institute, with the capabilities to:

- Ensure that Pacific Island nationals are educated and trained in a way that is consistent and commensurate with the realities they will face in their own countries.

- Equip Australians delivering development assistance in Pacific countries with the cultural and other skills required to effectively undertake their mission and orient them to their task.
- Provide opportunities to influential people from Australia and Pacific Island nations to jointly address major issues of mutual concern with the intent of arriving at new, or integrating existing, strategic pathways to resolve those issues.

While the Pacific Institute will not be able nor seek to absorb anything more than a relatively small part of the Pacific's total educational and training requirement, it will be able to model an approach to how this can best be achieved and act as an exemplar for other institutions engaged in similar projects and activities.

The Pacific Institute will:

- Train Australians and New Zealanders and other Pacific Islanders who work in various capacities in Pacific nations.
- Train people from Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea, Timor-Leste and other nations in matters such as governance, public service management, conflict resolution and issues related to social and economic development.
- Orientate Australians and New Zealanders intending to work in the Pacific to cultural nuances and to techniques of navigating through the complex situations in which they will operate
- Orientate Pacific Islanders who work in Pacific nations other than their own.
- Initiate program of seminars and workshops to enable senior people to discuss critical regional issues in a comparative way to develop better understandings of policies and techniques that may help resolve these issues.

This proposal suggests the Pacific Institute is best placed in Brisbane. This will both broaden the base of Australia's Pacific training from Canberra and also utilise a range of State institutions.

Queensland educational institutions, such as TAFE, Queensland University of Technology [QUT], the University of Queensland [UQ] and the State's public service are well equipped to provide the initial resources for this initiative.

## 6. SUGGESTIONS FOR FOUNDATION ACTIVITIES

### 6.1 – SOLOMON ISLANDS

In this and the next section, this paper examines some representative practical activities that could be initiated by the Pacific Institute. It should be noted that the proposals herein that refer to Papua New Guinea are also of importance to Solomon Islands.

There are several substantial UQ projects underway in Solomon Islands, covering forestry, marine resources, water resources, health, history and politics, law, and peace and conflict studies. UQ's Consortium on Community Building and Responsible Resource Development (ConCord) has also developed a scoping proposal for sustainable mineral development. There is also an active Solomon Islands Partnership for Peace and Development group which coordinates these activities.

#### 6.1.1 - Solomon Islands Summit

In June 2008, discussions with Dr Derek Sikua, Prime Minister of Solomon Islands, yielded a suggestion that UQ host a Solomon Islands summit to discuss the future relationship between Australia and Solomon Islands. It was envisaged that the Summit involve representatives of the Solomon Islands Government, non-government organisations and civil society, church groups, the Queensland and Australian Governments, donor governments and agencies, and academics from a variety of institutions. This would be a first step to canvass a range of opinion on what would be best for Solomon Islands thirty years from now and to discuss the Pacific Regional Training Institute proposal. The Prime Minister responded favorably to the suggestion.

#### 6.1.2 - UQ/QUT and Queensland TAFE to mentor SICHE

UQ, QUT and the Queensland TAFE system could mentor the Solomon Islands College of Higher Education [SICHE] to maintain and enhance standards and complement the University of the South Pacific expansion into associated courses through on-site and distance education. UQ has recently re-signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Solomon Islands Government, which relates to SICHE.

The Solomon Islands Government wishes to strengthen SICHE, which grew out of several institutions created in the late colonial years to train teachers, nurses and workers in the

trades, marine and agricultural areas. There are national aspirations to transform SICHE into an institution that will continue to provide certificate and diploma courses while moving into bachelor-level studies, with also some research capacity amongst the staff. SICHE staff are undergoing training programs overseas to upgrade their qualifications, but there remains a chronic lack of funds to achieve much independent development.

The establishment of the SICHE Forestry Training College on Kolumbangara was supported by AusAID but became under-resourced as a result of recent political troubles and needs support to re-establish a viable training program. There is an urgent need for forestry skills to support reforestation and develop sustainable forest management systems in Solomon Islands. The Forestry College should play a major role in this. A twinning relationship with an institution such as UQ – that worked so well on the AIDAB Prince of Songkla University Project in Thailand – could be an excellent model to follow.

### 6.1.3 - Centres for vocational education and distance education

QU's large Gatton Campus and farm is dedicated mainly to agricultural, natural and rural systems management education and research, and houses the Centres for Vocational Education and Distance Education. These resources could support the development of improved tropical agriculture, rural development and natural resource management including forestry in the Pacific as well as supporting collaborative research projects. They could also be linked with an innovative UNESCO and European Union distance education system being implemented in the Solomon Islands, and to the University of the South Pacific [USP] distance education network.

### 6.1.4 - Diversification of education providers

The Solomon Islands needs to diversify education providers away from Honiara, and one obvious place would be Malaita Province, which has a large population but is underdeveloped. A Malaita Campus could be linked to UQ's Gatton Campus to encourage agricultural experimentation and development. Sites at the Dala Agricultural Training Centre, north of the provincial capital Auki, and at the National Agriculture Training Institute at Fote, West Kwara'ae, Malaita Province, are available. Local public service training courses could also be run from either Malaitan campus.



## 6.2 - PAPUA NEW GUINEA

### 6.2.1 - Agricultural training

Leadership training in addressing policy, cultural and social constraints to the adoption of agricultural technologies as well as more technical education in improving smallholder revenues from activities such as tree and root crop production, fisheries, forestry, aquaculture, forestry and horticulture could be provided in conjunction with the Gatton Campus.

### 6.2.2 - Private sector experiential programs

Papua New Guinea has skills development needs in the private sector as well as the public sector, with training in human resources management, financial management and supervision of particular importance. QU could offer workshops for middle to senior managers in conjunction with QUT and Commerce Queensland combined with practical sessions with selected people from the private sector.

### 6.2.3 - Broadcasting in community development

As it recovers from a devastating civil war, the Autonomous Province of Bougainville has just seen its first community-based radio broadcasting station established with assistance from UNESCO and the German Government. There is a requirement to train management and professional personnel as well as to look at content development for a broadcast station with a community development remit. This could be done in conjunction with QU's Centre for Communication for Development and Social Change.

### 6.2.4 - Strengthening civil society

Working with NGOs with a presence in both Australia and the Pacific, develop programs to both strengthen the effort of these organisations and bring them together to share comparative techniques and experiences.

## 7. GOVERNANCE & RESOURCES

To bring this proposal to fruition will require collaboration between UQ, QUT, the Queensland Government, the Commonwealth Government and other institutions.

UQ has the capacity and the expertise in development studies to support the establishment of an Australian Regional Training Institute based on the Ipswich Campus and the Gatton Campus. UQ's commercial marketing company UniQuest is already involved in a range of consultancies in the Solomon Islands and other areas of the Pacific. QUT has an industry focus that could supplement UQ; or its contribution could be limited to the lease of its Carseldine Campus to the Institute.

It is proposed that the Pacific Regional training Institute be based on the facilities of UQ using the Ipswich and Gatton Campuses. An alternative would involve QUT, which is about to vacate its large Carseldine campus. Consideration should also be given to creating institutional facilities in the Pacific.

## 8. CONCLUSION

Just as Australia is coming to terms with finding its place in Asia, we must seek to obtain an appropriate relationship with the Pacific. This will not be defined only by Australia, of course, but by each nation Australia transacts with in the Pacific.

This proposal suggests developing an institutional axis in Queensland involving Government, universities, technical and further education colleges, NGOs and the private sector to create a secure and sustainable relationship between Australia and its Pacific neighbours.

Australia faces a range of disparate issues: security concerns, the need to bolster failing and unstable states, the spread of HIV/AIDS in the region, pressure for seasonal migration, climate change and resettlement. And these are just a few.

Australia needs a new approach to equipping people with the intellectual, technical and policy skills to tackle these issues in a mutual and coordinated way.

While the ASOPA and ITI rationales are no longer relevant to the current situation, some of the concepts on which both were based –preparation of Australians for effective engagement in administration in a different cultural context and training citizens of developing world nations to be effective managers of their own futures – remain.

By virtue of its physical facilities and its collective staff experience, UQ is best able to host a Pacific Regional Training Institute.

Queensland has the advantage of geographic proximity to our largest Pacific neighbours and has considerable trade links with the Pacific.