



PARLIAMENT
OF AUSTRALIA

Australian Parliamentary Delegation

Tuvalu and Fiji
2–5 December 2024

REPORT | March 2025



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Members of the Delegation

Leader of the Delegation

- President of the Senate, the Hon Sue Lines, Senator for Western Australia

Delegates

- Hon Karen Andrews MP, Member for McPherson, Queensland
- Senator Penny Allman-Payne, Senator for Queensland
- Senator Tony Sheldon, Senator for New South Wales

Officials

- Ms Nyat Mulugeta, Adviser to the President of the Senate
- Ms Sofia Wilson, Adviser to the President of the Senate
- Mr Dinko Colak, IPRO, Delegation Secretary

Introduction

An Australian Parliamentary delegation, led by the President of the Senate, the Hon Sue Lines, visited Tuvalu (2-3 December) and Fiji (3-5 December 2024), meeting with parliamentary and government leaders as well as representatives of civil society and social enterprises.

The cross-party visit to Tuvalu built on the increased engagement following the signing of the Australia-Tuvalu Falepili Union in November 2023 and demonstrated Australia's enduring commitment to Tuvalu and both countries' shared vision for partnership.

The inclusion of Fiji reflected the practical cooperation and strategic partnership on both government and people-to-people levels. This relationship is underpinned by the renewed and elevated Fiji-Australia Vuvale Partnership (signed in October 2023), which focuses on mutual efforts towards building and maintaining a peaceful, prosperous and resilient Pacific region.

Acknowledgements

In preparation for the visit, the delegation received briefings from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and wishes to thank the officials involved.

The delegation also wishes to thank the staff of the International and Parliamentary Relations Office for their assistance with developing and coordinating the delegation arrangements.

In Tuvalu, the delegation was accompanied by Mr Brenton Garlic, Australian High Commissioner, and Mr William Paparo, Deputy High Commissioner. In Fiji, the delegation was accompanied by Mr Ewen McDonald, Australian High Commissioner, and Ms Claire McNamara, Deputy High Commissioner. The delegation wishes to thank officials in both countries for the time they took, and the efforts invested to ensure the delegates were well-supported during the official program.

Finally, the delegation would like to thank the representatives of the institutions and organisations who received the delegation during its visit and express gratitude for giving time to share their knowledge and friendship.

President of the Senate, the Hon Sue Lines
Senator for Western Australia

Report of activities

The visit to Tuvalu and Fiji was a part of a Pacific consultation tour, providing targeted engagement with leaders and grassroots organisations to inform the delegation about the parliamentary strengthening priorities in the Pacific. It also focused on issues the island countries' communities are facing in areas of gender equality and women empowerment, women's leadership and political participation, access to education, healthcare and skills development.

This report details the delegation's activities and meetings. A full delegation program is included at the end of the report.

Tuvalu

Briefing by officials from Australian High Commission in Funafuti

The delegation received a briefing over lunch on Australia-Tuvalu relations from the High Commissioner Mr Brent Garlic and Deputy High Commissioner Mr Wiliam Paparo.

Meeting with Sir Iakoba Taeia Italeli, Speaker of the Parliament of Tuvalu

The delegation met with Sir Iakoba Taeia Italeli, Speaker of the Parliament of Tuvalu. The Speaker briefed the delegation on the structure and history of the Tuvalu Parliament.¹ Discussion covered parliamentary procedure and the passage of bills through the chamber, the post-election processes for the formation of government in Tuvalu, and the Tuvalu Parliament's current work on establishing standing committees. The President presented a Guest of Parliament invitation to the Speaker inviting him to lead a delegation to visit Australia and reiterated that she looked forward to receiving the delegation when they visited.

¹ There are no organised political parties and no formal demarcation between government and opposition members. MP's support depends on personal alignment towards a particular policy.



Delegation members with the Speaker of the Parliament of Tuvalu. The Parliament currently sits in a multi-purpose use building, with a model of a traditional village in the centre of the chamber.

Meeting with Sir Tofiga Vaievalu Falani, Governor-General of Tuvalu

At the courtesy call on the Governor-General, the delegation discussed their visit in detail and their appreciation of the opportunity to gain first-hand experience of the practical implementation of the Falepili Union treaty. The meeting also included a discussion on the Australian government support to Tuvalu,² and the importance of the parliamentary work in constituencies. The President reiterated Australia's commitment to the Pacific family and support for Tuvalu across Parliament.



President Lines and delegation at the meeting with the Governor-General of Tuvalu.

² The Governor-General expressed his gratitude to Australia for the recent donation of a Guardian-class patrol boat.

Visit to Tuvalu Coastal Adaptation Project (TCAP II) site and Island tour to causeway

The delegation visited the UNDP-managed site in Funafuti where the second phase of the land reclamation project started in September 2024. Co-funded by Australia and New Zealand, the work is being undertaken by Australian company Hall Contracting. The project aims to protect 800 metres of vulnerable shoreline of the capital and reclaim 7.8 hectares of new, flood-free raised land.³ Construction equipment has been brought from Australia and TAFE Queensland is providing training for heavy machinery operators.

The reclaimed land will be given to the government of Tuvalu and will provide space for housing and other essential public services.



Delegation receiving a briefing at the TCAP II site.

³ With a land area of around 26 square kilometres, spread over 750,000 square kilometres of ocean territory, much of Tuvalu is less than one metre above spring tide levels, with no territory higher than 6 metres above sea level. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (the UN body assessing the science related to climate change) projects that the global mean sea level is expected to rise by around 30cm by 2050 and by 75cm by the year 2100.

UNDP representatives accompanied the delegation on a tour to the Funafuti atoll causeway. The islet where main settlements are situated⁴, has a width of around 400 metres at its greatest and around 20 metres at its narrowest and demonstrates the effects of coastal erosion and the threat that sea-level rise poses to Tuvalu⁵.



The above photo highlights the narrow width of Tuvalu with the lagoon on the left and the ocean to the right.

Visit to Guardian-class patrol boat *Te Mataili III* and Tuvalu Family Health Association

The delegation visited the Guardian-class Patrol Boat (GCPB) *Te Mataili III*. The vessel was designed and built in Australia and donated to Tuvalu in October 2024 through the Australian Defence Force's Pacific Maritime Security Program. The patrol boat will be used for search and rescue regional operations, long-distance emergencies and evacuations (to outer islands), fisheries protection and patrolling Tuvalu's large exclusive economic zone.

⁴ The entire Funafuti atoll is designated the capital of Tuvalu, with Fongafale islet being the largest of around thirty narrow islets of the atoll. Four villages on Fongafale are host to around 60% of the Tuvalu's population of 12,000.

⁵ When Hurricane Bebe hit Funafuti in October 1972, the storm surge swept across the atoll destroying most of the structures in the capital.



Presentation on the bridge by the GCPB's commanding officer.



Visit to the Tuvalu Family Health Association

The delegation received a briefing on Australian-funded health programs during the visit to the Tuvalu Family Health Association (TuFHA). The Association provides sexual and reproductive health clinical services through a permanent clinic in Funafuti.



Delegation receiving a briefing during the visit to the Tuvalu Family Health Association.



President and the delegation with staff at the TuFHA clinic.

The Program leader briefed the President and delegation on the Association's work involving vulnerable and underserved communities through the outer islands outreach program, monthly mobile clinics and other activities.

Reception hosted by the Australian High Commission

The High Commissioner hosted a reception for the President and the delegation with representatives from Tuvalu parliament, civil society and community leaders. President Lines and Speaker Italeli addressed the gathering, acknowledging the cordial relations between legislatures and Australia's support for capability-building parliamentary activities.

Meeting with the Hon Feleti Teo, Prime Minister of Tuvalu

The delegation met with the Hon Feleti Teo, Prime Minister of Tuvalu. The meeting discussed a number of activities being undertaken between Tuvalu and Australia following the Falepili Union entering into force in August 2024, with both expressing that it was a great privilege to witness the strength and commitment to the Union and that both parties were looking forward to its practical implications.

The Prime Minister singled out climate change as having the greatest impact on Tuvalu, with sea-level rise its most severe manifestation.⁶

Discussion covered international support for the development of international law on climate change to recognise permanency of maritime boundaries and future statehood, the undersea data cable and legislation needed to set rules and safeguards, Australia's commitments towards cooperation on cyber security, and current gender imbalances in the Tuvalu parliament.⁷

Visit to Nauti Primary School and Aofiaga Centre

The delegation visited Nauti Primary School, an inclusive education centre supported by the Tuvalu-Australia Partnership for Quality Education (TAPQE). Representatives from the Tuvalu Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MEYS) and the TAPQE team gave a presentation on program goals, how it improves literacy and numeracy by addressing gaps identified in student learning outcomes, and fosters a supportive learning environment for all students, including those with disabilities.

⁶ Prime Minister Teo spoke at the opening session of the Sea-Level Rise High-Level Meeting during UNGA in New York on 25 September 2024, noting it was the first global event that placed sea-level rise at the top of the international agenda, decoupling it from the broader climate change issue.

⁷ Only three women have been elected to Tuvalu's Parliament since independence with no women in the current parliament.



President Lines and Senator Sheldon reading with students at Nauti Primary school.

Following the presentation, the delegation spoke with the teaching staff who provided practical insights on the program and how it incorporates inclusive education and climate change resilience. The President provided Australian children's books to the students, with *Magic Possum* and *If I Had a Kangaroo* attracting much interest.



President Lines and delegation with students, MEYS and TAPQE teams at Nauti Primary School.

The Hon Mrs Karen Andrews MP and Senator Penny Allman-Payne with one of the teachers.



Visit to 'Fatu' Lei (Tuvalu Women for Change) – Women and Girls Resource Centre

The delegation visited 'Tuvalu Women for Change', a gender-focused civil society organisation based in Funafuti. The centre was established in 2019 with funding from the Australian Government.⁸



President Lines and delegation in discussion with the Fatu Lei team.

Ms Filiga Taukiei Nelu, Secretary-General of Fatu Lei, joined via a video link, and discussion covered the range of topics, including:

- the thematic areas of focus (traditional values and responsibilities; domestic issues and challenges (domestic violence), economic empowerment; women and girls in ICT; spiritual beliefs (Christianity); traditional knowledge (arts and crafts as means of earning revenue);
- Women exercising leadership;
- Courses and mentoring sessions at the community level (e.g., on financial literacy);
- Gender responsive government⁹ and how, given the lack of women parliamentarians, women in the leadership roles in Tuvalu's banking, telecom, and broadcasting sectors, help ensure women's voices are heard in public discourse;
- Australia's Pacific Women Lead Program; and

Australia Pacific Training Coalition (APTC).

⁸ Australia is the primary funder of gender equality programs in Tuvalu and provided the initial grant of \$50,000 to Fatu Lei. The Australian High Commission Gender Equality Plan for Tuvalu includes working with the Development Bank of Tuvalu to increase access to finance for women and youth entrepreneurs and the civil society organisations.

⁹ The gender portfolio in Tuvalu is under the Office of the Prime Minister

Visit to the Republic of Fiji

Briefing by officials from Australian High Commission in Suva

The delegation received a briefing on Australia's political, security, economic and development engagement with Fiji and an overview of a broader regional Pacific agenda from the High Commissioner Mr Ewen McDonald and Deputy High Commissioner Ms Clair McNamara.

Official Reception at the Australian High Commission

Australia's High Commissioner hosted a reception for the delegation at the High Commissioner's residence. The event was attended by representatives from the Fijian Government, members of parliament, senior government officials, select members of the Diplomatic Corps and business community. During the reception, President Lines met with the Hon Sitiveni Rabuka, Prime Minister of Fiji.



President Lines and Prime Minister Rabuka



Delegation with the Prime Minister of Fiji

Meeting with Ratu Villiame Seruvakula, Chair of the Great Council of Chiefs

The delegation had a working breakfast with Ratu Viliame Seruvakula, Chair of the Great Council of Chiefs (GCC) and Mr Pita Tagicakirewa, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of iTaukei (Indigenous Fijian) Affairs. Mr Seruvakula provided a briefing on the work of the GCC, a Fijian constitutional body restored in May 2023.¹⁰

¹⁰ The Great Council of Chiefs was established in 1876 during the British colonial rule as an advisory body representing indigenous Fijians. It functioned as an electoral college following Fiji's independence with powers to elect the president and vice-president of Fiji and to choose 14 of the 32 members of the Senate. Commodore Frank Bainimarama suspended the GCC in 2007 after the 2006 military coup and the Council was formally abolished in 2012.



President Lines and delegation with Mr Seruvakula and Mr Tagicakerava

Discussion covered current issues affecting indigenous communities, the role of the GCC, finding ways for communities to monetise the resources in their provinces, women's empowerment and socially responsible development as a way to curb excessive migration from villages to urban centres.

Meeting with the Hon Filimone Jitoko, Speaker of Fijian Parliament

The President congratulated the Speaker on his recent appointment and they discussed the role of a presiding officer in ensuring effective parliamentary proceedings. Other topics covered included the Fiji-Australia Vuvale Partnership, parliamentary engagement with both the Inter-Parliamentary Union and Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, women's representation in parliaments, the role of standing committees and the UNDP Support Program for the Fiji Parliament¹¹.

¹¹ The UNDP-led Fiji Parliament Support Program provides technical assistance, capacity development and infrastructure to the Fiji Parliament, its staff and members of parliament to support implementation of legislative, oversight and representative roles.



President Lines meeting with Speaker Jitoko

Visit to Greenhouse Small and Medium Enterprise ‘Marketplace’

The delegation visited Greenhouse Coworking (GCO), Fiji’s first full-service virtual and in-person coworking community. The founder of Greenhouse Studio, Ms Ronna Sekiguchi gave a tour of the facility which was launched in 2021 with the support of the Australian Government. GCO provides a platform for supporting business development planning, market access and addressing barriers to growth and participation. Ms Kelera Cavuilati, Country Manager, Market Development Facility (MDF) and Mr Navi Tuivuniwai, Country Manager, PHAMA Plus, briefed on the role of government funded programs in supporting private sector development, trade facilitation and agriculture development in Fiji.



President Lines and delegation at Greenhouse Marketplace

Following the presentation, the delegation had an opportunity to meet stallholders who shared their personal insights into how Australia’s development assistance has supported their businesses.

Lunch with Female Government Leaders

The delegation attended a working lunch with three women parliamentarians and two Permanent Secretaries¹². Discussion covered measures to promote women's voices in parliament, ending violence against women and girls, and promoting women's participation in the labour force¹³.



President Lines, delegation and High Commissioner McDonald with Fijian women leaders

¹² Hon. Lynda Tabuya, Minister for Women, Children and Social Protection, Hon. Lenora Qereqeretabua, Assistant Minister for Foreign Affairs, Hon. Sashi Kiran, Assistant Minister for Women, Children and Social Protection, Ms Eseta Nadakuitavuki, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Women, Children and Social Protection, and Ms Selina Kuruleca, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Justice.

¹³ Five female parliamentarians hold seats in the current Fijian parliament of 55 members (down from 10 women parliamentarians in the previous parliament). Fiji is the first Pacific Island country to adopt an action plan to address the issue of gender-based violence and it remains a critical concern. The Ministry of Women, Children and Social Protection promotes and guides efforts to advance the economic empowerment of women to address the significant disparity that persists between women's and men's paid labour force participation (39.1% and 76.8% respectively).

Afternoon tea with Australian High Commission staff and families

The delegation had the pleasure of meeting Australian High Commission staff at an afternoon tea. President Lines thanked and acknowledged the dedication and contribution of all staff and their families for their work promoting Australia's interest in Fiji and the Pacific region.

Visit to the National Council of Persons with Disabilities Complex



Delegation with the staff and patrons of NCPD Complex

The delegation visited the National Council of Persons with Disabilities (NCPD) Complex. NCPD was refurbished with Australian Government support and opened on 29 November 2024. Mr Lemeki Cagialau, Executive Director of NCPD and representatives from the Fiji Disabled Persons Federation provided a briefing on services provided by the complex. The delegation then visited a sensory classroom for children with autism, training room for elderly and disability carers, a computer lab and a new shared storage facility.

Visit to the Maritime Essential Services Centre

The delegation visited the Australian Government funded Maritime Essential Services Centre (MESC)¹⁴ construction site. The Centre is scheduled for completion and handover to the Fiji Government in the first half of 2025. The MESC will be a multipurpose facility housing the headquarters of the Fijian Navy, the Rescue Coordination Centre, Suva Coastal Radio Station and Fiji Hydrographic Office.¹⁵ The centralisation of these services will strengthen maritime security cooperation between Australia and Fiji and improve Fijian Government interagency collaboration through information sharing, coordination of maritime planning, conduct of training, and humanitarian and disaster relief operations.



Delegation with Australian Defence Force personnel and contractors at the MESC construction site.

¹⁴ Australia funded the MESC project with \$83 million as part of the Australia-Fiji Vuvale partnership.

¹⁵ It will support command and control of Fiji's naval vessels including the Guardian-class Patrol Boat donated by Australia under Pacific Maritime Security Program.

Dinner with Australia Awards Alumni

The delegation joined eight Fijian Australia Awards Alumni for dinner. During the dinner, alumni representatives shared their perspectives on climate and environmental issues in Fiji and how they are using the skills gained through their education in Australia to address these issues.

Markets for Change - Tour of Nausori Market

The delegation visited the Nausori Municipal Markets¹⁶ and met with vendor representatives. The visit included a tour of the Nausori Accommodation Centre¹⁷ to learn about the facility, a joint Fijian – Australian initiative, opened in 2022 to provide secure accommodation to vendors who travel from remote locations to sell products at the markets.¹⁸



President Lines and delegation at the Nausori Accommodation Centre

¹⁶ Australia provided funding, through the UN Women's Markets for Change Project, to support marketplaces in rural and urban areas of Fiji, Solomon Islands, Samoa and Vanuatu to be safe, inclusive and non-discriminatory. The Nausori Market is an example of that work. Markets for Change is principally funded by Australia's Pacific Women Lead, with contribution from New Zealand, Canada and UN Women.

¹⁷ DFAT partnered with Fiji's Ministry of Housing and Local Government to fund and construct the Accommodation Centre in Nausori Market, which was opened by the Australian Governor-General David Hurley in 2022.

¹⁸ Women make up most market vendors and provision of secure accommodation enables those who travelled from rural areas to sell their produce at the market without having to sleep on the floor of their market tables.

Tour of the Blackrock Peacekeeping and Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief Camp

The delegation visited the Blackrock Peacekeeping and Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) Camp outside Nadi. The redevelopment of the Camp was jointly funded by Australia and Fiji for the Republic of Fiji Military Forces. The Camp was officially opened in March 2022. The camp provides a training and regional response hub for natural and man-made disasters. It also hosts pre-deployment training of Fijian peacekeepers and joint exercises for the UN missions.¹⁹



President Lines and delegation at the Blackrock Peacekeeping and HADR Camp

¹⁹ Fiji is a consistent contributor to UN peacekeeping operations with more than 300 peacekeepers sent on missions every year, which, per capita, ranks Fiji amongst the highest contributors globally.

Delegation Program

Monday 2 December: Funafuti, Tuvalu

Briefing with the High Commissioner and lunch with the team at High Commission
Meeting with Sir Iakoba Taeia Italeli, Speaker of the Parliament
Meeting with Sir Tofiga Vaevalu Falani, Governor General of Tuvalu
Tuvalu Coastal Adaptation Project briefing at TCAP II site
Island tour to causeway
Visit to Guardian-class Patrol Boat <i>Te Mataili III</i> .
Visit to Tuvalu Family Health Association
Reception with parliamentarians, civil society, and other community leaders

Tuesday 3 December: Funafuti, Tuvalu (morning)

Meeting with the Hon Feleti Teo, Prime Minister of Tuvalu
Visit to Nauti Primary School and Aofiaga Centre with TAPQE team
Visit to Fatu Lei (Tuvalu Women for Change) Women and Girl's Resource Centre
Short stop at the High Commission for refreshment
Travel to Suva, Fiji

Tuesday 3 December: Suva, Fiji (afternoon)

Briefing with Australia's High Commissioner
Reception at the residence of the Australian High Commissioner to Fiji

Wednesday 4 December: Suva, Fiji

Breakfast with Ratu Viliame Seravakula, Chair of the Great Council of Chiefs

Observe Parliamentary proceedings
Meeting with the Hon Filimone Jitoko, Speaker of Parliament
Morning tea with the Parliamentarians
Visit to Greenhouse Marketplace
Lunch with Women Government Leaders
Afternoon tea with Australian High Commission staff
Tour and briefing of the National Council of Persons with Disability Complex
Visit to Maritime Essential Service Centre
Dinner with Awards Alumni in Environment, Climate, Humanitarian sector

Thursday 5 December: Suva, Nadi, Fiji and depart for Australia

Visit to the Markets for Change Nausori Market and Accommodation Centre
Travel to Nadi
Tour of the Blackrock Camp
Depart Nadi for Australia