

Chapter 2

Vanuatu

Country brief¹

2.1 Vanuatu is an archipelagic nation of 83 islands, extending over 1,000 kilometres in a north-south direction between the equator and the tropic of Capricorn. Vanuatu has a small, dispersed, predominantly rural and culturally diverse population of approximately 250,000 people. Around 70 per cent live in rural areas on 65 of the 83 islands. Formerly known as the New Hebrides, Vanuatu was governed jointly by British and French administrations, in an arrangement known as the Condominium, before attaining independence on 30 July 1980. The country has six provinces (Torba, Sanma, Penama, Malampa, Shefa and Tafea) with limited administrative authority.

Political system

2.2 Vanuatu has a unicameral 52-member parliament, elected to a four-year term. The President of the Republic is elected for a five-year term through secret ballot by an electoral college comprising the members of parliament and the presidents of the six provincial governments. The current President, Iolu Johnson Abbil, was elected in September 2009. The Prime Minister is elected by parliament from among its members by secret ballot.

2.3 Vanuatu is the only Pacific country with multi-member electorates. The proliferation of political parties is seen, by some, as one reason for persistent political instability. Until about 1991 the main political divide in Vanuatu was between Anglophones and Francophones, respectively represented by the Vanua'aku Pati (VP) and United Moderates Party (UMP). During the last decade, parties have been splintering over policy and, more often, personality differences, in a manner more typical of other Melanesian countries like Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands. Recent efforts to try and reunify each of the two sides, ostensibly to encourage greater political stability, have yet to play out fully.

2.4 The most recent parliamentary elections were held on 30 October 2012. Sixteen political parties and four independents won seats. The largest party (VP) led by Edward Natapei won only eight of the 52 seats. At the first sitting of the new parliament, held on 19 November 2012, Meltek Sato Kilman Livtuvanu (People's Progressive Party) was re-elected prime minister to lead a coalition government. But Kilman resigned ahead of a parliamentary no-confidence motion and on 23 March 2013, Prime Minister Moana Carcasses Katokai Kalosil (Green Confederation), was elected. Carcasses held a small, unwieldy coalition majority but faced opposition over a number of decisions, including a US\$350 million airport concession agreement. Three unsuccessful no-confidence motions were lodged against the Prime Minister in 2013 and 2014. One was rejected by the Speaker in July 2013, one was withdrawn by

1 Much of the factual information in this chapter has been provided by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the Department of Defence.

the Opposition in December 2013 and one was defeated by the Government in February 2014. However, a fourth no-confidence motion was successful in May 2014 when Prime Minister Carcasses was replaced by Joe Natuman as Prime Minister.

Australia's relationship with Vanuatu

2.5 Australia is Vanuatu's closest security partner, its largest aid donor and an important trade and investment partner. Australian investment in Vanuatu is estimated at \$147 million, primarily in banking and in services sectors, such as tourism. Australian business interests in Vanuatu include Westpac, ANZ and cruise-ship operator Carnival Australia. Vanuatu has an active off-shore finance centre in which a number of Australian lawyers and accountants participate, taking advantage of the country's status as a tax haven. Two-thirds of long-stay tourists to Vanuatu and almost all cruise ship passengers are Australian. Former Prime Minister Carcasses visited Sydney in July 2013 to witness the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between Carnival Australia and the Australian Government to provide training and business development opportunities in Vanuatu (and PNG).

2.6 People-to-people links are strong: there is a large resident population of Australians (approximately 3000). According to the 2011 census, the number of people in Australia of ni-Vanuatu ancestry is 705. Australia has a high commission in Port Vila, and the Vanuatu Government established a high commission in Canberra in March 2012.

Issues discussed in detail

Development assistance: overview

2.7 The Government of Vanuatu relies heavily on Australia's development assistance. Australian aid (which is proposed at \$62.2 million in 2013-14) accounts for over 60 per cent of all grant aid flows to Vanuatu (excluding non-traditional donors such as China and Russia), and roughly 30 per cent of total public spending. Overall, Vanuatu's progress on achieving the Millennium Development Goals has been mixed. Vanuatu is on-track to achieve two of seven goals (reducing child mortality, and combatting HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases). Vanuatu is ranked 124 out of 187 on the UN's Human Development Index.

2.8 The committee is pleased to note that Australia's development assistance to Vanuatu is continuing to make a number of positive contributions, including:

- providing greater access to basic education in Vanuatu through contribution to school grants (boosting primary school enrolments by seven per cent between 2009 and 2011). In 2012, Australia trained 312 teachers and delivered 43,384 textbooks to primary schools;
- supporting Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) to provide relevant skills for sustainable economic growth. Australia's TVET Program has been successful in raising incomes and stimulating economic development in sectors such as tourism, fisheries and agriculture. A 2012 evaluation of the program identified that, in participating communities, household incomes increased an average of

26 per cent relative to communities that did not participate. The TVET Program began in 2009, and the third phase started in March 2014;

- helping the Vanuatu Government to expand immunisation coverage, train health workers, improve health planning and eliminate malaria in some areas. With Australian support, malaria prevalence has dropped by around 80 per cent between 2007 and 2014;
- helping fix and maintain 137 kilometres of rural roads in Vanuatu, which has increased economic development and access to essential services in remote areas; and
- assisting the Vanuatu Government to improve its economic governance and public financial management. For example, Value-Added Tax collections exceeded the October 2012 target by 34 per cent, and major national procurement reforms are underway.

2.9 A key objective of the visit was for the committee to gain a greater understanding of how Australia's development assistance to Vanuatu is contributing to improved political governance, economic growth, education, health and infrastructure in Port Vila and its peri-urban environment and in the outer islands. During a two-day program the committee had an opportunity to discuss aid-related issues with a range of partners including members of the Vanuatu Government, civil society organisations and the private sector in Port Vila, and in Luganville and Port Olry on the island of Santo.



Senate committee with the Honourable Philip Boedoro, Speaker of Parliament, Parliament of Vanuatu

Technical and Vocational Education and Training

2.10 An important part of the committee's visit to Vanuatu was a day-long visit to the northern island of Santo where the committee was able to observe first-hand how Australia's aid is contributing to Vanuatu's Technical and Vocational Educational and Training (TVET) sector. Vanuatu's TVET sector provides education, training and learning activities in agribusiness, tourism, fisheries, forestry, manufacturing, trades and services. This training provides local communities with knowledge, skills and attitudes relevant for employment or self-employment.

2.11 There are currently three TVET centres in Vanuatu: in Sanma, Malampa and Torba provinces. They facilitate training accredited by the Vanuatu National Training Council and small business coaching services that are both flexible and accessible. A particular focus is ensuring the participation of women and people with disabilities. They are sometimes described as a 'one-stop-shop' providing a range of skill development services including accredited training, business development services, training provided support services and IT services. Since 2009 there have been in excess of 6000 trainees participating in TVET programs, including 2400 women, 150 trainers and 125 people with a disability. Approximately 90 per cent of self-employed trainees increase their profit as a result of their training.

2.12 The Sanma centre, established under the Australian-aid-funded TVET Program in 2008 in partnership with the Ministry of Education and Training, coordinates skill development services that respond to the demands of the productive sectors and local industry. The centre works with representatives from priority sectors and small business (tourism, agriculture, trades) to identify skill gaps. It liaises with local training providers and industry experts to provide an appropriate training and/or coaching response for target groups and individuals. The centre also supports these clients with follow-up and iterative training services.

2.13 The centre runs two types of program: an employment training fund and business development service. The committee was told that various types of training are provided to assist with capacity building to improve service delivery: fabric painting, basic literacy and numeracy, and business management and tourism to assist with the sale of local products.

2.14 The committee received briefings from the Centre Manager and other clients about their experiences and the benefits they have gained from participating in TVET programs. The committee was particularly encouraged to learn how the TVET programs are delivering real benefits for local communities. These include using role models and experience to coach and mentor, encouraging couples to attend training, and providing assistance to trainers to develop action plans and follow-up after three to six months.

2.15 The committee received an interesting briefing from a representative of one of Luganville's most popular and successful tourist attractions, the one-day *Millennium Cave Tour*, which has been a beneficiary of the TVET system. The tour offers participants a varied experience of rainforest walks, dark caves, a canyon swim and a climb out of the canyon on a 'rickety ladder'. A key to the company's success is the level of training provided to staff in areas as varied as tour guiding to book keeping.

Over the previous three years the company has become a licenced and certified operator, has opened a reservations office and has increased visitor numbers from under 1000 to nearly 4000 each year.

2.16 Based on the proven success of the TVET Centre model to raise incomes and productivity levels for its clients, the Ministry of Education has now formally integrated the provincial TVET Centres within its institutional structure.

Economic issues

Infrastructure and private sector engagement

2.17 The committee was advised that access to finance from the local banking sector is difficult due to high interest rates. The committee was interested in whether there were alternative models for micro and small business receiving assistance from local financial service providers. The committee was told that the local banks are extending their reach in Vanuatu and promoting financial products including in the remote areas and outer islands

2.18 Investment in infrastructure and roads are considered priorities of the Vanuatu Government. Australian aid contributes to Vanuatu's Roads for Development Program which is focusing on the restoration and maintenance of rural roads to increase economic development opportunities and access to essential services. Australia is also contributing \$31 million to the Port Vila Urban Development Project which will upgrade 22 kilometres of roads, fix stormwater drainage to prevent flooding, and improve pedestrian crossing and footpaths and sanitation and hygiene facilities.

2.19 In a briefing with former Deputy Prime Minister Natapei, a number of issues were discussed including infrastructure development, Australian nationals investing in Vanuatu, opportunities to partner with local business and export opportunities, and development of a new international airport in Port Vila. The committee also discussed how the traditional land-ownership system in Vanuatu assists and hinders commercial ventures involving overseas companies wanting to purchase or lease large tracts of land.

Seasonal Worker Program

2.20 Vanuatu's participation in the Seasonal Worker Program (SWP) and the importance of remittances was raised during the committee's visit. During 2012-13, 119 seasonal workers were recruited by Australian employers and 185 seasonal workers recruited to 31 March this year.

2.21 Vanuatu has the largest percentage of women participants under the seasonal workers program and the second-largest number of visa grants (after Tonga). There are currently 10 licensed agents operating in Vanuatu. Seasonal workers from Vanuatu to be recruited to work later this year in Koo Wee Rup, Victoria, to harvest asparagus will have the opportunity to participate in the Australian Government's add-on skills training program and may receive training in basic IT, first aid, and English numeracy and literacy.

2.22 The SWP commenced on 1 July 2012, building on the experience and findings of the Pacific Seasonal Worker Pilot Scheme. The objective of the SWP is to

contribute to the economic development of participating Pacific Island countries and Timor-Leste. Outcomes are driven by employer demand for seasonal labour, and workers' employment experience, skills/knowledge transfer and remittances. The findings of an evaluation conducted during the Pilot found that an average seasonal worker could earn \$12,000 and remit between \$5000 and \$6000 over a six month job placement. This far exceeds the per-capita income of most Pacific countries.

2.23 The SWP includes a program in horticulture and a small scale three year trial (to 30 June 2015) in the accommodation, aquaculture, cane and cotton sectors. From 1 July 2012 to 30 June 2016, up to 12,000 places are available to employers who may recruit seasonal workers from nine partner countries (Timor-Leste, Nauru, Kiribati, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu). The SWP allows workers from participating countries to undertake between 14 weeks' and six months' work with Australian employers who can demonstrate an unmet demand for low-skilled labour. Take-up of the SWP is demand-driven by Australian employers who are able to choose the participating countries from which they wish to recruit.

2.24 The SWP progressed well in its first year to 30 June 2013, and 1454 (90 per cent) of the 1600 places available to horticulture employers were filled. All 2000 places available to horticulture employers this year (2013-14) are likely to be utilised. Take up in the trial sectors has been low, particularly in the cane, cotton and aquaculture sectors. The accommodation sector trial is building with businesses in Western Australia, the Northern Territory and Far North Queensland and the Whitsundays region taking part.

Social Issues

Gender and social issues

2.25 The committee's Vanuatu program began with a briefing by the High Commission's Development Cooperation Counsellor on the main social, economic and political challenges facing Vanuatu. It was revealed that:

- 40 per cent of the population is under 15 years of age (high youth unemployment and development of a large peri-urban fringe, especially in Port Vila);
- low education levels (only six percent tertiary and seven per cent secondary); not a large pool of experience and talent to draw from; and
- health issues include low rates of child immunisation; limited access to health facilities such as doctors, nurses and dentists; and underage mortality.

2.26 The committee was alarmed by published statistics on domestic violence and violence against women and children. These are major social problems in Vanuatu. A 2011 study on violence against women in Vanuatu conducted by the Vanuatu Women's Centre in partnership with the National Statistics Office, found that 60 per

cent of women experience physical and/or sexual violence in their lifetime by husbands and partners.² The study also found that:

- 90 per cent of the women experienced severe physical violence;
- one in four women experienced physical violence by non-partners over a fifteen year period;
- one in three women experienced child sexual abuse under the age of 15, and sexual violence over the age of 15;
- violence caused injuries for many women with approximately 20 per cent experiencing a permanent disability;
- physical and sexual violence caused mental health problems, including attempted suicide, and disrupted women's work and daily living.

2.27 The issues of domestic violence and violence against women in Vanuatu, including measures to reduce the level of violence, were discussed in a briefing provided to the committee by officers from New Zealand's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade in Wellington on 8 May. The discussion acknowledged that domestic violence in Vanuatu is a multi-faceted social problem and raised a number of issues, including:

- domestic violence against women is the number one crime across the Pacific region and should therefore be integrated in to police programs;
- up to 50 per cent of detainees in Vanuatu jails have been convicted of so-called 'moral crimes', usually involving violence and/or sexual offences against women and children;
- ways to engage the local churches and church leaders;
- the importance of education, economic opportunity and independence, and political mobilisation as factors to address violence against women; and
- traditional cultures are prone to domestic violence when exposed to rapid urbanisation, land acquisition and resource development projects, often resulting in social dislocation.

2.28 These gender issues are not confined to Vanuatu but represent a significant challenge across the Pacific region. Women comprise less than four per cent of parliamentarians compared with the global average of approximately 20 per cent. Women occupy a third of formal sector jobs and men earn 20 to 50 per cent more than women.

2.29 The committee notes that the Australian Government is supporting an ambitious ten-year \$320 million program, Pacific Women Shaping Pacific

2 *Women's Lives and Family Relationships*, Vanuatu Women's Centre in partnership with the National Statistics Office, October 2011

development, which aims to improve political, economic and social opportunities for Pacific women in 14 countries

2.30 One specific area of concern for the committee is the absence of female women representation in the Vanuatu parliament, and the lack of women in leadership positions more generally. From 1980 to 2012, only six women, or 1.4 per cent of members, have been elected to the Vanuatu parliament. In 2012, 17 women candidates contested the 52 seats but none was elected. Of the 91 municipal-level councillors elected since 1993, eight women have been elected. Following an initiative of the Carcasses government, the Vanuatu parliament recently gave approval for Port Vila Municipal Council to reserve 30 per cent women's representation at its Port Vila elections in January 2014. Five women were elected.

2.31 The committee notes that Australia continues to support women's empowerment through a number of practical measures including:

- the Pacific Leadership Program—helping the Department of Women's Affairs to develop and implement a three-year plan on reserved seats for women at municipal elections;
- supporting TVET Centres to target the skills development needs of rural women; and
- support of around \$1 million annually for the Vanuatu Women's Centre (VWC) to provide counselling, community education and legal services for victims of gender-based violence. The VWC is the only national provider of services to women experiencing (or at risk of) violence.

Vanuatu College of Nursing Education and Vila Central Hospital

2.32 The committee was fortunate to have an opportunity to inspect the Vanuatu College of Nursing Education (VCNE), completed in 2009, and Port Vila's Central Hospital (VCH) and related facilities. The main aim of the visit was for the committee to experience first-hand the level of health services currently provided to the Vanuatu community, how Australian aid is contributing to patient care at VCH and Vanuatu's health sector, and ongoing challenges of health service delivery in Vanuatu. The committee inspected a new facility to accommodate the College on the grounds of Vila central Hospital. The facility was jointly funded by the Australian and French Governments and has classrooms, demonstration/practice rooms, a library and office space.

2.33 In recent years, Australia has worked closely with Vanuatu's Ministry of Health and the VCNE to improve the quality of nurse training in Vanuatu. The VCNE currently enrolls up to 105 students in a Diploma of Nursing with nearly 40 new students enrolling each year. Currently, 25 students each year graduate as registered nurses from the three year nursing program. A new curriculum for training nurses was developed in 2012 combining basic midwifery and nursing skills. The new curriculum was developed in response to the need for multi-skilled specialist nurses in rural and remote health centres. Students are required to pay the equivalent of \$A200 each year with approximately 30 students receiving performance-based scholarships which are supported by Australia. There is a 70 to 80 per cent completion rate.

2.34 In addition to nurse training, the committee inspected the Vila Central Hospital to gain a deeper understanding of how Australia has been supporting Vanuatu's health sector over the previous 10 to 15 years. Currently there are eight Australian Government funded specialists employed at VCH supporting local doctors in key areas including surgery, anaesthesiology and paediatrics. Australia's support to paediatrics is currently providing the only fully-qualified paediatrician for Vanuatu's 165,000 children.

2.35 The committee also briefly visited the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit within the hospital's maternity ward, which was established in 2012 with funding support from the Australian Government. Australia's support enabled the purchase of four high-quality incubators and the renovation of a hygienic working space.

2.36 The committee notes two additional recent developments within the hospital precinct which have benefited from Australian aid funding: development of new oxygen plants and refurbishment of the Central Medical Stores. In 2013, Australia funded two new oxygen plants for the main referral hospitals in the northern and southern provinces—one in the capital Port Vila, and the other in Luganville, Santo. Each plant will have a design life of 20 years without the need for major refurbishment. Australia also provided technical assistance to the Vanuatu Ministry of Health to procure and install two oxygen plants and train personnel in their use. The new oxygen plants will ensure self-sufficiency in the production of quality medical gases in the event of a natural disaster.

2.37 The committee is very pleased to learn that although each oxygen facility will cost approximately AU\$40,000 each year to operate, budget savings for the Ministry of Health will be in the order of \$240,000, a very significant overall saving relative to the ministry's total budget.

2.38 As recently as 2013, the Australian Government funded the refurbishment of the Central Medical Stores at VCH and four provincial pharmacies to increase the total pharmaceutical and medical supply storage capacity. A satellite medical store has also been co-located with the Northern District Hospital in Luganville, Santo, to separate pharmaceutical supplies to ensure a timely response to orders from the Northern provinces.

2.39 The Australian Government, through the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, supports the Central Medical Stores in a number of other ways. Financial support is provided for an electronic inventory and stock control module linking provincial hospital pharmacies, and for testing services for pharmaceuticals in Australia to ensure receipt of quality product. It is expected that A\$300,000 will be available in 2014 for infrastructure projects and support arrangements relating to the Central Medical Stores

2.40 The committee appreciates the importance and timeliness of these measures to ensure that pre-positioned medical supplies are available to authorities to provide good medical care, especially to victims of natural disasters.

Tourism

2.41 Vanuatu is Australia's 43rd largest inbound market by arrivals. In 2012-13, there were 10,200 visitors to Australia from Vanuatu, a decrease of 1.9 per cent on the previous year. Over the last five years, the average annual growth rate in arrivals from Vanuatu was 3.8 per cent. In 2012-13, there were 66,300 short-term resident departures from Australia to Vanuatu, an increase of 10.1 per cent on the previous year. Over the last five years, the average annual growth rate in departures from Australia to Vanuatu was two per cent.

Air Services Arrangements

2.42 Air services talks with Vanuatu were last held in Port Vila in December 2010. The arrangements include the Regional Package (unrestricted capacity and frequency for direct flights to and from Australia's regional gateways) and access into Australia's major gateway airports (Brisbane, Melbourne, Sydney and Perth) as follows: 1,900 seats per week for Vanuatu carriers and 2,800 seats per week for Australian carriers.

2.43 Virgin Australia currently operates services to Port Vila. Qantas code-shares on Air Vanuatu services to Port Vila.

Sanma Information Centre, Luganville

2.44 Following the briefing on TVET at the Sanma Centre, the committee visited the Sanma Information Centre to discuss with centre staff the centre's role and function since opening in early 2014. The centre was established through collaboration between the Vanuatu Department of Tourism, TVL (a telecommunications company), and the Australian and New Zealand governments. It is based on a similar centre in Malampa, which is also supported by Australia, and generated \$200,000 in bookings for Ni-Vanuatu tourism businesses in 2013—a 30 per cent increase on the previous year.

2.45 The Centre supports tourism in Sanma province by providing information to visitors on the region's attractions, reserving accommodation and taking payments via an eftpos terminal. Australian tourists account for 65 per cent of its business and New Zealand tourists 15 per cent. By 2017 it is expected that 70 per cent of total bookings will be made by smart phones. The Centre operates three levels of membership for local tourist operators—providing access to its website only, access to the website and handling inquiries, and full membership which includes managing bookings and taking payments.

2.46 Australia's support to the centre is complementary to Australia's TVET Program in Vanuatu, which has been working with local partners since 2009 on skills development for economic growth. The TVET Program facilitates access to quality skills-training and small-business support in a range of areas — including tourism and agriculture. TVET also promotes environmental sustainability through using exclusively local materials in construction and local food in restaurants.

2.47 During its visit to Santo, the committee travelled to Port Olry, met with community representatives and was welcomed by Chief Gratien Alguet. The committee was fortunate to have an opportunity to inspect a series of newly

constructed tourist bungalows owned and operated by beneficiaries of the TVET Program. The committee also briefly visited Champagne Beach, which is a key highlight and location on Carnival Australia's cruise itineraries to Vanuatu. It is also the location of a regular market involving surrounding villages. The committee was able to gain a better understanding of the impact of tourism in the area, including local business development and income-earning opportunities flowing from the Australian Government's partnership with Carnival.

Security, policing and defence

2.48 The committee received a valuable briefing on the Defence Cooperation Program from the Maritime Surveillance Adviser, Lieutenant Commander Robert Lewis. The committee was told that the Defence Cooperation Program (DCP) focuses on developing longer-term capacity within the Vanuatu Police Force, which has a key role in addressing domestic security concerns in Vanuatu. The committee notes that Vanuatu does not have a separate national defence force. The Vanuatu Police Force (VPF) and the Vanuatu Mobile Force (VMF) operate a single unified entity, which the Australian Government continues to support.

2.49 Another major goal of the DCP over the next three years is to advise and assist in re-establishing an efficient and self-sustaining Police Maritime Wing working collaboratively with government departments and other stakeholders to ensure the sovereignty of Vanuatu's exclusive economic zone.

2.50 The DCP budget for Vanuatu in financial year 2013-14 is \$745,000, with a focus on developing longer-term capacity within the VPF by providing support to the Pacific Patrol Boat (PPB) Program, small-scale infrastructure projects and strategic dialogue. These activities are supported in-country by a Royal Australian Navy Maritime Surveillance Adviser and a Technical Adviser.

2.51 Australia's primary engagement activity with the VMF, Exercise Vanuatu Alliance, provides training in conducting joint police patrols, community engagement and enhancing the VMF's capability to respond to humanitarian and disaster relief contingencies. This approach seeks to support a useful role for the VMF and promote cooperation between VMF and VPF elements.

Vanuatu Australia Police Project

2.52 The committee was also briefed on the Vanuatu Australia Police Project (VAPP) by Mr Peter Kuhnke, Adviser to VDF Commissioner and Commander VAPP. The current VAPP commenced in February 2011 having replaced the former Vanuatu Police Force Capacity Building Project which commenced in February 2006.

2.53 The Vanuatu Police Force (VPF) plays a key role in addressing domestic security concerns in Vanuatu. The VPF is made up of three elements; the General Duties VPF, the paramilitary Vanuatu Mobile Force (VMF) and the Police Maritime Wing. A key objective of the DCP is to foster greater levels of cooperation between the various VPF elements and to provide opportunities for the VMF to contribute to Vanuatu's security. Since the VPF is a law enforcement organisation, Defence closely coordinates its assistance with the AFP.

2.54 Australia has been the lead donor in the policing sector for over a decade. Under VAPP, the Australian Federal Police has two advisers in Vanuatu. The VAPP and broader law-and-justice programs will end on 30 June 2014. The nature and scale of support beyond this date is currently under discussion with the Vanuatu Government. VAPP is funded by DFAT and jointly implemented by the VPF and AFP.

2.55 Key achievements under the police project over the last year include: establishing and equipping a fingerprint forensic laboratory at Port Vila Police Station; opening of remote police posts in Ambae and Ambrym (central Vanuatu islands); retirement of 11 police officers to free salary for a new round of police recruitment with reserved places for female officers; training for Provincial Firearms Licensing Officers; putting the *RVS Turoroa* police vessel into operation with increased visibility of police in the northern islands; and a new professional standards policy to tackle lack of internal discipline in the force.

RVS Tukoro and the Police Maritime Wing

2.56 The centrepiece of Australia's security engagement in the Pacific region is the Pacific Patrol Boat (PPB) program. Between 1987 and 1997, Australia built and gifted 22 patrol boats to 12 Pacific Island countries. The boats are operated by local defence forces and/or police service maritime elements. They provide countries with a sovereign capability to conduct maritime surveillance and enforcement in their extensive Exclusive Economic Zones. They also play a key role in other national tasking, including search and rescue, disaster relief, election support, immigration and customs and official government transport.

2.57 In addition to the provision of the patrol boats, Australia provides participating states with enduring advisory, training, and maintenance support. A network of 24 Royal Australian Navy advisers (and two associated Royal New Zealand Navy personnel) is attached to the various Pacific Island countries to provide operational and technical advice to the operating elements. Australia also funds patrols that involve engagement between two or more countries.

2.58 Australia gifted Vanuatu's Pacific patrol boat, *RVS Tukoro*, in 1987 as part of the Program. The *Tukoro* participates in a number of regional exercises and provides critical maritime surveillance and emergency response assistance. Australia currently provides ongoing funding for maritime training for *Tukoro's* crew and operational fuel to conduct surveillance patrols of Vanuatu's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). *Tukoro* spent much of 2013 undergoing its third refit in Cairns at a cost of approximately \$8 million, which was funded through the Program. This refit will see the *Tukoro* remain in operation until its scheduled end-of-life in 2019.

2.59 In addition to support to *Tukoro*, the Defence Cooperation Program funds on-shore infrastructure projects to upgrade and maintain the Police Maritime Wing's Headquarters, RVS Mala (located in Port Vila). These infrastructure projects are undertaken by local contractors and the VMF Engineering Platoon under the supervision of the senior ADF and NZDF officer in country.

2.60 The committee had an opportunity to inspect the *Tukoro* and ask questions of Robert Lewis, Maritime Surveillance Adviser, about the boat's capabilities and scheduled operations. The committee notes the difficulty faced by participants in the PPB Program to achieve effective policing of their EEZ due to the lack of a persistent capability to detect targets and cue the patrol boats to intercept illegal vessels. The follow on program for PPB should include consideration of a persistent cueing capability, the operation of which engages Pacific Island nations in the collection and dissemination of intelligence.



Senate committee inspecting Vanuatu's Pacific patrol boat, *RVS Tukoro*.

