

## **Pacific Buzz (May 2): Contact in Fiji | Growing Chinese influence | Honiara security issues | Ongoing flood effects...and more**

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**Date :** May 2, 2012



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

### **Ministerial contact in Fiji**

The high-level Pacific Islands Forum Ministerial Contact Group meeting commenced in Fiji (for the first time in four years) on Monday April 30<sup>th</sup>, with consultations beginning May 1<sup>st</sup>. The delegation comprised a number of officials from the region, including Australian and New Zealand foreign ministers Bob Carr and Murray McCully. The meeting was focused on the Fijian [constitution consultation](#) process and election preparations.

Minister Carr announced the trip to Fiji whilst in the US. It is the first visit by an Australian Foreign Minister to Fiji in more than 3 years. The visit comes at a time when the [growing importance](#) of Melanesia is being increasingly recognized. [Speaking from Fiji](#), Bob Carr said that while he is encouraged by reform measures taking place in Fiji, it is too soon to talk about lifting sanctions. Commodore Bainimarama was out of the country at the time of the meeting.

### **Growing Chinese influence in Polynesia**

Tonga's recently announced bid for the 2019 Pacific games is underpinned by Chinese financial support. This provides another example of the increasing prominence of China in the region as did the recent completion of the US\$ 69 million rehabilitation of Nuku'alofa's business district, following riots in 2006. [Recent analysis](#) highlights the provision of Chinese financing and aid to countries such as Tonga, where economic performance has been poor. Elsewhere [it has been noted](#) that China is positioning itself as a key development partner in the Pacific. Debate around relationships between Pacific island countries and China is ongoing as seen in recent discussion about a [developmental partnership](#) with Cook Islands.

### **Honiara security issues as RAMSI discussed**

Concerns about security in Honiara arose following the April 21 murder of former Solomon Islands diplomat,

Simon Fuo'o. The killing led to a spate of retaliation measures and the deputy police commissioner, Edmond Sikua, [admitting](#) that police responses were not up to standard.

Subsequently, Australian defence minister, Stephen Smith, [discussed](#) the timing of the withdrawal of troops deployed under the Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands (RAMSI) during last week's visit to Honiara. [Analysts](#) recently highlighted the need for ongoing support for the Solomon Islands police force, which was echoed by Smith, who noted that no troop withdrawal would be likely within the next 12 months and even then, the police and judicial arms of RAMSI would remain.

### **PNG's political prevarication**

There continues to be confusion and inconsistency within the PNG political discourse. Increasingly the effects of the ongoing turmoil are being felt by the wider community including the private sector. Whilst the latest indications suggest that elections will be held in June, commentators are reflecting increasing levels of [frustration](#) among the population. Meanwhile, the police have [issued](#) firm warnings against any unauthorised protests. The tensions between the executive and the judiciary remain with the National Court having stayed the Judicial Conduct Act.

### **Ongoing flood effects in Fiji**

The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) notes that last month's floods continue to impact people's livelihoods in Fiji. In response, a [temporary employment programme](#) is initially supporting 260 affected people. Additionally, a rise in communicable diseases, particularly typhoid, leptospirosis and dengue fever has been attributed to the floods.

### **States claim share of fishing revenues in Palau**

The association of governors from Palau's 16 states [appealed for the renewal of legislation](#) providing for the disbursement of key revenue from fishing activities. Under previous arrangements, 85 per cent of revenues were allocated to state governments, but the enabling legislation has not been enacted in 2012.

### **In Brief**

- Election [date](#) in Vanuatu causes some concerns.
- Nautilus signs [first customer](#) for undersea mine in PNG.
- Tuvalu government [concludes](#) meeting with donor partners.
- Kiribati to open a [tuna processing facility](#) to boost economic growth.
- USP Professor Biman Prasad suggests Vanuatu is potentially the [Mauritius](#) of the Pacific.
- Tonga government [launches](#) weekly newspaper.
- PNG Government, Asian Development Bank and AusAID launch a [\\$25m microfinance project for rural communities](#).
- US [confirms](#) it will send 5,000 marines from Okinawa to Guam.

*This biweekly 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.*