



## Australian Institute of International Affairs

### National President's Forum and Governor-General's Reception

#### *Australia and the South Pacific: Role and Responsibilities*

#### Final Report

This report summarizes the main outcomes of the National President's Forum and Governor-General's Reception on *Australia and the South Pacific: Role and Responsibilities* hosted by the Australian Institute of International Affairs on 14 July 2006.

The Forum brought together South Pacific speakers, expert commentators and senior Government officials to discuss Australia and its role in the South Pacific.

Highlights included:

- Involvement of eight international experts and 14 national experts as speakers and discussants
- Five Government departments represented at senior level
- Wide breadth of perspectives
- High quality presentations
- Positive feedback from participants and observers
- Substantial media coverage, including ABC Radio's *Background Briefing* and *Saturday Extra* and *The Diplomat*
- Completion of a Rapporteur's Report by Allan Hawke, Chancellor of ANU
- A reception hosted by the Governor-General of Australia, His Excellency Major General Michael Jeffery, AC, CVO, MC (Retd)
- Papers and other materials available from the AIIA National Website: [www.aiaa.asn.au](http://www.aiaa.asn.au)



*National President's Forum, Jubilee Room, NSW Parliament House,  
Sydney, 14 July 2006*



## Forum Objectives

The Australian Institute of International Affairs seeks to promote an interest in and understanding of international relations in Australia. The Institute provides a forum for discussion through its journal *The Australian Journal of International Affairs*, its book series *Australia in World Affairs* and through workshops, forums and lectures.

Specific objectives of the Forum were:

- to bring together a select group of national and international experts to develop recommendations for Australia's role in its immediate neighborhood on key issues such as labour mobility, poverty reduction, regional stability
- to stimulate debate on Australia and the South Pacific
- to stimulate public education
- to influence Australia's foreign policy regarding the South Pacific
- to establish a platform for future collaboration between the parties in the South Pacific.

In particular, the Forum enabled debate across several divides:

- Australian Government:
  - o Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Pacific and Middle East Division
  - o Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, International Division
  - o Commonwealth Treasury, Pacific and Assistance Division
  - o Department of Defence, International Division
  - o AusAID
- Pacific leaders and regional perspectives:
  - o Secretary-General, Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat
  - o Director-General, South Pacific Community
  - o Executive Director, Foundation of the Peoples of the South Pacific International Secretariat
  - o Regional Rights Resources Team
  - o Pacific Cooperation Foundation of New Zealand
  - o New Zealand Institute of International Affairs
- Leading thinkers on the Pacific
  - o Universities (ANU, University of Queensland, Griffith University, University of Wollongong)
  - o Policy institutes (Lowy Institute for International Policy, Centre for Independent Studies)
  - o International organizations (World Bank Pacific Regional Assistance Strategy)
  - o Non-government organizations (Oxfam International)

Each session of the Forum took the form of a speaker and two discussants followed by discussion by participants. The number of participants was limited to 30 to enable genuine dialogue and debate.

Sessions focused on:

- Setting the Scene: The Current State of the South Pacific
- Learning from Experience: Australia and PNG
- Learning from Experience: Australia and the Solomon Islands
- Future Directions

Mr. Allan Hawke, the Chancellor of the Australian National University and former Australian High Commissioner to New Zealand reported on the outcomes as a rapporteur.



## Responses to the Forum

### Participant Evaluation

Participants' evaluation of the overall quality of the Forum was excellent, averaging a rating of 4.3 out of 5. Keynote speakers were rated 4.4 and discussants rated 4.3 out of 5.

The following were identified as highlights of the Forum:

- "Putting Pacific in perspective and centre-stage"
- "Hearing perspectives coming from the grassroots of Pacific societies/polities"
- "Discussion of issues and countries with which I was not familiar"
- "Quality of discussion"

The Forum was reported to have the following impact on participants' perspectives:

- "It gave me a sense of where the debate is at, where it's stuck and what is needed to keep it moving"
- "Interesting to hear perspective of Pacific Islanders and Australian government officials, both very often absent in purely academic discussions."
- "Brought up many issues of current interest"
- "Refined key dimensions in my world view in the Pacific"

Participants also found the Forum helpful in building or renewing contacts:

- "Renewed some old contacts and have met new ones for future work on this area."
- "Saw some new faces"
- "Excellent way to highlight some important thinkers dealing with the Pacific"

### Feedback

The Institute also received a number of unsolicited thanks from participants including:

- "Congratulations on a superbly run affair"  
*Mr Brian Lynch, Director of the New Zealand Institute of International Affairs*
- "Once again, thanks for the opportunity to participate in a very interesting round-table"  
*Mr Nic Maclellan, Senior Policy Advisor - Pacific, Oxfam International*
- "Many thanks for the opportunity to participate. It was a very useful event I thought and beautifully managed."  
*Dr Anne Brown, Australian Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies, University of Queensland*
- "I truly enjoyed last week's meeting ... both because of the opportunity it provided to learn from the formal meeting and for the opportunity it afforded to catch up with old friends and make new ones. I have received an almost unprecedented volume of positive feedback, most from people I do not know, not only here in Papua New Guinea but from Australia and New Caledonia. Thank you for the most enjoyable, and intellectually and professionally rewarding opportunity to participate in the recent President's Forum."  
*Professor Edward Wolfers, Head of History and Politics at Wollongong University and Adviser to the Papua New Guinea Government*



## Outcomes

### Dissemination of Results

The main objective of the Forum was to stimulate debate. As much material as possible has been made publicly available following the Forum to continue expert discussion and public education on the issues discussed.

The following information has been made available on the AIIA's website, [www.aiaa.asn.au](http://www.aiaa.asn.au):

- Four keynote addresses by:
  - o Mr Greg Urwin PSM, Secretary General, Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat
  - o Professor Ted Wolfers, University of Wollongong and Adviser to the Papua New Guinea Government
  - o Associate Professor Clive Moore, Head of History, School of History, Philosophy, Religion and Classics, University of Queensland
  - o Ms Imrana Jalal, Human Rights Advisor, Regional Rights Resources Team, Fiji
- Transcripts of eight discussants' remarks by:
  - o Dr Jimmie Rodgers, Director-General, South Pacific Community
  - o Mr Neil Plimmer, Chairman, Pacific Cooperation Foundation of New Zealand
  - o Mr Charles Lepani OBE, High Commissioner for Papua New Guinea
  - o Mr Sean Dorney, Pacific Correspondent, ABC
  - o Dr Michael Fullilove, Director of the Global Issues Program, Lowy Institute for International Policy
  - o Ms Mary-Louise O'Callaghan, Gold-Walkley Award-Winning Journalist and Commentator, based in the Solomon Islands
  - o Mr Rex Horoi, Executive Director, Foundation of the Peoples of the South Pacific International Secretariat
  - o Mr Nic Maclellan, Senior Policy Advisor - Pacific, Oxfam International
- Rapporteur's report prepared by Chancellor of the Australian National University and former Australian High Commissioner to New Zealand
- Remarks made by Mr Hawke at the Governor General's Reception
- A link to remarks made by the Governor-General of Australia, His Excellency Major General Michael Jeffery, AC, CVO, MC (Retd).

This report and the Rapporteur's report have also been distributed to the Institute's 1,300 members nationwide.

### Media Coverage

While the Forum was invitation-only, subsequent media coverage ensured public education on the topics that were addressed. Media coverage included:

- A full program of Chris Bullock's *Background Briefing* on ABC Radio National was devoted to the Forum, including excerpts from most speakers' and discussants' remarks. This was broadcast twice and recordings made available online at [www.abc.net.au/rn/backgroundbriefing](http://www.abc.net.au/rn/backgroundbriefing)
- Interviews with Dr Jimmie Rodgers and Neil Plimmer were broadcast on Geraldine Doogue's *Saturday Extra* on ABC Radio
- An interview with Neil Plimmer was broadcast on Radio Australia with Graeme Dobell
- An interview with Dr Jimmie Rodgers was broadcast on *Pacific Beat* on ABC Radio and made available online
- Pieces by participants were published in *The Diplomat* magazine

The Institute was also pleased to be able to involve media representatives as discussants in the Forum, including Sean Dorney and Mary-Louise O'Callaghan.



## Governor General's Reception

The AIIA's patron, His Excellency Major General Michael Jeffery AC CVO MC, Governor General of Australia, hosted a reception after the Forum at Admiralty House in Kirribilli. Approximately 70 Forum participants and additional guests attended the reception.

The reception provided the opportunity to involve business leaders and diplomats from the region including representatives from:

- Macquarie Bank
- ANZ Pacific
- Westpac Pacific Banking
- Oil Search Ltd
- Austrac
- PNG Sustainable Infrastructure Ltd
- Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry
- High Commissioner for Samoa
- High Commissioner for Papua New Guinea
- Consul-General for New Zealand
- Consul-General for Fiji

At the reception, the Governor-General made a few remarks on the importance of the Forum, followed by remarks from the Rapporteur on the outcome of the Forum and a vote of thanks by the Institute's National President, Clive Hildebrand.

The Governor-General's Reception was an exquisite opportunity for parties to meet informally and establish a platform for future collaboration and contacts.

*His Excellency the Governor-General with ANU Chancellor Mr Allan Hawke, AIIA National President Mr Clive Hildebrand and AIIA National Executive Director Ms Melissa Conley Tyler*



*AIIA National Vice-President Mr Geoff Miller AO, New Zealand Institute of International Affairs Executive Director Mr Brian Lynch and AIIA QLD Branch President Veronika Butta*



## Acknowledgements

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- Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
- His Excellency Major General Michael Jeffery AC CVO MC
- New South Wales State Parliament

The event would not have been possible without the generous input of all of the speakers and discussants, the assistance of the NSW Branch and the Sub-Committee responsible for organizing the event:

- Mr Clive Hildebrand, National President
- Mr Geoff Miller AO, National Vice-President
- Dr Sue Boyd, President WA Branch
- Professor Michael Wesley, Chair of Research Committee
- Ms Melissa Conley Tyler, National Executive Director

Special thanks are due to all the volunteers involved during the day:

- Jessica Miller, Intern (Australian National University)
- Jason Barber, Intern (University of North Carolina)
- Janinka Feenstra, Intern (University of Twente, Netherlands)



*AIA Intern Jess Miller with Mr Rex Horoi, Executive Director of the Foundation of the Peoples of the South Pacific and Professor Ted Wolfers, University of Wollongong and Adviser to the Papua New Guinea Government*

*His Excellency the Governor-General with HE Charles Lepani OBE, High Commissioner for Papua New Guinea*

