AP4D

**Asia-Pacific Development,
Diplomacy & Defence Dialogue**

Synthesis Report

Australia and the Pacific: Shaping a Shared Future

AP4D

Asia-Pacific
Development,
Diplomacy &
Defence Dialogue

DISCLAIMER

Why it matters

Geopolitics have brought the Pacific to the forefront of Australia's foreign policy debate. However, viewing the region solely through the lens of geopolitical competition is detrimental to Australia's engagement with the Pacific and the mutual interests of both.

Australia's interest in the region, and the attention it pays to it, should remain clear, consistent and coherent, irrespective of whether there are crises or not.[1] Genuine, unfluctuating Australian engagement should address each Pacific island country's unique needs through both bilateral and regional Pacific-led initiatives.

A short-term and transactional approach would be counterproductive.

The Pacific will always be an area of great strategic significance for Australia. Peace and stability in Pacific island countries goes to the heart of Australia's security, prosperity and national interest.

There is insecurity in the Pacific at multiple levels:

- globally, as a warming planet presents ecological and civilisational threats;
- regionally, as players and relationships change;
- nationally, as countries respond to the effects of COVID-19, natural disasters, illegal fishing, transnational crime and other threats, compounded by gender inequality; and
- locally, where community leaders and security agencies struggle to control violence and subnational conflicts in several countries. In some areas, law and order challenges and the proliferation of firearms mean that risks to individual safety and tribal and political violence is extremely real.

These shared challenges and mutual threats require the long-term attention of Australia and Pacific island countries. Building a Pacific security community is an endeavour that will require strategic persistence and patience.[2] This suggests the need for Australian policymakers to think big to achieve a significant reset in security cooperation.

We need to move beyond paying lipservice to each others' security concerns and develop a common framework for security that responds to the full set of peace and security challenges in the Pacific. This requires deepening relationships and making sure other shared concerns are not lost as geopolitics come to the fore.

There are strong foundations to work on in Australia-Pacific cooperation. Australia has security cooperation arrangements with most Pacific Island states, ranging from police-to-police cooperation, defence capacity-building and joint military exercises through to development programs designed to address drivers of fragility such as inequality and inclusive economic growth. Even in the area of climate change, there has been cooperation on climate science, on sustainable fisheries and on preserving maritime boundaries in the face of sea level rise. There is goodwill towards Australia in the region to draw on.

Australia needs to envisage Pacific island countries as a network of interaction, trade, exchange, communication and influence reaching across much of the Pacific Ocean. Strong relationships are not made up only of defence and security ties, and do not come into play only in situations of threat. They are the product of long-term, consistent and multi-faceted engagement, of genuine partnership with and respect for countries that are equally sovereign, and exchange that takes seriously the priorities, concerns and values of all the parties.

Australia should reset its expectations to accept that Pacific island countries will also engage with other countries and use the opportunity to recognise the gaps in its defence, development and diplomatic relationships.

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1   Joanne Wallis, *Crowded and complex: The changing geopolitics of the South Pacific*, Australian Strategic Policy Institute, April 2017, https://www.aspi.org.au/report/crowded-and-complex-changing-geopolitics-south-pacific; Hugh White, In denial, Australian Foreign Affairs, January 2019, https://www.australianforeignaffairs.com/articles/extract/2019/08/in-denial.

2   James Batley, *Australia and security in the Pacific Islands*, Policy Forum, April 2021, https://www.policyforum.net/australia-and-security-in-the-pacific-islands/.

RISKS:

- At a time of intensifying geostrategic competition there may be pressure for Australia to take a short-term and transactional approach towards the region. Such crisis thinking would be unnecessary and counterproductive.

- Where Australia privileges its own institutional requirements and solutions above local agency and local solutions this can feed negative perceptions about Australia's intent. There is a danger that a focus on China overtakes other priorities and dominates the relationship; this would undermine trust and lead to Australia's diplomatic intentions not always being well-received.

- Australia's lack of urgency and leadership on climate change has been disconnecting Australia from the region.[3] Australia needs to be seen to be taking climate action seriously, including in its domestic climate policies. Pacific island countries are dealing with the impact of climate change, including more regular severe cyclones, changing rainfall patterns, flooding, marine heatwaves, coastal erosion and inundation and coral bleaching. Australia's comprehension of what is at stake for Pacific island countries is critical to its own regional objectives.

- Australia's concerns about geopolitical change lead it to overstate differences with Pacific island countries. There will always be areas where Australian and Pacific views and interests align, and others where they do not.

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3   Cheryl Durrant, Simon Bradshaw and Alix Pearce, *Rising to The Challenge: Addressing Climate and Security in Our Region*, Climate Council, 2020, https://www.climatecouncil.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/CC_MVSA0274_Climate-Security_V8-FA_Low_Res_Sin-gle_Pages.pdf

OPPORTUNITIES:

- By contributing to building stronger, resilient and prosperous societies, Australia is investing in a more secure and stable immediate neighbourhood that will reap mutual benefits.

- Australia's scale in the region means its actions are consequential and it can have a positive impact on the trajectory of Pacific economies and societies.

- There is the opportunity for a rhetorical reset framed in terms of long-term, generational partnership, demonstrating responsiveness to the Pacific's priorities for development and with a clear eye on a shared, long-term future.

- A focus on problem-solving and genuine partnership can produce deeper and longer-lasting relationships founded on trust.

- Common interests and shared geography should attune parties to building respectful mutually beneficial relationships. Having different security perspectives need not preclude regional cooperation.

- A digitally connected Pacific will pay diplomatic dividends for Australia. The importance of digital connectivity goes beyond defence and security and is about building relationships.

- There is an opportunity for Australia's diplomacy and development assistance to the Pacific to have an increased profile for Indigenous people and practices. Engagement with the Pacific should be a key focus of Australia's First Nations Foreign Policy.

- There are opportunities to increase people-to-people engagement through Australia increasing its Pacific literacy through sustained investment.

- With Australian communities suffering major weather events, there is growing awareness of the shared experiences of Australians and their Pacific neighbours. There are shared interests and opportunities to work together on disaster response.

AUSTRALIA AND THE PACIFIC

- The overall vision is of an Australia-Pacific partnership of mutuality, respect and shared leadership.

- Australia recognises the necessity of applying all arms of statecraft in engaging with the region, ensuring both sufficient investment across development, diplomacy and defence and the effective coordination of the activities of each in support of common strategic objectives.

- Australia recognises the existential threat that climate change poses to Pacific island countries and reflects this in its domestic and international policies.

- Australia frames its engagement with the Pacific as valuable in its own right, not through the lens of geostrategic competition. Australia de-emphasises the focus on the Pacific as a stage for great power contestation in its foreign policy approach.

- Australia is an active and engaged partner in a mutually beneficial partnership where Australia leverages its expertise and experience to support local and regional priorities.

- Australia anchors its Pacific development, diplomacy and defence engagement in a strategy of shared interests. Australia positions itself as an integral and invested part of the Pacific neighborhood and a genuine part of Pacific regionalism.

- Australia focuses on being an effective partner by aligning with Pacific priorities. It is in Australia's interest to care about what Pacific island countries care about.

- The Pacific agenda is a priority in Australia's broader global agenda and Pacific preferences are not overridden.

- Australia is willing to invest in the necessary resources to maintain its status as a trusted and influential partner to governments, civil society and business in the region. It invests sufficient diplomatic and political resources to engage effectively with Pacific island countries.

The vision in practice

This report investigates four areas to illustrate what it looks like for Australia to shape a shared future with the Pacific.

What does it look like for Australia to be an...

| effective climate ally | generational partner for economies and societies | effective partner for security and peace | partner on digital resilience and transformation |

...with the Pacific

Australia becomes a **climate ally** with the Pacific. Recognising that climate change is an existential security issue for Pacific island countries, Australia revisits its own contribution to climate change as a major emitter and exporter and it transitions away from use of fossil fuels towards becoming a major exporter of renewable energy. Australia works with Pacific island countries through processes of multilateral diplomacy to drive global ambition to reduce emissions. It becomes a staunch advocate for global climate goals and uses its diplomatic capacity to promote greater climate action. As well as implementing preventative measures, Australia is well-placed to help strengthen regional climate mitigation and disaster response capacity in coordination with local organisations. Australia works with the Pacific on other forms of environmental degradation including over-fishing, waste disposal, deforestation and environmental rehabilitation.

Australia is a **generational partner for Pacific economies and societies**. Faced with a challenge to its profile and influence, Australia pursues a long-term approach focusing on economic integration, reciprocity and sustained commitment to generational progress. This will reap dividends far beyond transactionalism. As the single largest development partner in the region, Australia is well-positioned to take the relationship forward in a positive and sustainable way. Through tools including labour mobility, education and training, people-to-people relationships and long-term development partnerships it can build towards a vision of fighting poverty, increasing economic capacity, building governance, strengthening resilience and promoting more peaceful societies.

Australia is an **effective partner for a secure and peaceful Pacific**. Australia and Pacific island countries support each other to anticipate, prevent and respond to a broad range of security threats and coercive influences. These include climate change, human security, gender equality, environmental and resource security, transnational crime and cybersecurity. Australia and Pacific island countries develop a common sense of the threats to peace and security in the region. Australia supports Pacific regionalism and Pacific-led initiatives and aligns with regional priorities. National security strategies anchor how Australia and like-minded countries coordinate and deliver cross-sectoral efforts, ensuring that they follow security agendas set locally and regionally rather than being paternalistic providers. Australia can also invest in civil society, media and other socio-political institutions critical to good governance, democratic norms and countering external influence, as well as drawing on its peacebuilding and conflict mediation experience.

Australia is a **partner on digital resilience and transformation** in the Pacific. Technological change is one of the most critical issues facing the Pacific. Digital technology cuts across all sectors of society and government and is vital for how Pacific island countries function now and into the future. It is not a niche concern. Digital technology provides an immense opportunity for the Pacific, meeting the deep desire to be better globally connected in a region where logistics and connectivity has always been an issue.[4] At the same time, digital technology poses a major risk to state sovereignty and challenges the nature, viability and legitimacy of Pacific island countries as functioning states. Australia needs to partner with the Pacific both on digital resilience – the ability to withstand incidents and criminal and malicious attacks and still continue to operate – and on digital transformation – the ability to reap the benefits of technological change. Australia can leverage its knowledge and expertise to build digital capacity and capability (and embed sustainability) and strengthen national and regional responses. As well as the physical infrastructure required to build Pacific connectivity, Australia has a role in promoting online safety, digital literacy, online learning, digital marketplaces and training. The development sector should explore opportunities provided by digital technology and integrate these into development programs.

4   Australian Strategic Policy Institute, *ICT For Development in the Pacific Islands*, February 2020: https://www.aspi.org.au/report/ict-development-pacific-islands

Case studies

It would be wrong to think that Australia is not active in its Pacific engagement.
The region is currently receiving significant focus and attention.

There are examples already in action that illustrate an approach based on partnership, shared interests and applying all arms of statecraft. It is important to recognise these and encourage further investment in similar activities.

Initiative	Description
SciTech4Climate	Australia's Science and Technology for Climate Partnerships (SciTech4Climate) program is a $5.5million science and technology partnership to support climate resilience in the Indo-Pacific. The program connects leading Australian scientists and climate specialists with development partners in the Indo-Pacific to ensure the region's response to climate change is supported by the best available science and technological advances. https://www.dfat.gov.au/international-relations/themes/climate-change/supporting-indo-pacific-tackle-climate-change/scitech4climate-harnessing-science-and-technology-support-climate-resilience-indo-pacific
Asia-Pacific Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction	In Brisbane in the second half of 2022, Australia will host a range of ministerial meetings, thematic sessions and partner-led public forums to promote coordination and cooperation and assess regional progress made in the implementation of the Sendai Framework, the global blueprint to reduce disaster risk and losses. www.undrr.org/event/asia-pacific-ministerial-conference-disaster-risk-reduction-apmcdrr-2022
The Indo-Pacific Centre for Health Security	The Centre is the implementation body for the Australian Government's Vaccine Access and Health Security Initiative. It brings together global investments, collaboration with regional organisations and bilateral health cooperation to deliver both strategic direction and practical, timely assistance for regional government partners. Its mix of DFAT staff, secondees from six Departments and specialist contractors provides in-house expertise in areas including the veterinary sciences, regulation, immunology, microbiology, epidemiology and anthropology. A further five-year strategic investment has just been announced. https://indopacifichealthsecurity.dfat.gov.au/

Pacific Women Lead	Pacific Women Lead is the Australian Government's new regional gender equality program for the Pacific. It aims to ensure that Pacific women and girls, in all their diversity, are safe and equitably share resources, opportunities and decision-making with men and boys. It will focus on women's leadership and women's rights, including safety, health and economic empowerment. It builds on Australia's long-standing support for gender equality in the Pacific through the Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development program. https://www.dfat.gov.au/about-us/business-opportunities/business-notifications/pacific-women-lead-atm-id-dfat-324
Cardno Market Development Facility	Cardno's Market Development Facility is an Australia-funded multi-country initiative working in five countries including Fiji, Timor-Leste and PNG. It uses a market systems development approach to promote sustainable economic development by connecting individuals, businesses, governments and NGOs with each other and with markets at home and abroad. It has leveraged US$14.2 million in private sector investment since 2012 and a cumulative 170,200 women have benefitted since the start of the program. https://marketdevelopmentfacility.org/what-we-do/
BRIDGE School Partnerships Program	The Building Relationships through Intercultural Dialogue and Growing Engagement (BRIDGE) School Partnerships Program is a program of the Asia Education Foundation that has operated since 2008 and expanded into the Pacific in 2018. BRIDGE supports schools across Australia to establish a partnership with a sister school from the Pacific region. The program builds educators' professional knowledge, capabilities and skills while students collaborate on projects, practice language skills and develop friendships. A key focus is strengthening links between schools that offer education to students with a disability. https://www.asiaeducation.edu.au/programmes/school-partnerships/participating-countries/pacific
Regional Maritime and Fisheries Operations	Agencies across national jurisdictions cooperate to crack down on illegal and unregistered operations in the Pacific Ocean. An example is a recent Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA) operation which covered an area of 18.4 million square kilometres. The regional team was supported by the Australian Defence Force (working remotely due to COVID) providing intelligence gathering and analysis. Australia, New Zealand, France and the United States provided support through aerial and surface surveillance. https://www.ffa.int/node/2605

Pacific Fusion Centre	The Pacific Fusion Centre is a newly established centre based in Vanuatu that intends to deliver training and strategic analysis against Pacific security priorities. Under the guidance of the Pacific Islands Forum, the Centre provides assessments and advice on Pacific regional security challenges, including climate security, human security, environmental and resource security, transnational crime and cyber security. It will host security analysts from across the Pacific for capacity-building, information-sharing and cooperation activities to enhance their analytical assessment skills. https://www.pacificfusioncentre.org/
'I Am Digital' campaign	Save the Children has partnered with Meta (Facebook) to deliver a digital literacy and safety initiative in the Pacific. The campaign has developed learning materials to help Pacific people stay safe on the internet with tip sheets, jingles and videos shared online, in person and via radio. They help empower children and their parents to have safer, more positive experiences online and safeguard themselves against abuse, bullying and exploitation. The campaign has been implemented in Fiji, Kiribati, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu. https://www.savethechildren.org.au/media/media-releases/save-the-children-and-facebook-launch-the-first
Catalpa: Pacific eLearning Program	Development organisation Catalpa is using technology to deliver Pacific e-learning programs to improve science learning outcomes for students and professional development opportunities for teachers. The program uses engaging science content relevant to the Pacific context and delivers interactive online teacher professional development. The co-designed learning content is delivered via a custom e-learning platform and is designed for scaling across the region. The program is currently being implemented in the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Samoa and Cook Islands. https://catalpa.io/projects/pacificelearning/
Know Your Customer Program	South Pacific Central Banks, including the Reserve Bank of Australia, are working together to bring down the cost of remittances through the regional 'Know Your Customer' facility. It aims to improve customer due diligence processes and compliance with anti-money laundering and countering financing of terrorism compliance. Reducing the complexities of sending money digitally from Australia and New Zealand to the Pacific is significant given that impact of remittances on individuals and communities across the region. https://www.rba.gov.au/media-releases/2020/mr-20-31.html
With You With Me	The Australian based media company With You With Me is an organisation that provides training for veterans to start a digital career. The program assists veterans to discover the right digital career pathway, and provides training as well as continuous learning through establishing a career plan for each candidate. The program is currently operating in Australia, Papua New Guinea and Fiji and is an example that could be built on in other countries to support more digitally skilled Pacific workers. https://www.withyouwithme.com/

Pathways

AP4D Options Papers have identified further pathways towards this vision including:

FOCUS: CLIMATE ALLY

Need	Possble pathway
Demonstrate commitment	The Australian Government changes its declaratory policy on climate, reaffirming that climate change is the single greatest threat to the Pacific region.
International leadership and diplomacy	Australia undertakes meaningful collective diplomacy on climate change, working as an ally for climate action on the global stage. Australia and Pacific island countries co-host a Conference of the Parties (COP) meeting.
Energy policy	Australia announces an ambitious emissions target for 2030 and adopts an energy policy that sends a strong signal to the market that investment in renewables is viable and profitable. Australia establishes regional targets for decarbonisation as part of the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific.
Dialogue and links	Australia builds on relationships between Australian and Pacific climate science organisations and establishes a new "1.5 Track Dialogue for 1.5 Degrees". Relationships with Pacific peoples are a key focus of Australia's First Nations Foreign Policy.
Disaster risk and response	Australia should conduct a national review of climate risks and collaborate with Pacific island countries and New Zealand on a regional climate risk assessment. Australia helps build local disaster response capacity for longer and larger disaster seasons, with development programs playing a role in planning for disaster resilience. Defence can promote greater civil-military cooperation and involvement of first responders including fire and emergency services.
Climate finance	Australia rejoins the Green Climate Fund and advocates for reform to support direct access pathways for Pacific island countries. It should support a range of financing modalities including the Pacific Islands Forum's Pacific Resilience Fund and the Regional Pacific Nationally Determined Contribution Hub.
Migration	Australia should prepare for the future in its migration policies, tackling the problem of climate mobility as a serious issue given the need for people movement to major economies and within the region. Safe migration pathways need to be discussed and a new regional convention of refugees may be needed. The desire to maintain community bonds and culture may require a new model that allows Pacific communities to retain nationhood within Australia's political structure.
Loss and damage	Australia should continue to engage with Pacific island countries in the emerging debate calling for reparation for loss and damage caused by carbon emitters. There are likely to be continuing calls as a question of climate justice. With outstanding issues following the Glasgow Conference of the Parties (COP), there is an opportunity for Australia-Pacific collaboration to be part of this debate.

FOCUS: ECONOMIES AND SOCIETIES

Need	Possible pathway
Leadership on climate change	Australia should acknowledge the threat climate change poses to the region and overcome ambivalence and inconsistency around Australian climate and energy policy, sending a message that it truly wants to be part of the Pacific.
Labour mobility and migration pathways	Expand labour mobility by opening up the labour market to create new opportunities for Pacific islanders. Address flaws that create the risk of exploitation and introduce pathways to permanency into Australia's migration program. Labour mobility can be a focus of shared engagement to form the basis of the long-term economic relationship.
Reinvigorate relationships through literacy and cultural exchange	Enhancing Pacific literacy among both Australian policy makers and the Australian community is key to demonstrating Australia listens to and respects local needs and priorities. Future programs can build upon long-standing, people-to-people links and educational exchanges. There is potential for Australian First Nations and Pacific Islanders in shared problem solving, particularly around the Coral Sea.
Be a partner for education and skills	As an active leader in international education, Australia can support the Pacific by overcoming secondary education gaps, barriers to entry into technical training and complicated pathways for degrees, accreditation and visas.
Unlock opportunities through long-term civil society partnerships	Building on existing initiatives that exemplify strong collaborative partnerships, including the Australian NGO Cooperation Program. This should integrate diplomatic efforts with development cooperation to create sophisticated, modern, and respectful partnerships that are genuinely collaborative and long-term.
Trade pathways	Australia supports small-scale appropriate technology development that can be used by rural Pacific communities for undertaking small scale economic enterprises. Australian training institutions and industry establish partnerships to enable physically disconnected, informal and small-scale enterprises to become profitable and sustainable.
Change the conversation on infrastructure projects	Australia should continue to invest in infrastructure, which is important to pandemic recovery, with a focus on infrastructure which supports economic growth over the long term. Infrastructure financing should increasingly be about maintenance of existing infrastructure, small-scale capital works and climate adaptation, with a focus on appropriate technology, utilising renewables and making use of local materials. Casting a gender lens on infrastructure is an important element in making cost benefit analyses.

FOCUS: SECURE AND PEACEFUL PACIFIC

Need	Possible pathway
Supporting Pacific-led regionalism	Australia supports regionalism in the Pacific as valuable in and of itself. This includes support for the Pacific Islands Forum and related regional agencies, particularly for services that can help member countries respond to security, technological and legal developments.
Responding to local security agendas	National security strategies should anchor how Australia and like-minded countries coordinate and deliver cross-sectoral efforts. This ensures partners follow security agendas set locally and regionally rather than acting as paternalistic providers.
Building inter-governmental cooperation	Australia should review existing intergovernmental instruments between Australia and Pacific island countries (including information-sharing, logistics, defence cooperation and visiting forces arrangements) to identify gaps and prioritise areas for further work. Australia can assist in reviewing gaps in the extent to which Pacific island countries are parties to key international treaties, including on topics such as corruption, transnational crime and money-laundering. Australia can support more Pacific candidates, particularly women, for roles in international organisations and can assist with capacity-building for smaller Pacific nations in legal and diplomatic tradecraft to strengthen the ability to participate in international forums.
Changing the climate conversation	Australia must indicate its seriousness to act and to support Pacific-led and Pacific-supported climate change initiatives. This should include continued engagement, through regionalism and technical support, to progress Pacific concerns regarding maritime boundaries.
Supporting good governance and open societies	Australia continues and expands its investments in civil society, media and other socio-political institutions critical to countering external influence, in a way that Is respectful of Pacific sovereignty. Support to increase women's political participation and representation is critical to enabling good governance and democracy in the Pacific. Strengthening democratic norms and good governance is vital. Countries that have the pillars of peace – such as well-functioning governments, low corruption and strong connections between government and societal forms of governance – have higher resilience to counter threats. Australia can provide support for security vetting systems and provide technical assistance for telecommunications and infrastructure for Pacific island countries to set the terms for investment, including assessing offers and setting terms in line with Pacific needs.
People-centered approach	Australia invests in Pacific literacy, building cultural understanding, language, better appreciation of divisions and shared chapters in our history. It promotes education, civil society and peer-to-peer linkages to increase knowledge of the Pacific among Australians for more mutual relationships. It supports enhanced movement of Pacific people to and from Australia, and increased economic flows in both directions, including pathways to citizenship.
A focus on mediation and peacebuilding	Australian can create more capacity for conflict resolution, mediation and peacebuilding including restoring the Conflict and Fragility team or setting up a Peace and Conflict unit within DFAT. Such services may be particularly valuable in cases such as secessionism and independence movements. While it is a politically sensitive issue, Australia needs to look ahead strategically to plan for any potential transition by Pacific territories to new political status. This would focus on the building blocks required to support peaceful transition, including capacity-building programs such as scholarships, technical assistance, medical training, information-sharing, English language, politics and other initiatives.

FOCUS: DIGITAL RESILIENCE AND TRANSFORMATION

Need	Possible pathway
Cyber security	Australia enhances cooperation with regional networks to strengthen responses to cyber incidents including through the Pacific Cyber Security Operational Network (PaCSON), Forum of Incident Response and Security Teams (FIRST) and Pacific Islands Law Officers Network (PILON).
Sustainable infrastructure	The Australian Government has a clear role in financing the physical infrastructure required to build Pacific connectivity, as it did for the Coral Sea cable network. It should work collaboratively with other actors. Australian development cooperation should support infrastructure promoting digital connectivity that addresses the different levels of development across the region. This goes beyond just providing technology and requires affordability of access. Australia can provide practical assistance at the local level, for example simple solar technology to enable charging of phones.
Online safety and digital and media literacy	Australia's eSafety Commissioner should work collaboratively with Pacific governments to reduce online harm and protect the safety of citizens across the Pacific, including education for digital and media literacy. Australia can work with Pacific governments to strengthen their capabilities and capacity to manage misinformation through understanding and mapping the threat landscape.
Digital development	Australia should explore opportunities provided by digital technology and integrate them into development programs. This is particularly relevant in the education sector where there is significant scope to expand and improve online learning and teaching.
Governance and regulation	Australia should take an active role in regional forums and seek platforms for Pacific island countries in forums including the Asia Pacific Telecommunity (APT), Global Forum on Cyber Expertise (GFCE) and the United Nations Internet Governance Forum (IGF). Australia can strengthen regional forums to encourage Pacific-led dialogue on governance and the use of technologies. Australia should ensure human rights discussions are part of engaging with Pacific counterparts on cyber and digital policy and legislative development.
Digital transformation	The Australian Government should partner with platforms that support cultural and economic connectivity for communities to increase their reach, for example working with chambers of commerce to adopt digital marketplace platforms and funding research on markets for digital content and digital products. The Australian Government should support fast-tracking more digitally skilled Pacific people to support a safe and secure digital transformation. Australian development cooperation should focus on strengthening skills and knowledge through mentoring, training and upskilling to keep pace with the rapidly evolving digital technology.
Strengthened coordination	The Australian Government should invest resources in coordination of cyber security activities to maximise the benefits for all. The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade should be resourced to coordinate a whole-of-government effort in the Pacific. Australia should be open to learning and collaborating with other countries and should take the lead and proactively bring together different actors to encourage collaboration in the digital space. DFAT can play a convening role for government, academics and tech companies to work creatively to find ways to partner together.

The AP4D approach

The Asia-Pacific Development, Diplomacy & Defence Dialogue (AP4D) is a platform for collaboration between the development, diplomacy and defence communities that brings together individuals and organisations united by a mission to reimagine Australia's international relations.

Funded by the Australian Civil-Military Centre, AP4D's inaugural program commenced in mid-2021 with the aim of generating more effective approaches to advancing Australia's influence in Southeast Asia and the Pacific through the integrated application of development, diplomacy and defence perspectives.

The Pacific component began in December 2021 with a series of online diagnostics discussions in which experts surfaced problems and raised questions about Australia's approach to the Pacific. A compendium of research was prepared covering Australia's Pacific policy foundations as well as commentary and analysis from Australia and perspectives from the region.

A dialogue event was then held in February 2022 in which over 90 experts and practitioners from the development, diplomacy and defence communities determined priority areas of focus. The Deputy Secretary General of the Pacific Islands Forum delivered remarks on Pacific priorities to inform discussions. Two stand-alone Pacific Voices Consultations were also held in April in conjunction with the Griffith Asia Institute to further ensure Pacific voices were included.

These discussions formed the basis for the four topics selected for Options Papers. Working Groups comprising more than 50 experts from Australia and the Pacific collaborated on draft papers from March to May. Draft papers were presented for feedback to senior departmental representatives at a work-in-progress roundtable hosted by the Office of the Pacific in mid-May. Throughout the process AP4D also held private briefings and consultations with more than a dozen senior bureaucrats and political advisors.

The key findings and common themes from the Options Papers form the basis for this Synthesis Report, which in conjunction outline a vision for how Australia can put an integrated approach to foreign policy into practice in the Pacific.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

What does it look like for Australia to be an...

Effective Climate Ally
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DISCLAIMER

Why it matters

The effects, impacts and root causes of climate change should be Australia's central foreign policy concern in the Pacific. Climate change is the primary security issue for Pacific island countries and, due to their geographies, is an existential threat. Australia's comprehension of what is at stake for Pacific island countries is critical to its own regional security objectives. This requires taking Pacific concerns seriously and approaching climate change as a major regional priority requiring massive, urgent action.

Climate change is a shared experience Australia has with the Pacific. Through rising sea levels, changes in weather patterns and more extreme weather events, climate change is creating severe disruption to both Australian and Pacific communities.

In the Pacific, the comprehensive effects of climate change are dislocating communities and affecting both human and traditional security calculations. Low-lying regions face the prospect of wholesale migration as islands become uninhabitable.[1] Across the region there are impacts on employment, resource availability, food security and emergency services. For fragile states there is the danger of complete state failure.

For Pacific governments climate has become the central pillar of their national strategies. Development priorities are now built around the effects of climate change on health, livelihoods, infrastructure and resources. Climate change is seen not just through major natural disasters, but in how it affects specific communities on a day-to-day basis, such as those that are sensitive to environmental disruption like farming and fishing. This has ramifications for how Australia structures aid and development partnerships in the future. On the current global warming trajectory, there are regions where adaptation may not be possible. It is no longer a matter of development as usual.

Climate change, natural disasters and environmental degradation disproportionately impact vulnerable social groups, often further entrenching disadvantage and disempowerment.[2] Discrimination and structural disadvantage can exacerbate vulnerability to climate change and exclusion from climate and environmental governance. However, opportunities also exist to harness and support positive shifts in gender norms and roles which can occur during episodes of environmental crisis and natural disasters.

Building trust with Pacific island countries supports Australia's broader geopolitical interests. China is aware of the importance of Pacific relationships to Australia's foreign policy, and it is making considerable effort to enhance its own relationships in the region, including opening a Climate and the Pacific Friendship Centre.[3]

For Australia to become an effective climate ally with the Pacific it needs to do more than simply position itself as a first responder to natural disasters. Australia needs to revisit its own contribution to climate change as a major emitter and fossil fuel exporter through an ambitious domestic climate policy and work with Pacific island countries through processes of multilateral diplomacy to drive global ambition to reduce emissions.

1   Kate Lyons, *IPCC report shows 'possible loss of entire countries within the century'*, The Guardian, 10 August 2021, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/aug/10/ipcc-report-shows-possible-loss-of-entire-countries-within-the-century

2   Robin Mearns and Andrew Norton (eds), *Social Dimensions of Climate Change Equity and Vulnerability in a Warming World* (The World Bank, 2010), https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/2689/520970PUB0EPI11C010disclosed0Dec091.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

3   Denghua Zhang, *Assessing China's Climate Change Aid to the Pacific*, ANU Department of Pacific Affairs, In Brief 3, 2020, https://dpa.bellschool.anu.edu.au/sites/default/files/publications/attachments/2020-02/dpa_in_brief_2020_3_zhang_final.pdf

Aligning views

PACIFIC VIEWS

The issue of climate change is **all-encompassing** in the Pacific. It permeates everything given its existential nature. There is a shared sense across the region of the importance of climate change as a security threat and an understanding of the loss and damage that climate change will cause.

Pacific island countries have been **at the forefront of global concern** about climate change since the scientific consensus emerged in the mid-1980s.[4] They demonstrated diplomatic leadership by forming an alliance of mutual interest and concerns with island states in the Caribbean and the Indian Ocean in 1990,[5] while the following year the Pacific Islands Forum released a statement stating that climate change posed a major risk to the region.[6] Pacific island countries were instrumental in putting climate change on the agenda at the United Nations Security Council, while Pacific leaders have become highly experienced in climate negotiations.[7]

The concept of the **"Blue Pacific"** has become central to the collective diplomacy of the Pacific Islands.[8] It seeks to reframe these countries away from being considered "small island developing states" towards being seen as "large ocean states". The idea of the Blue Pacific is the recognition that the ocean is the primary influence on the region's way of life.

Pacific communities have a deep spiritual connection to the ocean: it shapes the region's history, values, practices and cultural identity. Pacific people see themselves as custodians of the ocean and policy should be filtered through this lens.

On broader **environmental issues** there are a diverse range of views within the Pacific that reflect countries' own economic interests and can create tensions within the Blue Pacific concept. Natural gas is important in Papua New Guinea and logging is important in Solomon Islands. As it struggles to find new sources of income, in June 2021 Nauru triggered a clause with the International Seabed Authority to finalise regulations around deep-sea mining.[9] The formation of a new Pacific Parliamentarians' Alliance on Deep-Sea Mining demonstrates that this will be a source of tension within the Pacific.[10]

On **perceptions of Australia**, there is recognition of Australian funding for disaster response and for community adaptation over at least two decades. Australian diplomats are perceived as having done well in understanding and engaging with the needs of the Pacific region. However, there can be a perceived disconnect between listening and action, with Australia sometimes viewed as listening to Pacific views then doing the opposite.

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4   George Carter, *Establishing a Pacific Voice in the Climate Change Negotiations*, in Greg Fry and Sandra Tarte (eds) The New Pacific Diplomacy (ANU Press, 2015), pp. 205-222. https://press-files.anu.edu.au/downloads/press/p328371/pdf/ch17.pdf

5   https://www.aosis.org/

6   https://www.forumsec.org/1991/07/29/twenty-second-south-pacific-forum-palikir-pohnpei-federated-states-of-micronesia-29-30-july-1991/

7   Fulori Manoa, *The Pacific Small Island Developing States (PSIDS)' early advocacy on climate and security at the United Nations, Griffith Asia Insights*, 27 May 2021, https://blogs.griffith.edu.au/asiainsights/the-pacific-small-island-developing-states-psids-early-advocacy-on-climate-and-security-at-the-united-nations/

8   https://www.forumsec.org/2050strategy/

9   Kate Lyons, *Deep-sea mining could start in two years after Pacific nation of Nauru gives UN ultimatum*, The Guardian, 30 June 2021, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jun/30/deep-sea-mining-could-start-in-two-years-after-pacific-nation-of-nauru-gives-un-ultimatum

10   https://www.pacificblueline.org/pacificparliamentarians

AUSTRALIAN VIEWS

Pacific leaders believe that Australia has signed up to a series of regional agreements on climate and should **meet these commitments** regardless of the domestic pressure within Australia on energy policy. Australia is perceived as having tried to water down regional climate statements at key moments in international negotiations.

There is a deep concern among Pacific island countries about **migration** as a form of adaptation. Relocating is not the best or preferred option, especially given the cultural ties of Pacific peoples to their homelands. Migration as a form of adaptation also shifts the responsibility of adaptation away from carbon emitters to individuals and families.

Australians are conscious of vulnerability to climate change and there is **widespread recognition** of the climate crisis.[11]

At the federal political level, Australia's approach to climate change has been impacted by the economics of coal and natural gas being its second and third largest exports. This creates political calculations in regions where these industries dominate. Energy policy has been the "third rail" of Australian domestic politics, slowing Australia's transition towards renewables.

There are signs that the consensus in favour of climate action is strengthening.

Climate is part of **mainstream defence debate** in Australia, with the Australian Defence Force often called upon to respond to extreme weather events.[12] This impacts on resources and overall capability. The ADF has been looking at risk reduction measures, root causes, resilience and collaborating around response modalities. There are concerns that China may use its military for emergency response and disaster recovery, integrating itself into the security structures of the Pacific region.

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11   The Australia Institute, *Climate of the Nation 2021, Tracking Australia's attitudes towards climate change and energy*, October 2021: https://australiainstitute.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/211013-Climate-of-the-Nation-2021-WEB.pdf

12   Department of Defence, *2020 Defence Strategic Update*, July 2021, https://www.defence.gov.au/about/publications/2020-defence-strategic-update

OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALIGNMENT

With Australian communities suffering major weather events, there is **growing awareness** of the shared experiences of Australians and their Pacific neighbours. For Australia to become an effective climate ally with the Pacific the first step needs to be a mutual recognition of the crisis.

There are shared interests and opportunities to work together on **disaster response**, enabling and supporting communities to protect and preserve key critical marine habitats with support for education, technology and capacity-building. This is not just one-way, as shown by Pacific assistance to Australia during bushfires and floods.

There is an opportunity for **mutual learning** between Australia and the Pacific. At the international level, there is a market for Pacific knowledge on environmental management and climate adaptation. The Pacific can contribute local knowledge and innovations on areas including desalination and crop techniques. Exchanges can facilitate mutual learning from ocean management to extractive industries.

Indigenous knowledge can be a critical component in this knowledge-building. The relationship between Australia's First Nations and Pacific peoples is a missing pillar of Australia's relations with the Pacific. Indigenous perspectives on environmental guardianship are complementary to the Blue Pacific concept, focusing on collective and individual responsibilities for caring for Country.[13] Pacific communities have signalled that they want to collaborate more with Indigenous First Nations.

There is a role for the **Pacific diaspora** in Australia to share valuable knowledge both in the Pacific and in Australia. Australia can work more closely with the Pacific diaspora in support of disaster preparedness and response.

There are **foundations to work on** in Australia-Pacific climate action. Positive examples to build on include cooperation on sustainable fisheries with the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency and Australia's support for Pacific island countries to preserve their maritime boundaries in the face of sea level rise. This is likely to require continuing cooperation as sea level rise may make the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) a more contested space in international relations.[14] This is something Pacific Islands have already been planning for, lodging their Exclusive Economic Zones using GPS coordinates rather than coastal baselines. In 2021 the Pacific Islands Forum made a declaration on "preserving maritime zones in the face of climate change-related sea-level rise."[15]

Cooperation on **climate science** is the foundation of joint efforts on adaptation, including monitoring sea level changes and gathering evidence and evaluations. There is a strong demand for scientific collaboration. Australian NGOs working with local Pacific NGOs can assist in aligning views.

Australia has the potential to develop a **maritime consciousness** that aligns with the Blue Pacific. Australia has expressed its desire to be a two-ocean power and this should be seen as more than just the ability to project naval power into the Pacific and Indian Oceans. Australia has a huge Exclusive Economic Zone, which should be understood as a responsibility. Major assets like the Great Barrier Reef could be viewed with the same guardianship that is central to the Blue Pacific.

13   James Blackwell and Julie Ballangarry, *Indigenous Foreign Policy: a new way forward?* AFFPC Issues Paper Series. Issue 1, April 2022: https://iwda.org.au/assets/files/AFFPC-issues-paper-Indigenous-Foreign-Policy-Blackwell-Ballangarry-FINAL.pdf

14   Griffith Asia Institute, *Climate change and maritime boundaries: Pacific responses and implications for Australia*, Regional Outlook Paper No.66, 2021: https://www.griffith.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0033/1378437/RO66-Strating-and-Wallis-web.pdf

15   Pacific Islands Forum, *Declaration on Preserving Maritime Zones in the Face of Climate Change-related Sea-Level Rise*, August 2021, https://www.forumsec.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Declaration-on-Preserving-Maritime.pdf

CASE STUDY:

AUSTRALIA'S SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY FOR CLIMATE PARTNERSHIPS (SCITECH4CLIMATE)

The SciTech4Climate program is a $5.5million science and technology partnership to support climate resilience in the Indo-Pacific.[16] The program connects leading Australian scientists and climate specialists with development partners in the Indo-Pacific to ensure the region's response to climate change is supported by the best available science and technological advances.

Through SciTech4Climate, DFAT is partnering with Australia's national science agency, CSIRO and the Australian National University (ANU), to develop practical actions to adapt to climate change and reduce greenhouse gas emissions in the Indo Pacific. CSIRO and ANU work closely with partner governments, industry and local communities to translate cutting-edge science into novel, locally appropriate solutions to climate challenges. These partnerships help the Pacific to adapt to climate change and build resilience to the challenges ahead.

SciTech4Climate is building strong cooperation with the Pacific to harness science and technology to support climate resilience. It is an example of a successful program that can be built on in the region.

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16   https://www.dfat.gov.au/international-relations/themes/climate-change/supporting-indo-pacific-tackle-climate-change/scitech4climate-harnessing-science-and-technology-support-climate-resilience-indo-pacific

"We reaffirm that climate change remains the single greatest threat to the livelihoods, security and wellbeing of the peoples of the Pacific and our commitment to progress the implementation of the Paris Agreement."

Boe Declaration on Regional Security, Pacific Islands Forum Leaders' Meeting, Nauru, 2018

Barriers

The high degree of **politicisation of climate change** has made cohesive and collaborative engagement difficult. With coal and gas as two of Australia's major exports, the Australian government has viewed fossil fuel industries as a vital national interest. Australia has been unwilling to plan for the emerging scenario where renewables become the dominant form of global energy consumption.

This has meant that Australia's economic and political settings **have not matched Australia's foreign policy priorities** in the Pacific. The reluctance of successive Australian governments to set ambitious emissions reduction targets has hindered Australia's diplomatic efforts in the Pacific. Given the importance of these issues to the Pacific, Australia's domestic energy policy effectively became its foreign policy within the region. There has been a lack of consistency between the adaptation and resilience measures Australia has supported in the Pacific and Australia's domestic climate policy.

This leads to a danger that measures such as Australia's "Pacific Step-up" are viewed as **lacking diplomatic credibility** if perceived to be only in response to China's increased presence and not a genuine commitment to regional integration. Successive cuts to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade have weakened the ability of Australia to engage substantively with the Pacific.

Pacific countries face a large **climate finance gap** with demand for financing of climate adaptation far exceeding existing opportunities. There is also a lack of transparency and coherence in climate financing. The Green Climate Fund has become the dominant climate fund in the Pacific since it started approving projects in 2015. It has proven difficult for Pacific island countries to directly access financing through this mechanism, with low rates of accreditation and spending.[17] This means that often funding is not getting to the local level in the Pacific.[18]
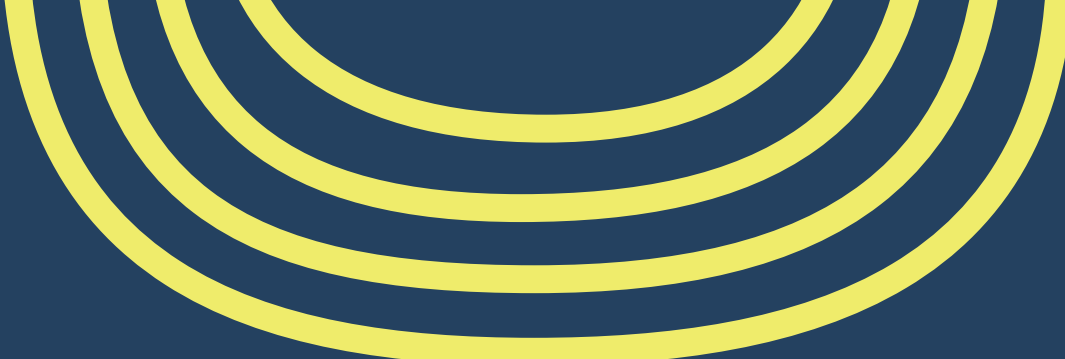
Community resilience to disasters is weakening. Bigger and longer disaster seasons are challenging communities across the region. There is the danger that with so many natural disasters, there are limits to resilience. Findings suggest that after the third time, people don't build back. This will require not just rebuilding but imagining new economies and politics that helps build a survival bridge into the future.

Perspectives on climate change, environmental destruction and disasters are **not being equally heard**, with marginalised voices including women, youth, LGBTQI+, disabled, rural, Indigenous and ethnically diverse people. This can severely reduce the efficacy of mitigation, adaptation and natural disaster recovery efforts, while also increasing or entrenching disadvantage and contributing to higher levels of state and human insecurity.

There is the potential for climate change to overshadow **other forms of environmental degradation** not directly related to carbon emissions. These include over-fishing, waste disposal, reduction in plastic use, deforestation and environmental rehabilitation. There are extractive industries within the Pacific that are both environmentally and socially fraught. The Panguna copper mine in Bougainville, mass logging in Solomon Islands and the prospect of deep sea mining instigated by Nauru all have local geopolitical effects that threaten regional stability. As with Australia's extractive industries, sometimes economic calculations can override environmental imperatives. The environment can be seen as a purely economic asset, creating tension between economic and environmental human security.

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17   International Monetary Fund, *Unlocking Access to Climate Finance for Pacific Island Countries*, Departmental Papers, 2021: https://www.elibrary.imf.org/view/journals/087/2021/020/087.2021.issue-020-en.xml

18   International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, *World Disasters Report 2020, Come Heat or High Water, Tackling the humanitarian impacts of the climate crises Together*, 2020: https://www.redcross.org.au/globalassets/cms-migration/documents/news/20201113-worlddisasters-full-final_1.pdf

"For Australia to get Pacific islands' trust, Australia will have to prioritise what Pacific islanders think is important."

Michael Kabuni, Papua New Guinea, AP4D Pacific Voices Consultation, April 2022

"Is there a magical solution to the reliance on fossil fuel? That would be great. That way we don't have to have these awkward conversations."

Jope Tarai, Fiji, AP4D Pacific Voices Consultation, April 2022

"The care of and preservation of Pacific knowledge is an area where we can grow with Australia."

Opeta Alefaio, Fiji, AP4D Pacific Voices Consultation, April 2022

The vision in practice

WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE FOR AUSTRALIA TO BECOME AN EFFECTIVE CLIMATE ALLY WITH THE PACIFIC?

Australia becomes a **constructive partner** for the Pacific on the mutual challenge of climate change. It works with the Pacific in a model of shared leadership.

Australia becomes a **staunch advocate for global climate goals**, understanding this to be an essential component of its national interest in terms of domestic well-being and its regional foreign policy goals. Australia uses its diplomatic capacity to promote greater climate action. Australia's diplomatic network views climate action as a priority and it uses diplomacy to drive climate ambition and reap the economic and strategic opportunities of climate action.

Australia joins the Pacific in a regional diplomatic bloc that can **drive global ambition** on climate change mitigation. Australia is no longer isolated from the international consensus on climate action. Australia enhances its status on the global stage by working together with the Pacific. Connected and combined, Australia and the Pacific have a strong international voice on climate action.

Australia positions itself as a genuine part of post-independence **Pacific regionalism**, overcoming the idea that the Pacific is Australia's "backyard" and instead seeing itself as being an integral and invested part of the Pacific neighbourhood.

Australia has an energy policy that is committed to **transitioning away from the use of fossil fuels** for domestic energy consumption. There will also be a realisation that exports of fossil fuels have a limited lifespan and that new sources of export revenue need to be found before demand for fossil fuels in international markets falls.

Australia's energy transition includes building **economic resilience within communities that are currently reliant on fossil fuels**. A priority should be preventing these communities from experiencing an economic shock when export demand falls as major economies' 2030 emissions targets reduce the viability of coal. This will be a highly political process that will need sustained leadership across government to manage obstacles.

Australia becomes a **major exporter of renewable energy**. Australia's emergence as a renewable energy superpower allows it to reconcile its economic needs with its foreign policy in the Pacific, enhancing Australia's global standing, as well as respect and trust within the Pacific. A fossil fuel provider like Australia changing tack also provides a major signal to global markets.

Australia works in cooperation with Pacific island countries to enhance their **access to renewable energy technology**, including servicing, as part of transitioning to a green economy together. Australia consolidates the successes of its engagement in the Pacific, such as cooperation on fisheries and the growth of environmentally sustainable industries. This can be a shared partnership vision between Australia, New Zealand and Pacific island countries.

This should include support for the development of a significant **Australian domestic solar panel industry**. With China currently dominating the market, Australia should invest in next generation technology, such as crystal technology based on iodine rather than silicone, for strategic independence and respect for human rights.[19]

Australia develops a **defence policy response** to the challenges and risks posed by climate change, including working closely with New Zealand and Pacific island security forces in humanitarian assistance and disaster response. This will include coordination with community networks, churches and civil society groups throughout the Pacific who are often frontline responders to natural disasters.

Australia will make **gender equality a central pillar** of its action, adopting a feminist foreign policy that promotes gender equality as a key goal. It will understand the disproportionate manner in which climate change affects women and will include issues around women's empowerment, safety and political voice in all its work, viewing women's individual security as essential to national security. Australia will build on the Pacific Women Lead program launched in 2021 to promote women's leadership and economic empowerment with regards to climate change, adaptation and disaster planning.[20]

Australia will promote and strive to ensure the full, meaningful, and equal representation of women – particularly including Indigenous women – in all local, regional and international climate action and environmental diplomacy efforts.
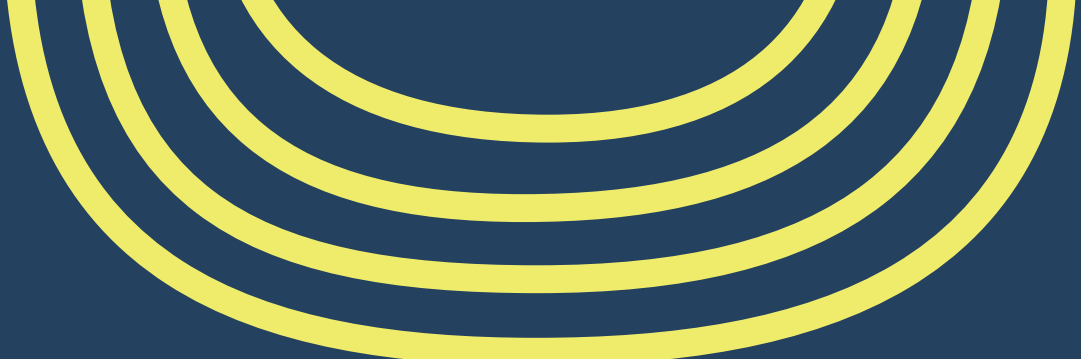
Australia will develop strong **climate action linkages** between Australia and the Pacific at multiple levels including through youth climate networks, civil society, churches and women's coalitions.

Australia strengthens **institutional and regulatory frameworks**, including the Pacific Island Forum's Framework for Resilient Development in the Pacific. Australia is part of regional efforts, including on technical working groups. As an ambitious and responsible middle power, Australia works with coalitions of other states to set global climate rules.

Australia will pursue a Pacific diplomacy that is based on mutuality and respect, on shared interest and a shared future. Coordinated climate action becomes an opportunity for the development, diplomacy and defence communities to work together in an **integrated way**.

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19   See, for example, Laura Murphy and Nyrola Elimä. *In Broad Daylight: Uyghur Forced Labour and Global Solar Supply Chains* (Sheffield Hallam University and Helena Kennedy Centre for International Justice, 2021): https://www.shu.ac.uk/helena-kennedy-centre-international-justice/research-and-projects/all-projects/in-broad-daylight

20   Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *Pacific Women Lead design framework, 2021*: https://www.dfat.gov.au/publications/development/pacific-women-lead-design-framework

"We, the Leaders of the Pacific Islands Forum, meeting in Tuvalu see first-hand the impacts and implications of the climate change crisis facing our Pacific Island Nations… Right now, climate change and disasters are impacting all our countries. Our seas are rising, oceans are warming, and extreme events such as cyclones and typhoons, flooding, drought and king tides are frequently more intense, inflicting damage and destruction to our communities and ecosystems and putting the health of our peoples at risk."

Kainaki II — Declaration for Urgent Climate Change Action Now — Securing the Future of our Blue Pacific, Pacific Islands Forum Leaders' Meeting, Tuvalu, 2019

"Australia's climate inaction has not only damaged its relationships with the Pacific but has also led to doubts about Australia's place in the regional political order."

Salā George Carter, The Pacific should persist with Australia on climate change, East Asia Forum, September 2019

Pathways

DEMONSTRATE COMMITMENT

The Australian Government changes its declaratory policy on climate, signalling a shift to a new approach. This would include reaffirming the Boe Declaration[21] and Kainaki II Declaration[22], which both assert that climate change is the single greatest threat to the Pacific region.

INTERNATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND DIPLOMACY

Australia and Pacific island countries co-host a Conference of the Parties (COP) meeting as a demonstration of Australia's commitment to the targets set by the Paris Agreement, as well as affirmation that Australia is a dedicated member of the Pacific family.

Australia works with Pacific island countries to undertake meaningful collective diplomacy on climate change, working as an ally for climate action on the global stage. It supports the Friends of Climate and Security Group in the United Nations Security Council. This should include issuing a regional declaration at the Pacific Islands Forum calling on all countries to submit nationally determined contributions consistent with limiting warming to 1.5C.

CLIMATE AND ENERGY POLICY

Australia announces an ambitious emissions target for 2030, in line with key partners including the United States, Europe, United Kingdom and the G7. Australia adopts climate and energy policies that gives market operators certainty about Australia's climate ambitions and sends a strong signal to the market that investment in renewables is viable and profitable.

Australia establishes regional targets for decarbonisation in 2030 and 2050 as part of the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific. This would involve a timeline to phase out coal as a domestic energy source, as well as a recognition that coal will have a limited lifespan as an export commodity.

DIALOGUE AND LINKS

Australia establishes an annual discussion within the Pacific (distinct from the Pacific Islands Forum) with a specific climate focus: "a 1.5 Track Dialogue for 1.5 Degrees".

The relationship with Pacific peoples is a key focus of Australia's First Nations Foreign Policy.

Australia builds on the good practice relationships that exist between Australia's climate science organisations and Pacific equivalents – including CSIRO, Geoscience Australia and the Bureau of Meteorology – and through higher education and technical training.[23] With so many projects, there can be a problem of coherence, meaning that there is a potential role for a regional knowledge broker bringing together ad hoc investments into an integrated response.[24] Australia should investigate creating a knowledge bank that brings together and synthesises the data on Australia's investments in community climate resilience.

21   Pacific Islands Forum, Boe Declaration on Regional Security, September 2018 https://www.forumsec.org/2018/09/05/boe-declaration-on-regional-security/

22   Pacific Islands Forum, Kainaki II Declaration for Urgent Climate Action Now, August 2019 https://www.forumsec.org/2020/11/11/kainaki/

23   Australia Aid, *Australia Pacific Climate Partnership* https://apclimatepartnership.com.au

24   Pacific Fusion Centre https://www.pacificfusioncentre.org, and Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme https://www.sprep.org

DISASTER RISK AND RESPONSE

Australia should conduct a national review of climate risks, following the lead of others including the United States and New Zealand.[25] This should subsequently be extended by collaborating with Pacific island countries and New Zealand on a regional climate risk assessment.

Within these risk assessments Australia should develop a greater understanding of what humanitarianism means in relation to climate change and the increasing impact and frequency of climate related emergencies.

In a climate change world, there will be a concatenation of natural disasters as well as unknown effects on natural systems like growing cycles and fisheries incubation. Australia is already stretched in terms of humanitarian and disaster relief (HADR), including domestic response. Australia needs to build local disaster response capacity given that longer and larger disaster seasons are going to challenge the region. Localisation will be an imperative.

Development has a key role in planning for disaster resilience. When societies have to withstand shock after shock, their resilience depends on equity and inclusion. Societies need to be strong, inclusive and equitable to deal with persistent major weather events and their widespread social knock-on effects.

Defence can promote greater civil-military cooperation and involvement of first responders including fire and emergency services. It should promote greater climate disaster response interoperability between Australia and the Pacific, as has occurred with the FRANZ arrangement.[26] If the Australian Defence Force or any other body develop a standalone disaster preparedness unit, this could be expanded to a regional unit, as has been endorsed by the Pacific Islands Forum, through creation of a new joint disaster response unit between Australia, New Zealand and Pacific Island countries.

Australia can further promote and engage with international frameworks including the Women, Peace and Security Humanitarian Action Compact,[27] and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030.[28]

25   Ministry for the Environment, *National Climate Change Risk Assessment for New Zealand (NCCRA)*, August 2020: https://environment.govt.nz/assets/Publications/Files/national-climate-change-risk-assessment-main-report.pdf

26   Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *The FRANZ Arrangement*, October 2014 https://www.mfat.govt.nz/assets/Aid-Prog-docs/NZDRP-docs/Franz-Arrangement-Brochure.pdf

27   United Nations Women, *Women, Peace and Security and Humanitarian Action Compact*, July 2021 https://wpshacompact.org/

28   United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, *Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030*, 2015: https://www.preventionweb.net/files/43291_sendaiframeworkfordrren.pdf

CLIMATE FINANCE

Australia rejoins the Green Climate Fund (GCF) which has become a major funder of climate projects in the region. As well as increased finance, this also provides the opportunity for Australia to advocate for reform to GCF governance as it applies to Pacific island countries. Currently, the preferred ways of working of Pacific countries in relation to climate change, particularly in support of direct access pathways to climate finance, is not well supported by GCF rules and regulation. Australia could use its diplomatic influence and development financing expertise to reform these practices, as it has done with other multilateral institutions working in the Pacific such as the Asian Development Bank. This could be through seconding Australian climate finance experts into the GCF, offering financial and administrative support to Pacific island countries to address regulatory barriers and through subsidising the management costs of GCF access.

Ultimately, given Pacific countries' huge needs for climate finance, Australia should support a range of financing modalities. This should include the Pacific Resilience Fund recently established by the Pacific Islands Forum, which has a strong focus on community-based resilience and small-scale grants. These are projects which currently fill in the gaps of external funding. There is a role for Australia to help finance this Pacific-led program and more broadly help develop climate financing more suitable to the needs of Pacific island countries, including through the Regional Pacific Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) Hub.

MIGRATION

Australia needs to prepare for the future in its migration policies, tackling the problem of climate mobility as a serious issue given the need for people movement to major economies and within the region. Safe migration pathways need to be discussed and a new regional convention of refugees may be needed. The desire to maintain community bonds and culture may require a new model that allows Pacific communities to retain nationhood within Australia's political structure. Australian leaders should plan for the need to prepare the domestic population for an influx of people from the Pacific.

LOSS AND DAMAGE

Australia should continue to engage with Pacific island countries in the emerging debate calling for reparation for loss and damage caused by carbon emitters. There are likely to be continuing calls as a question of climate justice. With outstanding issues following the Glasgow Conference of the Parties (COP), there is an opportunity for Australia-Pacific collaboration to be part of this debate.

CASE STUDY:

ASIA-PACIFIC MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE ON DISASTER RISK REDUCTION (APMCDRR)

Australia's hosting of the Asia Pacific Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction in Brisbane in the second half of 2022 is a good example of Australia leading with international leadership and diplomacy on climate action.

Australia will host a range of ministerial meetings, thematic sessions and partner-led public forums to promote coordination and cooperation and assess regional progress made in the implementation of the Sendai Framework, the global blueprint to reduce disaster risk and losses.[29] The APMCDRR also provides great potential for sharing new technologies for weather prediction, modelling and geo-spatial mapping of hazards developed by Australian institutions such as the CSIRO and Bureau of Meteorology. It is an opportunity for Australia to showcase these collaborations and share knowledge and learning with Pacific counterparts.

"Australia tends to assume it is the regional leader in the Pacific. On the issue of climate change, however, the tables are turned. Pacific island countries are global leaders, while Australia is isolated from the international consensus."

Wes Morgan, The Ripple Effect: the cost of our pacific neglect, Australian Foreign Affairs, July 2021

"Nothing is more central to the security and economies of the Pacific. I understand that climate change is not an abstract threat, but an existential one… You've been saying this for a long time. Pacific leaders were saying this to me when I was Climate Minister over a decade ago. You've been crystal clear and consistent. You've led the global debate."

Minister for Foreign Affairs Penny Wong, May 2022

Contributions

Thank you to those who have contributed their thoughts during the development of this paper. Views expressed cannot be attributed to any individuals or organisations involved in the process.

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What does it look like for Australia to be a...

Generational Partner for Pacific Economies and Societies

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DISCLAIMER

Why it matters

Australia's engagement with the Pacific is one of its **highest foreign policy priorities**.[1] Risks to the openness and stability of the Indo-Pacific[2] impact on Australia's own prosperity – and the pandemic has highlighted the need to strengthen regional economies against future economic shocks.[3]

Recent events remind us that the Pacific is a region of global significance. **China's growing presence in the region** has shifted regional dynamics, and not in Australia's favour.[4]

At a time of intensifying geostrategic competition there may be **pressure for Australia to take a short-term and transactional approach** towards the region. Such crisis thinking would be unnecessary and counterproductive.

Faced with a challenge to its profile and influence, the most sensible steps for Australia to take are those which resolutely focus on **economic integration, reciprocity and sustained commitment to generational progress** – rather than reactive short-termism fuelled by geostrategic competition.

Australia needs to embrace the chance to **shape a sophisticated vision for its engagement in the region**. This means moving to an approach based on a long-term, generational relationship linked to the sustainable development agenda. This requires a framing that embraces opportunities for Australians and Pacific Islanders to achieve their potential both now and into the future, supporting each other across generations.

A long-term approach based on a mutually-beneficial partnership will **reap dividends far beyond transactionalism**. For example, it is true that the things that are a risk to the region are also a risk to Australia, like infectious disease risk, but it is problematic to talk about supporting health security to keep Australia safe. Pacific communities deserve good health irrespective of Australia's health security. The aim should be true and meaningful partnership and sustainable development.

As the single largest development partner in the region, **Australia is well-positioned** to take the relationship forward in a positive and sustainable way. Through tools including labour mobility, education and training, people-to-people relationships and long-term development partnerships, Australia can build towards a **positive agenda** based on people, prosperity, planet, partnership and peace. Australia can be a generational partner for Pacific economies and societies in fighting poverty, increasing economic activity, building governance, strengthening resilience and promoting more peaceful societies. This period offers an opportunity to reposition.

1   Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *"Australia's Pacific Engagement"*: https://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/pacific/engagement/stepping-up-australias-pacific-engagement

2   Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *Partnerships for Recovery: Australia's COVID-19 Development Response*. Ministerial Foreword, pp1; https://www.dfat.gov.au/development/australias-development-program/partnerships-recovery-australias-covid-19-development-response

3   Asian Development Bank Pacific Economic Monitor, December 2021: https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/757271/pem-december-2021.pdf

4   Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *2017 Foreign Policy White Paper*, 23 November 2017: https://www.dfat.gov.au/publications/minisite/2017-foreign-policy-white-paper/fpwhitepaper/index.html; Department of Defence, *2020 Defence Strategic Update*, 1 July 2020:https://www.defence.gov.au/about/publications/2020-defence-strategic-update

Aligning views

PACIFIC VIEWS

It is well-established that the countries of the Pacific consider **climate change and its effects** to be the single greatest threat to their livelihoods, culture, security and sovereignty. Australia's perceived inconsistency of commitment as to the significance of climate security is confusing.

The daily, widespread struggles for **access to basic services** – such as healthcare, education, financial services, markets, and opportunities for income generation – present fundamental challenges. This is particularly so for people who are geographically disconnected.

Pacific island countries remain extremely vulnerable to the **health and economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic**. For example, as well as the immediate impact on tourism, the closure of schools for long periods during the pandemic has had enormous long-term effects on education. Pacific leaders are concerned about the potential for a lost decade – or even a lost generation – both in the formal and informal economies. On the positive, the pandemic is an opportunity to make more sustainable economies.

There is a massive **need for employment opportunities** to manage domestic pressures. Australia's current labour mobility program is perceived as conditional and one-sided and there is evidence of exploitation by some employers. More broadly, the difficulty of access to Australia – for example for short-term visits – is seen as unequal and demeaning in that Australia does not reciprocate the familial relationship it continues to advocate for across the region.

From the perspective of Pacific people, Australian investments in the region are **not always tangible**; by contrast, many Chinese investments, such as in infrastructure, are high visibility. Australian programs that have strong recognition include Pacific Women Lead, educational and technical and vocational education support, and programs focused on gender equality, disability and social inclusion (GEDSI).[5] While Australian assistance is, in a general sense, respected and valued, it is not always well-understood.[6]

Where Australia is perceived as emphasising its own interests (even if concurrently with notions of family), there is the risk that it may be perceived as giving **in order to buy influence** and acting according to its own priorities without commensurate consideration to Pacific interests and regional challenges. The region will respond negatively to attempts to use Australia's development cooperation program to impose its vision or, alternatively, frame it exclusively in terms of geopolitical competition; this will fail to achieve either national interest or development objectives.[7]

Instead of playing the same game as its perceived competition, Australia now has an opportunity to articulate its aims for the Pacific in terms that work to its **comparative soft power advantage**, while also addressing the compounding health and economic impacts of the pandemic. It should focus on improving resilience and social cohesion, building human capital and advancing human security as part of a geo-economic strategy with social infrastructure at its centre.

5   Whitlam Institute, *Pacific Perspectives on the World: Listening to Australia's Island Neighbours in order to build strong, respectful and sustainable relationships*, February 2020, p. 23: https://www.whitlam.org/publications/2020/2/13/pacific-perspectives-on-the-world "Participants were mindful of the considerable and extensive assistance that Australia has provided to the region over many years. However, there appears to be a mismatch between the number of Australian programs, projects, and initiatives (some of which predate the Step-up) and the infrequency with which they were referenced by the people we listened to. Very few programs and their dollar value were raised by the research participants: notable exceptions were labour mobility programs, APTC, Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development and RAMSI."

6   See, for example: Whitlam Institute, *PNG Voices: Listening to Australia's Closest Neighbour, Papua New Guinean perspectives on Australia and the world*, April 2022: https://www.whitlam.org/publications/pngvoices

7   Australian Council for International Development, Submission to JSCFADT, *Strengthening Australia's Relationships with Countries in the Pacific Region*, June 2020: https://acfid.asn.au/sites/site.acfid/files/ACFID%20Submission%20to%20the%20JSFADT%20Inquiry%20into%20Strengthening%20Australia%27s%20relationships%20with%20countries%20in%20the%20Pacific%20Region.pdf

Australian bilateral and collaborative investments with partner donors should build the health, education and social protection systems that Pacific island countries need for coming generations.

The region has long been open to an approach to cooperation with Australia which focuses on strong partnerships and the **transfer of knowledge, skills and people**. There is a desire to see greater Pacific engagement in the different dimensions of the relationship. This includes people-to-people linkages, welcoming and engaging with Pacific people, more extensive trade and promoting leadership of local bodies in design, implementation and delivery of disaster recovery and development assistance.

'Localisation' is much broader than simply 'replacing people' – it is about greater Pacific engagement in all aspects of development program design and implementation with multi-dimensional implications throughout the region. What is desired is a genuine commitment to listening to Pacific voices and **responsiveness** to the Pacific's development priorities.[8] This can build on the momentum COVID-19 has brought to normalising local leadership. Localisation is an asset that helps progress Australia's broader partnership narrative.

AUSTRALIAN VIEWS

From the Australian perspective, it has become the norm to think in terms of **national interest**, but Australia also approaches the Pacific with a sense of certain **shared values** as well. Australia's rhetoric on engagement in the region has been geared towards three themes: shared geography and history, Australia as a trusted friend and partner of choice and a deeply intertwined future.

As the people who are closest geographically, Pacific economies and societies are necessarily important to Australia. Australia has long-standing concerns about **instability** in the region and more recent concerns about **Chinese geopolitical influence**. There have been explicit statements around Australia's 'red lines' in the region.

Australia has traditionally had a **sense of responsibility** to work with the Pacific. Aid has been a key mechanism, with development assistance the major component of the budget for the Pacific. Defence plays an important role responding to the constant and accelerating impact of natural disasters as an auxiliary to civilian-led response.

Enabling prosperity and sustainable economic development in the Pacific is the first pillar of Australia's Pacific Step-up agenda, including trade, education, employment and infrastructure investment.[9] Australia and the Pacific have shared interests in trade and growth to build globally competitive, diversified, knowledge-based economies across region.

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8   Whitlam Institute, *Pacific Perspectives on the World: Listening to Australia's Island Neighbours in order to build strong, respectful and sustainable relationships*, February 2020: https://www.whitlam.org/publications/2020/2/13/pacific-perspectives-on-the-world

9   Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade, *Strengthening Australia's Relationships in the Pacific*, March 2022: https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Joint/Foreign_Affairs_Defence_and_Trade/PacificRelationships/Report

There are different views in Australia on the current focus on **infrastructure**. Government has emphasised hard infrastructure investments through the Australian Infrastructure Financing Facility for the Pacific (AIFFP). There is no denying that Pacific island countries need such infrastructure built. But many in the development community argue that hard infrastructure cannot stand alone without concurrent investments in social infrastructure, especially given the income and opportunities lost during the pandemic. Further, as the AIFFP has earmarked a substantial sum of limited ODA for its use, hard infrastructure projects should be augmented by additional social programs, for example leveraging electrification and internet expansion for health, education and social payment outcomes.

Australia's ideal vision is of a **stable, prosperous and inclusive region** where **Australia is a preferred and trusted partner**. Many understand that to achieve this, Australia needs to work with the Pacific on things that are important to the Pacific.

At times there are **tensions** between Australia's national interest and being responsive to Pacific needs. Where Australia privileges its own institutional requirements and solutions above local agency and local solutions this can undermine trust and feed negative perceptions about Australia's real intent.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALIGNMENT

The **changing debate on climate change in Australia** may offer greater opportunities for alignment.

Security issues can be framed as **common interests** in a shared sphere of interest. Tensions around geopolitical concerns can potentially be used to make engagement work better for the Pacific. For example, geopolitical concerns have been a factor in greater investments in infrastructure through the AIFFP.

Australia and the Pacific have a **shared interest in disaster resilience and recovery**. They also have a **shared interest in health security** and an effective response to the immediate and longer-term effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. This provides an opportunity for closer engagement, collaboration and continued investment towards strengthening health systems and health outcomes across the region.

At the macro level, a stronger focus on problem-solving and genuine partnership can produce deeper and longer-lasting relationships founded on trust. There is the **opportunity for a rhetorical reset** framed in terms of a long-term generational partnership, prioritising responsiveness to the Pacific's own priorities for development and with a clear eye on a shared, long-term future. Engaging with the cultural underpinnings, ways of thinking and decision-making processes of Pacific societies can help shift the conversation towards one of partnership.

DIGITAL CASH PROGRAMMING IN FIJI

An innovative Save the Children digital cash program helped vulnerable families in Fiji to manage the devastating impacts of COVID-19, with the largest humanitarian cash transfer in Fiji's history using mobile payment platforms to send almost A$20 million in funds to households identified as having the greatest need.

The report shows that many families assisted in the first phase of the project spent money on food (95%), water (27%), electricity (30%), clothing (19%) and medical expenses (16%) after receiving $400 Fijian dollars. Some also bought cleaning products to keep their homes COVID-safe during the height of the pandemic.

Between December 2020 and June 2021, about A$4.2 million was distributed to 16,772 families who had lost income due to the pandemic or recent to the second phase of the project transferred A$15.3 million before ending in January, taking the total amount to A$19.5 million benefitting 39,000 households.

Using assessment criteria developed with the Fijian government and local NGOs like the Fiji Council of Social Services, Save the Children prioritised vulnerable groups such as the elderly, women, children and people living with a disability. Save the Children uses cash and voucher assistance to support households impacted by disasters all over the world, however the use of digital cash is a recent development.

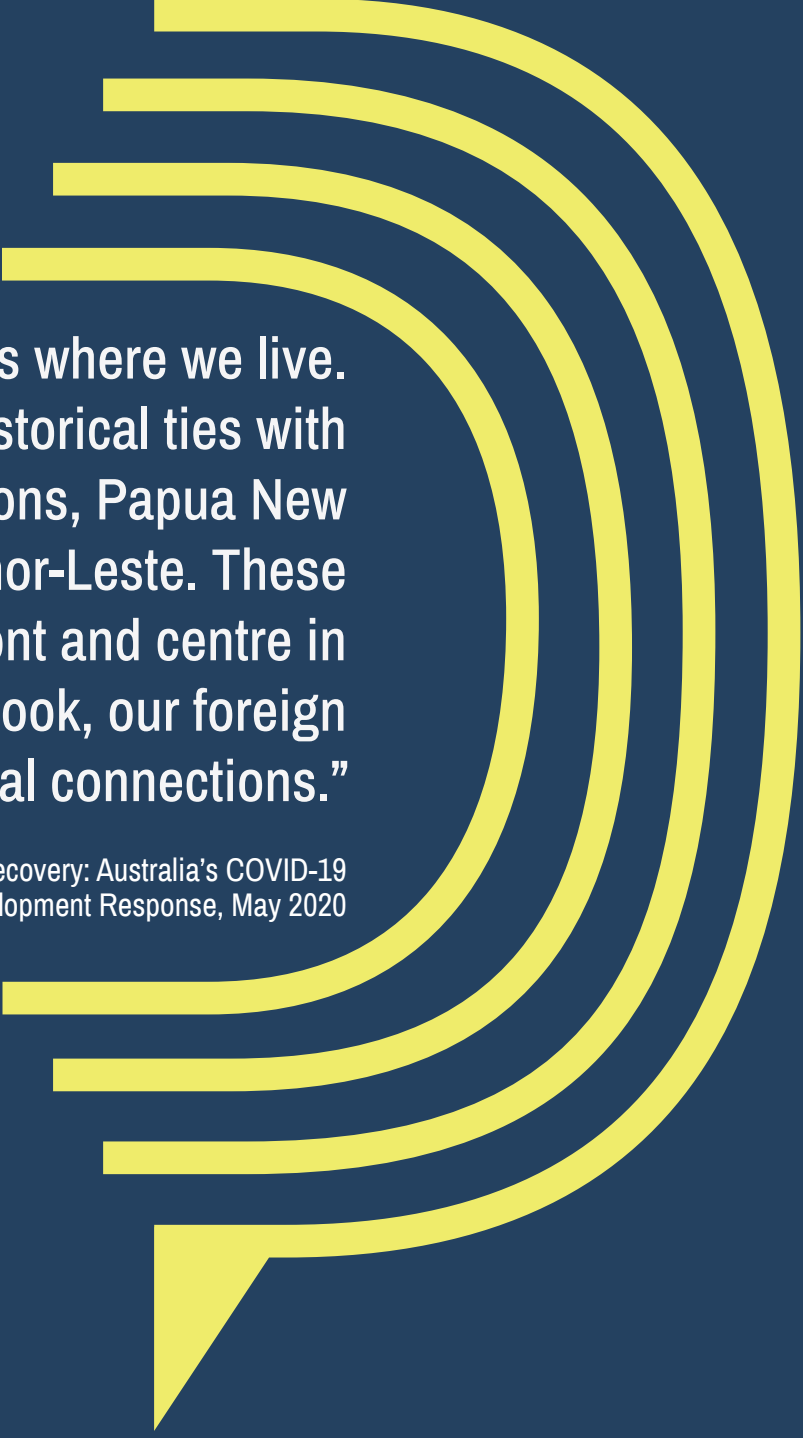## DELIVERING RESULTS THROUGH LONG-TERM NGO PARTNERSHIPS[10]

NGOs and civil society have been working in partnership with the Australian Government, particularly through the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP), for over 40 years to deliver development outcomes. DFAT's own evaluation of the ANCP corroborates the effectiveness of the program's approach. The 2015 review described the ANCP as "one of the best performing programs" delivering 18.2 percent of DFAT's aggregate development results for only 2.7 percent of the overall development program spend.

Beyond the ANCP, in 2020, 61 Australian NGOs expended $157 million across 529 projects in a dozen Pacific countries. While 50% of funding comes from DFAT, another 11% is corporate support with the remainder from the public, which is significant as an aggregate across the region.

The advantage of the Australian community NGOs is their longstanding and close relationships with Pacific churches and community organisations, which means ready-made partnerships and community level knowledge and response.

The program fosters unparalleled people-to-people linkages, supporting Australia's development program's engagement with marginalisation and exclusion that would likely otherwise remain unreachable.

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10   Australian Council for International Development, Submission to JSCFADT, Strengthening Australia's Relationships with Countries in the Pacific Region, June 2020, p.10:

"The Pacific is where we live. We share deep historical ties with Pacific island nations, Papua New Guinea and Timor-Leste. These countries are front and centre in Australia's strategic outlook, our foreign policy, and our personal connections."

Partnerships for Recovery: Australia's COVID-19 Development Response, May 2020

Barriers

There are a range of reasons why Australia has found it challenging to navigate relations in the Pacific and build confidence across the region in its intent and capabilities. Geopolitics and geostrategic competition encourages short-termism and makes it harder to focus on longer-term, principled and genuine engagement. There is a danger that the current focus on China overtakes other priorities and dominates the relationship; thus diminishing trust and leading to Australia's diplomatic intentions not always being well-received. Taking a competition-based approach to engagement is counter to everybody's interests, particularly Pacific Islanders.

Australia's lack of urgency and leadership on climate change disconnects Australia from the region. There is a need for Australia to take climate action seriously. The Boe Declaration is the logical starting point and Australian domestic climate policies are critical.

Tension persists between what purports to be a familial partnership built on shared values and what sometimes appears to still be a traditional donor-recipient relationship.
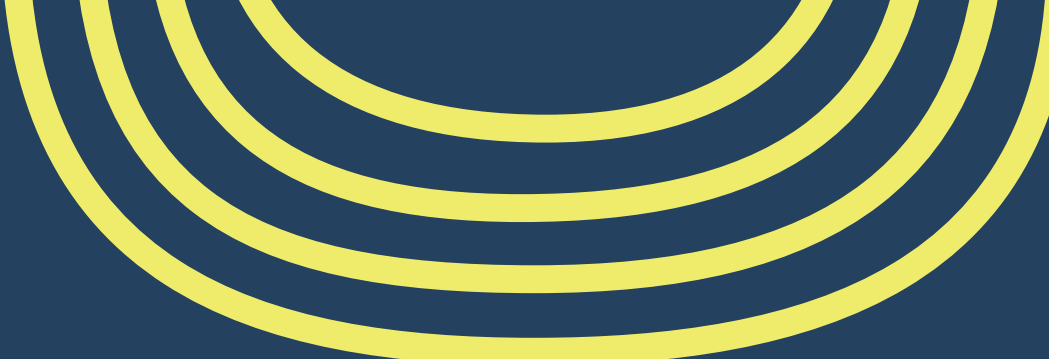
The language and framing of engagement can create negative perceptions of Australia. Colonial undertones are unhelpful. Diplomatically, Australia needs to get the language right.

The structural limitations faced by Pacific economies present a significant challenge. For example, lack of access to banking and digital technologies is a barrier for many Pacific businesses and services. Far away from international markets, small economies prevent economies of scale. For example, in health services the cost per life saved or disability-adjusted life-year will be more expensive due to small populations to serve and the physical realities of many Pacific island

countries. This means grant support and 'aid' is still a key component to economic development, but it doesn't have to be the only emphasis. The challenge remains how to provide effective support in specific areas where it is not realistic for Pacific island countries to be self-sufficient through domestic resource mobilisation. For example, Pacific island countries will have a continuing need for foreign exchange to purchase essentials such as vaccines, drugs and consumables for healthcare, and this will require international support.

Australian concerns have meant that labour mobility programs lack pathways for permanent migration, and it is a missed opportunity for enhancing an alternate development strategy.

Australia's low levels of Pacific literacy are a barrier to greater partnership. Pacific Islanders know a lot about Australia, but the reverse is far from true with Australians often lacking knowledge of culturally sensitive issues and lacking empathy on Pacific regional concerns.

"Australia's got strength to work on; they just need to be serious on the long-term, on the long-term relationship… If you gave the choice to Papua New Guinean students between China and Australia, without question they could choose Australia over China."

Michael Kabuni, Papua New Guinea, AP4D Pacific Voices Consultation, April 2022

"We don't need handouts or highly trained technical advisers. What we do need is for Australia to listen to local leaders, to listen to provincial leaders, and then to listen to the national leaders and if you don't have the mechanism to do that, find the mechanism to do that… Australia cannot talk about work or employment issues unless it is coming to the table with the resources to support local opportunities but also to support opportunities for youths in the Pacific to find employment in Australia and New Zealand."

Dr Basil Leodoro, Vanuatu, AP4D Pacific Voices Consultation, April 2022

"We are not the small brother, Australia's not the big brother. We are all neighbours."

Opeta Alefaio, Fiji, AP4D Pacific Voices Consultation, April 2022

The vision in practice

Australia frames its approach to the Pacific as a generational partnership and enjoys a deeper, more sophisticated relationship with Pacific island countries characterised by respect and trust.

Australia listens and responds to the Pacific on the existential threat posed by climate change and delivers a response commensurate with the threat.

A more open labour market increases benefits to the region, and a more flexible border creates a relationship on a more equal footing. There is a positive ethos of Pacific people working and living in Australia and Australian people living and working in the Pacific. Strong diasporas support the partnership relationship. The Pacific region is no longer viewed through a development lens, with less dependence, and more partnership.

A strengthened development cooperation program sits alongside a growing economic and security partnership. It aims to support inclusive growth, rather than just economic output, for example through microfinance and programs for rural and areas of greatest need. The development program supports community organisations and civil society.

Australia focuses on coherence across its development partnerships and coordinates with other donor countries. Australia's interventions complement, capitalise and build on Pacific systems and institutions already in place.

Australia is able to strengthen effective, long-term development partnerships that are responsive to Pacific voices and priorities.[11] Localisation is a natural and critical input, rather than an ideological 'nice to have'. Local and Indigenous leadership is visible, valued and sought, including by Indigenous researchers in Australia working with Pacific colleagues. On disaster risk reduction, respect for traditional knowledge and support for community-led local resilience are hallmarks of Australia's engagement.

Climate adaptive planning is integrated into development partnerships, going beyond traditional environmental safeguards to effectively address climate change and environmental risks while seeking opportunities to make positive environmental and climate impacts. Australia prioritises initiatives and models – such as innovative green infrastructure approaches, ecosystem-based resource management and nature-based disaster risk reduction solutions – which deliver social, economic, and environmental benefits.

A life-course approach to health is applied across families and generations, ensuring disability inclusiveness and addressing non-communicable diseases.

Australians appreciate the culture and diversity of their Pacific neighbours and show increasing Pacific literacy, including interest in Pacific languages. Deepened people-to-people links between the Australian public and Pacific Islanders facilitates reciprocal knowledge, greater collaboration and mutual respect. Culture is understood to be much more than dancing and handicrafts, but as a vehicle for Indigenous and traditional knowledge systems.

Large Pacific diasporas in Australia are key sources of knowledge and expertise and are included and welcomed when it comes to critical conversations. Australia celebrates its Pacific heritage and acknowledges the contribution of Pacific Islanders, building on local government efforts in this area.

Australia applies its comparative advantage as an education provider to address the demand for skills, management and leadership. Strengthened linkages between Australian institutions and Pacific schools and universities enable policy and knowledge exchange in priority areas including health, education, and climate change. Academic institutions across the region are supported to be innovative in boosting cross-cultural knowledge.

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11   Australian Council for International Development, Submission to JSCFADT, *Strengthening Australia's Relationships with Countries in the Pacific Region*, June 2020: https://acfid.asn.au/sites/site.acfid/files/ACFID%20Submission%20to%20the%20JSFADT%20Inquiry%20into%20Strengthening%20Australia%27s%20relationships%20with%20countries%20in%20the%20Pacific%20Region.pdf

Over the longer term, Australia helps Pacific island countries identify viable economic activities and local jobs that would connect the region to the global economy in a sustainable way. Trade expos celebrate the excellence of Pacific products and regulatory and administrative processes are streamlined for Pacific products.

Australia and Pacific trade grows for mutual benefit with new opportunities building on PACER Plus. Australian trade supports healthy lifestyles rather than contributing to health problems. For example, ending Australian and New Zealand's export of low-quality meat to Pacific island countries would reduce its contribution to lifestyle diseases and reduction of life expectancy. Setting mutually-agreed quality controls on exports and imports would benefit both Australia and the region.

Financial flows have a positive impact on Pacific economies and societies. Pacific businesses are creative and active in building markets and see barriers to trade reduce over time. Australia builds on market development programs that link producers with purchasers.

Australia responds to the need for small-scale appropriate technology development that can be used by rural Pacific communities for undertaking small-scale economic enterprises. Partnerships are established by Australian training institutions and industry to develop or market existing appropriate technology for use at the household level to enable physically disconnected, informal and small-scale enterprises to become profitable and sustainable.

Key Australian actors frame and talk about the Pacific using rhetoric that emphasises partnership and positive relationships rather than problems and needs. This reframes the relationship as a partnership of neighbours, not as Australia as the fixer of Pacific problems. It focuses on Pacific capacity strength rather than capacity deficit.

Australia understands its relationship as a 'long walk' alongside generations of Islanders given its location on the shores of the Blue Pacific continent. This plays to Australia's strengths

CASE STUDY:

THE INDO-PACIFIC CENTRE FOR HEALTH SECURITY [12]

The Centre is the implementation body for the Australian Government's $300 million Health Security Initiative, launched in 2017, and the $623 million Vaccine Access and Health Security Initiative, announced last year in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Centre is located in the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and brings together relevant Australian Government Agencies, advised by a distinguished Technical Reference Group. The Centre's mix of DFAT staff, secondees from six Departments and specialist contractors provides in-house expertise in areas including the veterinary sciences, regulation, immunology, microbiology, epidemiology and anthropology.

The Centre for Health Security is uniquely placed to leverage the projects, partnerships and goodwill Australia has built to address the urgent need to mitigate growing health security threats to our country and our region.

The Centre brings together global investments, collaboration with regional organisations (including ASEAN) and bilateral health cooperation to deliver both strategic direction and practical, timely assistance for regional government partners in the Indo-Pacific region. It is an example of supporting collaboration and demonstrating that building local capacity, valuing local expertise and knowledge.

12   https://indopacifichealthsecurity.dfat.gov.au/

CASE STUDY:

PACMOSSI - JOINING FORCES TO RAMP UP MOSQUITO CONTROL AND REDUCE DISEASE[13]

Demonstrating the power of collaborative research and effective capacity strengthening, the Pacific Community (SPC) has joined forces with James Cook University to tackle the scourge of mosquito borne disease that continues to blight the region.

PacMOSSI is a consortium led by the World Health Organisation, and featuring 12 international partners, including SPC and James Cook University. It is co-funded by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and France's development agency.

A malaria vaccine may have been endorsed by the World Health Organisation, but the idea of eliminating disease caused by mosquitoes is still a long way off, as 96 outbreaks of dengue, zika, and chikungunya in the Pacific between January 2012 and May 2021.

PacMOSSI focuses on training, surveillance and response plans. One of its first projects is to complete a needs analysis of the Pacific island countries, so that training can be adapted accordingly and informed by listening to their needs, their contexts and realities.

CASE STUDY:

BRIDGE SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS[14]

The Building Relationships through Intercultural Dialogue and Growing Engagement (BRIDGE) School Partnerships Program is a flagship program of the Asia Education Foundation that has operated since 2008. Announced by the Hon Julie Bishop MP and the then Senator, the Hon Concetta Fierravanti-Wells, in 2018 the Program expanded into the Pacific region.

BRIDGE supports school communities across Australia to establish an international school partnership with a sister school from the Pacific region. The program builds educators' professional knowledge, capabilities and skills and students collaborate on projects, practice language skills and develop lifelong friendships with their partner school. A key focus of the program is strengthening links between schools that offer education to students with a disability.

Through pre-departure training, online and face-to-face professional learning in Australia and abroad, educators deepen their understanding of global engagement; create opportunities for connecting students globally through classroom learning; explore innovative technologies to take learning beyond the four walls of the classroom; and connect with educators to share innovative classroom practice, including inclusive education.

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13   https://pacmossi.org/

14   https://www.asiaeducation.edu.au/programmes/school-partnerships/participating-countries/pacific

Pathways

LEADERSHIP ON CLIMATE CHANGE

Australia should acknowledge the threat climate change poses to the region and overcome ambivalence and inconsistency around Australian climate and energy policy. Climate – along with migration – is an area where Australia can send a message that it truly wants to be part of the Pacific by making hard decisions and sacrificing something for the Pacific's sake.

LABOUR MOBILITY AND MIGRATION PATHWAYS

Expand labour mobility by opening up the labour market to create new opportunities for Pacific islanders and spreading its income generating potential further. Address the flaws in the current schemes that create the risk of exploitation and introduce pathways to permanency into Australia's migration program.

Emphasise the positive ethos around mobility, that is, reciprocity and multicultural exchange with Australians working and living in the Pacific and Pacific Islanders working and living in Australia. Reciprocity sends a significant message. Leveling the playing field when it comes to labour mobility – that is, removing the one-sided conditionality of the scheme – would reflect the "Pacific family" terminology sometimes used to describe the relationship. It fits well with the model many Pacific Islanders have where they have a foot in the village and a foot in the city, flowing from where they come from, going back and forth to build up skills and income and come back.

A skills visa approach is the most promising economically, in terms of drawing the link between Australia's need for domestic service workers, and the fact that the Pacific is well placed to provide this. With Australia's needs given an aging population, fulfilling the potential of the scheme serves Australia's economic and national

interests, plays into the kind of strategic partnership that Australia should have with the region, and builds critical people-to-people connectedness. One area to investigate is potential recruitment of Pacific citizens in the ADF as occurs with, for example, the British army.

It has been estimated that expanded labour mobility opportunities could generate an additional net income of about US$13 billion for about 240,000 permanent migrants by 2040, generating benefits for both the labour-receiving and labour-sending countries as well as for the migrants themselves.[15]

There is an important role for pre-departure preparation for labour mobility, ensuring that those coming to a new country are well-prepared and ready to relate to others.

The "youth bulge" in the Pacific is an opportunity for Australia and Pacific island countries to come together to address challenges associated with livelihood opportunities. Labour mobility can be a focus of shared engagement and activity to improve existing programs and then this can form the basis of long-term economic relationship.

REINVIGORATE RELATIONSHIPS THROUGH LITERACY AND CULTURAL EXCHANGE

Enhancing Pacific literacy among both Australian policy makers and the Australian community is key to demonstrating Australia listens to and respects local needs and priorities. Future programs can build upon long-standing, people-to-people links and educational exchanges. Incorporation of Pacific culture into Australian schools, including Pacific languages, builds intercultural understanding.[16] There should be increasing recognition and acknowledgement of the tens of thousands of Pacific Islanders who already live in Australia.[17]

Sustained investment is needed to build Australia's Pacific literacy. Realistically this will be a long-term project that

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15   World Bank, *Pacific Possible*, 2017: https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/28135/ACS22308-PUBLIC-P154324-ADD-SERIES-PPFullReportFINALscreen.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

16   https://www.dfat.gov.au/people-to-people/foundations-councils-institutes/australia-indonesia-institute/programs/bridge-school-partnership-program

17   25 August marks Australian South Sea Islander (ASSI) recognition week on our national cultural calendar. https://australian.museum/learn/cultures/pacific-collection/australian-south-sea-islander-recognition-day/

requires an array of approaches and roles for a range of organisations rather than just government – although government has an important role in setting tone.

As well as Australian and Pacific public and civil society, it is also critical that new and emerging leaders have the chance to engage with one another. Examples include the newly-formed Friends of the Pacific Family Parliamentary Group, the Australian Development Cooperation Parliamentary Program and the ADF Parliamentary Program.[18]

There is potential for Australian First Nations and Pacific Islanders in shared problem solving[19], particularly around the Coral Sea. Many First Nations Queenslanders are Coral Sea people, in the same way that Papua New Guineans, Solomon Islanders and Ni-Vans are Coral Sea people.

BE A PARTNER FOR EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Australia has been an active strong leader on international education into Asian countries, but the Pacific has not participated as much as desired, primarily due to barriers to entry into technical training, secondary education gaps, and complicated pathways for degrees, accreditation and visas. Formal recognition of degrees needs priority, as do generating systems whereby universities encourage postgraduate students to return, both to conduct more research and address brain drain. Establishing agreements with Pacific institutions for Australian students to work and live amongst local people would be enriching, and help develop a more nuanced, contextual and accurate opinion of place and people.

Realising the opportunities for economic and societal advancement in Pacific island countries will depend on the availability of adequate skills and education - at all levels.   This in turn requires improved basic education and what the World Bank's 'Pacific Possible' publication refers to as 'market-responsive skills development'.[20]

Within the development program, the vocational training portion of the Australia-Pacific Training Coalition (APTC) is very highly regarded in its methodological approaches. The danger is that without employment pathways, such interventions can lead to a lot of over-skilled and underemployed people. APTC could utilise labour mobility and link into Australian employment systems. This would create more mutuality rather than siloed aid approaches.

UNLOCK OPPORTUNITIES THROUGH LONG-TERM CIVIL SOCIETY PARTNERSHIPS

Building on existing initiatives that exemplify strong collaborative partnerships brings significant benefit to both Australia and the Pacific, including the Australian NGO Cooperation Program. This should integrate diplomatic efforts with development cooperation to create sophisticated, modern, and respectful partnerships that are genuinely collaborative and long-term. The value of civil society organisations cannot be overstated as a soft power asset for Australia.

TRADE PATHWAYS

There are opportunities to increase trade, including in commodities such as coffee, palm oil and coconut.

There is a great need for small-scale appropriate technology development that can be used by rural Pacific communities for undertaking small scale economic enterprises. Establishing partnerships with Australian training institutions and industry to develop or market already developed appropriate technology for use at the household level will be useful to enable physically disconnected, informal and small-scale enterprises to become profitable and sustainable.

18   OECD, *Development Co-operation Peer Review*: Australia, 2018, https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/development/oecd-development-co-operation-peer-reviews-australia-2018_9789264293366-en

19   James Blackwell and Julie Ballangarry, *Indigenous Foreign Policy: a new way forward?*, Australian Feminist Foreign Policy Coalition Issues Paper Series, Issue Paper 1, April 2022, https://iwda.org.au/assets/files/AFFPC-issues-paper-Indigenous-Foreign-Policy-Blackwell-Ballangarry-FINAL.pdf

20   World Bank, *Pacific Possible, 2017*: https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/28135/ACS22308-PUBLIC-P154324-ADD-SERIES-PPFullReportFINALscreen.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

CHANGE THE CONVERSATION ON INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS

Australia should continue to invest in infrastructure, which is important to pandemic recovery.

It should focus on infrastructure which supports economic growth over the long term (not only demonstrating countering China). Because the Pacific has been receiving significant infrastructure financing, it is becoming harder to justify funding more marginal projects. Increasingly, it will be about service delivery, with a need to move away from large scale projects to maintenance of existing infrastructure, small-scale capital works and climate adaptation. These are the areas that will have the highest economic return. The dispersed nature of populations in smaller outlying islands in most Pacific island countries means that small-scale financing and recurrent expenditure for maintenance and operating of infrastructure is best long-term investment. "Build and forget" is not a viable model and offers a potential point of distinction for Australian infrastructure developments if a "lifetime engagement" approach is taken.

Australia should consider sustainability as part of capital works and build in climate resilience. It will focus on investing in appropriate technology: on infrastructure that can be of most benefit to the most people over generations. Casting a gender lens on infrastructure is an important element in making that cost benefit analysis. Building capacity, utilising renewables and making use of local materials are all important for sustainability.

Australia should enhance concessionality of loans to avoid adding to Pacific debt burdens. The repurposing of the A$1.5 billion non-concessional loan component of the Australian Infrastructure Financing Facility for the Pacific (AIFFP) into either more concessional loans or grants would help free-up additional resources to fund social infrastructure such as health facilities and support pro-poor economic recovery. This is particularly important for PNG and other Pacific island countries which have limited international borrowing options and rely largely on the multilateral development banks (with already stretched resources) or with loans from China.

It is worth noting that Australia's A$500 million in reconstruction and development loans to Indonesia provided by the Howard Government after the December 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami were on highly concessional terms, even though Indonesia is a much larger and richer economy than those in the Pacific.[21] Given the danger of high rates of indebtedness of some small Pacific island countries[22] and the budget expenditure forgone on social services, there have been calls for a moratorium on repayments on Australian loans and consideration of debt swaps for budget priorities in health and education.[23]

21   Australian Council for International Development, Submission to JSCFADT, *Strengthening Australia's Relationships with Countries in the Pacific Region*, June 2020, p.13: https://acfid.asn.au/sites/site.acfid/files/ACFID%20Submission%20to%20the%20JSFADT%20Inquiry%20into%20Strengthening%20Australia%27s%20relationships%20with%20countries%20in%20the%20Pacific%20Region.pdf; S Howes & M Dornan, Moving beyond grants: questions about Australian Infrastructure financing in the Pacific, 2018.

22   Lowy Institute Pacific Aid Map: https://pacificaidmap.lowyinstitute.org/. For analysis, see Roland Rajah, Jonathan Pryke and Alexandre Dayant, "*China, the Pacific, and the "debt trap" question*", The Interpreter, 29 October 2019: https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/china-pacific-and-debt-trap-question

23   For example, Australian Council for International Development, *Mobilising development finance for economic growth and social impact*, 2022: https://acfid.asn.au/sites/site.acfid/files/Election%20Policy%20Brief%20-%20Development%20Finance.pdf; Luke Fletcher, "*Don't saddle Pacific Islands with disaster debt*", The Interpreter, 1 June 2022: https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/don-t-saddle-pacific-islands-disaster-debt

CASE STUDY:

CARDNO MARKET DEVELOPMENT FACILITY[24]

Cardno's Market Development Facility (MDF) is an Australian Government funded multi-country initiative working in five countries across Asia Pacific – Fiji, Timor-Leste, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and PNG.

Implemented by Palladium, in partnership with Swisscontact, MDF uses a Market Systems Development (MSD) approach to promote sustainable economic development, through higher incomes for women and men by connecting individuals, businesses, governments and NGOs with each other, and with markets at home and abroad.

This enhances investment and coordination and allows partnerships to flourish, strengthening inclusive economic growth, with the economic empowerment of women central to its work.

MDF has leveraged US$14.2 million in private sector investment since 2012. In 2020, 45 percent of MDF's program beneficiaries were women. This reflects a cumulative 170,200 women who have benefitted from MDF interventions since the start of the program. MDF is increasingly focusing on climate change mitigation and adaptation as part of building inclusive market interventions, supporting its partners to explore viable opportunities for sustainable economies of scale as well as avenues for green growth.

CASE STUDY:

PACIFIC WOMEN LEAD[25]

Pacific Women Lead (PWL) is the Australian Government's new regional gender equality program for the Pacific, to be delivered over 5 years (2021-2026) through an A$170 million investment.

The PWL program aims to ensure that Pacific women and girls, in all their diversity, are safe and equitably share resources, opportunities and decision-making, with men and boys. PWL will focus on women's leadership and women's rights, including safety, health and economic empowerment and increasing the effectiveness of regional gender equality efforts. This new program builds on Australia's long-standing support for gender equality in the Pacific region through the Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development program. PWL will complement and is additional to existing (separately funded) bilateral gender equality partnerships.

Pacific Women Lead will support Pacific-led approaches and prioritise Pacific voices and ownership, through the establishment of a new Governance Board and new strategic partnerships with Pacific organisations, including the Pacific Community (SPC) and Pacific women's organisations as key delivery partners.

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24   https://marketdevelopmentfacility.org/what-we-do/

25   https://www.dfat.gov.au/about-us/business-opportunities/business-notifications/pacific-women-lead-atm-id-dfat-324

"Pacific island nations, like many others in the AsiaPacific, face a long and challenging road to recovery out of COVID-19. Australia's 'stepped-up' Pacific engagement must recalibrate, with a renewed emphasis on strengthening trade and business relations in ways that respond to Pacific priorities, while providing a boost to recovery now and into the long term."

Caitlin Byrne and Tess Newton Cain, Activating trade and investment between Australia and the Pacific islands region, Griffith Asia Insights, October 2021

"Closures of international borders have shut down industries like tourism in the Pacific… and curtailed migration, which has reduced flows of remittances to developing countries. Public health measures imposed to contain the pandemic have pushed firms out of business and destroyed jobs in developed and developing countries alike. But developing economies have had less resilience, or often less diversified, and have thinner social safety nets, making their people far more vulnerable to the pandemic's economic shock… The road to recovery for developing countries requires concerted support from developed countries, focusing on both health care and economic recovery."

Then Shadow Minister for International Development and the Pacific Patrick Conroy MP, Address to the Australian Council for International Development, September 2021

"For me, as a leader, and us as governments, our collective interests are being pressured and shaped toward a new Pacific order — one that won't necessarily meet the expectations of others — or the perceptions of outsiders. What is important is that we choose what's best for us. We have the ability to define what's good, and we have the right to take commanding ownership of our future."

Secretary-General of the Pacific Islands Forum Henry Puna, University of the South Pacific, October 2012

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Thank you to those who have contributed their thoughts during the development of this paper.
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Why it matters

There is a strong sense of insecurity around the Pacific region. This exists at multiple levels:

- globally, as a warming planet presents ecological and civilisational threats;[1]
- regionally, as players and relationships change, the values and principles enshrined in the United Nations Charter and underpinning regional stability since World War Two are under challenge;[2]
- nationally, as countries respond to the effects of COVID-19, natural disasters, illegal fishing, smuggling, transnational crime and other security threats, which are compounded by gender inequality; and
- locally, where community leaders and security agencies struggle to control violence and subnational conflicts in several countries. In some areas, law and order challenges and the proliferation of firearms mean that risks to individual safety and tribal and political violence is extremely real.

For Australia, stability and peace in the Pacific goes to the heart of its security, prosperity and national interest. During a historic period of geopolitical change, the signing of a security agreement between Solomon Islands and China in April 2022 has brought geopolitical competition and militarisation in the Pacific to the fore of political and public discussion.[3] There are concerns regarding the potential for Chinese military and security presence, economic coercion and suppression of human rights.

For Pacific island countries, the key security issue is climate change, including its impact on human security. In statement after statement, Pacific leaders have described climate change as an existential security threat to their territory, statehood and cultures due to sea level rise and increased frequency of natural disasters. Pacific island countries have often been disappointed by Australia's failure to support – and sometimes efforts to block – international action on climate change and by Australia's reticence in responding to climate change as a security priority.

Pacific leaders have recognised an expanded concept of security in the Boe Declaration on Regional Security (2018).[4] In this human security frame, gender equality, is a key area of concern. The Pacific has the lowest levels of women's political representation in the world with just 6% of seats held by women.[5] Rates of gender based violence are amongst the highest in the world.[6]

1   Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, *Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability*, 2022, https://report.ipcc.ch/ar6wg2/pdf/IPCC_AR6_WGII_SummaryForPolicymakers.pdf

2   Department of Defence, *2016 Defence White Paper*, 2016: https://www.defence.gov.au/about/publications/2016-defence-white-paper; Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *2017 Foreign Policy White Paper*, 2017: https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/2017-foreign-policy-white-paper.pdf; Department of Defence, *2020 Defence Strategic Update*, 2020: https://www.defence.gov.au/about/publications/2020-defence-strategic-update

3   Minister for Foreign Affairs and Minister for International Development and the Pacific, *"Joint Statement on Solomon Islands"*, 19 April 2022: https://www.foreignminister.gov.au/minister/marise-payne/media-release/joint-statement-solomon-islands-0

4   This expanded concept includes: "human security, humanitarian assistance, prioritising environmental security, and regional cooperation in building resilience to disasters and climate change". See Pacific Islands Forum, *Boe Declaration on Regional Security*, 2018: https://pacificsecurity.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Boe-Declaration-on-Regional-Security.pdf

5   Inter Parliamentary Union, *Global and regional averages of women in national parliaments*, 2022, https://data.ipu.org/women-averages?month=5&year=2022

6   Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development, *Ending Violence Against Women*, 2020, https://pacificwomen.org/our-work/focus-areas/ending-violence-against-women/

This insecurity at the individual level also impacts on national and regional security, with the Asian Development Bank identifying gender inequality as the greatest factor in fragility of Pacific island countries[7] and gender-based violence identified as a key priority in several Pacific countries' national security strategies.[8]

There also remains unfinished business with independence and decolonisation movements in the region including in New Caledonia, Bougainville, West Papua and other territories.

This means it is a challenging time for Australia-Pacific security cooperation. Australian policymakers need to think big to achieve a significant reset in security cooperation. Bold suggestions should be considered. It is not the time for timid or incremental policy options.

There is a solid base for security cooperation. Australia has security cooperation arrangements with the majority of Pacific Island states, ranging from police-to-police cooperation, defence capacity-building and joint military exercises through to development programs designed to address drivers of fragility such as inequality and inclusive economic growth. While there have always been differences in views on security between Australia and the Pacific – and among Pacific island countries themselves – a range of ongoing mechanisms, instruments and institutions facilitate cooperation for peace and security in the region.[9]

But what has maintained peace in the region in the past cannot be assumed to be sufficient in a deteriorating strategic environment. We need to work harder with the Pacific to respond to drivers of instability to support a peaceful and secure region in which sovereign states can prevent and respond to threats and coercive influences.

We need to move beyond paying lipservice to each others' security concerns and develop a common framework for security that responds to the full set of peace and security challenges in the Pacific. This requires deepening relationships and making sure other security issues and shared concerns are not lost as geopolitical concerns come to the fore.

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7   Asian Development Bank, *Mapping Fragile and Conflict-Affected Situations in Asia and the Pacific: The ADB Experience*, 2016: https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/211636/mapping-fcas-asia-pacific.pdf

8   Pacific Islands Forum, *Boe Declaration Action Plan*, 2019: https://www.forumsec.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/BOE-document-Action-Plan.pdf; Government of Papua New Guinea, *National Security Policy*, 2013: https://pacificsecurity.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/2013-PNG-National-Security-Policy.pdf; Government of Solomon Islands, *National Security Strategy*, October 2020: https://pacificsecurity.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/210201-SOLOMONS-National-Security-Strategy-Final_.pdf; Government of Vanuatu, *Vanuatu National Security Strategy: Secure & Resilient*, 2019: https://www.gov.vu/images/publications/Vanuatu_National_Security_Strategy.pdf

9   For more detail see: Joanne Wallis, et al., *Mapping Security Cooperation in the Pacific Islands,* 2021: https://dpa.bellschool.anu.edu.au/sites/default/files/publications/attachments/2021-06/mapping_security_cooperation_in_pacific_islands_dpa_research_report_2021_joanne_wallis_henrietta_mcneill_james_batley_anna_powles.pdf.

Aligning views

AUSTRALIAN VIEWS

Australia, like its Pacific neighbours, is an island nation which **brings strategic strengths but also real vulnerabilities**. Stability and instability in the Pacific is of great strategic and practical significance to Australia.

Historically, Australia has assumed a **sense of responsibility** for the region. This has included military cooperation, acting as a major aid donor, providing capacity-building and supporting regionalism including the establishment of the Pacific Islands Forum. Australia has prioritised support for gender equality initiatives in the region through specific programs like Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development, Pacific Women Lead and Balance of Power, as well as by mainstreaming gender equality across development initiatives in the region

Now, closer **links between Pacific island countries and China**, including the recent Solomon Islands security agreement, have revealed issues in quality, resilience and depth of relations between Australia and the Pacific. Communities and leaders in Australia and the Pacific are looking to how these may be strengthened in the interests of long-term stability and peace. Australian policymakers and the public are concerned about the potential for a Chinese military base in the Pacific region and harbour wider concerns that China's coercive influence is becoming sharper and more destructive.

By contrast, up to now Australian policymakers have tended to see **climate change** as a threat multiplier, for example in natural disasters, rather than as a security threat to Pacific lives and livelihoods.

PACIFIC VIEWS

Key Pacific documents on regional security[10] have **an expanded view of security** and set out the key security issues and priorities for the Pacific as including climate change, human security, gender equality, environmental and resource security, transnational crime and cybersecurity.

Despite its cultural and linguistic diversity, Pacific Leaders are united in consistently highlighting the **existential security threat of climate change**. This is reflected in the Boe Declaration on Regional Security (2018) which declares climate change is "the single greatest threat to the livelihoods, security and wellbeing of the peoples of the Pacific."

Pacific island countries are dealing with the **security impact of climate change**, including more regular severe cyclones, changing rainfall patterns, flooding, marine heatwaves, coastal erosion and inundation and coral bleaching. Some of the consequences of climate change – such as migration, land insecurity, loss of livelihoods and disaster damage – are leading to localised conflict and governance crises. This is affecting peace in Pacific societies and has the potential to make any response more crisis-driven, exclusive and potentially more authoritarian. Progress towards United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 16 "Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions" has been mixed.[11]

At the national level, most Pacific island countries have been in the process of **democratic transition**. In some cases, this has been marred by corruption and lack of transparency. Another challenge is the extremely low representation of women in elected bodies such as parliaments. Although it can appear that national government and its institutions have overarching legitimacy and authority, at a local and community level such authority is typically dispersed.

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10   Pacific Islands Forum, *Boe Declaration on Regional Security*, 2018: https://pacificsecurity.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Boe-Declaration-on-Regional-Security.pdf plus associated action plan.

11   Murray Ackman, Andrea Abel van Es and Daniel Hyslop, *Measuring Peace in the Pacific - Addressing SDG16: Peace, Justice & Strong Institutions, Institute for Economics & Peace*, 2018, https://reliefweb.int/attachments/00c60cfe-b0f8-3904-a9b7-e9423d67f6f3/Measuring_Peace_in_the_Pacific.pdf

This disconnect with national institutions has positive and negative implications for governance, inclusive decision-making and peace and security. For Australian policy-makers and practitioners, this requires additional effort to understand and engage appropriately.

There are pushes for **independence, self-reliance and decolonisation** in various territories in the Pacific and these movements have national and regional ramifications. As shown with past deployments in Timor-Leste, Bougainville and Solomon Islands, Australia may be called on to contribute to peacekeeping and peace-building initiatives as governance and sovereignty transitions or challenges take place.

Pacific leaders are dealing with an **increased number of donors** and bilateral and regional relationships, from New Zealand, the United States, Asia, the Middle East and elsewhere. This has led to a complex and crowded environment and the potential danger of breaking down Pacific collective vision. Some Pacific leaders have indicated that Australia must respect Pacific island countries' decisions to choose security partnerships with non-traditional partners, such as China, and see such moves as part of establishing their countries on a more equal footing with larger countries such as Australia.

Some Pacific island countries have expressed concern about the AUKUS (Australia, UK and US) agreement[12] including Australia's intention to obtain **nuclear** powered submarines. Pacific island countries have a long history of calling for elimination of nuclear weapons and have suffered disproportionately from the testing of nuclear weapons particularly by France, Britain and the US in the northern Pacific. New Zealand and nine Pacific Island Forum member states have ratified the Treaty on the Prohibition on Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), which Australia has, up to now, opposed in international forums.

In recent years, Pacific governments have been diversifying their aid, trade and political relationships beyond traditional partners like France and the ANZUS allies, to build **South-South partnerships** on issues of concern. Drawing on decades of climate diplomacy – often challenging Australia's reluctance to act with urgency on emissions reductions – Pacific island states have developed new mechanisms to advance their agendas on the international stage, such as the Pacific Small Island Developing States group, which is now part of the Asia-Pacific bloc within the United Nations.

At the regional level, Pacific island countries have a history of **oceanic diplomacy** that is also troubled by fissures (such as a controversial vote for the latest Pacific Islands Forum Secretary General[13]) and diversity of actors and interests. Subregional groups have also become more prominent such as the Parties to the Nauru Agreement (PNA) in fisheries; the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) which collaborates on issues such as trade and development; and the Pacific Island Chiefs of Police (PICP).

OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALIGNMENT

Both Australian and Pacific leaders have long stressed the importance of strong and enduring relationships given the interdependence for peace and security. Australia and the Pacific have shared geography, history, engagement in regional institutions and long-standing security relationships. They also share a commitment to upholding international law, the global rules-based order and the associated governance frameworks of the United Nations. There is goodwill towards Australia in the region to draw on.

Australia and the Pacific are generally aligned in framing security as including human security[14], with a vision of Pacific people living free from violence and the fear of

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12   Greg Fry, *AUKUS undermines Australia's "Pacific family"*, Devpolicy, November 2021: https://devpolicy.org/aukus-undermines-australias-pacific-family-20211104/

13   Gil Rickey, *Micronesia stays in the Pacific Islands Forum fold – for now*, The Interpreter, February 2022: https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/micronesia-stays-pacific-islands-forum-fold-now

14   Pacific Islands Forum, *Boe Declaration on Regional Security*, 2018: https://pacificsecurity.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Boe-Declaration-on-Regional-Security.pdf

violence and "leading free, healthy and productive lives." [15]Australia has supported countries to draft individual national security strategies that recognise broader and longer-term challenges to human security such as gender equality, climate change, natural disasters and cyber security, and clearly articulate the priorities of respective countries. Multisectoral responses that combine efforts from peace, security, gender, development and diplomatic institutions are preferred.

However, within the human security frame, Australia and Pacific island countries diverge in how prominent certain topics should be. Australia could align more with Pacific security concerns in its balance of finance, technical assistance, capacity-building, legal and law enforcement engagement, political engagement and diplomacy to support Pacific priorities. Pacific women's organisations have also called for a broader approach to security including decolonisation, climate action and gender equity to address past injustice.[16] Australia can align with this by including Pacific women's perspectives in policy and taking up calls for increased representation of women in security spaces.

Common interests and shared geography should attune parties to building respectful mutually beneficial relationships. Having different security perspectives need not preclude regional cooperation,[17] as can be seen in initiatives including the Pacific Maritime Security Program, joint statement on exclusive economic zones and multilateral cooperation on joint monitoring, control and surveillance operations on fisheries to deter and disrupt transnational crime.

Climate change poses challenges towards the definition of maritime boundaries of Pacific island countries as these may change due sea level rise and land degradation. Their response has been to utilise regional solidarity and international activism, particularly under the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF), to establish decisions and precedents that can cement Pacific island countries' control over their boundaries over the past 20 years.

Most recently this culminated commitment at the 2019 PIF leaders' meeting for "a collective effort to develop international law with the aim of ensuring that once a PIF Member's maritime zones are delineated in accordance with UNCLOS, that Member's maritime zones cannot be challenged or reduced as a result of sea-level rise and climate change" as stated in the communique.

Supporting regional cooperation on this issue has been the Pacific Islands Regional Maritime Boundaries Project, a collaboration of regional organisations, Australian institutions and Pacific island countries which provides technical support for Pacific island states to clarify the extent of their maritime jurisdictions, including: depositing information about their maritime boundaries with the Secretary-General of the UN; preparing continental shelf submission for the UN Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf; updating maritime zones legislation; and delineating the limits of their maritime zones, including drafting and negotiating maritime boundaries treaties. At least 49 maritime boundaries have been clarified as a result of this project.

1   Rebecca Strating and Joanne Wallis, *Climate change and maritime boundaries: Pacific responses and implications for Australia*, Griffith Asia Institute Regional Outlook, Paper No. 66, 2021, https://www.griffith.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0033/1378437/RO66-Strating-and-Wallis-web.pdf

15   Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *Consultations on Pacific Islands Forum 2050 Strategy*, October 2020: https://www.dfat.gov.au/news/consultations-pacific-islands-forum-2050-strategy

16   'Ofa-Ki-Levuka Guttenbeil-Likilik, *Creating Equitable and Decolonizing South-North Partnerships: Nurturing the Vā and Voyaging the Audacious Ocean Together*, International Women's Development Agency, 2020, https://iwda.org.au/resource/creating-equitable-south-north-partnerships/; Fiji Women's Rights Movement, *Pacific Feminist Charter Action Plan*, 2019: http://www.fwrm.org.fj/images/PFF/WEBSITE/PFF_Charter_Action_Plan.pdf

17   Sandra Tarte, *Reconciling Regional Security Narratives in the Pacific*, East Asia, 39(1), 2022, pp. 29-43.

"The Pacific Step-up builds on Australia's history of
sustained engagement with countries in the Pacific
and our shared and abiding interest in the promotion
of sovereignty, stability, security and prosperity in
the region. In line with the Boe Declaration adopted
by Pacific leaders at the 2018 Pacific Islands Forum,
Australia is enhancing its security cooperation
with Pacific countries, including through expanded
ADF training activities, infrastructure development,
maritime capability and people-to-people links."

2020 Defence Strategic Update, July 2020

Barriers

There are **power imbalances** that create tension in the relationship between Australia and the Pacific. Due to its dominance in providing funding for the Pacific, with Australia the number one donor providing 35% of all aid to the Pacific in 2019,[18] there is a danger of Australian frameworks being adopted by default rather than addressing development challenges in ways that are respectful, dialogic and mutual.

Diplomatic references to the "Pacific family" are intended to reflect an ideal relationship of cooperation but this does not always ring true. Issues where **Australia is perceived as prioritising its own self-interest** include withholding support from Pacific cooperation on global climate change action and on visa and business access for Pacific citizens.

From Pacific points of view, Australia can **lack policy coherence** in setting positions and agendas and in practice. For instance, Australia's past statements about denuclearisation are now complicated through the AUKUS agreement. Pacific views are often collated and included in consultations by some ministries and departments but then overlooked by other parts of the Australian Government when key decisions are made. Sometimes this is interpreted as Australia not listening to the Pacific, but it should be seen as an issue of conflicting priorities where Australia's global agenda trumps its regional agenda; that is, Australia is aware of Pacific views but then prioritises global strategies.

The lack of **coordination between Australian agencies** can mean Pacific leaders and senior civil servants are burdened by many meetings and seemingly overlapping or conflicting agendas of Australia and other like-minded countries. Approaches are sometimes experienced as ad hoc and driven by specific Australian requests, rather than informed by longer-term policies and plans. This can result in assistance provided that may not be needed, or testing approaches in the Pacific rather than drawing on grounded analysis of what works in local contexts.
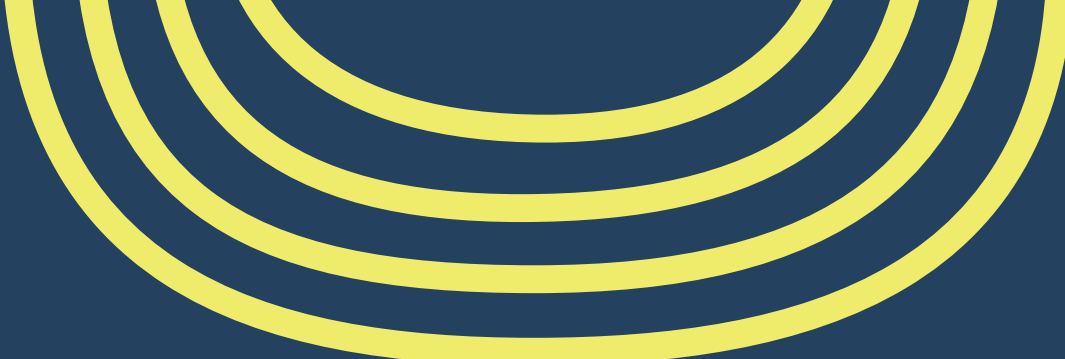
Coordination with other countries is also an issue. The increasing interest in the region by Five Eyes countries plus France and Japan has flagged a level of "competition" for the delivery of assistance. New Zealand has invested significantly in the Pacific, and other partners are ramping up investment, such as increased access to aid and the re-establishment of a US Embassy in Solomon Islands. Australia is not the only regional provider and needs to acknowledge this by aligning with and leveraging off other likeminded countries to make collective efforts meaningful and enduring.

Because security is political, both Australian and Pacific leaders can focus on **short-term political considerations**, which can divert attention away from trends and threats to peace and stability that need longer-term and sustained action. A focus on elected leaders and senior civil servants in consultations can also exclude women, given their lack of representation in these areas, meaning that the gendered drivers of insecurity, and the gendered impacts of security decisions, are not fully understood.

Both Pacific island countries and the Australian Government **lack accountability** on following through the policies and intergovernmental instruments they have signed. There are many good statements of intent, but implementation and review of progress towards security goals is less clear. This is also complicated by small island developing states having to respond to a spectrum of international law issues without the staffing and expertise of larger states. Coordination and sustainability of effort is crucial to support the Pacific for regional security.

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18   https://pacificaidmap.lowyinstitute.org/

"In Papua New Guinea, there is a popular saying – 'where China goes, Australia follows'… it's a reaction… The responsibility lies with Australia in understanding what the Pacific needs are. It's not the other way around… If Australia can address what Pacific island countries think is a security threat, there won't be a need for the Pacific to seek China's help."

Michael Kabuni, Papua New Guinea, AP4D Pacific Voices Consultation, April 2022

"We're on different sides about what security is."

Jope Tarai, Fiji, AP4D Pacific Voices Consultation, April 2022

"Australia is treating us as an arena of contestation rather than relationship building."

Opeta Alefaio, Fiji, AP4D Pacific Voices Consultation, April 2022

The vision in practice

Australia and Pacific island countries support each other to anticipate, prevent and respond to security threats and coercive influences. They develop a common sense of the threats to peace and security in the region. Australia is not reactive, but insightful; not directing, but reflexive; and not static, but forward-thinking in order to create security with Pacific island countries and regional institutions for a peaceful region.

In a spirit of **strategic humility**, Australia understands that its role is to learn from Pacific island countries' experiences and perspectives to support informed and inclusive decision-making processes in the Pacific through development assistance. While this support comes in different forms, it is linked to strategic plans and policies created by Pacific island countries, individually and together as a region, to be secure and peaceful, which in turn creates peace for Australia and the Pacific alike.

Australian policymakers recognise that it is in **Australia's interest to care about what Pacific island countries care about**. While Australia pursues and discusses its national interests in security, it refers to Pacific interests as its interests and seeks out win-win solutions. Publicly and privately the emphasis is on the shared interests Australia, New Zealand and Pacific island countries have in the Pacific as a region of peace and rule of law. Leadership is distributed and collective.

The **Pacific agenda is a priority** in Australia's broader global agenda and Pacific preferences are not overridden. Australia not only gives weight to the direct bilateral and regional relationships but also gives weight to Pacific interests and concerns in its interactions with other international partners.

Australia envisages Pacific island countries as a network of interrelated activity, interaction, trade, exchange, communication and influence reaching across much of the Pacific Ocean. Strong relationships are not made up only of defence and security ties, and do not come into play only in situations of threat. They are the product of **long-term, consistent and multi-faceted engagement**, of genuine partnership with and respect for countries that are equally sovereign, and exchange that takes seriously the priorities, concerns and values of all the parties.

Australia ensures that it is **not imposing its concept of security** on the Pacific, and Pacific Island states make informed decisions on their own security free of coercive influences. Australia anchors its activities to a meaningful, coordinated and sustainable plan, prioritised by the Pacific countries. At the same time, there is discussion of Australia's security concerns and how Australia defines them. Where national interests between Australia and the Pacific diverge on some issues, the differences are maturely recognised while maintaining relationships.

Australia has a clear understanding of Pacific peace and security at local and regional levels both currently and into the future. Australian assistance to Pacific island countries is **aligned to the priorities of national security strategies** and respect sovereignty and local agendas. Australia recognises that security includes a multiplicity of actors, not just state actors but also the private sector, civil society, women's rights organisations and local governance such as chiefly systems and subnational island groupings. It thus understands that governance must be inclusive, avoiding overly centralised systems exacerbating local conflicts, and directs its efforts accordingly. This deep contextual knowledge includes recognition of the gendered nature of security and the need to ensure women's participation and leadership in security spaces.

Australia's understanding of Pacific island countries means that it **supports capacity-building** of state and non-state actors in the Pacific and conducts regular people-centred, multitrack dialogues and programs including working with civil society, media and subnational governance institutions. In some cases, this support includes development and sovereignty transitions. Australia supports health and education, as key human security concerns, and as a bridge between peoples, including Pacific islanders residing in territories.

Australia's defence establishment has an integral role building capacity to **respond to crises**, both in tools and equipment but also systems, human capital and

consumables like fuel. It supports civilian-led crisis response by delivering coordinated end-to-end sectoral capabilities to agencies who provide a first response to human security issues. Australian assistance works alongside state and local community leaders and groups and respects local forms of social order in its bilateral and multilateral operations.

Australia and the Pacific are working together on **climate and security**. Australia recognises climate change as a key national security threat and a key threat to Pacific island states. Understanding that addressing this threat requires a rapid reduction in global emissions this decade, Australia works with Pacific island countries in key multilateral forums to press for deep emissions reductions by 2030. As part of this recognition of the relation of climate change to Pacific resilience and peace, Australia invests heavily in Pacific-led initiatives, such as the Pacific Resilience Facility and the Group of Friends on Climate and Security at the United Nations.

Australia **invests sufficient diplomatic and political resources** to engage effectively with Pacific island countries, both in the field and in key international forums such as New York and Geneva, where strategic engagement across diverse United Nations and other multilateral settings is important. Diplomatic engagement is based on a long-term strategy and supported by strong coordination and consultation across relevant Australian government stakeholders. Australia's diplomatic relationships with Pacific counterparts are strong and deep and are maintained and cultivated over time. Australia supports strengthened Pacific engagement in multilateral forums, for closer coordination and targeted capacity-building. Australia's support to Pacific island countries enables the strengthening of law based order, and Pacific island countries are now seen using regional and international mechanisms to bolster their own peace and security and negotiating new instruments to fill gaps in cooperation and action to address security threats.

Australia's diplomacy and development assistance to the Pacific has an **increased profile for Indigenous people**, practices, worldviews and organisations – including through a First Nations Foreign Policy. Australia is aware of its own failures in relation to Australia's First Nations and the Pacific and shows a sense of responsibility and humility to discuss the past and build more equitable relationships in future. This means Australia supports Indigenous forms of mediation, peacebuilding and conflict resolution within the Pacific and funding for indigenous NGOs and networks that build peace in local communities. Most local conflict in the Pacific is resolved nonviolently by local level leaders and actors, including customary governance, women and youth groups and local services. Australia celebrates and resources this source of Pacific resilience.

Australia engages over many years to ensure **Pacific national security strategies** are not just pieces of paper. Some key successes from this process include demonstrated success in the detection, deterrence and disruption of transnational crime through the combined efforts of multi-agency information sharing networks and taskforces; prevention of security incidents; and improved responses by Pacific agencies to broader security threats. This has a positive impact on issues including illegal fishing, logging, drugs and financial crime.

Australia also provides physical resources and capacity-building through **regional forums** that are agency-specific, such as the Pacific Islands Chiefs of Police, Oceania Customs Organisation and Pacific Immigration Development Community. Support for Australia-Pacific security relationship is bipartisan in most contexts. Australia and Pacific island countries regularly cooperate on joint exercises for humanitarian assistance which helps protect security from short term political agendas or tensions.

Pacific leaders and senior civil servants remark on **an improved tone and approach** by Australian officials and leaders. Pacific people report that Australian agencies coordinate their projects and visits, and that this coordinated approach helps them appreciate the entirety of peace and security issues and responses and acknowledge Australia as an excellent security partner.

Pacific and Australian leaders talk about how security is shared, and while there are still disagreements from time to time on security frames and responses, no one doubts that the Australia-Pacific peace and security **relationship is close and continuing**.

CASE STUDY:

WORKING REGIONALLY, MARITIME AND FISHERIES OPERATIONS[19]

Regional maritime and fisheries monitoring, control and surveillance operations and cooperation have a long history in the Pacific, working through regional institutions. In these operations, agencies across national jurisdictions cooperate over a set period to crack down on illegal and unregistered operations in the Pacific ocean. An example is the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA) which coordinated a recent operation, Operation Island Chief which covered an area of 18.4 million square kilometres.

The FFA regional team was supported by seven officers from the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force (RSIPF), Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources, and Australian Defence Force (working remotely due to COVID), provided intelligence gathering and analysis, supplementing targeted information before and during the operation in order to support surveillance activities by Member countries. Australia, New Zealand, France and the United States provided support through aerial and surface surveillance, alongside the FFA Aerial Surveillance Programme aircraft, further enhancing the maritime surveillance coverage during the operation. Twelve ships, eight aircraft and dark vessel detection technology rounded out the assets included in this complex operation. A great deal of the success of the operations has been due to increased local capacity which gives depth in expertise to Pacific security personnel.

CASE STUDY:

NEW SECURITY MECHANISMS: PACIFIC FUSION CENTRE[20]

The Pacific Fusion Centre is a newly established centre based in Vanuatu that intends to deliver training and strategic analysis against security priorities identified by Pacific Island Forum Leaders in the 2018 Boe Declaration on Regional Security. Under the guidance of the Pacific Islands Forum Sub-committee on Regional Security, the Centre provides assessments and advice on Pacific regional security challenges, including climate security, human security, environmental and resource security, transnational crime, and cyber security.

The Pacific Fusion Centre will host security analysts from across the Pacific for capacity building and information sharing and cooperation activities. The first cohort of seconded analysts to join the Centre in Port Vila arrive in 2022 and will spend up to six months producing strategic assessments. They will receive training and mentoring opportunities to enhance their analytical assessment skills before returning to their home countries.

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19   Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency, *Operation Island Chief continues protection of Pacific from illegal fishing*, August 2021, https://www.ffa.int/node/2605

20   https://www.pacificfusioncentre.org/

Pathways

SUPPORTING PACIFIC-LED REGIONALISM

Australia supports regionalism in the Pacific as valuable in and of itself. This includes support for the Pacific Islands Forum and related regional agencies, particularly for services that can help member countries respond to security, technological and legal developments.

Pacific regionalism remains an imperative, given the greater bargaining power that Pacific island countries can leverage collectively to engage with larger powers and international institutions and the ability to pool resources and cooperate across countries.

RESPONDING TO LOCAL SECURITY AGENDAS

While Australia and Pacific island countries agree on a human security approach, more attention is needed to put this approach into action, working to provide safety at the individual level through to the country level and wider region. Putting the Boe Declaration into practice means a human security approach that reaches out to subnational and non-state groups, women's groups and youth groups to help create peaceful and cohesive societies. This includes:

- Feminist approaches and centering the perspectives of women in decision making, such as supporting Pacific Women Lead and other programs led and staffed by islander women
- Developing a shared feminist foreign policy agenda for the region, which centres Indigenous people, approaches and worldviews, recognises the gendered drivers of insecurity and applies locally owned solutions.
- Social inclusion, acknowledging large youth populations in the Pacific and need to respond to their economic and political imperatives
- A focus on the impact of extractive industry on human security.

National security strategies can anchor how Australia and like-minded countries coordinate and deliver cross-sectoral efforts. Countries can support the Pacific with staffing and resource gaps, but must ensure they are partners that follow security agendas set locally and regionally rather than paternalistic providers.

Australia has invested in support for national security strategies in some countries, whilst others are yet to draft and/or ratify theirs (including Australia itself). As a priority, Australia or its international partners must ensure that Pacific countries continue to have the assistance needed to draft and ratify individual strategies to bring to life the commitments of the Boe Declaration. In the absence of these, there are policies and strategies that should set the priorities for aid and technical support. It is Australia's national interest to maintain good relationships with Pacific island countries by aligning to the priorities outlined in these Pacific strategies.

Partnered multi-agency efforts which deliver the pillars of the national security strategies could provide a more effective, coordinated, and accountable pathway to delivering priority outcomes for Pacific countries. The previous Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) and the current Vanuatu Australia Police and Justice Program (VAPJP) provide contemporary examples of how multilateral missions work in a defence, justice and policing context, although there is potential for improvement. Working under unified command, such a model would allow partners from like-minded countries to leverage their own interests through their participation and the provision of relevant capability and financial support. This is a 'big idea' that would reduce existing duplication of effort and respond better to security challenges – but it would require challenging prevailing thinking on program delivery and funding.

Such multi-agency efforts also need to include support for preexisting networks including the Pacific Islands Chiefs of Police, Pacific Community for Law Enforcement Cooperation and Pacific Fusion Centre to regularise learning amongst Pacific island countries and opportunities for multistate cooperation on policing and security. Joint operations on drugs, money laundering, human trafficking and maritime surveillance which result in prosecutions and increased deterrence are needed for a safe and secure region.

BUILDING INTERGOVERNMENTAL COOPERATION

Effective cooperation is underpinned by a network of intergovernmental instruments, for example on information-sharing (including sharing of classified information), logistics, defence cooperation and visiting forces arrangements. Australia should review existing instruments between Australia and Pacific island countries to identify gaps and prioritise areas for further work.

Australia can also assist in reviewing gaps in the extent to which Pacific island countries are parties to key international treaties, including on topics such as corruption, transnational crime and money-laundering, and support countries to become parties to them including helping them work through challenges to their becoming parties to particular treaties.

Australia can support more Pacific candidates, particularly women, for roles in international organisations and can encourage the creation of Pacific national groups under the Permanent Court of International Arbitration. It can assist with capacity-building for smaller Pacific nations in legal fields and diplomatic tradecraft to strengthen Pacific island countries' ability to participate effectively in international forums.

CHANGING THE CLIMATE CONVERSATION

Australia must make up for lost time it has spent disagreeing with Pacific island countries on climate change and indicate its seriousness to act and to support Pacific-wide initiatives. Pathways to change the conversation and demonstrate Australia's partnership with the Pacific include:

- Supporting Pacific-led and Pacific-supported climate change initiatives, such as the Pacific Resilience Facility, Green Climate Fund and the Group of Friends for Climate and Security at the United Nations.
- Establish a regional climate risk assessment to examine risks to both Australia and Pacific island countries from climate change

- Support regional 1.5 track dialogues, such as launching a Suva Dialogue for multilateral discussions and to build coalitions for change
- Back collective diplomatic strategy for driving emissions reduction in multilateral forums
- Consider and respond to views on loss and damage reparations coming from the Pacific
- Continued engagement, through regionalism and technical support, to progress Pacific concerns regarding maritime boundaries

SUPPORTING GOOD GOVERNANCE AND OPEN SOCIETIES

Australia continues and expands its investments in civil society, media and other socio-political institutions critical to countering external influence. This includes partnerships with traditional leaders such as chiefs, as well as networks of women and youth leaders and facilitators for inclusive governance that fit local cultural contexts. This needs to be respectful of Pacific sovereignty.

Support to increase women's political participation and representation is critical to enabling good governance and democracy in the Pacific. This must be accompanied by holistic efforts to achieve gender equality and inclusion through changes to norms and institutions.

Strengthening democratic norms and good governance is vital. This includes increased support for journalism, supporting mainstream media as an important source of debate and information in Pacific island countries and their ability to report accurately and safely as well as bolstering online forums for information and debate. Countries that have the pillars of peace – such as well-functioning governments, low corruption and strong connections between government and societal forms of governance – have higher resilience to counter threats.

Security agencies can also cooperate to improve accountability of staff and institutions, for example Australia can provide support for security vetting systems to help build a secure and trusted Pacific government workforce, and support efforts for intelligence sharing across borders about persons of interest or with criminal convictions.

Coordinated technical assistance for telecommunications and infrastructure for Pacific island countries to set the terms for investment, including assessing offers and setting terms in line with Pacific needs, can also contribute to infrastructure which connects people and institutions and promotes information sharing.

PEOPLE-CENTERED APPROACH

Strong relationships are built by interest in and understanding of other societies and extensive networks of people-to-people links. Greater understanding by Australia and Pacific island countries of each others' security concerns can be built through pathways that recognise and value relationships between people:

- Investment in Pacific literacy in Australia, building cultural understanding, language, better appreciation of divisions and shared chapters in our history
- Promote education, civil society and peer-to-peer linkages to increase knowledge of the Pacific among Australians for more mutual relationships where each understands the other
- Enhanced movement of Pacific people to and from Australia, including examining options for pathways to citizenship, and increased economic flows in both directions.

A FOCUS ON MEDIATION AND PEACEBUILDING

Structural changes to Australian assistance and institutions could create more capacity for conflict resolution, mediation and peacebuilding. This could include restoring the Conflict and Fragility team or setting up a Peace and Conflict unit within DFAT which would provide expert advice and services such as mediation and conflict resolution, while directly supporting mediation and peacebuilding initiatives within the region. Such services may be particularly valuable in cases such as secessionism and independence movements. The unit could also provide services to regional organisations when required. These efforts should also be aligned with the Women Peace and Security Agenda which emphasises the need for women's participation in peacebuilding processes.

While it is a politically sensitive issue, Australia needs to look ahead strategically to plan for any potential transition by Pacific territories to new political status. This would focus on the building blocks required to support peaceful transition, including capacity building programs such as scholarships, technical assistance, medical training, information-sharing, volunteer programs (especially in English language teaching), politics and other initiatives.

SUPPORTING PACIFIC VISIONS, NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGIES[21]

CONNECTED ISLANDS, CONNECTED SECURITY PERSONNEL[22]

Four Pacific island countries (Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Vanuatu and Solomon Islands) have completed national security strategies with funding and technical assistance from Australia. National security strategies differ across countries, but many threats are common to all, while each strategy has a context specific analysis of the security environment, current local capabilities, and gaps and actions needed. The strategies give governments and partners tools to prioritise and deliver actions and work more cohesively, with a whole of government approach, to allocate resources.

National security strategies are an example of how Australia can support sovereign decisions of Pacific island countries to identify security threats and concerns and enable appropriate responses. These strategies have become even more prescient as Pacific countries grapple with COVID-19 health, economic and security impacts.

Pacific regional organisations and partners have supported specific networks and regularised contact between security personnel across national borders. These are important forums for learning from each other and identifiying opportunities for cooperation across Pacific island countries to prevent and address security threats. The Pacific Islands Chiefs of Police (PICP) convene regularly and run projects on issues of joint interest such as preventative policing, cyber safety, gender and policing, family violence and transnational crime. This has been running for over fifty years with the support of various partners and is hosted by New Zealand Police at their headquarters in Wellington. The group also has the Pacific Community for Law Enforcement Cooperation (PCLEC) that supports capability development in law enforcement priority areas as directed by PICP and involves Pacific security personnel and support from the Australian Federal Police.

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21   Tim George, *Strategies for a safer Pacific: can national security strategies make the region more secure?*, Australia Pacific Security College, May 2021: https://pacificsecurity.net/strategies-for-a-safer-pacific-can-national-security-strategies-make-the-region-more-secure/

22   https://picp.co.nz/
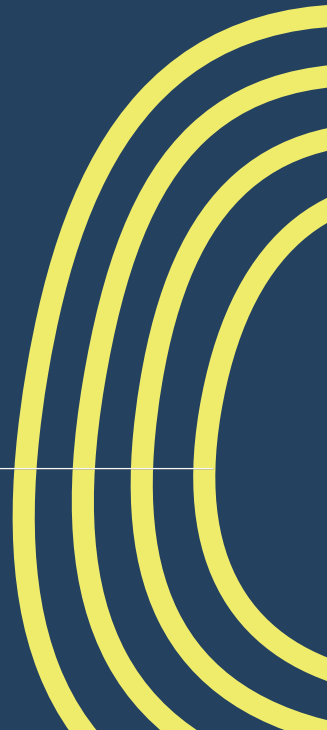
"As one of many Pacific Island nations, Australia is historically and indelibly linked to its neighbours in the region. Our shared history of endurance and mutual assistance during times of major international conflict, natural disaster, climate change and pandemic has forged strong links between Pacific Island neighbours which go beyond statehood and diplomacy. Our people-to-people links, forged over centuries with our Pacific Island family, is at the core of this deep understanding, and defence relationships play a significant role in creating and maintaining this unique connection."

Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade, Inquiry into Australia's defence relationships with Pacific Island nations, March 2021

"The interplay of different security challenges has long been appreciated in the Pacific. Recently, it was highlighted by Pacific Island leaders' 2018 Boe Declaration on Regional Security which defined an 'expanded concept of security'. Climate security was recognised as the primary threat to regional security, but other security concerns were also noted – human security, environmental/ resource security, traditional security (transnational crime, cyber security, and border protection). The complex interplay between these security challenges and limited resources raises the need for regional and national cooperation to build resilience."

Meg Keen, Security through a Pacific lens, ANU Press, February 2021.

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Thank you to those who have contributed their thoughts during the development of this paper. Views expressed cannot be attributed to any individuals or organisations involved in the process.

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What does it look like for Australia to be a...

Partner on Digital Resilience and Transformation in the Pacific

AP4D

Asia-Pacific
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DISCLAIMER

Why it matters

Technological change is one of the **most critical issues** facing the Pacific. Digital technology is a stand-alone issue, but also cuts across all sectors of society and government and is vital for how Pacific island countries function now and into the future. It is not a niche concern.

Digital technology provides an **immense opportunity** for the Pacific, a region that is still struggling with global connectivity.[1] The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the importance of digital connectivity, providing economic opportunities for the Pacific to promote business and continue to connect with global customers while borders were closed and tourism shut down.

Digital technology enables Pacific nations to maintain notions of statehood, **providing opportunities to capture and preserve identity, traditional knowledge, way of life and culture**. This is increasingly important as climate change is forcing the relocation of whole communities. The nation of Tuvalu, severely impacted by climate change, is rapidly adopting digital tools and platforms to build a digital nation.

At the same time, digital technology poses a **major risk to state sovereignty**. Cyber-attacks can bring down parts of the bureaucracy.[2] With so many critical functions of governments and societies dependent on technology, identifying and protecting critical assets is a core security issue – and one on which governments, civil society and industry need to work together.[3]

Further, new technology in the digital space challenges the nature, viability and legitimacy of Pacific island countries as functioning states. New technology is **undermining the already unstable nature of statehood** and presenting threats to states already struggling with inclusive, transparent and accountable governance.[4]

Technology has the potential to **undermine democracy** and poses increasing risks to freedom of expression as governments may seek to exert control over digital media.[5]

From Australia's perspective, physical and digital linkages across the Pacific directly **impact Australia's national security**, highlighting the intersection of defence, diplomacy and development cooperation with the region. Insecurity in the Pacific affects Australia as insufficiently protected vectors could provide avenues for hostile actors to gain access to Australia's critical infrastructure.

A digitally connected Pacific will pay **diplomatic dividends for Australia**. The importance of digital connectivity goes beyond defence and security and is about building relationships. Incorporating digital technology into the way Australia engages with the Pacific is vital to help people connect, to enable Australia to pursue its advocacy and to engage in dialogue.

Australia needs to partner with the Pacific both on **digital resilience** – the ability to withstand incidents and criminal and malicious attacks and still continue to operate – and on **digital transformation** – the ability to reap the benefits of technological change. Digital technology is a complex multidimensional problem that requires a holistic and tailored approach to help countries understand where they stand now and identify their own priorities for next steps. To achieve digital resilience, longer-term development support will be required.

1   Australian Strategic Policy Institute, *ICT For Development in the Pacific Islands*, February 2020: https://www.aspi.org.au/report/ict-development-pacific-islands

2   Radio New Zealand, *PNG government system hit by ransomware attack*, October 2021, https://www.rnz.co.nz/international/pacific-news/454467/png-government-system-hit-by-ransomware-attack

3   Global Forum on Cyber Expertise, *Towards Identifying Critical Infrastructures in the National Cybersecurity Strategy Process*, 2021: https://cybilportal.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/White-Paper-Towards-Identifying-CNI-in-the-NCS-Process.pdf

4   Danielle Cave and Jake Wallis, *Why the Indo-Pacific needs its own hybrid threats centre*, The Strategist, December 2021: https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/why-the-indo-pacific-needs-its-own-hybrid-threats-centre/

5   Global Partners Digital, *Human Rights in the Digital Age: State of Play across Commonwealth Pacific Countries*, March 2021: https://www.gp-digital.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/PACIFIC-REPORT_GPDfinal.pdf

Aligning views

The speed of digital technology advancement has created a critical time frame for Pacific countries to become digitally equipped and to protect their sovereign interests. This has led to a heavy reliance in the short- to medium-term on international partners. Governments with a lack of capacity to pursue opportunities and address threats have struggled to coordinate and connect with appropriate support.

It is in Australia's interest to **reinforce norms and democratic values in the digital space**. Increasing access to these technologies, both by governments and Pacific people, requires attention to how technologies are used and how some governments might be tempted to seek to use them. Digital tools and resources alongside cyber security considerations should be part of Australia's development program.

The recent Tonga volcanic eruption which severed Tonga's undersea cable and thus its **connection to the outside world** demonstrated how vulnerable Pacific island countries are in terms of connectivity. With people living so much of their lives online, they are severely impacted if this is cut.

Other actors in the region are providing the infrastructure, skills and knowledge to support Pacific ambitions on digital connectivity. Australia must ensure **it does not leave a vacuum** in the digital space in the Pacific.

PACIFIC VIEWS

There is a deep desire for communities and governments across the **Pacific to be better globally connected**, bringing significant change for a region where logistics and connectivity has always been an issue. Digital technology and communications in the Pacific are a shared commodity, with phones often becoming community assets. However isolated communities are not integrated into the new technology landscape and many people still only have 2G access. There is interest in the potential for technology such as Starlink, operated by SpaceX, to bring game-changing connectivity to the region, as well as Telstra's acquisition of Digicel to expand affordable access.[6]

Training, education and skills development are important for Pacific island communities to fully participate in new technology. Digital literacy is a priority, particularly for those receiving remittances. Technical training is required that is tailored to opportunities in the Pacific.

Disruptive technology platforms have changed the way people communicate and consume information, disrupting traditional communication practices. Discussions within and between communities are now taking place online, challenging social structures and traditional communication channels. Social issues such as domestic violence, community disagreements and bullying can be carried across onto online social media platforms. Misinformation can have real-world effects – for example in violence between villages or in health outcomes due to vaccine misinformation.

There is a need for education to support people going online to recognise both bad and good behaviour as well as education to improve **media literacy to recognise misinformation**. It is critical for governments and social media companies to work together to balance staying safe with having a positive experience online. Technology companies are sometimes perceived as not spending resources to understand and respond to the context of the places they work in.

From a Pacific perspective, success is economic and digital transformation through **building a digital economy and creating a safe space for communities**.

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6   AP4D Pacific Voices Roundtable Consultations, 21 and 26 April 2022

There is greater consideration of the communal use and benefits of digital technology and how it might affect future generations, which differs from a western society view focused on the immediate individual benefits.[7]

Pacific Governments can utilise digital technology to communicate **information for good or bad citizenship**. Using radio to educate and inform communities in isolated areas, such as in the Papua New Guinea highlands about upcoming elections, demonstrates the benefits of digital technology when used appropriately.

Some Pacific Governments have **demonstrated interest in digital finance**. Tonga and Vanuatu have investigated introducing cryptocurrency as part of its national currency, with geothermal energy powering bitcoin mining. This is an emerging issue for the region and the Australian Government. Australia must engage and address the impact digital finance has on stability and financial security by encouraging dialogue on the risks and threats associated with blockchain technology.

There is a strong perception within the Pacific that digital technology is an **area of geopolitical competition**. Pacific island countries are prepared to accept assistance and partnerships with countries other than Australia. Australia must also be aware of and manage perceptions in the region that strengthened engagement in the digital space is not purely for its domestic political purposes, but a genuine attempt to build stronger relations and a safer and more secure Pacific. Australia should reset its expectations that Pacific island countries will only engage with Australia and use the opportunity to recognise the gaps in its defence, development and diplomatic relationships.

AUSTRALIAN VIEWS

Australia's perception that its **security interests** are implicated is evident in its strategic investments in the Coral Sea cable network linking Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea to Australia, and the Australian Government's underwriting of Telstra's acquisition of Pacific telecommunications provider Digicel. The recently signed memorandum of understanding between Papua New Guinea and Australia on cyber security cooperation demonstrates the priority being given to this area.

Cyber security and digital infrastructure is perceived as a **domain of geopolitical competition**. Malicious state or state sponsored actors are active in cyberspace against countries around the world, and the Pacific is not immune. Raising the capabilities and defences directly benefits Australia as well as Pacific island countries.

Australia has a **role in coordinating cyber defence** for the region. Given that establishing cyber security frameworks is expensive and requires niche capabilities, Australia should offer to lead to support Pacific island countries' needs. Partnership in this area comes with having a shared understanding of what the Pacific can realistically contribute. There must be recognition that countries across the region are on a broad spectrum of technological development and have diverse needs. Australia's approach must not be one size fits all.

There is a **spectrum of views** on the threat, opportunity and risk associated with digital technology across government, private sector and civil society. There is also a range of views on cyber security and what cyber is. Agreeing on scope is important.

The development community is not perceived as having been an early adopter of digital technology, despite its huge potential to positively impact and support **development outcomes** across all sectors of Australia's development cooperation, including education, health, climate and economic development. Some NGOs are embracing the opportunities technology provides and

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7 Australian Strategic Policy Institute, *The Sydney Dialogue - Indigenous Technologies: Innovations Powering the Continuation of our Oldest Civilisations*, February 2022, https://tsd.aspi.org.au/session/indigenous-technologies-innovations-powering-the-continuation-of-our-oldest-civilisations

partnering with technology companies to use social media platforms for development programs, including to educate people on online safety, or using digital tools to assist with humanitarian relief, such as using blockchain technology to get funds to affected areas.

The Australian government must be aware of how quickly the digital environment in the Pacific is evolving or **risk being left behind**. Multi-national tech companies including Twitter, Facebook (Meta), and TikTok are more agile than governments and build their own relationships directly with governments, commercial partners and community groups. A recent example is Elon Musk restoring Tonga's internet access by deploying Starlink low-orbit satellites after a volcanic eruption damaged its undersea cable.[8]

OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALIGNMENT

Australia and the Pacific have a shared interest in preventing and responding to cyber security challenges. Governments can form a strong partnership to build a regional **cyber security shield**.

Emerging digital technology has created **capacity issues across the board for governments** around the world, including Australia and the Pacific. There is an opportunity for Australia, if it is solving problems domestically, to then make this region-wide as a matter of common security.

There is an opportunity for the benefits of an Australian government **partnership with the private sector**, established to utilise the specialised skills and resources to upgrade cyber security and coordinate implementation domestically, to then be extended out into the region to address similar cyber security issues faced by Pacific island countries.

There is a shared interest in **combating the spread of disinformation** that can cause significant harm and poses significant risk to communities.[9] All countries share concerns about foreign influence through the spread of disinformation online and the impact that may have on democracy and governance. Currently no country is successfully responding to this issue.

Australia and the Pacific have a shared interest in ensuring citizens stay safe and have a positive experience online, and governments must **find a balance** between protecting and constricting the digital media space. There is a shared interest in protecting good governance.

8   ABC News, *Elon Musk's SpaceX helps to restore Tongan internet, as Pacific nation battles growing COVID-19 outbreak*, February 2022, https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-02-10/musk-helps-restore-tongan-internet-amidst-covid-outbreak/10081911

9   The Asia Foundation, *The Pacific COVID-19 Pandemic Infodemic: Challenges and opportunities in the Pacific's response to an online information crises*, 2020: https://asiafoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/The-Pacific-COVID-19-Infodemic_Nov17.pdf

CASE STUDY:

SAVE THE CHILDREN 'I AM DIGITAL' CAMPAIGN

An example of the development community partnering with technology companies is the Save the Children 'I Am Digital' campaign.

Save the Children has partnered with Meta (Facebook) to deliver a digital literacy and safety initiative in the Pacific, the 'I am Digital' campaign. The campaign has developed learning materials to help Pacific people stay safe on the internet. The tip sheets, jingles and videos are shared online, in person and via the radio. They help empower children and their parents to have safer, more positive experiences online and safeguard themselves against abuse, bullying and exploitation.

The campaign was first launched in February 2021, and has been implemented in Fiji, Kiribati, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu, and featured educational materials in English, Bislama, Fijian iTaukei, Fiji Hindi, French, Kiribati, Samoan, Solomon Islands Pijin, Tok Pisin and Tongan.

This is an example of what can be built on in other areas.

CASE STUDY:

WITH YOU WITH ME (WYWM)

The Australian based media company With You With Me (WYWM) is an organisation that provides training for veterans to start a digital career.

WYWM builds talent where there are skills shortages in the technology sector through established training, education and recruiting systems. The program assists veterans to discover their civilian skills and the right digital career pathway, and provides training as well as continuous learning through establishing a career plan for each candidate.

The program is currently operating in Australia, Papua New Guinea and Fiji and is an example that could be built on in other countries to support more digitally skilled Pacific workers.

"Australia's vision of an open, free and secure cyberspace and our ambitions across the broad spectrum of cyber affairs are impossible to achieve alone. All of our efforts, both globally and regionally, will be delivered in partnership... Harnessing the opportunities of the digital age and mitigating risks is a shared challenge and a shared responsibility."

Ambassador for Cyber Affairs Dr Tobias Feakin

Barriers

There is a **capability gap** across the Pacific, not only of digitally-equipped people, but of government capability and capacity to deal with digital technology. This includes the ability to coordinate and pursue opportunities, address threats and respond to how technology is shaping governance and policy. Local agency exists, however it is difficult to reach and connect to government policy and development cooperation.

Technology is emerging too fast for governments to regulate or understand how to effectively integrate into its diplomacy, development and defence toolkit. This requires connecting and partnering government decision-makers with the private sector expertise that is required.

New technology exacerbates government vulnerabilities. A lack of capacity and capability creates a dependence on outside assistance, opening up the possibility of outside actors taking advantage of governments. Pacific governments have already begun ceding important tasks such as disseminating information to private corporations. Australia is also challenged by this issue, with varying levels of success.

Limited donor coordination coupled with a dependency on international aid has led to the introduction of different types of digital technologies, platforms and applications. Multiple donors with overlapping programs increase the burden on Pacific island countries with limited capacity to engage, coordinate and manage programs. A cultural challenge in saying no to resources has also led to duplication of programs and reduced aid effectiveness.

Incompatible cyber and tech capability between countries hampers communication and cooperation on regional security efforts. For example, incompatible technology has caused significant issues in defence cooperation activities working to combat Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing.
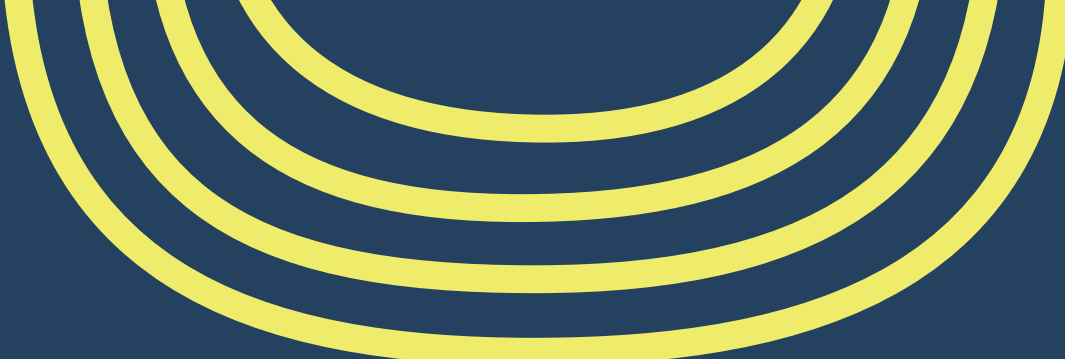
There are **differences within and between Pacific island countries** around societal structures, decision-making processes and levels of development and technological development. Engaging with this complex environment requires better coordination between defence,

development and diplomacy to ensure engagement is culturally-appropriate and context-specific.

Perceptions of sovereignty are sensitive when cooperating on cyber security programs. There is a risk cyber security can intrude in direct ways on a country's sovereignty and interfere with culture, communities and society. The solution lies in Australia supporting Pacific-led policies and programs, such as the implementation of Papua New Guinea's National Cyber Security Policy.

Judging **what constitutes misinformation** is inherently political, challenging the balance between governments' role in protecting citizens and protecting democratic norms and values. The recent example of the Solomons Islands Government national ban on Meta (Facebook) demonstrates the potential for the perception of misinformation to be used to prevent the sharing of information and opposing political views.

The cost of technology is a significant barrier for the Pacific and it goes well beyond initial investment and includes maintenance costs and the need for skilled people to utilise the technology. There are many examples of programs funding high-tech digital equipment, such as cameras or computers, requiring high levels of maintenance which means they are unusable when there is no additional or local support available, so the utility of the intervention is lost. **Ongoing costs** must be built in from the beginning of development cooperation programs. Small Pacific markets are a barrier for industry in terms of profitability.

"I hope we can get past politics and Australia can be genuinely interested in the Pacific."

Michael Kabuni, Papua New Guinea, AP4D Pacific Voices Consultation, April 2022

"It's more than about cyber security."

Jope Tarai, Fiji, AP4D Pacific Voices Consultation, April 2022

"Australia is one of the leading countries in the world in the cultural and creative industries but there is no partnership in the Pacific in that space, or it's very, very limited."

Letila Mitchell, Fiji, AP4D Pacific Voices Consultation, April 2022

The vision in practice

The Pacific region will be **digitally connected in a secure and safe way** that provides protection for governance, societies and communities and allows access to global cultural conversations, global markets and global information flows. A safe and prosperous digital environment will allow for flourishing and safe economies.

Pacific island countries will have agency to make their own decisions and choices. Pacific stakeholders will **participate in joint efforts** through conversations, dialogue and connections rather than being on the sidelines. Pacific communities will be empowered to deal with their own priorities through sustainable support.

The Australian government will support a **regional cyber security shield**, based on mutual need for a stable and secure region, meeting the national security interest of all. The Australian Government's support for regional cyber security will be through a process of closer consultation and engagement with Pacific neighbours. Australia will align with the Pacific Island Forum's Boe Declaration on Regional Security to support broader regional cyber security efforts.[10]

The Australian Government will **actively engage with regional forums** to build on cooperation already taking place.

The Australian Government will seek opportunities to **closely collaborate with other actors** with shared interests including the United States, Japan, New Zealand and France. When engaging with partners, Australia will focus on its strengths and use its knowledge, close diplomatic and development cooperation to identify areas of investment for digital technology transformation.

Australia assists in increasing **digital capacity and digitally-equipped people** in the region. Australia supports sustainable digital and technology solutions that are managed, resourced and deployed locally. Programs will be designed and implemented to embed sustainable capability into the future, made possible by long-term investment with development cooperation partners.

The Australian Government will partner with the private sector to use digital technology platforms to **support the ability to respond quickly to natural disasters** in the region. There will be interoperability of platforms to enable coherent disaster response.

Australia has **strong partnerships** with Pacific island countries through co-developing long-term programs that seek to address the priority needs they have identified. Emerging from the COVID-19 pandemic, which closed borders and moved interaction online, Australia will work to build robust and positive relationships by taking opportunities to be present and on the ground to maximise people-to-people engagement.

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10   Pacific Islands Forum, *Boe Declaration on Regional Security*, September 2018, https://www.forumsec.org/2018/09/05/boe-declaration-on-regional-security/

Pathways

CYBER SECURITY

Australia will enhance cooperation with regional networks to strengthen regional responses to cyber incidents. Australia, as a member of the Pacific Cyber Security Operational Network (PaCSON), can work to encourage Pacific island countries which are not yet members but are looking to build a national response capability to join and expand the network across the Pacific.[11] Additional support to build capacity could come from encouraging and supporting government, private sector and civil society stakeholders to engage in the global Forum of Incident Response and Security Teams (FIRST).[12]

The Australian Government should further its partnership with the Pacific Islands Law Officers Network (PILON) to strengthen regional responses to cybercrime, including the implementation of best practice legislation in line with the Council of Europe Convention on Cybercrime (the Budapest Convention).[13] The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the Attorney-General's Department should ensure PILON has the resources and capabilities it needs to strengthen regional efforts.

Australia and the Pacific should promote mutual learning by encouraging knowledge exchange. There are opportunities for a comparative analysis in digital technology issues between small island developing states. Australia can look to the role of the Organisation of American States (OAS) in developing regional cyber security capability and capacity in the Caribbean.

SUSTAINABLE INFRASTRUCTURE

The Australian Government should have a clear role in financing the physical infrastructure required to build Pacific connectivity. The Coral Sea cable network is a good example of Australia connecting Pacific island countries such as the Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea to global information flows. Australia is working collaboratively with other actors in this area. Through the Australian Infrastructure Financing Facility for the Pacific (AIFFP), Australia is partnering with Japan and the United States on financing an undersea cable to the Republic of Palau,[14] and is partnering with New Zealand, Japan and the United States on a Papua New Guinea Electrification Partnership.[15] Australia also has a trilateral partnership with the US and Japan for infrastructure investment in the Indo-Pacific.[16] However there are still opportunities for Australia to connect further, such as in USAID's Digital Connectivity and Cyber Security Partnership (DCCP) activity in the Pacific.[17]

Australian development cooperation should support infrastructure that addresses the different levels of development across the region. For example, Fiji aspires to become a cyber hub, while Papua New Guinea is focused on providing its population's basic electricity needs. The provision of digital connectivity goes beyond just providing technology, requires affordability of access. Australia can provide practical assistance at the local level, for example simple solar technology to enable charging of phones.

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11   https://pacson.org
12   https://www.first.org
13   https://pilonsec.org
14   https://www.aiffp.gov.au/news/australia-partnering-japan-and-united-states-finance-palau-undersea-cable
15   https://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/papua-new-guinea/stepping-up-in-papua-new-guinea
16   https://www.pm.gov.au/media/joint-statement-governments-australia-japan-and-united-states
17   https://www.usaid.gov/digital-development/digital-connectivity-cybersecurity-partnership

CASE STUDY:

THE CYBER SAFETY PASIFIKA PROGRAM

Led by Australian Federal Police, Cyber Safety Pasifika is an example of a program already in place working to improve cyber safety in the Pacific.

Cyber Safety Pasifika is aimed at increasing cyber safety awareness and education of vulnerable communities. The program is managed through the Pacific Police Development Program – Regional (PPDP-R). The program delivers activities in three key areas: cyber safety awareness and education; development of cybercrime legislation and policy; and upskilling of Pacific police in cybercrime investigations.

Cyber Safety Pasifika has been delivered in 18 Pacific island countries through local Pacific police officers, and is an important part of regional efforts to counter cybercrime and to help keep communities safe.

CASE STUDY:

CERT VU RADIO SONG VANUATU

In support of the Vanuatu National Cyber Security Strategy 2030, the Computer Emergency Response Team Vanuatu (CERT VU) is encouraging cyber security awareness through music. Lyrics written in the national language of Vanuatu, Bislama, are promoting critical cyber security messages to Vanuatu's citizens, businesses and everyday internet users. The songs have been composed to help keep citizens safe online and have each been performed by well-renowned Vanuatu musicians.

The program is part of the regional Pacific Get Safe Online initiative, which has developed bi-lingual online resources and supported local train-the-trainer approaches to embed skills and ensure awareness activities are sustainable.[18]

This is an example of a fun and innovative cyber security program from the Pacific that could be successful in Australia.

ONLINE SAFETY AND DIGITAL AND MEDIA LITERACY

Australia's eSafety Commissioner should work collaboratively with Pacific governments to reduce online harm and protect the safety of citizens across the Pacific. Education for digital and media literacy needs to be part of governments' response to online safety concerns. As more people go online and the opportunity for misinformation to spread grows, governments need to partner together to support each other in countering this serious issue for the region. Australia can support Pacific countries to establish their own eSafety commissioner roles to support a regional approach to cyber safety for citizens.

Australia can work with Pacific governments to strengthen their own capabilities and capacity to manage misinformation through understanding and mapping the threat landscape and supporting government agencies to design contextualised approaches to monitoring and responding to these threats. Part of this effort could be to support National Cyber Security Strategy development and revision, ensuring countries have strategies that reflect the current risk environment and national priorities.

DIGITAL DEVELOPMENT

Australia can explore opportunities provided by digital technology and integrate them into development programs in education, health, climate and economic development. In the education sector where there is significant scope to expand and improve online learning and teaching. Australia could partner with the University of the South Pacific on ongoing information and communication technology (ICT) investment in campuses, extending this across the region. Investing in the younger generation can build trust and respect between Australia and the Pacific.[19]

GOVERNANCE AND REGULATION

Australia should take an active role in regional forums and seek platforms for Pacific island countries in global and regional forums including the Asia Pacific Telecommunity (APT), Global Forum on Cyber Expertise (GFCE) and the United Nations Internet Governance Forum (IGF).

Australia can strengthen engagement with regional forums, including the Pacific Islands Forum, the Pacific Community and the Pacific Fusion Centre, to encourage Pacific-led dialogue on governance and the use of technologies in public policy. Australia can leverage existing partnerships to promote discussion on regional governance as a policy priority for the region, connecting it to economic development, regional integration and geopolitical challenges.

Working through established regional organisations will lessen the burden faced by Pacific islands countries with limited human resources to contribute to multiple different consultation processes. Australia should look to encourage meetings in the margins of other major meetings, rather than separate events, to make it easier for the Pacific to engage.

Australia should ensure human rights discussions are part of engaging with Pacific counterparts on cyber and digital policy and legislative development. Working to support freedom of expression and other key democratic principles only promotes Australian values, but also protect the rights of Pacific people.

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19   AP4D Pacific Voices Roundtable Consultations, 21 & 26 April 2022

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

The Australian Government should partner with platforms that support cultural and economic connectivity for communities to increase their reach. The Australian Government has a role in bringing these programs onto the national and regional agenda for Pacific countries, for example, working with chambers of commerce to adopt digital marketplace platforms.

Australia could contribute through funding research on markets for digital content and digital products, for example how to monetise digital media with a focus on the diaspora communities who are better placed financially.[20] There could be greater support for Pacific-focused content on Australian media platforms streaming into the Pacific.

The Australian Government should support fast-tracking more digitally skilled Pacific people to support a safe and secure digital transformation. Australia can implement a dual approach that addresses the short-term tactical workforce development needs for technical cyber skills with programs such as cyber career conversion, targeted talent campaigns, training of trainers and sharing course materials, along with the development of longer-term workforce development pathways. Australia could undertake a regional cyber security training needs analysis to understand which skill sets are required to build a strong cyber security workforce, as was recently done in the Caribbean.[21]

Australian development cooperation should focus on strengthening skills and knowledge within the region, and support Pacific countries and governments to retain professionals by providing long-term commitments to mentoring, training and upskilling to keep pace with the rapidly evolving digital technology.

STRENGTHENED COORDINATION

The Australian Government should invest resources in coordination of cyber security activities to maximise the benefits for all. The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade should be significantly better resourced to coordinate a whole-of-government effort in the Pacific. Through a greater investment in DFAT, Australia can provide the resources to support coordination not only between key development partners, but assist countries within the region with their own coordination efforts.

Australia should also be open to learning and collaborating with key partners such as New Zealand. Australia could provide support to the Pacific Data Hub (PDH), a platform led by the Pacific Community and supported by the New Zealand Government, that serves as a gateway to a comprehensive collection of data and information about the Pacific across key areas.[22]

The Australian Government should take the lead and proactively bring together different actors to encourage collaboration in the digital space. DFAT should play a convening role for government, academics and tech companies – including Meta (Facebook), TikTok and Google – to work creatively to find ways to partner together. With Telstra's acquisition of Digicel, there is an opportunity to do more to connect and encourage dialogue between government and industry to find ways to work together and harness the most technology has to offer.

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20   AP4D Pacific Voices Roundtable Consultations, 21 and 26 April 2022

21   Government of Jamaica, Office of the National Security Advisor, *Caribbean Regional Cyber security Training Needs Analysis*, 2022, https://caribbeanmilitaryacademy.edu.jm/newcic1.php

22   https://pacificdata.org/about-us

AUSTRALIA AND FIJI ESAFETY COMMISSIONER PARTNERSHIP

In February 2021, Australia's eSafety Commissioner formed a new online safety partnership with Fiji Online Safety Commission to work together to tackle online harms. The partnership is a world-first online safety regulator partnership.

Supported by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade through its Cyber Cooperation Program, the project utilises best practice to deliver resources and tools to build online safety capabilities. Their collective work involves fostering more positive online experiences, focusing on supporting diverse and remote communities and reaching the most at-risk people.

This partnership is an example of what can be achieved when Australia and Pacific Governments are focused on regulating for a range of online harms and take care to preserve an open and free digital environment. The partnership shows online harms are not bound by national borders and these issues require governments and industry to work together towards a shared vision.

CATALPA: PACIFIC ELEARNING PROGRAM

Development organisation Catalpa is using technology to deliver Pacific e-learning programs to improve science learning outcomes for students and professional development opportunities for teachers.

The program uses engaging science content relevant to the Pacific context and delivers interactive online teacher professional development. The program also enables flexible offline learning. The co-designed learning content is delivered via a custom e-learning platform and is designed for scaling across the region.

The program is currently being implemented in the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Samoa and Cook Islands and is an example of the opportunities digital technology provides in improving the delivery, reach and effectiveness of education programs in the Pacific.

The South Pacific Central Banks, including the Reserve Bank of Australia, are working together to collectively bring down the cost of remittances through the regional 'Know Your Customer' (KYC) facility.

The program aims improves customer due diligence processes and compliance with anti-money laundering and countering financing of terrorism compliance, lower legal compliance risks and support the provision of banking services to the region. The program aims to reduce the cost of remittances by reducing the regulation and complexities of sending money digitally from Australia and New Zealand to the Pacific. This is significant for the Pacific given that remittances are a key source of income and have a significant impact on individuals and communities across the region.

This is an example of Australia working with regional forums to strengthen efforts on digital technology issues to help drive financial inclusion in the region.

'Influen-shell' is a social media campaign promoting local businesses developed in partnership between Meta (Facebook) and the Solomon Islands Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

The campaign ran for five weeks in 2021 and aimed to promote local businesses in the Solomon Islands through sharing of stories of growth, resilience and connectedness, particularly with their use of digital technology. It celebrated Solomon Islands local enterprises and their employees, and showcased their diversity, adaptability and innovation, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.

It is an example of the potential social and economic benefit from access to social media services.
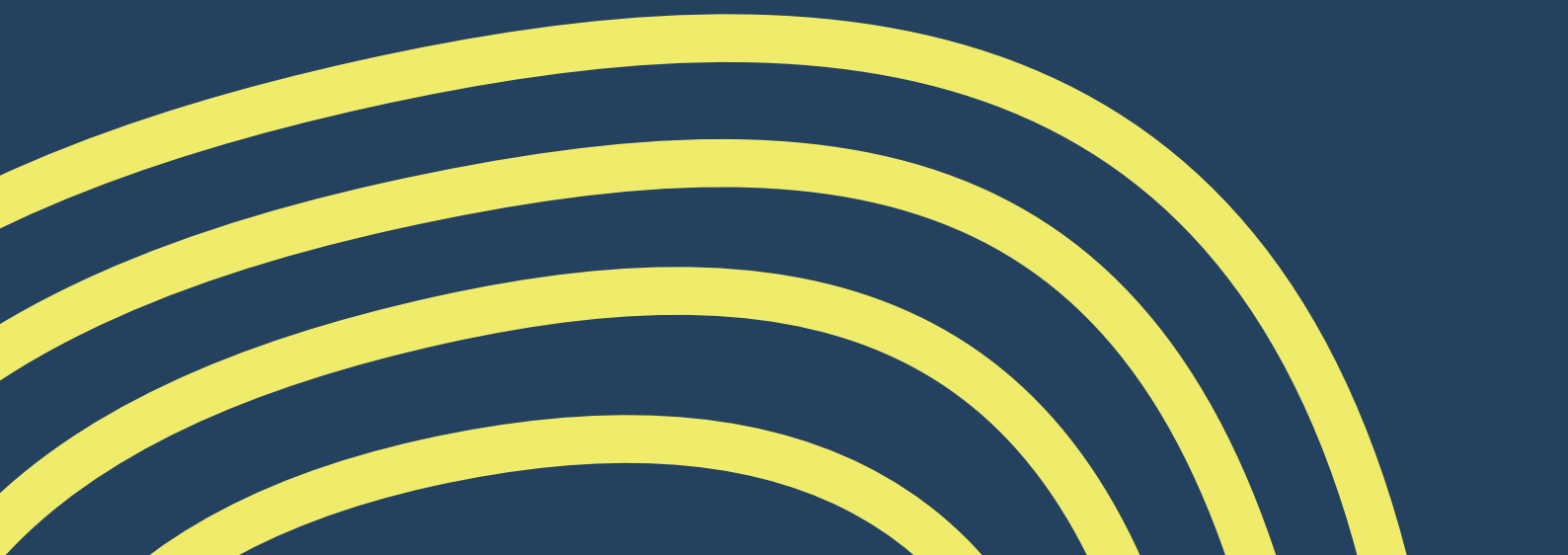
"Globalisation is wonderful in the way in which it has cross-pollinated human development. Of course, the Pacific can and should benefit from this as well."

Then Deputy Leader of the Opposition the Hon Richard Marles MP, "Pacific in peril: Why our region needs us to step up and lead", Sydney Morning Herald, August 2021

"…human security, environmental/resource security, traditional security (transnational crime, cyber security, and border protection). The complex interplay between these security challenges and limited resources raises the need for regional and national cooperation to build resilience."

Meg Keen, Security through a Pacific lens, ANU Press, February 2021

"I think the time is right that we take on a more concerted effort, as a region, to define ourselves on our own terms. After all, this global community of ours is continuing to shrink rapidly, thanks to the marching advancement of internet technology and the uptake of mobile devices, which can basically run and organise a business or organisation — on the run!"

Secretary-General of the Pacific Islands Forum Henry Puna, University of the South Pacific, October 2012

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