

Pacific Buzz (June 27): Voting in PNG | Rio wrap | Tongan democracy | Media concerns... and more

Author : Depolicy-PiPP

Date : June 27, 2012

A roundup of development policy issues in the Pacific by the [Pacific Institute of Public Policy](#) and the [Development Policy Centre](#).

Our thoughts are with all those affected by recent disasters at sea in Australia, Tonga and Vanuatu.

PNG elections ... stage one

Voting commenced in Papua New Guinea on 23rd June. The elections are expected to provide something of a [circuit breaker](#) to the recent political turmoil. Voting will last for approximately two weeks and it will be several more weeks before a new government is formed.

Election logistics in PNG are extremely challenging, with around 4,000 polling booths required across 22 provinces. Numerous locations are inaccessible other than by air or sea. Australia and New Zealand have provided logistical and security support in the form of troops, transport planes and helicopters.

There are 46 parties fielding 3,435 candidates (including 135 women) to contest 111 seats. [Election-related violence](#) was identified as a concern in the lead-up, and the leader of the Commonwealth's [independent observers group](#), Edward Natapei (former prime minister of Vanuatu), has stressed the need for the elections to be free, fair and peaceful. Whilst the Australian media have focused on [problems](#) with voting in Hela and Southern Highlands province, commentators in the social media within PNG note that the bigger picture is one of the elections progressing relatively smoothly so far.

Rio Wrap

The United Nations Rio+20 sustainability summit took place last week. The Pacific [featured prominently](#) at the summit, with a number of side events focused on the particular challenges our region faces.

The [outcome document](#) was, as anticipated, unambitious and weak, lacking targets and binding mechanisms for implementation. However, individual states made a number of important [voluntary commitments](#) at Rio+20. These include Tokelau and Tuvalu pledging to provide 100 per cent [renewable energy](#), Fiji committing to 100 per cent access to electricity by 2016, and the development of a regional framework aiming to [conserve an area of the ocean](#) more than four times the size of the United States.

There was also a push for [more cooperation](#) between the Pacific, Caribbean and African small island developing states on sustainability issues, with agreements between the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC), the Caribbean Community Climate Change Centre (5Cs) and the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) to strengthen ties between the regions.

Tongan democracy

A motion of no confidence in the prime minister, Lord Tu'iavakano, was [lodged recently](#) and is expected to be heard on June 27th further to the conclusion of parliamentary debate on the 2012-13 budget. Ahead of the motion being tabled, three ministers have resigned. They are all members of the Democratic Party, which put forward the motion of no confidence.

Media concerns

There are renewed concerns about media freedom in the region following the forced [closure](#) of the Kiribati Independent newspaper, [alleged pressure](#) by the Fiji military government on Fiji TV ahead of the renewal of its licence and allegations by the former Solomon Islands Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare that the present PM Gordon Darcy Lilo is attempting to [censor the media](#). Meanwhile, the Pacific Freedom Forum has highlighted threats to [media personnel](#) in PNG. It has been a big week in the Australian media, with both Fairfax media (publisher of the Sydney Morning Herald) and News Ltd (publisher of The Australian) announcing [major job cuts and restructuring](#).

Regional & sub-regional organisations

Whilst in Port Vila for the Pacific Debate, Congressman Eni Hunkin Faleomavaega of American Samoa [said in an interview](#) that the role of the Pacific Islands Forum had been undermined over the issue of Fiji. He also commented favourably on the establishment of sub-regional groupings (the Melanesian Spearhead Group, the Micronesian Leaders' Summit and the Polynesian Union) seeing these organisations as adding to the region's strength. The significance of these groupings was also demonstrated by the recent visit of [China's special envoy](#) to the Pacific Islands Forum Dialogue to the secretariat of the Melanesian Spearhead Group.

The Melanesian Spearhead Group continues to be active with recent discussions as to how the 'Police Formed Unit' may be able to participate in [international peacekeeping](#) activities (which have proved economically significant for Fiji), and the launch of its [climate change declaration](#) at the Rio+20 summit.

Julie Bishop on the Pacific

Speaking at the ANU's Crawford School at a public lecture hosted by the Development Policy Centre on June 21st, deputy leader of the Australian opposition and shadow minister for foreign affairs, Julie Bishop, painted a new vision of Australia's relations with the Pacific, calling on Australia to 'show the leadership and vision that is expected of us in the Pacific' and backing 'the forging of true economic partnerships with our great friends' of PNG and other countries in the Pacific.

Highlights of her speech included an endorsement of the Pacific seasonal worker programme and PACER Plus, elevation of the relationship with PNG (in particular, support for relaxing visa requirements for Papua New Guineans visiting Australia) and increased focus on aid effectiveness.

A transcript of her speech is available [here](#), a blog summary [here](#), and a video will be available shortly.

In Brief

Calls for [constitutional reform](#) in PNG and [consultations](#) on Solomon Islands' draft constitution.

Cook Islands [negotiating the boundary](#) of its EEZ with neighbours.

Pacific Network on Globalisation releases '[Fool Me Once](#)' which claims to show the impact of joining the WTO on ordinary Tongans.

Niue explores alternative [medivac arrangements](#), including [compulsory insurance](#) for visitors.

PiPP will convene a forum on the creative economy at the [Festival of Pacific Arts](#), which starts July 1st.

[Nauru](#) to take part in Australia's seasonal workers scheme.

Australia announces creation of the world's largest [marine reserve](#).

Inaugural meeting of the [Australia Vanuatu Business Forum](#) held in Brisbane.

This roundup of development policy issues in the Pacific is a joint venture of the [Pacific Institute of Public](#)

[Policy](#) and the [Development Policy Centre](#). Editorial content is the responsibility of Derek Brien, PiPP Executive Director, and Stephen Howes, Devpolicy Director.