

Foreign Policy White Paper Submission

ANU Development Policy Centre

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Introduction

This submission is from the staff of the Australian National University Development Policy Centre (Devpolicy), a think tank for aid and development serving Australia, the region, and the global development community. We undertake independent research and promote practical initiatives to improve the effectiveness of Australian aid, to support the development of Papua New Guinea and the Pacific island region, and to contribute to better global development policy. We were established in September 2010 and are based at Crawford School of Public Policy in the ANU College of Asia and the Pacific at The Australian National University.

Individual staff are responsible for the various sections as noted in the Table of Contents. Those sections reflect their views, and these are not necessarily the views of other contributors, nor of the ANU, nor any of the funders of the Development Policy Centre.

This submission is intended to be brief and selective. Aid priorities have already been set by the current government and we do not dwell on these. Nor do we comment at length on issues of aid effectiveness, which we have analysed elsewhere. Our focus is on particular areas and strategic approaches where we think the forthcoming Foreign Policy White Paper can make a real difference.

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission. We would be happy to discuss it further.

Professor Stephen Howes
Director, Development Policy Centre
Australian National University
28 February 2017

Summary of recommendations

Recommendation 1 (relating to the role of development in Australia's foreign policy)

The White Paper presents a unique opportunity to clarify the role of development in Australian foreign policy and in the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in an integrated post-AusAID era. It should do this in four ways, by:

- emphasizing the importance of development for Australian foreign policy, including by renaming DFAT as the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development
- articulating the goals of our foreign policy in terms not only of advancing Australia's interests but also of expressing our values
- noting the importance of aid implementation, and committing to reverse the perceived decline in aid effectiveness and communications post-integration
- referring to the importance for development of policy tools other than aid, in particular labour mobility in the Pacific.

Recommendation 2 (relating to linking aid to Australian values):

Reflecting the values of Australians, Australian aid should be focused, first and foremost, on helping tackle development problems in developing countries.

Recommendation 3 (relating to the aid policy framework):

The government should undertake to refresh its aid policy framework from about mid-2017, three years after the adoption of the existing framework, with a view to enhancing its relevance, its flexibility and its usefulness as a tool for communication and accountability. As part of this process, the government should consider shifting away from country-based allocations in most cases and defining a core set of thematic priorities on which Australia is particularly well placed to deliver. It should also assess the merits of creating new institutional arrangements to deliver on certain priorities, including international medical research and outward investment promotion.

Recommendation 4 (relating to aid volumes)

In the interests of enhancing Australia's standing as a good international citizen, the government should, as a first step, commit to increase Australia's ODA/GNI ratio to at least 0.3 per cent, the present OECD average, over several budgets (i.e. by 2020).

Recommendation 5 (relating to Australia's unique role in the Pacific)

Australia plays a unique role in the Pacific islands, as the largest economy and provider of development assistance in the region. Foreign aid to the region is likely to continue to be important in the future, given the limits to growth imposed by economic geography and poor governance. Australian aid must therefore be predictable. It should be used in such a way as to leverage other sources of funding, and to allow Pacific islanders to take advantage of the limited income-generating opportunities that are available to them.

Recommendation 6 (relating to Pacific labour mobility)

To promote Pacific labour mobility, Australia should:

- 6.1 Continue to promote and reform the Seasonal Workers Program to improve employer demand.
- 6.2 Introduce a Pacific Category permanent migration visa.
- 6.3 Promote bilateral Work and Holiday Agreements with Pacific island countries.
- 6.4 Expand the Temporary Graduate visa to include Australia-Pacific Technical College graduates.
- 6.5 Pilot an aged care trial to examine the industry suitability for Pacific labour mobility.
- 6.6 Develop an 'aid for migration' strategy to foster labour mobility in the Pacific, especially in countries without a history of migration.

1. Defining the role of development in an integrated foreign policy and Department

Prof. Stephen Howes, Director

Ever since the abolition of AusAID and the transfer of responsibility for management of the aid program to DFAT, there has been a lack of clarity around the role of development in foreign policy. There has been an effort at the Ministerial level to articulate the place for aid as part of a broader “economic diplomacy” and, more recently, as something that supports our national interest. To these framings for aid could be added the importance of expressing Australian values, and of acting as a good international citizen.

However, a proper understanding of the role of development in foreign policy needs to go beyond the framing of our aid objectives, and link aid to our broader foreign policy efforts. This submission outlines four ways in which this could be done, and where the White Paper could play a useful role.

First, the White Paper should reflect on the importance of development. How important are our development efforts, relative to other diplomatic and trade goals? Generally, the importance of our development efforts is underappreciated. Foreign policy think tanks pay scarce attention to development issues and aid. Foreign Ministers and DFAT Secretaries give few speeches on the topic. Yet Australia has few assets as powerful as its aid budget, even at its greatly diminished size of 3.8 billion dollars. And aid management is a complex matter that requires strong political and bureaucratic leadership. Moreover, as a middle power Australia has only few opportunities to make a real difference in foreign policy. Those opportunities typically arise in our region, where our response is heavily shaped by foreign aid itself: think of Timor Leste, Solomon Islands and earlier the Cambodian peace settlement. A good way to signal the importance of aid and development for our foreign policy would be to rename DFAT the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development.

Second, a proper understanding of the place of development in our foreign policy also requires that our foreign policy be appropriately framed. Currently DFAT [describes](#) its purpose as to “help make Australia stronger, safer and more prosperous by promoting and protecting our interests internationally and contributing to global stability and economic growth.” But this is inadequate given that aid (and other areas of foreign policy such as human rights and anti-death-penalty advocacy) are as much if not more expressions of Australian values as they are of Australian interests (see the accompanying submission by Terence Wood in particular). It would be better to explain the role of Australian foreign policy and DFAT as one of advancing Australia’s interests **and** expressing Australia’s values

Third, the fact that DFAT now has a major implementation role also needs to be emphasized. The Department not only “provides foreign, trade and development policy advice to the government” as emphasized by its [website](#). It also, and very importantly, *implements* a 3.8 billion dollar aid program. Recognizing this would provide a sound foundation on which efforts to promote aid effectiveness – such as transparency, reporting and evaluation – can be based. Aid stakeholders overwhelmingly perceive that aid effectiveness and communications have fallen since integration (see our [2015 aid stakeholder survey](#) and our [communications policy brief](#)). Reversing these perceptions should be a major objective of the Department going forward.

Fourth and finally, while aid will always be the major instrument any country has to further development, development should not be reduced to aid. Diplomacy can be used for development ends, and, more importantly, tools in other ministerial portfolios can also be important for

development. This is particularly the case when it comes to labour mobility in the Pacific. Such policies will never be decided solely on the basis of their development impact, but nor should developmental nor other foreign policy impacts be ignored in their formulation.

Recommendation 1: *The White Paper presents a unique opportunity to clarify the role of development in Australian foreign policy and in the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in an integrated post-AusAID era. It should do this in four ways:*

- *emphasizing the importance of development for Australian foreign policy, including by renaming DFAT as the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development*
- *articulating the goals of our foreign policy in terms not only of advancing Australia’s interests but also of articulating our values*
- *noting the importance of aid implementation, and committing to reverse the perceived decline in aid effectiveness and communications post-integration*
- *referring to the importance for development of policy tools other than aid, in particular labour mobility in the Pacific.*

2. Aid and Australians’ values

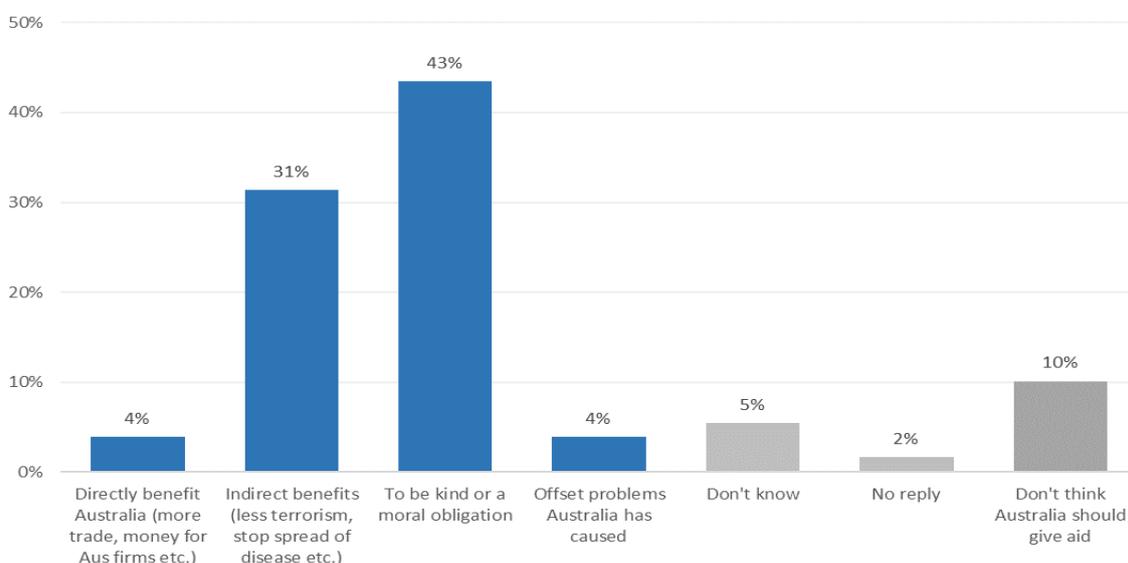
Dr Terence Wood, Research Fellow

The call for submissions for this White Paper asks “How should our values underpin Australia’s foreign policy?”

In aid’s case, the values of Australians can be found in responses to the 2016/17 Australian Survey of Social Attitudes – a large (n=929), nationally-representative public opinion poll.

In one of the poll’s questions, participants were asked whether they wanted Australian government aid given primarily to help poor countries or whether they wanted it focused on advancing Australia’s commercial and strategic interests. 66 per cent of respondents favoured giving aid primarily for the purpose of helping poor countries. Fewer than 20 per cent of respondents favoured focusing aid on advancing Australia’s interests. Participants were also asked, “the main reason you think Australia should give aid”. Responses are charted below.

Figure 1: The main reasons Australia should give aid (percentage share of responses)



Public policy should not always be governed by public opinion. Aid, however, is less than one per cent of federal spending, and it affords Australia an important means of projecting its values into the world. Australians' values in this area are clear: most Australians want aid focused on helping people in need.

Recommendation 4: *Reflecting the values of Australians, Australian aid should be focused, first and foremost, on helping tackle development problems in developing countries.*

3. The policy framework for aid: shifting to themes

Robin Davies, Honorary Professor and Associate Director

There are some clear and instructive trends in the articulation of aid policy frameworks by other donor countries in recent years.

There is now much less emphasis on country-based aid in the form of traditional economic and social development programs. Humanitarian aid is more prominent, and accounts for a larger share of spending.¹ Aid policy narratives tend to rest on two or three of the following pillars: assistance to the most fragile countries, including conflict-affected states; responses to global and regional challenges requiring collective action; and direct engagement with the private sector to promote trade and investment.

Where country-based assistance still figures beyond the category of fragile states, the emphasis is now much more on support for domestic revenue collection and public expenditure management in middle-income countries, including the development of social protection systems.

The central tenet of recent policy frameworks is that aid, well used, can leverage the benefits and mitigate the downsides of globalisation. They are, in that sense, 'one world' frameworks. Some titles alone illustrate the point:

- *UK aid: tackling global challenges in the national interest*, November 2015
- *One world, one future: Ireland's policy for international development*, May 2013
- *A world to gain: a new agenda for aid, trade and investment*, the Netherlands, April 2013

Several factors have driven the evolution of aid policy narratives away from what was previously a two-world, 'poverty reduction through sustainable development' storyline.

One is the emergence of new international finance providers who tend to specialise in public infrastructure and can outcompete traditional donors in that domain.

Another is the graduation of all but the most fragile countries to middle-income status, combined with the ever-increasing importance of private financial flows to this same group of countries.

And a third, arguably the most important, is the level of public concern in donor countries — superimposed on a perennial background of aid scepticism — about the impact of transboundary problems such as climate change, irregular migration and communicable diseases.

¹ As a proportion of aid provided by all countries that report their assistance to the OECD (which includes some non-member countries), humanitarian assistance increased from 5.6 per cent in 2002 to 11.2 per cent in 2015.

Given these shifts in the global context for aid, already reflected in other donors' policy frameworks, it is reasonable to question whether Australia should continue to place as much emphasis as it does on bilateral aid relationships and allocations.

Certainly, it makes sense for Australia to maintain bilateral aid relationships with Papua New Guinea, the Pacific island countries and Timor-Leste — countries with high dependence on Australian aid. Beyond that, there is unlikely to be any significant downside in shifting to an aid program organised along primarily thematic lines.

The advantage of a thematic approach is that it would allow Australian governments much greater flexibility to address global and regional problems, and also quickly to transfer resources to wherever they can best be utilised.

As most of the developing countries of Asia now have very low levels of aid dependence, and a diversity of financing sources, they are unlikely to voice any serious objections to a shift from country-based to thematic aid allocation on Australia's part.

Single-country investments should continue to be made, as they are generally more effective than multi-country programs, but they could be made with much greater cross-program coherence without the straightjacket of country-based funding envelopes.

As for the selection of thematic priorities, Australia is a middle-ranking donor with, currently, limited budget flexibility and administrative capacity. In these circumstances, it makes sense to focus resources on humanitarian aid, selected thematic objectives, some public policy partnerships in areas where Australia has particular expertise, and carefully targeted private sector engagement backed by risk-reduction financing.

There is always a level of temptation to allocate aid to monolithic, contractor-operated technical assistance facilities or infrastructure projects, for the sake of simplicity. However, Australia really has nothing distinctive to offer through such investments. Simplicity is usually better achieved by using multilateral channels where they are deemed effective.

The balance of the aid program's resources can then be applied to areas in which Australia does have much to offer (e.g. agriculture, medical research, social policy), in which Australia has an existing or incipient specialisation (e.g. assistance to vulnerable groups, including people with disabilities), or in which Australia has obvious scope to do more (e.g. incentives for Australia's multinational firms to invest more in the poorer and more fragile developing countries of Asia and the Pacific).

A tighter focus on humanitarian assistance and the three pillars of development assistance outlined above — assistance to our fragile neighbouring states, action on global and regional challenges, and direct engagement with the private sector — would be likely to improve both the effectiveness and communicability of Australia's aid effort.

Recommendation 3: *The government should undertake to refresh its aid policy framework from about mid-2017, three years after the adoption of the existing framework, with a view to enhancing its relevance, its flexibility and its usefulness as a tool for communication and accountability. As part of this process, the government should consider shifting away from country-based allocations in most cases and defining a core set of thematic priorities on which Australia is particularly well placed to deliver. It should also assess the merits of creating new institutional arrangements to deliver on certain priorities, including international medical research and outward investment promotion.*

4. Aid volume and international burden sharing

Robin Davies, Honorary Professor and Associate Director

Domestic observers of Australia's aid program are mostly preoccupied by changes in its size over time. Many view with understandable and deep concern the fact that Australia's aid effort, measured in terms of the ratio of aid to gross national income, now stands at its lowest level ever, 0.22 per cent.²

However, in the context of the White Paper, it is Australia's performance relative to other wealthy countries that matters most. Australia's capacity to achieve its desired outcomes in the multilateral arena, such as election to a UN Security Council seat or to the UN Human Rights Council, depends in no small part on the extent to which Australia is perceived to be providing its fair share of international development assistance.

It should be recalled that a key plank of Australia's candidacy for a 2013-14 Security Council seat was Australia's generosity as an aid donor, expressed in terms of our commitment to a 'double doubling' of aid over the decade from 2005 to 2015, and backed by the slogan, 'we do what we say'.

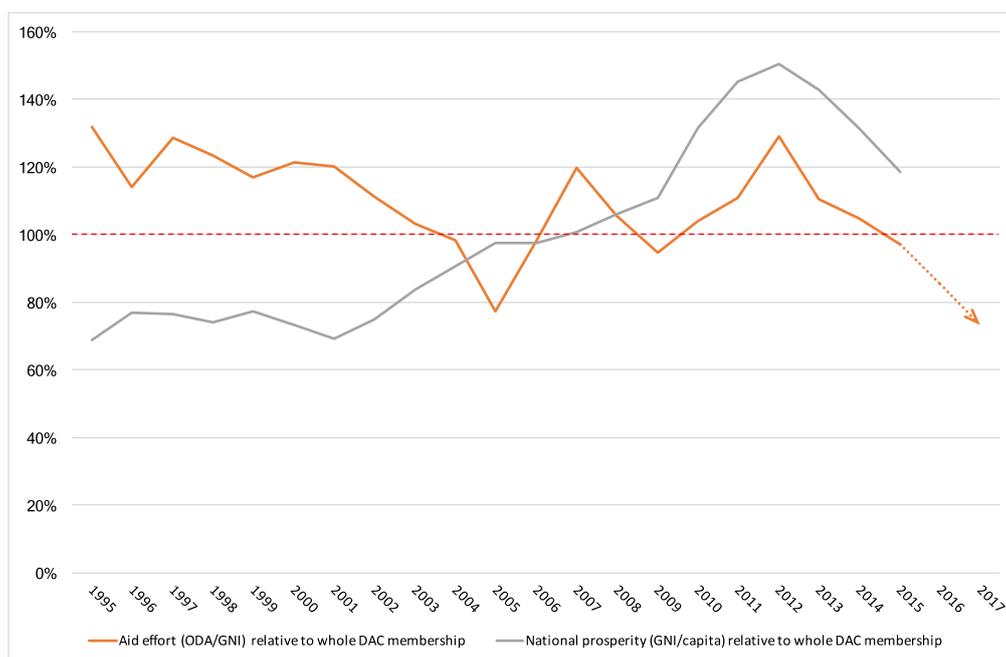
For most of the past two decades, Australia's aid effort, while less than it had been in earlier decades, was above average among the member countries of the OECD's Development Assistance Committee or DAC (Figure 2).³ Only once did it drop significantly below that average, in 2005, just before the Howard government's commitment — announced, notably, at the UN — to the first doubling of aid between 2005 and 2010.

This year, though, Australia's relative performance will fall to a new historic low — about 75 per cent of the OECD average — at a time when Australia's GNI per capita remains healthy. By contrast, total OECD aid has roughly kept pace with total GNI growth for the past decade, growing by 20 per cent in real terms. Over the 15 years since the turn of the century it has grown by 82 per cent in real terms. And it achieved new record highs in each of the three years to 2015.

² This estimate is based on the 2016-17 economic growth forecast contained in the December 2016 Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook.

³ The average referred to here is the weighted average, which is calculated as the ratio of DAC members' total aid to their total GNI. The OECD also tracks the unweighted average, which is the average of the ODA/GNI ratios of all member countries — that is, the average country effort. The unweighted average is always higher than the weighted average owing to the high ODA/GNI ratios of several small donors. In 2015, the unweighted average was 0.41 per cent and the weighted average 0.3 per cent.

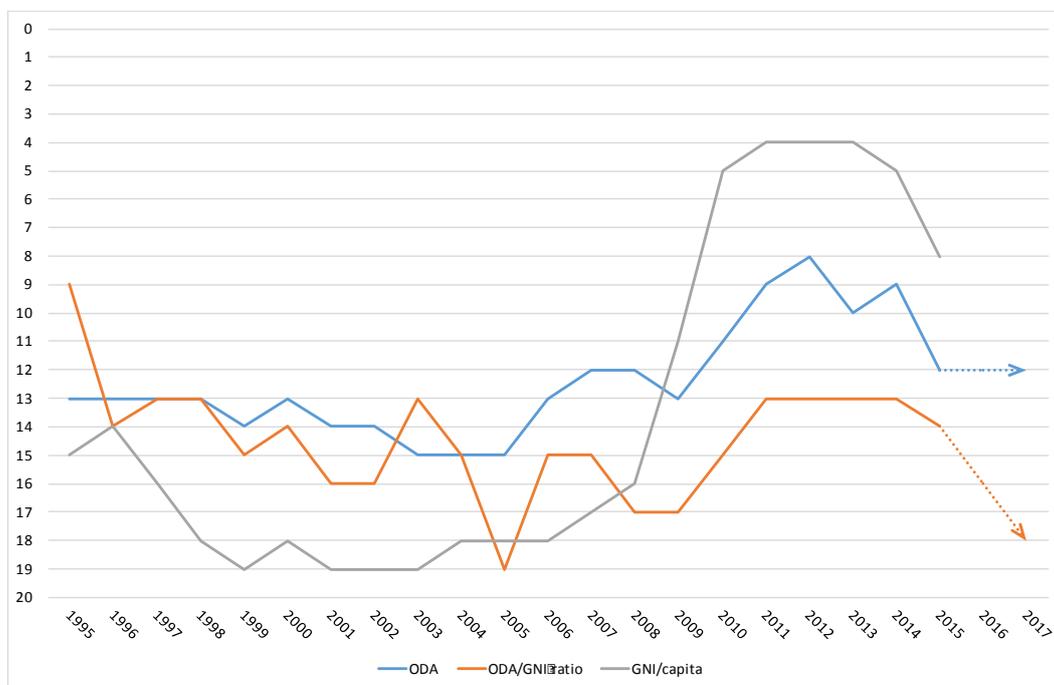
Figure 2: Australia's aid effort and prosperity in the OECD context



Source: OECD aid statistics. Effort projections for 2016 and 2017 are based on the assumption that Australia's 2017-18 aid budget is maintained at about the 2016-17 level in dollar and ODA/GNI ratio terms.

Australia will likely rank about 18th among OECD donors for aid generosity this year, which takes us back to 2005 (Figure 3). While we will continue to rank about 12th for aid quantity, since there is a big gap between us and the next donor down (Denmark), this is well below our rank on GNI per capita, which was 8th in 2015.

Figure 3: Australia's ranking among OECD donor countries



Source: OECD aid statistics. Projected rankings for 2016 and 2017 with respect to ODA and ODA/GNI ratios are based on the assumption that Australia's 2017-18 aid budget is maintained at about the 2016-17 level in dollar and ODA/GNI ratio terms, with parameters for other donors held constant.

Recommendation 4: *In the interests of enhancing Australia’s standing as a good international citizen, the government should, as a first step, commit to increase Australia’s ODA/GNI ratio to at least 0.3 per cent, the present OECD average, over several budgets (i.e. by 2020).*

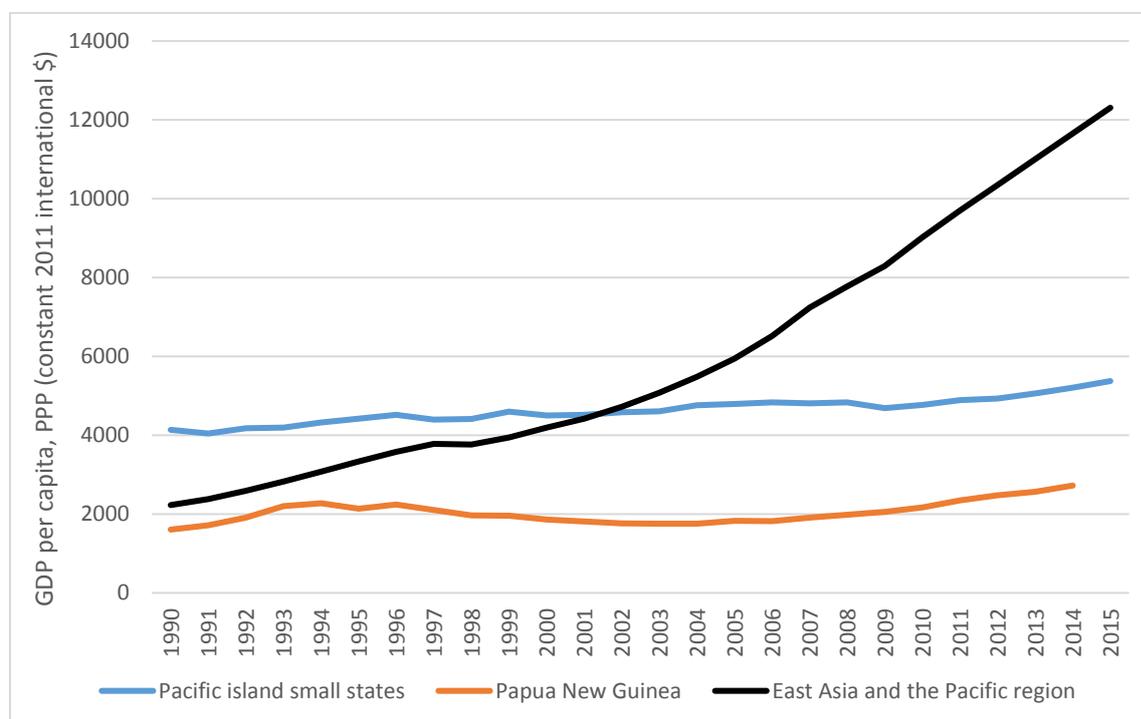
5. Australia’s unique role in the Pacific

Matthew Dornan, Deputy Director

Australia’s unique role in the Pacific islands region has long been recognised in Australian foreign policy. As a guarantor of security in the region, a former colonial power, and as the largest economy in Oceania, Australia exercises more influence in the Pacific than in any other region of the world. Small changes in Australian policy, whether in relation to aid, defence or migration policy, have significant ramifications for Pacific island countries. Rightly or wrongly, Australia is viewed internationally as having a special responsibility in the region.

Attributes of the Pacific islands have a number of implications for Australian foreign policy. The economic geography of small island developing states in the region, specifically their small size and distance from major markets, limits their ability to mimic the economic growth trajectory enjoyed by Asia in the last two decades (Figure 4). Coupled with deep-rooted political economy constraints to growth in larger countries like Papua New Guinea, this means the Pacific is unlikely to enjoy the kind of rapid development observed in other parts of the world.

Figure 4: GDP per capita in Pacific small island developing states, Papua New Guinea, and in the broader East Asia & Pacific region



Source: World Bank database

Foreign aid therefore has a uniquely important role to play in the Pacific. Already, foreign aid comprises a large source of government revenue (up to 40 per cent in some cases) in Pacific island states, enabling those governments to spend more in areas such as health and education. This is

likely to continue in the future in most Pacific island countries, with Fiji and PNG exceptions owing to their size. Australian aid is especially significant for the region, with over 50 per cent of foreign aid in the Pacific provided by Australia (a concentration not seen in any other region of the world).

In this context, ensuring that foreign aid is predictable is important, especially in the case of country programs. Australia's aid program is also in a unique position to leverage other sources of funding. One example is Australia's support for infrastructure policy and management that complements the physical infrastructure investments of multilateral banks. This arrangement has worked well and should continue. Aid investments in areas that are known to generate income for Pacific islanders, such as in support of enhanced labour mobility, should also be a priority for the aid program. Ensuring that Australia's migration policy and foreign aid program complement rather than undermine one another in relation to the Pacific would see the full extent of these gains realised (see the submission on labour mobility below).

Recommendation 5: *Australia plays a unique role in the Pacific islands, as the largest economy and provider of development assistance in the region. Foreign aid to the region is likely to continue to be important in the future, given the limits to growth imposed by economic geography. Australian aid must therefore be predictable. It should be used in such a way as to leverage other sources of funding, and to allow Pacific islanders to take advantage of the limited income-generating opportunities that are available to them.*

6. Promoting Pacific labour mobility

Henry Sherrell, Research Officer

[Pacific Possible: Labour Mobility](#), a joint report from the Development Policy Centre and the World Bank, clearly establishes the \$10 billion dollar prize for the Pacific by expanding labour mobility to developed countries. [Analysis by the Lowy Institute](#) furthers this case, finding "that allowing just 1 per cent of the Pacific's relatively small population to work in Australia would bring more benefits to the people of the Pacific than what Australia currently gives in aid."

The gains on offer for Pacific countries in the form of earning opportunities and remitted income are significant, and unmatched by other opportunities. Australia's migration policies should be modified to better deliver these gains, delivering benefit to the Pacific in Australia's national interest. Migration is a clear mechanism to promote Australia's interests and values. It both facilitates people to people links and underpins long-term commercial and cultural relationships. Australia's various migration programs and overall migration management are among the most well regarded internationally.

The importance of political leadership

Rising anti-migrant sentiment is the primary component of populist political movements in OECD countries. Some may argue that now is not the time to expand Pacific labour mobility and migration given this rising sentiment. These arguments do not hold weight. Australian attitudes to immigration are still [fundamentally positive](#). Political leadership on key questions of migration policy will help maintain social cohesion and constrain anti-migrant sentiment. Similar to the political bidding which occurred on backpacker tax rates, when migrants are seen as a solution to labour market and economic problems, broad support across the political spectrum can foster strong public confidence in migration policies.

Policy changes to support Pacific labour mobility

Seasonal Worker Program

The establishment and formalisation of the Seasonal Worker Program (SWP) in 2012 has provided Australia with a framework to induce additional Pacific labour mobility. As has been clearly documented, the SWP is held back by a lack of demand from employers. Second-year backpacker visas are the primary competition for seasonal workers, young citizens from already developed countries outnumber seasonal workers by about ten to one. Without the need for sponsorship and pastoral responsibility, backpackers outcompete seasonal workers on price. This has reduced the potential demand for seasonal workers in Australia.

However recent growth in the program has been positive. To support additional growth, the Australian Government should introduce additional compliance and employment monitoring in the horticultural industry to create a more even playing field for seasonal workers. Continuing to refine regulatory oversight and increasing the resources at the Department of Employment to better meet the needs of employers will promote greater employer interest. Policy decisions such as extending the length of stay to 12 months for Australia-Pacific Technical College graduates would also promote additional employment opportunities. Finally, a substantial domestic promotion strategy should be undertaken to build employer awareness of the program and the current regulatory requirements.

Care must be taken not to shoehorn all Pacific labour mobility goals through the SWP. Expanding the program to meet labour demand in additional industries may help stimulate more labour mobility however the inclusion of non-seasonal industries will likely generate regulatory tension. The proposals below help address this. Further detail on these proposals can be found in the Devpolicy-World Bank [Pacific Possible: Labour Mobility](#) report.

A Pacific Category visa

To complement the SWP, a permanent Pacific visa should be introduced in Australia. Mirrored on New Zealand's Pacific Category, these visas would require a job offer and be available by lottery to determine the outcome.

In New Zealand, the system was carefully designed to avoid brain drain by requiring a low skill threshold. The Pacific Possible report recommends an Australian version requiring high school graduation and an English test. These requirements would ensure adequate medium-term employment rates in Australia and with demand for these placements likely far outstripping the available supply, these requirements will act as an inducement to increase high school completion rates and English proficiency.

Pacific backpackers

A straightforward opportunity to promote labour mobility and circular migration would be the establishment of bilateral Work and Holiday agreements with additional Pacific countries.

Eligibility criteria for Pacific citizens should be weakened compared to existing 462 subclass visa conditions. For example, a high school completion should be adequate as well as a smaller level of demonstrated saving. Domestic government approval should be abandoned as this has clearly stymied the ability of Papua New Guinea to implement the bilateral agreement signed in 2011. Just as a British citizen does not require the approval of their government to be granted a subclass 417 visa, nor should a Pacific citizen require the approval of their government for a subclass 462 visa.

Expanding Graduate visas

Under a new stream of the Temporary Graduate visa (subclass 485), graduates of the Australia-Pacific Technical College (APTC) should be provided with a two year work visa. This would require amending the existing 'Australian study requirement' and modifying the English requirement to an IELTS average score of 5 (or equivalent test). It would be the most direct and simplest method of promoting labour mobility through the APTC.

Looking ahead

An ageing Australian population will change both labour demand in Australia and the composition of the labour market. Industries and occupations such as aged care and personal carers are well suited to match to Pacific labour mobility. However this will be difficult to achieve in a reactive manner. We must look ahead and carefully plan how Pacific labour mobility can assist Australia better mitigate the transitional effects of an ageing society. The newly introduced Microstate visa or the use of a Work Agreement under the subclass 457 visa are both well suited for adaption to test out appropriate labour market environments for Pacific labour mobility.

Aid for migration

Unlike 'aid-for-trade', an 'aid-for-migration' agenda could deliver effective outcomes in the Pacific. By greasing the wheels of Pacific labour mobility, particularly in countries without an emigration history or an existing Australian diaspora, such as Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands, aid funding could play a small but important part to overcome barriers.

This agenda would focus aid funding on tangible and achievable objectives. Initiatives to establish a network of Pacific-Australia job brokers, subsidise skills certification, assist with individual visa applications, or reduce the cost of remittances could all generate additional Pacific labour mobility and/or increase the gains from migration.

Recommendation 6:

To promote Pacific labour mobility, Australia should:

- 6.1 Continue to promote and reform the Seasonal Workers Program to improve employer demand.*
- 6.2 Introduce a Pacific Category permanent migration visa.*
- 6.3 Promote bilateral Work and Holiday Agreements with Pacific island countries.*
- 6.4 Expand the Temporary Graduate visa to include Australia-Pacific Technical College graduates.*
- 6.5 Pilot an aged care trial to examine the industry suitability for Pacific labour mobility.*
- 6.6 Develop an 'aid for migration' strategy to foster labour mobility in the Pacific, especially in countries without a history of migration.*