

**TESS:** My name's Tess Newton Cain. I'm a visiting fellow with the Development Policy Centre. And today, here in Brisbane, I'm very happy to have the chance to chat with Sean Dorney. Sean, welcome to Pacific Conversations.

**SEAN:** Thank you very much, Tess.

**TESS:** So, usually I ask people to give a bit of an intro to themselves and their background, but as it's you, I've decided I'm just going to tell the listeners that Google is their friend, and if they don't know who you are, they can look you up. So, we'll move straight on. And the other thing I'm going to do, which may put some of them off, is I'm going to remind you that you and I agreed the other day that we'd use this chat to talk about your work in the Pacific other than Papua New Guinea.

**SEAN:** Yeah.

**TESS:** So, there's plenty of scope for talking about Papua New Guinea, but we're going to save that for another time.

**SEAN:** Fine.

**TESS:** So, let's start by looking back at all of the stories that you've covered in the region, other than PNG. Which do you think are the ones that have had the most impact on you and why would that be?

**SEAN:** Well, it's a pretty difficult question to answer. Look, one of the things about the Pacific is all the countries are so very, very different. The Polynesian countries are different from the Melanesian countries. They're both different to the Micronesian countries. And I've been fortunate enough to have been to almost every one of them. And what I find fascinating is that no matter where you go, every country has its own sort of individual issues and problems. So, that's what I'd start with, is that there's a huge variety of interesting things going on in all these different countries.

**TESS:** And even within one country, there can be different things going on in different parts of that country.

**SEAN:** Especially in Melanesia, where the language groups are so diverse and—but that's true, too, in Polynesia. Some parts of say Samoa are quite different from other parts. So, it's very difficult to make huge generalisations, I think, about the Pacific. But one of the big advantages I think I had, as a journalist spending so much time in the Pacific, is that I actually like Pacific islanders.

**TESS:** Yes.

**SEAN:** I mean I ended up marrying one from Manus Island in PNG. But I genuinely have built up, I think, real friendships throughout the region, which has been exceptionally sort of useful. One of the other things that I've found, too, and I think that any journalist from outside who is coming into the Pacific, who is trying to do their job and chase up stories, you rely, if you're going to get it right, enormously on the local journalists, on the journalists in those countries.

I had excellent relationships, I believe, with journalists throughout the Pacific. And one of the first things I did wherever I went, when I was covering a story, as long as it wasn't sort of something that demanded immediate sort of coverage, was to go and chat with the local newspaper and talk to those people.

**TESS:** So, that, I think, is really—a really important point, so I'm just going to pause there.

**SEAN:** Yep.

**TESS:** Because you know, I've lived and worked in the Pacific for 20 years, more. And I think that is possibly the biggest—if you were going to give anybody a top tip, it's just slow down and listen and chat, and do that—I don't know what you call it—that ground preparing, or just do that relationship enhancing. If you can do it before you get there, good, but certainly, once you arrive, that's when you—

**SEAN:** Well, one of the really positive things that helped me so, so much, was going to the annual Pacific Island News Association conferences, where you actually met these journalists and you built up some relationships with them, even if you hadn't been to their country. And then when you did go to their country, they were always so delighted to see you, which is very pleasing.

**TESS:** It's almost like you sort of started making friends before the plane even touches down.

**SEAN:** Yeah. And look, I sort of—it was almost a rule of mine that when I was in any of these countries, I would link up with the local media. Because they know so much more than you could ever possibly know. You may occasionally sort of get a little bit of a scoop by politicians being more prepared to speak to you than they have to the local journalists, but to get the leads and to get the ideas of the things you need to pursue, I've just found it totally invaluable.

**TESS:** And also, I think just to get a better sense of the context. Because they can tell you “Oh yes, I was at school with that person,” or “My uncle played sport with them,” or “We're in the same church.” And that just brings so much more depth. So, even if that doesn't actually get into your story, do you find that that helps you decide what is going into the story?

**SEAN:** Absolutely, yeah. No, that's absolutely correct. The question was looking back at these stories, which of the ones that made an impact. Well, I suppose one of the ones that really made impact on me is going to Fiji and trying to cover the coups in Fiji. At one stage, when Bainimarama was ruled to be illegal by the courts there, I actually got deported after reporting that. So, I mean that has a bit of an impact—

**TESS:** Yes, it does.

**SEAN:** —on you if you get thrown out of a country. But I mean the whole atmosphere in Fiji, I have found prior to the coups, it was so much different.

**TESS:** So, when you say the coups, just give us a date of what period you're talking about there.

**SEAN:** Well, I've been in and out of—

**TESS:** Because we know there have been several.

**SEAN:** Absolutely. Well look, I've been in and out of Fiji since the mid-70s.

**TESS:** So, definitely '87?

**SEAN:** Yeah, the '87 coup was—I mean that was quite different to the post ones, to the Bainimarama coups. But yeah, look at—so in terms of impact, there's no doubt, the Fiji coups and trying to cover those were significant. The tensions in the Solomons. I was in and out of the Solomons again and again and again, covering that conflict between the Guadalcanal and the Malaitans, so many of whom had migrated to Guadalcanal.

So, I really spent a lot of time in Honiara. At times, it was difficult to get out of Honiara. We actually got captured at one stage when we ventured across the line. But Rabuka, who was there as a peace negotiator, at that time, this was well after he was—his coup. But he'd become sort of a figure in the Pacific.

**TESS:** Poacher turned gamekeeper

**SEAN:** Well, the commonwealth, the commonwealth had approached him to be a sort of peace negotiator in the tensions in the Solomons. And Michael Field and I, we had ventured out into sort of the Isatabu sort of territory, and we were taken and looked as though we were going to be held hostage. But Rabuka came along and just happened to come by, and we'd been staying in the same hotel, and so we'd been having breakfast with Rabuka and dinner with Rabuka every day.

So, he managed to convince them to let us go, and he even convinced them to give them back our tape recorder. So, he came back to our hotel after we got back there and delivered our tape recorders and everything back to us. So, look, the Solomons were, I found to be a real—had a real impact on me.

One of the stories, though, that I spent a lot of time doing in the Pacific in lots of different countries was the tuna fishery, because tuna is a resource that the Pacific actually own. And there's been a lot of effort put into trying to get as much of the benefits out of the tuna fishery as possible. And the Central and Western Pacific Fisheries Agency, which is based up in Micronesia, and the Forum Fisheries Agency in—

**TESS:** And the PNA secretariat.

**SEAN:** Yeah, the PNA have done extraordinary work. So, I mean that's one of the stories that I have spent quite a bit of time in quite a few different countries covering.

**TESS:** See, I think that's really interesting, because going back to what you said earlier about there are very few generalisations, which I agree with you entirely about, tuna, and Matt Dornan and I have talked about this a lot, tuna is one of the few things that regionalism really does work for. And it's largely

because the tuna don't stay still. They move from this country's jurisdiction to that country's jurisdiction. So, you have to work together because the resource is moving.

*SEAN:* You're perfectly right.

*TESS:* Am I? Well, I can't take any credit, because that's Matt's thinking that I've borrowed.

*SEAN:* But no, I mean it is true. I mean I was at the very, very first meeting, where the Forum Fisheries—the PNA, Parties to the Nauru Agreement, they met in Nauru of course, Parties to the Nauru Agreement. And I was there for that. And it was such a—almost a groundbreaking getting together of these different Pacific countries who all realised that they had to get their hands together and grasp this issue.

*TESS:* And significantly said “We don't want any donors involved. We're going to do this ourselves.”

*SEAN:* Oh, absolutely. I mean it was interesting because I was allowed into a lot of those meetings. But the Australian Foreign Affairs officials, who were desperately trying to find out what was going on, were sort of on the outer. So, that was really interesting.

*TESS:* And it's had such significant repercussions, because it's affected the negotiations around trade with the EU, which in turn affected what happened with PACER Plus. So, it's not—this story isn't going away.

*SEAN:* Not at all.

*TESS:* This is a longstanding and continuing story.

*SEAN:* Yeah. And so, that whole tuna issue is one that I spent quite a bit of time researching and talking to people about—

*TESS:* It's not straightforward. It's very—

*SEAN:* No, it is, it's very technical. And it's also—

*TESS:* And very political.

*SEAN:* Very political. And it's really interesting to go to those offices in Honiara and look at the way they keep track of all of these fishing boats that are going around the region. So, that, I think—of the economic stories in the Pacific, the one thing that, as you said, everyone seems to have a stake in, is the whole tuna fishery.

*TESS:* No, fascinating. Okay, let's move on to my next question. We can come back to that story.

*SEAN:* Sure.

**TESS:** So, I guess it follows on, and we've sort of started to talk about it maybe, but you might want to explore it in a different way, what do you think are the most significant changes you've seen in the Pacific during your career? Both positive and negative. And what do you think they mean for the countries in our region? Like not just now, but also going forward into the future.

**SEAN:** Well, on the positives, because I've been covering these countries since before some of them got their independence.

**TESS:** Exactly. So, you've seen some significant shifts?

**SEAN:** Confidence, I think, is one of the interesting things. The greater confidence that Pacific Islanders have developed in themselves, and in their negotiations with the outside world, that's one thing that I would put down as a positive. The—going back to the fisheries issue, that's very, very, very, very obvious.

**TESS:** What about more recently in relation to climate change diplomacy?

**SEAN:** Well, there's certainly been a cohesive effort in the Pacific, and they've actually made their voices heard of those international fora. So, that is one issue on which I think there is sort of unanimity in the Pacific. And if you go to some of the coral atoll islands, you actually get the almost feeling of impending doom that some of those very low-lying coral atolls experience.

So, I think that is definitely been an issue that there's very little opposition to in the Pacific. I mean people generally believe that this is a matter, and even Papua New Guinea, which probably is less affected by that sort of issue of submersion than any of the others. Papua New Guinea's been—

**TESS:** It's affected by other things, like those droughts and things like that, that we've seen.

**SEAN:** Yeah, that's true as well. So, that's one. That's one of the issues. Negatives? I can't avoid going back to the effect of the Fiji coups. I think that's been an overall negative in the Pacific.

**TESS:** So, tell me a bit more about that. Why is that negative for countries other than Fiji? Obviously—

**SEAN:** Well Fiji, for so long, was such a leader in the Pacific. And now, you've got a leader in Fiji who came to power initially through the barrel of a gun, basically. And I don't think it's a good thing for the Pacific for that to be, because despite Papua New Guinea being the most populous country, for so, so long, Fiji has been almost the *de facto* sort of principal country.

**TESS:** Every now and again, Papua New Guinea tries to sort of assert itself and say that it—it sort of talks in terms of wanting to take on a bigger leadership role in the region. O'Neil did that fairly early on, 2012 and the couple of years after that.

**SEAN:** Yes, but the other thing is that Papua New Guinea actually sees itself also as being part of Asia. I mean it's hard for a lot of other Pacific Islanders, I think, to realise that. But there is that sort of belief in Papua New Guinea that it's—and that's a bit of arrogance to it as well, is that sometimes a belief in Papua New Guinea that “We're so much bigger. We should be in a bigger league than these small island countries.” And I think that sometimes puts some of the other Pacific island countries off, when Papua New Guinea tries to take a leading role.

**TESS:** You don't feel that Pacific island countries feel that way about Fiji when Fiji tries to assert that they're the natural leaders?

**SEAN:** Oh, I think so. I think that's true as well. And I think especially since Bainimarama has been in charge, I don't think that there is that same admiration, I think, that there was for Fiji, because Fiji was one of the first to become independent and sort of led the way, I suppose. I mean Samoa would object to that.

**TESS:** I'm sure they would. Vociferously.

**SEAN:** And in a way, I suppose, the events in Fiji have given Samoa a little more sway in the negotiations in the Pacific.

**TESS:** Yeah, maybe. Although—yeah, I think that's right, certainly there was that ongoing tension between Samoa and Fiji. But essentially, I mean y'know, this is going off on a tangent slightly, but when we had that push a few years ago where people were saying “Oh, Australia and New Zealand should leave the forum because they dominate and they bully people,” and all of that sort of thing, I did remember saying to people “Yeah, if that happened, all we would do is sit around and moan about Fiji and PNG.” Like we would just find someone else to moan about. It's not like we're going to stop moaning just because Australia and New Zealand have gone home.

**SEAN:** No, I think—

**TESS:** And I think that's another thing that people don't always fully appreciate from outside the region, is that there's as much intra-tension—there's as much tension and jockeying between countries in the Pacific, the Pacific island countries, as there is between the Pacific and Australia and New Zealand.

**SEAN:** Yeah. And that's why the whole tuna issue is almost the exception to the rule.

**TESS:** Yeah.

**SEAN:** The other thing that I would like to say, you're talking about negatives, one of the concerns I think I have is to—I think I have—no, one of the concerns I have is population growth. I think the almost exponential growth of some of these Pacific island countries is going to be a real, real issue. I mean—

**TESS:** But again, that doesn't affect all of them.

**SEAN:** True.

**TESS:** Cook Islands actually has negative population growth.

**SEAN:** Well, the other thing too, and I was going to get on to that, because the Micronesian countries, or the ones that were former trust territories of the US, of the United States, have that release valve, where they're allowed to migrate to, and lots of them have migrated to.

**TESS:** To the mainland.

**SEAN:** Yeah, to the West Coast of America. So, those, the Marshall Islands and Palau, and the Federated States of Micronesia, there's a bit of a release valve for those countries. But Samoa—

**TESS:** You're mainly talking about Melanesia?

**SEAN:** We're talking about Melanesia, because Samoa and Tonga have a bit of a migration arrangement with New Zealand, where certain numbers can go. And then once they're there, their relatives can follow. But yes, Melanesia is a place where I think population issues are going to be increasingly difficult as the years go on.

**TESS:** Okay. Well, I think that will be an interesting one to watch. Because—and I mean I'm not in a position to say that that's—whether that's right or wrong. I obviously would recognise that that is where the population growth is. But it's also where the economic growth is. So, the Melanesian economies are the ones that are growing more than the ones in other parts of the region. But, as we know, the population is growing at a faster rate than the economies are at the moment.

**SEAN:** Yeah. And I know we don't want to talk about Papua New Guinea, but the population growth in Port Moresby I think is a bit of a worry. And probably in some of the other capitals around the Pacific...

**TESS:** Yeah, Vila and Honiara.

**SEAN:** Villa and Honiara. And the whole issue of squatter settlers and things like that are very, very difficult issues for these countries to face.

**TESS:** Huge policy challenges on all sorts of fronts, that whole—and as you say, it's the growth in the capitals, the birth rate, but then also, the inward migration from elsewhere in the country. So, it presents a huge number of challenges. I think it can present opportunities, but it certainly presents huge challenges.

**SEAN:** Yep, sure.

**TESS:** Excellent. So, let's move more from the Pacific generally to your particular—your career and your trade and your profession. So, looking at the media landscape in the Pacific islands region, what do you think are the most significant opportunities and risks for journalism at the moment and maybe over the next few years?

*SEAN:* Look, I don't want to sound as though I am absolutely on top of current day issues in a lot of these Pacific countries, because I haven't actually been on the beat now for several years. But look, one of the most negative issues for the media in the Pacific is intimidation, intimidation by governments, intimidation by people in positions of authority, sometimes intimidation by not only politicians, but people in the police forces and others.

So, there are people in the Pacific who don't like journalists inquiring into anything. So, that's one of the problems. I've got an enormous faith in the quality of some of the journalists in the region, but it's—things aren't, I think, getting a lot better in a lot of places. I think that the restrictions and freedom of the media are issues that really need to be sort of fought for, and there are groups of Pacific islands journalists who are sort of fighting that fight.

But look, one of the challenges facing the media is just the cost of everything. As technology improves, and even so, I mean one of the really interesting things I think is social media in the Pacific now. It's sort of—it's growing, and the more internet connections and the more access that people have, it's got its positives and negatives for the media because it sort of probably makes the media, in some ways, less influential, but in other ways, it allows them greater scope to spread the message I suppose.

*TESS:* Yeah, I mean certainly, this is something I guess I've thought about most closely in relation to Vanuatu, where I've seen it for the longest and close up. But I think you're right. It's that combination of the opportunity, but also, balancing the risks. I sometimes think, looking at the media in the Pacific, that it literally is a perfect storm. Because not only are they having to deal with this global change in the whole business model about how people access news and where they get their information from, but—

*SEAN:* And where they get the money from.

*TESS:* And where they get the money from. But also, they've also got this other stuff that you've referred to, around intimidation, or not even—even without getting into intimidation, just not really a full acceptance of what the role of the media in a liberal democracy is or should be. And this comes back to the whole Fiji thing. Because I've certainly sat in countries other than Fiji and had people—had politicians say to me, “Well, they've probably got it right in Fiji. That's what we should be doing here.”

*SEAN:* Yeah, that is—and when you hear that, that's a worry.

*TESS:* Yeah, it is a worry, but you do hear it.

*SEAN:* Yeah. Oh no, no doubt.

*TESS:* Oh yes. And then the banning Facebook thing and all of this sort of thing. These ideas do get thrown around with not necessarily gay abandon, but it's not that they are these isolated conversations, these conversations are taking place in all of the countries in the region. So, I think it is this sort of—they've got their—they're already fighting this rearguard action against intimidation and freedom and independence, and now they've got all this other stuff around no money from advertising, and the impacts

of social media. So, it's a lot for what we know a small, already stretched, resource-wise, organisations to be taking on.

**SEAN:** Yeah. I hate to use a term that Trump would use, but fake news. I mean not in terms of the main media, but in terms of social media. There's—one of my concerns is that there's quite a lot of stuff going out and being posted that is just absolutely untrue.

**TESS:** But that's true, but surely—I mean there's been *gamin toktok* forever.

**SEAN:** True.

**TESS:** It's just taking place in a different place. Is it not the same as the other crap that gets talked in kava bars in Vila and around betel nut stands in Honiara.

**SEAN:** Yep. You're perfectly right again

**TESS:** But no, obviously once it's out there on social media, it does—the fact that somebody's typed it and it's there for everyone to see, as opposed to just what you and I have been gossiping about by ourselves, can create this sense that it's somehow bigger, more significant, more important than just normal *gamin toktok* on the street.

So, let's think about how the Pacific is covered by the media here in this country where we are, here in Australia. What do you think are the factors that contribute to the way in which the Pacific is covered by the Australian media, and how do you think these factors should be addressed to increase the amount of coverage and improve the quality?

And I realise that that is something of a loaded/leading question. And it may be that you think we don't need any more coverage, and what we've got is fabulous. But if we do need more, and what we've got should be better, how might that come about? Let's start with the first bit. What are the factors that contribute to what we get from the Australian media about the Pacific?

**SEAN:** Cost and interest. It is—

**TESS:** Which comes first?

**SEAN:** Interest comes first.

**TESS:** I'm glad you said that.

**SEAN:** Yeah. No, I mean one of my concerns is that there doesn't seem to have been, I'm going to make a qualification on this shortly, but there doesn't seem to have been a belief in any of the managements of the major news organisations in Australia that the Pacific is in any way important. So, the bosses' attention to the region has just not been there. And then the cost issue, of course, it is quite expensive to travel.

**TESS:** But if you cared, if you thought it was important, you would find the money. If there's money to camp outside a cave in Thailand for however long while 12 or 13 kids are rescued, then there's money to go to Vanuatu and talk to people being evacuated from Ambae.

**SEAN:** Yes, there is. I mean let me give you an example of coverage. The Lombok earthquake just recently, massive coverage. Absolutely massive coverage. Compare that to the coverage in Vanuatu.

**TESS:** Yeah, exactly.

**SEAN:** With the evacuations and the earthquake and the volcano and everything there. Almost nothing in the Australian media. I mean yet, look, I just have a bit of a concern that we don't have enough people in the media in Australia who have an interest or who have any idea about what's going on. One of the things I often go on about is it doesn't seem to me to be, even in the school curriculums, anything to do with Australia's relationships with these countries that are—there's so many of them so close to us, they're all in our region, but we don't seem to even realise that they're there, in large part. So, that's one of the problems.

On the other side, the one thing, and it's almost distressing for me to say this, all of a sudden, we're getting this panicked interest because of China, because China is paying far more attention to the Pacific than Australia is. And that's really, really interesting. I'm not—China has all of a sudden sparked the interest, for instance, of News Limited in the Pacific, but they don't have anyone on the staff, apart from Rowan Callwick, who's based in Beijing, or was based in Beijing but is now back here and only writing once a month for them. There's no one in the *Australian*, or in the News media stable, who seems to know the first thing about the region.

**TESS:** That doesn't stop them having a lot to say.

**SEAN:** No. And they get quite a bit of it wrong, because they don't understand and don't have the connections and don't have the people who go out there. One of the other things that's worrying to me is that—and this could be changed if there's a reintroduction of international broadcasting, but the ABC is not paying as much attention as it used to.

I mean the ABC has a journalist here in Brisbane whose job it is to try and cover the Pacific, but he finds it exceptionally difficult to get the money to make the travel. And I find it really interesting that Stefan Armbruster from SBS actually travels out more into the Pacific than anyone from the ABC. I mean when I was with the ABC and when we had Australia Network, the television service going, I would spend seven days a month, on average, traveling around the Pacific.

We just don't do that anymore. And so, I hope that if there is this review of international broadcasting, and if there is some extra money provided for Australia to reenter that space which is virtually abandoned, that then there'll be someone who can get out there and do those stories around the region.

**TESS:** How significant are—you'll have to forgive me if I get the terminology wrong, but how significant are people like producers and editors, those ones that sit at that middle management level? How significant are they in this picture? And how—

**SEAN:** Well, they're very extremely significant, but they have no interest.

**TESS:** Is that because they don't see a career path in it, it's not going to get them a promotion? Or is it because their audiences aren't telling them what they want?

**SEAN:** Well, it's very interesting that you talk about career paths, because it disturbed me enormously just recently, after Eric Tlozek left Papua New Guinea, Eric did a fantastic job there for the ABC, but he's now gone to the Middle East. I heard that the ABC had decided that Port Moresby should now be occupied by a journalist on a 12-month basis. Now, you can't—

**TESS:** You can't get anything done in 12 months.

**SEAN:** No. You can't get to know a place like that, or the rest of the Pacific, in 12 months. And it's as though there's been a decision, if this is correct, that there's been a decision made in the ABC that "Look, it's not important. We'll try people out and then we'll send them to a proper place where they can be a foreign correspondent." And that is exceptionally distressing.

**TESS:** Yes, thanks for that. That is exceptionally distressing. Okay, so coming back to the bit of my question about what do we need to do to get more coverage, and for the coverage we get to be more and better? You've talked about there needs to be the interest, there needs to be money. What else? What responsibility do audiences have, if any, in this space?

Because I talk to Australian people all the time, and when I say to them "Oh, don't you think it's odd that you don't hear anything about the Pacific?" They say "Oh yeah, you're right. That is odd. Why don't I know what's going on in Papua New Guinea or Vanuatu? Why hasn't that been covered?" So, there does seem to be, my extremely non-methodologically sound research indicates that there is an interest. So, why isn't this getting—why isn't this affecting the people that make the decisions about giving money to Liam, or Stefan, or whatever it is? Where is the missing link? What's missing in that?

**SEAN:** If I knew the answer to that, Tess, I would hire myself out as a consultant. Yeah, look, I really—it's—then again, I come back to China. I mean all of a sudden, there's been this interest in Canberra, and therefore, in the Canberra press gallery, about the influence of China in the Pacific. One of the problems we have is that there's almost no one in Canberra in the press gallery who knows anything about the Pacific, and that's a bit sort of annoying.

**TESS:** There's an added problem in that that's all they want to talk about.

**SEAN:** Yes.

**TESS:** So, you can't get them to talk about anything unless it's got the 'and China' bit...

**SEAN:** Except that it may have the positive effect of making some of the bosses realise that this China story is going to be an important one. Therefore, we need people to get on the beat, get out there, and find out what's going on. So, that may be sort of a positive out of it. And I sincerely hope that some of those executives, news executives, who make these decisions are looking at this issue and thinking "Gee, we don't know much about it. How has China picked up this ball that we seem to have dropped? Let's go and find out a bit more about this." So, that's one of my hopes is that that will happen.

**TESS:** Yeah, I think that's a shared hope. No, it's good. I've said before, and I can't remember whether you and I have discussed this before, that one of the reasons I think that Australia finds itself in this situation is that there are no votes in the Pacific. So, no one's going to, when we have the elections next year, no one's going to be asked questions at a hustings or a town hall meeting about "Well, what do you think..."

**SEAN:** Oh yes, they will.

**TESS:** You reckon?

**SEAN:** Yep, they'll ask questions about Nauru and Manus. Because of the asylum-seeker issue. And it's—

**TESS:** Is that enough?

**SEAN:** No, it's not enough. And it skews the whole—

**TESS:** It does skew the whole thing.

**SEAN:** —issue. I mean that's one of—we're talking about positives and negatives. One of the negatives, I would say, of the last few years in the Pacific, has been this whole asylum-seeker issue that the Pacific is seen as a holding ground to sort of solve Australia's boat people problem. Now I don't want to get in depth on this whole asylum-seeker issue, because actually, I have views that some of those asylum seekers are not the sort of people we need in Australia anyway, because of the way they have treated the people in Papua New Guinea and Nauru. Some of the attitudes of some of these people, I don't think are the sort of things we really want in Australia. But in terms of Australia's relationship with places like Nauru and Papua New Guinea, there are some financial benefits to it, but there's a lot of sourness that's come as a result of it.

**TESS:** Yeah, I mean I think it's too big an issue for us to explore in great detail here, but I definitely agree with you that the impact that it has on the relationships, and also the impact that it has on those countries. Whatever happens to those refugee processing centres in the next however many years, the impacts of that, economically and socially, are going to be left on Nauru and Manus for years and years to come.

And after all, everything else is gone and the money's—all of that's all done and dusted, there are going to be long-lasting effects. And I think that that is possibly one of the most—one of the most despicable aspects of that whole thing, whatever you feel about the other issues, just the fact that essentially, Australia prosecuted, or is prosecuting domestic policy in foreign countries, with apparently very little regard for what that's going to mean for the future of those countries, is something that I find quite concerning.

**SEAN:** One of the things that concerned me right at the beginning is that Peter O'Neill would agree that Papua New Guinea's reputation was so bad that it was going to solve this issue for Australia. I mean it's turning out but it's... the boats have stopped. And so, that's been sort of a win for the Australian policy. But for Peter O'Neil to agree that Papua New Guinea would provide a solution because it had such a terrible reputation.

**TESS:** And to basically allow his country to be portrayed in those terms.

**SEAN:** Yep.

**TESS:** I mean that, I found quite chilling at the time. Yeah. Okay, let's see if we can finish on a slightly more upbeat note. We've sort of covered this already, but I want you to have a chance to think about it in maybe bigger, more ambitious terms. So, if we agree that the Pacific is or should be more important in Australia and to Australians, what do you think we can or should do to bring that about? And I don't know what I mean by "we" in that sense. What should be done in order to bring that about?

**SEAN:** We should teach our kids at school where we are in the world, that this is our region. We're surrounded, or not surrounded, we've got heaps and heaps of countries just to our North and off to the East that are vibrant and interesting and crucial, basically, to Australia's future. I mean China thinks they're important.

I think it's time that we actually had, in the Australian schools' curriculum, some elements that sort of teach our kids that we actually have a responsibility, I think, to where we live in the world, and to the prosperity and good health of these Pacific island countries, which have looked to Australia in the past for help and assistance. I think New Zealand pays far more attention to the Pacific generally than Australia does. But I think that this is—this is our part of the world. This is where we live. This is where we have and can have such a greater impact.

**TESS:** Okay. Sean, thank you very much.

**SEAN:** Thank you, Tess.