



Australian Government

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

*One Region, One Family, One Future:
Deepening relations with the Pacific nations through trade*

May 2024

Response to the recommendations

Recommendation 1:

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government prioritises its support for the Pacific region to recover from COVID-19 by:

- a) increasing its development assistance contributions to countries in the region to help them mitigate economic and health crises resulting from the pandemic (refer paragraphs 6.3, 6.5, 6.8 - 6.11, 6.17 & 6.22);**
- b) providing vaccine coverage for countries in the region including health workforce training and education campaigns (refer paragraphs 6.9 - 6.10 & 6.25)**

Response:

The Government **notes** this recommendation. However, given the passage of time since this report was tabled, a substantive Government response is no longer appropriate.

Recommendation 2

The Committee recommends that, given the evidence received, the Australian Government prioritises the activation of greater trade and investment with countries of the Pacific region by:

- a) considering measures and reforms to the Pacific Agreement on Closer Economic Relations (PACER Plus) to address any gaps in key areas such as in rules of origin, customs, biosecurity measures, standards, trade in services and investment during the Agreement's implementation by Australia, New Zealand and Pacific island countries (refer paragraphs 4.5, 4.8, 4.10, 4.37, 4.40, 4.82, 4.91);**
- b) providing training, seed funding, and targeted support to allow Pacific islanders, including Pacific islander small business owners and Pacific exporters, to gain access to Australian markets and also meet the standards required (refer paragraphs 3.102 - 3.104, 4.88 - 4.89, 7.45 & 8.4);**
- c) supporting further research and evaluation of Australia-Pacific island trade and investment (refer paragraphs 3.49, 5.127 & 5.129);**
- d) focusing its Aid for Trade program in the Pacific on building human resource, educational and institutional capacity in the Pacific island countries to reform national economic and trade policies, improve trade facilitation processes and build trade-enhancing institutions (refer paragraphs 3.90, 3.91, 3.93 & 3.95 – 3.104);**

- e) **supporting with technical assistance and expertise the establishment of National Standards Bodies in Pacific island countries with the ambition of developing a regional Pacific standard (refer paragraphs 7.26 – 7.38);**
- f) **supporting the Pacific Quality Infrastructure Initiative and other bilateral, regional and multilateral projects involving Australia in the Pacific region aimed at delivering quality infrastructure (refer paragraph 7.39);**
- g) **coordinating with interested super funds to support and promote pilot investor tours of Pacific island countries (refer paragraph 6.112);**
- h) **assisting interested governments of Pacific island countries to join Australia’s kava commercial importation pilot and for the pilot to consider the feasibility of classifying kava as a food under a joint food standard of Food Standards Australia New Zealand (refer paragraphs 8.13-8.33).**

Response:

The Government **notes** this recommendation. However, given the passage of time since this report was tabled, a substantive Government response is no longer appropriate.

Recommendation 3

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government improves travel and mobility between Australia and the countries of the Pacific region by:

- a) **establishing a Pacific travel bubble between Australia and New Zealand that includes interested countries of the Pacific region, subject to health advice and the implementation of COVID-safe travel and quarantine arrangements (refer paragraphs 3.30 – 3.46);**
- b) **investigating the potential for improving infrastructure and its maintenance to encourage and enable increased air and sea links between Australia and the Pacific (refer paragraphs 3.142, 3.145 - 3.146, 3.148, 3.157 - 3.158 & 3.160);**
- c) **introducing a Pacific Business Travel Card, similar to the visa APEC Business Travel Card (refer paragraphs 6.44, 6.48 - 6.49 & 6.51 - 6.52);**
- d) **reviewing existing labour mobility arrangements, including the Seasonal Worker Programme and the Pacific Labour Scheme, for workers from countries of the Pacific region with consideration for:**
 - **improving regulatory and administrative processes (refer paragraphs 5.33, 5.70 - 5.71 & 5.105);**
 - **improving working conditions including improved monitoring and enforcement activity in compliance with relevant provisions on workers’ entitlements (refer paragraphs 5.72 - 5.75 & 5.108 – 5.114);**
 - **improving workers’ access to superannuation by making the transfer of funds into workers’ superannuation accounts in the Pacific easier and faster (refer paragraphs 5.76 - 5.79);**

- improving workers' access to health care and insurance while on assignment in Australia (refer paragraphs 5.81 & 5.108);
- improving communication and access to information on workers' rights (refer paragraphs 5.80 & 5.108 - 5.110);
- incorporating industry-led third-party audited certifications, such as Fair Farms which is used in the horticultural industry, to help oversee ethical treatment of Pacific island workers (refer paragraphs 5.92 & 5.111 - 5.114);
- introducing induction training on labour mobility schemes to new diplomats from countries of the Pacific region (refer paragraph 5.103); and
- identifying youth and women employment opportunities (refer paragraphs 5.115 – 5.117, 5.125 & 5.126).

Response:

The Government **notes** this recommendation. However, given the passage of time since this report was tabled, a substantive Government response is no longer appropriate.

Recommendation 4

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government works towards deepening people-to-people ties between Australia and countries of the Pacific region through:

a) sport

- by expanding its Sports Diplomacy 2030 and Australia's Pacific Step-up initiatives through a new program called 'Team AusPac'. Team AusPac would be spearheaded by the Australian Government and, in partnership with relevant sporting organisations, the program would aim to (refer paragraphs 7.67 – 7.70);
- maximise opportunities for Pacific island countries to be closely associated with, and actively participate in, the 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games in Australia (refer paragraph 7.74);
- create a special Pacific islands program as part of the Australian Institute of Sport (AIS) in support of elite athletes from the Pacific (refer paragraph 7.70);
- support efforts by the Pacific to have a team from a Pacific island country enter the National Rugby League (NRL) competition (refer paragraph 7.68);
- expand the number of sports to receive special focus under the PacificAus Sports program beyond netball, rugby union, football and rugby league (refer paragraph 7.70);
- expand the scope of the PacificAus Sports program to include a capacity building program for sporting coaches and trainers from the Pacific (refer paragraphs 7.67 & 7.70).

b) Churches

- by continuing and building upon investment in cultural bridging programs such as the Pacific Church Partnerships program (refer paragraphs 8.34 – 8.39);

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- c) **media – by supporting the provision of more Pacific-related Australian media content on issues such as seasonal work opportunities or aid projects to Pacific nations while also assisting with the expansion and the quality of Pacific-focused business media services to the Pacific (refer paragraphs 6.113 – 6.115, 6.121 – 6.123, 6.127 – 6.130 & 8.35);**
 - d) **education – by offering a capped number of Commonwealth Supported Places, or equivalent, to prospective students from countries of the Pacific region, to attend Australian secondary schools, technical and further education institutes, and universities (refer paragraphs 2.92 – 2.93, 2.101, 3.88 & 7.59 – 7.61).**

Response:

The Government **notes** this recommendation. However, given the passage of time since this report was tabled, a substantive Government response is no longer appropriate.

Recommendation 5

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government recognise the role played by Australian states and territories, in particular by Queensland, in Australia’s relationship with countries of the Pacific by:

- a) **analysing the recommendations in this report within a Queensland context;**
- b) **undertaking a feasibility study on expanding the services of a Pacific-focused office for the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in Queensland, resourced by senior departmental staff (refer paragraphs 3.151 – 3.152 & 3.162); and**
- c) **engaging with the Queensland State Government and relevant local government authorities in Queensland on opportunities to work collaboratively on the recommendations in this report and other initiatives to further strengthen Australia’s relationship with countries of the Pacific region.**

Response:

The Government **notes** this recommendation. However, given the passage of time since this report was tabled, a substantive Government response is no longer appropriate.