

Pacific Buzz (October 14): Water security | PNG-Australia spotlight | Micronesian sharks | Women for peace

Author : Depolicy-PiPP

Date : October 14, 2011

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

Drought highlights climate change and water security challenge

The [drought](#) that has hit Tuvalu, Tokelau and Samoa has highlighted the issue of water security and the changing weather patterns associated with [climate change](#). Australia, New Zealand and the US have been working together to [send emergency water supplies and desalination units](#) to the worst affected areas. At the same time, there is renewed discussion on the longer term issues surrounding water capacity, including [population pressures](#), [resettlement](#) and climate change.

[Tuvalu](#) has not had rain for almost six months, and is nearly wholly reliant on rainwater harvesting and desalination. Most water is collected through household water tanks, which generally only meet drinking and cooking needs. A relatively small [desalination](#) plant and limited public catchments provide additional supply. Groundwater, where available is largely contaminated, and in periods of low rainfall becomes even more saline. The government is working with a number of international donors on water programmes, yet [concerns](#) remain about securing this fundamental resource.

Australia-PNG Ministerial Forum

There has been a lot of high level traffic between Port Moresby and Canberra lately. First up it was Australian foreign minister, Kevin Rudd, making a two-day trip to Papua New Guinea to pledge [\\$64 million to boost rural health services](#) as part of an Asian Development Bank programme. A little over a week later, and on the back of making his own pledge of [K100 million in budgetary support to the Solomon Islands](#), PNG's new prime minister, Peter O'Neill, visited Canberra for the Australia-PNG Ministerial Forum. The visit was the [first official meeting](#) between O'Neill and his Australian counterpart, Julia Gillard. In [this blog post](#), Stephen Howes put forward four suggestions (one big and three small) for what should be on the agenda to focus the relationship between the two countries on economic and strategic partnerships rather than aid. Some of the issues that were discussed included [education, a sovereign wealth fund and secondments for PNG officials in Australia](#).

While in Australia, O'Neill delivered a public lecture at the [Development Policy Centre](#) on 12 October, setting out his vision for the future of the Australia-PNG relationship. His address touched on a wide range of issues, including the need to capture employment opportunities being created by the USD\$12 billion LNG project in PNG, women's participation in parliament and the agenda of his new government.

In Port Moresby on 18 October, the [Pacific Institute of Public Policy](#) will be hosting a public panel discussion on the big issues in Melanesia. A panel of distinguished leaders - including new Melanesian Spearhead Group Director General Peter Forau; Hon. Dame Carol Kidu DBE MP; Vanuatu's Reserve Bank Governor Odo Tevi; and Port Moresby Governor Hon. Powes Parkop - will be on hand for a lively discussion on shaping a regional vision.

Reflecting on the importance of Pacific women

Three women who have campaigned for women's rights and an end to violence in Liberia and Yemen are the recipients of this year's [Nobel Peace Prize](#). The award provided an opportunity to reflect on the

importance of women in the Pacific as [equal partners in peace building and nation building](#).

In the same week, Fiji human rights lawyer Imrana Jalal was re-elected as Commissioner to the prestigious International Commission of Jurists. In a [press release](#), Fiji Women's Rights Movement Executive Director, Virisila Buadromo, said: "the women's movement in Fiji wholeheartedly congratulates Imrana on her re-election! Her presence in the executive is reflective of her dedication towards upholding the rule of law and human rights".

In a small step towards better representation of women in the Pacific, Samoan Prime Minister, Tuilaepa Sailele Malielegaoi, told [Radio Australia](#) of his aim for women to hold at least 10 per cent of seats in the parliament after the next election in 2016. Currently only two out of 49 MPs in Samoa are female.

New shark sanctuary and accountability measures in Marshall Islands

The Republic of the Marshall Islands made [international headlines](#) after enacting legislation that established the world's largest shark sanctuary. The new law includes a total ban on commercial shark fishing and the sale of shark fins.

Also making news was the Marshall Islands Nitijela (Parliament) [Public Accounts Committee](#), which criticised the government for lack of action on a number of [longstanding accountability concerns](#). The report marks the revival of the committee's oversight function under new chairman, Senator Frederick Muller, and highlights concerns with excessive government expenditure not appropriated in the 2010 budget. Over US\$1.2 million was found to be paid to the National Telecommunications Authority and Air Marshall Islands to cover loan defaults to the Bank of Marshall Islands. Government over-spending on an electricity subsidy to Majuro landowners was also noted.

Meanwhile, the [Marshall Islands Journal](#) reports that the Office of the Auditor General has received a modest budget increase together with a grant from the US Department of Interior to support training and development of auditors' skills in performance and financial audits, and in carrying out investigations.

This comes as a former French Polynesia [president was jailed](#) for misuse of public funds and a senior [PNG minister](#) was referred to the Public Prosecutor for alleged misconduct in office.

Straining Micronesia-US relations

Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) Senator Peter Christian called for the termination of the [Compact of Free Association](#) with the US in [response](#) to funding cuts to the College of Micronesia and [calls within the US Senate](#) to restrict travel to the US from the Freely Associated States of the Federated States of Micronesia, Marshall Islands and Palau. The funding arrangements under the Compacts have proven to be particularly difficult, with US officials viewing it more as an aid relationship, while many in Micronesia, including Senator Christian, point out it is a treaty between sovereign nations. In return for grant funding and the right for Micronesian citizens to live and work in the US, the Compacts provide the government of the US with 'strategic denial' over Micronesian foreign policy and access to the Kwajalein military base in the Marshall Islands. Grants under the Compact are decreasing by US\$800,000 annually and are due to terminate in 2023.

In brief:

- The people of Fiji celebrated the 41st anniversary of independence while the debate over the [Lowy poll](#) continues.
- Marking the 31st anniversary of the nation's Constitution, first head of state says Vanuatu is ready to make changes and try a [presidential system](#).
- A further 32 workers left Vanuatu for Australia under the [Pacific Seasonal Workers Pilot Scheme](#), joining the initial group of twelve.
- 138 candidates, including 12 women, are standing for the [Kiribati election](#) to be held on 21 October.

- Australian Foreign Minister Kevin Rudd and his PNG counterpart Ano Pala [have announced](#) a major reform agenda for the PNG higher education sector.
- Landowners have [accused PNG police](#) of conducting raids and beatings at the behest of a logging company.

This roundup of development policy issues in the Pacific is a joint venture by 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.