



## **Australian Government**

Australian Government response to the  
Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs,  
Defence and Trade report:

Inquiry into the human rights of women and girls  
in the Pacific

[February 2023]

## Introduction

The Australian Government thanks the Parliamentary Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade (the Committee) for its inquiry into the human rights of women and girls in the Pacific and its final report, tabled on 29 November 2021. The Government welcomes the report and thanks those who participated in the public hearing on 18 June 2021 and contributed through written submissions.

The whole-of-government response to the Committee's recommendations has been coordinated by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), in consultation with the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (PMC), Attorney General's Department (AGD), Australian Federal Police (AFP), Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR), Department of Health (DoH), Department of Education (DoE), Department of Home Affairs (Home Affairs), National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA), Australian Border Force (ABF) and Department of Defence (DoD). The Committee's recommendations on disaster risk reduction, education, gender equality treaties and legislation, transparency of results and financing, public sector and local organisation capacity building are welcomed, and will help strengthen our work in the region.

The departments referred to above will all have a role in taking forward the recommendations, and the key vehicle for targeted support to gender equality in the region will be the *Pacific Women Lead* (PWL) program funded under Australia's official development assistance program and administered by DFAT. PWL (\$170 million, 2021-26) is being delivered through a hybrid model that includes partnerships with the Pacific Community (SPC) and women's civil society organisations. SPC, as the principal scientific and technical regional development organisation owned by Pacific members, is being supported to deliver against regional gender equality frameworks and commitments. SPC is strengthening efforts to embed gender approaches across its operations. The Government is committed to a twin-track approach, combining specific gender equality investments with broader efforts to integrate (or 'mainstream') gender equality throughout all development and humanitarian activities, across all sectors.

The Government has announced that it will ensure at least eighty per cent of Australia's aid investments address gender issues and tackle violence against women, which serves as a target for work on gender equality. The Government is committed to pursuing gender equality outcomes in partnership with the Pacific.

## Response to the recommendations

### Recommendation 1

*The Committee recommends that all support provided by the Australian Government to any organisation or bodies undertaking disaster management planning and response work include women representatives.*

#### Response:

The Government accepts this recommendation in principle.

The Australian Government responds to requests from countries in the Pacific when they experience a disaster that stretches their own capacity to respond. The Government is committed to recognising, respecting and strengthening leadership and decision-making by national actors undertaking disaster management planning and response, in order to better address the needs of affected populations. Through our actions we reinforce the fact that affected governments in the Pacific lead the response effort. Australia's response thus supports the country's own governance structure and mechanisms, including for example national disaster management offices and ministries of health, justice, and education. Australia recognises women's leadership is essential to achieving better outcomes for our region and supports programs which promote gender equality in humanitarian action.

The Government's objective is to integrate gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls and marginalised people across its humanitarian preparedness, response and recovery and disaster risk reduction efforts. This includes supporting local women's and disabled people's organisations to support their roles as first responders.

Australia's overseas disaster response mechanisms include DFAT's Crisis Response Team (CRT), Australian Medical Assistance Teams (AUSMAT), Disaster Assistance Response Teams (DART) and power line restoration team (PowerOn). The Government's objective is to ensure that teams are inclusive and include women representatives.

AUSMAT has a significant number of women in leadership positions. This supports meaningful and culturally sensitive engagement with female representatives within partner governments' health systems, including ministries, at both senior and junior levels.

In 2021 and 2022, there were women representatives on all AUSMAT deployments, except two, which were single person deployments. Women members of AUSMAT comprised approximately 43 per cent of team members deployed to Solomon Islands in January 2022, 80 per cent deployed to Kiribati in January 2022 and 40 per cent deployed to Vanuatu in March 2022.

DART and PowerOn are continually increasing their female membership, ensuring the engagement with women in communities is effective. This proactive approach has led to increasing partner-to-partner ties in the Pacific and more effective response outcomes.

The Crisis Response Team (CRT) consists of DFAT personnel who are trained for rapid deployment to support Australia's whole-of-government response to an overseas crisis. As at July 2022, around 44 per cent of CRT members were women. DFAT has maintained an average 40 per cent proportion of women across all deployments in Financial Year

2021-22 and is working with DFAT's Humanitarian Gender Advisor to ensure CRT operations are appropriately gender sensitive.

The National Emergency Management Agency is committed to working with Government partners to ensure women are represented in all disaster management planning and response work undertaken by the Government.

The Department of Defence (DoD) is prioritising the United Nations Women, Peace and Security agenda and recognises that women make an indispensable contribution to conflict prevention, conflict resolution, peace and confidence building, and humanitarian and disaster response. Moreover, women provide an invaluable perspective in every aspect of the planning and conduct of military operations – across the spectrum of military activity.

The Australian Defence Force (ADF) aims to include Gender Advisors or other specialist gender personnel (such as Gender Focal Points) in all operations, exercises and planning activities, including humanitarian and disaster response. For example, in March 2022 Defence deployed a Gender Advisor on a Royal Australian Navy vessel as part of its disaster response to assist the Government of Tonga following the underwater volcanic eruption and tsunami. ADF Gender Advisors ensure that a gender perspective, (taking into account the different effects that conflict and disaster can have on men, women, boys and girls), is considered in all phases of military operations

## **Recommendation 2**

*To ensure that an understanding of women's needs in local areas are taken into account, the Committee recommends that the Australian Government works with Pacific governments to build the capacity of local organisations in the Pacific to respond to natural disasters and ensure Pacific women are included in the delivery and evaluations of programs.*

### **Response:**

The Government accepts this recommendation.

The Australian Humanitarian Partnership (AHP) is a partnership between the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and Australian non-government organisations (NGOs). The AHP implements the Disaster READY Program which aims to build the capacity of local organisations across the region to manage disasters more effectively.

Activities include supporting women's representation on community, sub-national and national disaster committees; revising humanitarian operating procedures to ensure they are responsive to the needs of women; and training community members, local organisations, and government employees to address the barriers that prevent the rights and needs of women being met.

Building on the successes of Phase I (2017-22) DFAT will seek to further strengthen the inclusion of women in the delivery and evaluation of the AHP's disaster preparedness programs. The monitoring, evaluation and learning approach in Disaster READY Phase II (2022-27) will enable communities and affected populations, particularly women and

people with a disability, to engage in and make decisions that improve implementation directly at the local level, and to adapt responses for continuous improvement. Additional resources will also be provided to support the participation of women's organisations in Disaster READY governance bodies.

The National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA), while not the lead for offshore capacity building, is committed to working with Government agencies to support Pacific government and local organisations in the Pacific to respond to disasters. NEMA supports the recommendation to ensure that women representatives have an active role in the delivery and evaluation of such programs. Throughout 2021 and 2022, AUSMAT deployments to the Pacific have been focused on capacity building to support our regional partners' response to COVID-19, including in allied health, logistics and supply chains and advisory services to National Coordination Centres.

The Department of Defence (DoD) is working with Fiji, Papua New Guinea and Tonga as part of the South Pacific Defence Ministers' Meeting to develop a regional Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) Framework that applies a gender lens. The Regional HADR Framework will complement the work of the Pacific Islands Forum and mainstream the Women, Peace and Security agenda.

DoD offers support to Pacific militaries to achieve the mutual goal of meaningful participation of women and girls in conflict prevention, peace processes and humanitarian and disaster response activities. For example, DoD offers positions on its Gender Advisor and Gender Focal Point training courses to participants from Pacific countries. These training courses are designed to support participants to develop the skills and the necessary knowledge to apply a gender perspective across a range of military activities, including humanitarian crises and disasters. Another example is the ADF's operation to deliver vaccines to Tonga's outer islands in September and October 2021. This marked the first time women served at sea in an operational deployment of the Tongan Navy. The Blackrock Peacekeeping and Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief Camp (Blackrock Camp) redevelopment's Fijian and Australian project team included several women to deliver world-class peacekeeping and operational training infrastructure.

Australia is supporting the Women's Resilience to Disasters (WRD) Program in Fiji, Kiribati and Vanuatu, under the *Pacific Women Lead* program. WRD is a \$13.5 million (2021-2026), four-year partnership with UN Women, that builds on a Solomon Islands pilot, to empower women in Fiji, Kiribati and Vanuatu to lead Pacific solutions to disaster prevention, preparedness and recovery. The goal is to make the lives and livelihoods of women and girls resilient to disasters and hazards, contributing to sustainable, secure, and thriving communities. The online WRD Knowledge Hub<sup>1</sup>, launched in February 2022, provides a global resource on gender-responsive disaster risk reduction.

Australia also supports the Women's International Network on Disaster Risk Reduction (WIN DRR), in partnership with the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR). This is a professional network to support women working in disaster risk reduction (DRR) to enhance their role in decision making and empower them to attain leadership. The annual WIN DRR Leadership Awards recognise women's achievements in

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<sup>1</sup> Women's Resilience to Disasters Knowledge Hub: <https://wrld.unwomen.org/>

DRR across the Asia-Pacific region. The awards presented at the Australian-hosted Asia-Pacific Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction (APMCDRR) in September 2022, provide an opportunity to recognise and celebrate excellence, encouraging best practice.

Australia has partnered with UNDRR to host the APMCDRR in September 2022. The APMCDRR is the main regional meeting in Asia-Pacific for promoting coordination and cooperation on Disaster Risk Reduction and the implementation of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction. It brings together UN Member States, intergovernmental organisations, international and national organisations and stakeholder groups, to accelerate progress on disaster risk reduction.

With up to 3,000 delegates from more than 40 countries, the APMCDRR is one of the most important gatherings in the Asia-Pacific to progress disaster risk reduction efforts. As the first regional meeting since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the APMCDRR has been organised under the theme: From Crisis to Resilience: Transforming the Asia-Pacific Region's future through disaster risk reduction.

Australia supports the Shifting the Power Coalition empowering diverse young women in Fiji to drive change from the bottom up, building their individual and collective power to influence policy and decision making at all levels, including on risk reduction and disaster response. This program proactively addresses the exclusion of those living with a disability, particularly where it intersects with other forms of discrimination based on gender, ethnicity, age, and other status factors.

In times of crisis, people with disabilities are among the most marginalised and face particular barriers in accessing life-saving relief and recovery support. Australia recognises people with disabilities and their representative organisations have significant untapped capacity and should have full and equal involvement in decision-making concerning their lives, including in crisis preparedness and response. Australia is exploring options to establish a regional coordination mechanism to improve support for disability inclusion in the Pacific in development and humanitarian action.

Australia also encourages better practice and improved gender and protection outcomes through greater participation of affected people in decision making and access to accountability mechanisms, such as complaints mechanisms and perception surveys.

### **Recommendation 3**

*The Committee recommends that the Australian Government works with Pacific governments to provide support for projects mapping the vulnerabilities experienced by women and girls in the region during disasters*

#### **Response:**

The Government accepts this recommendation.

Socio-economic data gathered prior to a disaster underpins mapping of vulnerabilities during and after the event. Australia has provided long-term support (since 2013) to the Pacific Community (SPC) to assist Pacific governments to integrate gender equality and women's human rights into policies, legislation and programs across all sectors, and strengthen data collection and analysis, including for development and humanitarian action. Australia is also assisting countries in the Indo-Pacific region to produce quality gender statistics, including through the development of a new multidimensional, gender-sensitive poverty measurement tool, and ensuring that availability of enhanced gender statistics leads to improved development policies and humanitarian action.

With Australian support, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA): supports Pacific countries to ensure that sector-specific needs assessments are inclusive and participatory; promotes coordinated approaches that integrate age, gender, disability and vulnerability in all aspects of humanitarian responses; and works towards placing accountability to affected populations at the centre of decision making and humanitarian programs. Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) activities are also integrated into humanitarian responses, through targeted briefings and maintaining an emergency PSEA network.

OCHA continues to maintain a regional humanitarian cluster approach to support national-led disaster management. In the Pacific, national sector-specific clusters are usually co-chaired by a government ministry and a United Nations or civil society member. The Gender and Protection Cluster assists Pacific Island countries in gender and protection-sensitive disaster preparedness, response, and recovery. A key activity of the Protection Clusters in each country is to support Rapid Protection Assessments and Rapid Gender and Protection Analysis (vulnerability mapping) to inform government planning and humanitarian response.

Australian Humanitarian Partnership (AHP) partners are active members in regional and country-based Gender and Protection Clusters. In Vanuatu, CARE and Save the Children co-lead, with the Department of Women's Affairs, the Gender and Protection Cluster. In Fiji, Live and Learn and CARE are part of the Regional and Fijian Protection Cluster, actively engaging and feeding in data through to the cluster after Tropical Cyclone Harold in 2020. In Tonga, Live and Learn and other AHP partners are liaising with the Safety and Protection Cluster to ensure the needs of vulnerable groups are being met in recovery from the Hunga Tonga – Hunga Ha'apai disaster.

Disaster READY has also provided training for Protection Cluster members. For example, in 2021 in the Solomon Islands, CARE and Live and Learn supported training to improve

inclusive data collection and social impact assessment which in turn is used by the government to inform disaster response.

AHP partners are required to deliver and report on inclusive humanitarian responses that meet the needs of everyone regardless of age, gender and/or disability. Humanitarian responses must seek to be inclusive. AHP must also establish measures to safeguard those vulnerable to harm, abuse or exploitation. AHP partner CARE Australia often completes Rapid Gender Assessments to inform these responses.

Australia is a leading supporter of international efforts to provide crisis-affected communities with lifesaving sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services and supplies to meet the needs of women and girls in the Indo-Pacific. These health services and supplies are often underfunded during crises, leaving women, girls, and babies vulnerable to preventable illness and death. Australia supports the SPRINT initiative delivered by International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF). Country-based member associations collaborate closely with local governments as well as non-governmental and community organisation partners to deliver SRH services with specific attention to gender, disability, and inclusion of marginalised groups. In 2021 and 2022, government and non-government stakeholders in Fiji and Vanuatu participated in a SPRINT simulation exercise for disaster preparedness and response planning to meet the essential SRH needs of women and girls in crisis. IPPF plans to roll out the exercise in additional Pacific countries.

Australia also partners with the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) to pre-position SRH supplies in countries at high risk of disaster or crisis, to allow for rapid distribution in an emergency. Where possible, SRH supplies are tailored for the local context, and adapted for specific groups, based on the needs and feedback of affected populations. For example, UNFPA has customised dignity kits for elderly people, the transgender community, and people living with a disability. The SPRINT initiative has been instrumental in the humanitarian response to COVID-19 in the Indo-Pacific, with kits that include face masks and sanitizer, as well as public health information about COVID-19 and hygiene.

Australia's support for social protection in the Pacific recognises the critical role of social protection programs to support and protect women and children, the elderly, people with a disability and the newly impoverished in times of crisis and need. Australia is working with partner governments to build social protection systems and programs in the Pacific that can deliver positive impacts for women and girls. When appropriately designed, payments can provide women with more decision-making power over household budgets, improve access to health services for women and children, and support and enable investment in education, including for girls.

Australia has supported numerous social protection responses to disaster events (in Fiji, Vanuatu and Tonga), directed through Pacific Island country social protection systems and programs.

Australia has funded the World Bank to implement the Pacific Data Observatory, which is using high frequency telephone surveys to monitor household wellbeing across the region, including when disasters and shocks hit. Australia also funds the World Bank Rapid Social Response fund, including grant projects in Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Kiribati, Tonga and



Samoa (\$1.8 million since January 2021) to provide technical advice to governments on adaptive and gender-sensitive social protection.

#### **Recommendation 4**

***The Committee recommends that the Australian Government work with the tertiary education sector to maintain networks with alumni from Pacific island countries who have studied in Australia, including women and girls.***

#### **Response:**

The Government accepts this recommendation.

DFAT supports and funds in-country Australia Awards alumni associations to engage with professional networks in Australia and facilitate skills and knowledge development to apply in their home country context. The associations network alumni from specialised programs, including the Australian Awards Scholarships (AAS), Australia Awards Pacific Scholarships (AAPS), Australia Awards Papua New Guinea (AAPNG) and the John Allwright Fellowship from the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR). They also support targeted enrichment programs for active scholars such as the Australia Awards Women Leading and Influencing (WLI) program to develop skills and build regional networks through interaction with alumni as mentors and sponsors. Alumni are regularly engaged through high-level bilateral, regional and sector-specific events and Government-led engagements that aim to provide equitable gender representation for participants. These activities strengthen networks, institutional and people-to-people linkages between Australia and the Pacific.

The Australian Institute of Police Management (AIPM) Pacific Faculty of Policing (PFP) maintains an alumni of all participants who are regularly called upon for inclusion in future programs as mentors, program sponsors, and visiting fellows. PFP also works in partnership with the Pacific Security College to access their alumni of men and women participants and has close working relationships with tertiary providers across the Pacific, including the University of the South Pacific.

The Pacific Police Development Program-Regional (PPDP-R) encourages the inclusion of women in all its capability development activities and maintains a sex-disaggregated database of Pacific police members who have participated in program activities.

As part of its capability assessment process, the Pacific Community for Law Enforcement Cooperation (PCLEC) works closely with other Government funded Pacific education initiatives (including the Australia Pacific Security College and the Australia Awards program) to identify Pacific police members among their alumni. This arrangement will continue, offering award recipients a workplace attachment to strengthen relationships and networks across police personnel in the Pacific.

The Department of Defence (DoD) is establishing a Pacific Security Network alumni consisting of police, civilian and military leaders from across the South West Pacific. The

network will reinforce existing people-to-people connections; promote skill development; invest in the growth of regional leaders and enhance cooperation and collaboration. The network will empower women to reach their potential through enhanced access to opportunities (including learning and development, attendance at events focused on relationship building, sharing of insights and experiences) and the support of regional networks.

### **Recommendation 5**

*The Committee recommends that the Australian Government continue to focus diplomatic efforts on the implementation of treaties and other legislation aimed at improving the quality of life for women and girls, including political representation and involvement in decision-making.*

#### **Response:**

The Government accepts this recommendation.

Australia supports a range of initiatives to strengthen legislation to improve outcomes for women and girls, including to enhance women's voices and roles in decision-making, leadership and peacebuilding, promote women's economic empowerment and to end all forms of violence against women and girls.

Under the *Pacific Women Lead* program, Australia is working with a range of Pacific partners, including the Pacific Islands Forum and the Pacific Community (SPC), to adopt policies and legislation to improve the lives of women and girls in the Pacific. Australian support to SPC will help enable the organisation to continue its work as Secretariat to the Regional Working Group on Implementation of Domestic Violence Legislation, and through its network of country focal officers focused on human rights.

Australia supports UN Women to provide technical knowledge and capacity building support to Member States to develop, adopt and implement gender-responsive laws and policies, including on women's political participation.

The Government is strongly committed to defending and promoting international norms and standards on gender equality through our engagement with international forums such as the Commission on the Status of Women, the UN Security Council and General Assembly, and the Human Rights Council. As part of implementing in full the Australian Human Rights Commission Report *Respect@Work*, the Government has announced it will ratify the International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention Concerning the elimination of violence and harassment in the world of work (ILO 190).

Australia consistently works to promote and protect gender equality in Human Rights Council Universal Periodic Reviews (UPRs) [a peer-review process, in which the human rights record of each UN Member State is considered every five years], including to encourage Member States to implement and strengthen action to improve the quality of life for women and girls. In 2021, Australia delivered statements at six Pacific country UPRs (Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Palau, Federated States of Micronesia and

Nauru) all of which commented on gender, with five including recommendations to strengthen gender equality outcomes.

Australia's second National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (2021-2031) builds on existing efforts to promote gender equality and increase the full and meaningful participation and leadership of women in peace and security processes. The National Action Plan covers the four pillars of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda – participation, protection, prevention, and relief and recovery.

The human rights of women and girls are also protected by the seven core international human rights treaties to which Australia is a party. These are the:

- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights;
- International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights;
- Convention on the Rights of the Child;
- Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment;
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination;
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women; and
- Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

## Recommendation 6

***The Committee recommends that the Australian Government continue to work with Pacific governments on public sector capacity-building work.***

### **Response:**

The Government accepts this recommendation.

The Government is committed to supporting a wide range of public sector capacity building activities, including to promote gender equality and women's human rights. Australia provides support to sectors that are critical to upholding women's rights, including health and education, economic governance, and law and justice.

Australia has provided long-term support (since 2013) to the Pacific Community (SPC) to assist Pacific governments to integrate gender equality and women's human rights into policies, legislation and programs across all sectors, and strengthen data collection and analysis. This support is continuing under *Pacific Women Lead* as a critical step in ensuring Pacific governments build capacity to integrate gender equality considerations into their operations.

At the country level, Australia funds in-line and advisory public sector positions in Nauru, Kiribati and Tuvalu through the Building Pacific Capacity program (2021-2025, \$8 million). These roles integrate gender equality and social inclusion outcomes to support and enhance partners' efforts; for example, public financial management advisers in Nauru and Kiribati (and under recruitment in Tuvalu) promoting gender-responsive budgeting.

In Tonga, the Australian Government will fund in-line positions at the Women's Affairs and Gender Equality Division of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. This will help underpin Tonga's efforts to promote women's rights and opportunities in all areas of government, including service delivery, leadership, social protection and human rights, humanitarian response, and economic empowerment and equality.

In Fiji, Australia is supporting the Government of Fiji to adopt and monitor gender-responsive budget allocations across several ministries in 2022. This is part of a broader effort by Fiji, to institutionalise a new gender-responsive budgeting methodology to enable greater equitable allocation of resources and strengthen the resilience of women and vulnerable people in Fiji.

In line with the AFP's International Command Gender Strategy 2018-2024, AFP missions (in Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu, Solomon Islands, Nauru, Tonga, Samoa, and Timor-Leste) include activities to improve gender composition and capacity within partner police and increase partner police services' capability on gender-related law enforcement operations. Common gender-related capacity building activities include promoting gender mainstreaming, building capability on gender-related law enforcement, supporting women's advisory networks, facilitating gender training and supporting women's leadership.

The Attorney-General's Department (AGD) leads Australia's support to the Pacific Islands Law Officers' Network (PILON), a regional network of senior Pacific law and justice

officials. Combatting Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV) is one of PILON's three strategic priorities.

AGD also leads an annual Pacific Legal Policy Twinning Program providing a unique opportunity for Pacific law and justice officers to improve their legal policy skills and progress an identified policy project specific to their home agency. The focus has been on projects that align with PILON's priorities and most recently, combatting SGBV.

The Australian Border Force (ABF) in partnership with the Oceania Customs Organisation (OCO) and RMIT University delivered the inaugural (virtual) Pacific Women's Professional Development Program (PWPD) in March 2022. The March PWPD event brought together 60 participants in Customs Administrations from 17 Pacific Island countries. The PWPD program supports women to build knowledge, skills and confidence to realise their full potential through leadership capability development and fostering opportunities for mentoring and professional collaboration. The program aims to enhance prospects for future career progression within PWPD members' home administrations. Further PWPD events are being considered to utilise other relevant customs training packages.

The Department of Defence (DoD) and the ADF participate in the Pacific Defence Gender Network meeting. The Network promotes the participation of women in Pacific defence forces through annual seminars and increased collaboration. It works to empower women within Pacific defence forces and promotes male champions and advocates.

In Papua New Guinea, the ADF continues to support senior members of the Papua New Guinea Defence Force (PNGDF) to advocate for gender equality and women's empowerment. Through the Defence Cooperation Program in Papua New Guinea, Australia supports, for example, gender policy awareness workshops and consultations. In 2022, Defence provided training on Women, Peace and Security to PNGDF and PNG Department of Defence personnel.

In Tonga, through the Pacific Maritime Security Program (PMSP), female engineers for the Guardian-class Patrol Boats have hosted outreach activities at local girl's high schools aimed at year 11 and 12 science, technology and maths students.

## **Recommendation 7**

***7a. The Committee recommends that the Australian Government publish an assessment of the progress on building the capacity of local organisations in the Pacific to advance the rights of women and girls.***

### **Response:**

The Government notes this recommendation.

Refer also to the Government's response to Recommendation 12(a).

The Government has a strong focus on building the capacity of local organisations in the Pacific, delivered through multiple initiatives and a range of partners. Locally led and owned development is central to the *Pacific Women Lead* program (2021-2026). Through

the program, the Government will enable local and regional organisations in the Pacific, supporting their needs and enabling them to provide similar flow-through support to smaller member organisations. Relevant *Pacific Women Lead* reviews, evaluations and monitoring will consider the capacity of local organisations to advance the rights of women and girls. The Government is committed to transparency and will work with partners to publish reports.

**7b. This should include data about what proportion of funding is provided to local organisations directly, and/or through intermediaries.**

**Response:**

The Government notes this recommendation.

As noted in the response to 7 a), programming, funding support and program performance will be reported regularly and assessed through independent evaluations.

**Recommendation 8**

***The Committee recommends that the Australian Government work with Pacific governments to provide support for the secondary and tertiary education sector within Pacific island countries, including infrastructure for education institutions.***

**Response:**

The Government accepts this recommendation.

The Government is working with Pacific governments to strengthen education systems and improve education and employment pathways for Pacific Islanders.

The Government recognises that education and skills development will play an important role in the Pacific's economic and social recovery from the impacts of COVID-19 and in helping to address longer-term development challenges in the region.

The Government is committed to placing a high priority on education in Australia's development program. In 2020-21, 59 per cent (\$134.1 million) of education spending in the Pacific region was from the bilateral program budget. It is estimated that this increased to 64 per cent in 2021-22.

In Vanuatu, Australia is the largest bilateral partner in the education and skills sector. In conjunction with the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET), and New Zealand Government, Australia is supporting a range of climate and disaster resilient education infrastructure projects across Vanuatu, including building six schools on Ambae, replacing those lost to the Ambae volcanic eruptions, and nine on Santo which will service displaced communities from Ambae. Australia, in partnership with MoET and the New Zealand Government, is also building a new primary school in the Beverly Hills community of Port Vila, Efate, which is expected to be completed by end 2022.

Australia is also supporting the repairs and reconstruction of health and education facilities in provinces affected by Tropical Cyclone Harold (Category 5, April 2020). This includes immediate repairs to ten damaged schools on Malo, Maewo and Pentecost.

In Solomon Islands, Australia is working in partnership with Solomon Islands and New Zealand to improve access to quality basic education for all girls and boys (Solomon Islands Education Sector Support Program (ESSP), \$41.5 million Australian contribution 2020-23). The partnership includes a focus on girls, including provision of girl-friendly infrastructure (including water, sanitation and hygiene facilities), especially at junior secondary level to increase transition and retention of girls at that level.

In Fiji, the Australian Defence Force worked in partnership with Fiji, New Zealand and France to rebuild classrooms and other education infrastructure at Lekutu Secondary School in Bua, Vanua Levu.

Through ESSP, Australia has also supported construction of six girls' dormitories including ablution blocks. It is also supporting gender equality and social inclusion by ensuring that new curriculum materials are gender inclusive in terms of roles, responsibilities and depiction of careers; promoting teacher professional development that uses gender inclusive strategies in the classroom; and encouraging greater parental involvement in their children's education and fostering attitude and behaviour change in relation to ensuring girls' and boys' equal access to - and participation in - schooling through non-government organisation led community initiatives.

The Government is investing in secondary education in a number of ways.

- The Pacific Secondary Schools Project (\$16 million, 2021-2024) will undertake research on the skills and competencies and education and training opportunities available to young people (14-18 years old) in the Pacific region. It will lead to a series of interventions to help improve the quality of secondary education, including in the context of COVID-19 recovery, and is being implemented in partnership with the World Bank and the Education and Quality Assessment Program (EQAP).
- Through EQAP, the Government is supporting Pacific Island governments to monitor education outcomes using data from the Pacific Islands Literacy and Numeracy Assessment program to inform education policies.

The Government also invests in the university and vocational education and training (VET) sectors in the Pacific including:

- A partnership with the University of the South Pacific (USP) (\$84 million, 2019-2025) to deliver quality tertiary education to over 30,000 Pacific students across the region. Since 2003, Australia has supported 1,230 (703 women) Pacific students to complete studies at USP under the Australia Awards Pacific Scholarships Program.
- The Australian Pacific Training Coalition (APTC) (\$154 million, 2018-2022), implemented by Queensland TAFE, delivers Australian accredited VET courses to Pacific students across the region in areas of labour market need. Over 17,000 Pacific Islanders have graduated from APTC, including almost 7,000 women.
- The Australia Awards Pacific Scholarships program provides people from Pacific countries with opportunities to study at selected education institutions in the Pacific region. Scholarships for study at Pacific institutions are part of Australia's broader

objectives of promoting education and training quality in the region, and to support and grow the capability of Pacific tertiary institutions.

- The Australia Awards Papua New Guinea program provides PNG citizens with scholarships for long or short-term study to achieve tertiary qualifications in Australia or in Papua New Guinea. The program contributes to Papua New Guinea's economic, social and human development by building a skilled workforce to address critical human resource gaps and to support in-country educational institutions capability development.

The Australian Centre for Agricultural Research (ACIAR) has provided support for the tertiary education sector in the Pacific through the Pacific Agriculture Scholarships and Support (PASS) Program since 2008 with the requirement that half of all placements go to women. It provides scholarships and support to postgraduate students in agriculture, forestry and fisheries at the University of the South Pacific and Fiji National University.

ACIAR scholars and partners can access professional development opportunities after the completion of their tertiary qualification. The Meryl Williams Fellowship for women in research leadership offers fellows the opportunity to develop professional linkages, enhance and build skills in leadership and management, and build the capacities of their organisations. The Fellowship currently supports 43 women from across the Indo-Pacific. ACIAR supports two other fellowships for further study and capacity building and strives for a minimum 50 per cent participation of women in all capacity building programs.

The Government is exploring new avenues to deepen education links between Australia and the Pacific, including opportunities to enhance education and employment pathways for Pacific women. For example, the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) scheme is piloting a training partnership with APTC and aged care employers to increase employment, predominantly for women. The Government is also working with partner countries on strategies to increase women's participation in labour mobility across sectors traditionally dominated by men, including horticulture and agriculture.

### **Recommendation 9**

*The Committee recommends that the Australian Government extends the role of the multi-role vessel to include working in partnership with civil society to support the Pacific Islands.*

#### **Response:**

The Government notes this recommendation.

The Government is delivering a dedicated Pacific Support Vessel. The vessel is available for humanitarian assistance and disaster relief and other missions to support the Pacific where required. The vessel sailed in September 2022 for its maiden voyage, as a Royal Australian Navy flagged vessel, in time for the 2022-23 high-risk weather season. The missions of the vessel will be undertaken in consultation with Pacific governments.



## **Recommendation 10**

*The Committee recommends that the Australian Government consider long-term funding cycles for official development assistance to be at least five-years.*

### **Response:**

The Government notes this recommendation.

The development budget operates on an annual budget appropriations cycle in line with the broader Federal Budget decision-making process for allocating public resources. In accordance with Commonwealth legislation, Government delegates can enter into multi-year commitments for official development assistance at the investment level, subject to annual budget appropriations.

Australia's regional gender equality investment, *Pacific Women Lead*, is funded for five years (2021-2026) with an option to extend for a further three years. This recognises that access to predictable long-term funding enhances the ability of partners to effectively and efficiently manage resources and deliver programming.

The 2019 'Ending Violence Against Women and Girls (EVAWG): Evaluating a decade of Australia's development assistance', found that Australia's long-term commitment to EVAWG has had a positive impact. The evaluation emphasised the importance of integrating EVAWG in all Australia's development cooperation investments. A key finding of the evaluation was that long-term funding to women's organisations has been effective and catalytic. In Pacific countries, women's organisations are now driving EVAWG. All of the recommendations in the evaluation were accepted.

The Government is committed to increasing the focus of attention on the prevention of violence against women and girls and supporting women's organisations addressing and responding to such violence.

## **Recommendation 11**

*The Committee recommends the Australian Government extend its current five-year commitment to the Pacific Women Lead program to allow for funding cycles of this duration to be provided and to include a target for its gender expenditure.*

### **Response:**

The Government notes this recommendation.

*Pacific Women Lead* is funded for five years (\$170 million, 2021-2026), with an option to extend for a further three years. Extension of the program will depend on a range of factors, including the program's performance, which will be assessed through an independent evaluation.

Australia has a history of long-term support for gender equality and women's empowerment in the Pacific region and the Government is committed to continuing this work with partners in the region to advance women's human rights.

DFAT already draws on OECD Development Assistance Committee guidance on gender equality and development expenditure in the aid program, and reports on this publicly, including to the OECD.

In the May 2022-23 Official Development Assistance (ODA) budget estimates, DFAT forecast that \$1.5 billion in expenditure will promote and support gender equality across the development program, including approximately \$500 million in the Pacific.

The Government has announced that it will ensure at least eighty per cent of Australia's aid investments address gender issues and tackle violence against women, which serves as a target for work on gender equality.

## **Recommendation 12**

**12a. The Committee recommends that the Australian Government commit to continuing to undertake and publish strategic, thematic evaluations focusing on substantive human rights issues affecting women and girls.**

**Response:**

The Government accepts this recommendation in principle.

Evaluations are a central component of the development assistance program, providing both learning and accountability across DFAT's activities.

Annual Development Evaluation Plans are published which outline planned evaluations for the calendar year. Completed evaluations to be published on the DFAT website with a management response. These evaluations contain extensive data on the performance of Australia's development cooperation, including in relation to gender equality and women's empowerment in the Pacific.

DFAT evaluations have and will continue to cover a range of strategic human rights issues affecting women and girls across multiple country programs. This work has included the publication of 'Ending Violence Against Women and Girls: Evaluating a decade of Australia's development assistance' in 2019. This evaluation provided a critical lens for assessing Australia's progress and made recommendations to guide Australia's aid program and policy engagement on EVAWG for the next decade. With a broad reach across multiple (14) country contexts, the 2020 'Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development Six-Year Evaluation Report' provided strategic recommendations for DFAT relating to human rights issues for women and girls in the Pacific. Lessons from evaluations such as these inform the design and delivery of development cooperation programs delivered by DFAT, both in the Pacific and across other geographic locations.

***12b. This should allow evaluations of the full range of official development assistance, and extend evaluations beyond those focused only at the investment or program-level.***

**Response:**

The Government accepts this recommendation in principle.

See response above.

## **Recommendation 13**

***The Committee recommends that the Australian Government improve monitoring, evaluation and reporting of development assistance programs to ensure transparency and easy access to data, especially including reporting on funding for gender equality and women's empowerment activities in the Pacific.***

**Response:**

The Government accepts this recommendation in principle.

DFAT has a comprehensive approach to monitoring, evaluation and reporting of development assistance programs.

DFAT has worked to enhance the transparency and accountability of the development program by improving the availability and consistency of information on the DFAT website.

DFAT provides guidance to staff on publishing information on development investments, to ensure consistency and accessibility across country, thematic and sectoral webpages on our website.

Information on Australia's support to gender equality, including activities in the Pacific, is provided on the DFAT website and guidance on sector specific programming is provided through DFAT's Aid Programming Guide.

We meet Australia's international development program reporting obligations to the OECD Development Assistance Committee and maintain our membership in the International Aid Transparency Initiative. We publish extensive performance information; an Official Development Assistance (ODA) Budget Summary; an ODA Statistical Summary; and the list of development investments between \$3 million and \$10 million.

The Government will further consider this recommendation in the context of preparing a new development policy and associated performance management system. The new policy will be finalised in the first half of 2023. The Government is committed to improving transparency in Australia's international development program, including through the development policy and performance system. For example, the Government recently agreed to the publication of the OECD Development Assistance Committee's 2021 mid-term review of Australia's development program. This is the first time permission has been granted for publication since 2013.

#### **Recommendation 14**

*The Committee recommends that the Australian Government, on an annual basis, publish data on the disbursements made to organisations for the purpose of gender equality initiatives. This should list the organisations receiving disbursements.*

#### **Response:**

The Government accepts this recommendation.

The Government is committed to ensuring transparency in how it delivers Australia's Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) programs. DFAT's actual ODA expenditure is reported in the annual publication *Australia's Official Development Assistance: Statistical Summary*.

DFAT will continue to report ODA expenditure at the investment level in line with OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) rules and guidelines. Each year Australia reports on calendar year funding data to the DAC's annual development finance statistics dataset, the Creditor Reporting System. This includes reporting on gender equality sectoral expenditure, as well as assessing every investment for its contribution to gender equality objectives. Names and types of organisations receiving disbursements are reported to the

DAC. Australia's Creditor Reporting System data is publicly available on the OECD DAC website.

AusTender provides centralised publication of Government business opportunities, annual procurement plans, multi-use lists and contracts awarded, including those for work that promotes gender equality.

## **Glossary**

AAPNG	Australia Awards Papua New Guinea
AAPS	Australia Awards Pacific Scholarships
AAS	Australia Awards Scholarships
ABF	Australian Border Force
ACIAR	Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research
ADF	Australian Defence Force
AFP	Australian Federal Police
AGD	Attorney General's Department
AHP	Australian Humanitarian Partnership
AIPM	Australian Institute of Police Management
APMCDRR	Asia-Pacific Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction
AUSMAT	Australian Medical Assistance Teams
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of all form of Discrimination Against Women
CRT	Crisis Response Team
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DART	Disaster Assistance Response Team
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
DoD	Department of Defence
DoE	Department of Education
DoH	Department of Health

DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction
EQAP	Education and Quality Assessment Program
EVAWG	Ending Violence Against Women and Girls
GEPC	Gender Equality and Policy Committee
GPE	Global Partnership for Education
HADR	Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief
Home Affairs	Department of Home Affairs
ILO	International Labour Organization
IPPF	International Planned Parenthood Federation
MoET	Ministry of Education and Training
NEMA	National Emergency Management Agency
NGO	Non-government organisation
OCHA	UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OCO	Oceania Customs Organisations
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development
PALM	Pacific Australia Labour Mobility
PASS	Pacific Agriculture Scholarships and Support
PCLEC	Pacific Community for Law Enforcement Cooperation
PDGN	Pacific Defence Gender Network
PFP	Pacific Faculty of Policing
PILON	Pacific Islands Law Officers Network
PMC	Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet
PMSP	Pacific Maritime Security Program
PNGDF	Papua New Guinea Defence Force
PowerOn	Powerline restoration team
PPDP-R	Pacific Police Development Program - Regional

PSEA	Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse
PWL	Pacific Women Lead
PWPD	Pacific Women's Professional Development Program
SGBV	Sexual and Gender Based Violence
SPC	Pacific Community
SRH	Sexual and Reproductive Health
SRHR	Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights
UNDRR	United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UPR	Universal Periodic Reviews
VET	Vocational Education and Training
WIN DRR	Women's International Network on Disaster Risk Reduction
WLI	Women Leading and Influencing
WRD	Women's Resilience to Disasters