

The Case for a Pacific Islands Community

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Abstract

We review the case for deepening integration in the Pacific to form a Pacific Islands Community, as the next step beyond the Pacific Islands Forum. New institutions of governance should include a Council of Ministers, a Parliamentary Assembly, and a Pacific Court..

Introduction

The upcoming 55th Pacific Islands Forum Leaders Meeting will begin on 30 August 2026. They will be discussing implementation of the overall 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent, which states that “*As Pacific Leaders, our vision is for a resilient Pacific Region of peace, harmony, security, social inclusion and prosperity, that ensures all Pacific peoples can lead free, healthy and productive lives.*” Here we consider possible next steps in regional governance towards that overall goal.

There has been mounting concern among the island states about possible devastation due to climate change in the region, including the submersion of low-lying islands such as Tuvalu. Recently a Pacific Resilience Fund has been set up to support climate resilience efforts in the Pacific, hoping to reach a target of \$1.5 billion. This would represent a major increase in the administrative responsibilities of the Forum.

As additional motivation, in recent times there has been widespread concern in the Pacific over the increase of Chinese influence in the region, brought to a head by the possibility that China might even try to set up a military base in Vanuatu. The Chinese government has been suspected of using ‘debt-trap’ diplomacy, offering large loans to countries in the region under their ‘Belt and Road’ initiative, which the recipients may have trouble repaying, thus being forced to offer concessions or facilities to the Chinese in return for forgiveness of the loans.

In these circumstances, the time seems ripe to revisit ideas for closer integration in the region, and more specifically, proposals for developing the Pacific Islands Forum into a *Pacific Islands Community*. Objectives of the Community would include:

- Greater cooperation in commercial enterprises, such as protection of the fishing industries of the Pacific island states;
- Greater cooperation in the distribution of aid, development and climate resilience funds to the island states;

- Improved collective security for the Pacific region, to counter any perceived security threat from China or other external powers;
- Advancement of human rights within the community;
- Closer participation by the island states in the formulation of regional policy in general.

Background

Integration in the Pacific has been proceeding by fits and starts ever since the former British colonies in the region attained their independence. It is obvious that the smaller island states cannot provide all the facilities of modern living for themselves, but must rely on co-operation with their neighbours if they are to have any hope of moving beyond a subsistence lifestyle. The recent COVID-19 pandemic, for instance, has emphasized their reliance on their larger neighbours for assistance in case of a health emergency such as this.

The South Pacific Forum was established in 1971 to foster co-operation between the island states, as an alternative to the old South Pacific Commission of colonial days, and in 1999 its name was changed to the Pacific Islands Forum to reflect a wider geographic reach.

The heads of government of the Pacific Islands Forum currently hold an annual meeting to discuss matters of common interest in the region. There are eighteen members, consisting of Australia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Western Samoa, Fiji, Tonga, Solomon Islands, Marshall Islands, Cook Islands, Micronesia, Nauru, Kiribati, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, Palau, and Niue, plus recent new members New Caledonia and French Polynesia. There is enormous variation in size and resources between them, ranging from Australia with 24 million inhabitants to tiny Niue with 1600.

The main focus of the Forum hitherto has been on trade and economic issues, such as regional air and shipping services, and the fisheries in the surrounding seas. The day-to-day activities are carried out by the Forum Secretariat [PIF Secretariat] based in Suva, Fiji, with around 100 staff members. The Secretary-General currently is Baron Waqa of Nauru. The current annual budget is around US\$30 million, of which Australia and New Zealand contribute about 60%. The main aims of the Secretariat are to provide economic and policy advice to the members of the Forum.

A number of crises have occurred in the region over recent years, including uprisings on Bougainville, Fiji and the Solomon Islands. The Regional Assistance Mission Solomon Islands (RAMSI) arrived in Honiara in 2003 to help restore order there, with the consent of both the Solomon Islands parliament and the Pacific Islands Forum. It included personnel from many of the island states, giving RAMSI a truly Pacific face as representing the Forum as a whole.

Forum leaders have always endorsed ideas for greater cooperation and integration in the Pacific. A wide-ranging “Pacific Plan” for the future development of the Pacific region was drafted two decades ago [Pacific Plan 2007], but implementation of the Plan was stymied by the 2006 military coup and interregnum in Fiji.

In 2013 a Review of the Pacific Plan was commissioned, led by Sir Mekere Morauta, former Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea. The Review expressed disappointment with the pace of regional integration under the Plan. Its central conclusion was that “what is needed to progress regionalism is not a revised list of priorities, but an overhaul of the processes, institutions, and governance of the Plan” [Pacific Plan Review 2013].

In 2014 the Pacific leaders replaced the Plan by a ‘*Framework for Pacific Regionalism*’, setting up a process by which proposals for regional integration could be reviewed and implemented. The challenges facing the Pacific region were discussed in the *State of Pacific Regionalism Report 2017*. The report emphasized a growing sense of uncertainty due to shifting global and regional geopolitics. Some of the specific challenges mentioned include climate change, ocean management and conservation, and regional conflict. All of these challenges demand a collective regional response, and they cannot be addressed by one nation acting alone. The Framework for Pacific Regionalism declared as one of its principal objectives “Strengthened governance, legal, financial, and administrative systems” in the region. The more recent *Blue Pacific communique* committed Forum Leaders to “strengthen regional architecture” [Blue Pacific 2017].

The *State of Pacific Regionalism Report 2019* from the Forum Secretariat offered an ambitious *Vision for a Blue Pacific Continent* in 2050. The Secretary General, Meg Taylor, noted that “the fundamental proposition underpinning the report is that ‘deepening regionalism’ requires the implementation of a long-term roadmap towards a Blue Pacific continent.”

In 2022 the Forum leaders officially adopted the ‘2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent’. The overall vision statement states that

“Our Pacific Vision is for a region of peace, harmony, security, social inclusion and prosperity, so that all Pacific people can lead free, healthy, and productive lives.”

We note at this point that the attainment of these objectives is the function of **government**, and that some form of strengthened system of regional government will be required to meet this vision.

A *Review of Regional Architecture* (RRA) has been set up to meet the evolving needs of the Pacific nations. The review aims to ensure the regional framework is

not only relevant but also capable of driving the ambitious goals set out in the 2050 Strategy.

In 2024 the Forum leaders endorsed the recommendations of Phase 2 of the Review, and commissioned a further Phase 3, which appears to be ongoing in 2026. Additionally, they called for a review of the Forum's own structures to ensure alignment with the evolving regional architecture.

This paper discusses a possible first step in such a process, namely the upgrade of the Forum into a *Pacific Islands Community*.

Suggestions for Change

a) Governance

The 2013 Review advocated a “new framework for Pacific regionalism”, and imagined a possible future path for the region leading all the way to a *Pacific Union*, or even a *Pacific Federation*.

These developments will only occur decades into the future, if they occur at all. But the immediate next step seems very obvious, namely the formation of a *Pacific Islands Community (PIC)*, as an extension of the present Forum.

The basic elements of a Pacific Islands Community are easily foreseen, and several are already in place:

- The Pacific Islands Forum already plays the role of a supreme Council. It would meet periodically to discuss major policy decisions, which would require a consensus for approval by the member states, as at present
- A *Council of Ministers* should be formally instituted, consisting of the ministers from each member state in a particular area (e.g. fisheries, or climate), to meet as needed to discuss detailed functional issues and formulate policy proposals for consideration by the supreme Council in that area. A mechanism of “qualified majority voting” should be used in reaching decisions by the Council of Ministers, if necessary. This would avoid dominance of the Council by any particular member state, or group of states, and also avoid possible deadlocks due to a veto by a single member. A possible scheme of this sort is discussed in the Appendix;
- The PIF Secretariat already fills the role of executive for the foreshadowed community;
- The Pacific Plan already proposed a *Forum Parliamentary Assembly* as an enlargement of the present Forum Presiding Officers Conference (FPOC) to meet once a year. The Assembly would provide some sort of democratic voice within the Community, and could indeed provide the nucleus of an eventual Pacific Islands *Parliament* in the longer term;

- The Pacific Plan already proposed setting up a panel of judges making up a Pacific Islands *Court* to adjudge cases involving regional treaties, which could become the nucleus of an eventual Pacific legal system.

These changes should not involve any great additional expense, although they would involve some reallocation of funding and personnel to the new Community. Some further comments follow.

The Forum Economic Ministers already meet regularly, as do the Forum Foreign Affairs Ministers. To facilitate decisions at such a Council of Ministers, and avoid any deadlock at this level due to a veto by one member state, a sensible voting scheme should be available if necessary at these meetings, as used by the European Union, for example. The scheme should naturally give greatest weight to the vote of the larger states, but it should also ensure that the smaller states have some 'voting power' over the decisions of the Council, and that no one state or group of states dominates. A theoretical ideal scheme is discussed briefly in the Appendix, along with an alternative which gives greater weight to the smaller island states. This would allay the suspicions of the smaller states that a regional community would be dominated by Australia and New Zealand.

If a Pacific Islands Parliamentary Assembly is instituted, it would be natural to hold it at the same time as the Leaders Forum or supreme Council, and in fact the two groups should probably hold a joint meeting during that time. In that way the Assembly members could be informed about the Leaders decisions, and at the same time they could provide political input and advice to their leaders. One model for the Assembly might also include an assembly of representatives from each major political party in each of the member states, to provide a range of views to the leaders. This would provide a natural basis for an eventual democratically elected Parliament. A discussion of the longer-term aim of a Pacific Parliament was given more than forty years ago by Mike Moore, a former Prime Minister of New Zealand [Moore 1982].

A Pacific Islands Court could be set up to hear cases involving Treaties between the member states on the basis of international law, and might eventually form the nucleus of a Pacific legal system. Given that the cases brought before the Court would very probably be few and far between, a reserve panel of judges could be appointed at fairly minimal cost. As one example of a possible responsibility, the Court might be given the task of assessing penalties for illegal fishing by foreign vessels encroaching on the Exclusive Economic Zones of the PIF member states. In the future, one can envisage the new legal system as helping to promote basic human rights within the community, such as gender equality, which has been a recent priority within Australia's DFAT.

A number of suggestions along these lines have already appeared. The Eminent Persons' Group [Eminent Persons Group 2004] called for consideration of "options for future economic and political integration", and said that "new thinking

on the relationship between sovereign states may be required". They also suggested that a regional panel of judges be established. Prime Minister Tuilaepa Aiono Sailela Malielegaoi of Samoa, who was the chairman of the Forum at the time, gave an address in which he foreshadowed "a new phase of regional integration – a Pacific union of as yet unknown dimensions", and mentioned the EU as an example of what can be done [Malielegaoi 2005]. He suggested the formation of a regional pool of jurists and public prosecutors; "and perhaps the establishment of a regional constitutional court to deal with critical legal issues arising from major extra-constitutional crises in or between Forum countries". In the area of legislative governance, he proposed that the annual meetings of the Forum Presiding Officers Conference (FPOC) evolve into a platform for a regional Parliamentary Assembly, to promote the principles of legislative democracy, representative government and good governance. He also noted that member countries will need to "agree to give up a little bit of our sovereignty not only for the common good but for our needs as a government and as a nation". In this way, many aspects of an eventual community have already been anticipated. In a special report to the Australian Security Policy Institute (ASPI), a distinguished task force also concluded that "the best way forward in Australia's engagement with its Pacific neighbours lies in a regional integration of Australia and the Pacific Island states conceived in the widest possible sense" [ASPI 2008].

Several of these proposals were incorporated into the old Pacific Plan [Pacific Plan 2007]. In the medium term, identified aims were to develop appropriate models for land ownership and tenure; and to "*enlarge the annual Forum Presiding Officers' Conference (FPOC) into a Forum Parliamentary Assembly to deepen regional co-operation between Pacific legislatures*".

In the longer term, the Plan looked for "harmonization of court structures in the region, and *development of a regional judicial mechanism or process to deal with important legal issues arising out of major extra-constitutional crises in or between Forum countries*". It included provisions for a register of judges and public prosecutors willing to serve in different countries. It did not yet explicitly recognize, however, that the Forum will itself need the power to make laws and regulations on common regional matters. If Pacific-wide economic integration is to be implemented, for instance, then the regional body will need to be given power to regulate inter-island economic affairs. This begins to impinge on national sovereignty, as recognized by the Samoan Prime Minister, and will need ratification by further treaties between the member states.

In the more recent Blue Pacific communique (2017), Forum Leaders renewed their commitment to a strengthened regional architecture.

b) Trade and Development

We do not have any specific suggestions to offer in this area, which has been under active consideration by the Forum and its members over the years, except to say that the funding and personnel in these areas should be brought under the control of the new Community itself. This would be a most important element, once again, in strengthening the sense of common citizenship, joint partnership and ownership of major community institutions between the Community members, which in turn would be a major counter to any malign foreign influences in the region.

Besides channeling Australian and New Zealand development funds under the control of the new Community, other foreign countries, such as the members of the 2022 'Partners in the Blue Pacific' group, which included the United States, Japan, and the UK in addition to Australia and New Zealand, should also be invited to do the same where possible, in order to demonstrate their disinterested goodwill towards the island states, and avoid any appearance of using the funds to exert any undue influence.

A problem within this area concerns the present Pacific Islands Development Forum, set up in 2013 primarily at the instance of Fiji, during its period of suspension from the Forum (Tarte 2015). This Forum is separate from the PIF, and does not include Australia, New Zealand or New Guinea as members, with Fiji arguing that they exerted undue dominance over PIF decisions. Perhaps now that Fiji is reconciled to the PIF, and given the promise of a greater voice for the island states under the new arrangements, this Forum could be brought back within the fold of the new Community. That would certainly be the neatest solution.

c) Climate change

One of the major concerns of the Pacific Island leaders has been the likely effects of climate change in the region. The predicted effects include disasters due to stronger hurricane events, and the flooding of low-lying areas due to the rise in ocean levels, which could actually obliterate island states such as Tuvalu. At the 54th Pacific Islands Forum Leaders Meeting in 2025 (?) leaders signed an Agreement to establish the *Pacific Resilience Facility* (PRF), a regional climate and disaster resilience financing facility dedicated to supporting Pacific communities. Solomon Islands Prime Minister and Pacific Islands Forum Chair, Hon. Jeremiah Manele, hailed the PRF as a game-changer for the region, emphasizing the importance of Pacific-led and owned solutions to address the structural barriers faced in accessing global climate financing. The PRF aims to mobilize US\$500 million in initial capital and ultimately reach a target of US\$1.5

billion to support climate resilience efforts in the Pacific. This would represent a major boost in funding available to the Community.

d) *Security and defence*

This is a sensitive topic which goes to core issues of national sovereignty, but there is an obvious need for some mechanisms of regional common security, namely:

- A *Pacific Islands Maritime Patrol* to combat illegal fishing, piracy, drug smuggling and similar problems in the region. The existing Pacific Maritime Security Program (PMSP) under Australian control essentially fills this role already. It should be placed under the control of the new Community.
- A land-based security force, perhaps a *Pacific Islands Regiment*, to carry out peacekeeping duties both within and outside the region, and if necessary to intervene in “extra-constitutional crises” in the region. Interventions by such a force would carry much greater legitimacy than a similar intervention by (say) Australian or New Zealand forces, which are always subject to charges of paternalism or neo-colonialism. It could also provide a significant source of employment for some of the smaller islands.

The principle should be that the Pacific islands take collective responsibility for maintaining peace and security in their own region. Their responsibilities would include

- Monitoring and patrolling the exclusive economic zones of the PIF members, and preventing illegal fishing
- Monitoring and preventing illegal logging activities in the PIF member states
- Maintaining peace and security within the region, including Intervention to restore peace and order in one of the Island nations, if authorized to do so by the Forum assembly itself.
- Contributing to international peacekeeping missions undertaken by the UN

The first responsibility is already undertaken by the Australian Pacific Maritime Security Program (PMSP). Using patrol boats, aircraft and retired frigates from the Australian navy, and satellite reconnaissance data supplied by Australia, the PIF already maintains a fairly sophisticated surveillance of the fishing zones from headquarters located in Honiara. Fishing is a major economic resource of the island nations, and the industry needs effective protection against illegal fishing by foreign vessels. The operations of the PMSP should be placed under the control of the new Pacific Islands Community.

This is a common theme in the literature. Indeed, the Australian Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee in 2010 called for “[*elevating the Pacific Patrol Boat Program into a regional initiative, supported by the Pacific Islands Forum and other donors*]” [Senate Committee 2010], and the Australian government promised to carry out an assessment of this idea. The Committee also called for a Regional Maritime Coordination Centre, which has come into being with the Honiara facility.

Satellite and aerial reconnaissance could also be used to detect illegal logging activities in the PIF member states. Again, this is a very serious problem, affecting a major industry in the Melanesian states. There were claims in 2008 that the forests of the Solomon Islands would be exhausted in five to seven years, at the then current rate of illegal logging [Skehan 2008], and a joint report from the University of Papua New Guinea and the Australian National University estimated that the PNG forests would be exhausted by 2021 at the current rate [Perry 2008]. Corruption at the political level also contributes to the problem: Sir Michael Somare, former Prime Minister of PNG, reportedly admitted to having financial links to logging companies [Roberts 2007].

Satellite reconnaissance data could easily be analysed to reveal the extent of logging activity in the Melanesian forests, and a Forum agency could compile the data, and compare it with estimates of what a sustainable logging regime would allow. It would then be up to the individual Forum members to act to protect their own resources.

The onshore security responsibilities could be undertaken by a *Pacific Islands Regiment*, again using equipment, training and facilities largely supplied by Australia and New Zealand. Such a regiment could undertake peacekeeping missions for the UN, earning income and providing employment for some of the island people. It would also be capable of spearheading any intervention to restore law and order in case of a breakdown of order in one of the island states, at the behest of the PIC council. It would thus act as guardian of their own peace and security, and would carry authority and legitimacy as embodying the collective response of all the PIF members.

We remark in parenthesis that the Regiment (and indeed the ADF) should also be trained and equipped to help undertake disaster relief in the region. The damage done by hurricanes, floods and bushfires is only likely to get worse as time goes on, exacerbated by climate change, as exemplified by recent bushfire seasons in Australia. This would give the Regiment an important extra function in times of peace, and add greatly to its good relations and reputation with the community in general.

In fact a Royal Pacific Islands Regiment already exists, set up in Papua New Guinea during World War II to help fight the Japanese, and incorporated into the PNG Defence Force after independence in 1971. It has already taken part in

missions to Vanuatu, Bougainville and the RAMSI mission in Solomon Islands. This regiment could perhaps be recommissioned as part of a security force for the whole Pacific Islands Forum; or else a new force might need to be raised. This would require further consideration by the experts.

The Fijian Defence Minister, Inia Seruiratu, indeed suggested that Australia should revisit the idea of a Pacific regiment in the Australian army [Seruiratu 2019], and the Australian Minister for the Pacific Alex Hawke responded positively, raising the possibility of a 'Pacific Support Force' [Lewis 2019], so ideas of this sort should be well received.

Implementation

If the Forum Leaders agree to this proposal, the standard procedure would be for them to appoint a Commission to draft a Treaty, which after review would establish the new Pacific Islands Community.

Possible Objections

Some arguments against this proposal are easily anticipated:

a) Sovereignty

A standard objection to any such proposal involving international integration is that it would infringe on the sacred principle of national sovereignty. There is also a standard reply, which is that no one nation has sovereignty over common community issues or problems anyway. The theoretical answer to this challenge lies in the principle of '*subsidiarity*' or self-determination, formulated by the EU, which was recognized in the Maastricht Treaty.

According to this principle, decisions should be taken as closely as possible to the individual citizen, so that whatever can be done locally, regionally or nationally should not be done at community level. Only those functions which absolutely require collective action, and cannot be performed by the member states independently, will become community responsibilities. Thus the member states will retain their sovereignty over internal affairs and most of their external functions as well. This principle would need to be adopted by the new Community also.

In this connection, we cannot resist quoting from William Penn, who noted the problem of national sovereignty three hundred years ago in his '*Essay Towards the Present and Future Peace of Europe*' (Penn 1692), advocating a European Parliament for the first time. He examined the proposition: "*That Sovereign Princes and States will hereby become not Sovereign: a Thing they will never endure*". He answers that this is a Mistake: "*they remain as Sovereign at Home as ever they were. Neither their Power over their People, nor the usual Revenue they pay them is diminished. So that the Sovereignties are as they were, for none*

of them have now any Sovereignty over one another: And if this be called a lessening of their Power, it must be only because the great Fish can no longer eat up the little ones, and that each Sovereignty is equally defended from Injuries, and disabled from committing them.”

b) Cost

Another likely objection to these proposals would be the cost. Certainly Australia and New Zealand would have to find the majority of any funds involved, as they are by far the largest developed economies in the region. The costs would not necessarily be large, however. They would mostly be transferring its unilateral control of existing funds into the hands of the new Community. New bureaucratic institutions would need to be set up to administer these funds, but this could largely be achieved by a separation of existing elements of the Departments of Defense and Foreign Affairs and ‘rebranding’ them as belonging to the Community.

The establishment of a new Pacific Islands Regiment would certainly be costly, but we would argue that the cost would be very well worthwhile in terms of the great benefits to common security in our Pacific region which we have outlined above, and also they would be relatively small compared to the overall defence budgets, which has been increased significantly in recent times. It would signal that Australia and New Zealand are seriously embracing their roles as genuine partners, albeit inevitably senior partners, in their regional community.

Looking at our two proposed security initiatives in detail:

a) Pacific Islands Maritime Patrol

Most of the functional elements of such a scheme are already in place. The major difficulties would involve transferring administrative control to the new Community, along with funding and personnel. These should not present any insuperable obstacle. As noted above, similar arrangements have already been discussed at official levels.

b) Pacific Islands Regiment

In this case, the practical difficulties in implementing such a scheme are more difficult. Where would the elements of the Regiment be located, and what facilities would they need? Where would its personnel be trained? How much extra funding would be required? What would be the relationship between the new Pacific Islands Regiment and existing national defence forces? These are difficult questions, which would require the advice of experts, but again the obstacles should not be insuperable.

Such a scheme would transform the Forum into a genuine security Community, a concept which is only now being seriously discussed within the European Union,

for instance. But we have given what we believe are very important reasons to consider such a scheme.

Summary and Conclusions

Maintaining and deepening the regional integration between the members of the Pacific Islands Forum brings obvious benefits, and can do much to promote peace and prosperity in the region. The smaller island states simply cannot provide all the benefits of modern life for themselves, and must rely on help and co-operation from the larger states to provide higher education, technical skills, industrial goods and employment for their people. Trade, investment and transport are best co-ordinated at the regional level, as also is the supervision and conservation of natural resources such as the fish stocks in the ocean and the tropical forests on land. Regional organizations can help maintain stable governance in fragile member states, as exemplified in the RAMSI mission, and can help counter any undue influence from outside, foreign states. Much has already been achieved in these areas, but much more remains to be done in the future.

Australia and New Zealand have generally adopted a sensible and bipartisan approach to the development of the Pacific region. The two governments between them provide the lion's share of the funding for regional organizations, and they are generally in favour of greater integration, as exemplified by the Australian joint Parliamentary Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade in 2003 [Senate Committee 2003], the Labor Party policy discussion paper '*Towards a Pacific Community*' [Sercombe 2005], or the more recent statements of Scott Morrison and Alex Hawke [Hawke 2019]. The present Australian Foreign Minister, Penny Wong, also supports building a stronger and more united Pacific family (Wong 2022). But their attitude has been that it must be for the Pacific Islands themselves to determine the costs and benefits of the Framework for Pacific Regionalism, and they have taken something of a back seat in its implementation. Recent developments should impel them towards playing a more active role, and a proposal along these lines from the Forum Leaders or the Secretary-General should be well received.

Australia and New Zealand (to a lesser extent) have also played an active role as 'deputy sheriff' for the region on several occasions, such as the military interventions in East Timor, Bougainville and the Solomon Islands. These actions were successful and well justified, being sanctioned by the United Nations and the Forum, respectively. There is always a danger, though, that such actions will be seen as paternalism and 'gunboat diplomacy', and arouse resentment among the smaller island states. Far better would be a collective response to such emergencies, carried out by regional security forces.

The new institutions we have discussed include a Pacific Islands Court, to adjudicate on cases involving regional treaties, and a Pacific Islands

Parliamentary Assembly, a successor to the previous Forum Presiding Officers Conference, to provide political input and impetus to regional decision-making. These bodies would also provide prototypes for an eventual Pacific legal system and a Pacific Parliament. The formal institution of a Council of Ministers, with a qualified majority voting system on the European pattern, is also recommended.

We have also proposed strengthened regional security systems, including a Pacific Islands Maritime Patrol, to regulate a sustainable fishing industry in the region, and a Pacific Islands Regiment, to restore order in case of a breakdown in one of the island states, and also to carry out peacekeeping duties and provide some employment for the island people. The Community would also provide new mechanisms for arriving at collective decisions on defence and security issues for the Forum as a whole, which would do much to counter the fears of increasing Chinese influence in the region.

The Pacific Plan discussed many further initiatives to do with trade, economic and social development in the region, which we have not discussed here. In any case, the Forum's members are already firmly launched on a path towards greater integration. If wisely managed, this course will indeed lead to a Pacific region "of peace, harmony, security and economic prosperity, so that all its people can lead free and worthwhile lives."

Appendix. Qualified majority voting schemes

The European Union has pioneered the use of qualified majority voting in the Council of Ministers. If it is based purely on population, the ideal scheme is known as the Penrose scheme, after the mathematician Lionel Penrose, or alternatively as the 'Jagiellonian compromise' [Penrose 1946]. It gives each member country a vote proportional to the square root of its population. Without going into details, this provides the ideal balance between the larger countries, which should have the largest vote, and the smaller countries, which should have at least a non-negligible voice in the outcome.

The European Union has never formally adopted the Penrose scheme, but by a process of pragmatic compromise, it has arrived at a very similar allotment of votes, as shown in Figure 1.

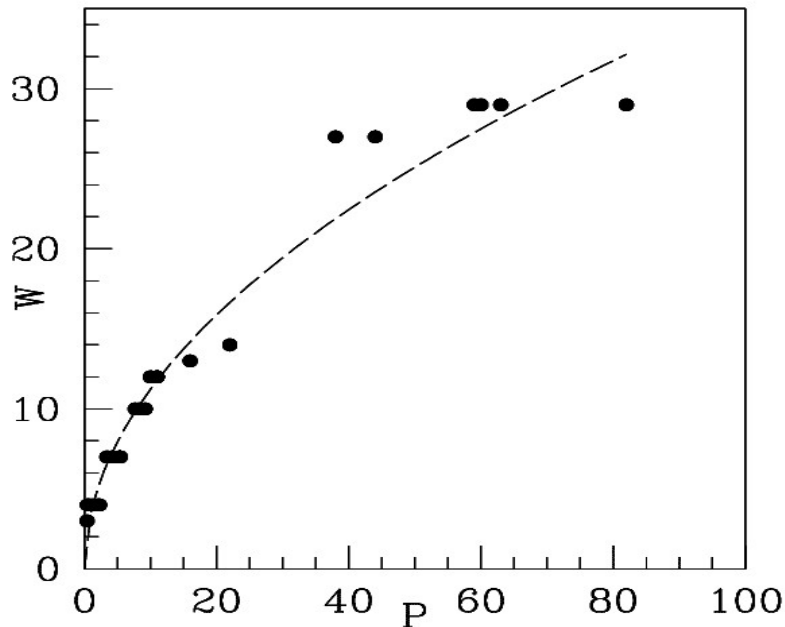


Figure 1. Number of votes W allotted to each member state in the European Council of Ministers as a function of population P (in millions), according to the Treaty of Nice. Germany is the largest state with 82 million, Malta the smallest with 410,000. The ideal Penrose formula is shown as a dashed line (W proportional to square root of P).

If the Penrose scheme was adopted by the Pacific Islands Forum, starting from Niue with one vote, then the votes allotted to the other members of the Forum would be as listed in Table 1. It can be seen that Australia has the largest vote at 34% of the total, as appropriate to its large population, but not a dominant vote.

Even Australia and New Zealand voting together would make up just less than 50% of the vote, and could be outvoted by all the other island states voting as a bloc. Note that in this perhaps unlikely eventuality, the vote of tiny Niue would be enough to swing the balance either way.

This 'ideal' scheme still gives Australia and New Zealand a virtually dominant voice under most circumstances. In this case, with such a disparity in populations between the member states, it might be desirable to adopt an even flatter voting distribution. An alternative scheme is shown in Table 1, where votes are allotted in proportion to the cube root of the population (!), rather than the square root.

Country	Population	Votes	
		(Penrose scheme)	(Alternative scheme)
Australia	23,717,700	121	24
Cook Islands	14,974	3	2
Fiji	859,178	23	8
Kiribati	106,461	8	4
Marshall Islands	56,086	6	3
Micronesia	101,351	8	4
Nauru	10,084	3	2
New Zealand	4,556,270	53	14
Niue	1,613	1	1
Palau	20,901	4	2
Papua New Guinea	7,398,500	68	17
Solomon Islands	581,344	19	7
Tonga	103,252	8	4
Tuvalu	11,323	3	2
Vanuatu	264,652	13	5
Western Samoa	187,820	11	5
Totals	37,991,509	352	104

Table 1. Examples of votes that might be allotted to each member state of the Pacific Islands Forum under the Penrose qualified majority voting scheme, and an alternative scheme mentioned in the text. Population figures according to Wikipedia, 2015.

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