The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia

Regional health issues jointly affecting Australia and the South Pacific

Report of the Australian Parliamentary Committee Delegation to Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands

House of Representatives
Standing Committee on Health and Ageing

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Canberra

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Foreword

From 6-16 October 2009, I led a delegation of health committee members on the inaugural committee delegation visit to Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands.

During our visit to both countries we met with a number of parliamentarians, and government and civil society representatives to discuss a range of regional health issues that jointly affect Australia and the South Pacific. We also inspected sites relevant to the delegation's aims and objectives.

In addition to detailing our programme activities and observations, this report outlines the committee's activities in Australia prior to the overseas delegation, which the committee as a whole took part in. These meetings and inspections prepared delegates well for the visits.

We were warmly received in both countries and appreciated the generous hospitality and support provided by the host Parliaments and Governments of Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands, as well as our high commission representatives in each place. We are very grateful to the many people who helped to make the visit such a success.

The delegation afforded a unique and valuable opportunity for parliamentarians to learn more about the health system and health services delivery in neighbouring countries and to strengthen the bilateral relationship with two countries with which we have longstanding and important ties.

We have fond memories of our time spent in each country.

Mr Steve Georganas MP
Chair

Membership of the Committee

Chair	Mr Steve Georganas MP	
Deputy Chair	Mr Steve Irons MP	
Members	Mr James Bidgood MP (to 22/10/2009)	Mrs Catherine King MP
	The Hon Bronwyn Bishop MP (from 03/02/2010)	Mrs Margaret May MP (to 03/02/2010)
	Mr Mark Coulton MP (to 03/02/2010)	Mr Shayne Neumann MP (from 11/02/2010)
	Mrs Joanna Gash MP	Ms Amanda Rishworth MP
	Ms Jill Hall MP	
	Mrs Julia Irwin MP	Dr Andrew Southcott MP (from 03/02/2010)

Membership of committee delegation

Leader	Mr Steve Georganas MP
Members	Mr James Bidgood MP
	Ms Jill Hall MP
	Ms Amanda Rishworth MP
Secretary	Ms Sara Edson

Committee secretariat

Secretary	Mr James Catchpole
Inquiry Secretary	Ms Sara Edson
Senior Research Officer	Ms Penny Wijnberg
Administrative Officer	Mr Shaun Rowe

Terms of reference

On 3 June 2009, the Committee resolved that:

The Committee will conduct inspections, hearings and a roundtable on regional health issues that jointly affect Australia and the South Pacific, in order to inform the delegation visit to Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands.

List of abbreviations

ABI	Avoidable Blindness Initiative
ALA	Australian Leadership Awards
ARCSHS	Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society
AusAID	Australian Agency for International Development
AQIS	Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service
AVI	Australian Volunteers International
AYAD	Australian Youth Ambassadors for Development
CDI	Centre for Democratic Institutions
CVD	Cardiovascular disease
DIAC	Department of Immigration and Citizenship
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
HAA	House of Representatives Standing Committee on Health and Ageing
HECS	Health Education and Clinical Services Program
HIC	Health Issues Committee
HSSP	Health Sector Support Program
JAC	Joint Advisory Council
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
MHMS	Ministry of Health and Medical Services (Solomon Islands)

MBBC	Men and Boys Behaviour Change Program
MMO	Movement Monitoring Officer
MMR	Maternal Mortality Rate
NDoH	National Department of Health (Papua New Guinea)
NRH	National Referral Hospital
NSW	New South Wales
NT	Northern Territory
NZ	New Zealand
ODE	Office of Development Effectiveness
PacMISC	Pacific Malaria Initiative Support Centre
PNG	Papua New Guinea
RAMSI	The Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands
SDP	PNG Sustainable Development Program Ltd
SCA	Save the Children Australia
SH&FPA	Sexual Health and Family Planning Australia
SI	Solomon Islands
SICHE	Solomon Islands College of Higher Education
SIPPA	Solomon Islands Planned Parenthood Association
SMHS	School of Medical and Health Sciences
STIs	Sexually Transmitted Infections
TB	Tuberculosis
TI	Thursday Island
TIM	Traditional Inhabitants Meeting
TSRA	Torres Strait Regional Authority

UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNIFEM	United Nations Development Fund for Women
VCT	Voluntary Counselling and Testing
VIDA	Volunteering for International Development from Australia
WHO	World Health Organisation

List of recommendations

2 Committee inquiry activities in Australia

Recommendation 1

The Committee recommends that the Speaker of the House of Representatives and the President of the Senate establish a parliamentary mentoring program between women in the Australian Parliament and women in Pacific Island Parliaments or aspiring female candidates.

Recommendation 2

The Committee recommends that collaborative research be undertaken into the sexual networks that exist in the Torres Strait Treaty zone, that includes the collection of data on the levels of Sexually Transmitted Infections, including HIV, on both sides of the border.

Recommendation 3

The Committee recommends that the Australian government facilitate forums for leaders in the region to come together at regular intervals to discuss HIV/AIDS prevention strategies, and, in particular, to seek ways to lessen the social stigma of talking about the disease.

Recommendation 4

The Committee recommends that the Australian government work together with the Australian state and territory governments to establish a reinspection program of installed water tanks, in dengue affected areas in Australia.

Recommendation 5

The Committee recommends that the Australian government partner with non-government organisations and communities to find nutritional solutions that promote healthy eating and redress malnutrition, in affected areas in the Torres Strait and Papua New Guinea.

3 Committee delegation visit to Papua New Guinea

Recommendation 6

The Committee recommends that the Australian government encourage and support further institutional partnerships and/or reciprocal exchanges between the School of Medical and Health Sciences at the University of Papua New Guinea and Australian universities.

Recommendation 7

The Committee recommends that the Australian government make efforts to link Igat Hope with counterpart organisations in Australia to strengthen their advocacy potential.

Recommendation 8

The Committee recommends that the Australian government consider establishing a contact point within the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade or AusAID to provide community organisations in Australia with basic information on the suitability of their intended donations to countries in our region.

Recommendation 9

The Committee recommends that the Australian government support additional health communications officer positions in the Torres Strait and treaty villages of the Western Province of Papua New Guinea.

Recommendation 10

The Committee recommends that the Australian government install additional rainwater tanks in treaty villages in the Western Province of Papua New Guinea.

Recommendation 11

The Committee recommends that any new health facility that the Australian government helps construct should provide for staff accommodation and ongoing maintenance, in consultation and partnership with the local community.

Recommendation 12

The Committee recommends that the Australian government, in conjunction with the Papua New Guinean government, facilitate more creative and inclusive forums in which locals on both sides of the treaty zone border can engage on health and other treaty related issues with each other and with government officials of both nations.

4 Committee delegation visit to Solomon Islands

Recommendation 13

The Committee recommends that the Australian government encourage and support further institutional partnerships, including reciprocal exchanges between Department of Health staff in the Solomon Islands and Australian institutions (such as hospitals, universities and laboratories), including the provision of training at the National Referral Hospital.

Recommendation 14

The Committee recommends that the Australian government support education programs about diabetes prevention and nutrition in the Torres Strait, the Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea, in areas where diabetes and nutrition are problematic.

Recommendation 15

The Committee recommends that a mentoring program (especially for women) be established that matches senior bureaucrats, in the Australian Department of Health and Australian health facilities with senior bureaucrats in the Solomon Islands Department of Health.