

## **The Historical ANU-UPNG Relationship**

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### *Introductory remarks*

Vice-Chancellor, distinguished guests, ladies & gentlemen.

It is an honour to have been asked to speak this evening at the culmination of what has been another successful PNG Update. These regular Updates are a testament to the important and continuing relationship between our two universities. It is fitting that I've been asked to say a few words tonight about the longer history of that relationship – one that goes back to the founding of both universities – ANU in 1946 and UPNG in 1965.

### *Contemporary connections*

I won't say much about the current partnership between the UPNG School of Business and the ANU's Crawford School. This week's events demonstrate the vibrancy and importance of that partnership. Most of us here tonight are well aware of its many contributions to both our university communities and beyond, including in areas of teaching and student experience; collaborative research & outreach; and faculty exchanges.

Instead, I turn to the deeper history of the relationship between ANU and UPNG which, as I said, goes back many decades and has encompassed diverse forms of research activity and other kinds of engagement, collaboration and the forging of strong personal links between academics in both institutions. It is in many respects a unique relationship - a longstanding relationship between two national universities that is also, by extension, a relationship between two nations. It is a relationship that has evolved over the years, reflecting broader changes and shifts in the relationship between the two countries, as well as developments within both universities and the larger academic world they inhabit.

*Let me begin with a little about my own personal history with both Universities.*

My own association with UPNG goes back well into the last century, though not as far back as 1965.

Coming directly from the UK, I spent four years at UPNG's then Law Faculty in the 1980s, working alongside such legal luminaries as Dr Alan Marat, Prof. John Nonggorr and the late Professor John Luluaki. Among my many students were the current Governor of the NCD, the Hon Powes Parkop, the current Acting Chief Justice, Justice Ambeng Kandakasi; and the former Justice Secretary and Attorney General, the late Dr Lawrence Kalinoe.

It was during this time that I visited Australia for the first time ... to a conference at the ANU in 1985 on "Law and Order in Papua New Guinea". As a young academic, I was struck by the interest in and deep knowledge about PNG and the Pacific at the ANU.

That first visit helped persuade me that the ANU was the best place to do my own PhD. Many of the senior scholars I came across – including the likes of Ron May, Bill Standish, Hank Nelson and Donald Denoon – had long personal and professional associations with Papua New Guinea, including in many cases having worked at this university or at the Institute of Applied Social and Economic Research (IASER – what is now the National Research Institute, NRI).

I was fortunate to later spend 3 years as researcher at the NRI in the early 1990s, another important national institution with strong historical and institutional links with ANU.

### *Early beginnings*

The ANU's association with Papua New Guinea goes back to the ANU's own establishment in 1946 following the Second World War. The university's founding charter as Australia's national university outlined its role to undertake research that would improve Australia's understanding of itself, its neighbours, and its place in the world, particularly within the Asia-Pacific region. Reflecting this mandate, the Research School of Pacific Studies was one of the ANU's four founding research institutes with a focus on the South-West Pacific. With growing awareness that Australia's northern colony was about to begin the transition to independence, PNG became a significant focus in the new School's research agenda.

In 1953, three ANU academics – historian Oskar Spate, anthropologist Cyril Belshaw and economist Trevor Swan – were tasked by the Australian government to investigate the economic structure of the then Territory of Papua and New Guinea. In their report, they noted significant knowledge gaps standing in the way of effective social and economic policy development in the Territory.

Eight years later, in 1961 – five years before the establishment of this university – the ANU’s Research School of Pacific Studies set up the New Guinea Research Unit (NGRU) with a mandate “to carry out work on problems of an inter-disciplinary nature which have both practical importance and scientific interest”. The Unit’s early research focused on internal migration and urbanisation, and land use and productivity. There was also considerable work on subsistence and cash cropping. In 1964, the NGRU coordinated a major study of the elections for the first Legislative Assembly and this became the first of an unbroken series of studies of PNG’s national elections that continues to this day involving ANU researchers working with PNG colleagues including many from this university.

In 1963, the Australian Minister for External Territories, Sir Paul Hasluck, initiated a Commission of Enquiry into tertiary education in the then territory. Oskar Spate, the ANU academic mentioned above, was a member of the Currie Commission which led to the establishment of UPNG in 1965, viewed as an important step in preparing the territory for eventual self-governance and independence. A total of 58 students commenced preliminary year studies in 1966. Many of this first cohort of UPNG students went on to become prominent national leaders, including future Prime Minister Sir Rabbie Namaliu; future Treasurer and Minister for the Public Service, Bart Philemon; and Vincent Eri, celebrated author (‘The Crocodile’) and future Governor-General.

In those early years of UPNG, ANU played a critical role in assisting the development of the new university, particularly in providing academic expertise, administrative support and curriculum development. A significant number of ANU academics taught at UPNG (including Gerry Ward, Hank Nelson, Donald Denoon, David Hegarty, Bill Standish, Bryant Allen, Tom Dutton). Two ANU Vice-Chancellors – Sir John Crawford and

Peter Karmel – served as Chancellors of UPNG. ANU researchers (including the likes of Ross Garnaut, Andrew Elek, Diane Conyers and Ron May) also made significant contributions to policy making in PNG, offering expertise in law, economics and finance, among other areas.

The Research School of Pacific Studies at the ANU became the global leader in studies of PNG's pre- and modern history, politics, economics and society and UPNG became an important partner in many of these research activities. I remember when ANU had its own guesthouse and vehicle in Boroko, as well as having a vehicle and facilities in the Western Highlands for use of visiting researchers. These were sold off in the late 80s or early 90s for financial & security reasons – the Boroko residence kept getting broken into!

ANU also became a favoured destination for many young PNG scholars seeking higher degrees in an international university with a unique concentration of Pacific (including PNG) expertise. Among the first generation of leading PNG scholars who attained their PhDs from the ANU were distinguished historians Dr John Waiko, Dr Ann Dickson-Waiko, and Dr August Kituai – all later professors at this university. There have, of course, been many others in later years, including Dr Philip Mitna, whose thesis I supervised, and who – as you know – is currently the Deputy Commissioner in the RPNGC. Today in my own Department of Pacific Affairs, our PhD cohort includes Michael Kabuni, Eileen Bobone, Geejay Milli, – all from UPNG – with other PNG graduate students (Masters & PhD students) studying at DPA and other parts of ANU.

In 1967 the NGRU, UPNG and the then Administrative College organised the first of the renowned Waigani Seminars, which came to provide a focus for debate on a range of issues in the lead-up to independence in the Melanesian island states. Papers from these seminars were published jointly by UPNG and ANU and remain an invaluable resource for all those interested in the important development debates during this formative period in PNG's modern history.

In 1968, the NGRU moved from its original premises in Badili to a new campus in Waigani across from the newly established UPNG. At independence in 1975, the NGRU was transferred from the ANU to the GoPNG and renamed the Institute of Applied Social and Economic

Research (IASER). IASER continued to undertake important applied research intended to inform policy-making in the new nation. In 1993, IASER became the National Research Institute. The research work of IASER-NRI has involved many productive collaborations between PNG's own researchers, most of whom are UPNG graduates, and external researchers, including many from the ANU.

### *A changing relationship*

As mentioned at the beginning of my talk, the relationship between the two universities has evolved over time reflecting changes in the relationship between the two countries, as well as changes within both universities in terms of their organisation and respective priorities.

PNG's Independence 50 years ago in 1975 naturally led to UPNG asserting its independence as an autonomous institution. This has meant developing its own academic identity as the new nation's leading tertiary institution. Over time, this has inevitably meant less reliance on expatriate staff and the nurturing of Papua New Guinea's own academics to run and set the academic directions for this university and the country's other tertiary institutions.

However, throughout this broader transition, the links with ANU have remained strong and enduring, particularly through the personal networks I have alluded to, the many joint research projects that have been undertaken over the years, and the institutional partnerships between different parts of our two universities.

Over time, the relationship has evolved from one of mentorship to one of collaboration between equals, although disparities in funding and capacity have sometimes challenged the balance.

There have also been many changes at the ANU over time, some of which reflect growing challenges facing universities in many parts of the world, others shifts in Australia's national priorities and strategic interests. Those of us who have been at ANU for a long time are aware of the fluctuating fortunes of Pacific studies over the years. These fluctuations are partly reflected in changes in ANU's internal organisation and nomenclature, including the evolution of the original Research School of Pacific Studies (RSPS) into the Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies (RSPAS) in 1994 and later in 2009 to the College of Asia and the Pacific (CAP).

That said, the focus and interest in PNG has remained fairly constant. A new generation of ANU-based researchers are working with a new generation of researchers at this university, as well as at the NRI and other PNG universities, on a range of important research collaborations, including around economic development and management, decentralisation, service delivery, electoral reform, anti-corruption, digital technology, gender empowerment, violence reduction and peacebuilding, and many more.

Whereas, in the early days of the relationship the direction of expertise was largely one way, it is markedly less so today. We are talking increasingly of two-way traffic between our institutions. In the Department of Pacific Affairs, we have research staff from different Pacific countries including PNG : Drs Theresa Meki and Mercy Masta who both graduated from this university – along with their colleagues – are actively shaping our research and other engagements with PNG and the wider Pacific, as well as educating undergraduates and graduate students, and improving understanding of PNG and the Pacific among Australian decision-makers and officials within the Canberra policy community.

Ladies and gentlemen, I've probably gone on for way too long but have hopefully conveyed some of the long history between our two universities.

It is clearly an enduring relationship that has weathered major transitions and changes over the last 60 years, including the inevitable ups and downs that characterise all long-term relationships.

It is a multi-faceted relationship comprising many dimensions and moving parts and one that I believe has benefitted both universities.

It is a relationship built and enacted through the contributions of numerous individuals in both institutions and the many important relationships forged over the years.

It is relationship that will continue to evolve in the years ahead.

I think we can all look forward in confidence – if not in person – to the next 60 years of the UPNG-ANU relationship.

Thank you.