

Pacific Buzz (September 5): Pacific Islands Forum Wrap | Fiji engages | Polynesian expansion... and more

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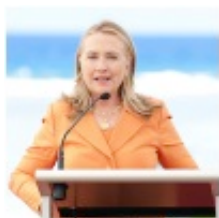
A fortnightly roundup of policy news in the Pacific by the [Pacific Institute of Public Policy](#) and the [Development Policy Centre](#).



FORUM WRAP

Commentators continue to question the [relevance](#) of the Pacific Islands Forum in a shifting geopolitical landscape and in light of a critical [independent review](#). This year's event in **Rarotonga** demonstrated that the Forum remains a valuable meeting place, albeit one with an increasing focus on bilateral side discussions and the international [Post Forum Dialogue](#) held after the main event. The review, which was commissioned by leaders at the 2011 meeting, identified a number of organisational and management reforms necessary to tackle the challenges that the Forum Secretariat faces servicing its members. The primary concerns relate to the lack of ownership by island states and their engagement with the secretariat. [Leaders](#) did not tackle some of the tough decisions that need to be made, instead deferring action pending another review of the [Pacific Plan](#), which is to be led by Sir Mekere Morauta of **Papua New Guinea**.

International enthusiasm



This year's Forum will be remembered as the one which highlighted the growing [American](#) and [Chinese](#) presence, with [Hilary Clinton](#) declaring 'the Pacific is big enough for everyone' as she outlined US re-engagement in the region. The [Economist](#) newspaper has questioned the re-found competition for influence in the region, suggesting America's renewed interest 'has brought the Pacific islands little of substance'.

As the **US** and **Australia** continue to call for greater transparency of Chinese aid, in a first in the region **New Zealand** has [partnered](#) with **China** to deliver a water project in **Cook Islands**.

Rebranding 'small island states'

Forum host **Cook Islands** [PM Henry Puna](#) sought to rebrand the Pacific identity as 'large ocean' rather than 'small island' states. With a focus on sustainable marine resource management, including fisheries and seabed minerals, there was a significant announcement of new [marine parks](#) in **Cook Islands** and **New Caledonia**. Commercial activities will be allowed in these parks under the proviso that resource extraction is carried out sustainably. **New Zealand**, also, [committed](#) NZ\$50 million to monitoring fisheries throughout the region and improving the management of tuna.

Cook Islands, Kiribati, Nauru, Niue, Marshall Islands, Tuvalu and Tokelau also signed agreements on [maritime boundaries](#). Maritime agreements, which have previously been raised as a [priority issue](#), should improve resource management and protect the statehood and maritime zones for countries facing inundation from sea level rise.

New money



Another considerable announcement from the Forum was the [AUD\\$330 million gender equality package](#) by Australian PM Julia Gillard, aimed at improving representation of women in parliaments across the Pacific, in light of the region having the [lowest](#) levels of women's representation in the world. The **US** and **New Zealand** backed the announcement, [highlighting](#) the need for more women in parliament, better maternal health care and campaigns against domestic violence.

Forum leaders again raised the challenge that Pacific island countries face in accessing the 'new and additional' **climate change** financing pledged by the international community since the 2009 Copenhagen summit, but welcomed news of a fresh commitment of [AUD\\$58 million](#) from **Australia** over four years.

The US also announced US\$32 million in [programme](#) funding as a part of the Asia-Pacific Strategic Engagement Initiative, a new US assistance framework. These programs will address regional priorities, such as sustainable economic development that protects biodiversity.

Continuing issues



As nuclear test survivor and international advocate, Lijon Eknilang, passed away in **Majuro**, Pacific leaders, particularly from Micronesia, called on Washington to remove the [continued presence](#) of radioactive contaminants left by 67 nuclear tests in the **Marshall Islands** from 1946-1958. Each year the Forum communiqué reiterates calls on the US to live up to its full obligations on the provision of compensation and restoration of affected areas.

While Pacific leaders did discuss broader security and human rights issues, they were again mute on the ongoing violence levelled against **West Papuans**. On the eve of the Forum, an [ABC 7.30](#) television exposé alleged human rights violations are being committed by an Indonesian anti terrorism unit, which receives Australian and US training and equipment.

POLITICS

Fiji engages



Fiji remains [suspended](#) from the Forum until elections are held, but was diplomatically active elsewhere. Commodore Bainimarama used his third annual [Engaging with the Pacific](#) meeting as a platform to criticise his country's exclusion from the Forum and its effect on participation in the Africa, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) grouping. **Papua New Guinea** PM Peter O'Neill has offered to host a meeting of Pacific ACP leaders to determine other forms of [engagement](#) with **Fiji** outside the Forum process. Fiji's foreign minister, Ratu Inoke Kubuabola also attended the Non Aligned Movement meeting in **Tehran**, formalising diplomatic relations with [North Korea](#) and [Iran](#) as well as opening a new embassy in [Abu Dhabi](#).

Polynesian expansion

The Polynesian Leaders' Group met in **Cook Islands** prior to the Forum and discussed the potential expansion of the group to include **Hawai'i, Rapa Nui and Aotearoa M?ori**. Samoan PM Tuilaepa Sailele Malielegaoi suggested that a secretariat could be established to formalise the group stressing, however, that it would work within the context of the Pacific Islands Forum and the Pacific Plan.

Face to Face with the nation



In what has been hailed a [landmark public forum](#), PIPP brought **Vanuatu's** prime minister and leader of the opposition face to face with a national audience. It was the first time people in all six provinces collectively participated in a national political dialogue. Recent technological advances allowed participants across the country to direct [questions](#) to both [leaders](#) in a live event broadcast on television, radio and the new e-government network.

IN BRIEF

Charges against the [PNG Chief Justice](#) may be dropped after intervention by PM Peter O'Neill.

Two government ministers face charges in relation to super yacht saga in [Vanuatu](#).

As chair of the MSG Special Foreign Ministers Meeting, Ratu Inoke, stressed [the support of MSG countries](#) for the independence of the Kanak people of **New Caledonia**.

Concerns raised over herbicide use in [Samoa](#).

[FSM](#) looking to Philippines for expertise in rice growing.

Anti-tobacco [campaign](#) planned for **Samoa**.

On the sidelines of the Forum, **Australia** and **Nauru** signed a [Memorandum of Understanding](#) for the

establishment of a regional processing centre in Nauru.

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