

Defence engagement in the Pacific

- 2.1 This chapter addresses two of the Inquiry's terms of reference:
- Current activities by Defence in the South West Pacific, including the Defence Cooperation Program (DCP) and the Pacific Step-up activities; and
 - How those activities respond to the needs, requests and feedback from partner nations in the Pacific.

Current Defence activities

- 2.2 Australia has had a near continuous defence presence in the Pacific since the 1970s. It is a multi-dimensional relationship comprising bilateral and multilateral arrangements, numerous security-related dialogues, senior leadership engagement, a broad attaché network, personnel exchanges, and joint participation in operations and training. The Committee heard that these institutional links are unique in their history and scope of integration and are often the strongest in the region.¹
- 2.3 Defence submitted significant detail on its activities throughout the region. Defence's long-standing relationships with the region have been built on three main lines of effort. These are the Defence Cooperation Program (DCP), Pacific Maritime Security Program (PMSP), humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR).²

1 Lowy Institute, *Submission 21*, p.10.

2 Department of Defence, *Submission 10*, p.2.

The Defence Cooperation Program

- 2.4 The Committee heard that the DCP strongly supports Australia's national interests and defence relationships within the Pacific. The DCP supports programs in the Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, the Marshall Islands, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Palau and Vanuatu.³
- 2.5 Several submissions identified the DCP as being one of Australia's most comprehensive and successful Pacific engagement mechanisms, and a key program which should continue to be funded and improved.
- 2.6 The Committee heard evidence from Joanne Wallis, a Professor of International Security at the University of Adelaide, about the centrality of the DCP to defence relations in the region:
- Australia's DCP is one of its most effective levers of influence in the region. This is because the DCP has been primarily directed at meeting what Pacific Island states identify as their needs in partnership with Australia, as opposed to what Australia has identified for them. This differentiates the DCP from the approach that largely characterised the Australian aid program until the mid-2000s...opportunities for military education and exchanges under the DCP have encouraged Australian and Pacific Islander military personnel to develop personal relations, on which Australia has been able to draw to influence Pacific Island military leaders in times of crisis.⁴
- 2.7 The Committee also heard that the DCP provides benefits additional to those strictly military. The DCP continues to support Australia's strategic interests in the Pacific by building strong people-to-people links and strengthening Australia's bilateral relationships.⁵
- 2.8 The High Commission of Tonga submission supports this assertion, highlighting the DCP as 'an essential component for high-level engagement' to raise dialogue pertaining to future goals and concerns in the region.⁶ In particular, efforts have been noted in improving recognition of women as an important component of the region's security space, and enabling capacity building and training programs to invest in human resources.
- 2.9 Professor Wallis gave evidence as to the core tenets of the DCP and consequently, its flexibility to address multiple security concerns:

3 Department of Defence, *Submission 10*, p.3.

4 Associate Professor Joanne Wallis, *Submission 2*, p.8.

5 Associate Professor Joanne Wallis, *Submission 2*, p.3.

6 High Commission of Tonga, *Submission 18*, p.1.

The most important aspect of the Defence Cooperation Program is the Pacific Patrol Boat Program and its replacement the Pacific Maritime Security Program. As islands and archipelagos, Pacific Island states have extensive maritime territories. As they often have limited government capacity, they face difficulties in monitoring these territories. As a result, they are vulnerable to illegal and often unsustainable fishing, unregulated seabed mining and transnational crime.⁷

2.10 The Committee heard that the DCP is also of significant importance for Pacific Islands nations:

Pacific Island states appreciate the Pacific Maritime Security Program. It has helped them to protect their maritime resources and in turn to increase their fisheries revenue. It's also helped in relation to other security challenges, including search and rescue, medical evacuations, transporting ballot boxes during elections and, most significantly, in humanitarian and disaster response. Recipient states also appreciate the training that is provided to support the program. An important element is that the Pacific Maritime Security Program represents a partnership between Australia and Pacific Island states, with Australia playing a facilitating role, whilst Pacific Island states operate the boats. Pacific Island states are also committed to the Pacific Maritime Security Program, reflected by the relatively high number of sea days that Pacific Island states manage to achieve with their boats, often at significant human and financial cost.⁸

2.11 Other submissions also endorsed the DCP as being one of Australia's most comprehensive and successful Pacific engagement mechanisms. While the Committee heard that the DCP is not without its opportunities for improvement (addressed in Chapter 4) it was generally regarded in inquiry submissions as a key program which should continue to be increasingly funded and continually improved.⁹

7 Associate Professor Joanne Wallis, University of Adelaide, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 15 July 2020, p.2.

8 Associate Professor Joanne Wallis, University of Adelaide, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 15 July 2020, p.2.

9 Assoc Prof Joanna Wallis, *Submission 2*, p.3.

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.

Pacific Maritime Security Program

- 2.12 The second pillar of practical defence engagement in the Pacific is the Pacific Maritime Security Program (PMSP). The PMSP comprises three main components: the replacement of the Pacific Patrol Boats with new Guardian-class Patrol Boats, integrated region-wide aerial surveillance, and enhancements to regional coordination.¹⁰
- 2.13 The PMSP represents a commitment of approximately AUD \$2 billion over 30 years to increase regional maritime security for Pacific Island nations.¹¹ It is the cornerstone of Defence maritime engagement in the Pacific, assisting Pacific nations to protect maritime resources, and reduce the economic and social costs of illegal activities. The Committee heard that the PMSP provides a number of key benefits:
- The Pacific Maritime Security Program serves Australia's strategic interests in several ways...It gives Australia a strategic presence in the region and helps us to be seen as a natural strategic partner of the recipient countries. It has helped Australia to build personal networks throughout the region via the maritime surveillance and technical advisers stationed in recipient states. It has effectively established an Australian controlled network of maritime surveillance in the Pacific Islands, which has enabled Australia to gain situational awareness throughout the maritime region.¹²
- 2.14 The PMSP builds on the success of the Pacific Patrol Boat Program, which gifted 22 steel patrol boats to 12 Pacific Island nations between 1987 and 1997. Together, these programs and the DCP will see an uninterrupted 60-year commitment of deeper-level engagement in the Pacific. The 12 Pacific Islands nations which participated in the previous Patrol Boat Program

10 Department of Defence, *Submission 10*, p.7.

11 Department of Defence, *Submission 10*, p.6.

12 Associate Professor Joanne Wallis, University of Adelaide, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 15 July 2020, p.2.

- will receive new replacement Guardian-class Patrol Boats over the course of 2018-2023. In addition, Timor-Leste will also receive two vessels.¹³
- 2.15 The Department of Defence submission noted that Australian-gifted patrol vessels are a critical capability which enable Pacific Island countries to participate in Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA) led maritime surveillance and patrol operations.¹⁴
- 2.16 Under the PMSP, Defence has also engaged civilian aircraft operators to provide aerial surveillance services to 15 PIF countries. This component of the PMSP supports targeted, intelligence-driven maritime patrols and enhances the capacity of Pacific Island nations to locate and prevent illegal activity occurring within their exclusive economic zones and adjacent high seas.¹⁵
- 2.17 The Committee heard that the PMSP aims to increase regional coordination efforts, particularly the improved use and sharing of information available through existing regional coordination centres and intelligence gathered from surveillance patrols and other sources. This effort is focused on increasing the capacity of participating countries to effectively collect, analyse, manage and share maritime security information across national agencies. It also aims to engage with neighbouring countries and regional coordination centres such as the Pacific Islands FFA in Honiara and the Pacific Transnational Crime Coordination Centre in Samoa.¹⁶

Humanitarian assistance and disaster relief

- 2.18 Humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) is a key component of Australia's Pacific Step-up. Pacific Island states have faced and survived natural disasters and humanitarian crises for centuries and are resilient, but they have also relied on Australia and New Zealand as the first-responders to Pacific emergencies. It is therefore incumbent upon Australia to continually improve its HADR capabilities and commitment to its Pacific partners as part of the Pacific Step-up.
- 2.19 In addition to increased emphasis on coordinated HADR operations as part of the Step-up, Australia is also investing in HADR infrastructure:
- Defence is redeveloping Fiji's Blackrock Peacekeeping and Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief Camp, which will produce a state-of-the-art peacekeeping operations facility and HADR capability for the Pacific

13 Department of Defence, *Submission 10*, p.6.

14 Department of Defence, *Submission 10*, p.6.

15 Department of Defence, *Submission 10*, p.6.

16 Department of Defence, *Submission 10*, p.6.

region. It will also build stronger interoperability between the ADF and Republic of Fiji Military Forces.¹⁷

- 2.20 Australian HADR support to the Pacific, its criticality to the future of the Pacific Step-up, and associated recommendations are expanded upon in Chapter four.
- 2.21 Australia maintains defence relationships with all Pacific nations that retain standing militaries. The DCP, the Pacific Patrol Boat Scheme, and support to the policing of illegal fishing and transnational crime links Australia's defence and security agencies with every Pacific nation.¹⁸ Of the 14 independent Island members of the Pacific Islands Forum, only four have any indigenous defence capacity. PNG, Fiji and Tonga have formal military establishments. Vanuatu's police force maintains a paramilitary unit which has some security functions.¹⁹
- 2.22 The Pacific Step-up represents a strong commitment across multiple Australian Government agencies and is coordinated through the Office of the Pacific (OTP) in the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT). Defence's efforts are thus synchronised with whole-of-government efforts and are delivered under the guidance of, and in cooperation with, the OTP.
- 2.23 Defence's contribution to Pacific Step-up includes:
- investing in significant infrastructure projects;
 - increasing the ADF's regional presence; and
 - deepening people to people links.

The needs, requests and feedback of Pacific Island states

- 2.24 The Pacific Islands Forum is the region's premier political and economic policy organisation. Founded in 1971, it comprises 18 members: Australia, Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, French Polynesia, Kiribati, Nauru, New Caledonia, New Zealand, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Republic of Marshall Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu.²⁰
- 2.25 The needs and vision of the Pacific Island nations have been articulated in regional forums and agreements (including Australian participation). This includes the Boe Declaration on Regional Security.

17 Department of Defence, *Submission 10*, p.7.

18 Lowy Institute, *Submission 21*, p.1.

19 Professor Richard Herr OAM, *Submission 20*, p.2.

20 [The Pacific Islands Forum website](#), accessed 15 Feb 21.

The Boe Declaration

- 2.26 On the 5th of September 2018 in Nauru, the Pacific Islands Forum, including Australia, adopted the Boe Declaration on Regional Security. The Boe Declaration recognises an expanded concept of security, including human, cyber and environmental security, and frames regional responses to emerging security issues.²¹
- 2.27 The Boe Declaration represents the contemporary and collective will of the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) states and is as an important input to Defence and Government policy. The Boe Declaration emphasises, in part, the importance of the following:²²
- the recognition of climate change as the region's 'single greatest threat'
 - the 'sovereign right of every Member to conduct its national affairs free of external interference and coercion'
 - the rules-based global order
 - that 'security' is a broad issue which includes climate change, cybersecurity, transnational crime, humanitarian relief and environmental/resource security
- 2.28 These terms of the Boe Declaration suggest that defence engagement initiatives will continue to benefit from being considerate of PIF states' emphasis on maintaining sovereignty and control of their own destinies. As such, Defence policy and activity in the region should continue to be formulated and communicated so as to convey Australia's interests as being based on equal-footed partnership with Pacific Island nations and to avoid any misperception of Australian dominance, paternalism or neo-colonialism in the region.
- 2.29 This approach is echoed by the New Zealand Minister for Defence who submits that 'Partnership and people-to-people ties have long been the hallmark of the New Zealand Defence approach'.²³ The New Zealand submission states that 'Core to our concept of partnership is the assurance that our engagement will be sustainable, focused on Pacific priorities, and underpinned by respect for Pacific countries' sovereignty.'²⁴
- 2.30 The Committee heard that New Zealand's Advancing Pacific Partnerships 2019 strategy document emphasises people-to-people links and respect for Pacific Island states' sovereignty as being at the core of the New Zealand approach. The document itself demonstrates this commitment by utilising

21 [Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Boe Declaration of regional Security](#), accessed 15 Feb 21.

22 [The Boe Declaration, 2018](#), accessed 15 Feb 21.

23 Government of New Zealand, Submission 16, p.2.

24 Government of New Zealand, *Submission 16*, p.6.

Pacific Islands' native languages to describe components of the policy, for example 'Vaka Tahī' (One Boat), Maori proverb 'He tangata, he tangata, he tangata' (the people, the people, the people) and 'Talanao' (Fijian process of inclusive, participatory and transparent dialogue).²⁵ The use of native languages and references to Pacific cultural ideals in the New Zealand Government's policy documents represents a symbolic yet powerful commitment to partnership and respect for sovereignty.

2.31 In addressing these aspects the Committee heard that the Department of Defence:

...has established a new, dedicated ADF Pacific Support Team. The Pacific Support Team is engaging with Pacific partners to understand their needs and deliver tailored packages that seek to strengthen capacity, resilience and interoperability in areas such as engineering, medical services, communications, logistics, maritime and planning. To ensure that the Pacific Support Team remains responsive and relevant to the needs of the Pacific, it will continue to evolve as it carries out activities with partner nations.

Defence continues to evolve its understanding of security cooperation within the Pacific, embracing a wider scope for security cooperation in line with the priorities of our Pacific partners and the intent of the Boe Declaration on Regional Security. Defence listens to the totality of our Pacific partners' security concerns to cooperate in non-traditional areas of security and respond to these requests in close coordination with Australian whole-of-government.²⁶

2.32 In addition to ongoing bilateral engagement, Defence contributes to Australia's participation in the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF). The annual PIF leaders meeting is an opportunity to work with our Pacific partners on practical solutions that deliver on the region's priorities.²⁷

2.33 Australia also participates on an annual basis in numerous security-related international and regional meetings at Defence Chief, Ministerial and Prime-ministerial levels including the South Pacific Defence Ministers' Meeting, Shangri-La Dialogue, Pacific Chiefs of Defence, and Joint Heads of Pacific Security.²⁸ These engagements reiterate Australian and Australian Defence Force support for challenges faced by our Pacific

25 Government of New Zealand, *Submission 16*, p.6.

26 Department of Defence, *Submission 10*, p.9.

27 Department of Defence, *Submission 10*, p.10.

28 Department of Defence, *Submission 10*, p.12.

partners and identify how best to collaborate and coordinate our efforts with other nations.

- 2.34 The DCP, PMSP, other maritime assistance and HADR have involved significant coordination with Pacific Island states and other partners in the region, particularly under the France, Australia, New Zealand (FRANZ) Agreement and the Quadrilateral Defence Coordination Group (DCG).²⁹ Given the established history between FRANZ and the DCG with numerous Pacific Island nations, expansion of these organisations to include formal Pacific Islander defence and/or Government representation would further entrench important people-to-people and cultural ties which are critical aspects of Pacific Island states' approach to diplomacy and international relations.

Committee Comment

- 2.35 The Committee acknowledges the significant depth and breadth of the Australian Government and the Department of Defence's ongoing bilateral and multilateral relationships, numerous security-related dialogues, senior leadership engagements, attaché networks, personnel exchanges, and joint participation in operations and training in the Pacific.
- 2.36 The Committee also recognises the significant positive impacts that the Defence Cooperation Program, the Pacific Maritime Security Program and ongoing Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief efforts have had and continue to have. It also recognises that enhancement and expansion of these existing programs would likely make very significant positive contributions to the Pacific Step-up.
- 2.37 The Committee understands PIF members' concerns regarding climate change, the rules-based global order, security and Pacific states' sovereign right to conduct their national affairs free of external interference and coercion. The Pacific Step-up should continue to be very sensitive to these priorities moving forward.

29 Associate Professor Joanne Wallis, *Submission 2*, p.9.

