

Coalition releases policy (fragment) on aid

Author : Ashlee Betteridge and Robin Davies

Date : September 5, 2013

The Coalition released its [foreign affairs policy](#) [pdf] today, shortly after [earlier announcing savings measures](#) that would see the aid budget reduced by \$4.5 billion over the forward estimates, including a \$656 million cut in the current financial year.

Most of what is said about aid in the policy is not new and it is very short on detail. The Coalition remains committed to scaling up aid to 0.5% of GNI, but says that it cannot commit to a timeframe 'given the current state of the federal budget'.

The policy is critical of the priorities and management of the aid program. It states: 'we are not satisfied with either the quality of governance of the programme, nor the strategic priorities, which were skewed by Labor's campaign for the UN Security Council seat'.

It goes on to say, 'we also do not believe that the Australian community is entirely comfortable with the Government's doubling of an already large overseas development assistance budget rapidly and without robust performance benchmarks – especially as Labor has slashed spending in important areas like Defence'.

The Coalition says it will review priorities in the aid program in order to consolidate efforts in the Asia Pacific-Indian Ocean area (Papua New Guinea is accorded particular priority) and to 'focus on the quality and rigorous administration of that effort'.

The policy places heavy emphasis on support for 'capacity building' building in Indonesia, PNG and the Pacific and, in this context, says the Coalition would 'explore the use of secondments between officials at local, state and national level'.

In line with [earlier signals](#) from Julie Bishop, the policy includes a commitment to examine the case for expansion of the Pacific Seasonal Worker Program.

Curiously though, there is no mention of increasing funding to NGOs at the expense of funding to multilateral organisations, which was [emphasised by Joe Hockey](#) when he announced the savings measures.

Read more of our analysis on the new government and aid [here](#).