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The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia

# **Inquiry into Australia's defence relationships with Pacific Island nations**

House of Representatives

Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade

March 2021  
CANBERRA

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## Foreword

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.

Defence and security challenges faced in the Pacific are now more prevalent and complex than ever before. It behoves all members of the Pacific family to be aware of emerging issues, and to face them together in an organised, collaborative, and coordinated manner. As a regional medium-power, Australia bears significant responsibility for creating the environment and providing the means to achieve this. From fisheries management, protection and surveillance, to humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, intelligence collection and sharing, climate change and the global pandemic, Australia's defence organisation stands ready to play its part in the Pacific Step-up. There is, however, more to be done.

As the committee heard throughout the conduct of the inquiry, there are several existing and proven defence initiatives and programs which contribute significantly to the Step-up. The committee also heard that there are ways to increase and enhance these initiatives, as well as new and innovative ways to forge, deepen and strengthen ties between members of the Pacific family. This is where the future of Australian defence relationships should be focussed.

While the conduct of this inquiry was impacted by COVID-19, the submissions received, and evidence heard at public hearings was of the highest quality and the

committee thanks all of those who contributed. This report and its recommendations reflect the committee's belief that Australia's defence relationships in the Pacific are extremely important and becoming increasingly so, and that additional efforts can and should be made to ensure the security of our region in the years to come.

**Mr Andrew Wallace, MP**  
**Chair**  
**Defence Sub-Committee**

## Members of the Committee

### Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade

<b>Chair</b>	Senator the Hon David Fawcett	
<b>Deputy Chair</b>	Ms Meryl Swanson MP	
	Mr Nick Champion MP (to 1/12/2020)	
<b>Members</b>	The Hon Kevin Andrews MP	Senator the Hon Eric Abetz
	Mr Vince Connelly MP	Senator Tim Ayres
	The Hon Damian Drum MP	Senator Mehreen Faruqi
	Mr Patrick Gorman MP	Senator the Hon Concetta Fierravanti-Wells
	Mr Andrew Hastie MP (to 22/12/2020)	Senator Kimberley Kitching
	Mr Chris Hayes MP	Senator Malarndirri McCarthy
	Mr Julian Hill MP	Senator Sam McMahon
	Mr Peter Khalil MP	Senator Jim Molan AO DSC
	Mr Ted O'Brien MP	Senator Deborah O'Neill
	Mr Tony Pasin MP	Senator Janet Rice
	Mr Gavin Pearce MP	Senator Tony Sheldon
	Mr Dave Sharma MP	
	The Hon Warren Snowdon MP	
	Mr Phillip Thompson OAM MP	

Ms Maria Vamvakinou MP

Mr Ross Vasta MP

Mr Andrew Wallace MP

### **Former Members**

The Hon Keith Pitt MP

The Hon Dr John McVeigh MP

Senator the Hon Arthur Sinodinos



## Membership of the Sub-committee

### Members of the Defence Sub-Committee

**Chair** Mr Andrew Wallace MP

**Deputy Chair** Ms Meryl Swanson MP (*ex officio*)

**Members** The Hon Kevin Andrews MP

Mr Nick Champion MP (*ex officio*) (to 01/12/2020)

Mr Vince Connelly MP

Senator the Hon David Fawcett (*ex officio*)

Mr Andrew Hastie MP (to 22/12/2020)

Mr Julian Hill MP

Senator Kimberley Kitching

Senator Sam McMahon

Senator Jim Molan AO, DSC

Senator Deborah O'Neill

Mr Gavin Pearce MP

Mr Dave Sharma MP

The Hon Warren Snowdon MP

Mr Phillip Thompson OAM MP

Mr Ross Vasta MP

## **Committee Secretariat**

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Ms Julia Morris (from 16/11/2020)

Ms Lynley Ducker (from 28/01/2020)

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Lieutenant Colonel Anthony Evans

**Office Manager**

Mrs Dorota Cooley

**Administrative Officer**

Ms Alexandra Grimes (from 07/09/2020)

Ms Renee Dennis (to 30/06/2020)

## **Terms of reference**

On Wednesday, 4 December 2019, the Minister for Defence, Senator the Hon Linda Reynolds CSC, asked the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade (JSCFADT) to inquire into and report on Australia's defence relationships with Pacific Island nations.

With respect to this inquiry the JSCFADT, in particular the Defence Subcommittee was asked to give particular regard to:

- Current activities and outcomes undertaken by Defence in the South West Pacific, including the relationship between Defence's longstanding Cooperation Program and its Step-up activities;
- How Australia's Defence Cooperation programs and Pacific Step-up activities correspond to the needs, requests and feedback from partner nations in the Pacific (including consultation with civil society, parliaments and executive governments);
- Opportunities for closer coordination and collaboration between Defence and other Government departments on Australian programs and activities across the South West Pacific;
- Opportunities for closer coordination and collaboration between other nations seeking to invest and engage in the South West Pacific, including planning and execution of joint activities and preparation for HADR; and
- Any related matters.

## List of abbreviations

ADF	Australian Defence Force
AMFA	Australian Fisheries Management Authority
ASPI	Australian Strategic Policy Institute
COVID-19	Coronavirus
DCG	Defence Coordination Group
DCP	Defence Cooperation Program
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
EEZ	Exclusive Economic Zone
FFA	Forum Fisheries Agency
FRANZ	France, Australia, New Zealand
HADR	Humanitarian assistance and disaster relief
ISR	Intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance
JSCFADT	Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade
NT	Northern Territory
NZ	New Zealand
OTP	Office of the Pacific
PICs	Pacific Island Countries
PIF	Pacific Islands Forum
PITO	Pacific Islands Treaty Organisation

PMSP	Pacific Maritime Security Program
PNG	Papua New Guinea
PNGDF	Papua New Guinean Defence Force
TA	Timor Awakening
US	United States
VCA	Veterans Care Association Inc.

## List of recommendations

### 2 Defence engagement in the Pacific

#### Recommendation 1

The Committee recommends that the Department of Defence seek opportunities to continually improve the capacity and capabilities of the Defence Cooperation Program (DCP), and to increase the inclusion of Pacific Islands' representation and leadership in DCP design.

### 3 Opportunities for closer internal coordination and collaboration

#### Recommendation 2

The Committee recommends the Department of Defence and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, via the Office of the Pacific (OTP), continue to improve collaboration to effectively monitor, evaluate and respond to diplomatic, environmental and defence challenges in the Pacific region.

#### Recommendation 3

The Committee recommends the Government pursue further opportunities for collaboration with state government partners to support Australia's Pacific Step-up. This would broaden the scope of possibilities for various levels of government to cooperate, facilitate partnerships and share capabilities in support of the Pacific Step-up.

#### Recommendation 4

The Committee recommends that the Government pursue further opportunities to integrate Australian Defence Force cooperation with Australian Industry to provide capability solutions in support of the Pacific Step-up.

**Recommendation 5**

The Committee recommends the Government consider opportunities to enhance Australia's soft-power and people-to-people ties in the Pacific, including educational exchanges and supporting Australian non-government organisations' initiatives.

**Recommendation 6**

The Committee recommends that the Government consider innovative and practical means of actively deepening its defence relationships with Pacific Island states and other powers in the region. This could include increased and enhanced integration of Australian, Pacific Island and other military forces on combined training and operations.

**4 Opportunities for closer external coordination and collaboration****Recommendation 7**

The Committee recommends the Government investigate further opportunities for defence cooperation in the Pacific region with likeminded nations, including New Zealand, the United States, Canada, Japan, France and the United Kingdom.

**Recommendation 8**

The Committee recommends that the Government and Defence expand existing programs (including the Defence Cooperation Program and Pacific Maritime Security Program), considerate of the need to maintain Pacific Island states' sovereignty, with the aim of further deepening institutional and people-to-people links with Pacific partners.

**Recommendation 9**

The Committee recommends that Government offer to assist with increased intelligence capacity and sharing of and with Pacific Island countries to support a broader range of security objectives, including maritime domain awareness and maritime security operations.

**Recommendation 10**

The Committee recommends the Department of Defence consider additional maritime surveillance initiatives in the Pacific region. This may include an increase in frequency and intensity of existing surveillance operations and the addition of new Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAV) and Unmanned Underwater Vehicles (UUV).

**Recommendation 11**

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government pursue opportunities to strengthen Australia's humanitarian assistance and disaster relief response in the Pacific to effectively build the capacities of regional militaries to respond to humanitarian crises in a manner which is considerate of the impacts on women and girls.