

# **The role of Australia's international development program in preventing conflict**

## **A Submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs Defence and Trade**

World Citizens Association (Australia)

The Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade has commenced a new inquiry into the role of Australia's international development program in preventing conflict. We would like to make a submission to this new inquiry.

Regarding the terms of reference for the inquiry, our submission will mainly address the following items:

1. the role of Australia's international development program in building resilience in fragile states, including by strengthening community and civic participation, governance, security reform and human capital;
2. the strategic use of Australia's international development program to prevent conflict in the Indo-Pacific.

### *Abstract*

*Australia has a particular responsibility for preventing conflict within its own region, in its capacity as the major power within the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF). The best way to prevent conflict in the region is to strengthen the institutions of governance and security within the region. We argue that the next step in that process should be an upgrade of the Pacific Islands Forum to a Pacific Islands Community, following the example set by Europe. Australia's international development program could provide a powerful lever in bringing that about. We should offer to transfer the administration of Australia's development funds for the region to the new Community, under suitable conditions.*

### *Introduction*

In this submission we will advocate for an upgrade of the **Pacific Islands Forum** to a **Pacific Islands Community**, along similar lines to the pattern set by Jean Monnet and collaborators at the beginning of the process of European integration. This would be of great help in dealing more effectively with the collective needs and issues of the Pacific region, including peace and security in particular, and giving the people of the Pacific a greater voice in their own affairs. Australia's international development funds could be used with great effect in this process.

The Pacific Islands Forum website declares the overall aim of their '**2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent**' to be [Blue Pacific 2022]:

*“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. “*

We can all subscribe to this generous vision. We shall argue here for an upgrade of the Pacific Islands Forum into a Pacific Islands Community in order to help fulfill these aims.

Under the Thematic Area of '**Political Leadership And Regionalism**', the Strategy states that *“The delivery of collective actions will be driven by effective governance, inclusivity and ownership that will build leadership and diplomatic capacity and commitment to regionalism”*, but it discusses no concrete means to ensure that outcome beyond the Forum itself. An upgrade of the Forum into a Community would do a great deal to ensure more effective collective action.

Under the Thematic Area of '**Peace And Security**', the Strategy states that *“Forum Members continue to work cooperatively to uphold regional peace and security, and support international peace and security efforts, in the face of complex global challenges and relationships.”* Again, an upgrade of the Forum into a Community would be a very effective way of enhancing regional peace and security.

**Climate change** has become one major issue of regional concern in recent years. In fact it has become an existential threat to some of the smaller island states such as Tuvalu, Kiribati and the Marshall Islands, as rising ocean levels begin to render these low-lying islands uninhabitable.

On 23 March 2024, the Forum Secretariat submitted a written statement to the International Court of Justice, arguing that the maritime rights and statehood rights of these threatened peoples should be preserved under international law, even if their home territories should vanish under the waves! They recalled previous PIF Declarations:

**Declaration on Preserving Maritime Zones in the Face of Climate Change-related Sea-Level Rise (12 August 2021).** Extracts:

*‘Forum Leaders continue to reaffirm climate change, inclusive of sea-level rise caused by anthropogenic emissions of greenhouse gases, as the single greatest threat to the livelihoods, security, and wellbeing of the people of the Pacific.’*

*‘**Proclaim** that our maritime zones, as established and notified to the Secretary-General of the United Nations in accordance with the Convention, and the rights and entitlements that flow from them, shall continue to apply, without reduction,*

*notwithstanding any physical changes connected to climate change-related sea-level rise.'*

### **Declaration on the Continuity of Statehood and the Protection of Persons in the Face of Climate-Change-Related Sea-Level Rise (9 November 2023).**

Extracts:

*'**Declare** that the statehood and sovereignty of Members of the Pacific Islands Forum will continue, and the rights and duties inherent thereto will be maintained, notwithstanding the impact of climate change-related sea-level rise,*

***Further declare** that Members of the Pacific Islands Forum, individually and collectively, bear an important responsibility for ensuring protection of our people, and are committed to protecting such persons affected by climate change-related sea-level rise, including with respect to human rights duties, political status, culture, cultural heritage, identity and dignity, and meeting essential needs.'*

*and*

*'**Call upon** the international community to support this Declaration and cooperate in achieving its purposes, consistent with our duty to cooperate and principles of equity and fairness.'*

The Island states will be looking at Australia in particular to assist in supporting these declarations with both physical and financial resources. Australia has already agreed to a new Treaty establishing migration pathways for people from Tuvalu whose homes are threatened by climate change [Tuvalu 2023].

Australia has also promised to contribute a foundational \$100 million to the Pacific Resilience Facility (PRF) and will rejoin and contribute \$50 million to the Green Climate Fund (GCF) [Wong 2023]. These contributions are indeed part of Australia's development funds program. Again, the establishment of a Pacific Islands Community would make it much easier to make joint decisions on the application of measures such as these.

### **Chinese influence**

In recent times there has also been widespread concern in Australia over the increase of Chinese influence in the Pacific region [Chin 2024]. Chinese development aid is of course to be welcomed, and its amount was at one time second only to Australia's in the region. But in 2022, Solomon Islands signed a security pact with China, sparking international concern over the possibility of Beijing building its first military base in the region [Guardian 2023]. The Chinese government has also 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. A pair of

strategic experts from ASPI warned at that time of the need for Australia to do more in terms of regional defence [Bergin and Newhouse 2022], Recently the US had increased its aid to the region in response, until it surpassed the Chinese total spending [Clark 2023], but that has now disappeared due to the abandonment of the USAID program [Lowy 2026]. And finally, the Pacific Island leaders themselves have urged Australia to do more to ensure that China cannot expand its influence in the region – warning of severe military consequences for failure! [Green 2023].

There is a perceived need for Australia and New Zealand to counter this Chinese influence by forging closer relations with our neighbouring Pacific Island states in the Pacific Island Forum. The Albanese government's largest Pacific commitment is a major security package which is worth around \$1.4 billion over four years. This year will see our development assistance to the region of \$0.7 billion, despite the decline in our overall aid budget. We will also be spending \$500 million to ameliorate the effects of climate change in the region.

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:

- Improved collective security for the Pacific region, to counter any perceived security threat from China or other external powers;
- Improved mechanisms for resolving and preventing any potential conflicts within the region itself;
- Greater cooperation in commercial enterprises, such as protection of the fishing industries of the Pacific Island states;
- Greater cooperation in the distribution of aid and development funds to the island states;
- Advancement of human rights within the community;
- More effective participation by the island states in the formulation of regional policy in general.

## *Background*

### *a) The European example*

The Europeans have set the example for regional integration. Their objective was indeed the prevention of further conflict within Europe, after the disaster of World War II. This represented the fifth major war between France and Germany in 200 years. It was recognized that the way to prevent further wars in Europe was to construct a proper system of regional government, ultimately a European Federation, as was clearly announced in the Schuman Declaration (1950). But such an objective was never going to be achieved in one giant leap, as was stated in the declaration: “Europe will not be made all at once, or according to a single plan”.

In 1950, Jean Monnet and his collaborators in the Action Committee for a United States of Europe led the campaign for establishment of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), to unite the production facilities within Europe for producing the 'sinews of war', as the first stage in the integration process. The ECSC had only six member states initially. Since then, the membership and functions of the organization have expanded stage by stage through successive Treaties: the Treaty of Paris, the Treaty of Rome, and the Maastricht Treaty

*b) Integration in the Pacific*

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 current 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 them, 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 PIF Secretariat based in Suva, Fiji, with around 115 staff members. The Secretary-General currently is Henry Puna from the Cook Islands. The current annual budget is around A\$40 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, the Solomon Islands and New Caledonia. 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. This provides an excellent example of collective action to maintain security in the region.

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 (the headquarters of the Pacific Islands Forum), led by Commodore Frank Bainimarama. Fiji was suspended from membership in the Forum in 2009, and this suspension was not lifted until after a measure of democracy was restored, and a Fijian general election was held in September 2014.

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 particular, the Review suggested that the Pacific Plan Action Committee (PPAC), which is charged with oversight of the implementation of the Plan and is mainly staffed by bureaucrats, had largely failed to drive progress in regional integration. It should be replaced by a smaller Board for Pacific Regionalism including representatives of civil society and the private sector.

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. At the same time, a measure of democracy was restored in Fiji, and elections were held for a new Fijian Parliament, so the time had clearly come to reconsider further steps in regional integration.

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.

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 in imitation of the European 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 is very obvious, namely the formation of a *Pacific Islands Community*, 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;
- A *Council of Ministers* should be formally instituted, consisting of the ministers from each member state in a particular area (e.g. fisheries), to meet as needed to discuss detailed policy 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 to 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. This would provide some sort of voice of the people 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 to adjudge cases involving regional treaties, which could become the nucleus of an eventual Pacific legal system.

These changes should not involve any huge 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 instituted by the Europeans. 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 (Australia) or

group of states dominates. The 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 completely dominated by Australia and New Zealand.

If a Forum Parliamentary Assembly is instituted, it would be natural to hold it at the same time as the leaders Forum, 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 Forum decisions, and at the same time they could provide political input and advice to their leaders. At present, the Forum Presiding Officers Conference consists of the presiding officers of each member parliament. 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 thirty years ago by Mike Moore, a former Prime Minister of New Zealand [Moore 1982].

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

#### *b) Trade and Development*

We do not have very 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 as far as possible. 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. This would presumably require a rebranding and reallocation of funding and personnel of large elements of the Office of the Pacific from within the present Australia Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade to become a separate Australian arm of the new Pacific Islands Community.

Australia has traditionally been heavily involved in development assistance in the region, from the previous AusAID agency (which was merged with DFAT in 2013), to the new Official Development Assistance (ODA) program of today, which was given a record budget of \$2 bn in 2024-25.

A useful project might be to carry out a SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) to plan bilateral and collective partnerships between nations within the Community and to systematically assess each nation's attributes and how they can complement each other.

Besides channeling Australian and New Zealand development funds under the control of the new Community, other foreign countries, such as France, the United States and China should 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. Australia could use its promise to put its development funds under the control of the Community as a powerful lever towards securing agreement by the member states to the establishment of the new Community.

A difficult 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 has better relations with the Australian government, and given the promise of a greater voice for the smaller 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) *Security & defence*

In our opinion, there is an obvious need for some upgraded mechanisms of regional common security, namely:

- *A Pacific Islands Maritime Patrol* to combat illegal fishing, piracy, drug smuggling and similar problems in the region. Such a force would probably need to involve both seaborne and airborne elements, and to make use of resources such as satellite data, and the Jindalee over-the-horizon radar installation in Australia. These problems and needs have been highlighted recently in an excellent documentary from Defence Australia, *Guardians of the Blue Pacific* [2024].
- 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
- Contributing to international peacekeeping missions undertaken by the UN
- 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.

The details of our suggestions for these upgrades in security mechanisms are set out in an earlier submission to the inquiry on *“Australia's Defence relationships with Pacific Island nations”*. They would play a very important role in countering any possible malign foreign influences in the region.

#### *Arguments for the Proposal*

The general argument is that we need to embrace our Forum partners more closely at the regional level, to build a closer sense of community and partnership between ourselves and the other Forum (or Community) members. This would provide a major bulwark against any malign influence from China or any other foreign state. Similar initiatives have been under discussion for many years in any case, aiming to lead towards a Pacific region “of peace, harmony, security and economic prosperity, so that all its people can lead free and worthwhile lives.”

In summary the arguments for the Community include

- It will provide improved collective security and timely decision making for the Pacific region, firstly, to counter any perceived security threat from China or other external powers, and secondly, to settle and prevent any internal conflicts within the region itself;
- It will facilitate greater cooperation and effectiveness in commercial enterprises, including protection of the fishing industries of the Pacific island states, the tropical forests on land, and the ocean resources in general;
- It will facilitate greater cooperation in the distribution of aid and development funds to the island states, and satisfy objections from island

states, particularly Fiji, that policy in this area is dictated by Australia and New Zealand;

- It will help in establishing basic human rights, such as gender equality, within the region
- It will allow greater participation by the island states in the formulation of regional policy in general and build effective working relationship without compromise or interference on their ability to self-determine their domestic aspirations. This would lead to an improved sense of partnership, involvement, and general community feeling between the member states, which can only be a good thing.

### *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 collective 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 for the first time a European Parliament. 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 to the Australian taxpayer. 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. Australia would mostly be transferring its unilateral control of existing funding into the hands of the new Community. As mentioned, 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, as we have mentioned above.

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 budget, which has been increased significantly in recent times. It would signal that Australia is seriously embracing its role as a genuine partner, albeit inevitably a senior partner, in its regional community.

## *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, hospital facilities 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 prescient Labor Party policy discussion paper by Bob Sercombe '*Towards a Pacific Community*' [Sercombe 2005], or the

more recent statements of Scott Morrison and Alex Hawke [Hawke 2019]. 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, however, and this ought to be well received by other Forum members, especially following the political demise of Frank Bainimarama in Fiji.

Australia and New Zealand 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 obvious next stage in the integration process is the upgrading of the Pacific Islands Forum into a Pacific Islands Community. This would not actually require huge changes in the regional architecture, or involve huge additional costs. Most of the elements have already been suggested in the Pacific Plan.

The new institutions we have discussed include a Pacific Court, to adjudicate on cases involving regional treaties, and a Pacific Parliamentary Assembly, a successor to the present Forum Presiding Officers Conference, to provide a voice for the people and impetus to regional decision-making. These bodies would also provide prototypes for an eventual Pacific legal system and a possible Pacific Parliament. The formal institution of a Council of Ministers, with a qualified majority voting system on the European pattern, is also recommended.

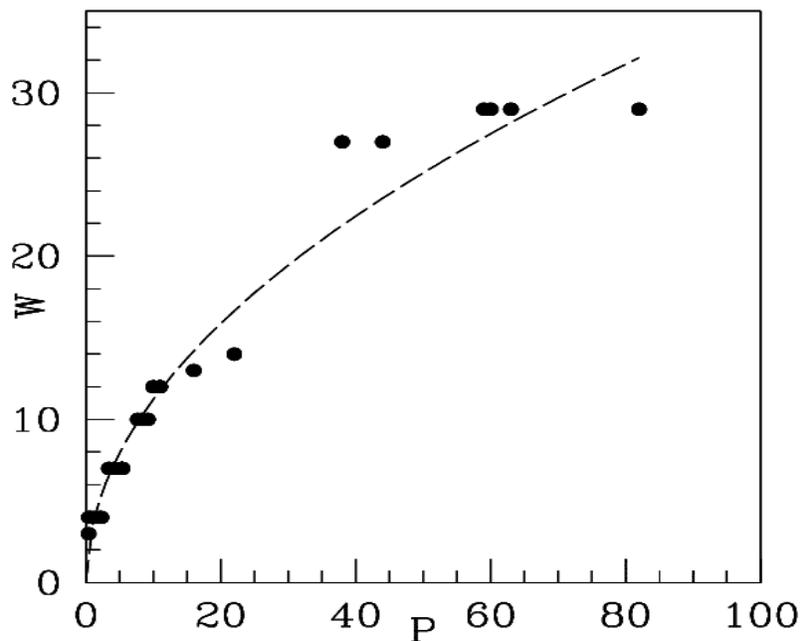
We have also proposed strengthened regional security systems, including a Pacific Islands Maritime Patrol to regulate a sustainable fishing industry in the region, and a Pacific Islands Regiment to restore order in case of a breakdown in one of the island states, and also to carry out peacekeeping duties 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. This would be a major advantage from Australia’s point of view. Insofar as security becomes the collective responsibility of the region as a whole, it would be much easier to counter any malign Chinese influence there.

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 detail. 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)	Votes (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
<b>Totals</b>	<b>37,991,509</b>	<b>352</b>	<b>104</b>

**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.

## References

- ASPI 2008. Australian Strategic Policy Institute, “*Engaging our Neighbors Towards a new relationship between Australia and the Pacific Islands*”, *Special Report*, March 2008, Issue 13
- Bergin and Newsham 2022. Anthony Bergin and Grant Newsham, ‘*Australia needs more defence grunt in its Pacific policy*’, *The Strategist*, 14 Oct 2022.
- Blue Pacific 2017. Communique of the 48<sup>th</sup> Pacific Islands Forum, Apia. Samoa, 5-8 September, 2017. See <https://forumsec.org/publications/forty-eighth-pacific-islands-forum-apia-samoa-5-8-september-2017>
- Blue Pacific 2022. Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, ‘*2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent*’, see <https://forumsec.org/2050>
- Chin 2024. James Chin, ‘What are China’s Interests in Papua New Guinea?’, *Australian Outlook*, 23 May 2024  
<https://www.internationalaffairs.org.au/australianoutlook/what-are-chinas-interests-in-papua-new-guinea/>
- Clark 2023. Colin Clark, ‘*New data shows US topped China ‘Belt and Road’ spending in Pacific Islands by 2021*’ *Breaking Defense* (2 Nov 2023), see <https://breakingdefense.com/2023/11/new-data-shows-us-topped-china-belt-and-road-spending-in-pacific-islands-by-2021/>
- Eminent Persons’ Group 2004. *Review of the Pacific Islands Forum, 2004*. See text at <http://www.mfat.govt.nz/foreign/regions/pacific/pif03/pifreviewdocs/wayforward.html>.
- Green 2023. Eli Green, ‘*Pacific Island leaders warn Australia on Chinese influence*’, 3 December 2023, see <https://www.news.com.au/world/pacific/pacific-island-leaders-warn-australia-on-chinese-influence/news-story/6d3673cd4c2b0f2a6b7bb9a37404387d>
- Guardian 2023. Article ‘*China’s rising power and influence in the Pacific explained in 30 seconds*’ (8 Mar 2023), see <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/mar/09/chinas-rising-power-and-influence-in-the-pacific-explained-in-30-seconds>
- Guardians of the Blue Pacific 2024. Defence Australia YouTube documentary, See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pKqp5123VUU>
- Hawke 2019. The Hon Alex Hawke, ‘*Australia’s Focus on the Pacific*’, keynote speech at the AIIA National Conference 17<sup>th</sup> October 2019, see <https://www.internationalaffairs.org.au/australianoutlook/australias-focus-on-the-pacific-minister-of-international-development-and-the-pacific-hon-alex-hawke-mps-keynote-speech-to-the-aiia-national-conference/>
- Lowy 2026. Lowy Institute Pacific Aid Map, <https://pacificaidmap.lowyinstitute.org/>
- Malielegaoi, 2005. Hon. Tuilaepa Aiono Sailele Malielegaoi ‘*The Future of Regionalism in the Pacific*’, Address by the Prime minister of Samoa and

- Chair of the Pacific Islands Forum, Prestigious Annual Pacific Lecture, Pacific Cooperation Foundation, Wellington 22 March, Auckland 23 March 2005. See text at <https://library.sprep.org/content/pacific-cooperation-annual-pacific-lecture-future-regionalism-pacific-wellington-auckland>
- Moore 1982. Mike Moore, *'A Pacific Parliament'*, Asia Pacific Books, Wellington 1982.
- PIF Secretariat. See website at <https://forumsec.org/pacific-islands-forum>
- Pacific Plan 2007. See [https://www.theprif.org/sites/default/files/documents/Pacific\\_Plan\\_Nov\\_2007.pdf](https://www.theprif.org/sites/default/files/documents/Pacific_Plan_Nov_2007.pdf)
- Pacific Plan Review 2013. *Report to Pacific Leaders*. Volumes 1 & 2, Suva, Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat.
- Penn 1692. William Penn, *Essay Towards the Present and Future Peace of Europe*. Reprinted in B.W. Cook, S.E. Cooper and C. Chatfield (eds.), *Peace Projects of the Seventeenth Century* (Garland, New York, 1972)
- Penrose, 1946. L.S. Penrose, *'The Elementary Statistics of Majority Voting'*, *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society* 109, 53 (1946); W. Slomczynski and K. Zyczkowski, *'Penrose Voting System and Optimal Quota'*, *Acta Physica Polonica B37*, 3133 (2006); *'Voting in the European Union: The Square Root System of Penrose and a Critical Point'*, *Acta Physica Polonica B37*, 3133 (2006).
- Secretariat 2024, Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat Release: *'PIF Secretariat Submits Written Statement to the International Court of Justice'*, 23 March 2024. See <https://forumsec.org/publications/release-pif-secretariat-submits-written-statement-international-court-justice>
- Senate Committee 2003. Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade (2003) ;*A Pacific Engaged: Australia's relations with Papua New Guinea and the island states of the south west Pacific*;; Canberra, Commonwealth of Australia, accessed at [http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary\\_Business/Committees/Senate/Foreign\\_Affairs\\_Defence\\_and\\_Trade/Completed\\_inquiries/2002-04/png/report/index](http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Foreign_Affairs_Defence_and_Trade/Completed_inquiries/2002-04/png/report/index)
- Sercombe 2005. Bob Sercombe, *'Towards a Pacific Community'*, Labor Pacific Policy Discussion Paper, Australian Labor Party (2005).
- State of Pacific Regionalism Report 2017. See <https://www.forumsec.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/State-of-Pacific-Regionalism-2017-Report.pdf>
- State of Pacific Regionalism Report 2019. See <https://www.forumsec.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/State-of-regional-Report-2019-1.pdf>
- Tarte 2015. Sandra Tarte, *'A New Pacific Regional Voice? The Pacific Islands Development Forum'*, Ch 7. of *'The New Pacific Diplomacy'*, eds. Greg Fry and Sandra Tarte (ANU Press, 2015)
- Tuvalu 2023. ABC News report, *'Tuvalu residents able to resettle in Australia after new agreement announced'* (10 Nov 2023), see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=phtusNSqPDc>

Wong 2023. Penny Wong media release, 'Supporting the Pacific family at COP28 to respond to climate change' (8 Dec 2023), see <https://www.foreignminister.gov.au/minister/penny-wong/media-release/supporting-pacific-family-cop28-respond-climate-change>

*\*This submission was prepared on behalf of the World Citizens Association of Australia by*

*A/Prof Chris Hamer  
President, World Citizens Association (Australia)  
73 Railway Parade, Wingello NSW 2579  
[C.Hamer@unsw.edu.au](mailto:C.Hamer@unsw.edu.au)  
M: 0457641299*

*and*

*Luiz Bispo  
Secretary and Executive Officer, World Citizens Association (Australia)  
13/51-55 Homebush Rd., Strathfield NSW 2135  
[luizfbispo03@gmail.com](mailto:luizfbispo03@gmail.com)  
M 0413692108*