



Through Pacific Eyes



a collection of stories, ideas and experiences from the Pacific

Emerging Pacific Leaders Dialogue Alumni (Australia)

May 2007





ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Through Pacific Eyes is a snapshot of stories, ideas and recollections that are shared by the Pacific people. Despite its simplistic form, a publication of this nature could not have been put together without the invaluable contribution, dedicated efforts and tireless nights spent by many individuals.

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Our sincere thanks to Sir William Dean, the Hon Teresa Gambaro MP, Mr Brian Pickett from the Commonwealth Study Conference, our auspicing body Redcliffe Multicultural Community Association and our funding source the Australian National Commission for UNESCO.

We also extend our thanks to everyone who has contributed to this project and made this project possible.

And to you, the reader: Tangkiu, Fakafetai, Meitaki, Fa'afetai, Vinaka, Merci and Thank you.



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FOREWORD



Through Pacific Eyes seeks to improve our collective understanding of the challenges and issues facing the Pacific region, while also rejoicing in its achievements. It draws together four key elements of the Pacific – land, sea, people and culture.

I applaud the Australian National Commission for UNESCO for its support of this publication. It has provided an opportunity to showcase how Pacific communities and cultures can provide important lessons from a range of programs across the region.

It was my great pleasure to Chair the Opening Plenary session of the inaugural Emerging Pacific Leaders Dialogue (EPLD), held in Brisbane in 2006. As an outcome of that dialogue, delegates identified the need to improve understanding of the Pacific, particularly amongst the Australian community.

Through Pacific Eyes delivers on this goal. The stories captured in this publication go to the very heart of what is important to Pasifika people; a sense of family over individualism, community over materialism and a connection to land that is eternal.

These are our neighbours' stories; stories from across the Pacific which nourish the soul and open our eyes to tremendous human and natural wonder.

I am confident that you will enjoy these stories.

Sir William Deane



CONTENTS

	Acknowledgements	ii
	Foreword	iii
	Introduction	i
	The Land	2
	The Sea	4
	The People	6
	The Culture	10
	Navigating Our Future Together	12



INTRODUCTION

Through Pacific Eyes was initiated by Australian participants from the inaugural Emerging Pacific Leaders Dialogue (EPLD), held in 2006. EPLD brought together delegates from 19 Pacific nations, to share their knowledge and experiences. As a result of participation in the program, delegates identified a need for greater understanding of the Pacific region. *Through Pacific Eyes* is one step towards this goal.

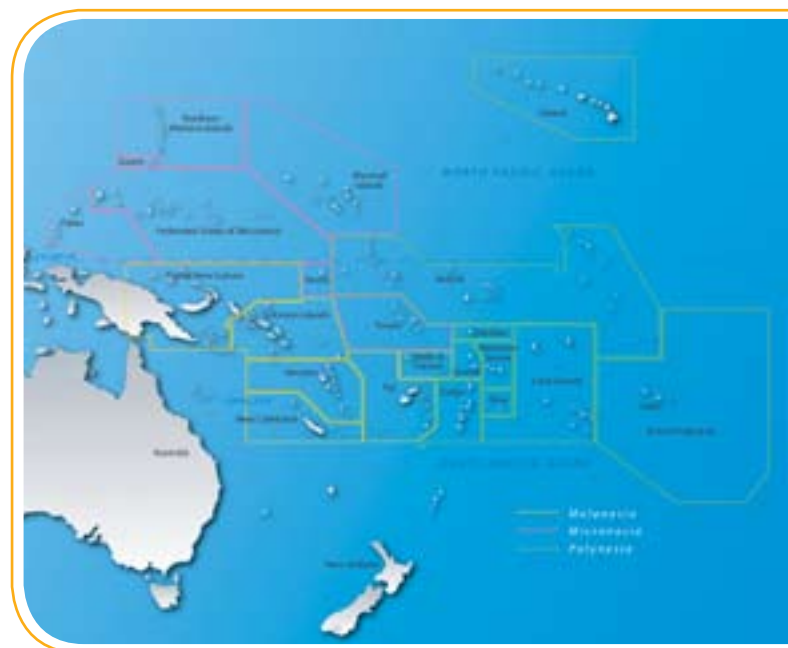
The guidebook draws together stories, projects, experiences and challenges from around the Pacific Region. It is designed to grow our understanding of the Pacific nations and recognise the contribution of intercultural dialogue - deepening our appreciation of both our similarities and our differences.

Pacifika people are experiencing a number of challenges at present – climate change, poverty, political stability, globalisation and economic growth. We explore some of the ways that the Pacific is responding to these challenges whilst protecting their cultural traditions.

To do this, *Through Pacific Eyes* brings together four key themes of the Pacific:

- The Land
- The Sea
- The People
- The Culture

Where is the Pacific and which countries make up this massive area? The following map shows the countries which make up the Pacific region, grouped broadly into their respective people groups.





“The problems of climate change are not just a countries, small or large. It is also not just

THE LAND

The nations of the Pacific Islands have custodianship over the largest part of the globe – some 30 million square kilometres (including exclusive economic zones). This equates to more than three times the land area of China. However of this massive area, only 2% is land, of which Papua New Guinea makes up more than 80%.

Even though the land mass of the Pacific Islands is small, there is great diversity. From sugar cane fields on Viti Levu, Fiji to coral atolls in Tuvalu; from rainforest mist in the highlands of Papua New Guinea to the many active volcanos in Vanuatu.

Pacifika people depend on the land for both subsistence and cash cropping. They also depend on the land for food and for a range of other products, including materials for housing, and wood for tools and boat construction.

What is Customary Land Ownership?

Land ownership in the Pacific region is extremely complex. In most cases land is owned through customary systems; owned and managed according to historical family and tribal ties. For example, approximately 97% of Papua New Guinea’s total land area is under customary title; with no government administration or title documentation.

Commonly customary land ownership brings with it rights and obligations at the individual, family, clan and tribal levels.

Tribal leaders or chiefs are key leadership figures within each community. In the case of Vanuatu and Fiji, this is formalised at the national government level and takes the form of the Council of Chiefs.

Pacifika people are very passionate about their family and/or tribal land. They have a very tangible connection with the land, its stories and its connection to ancestors.

Observing Land Ownership in the Pacific

Far from Port Moresby and Lae, many indigenous people in PNG are struggling to borrow money from banks or government institutions against their combined lands to leverage their business. Thus not being able to provide funding to develop their farming and grow their wealth. The availability of relatively cheap debt on appreciating assets is a fundamental requirement of a successful society.

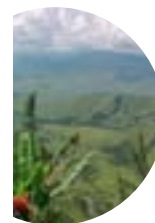
The ownership of land is also in flux in PNG. This is best evidenced by PNG’s long history of communal ownership compared with only one or two generations of ‘Western’ land ownership concepts. Good legislation outlining clear title, ownership and surveying of land with no racist bias against who can own land is an important issue that needs to be addressed throughout the Pacific, including in PNG.





national problem; it is a global problem – a problem for all a geographic problem; it is far more wide-reaching.”

Rt Hon Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese Ta'isi Efi (Former Samoan Prime Minister)



Vanuatu is addressing the issues of land ownership. A 'National Land Summit' held in late 2006 drew together landowners, Chiefs, leasees and members of the public and private sectors. A 'Land Summit' may also be considered for other Pacific nations, including the Solomon Islands.

Customary land ownership is still a major challenge for the Pacific region moving forward. It is seen as one of the key issues in the economic development of the region. There continues to be a role for the international community to support Pacific Islands to invest in their land tenure systems so a balance can be reached between economic development, investment and the maintenance of traditional and customary practices.

Managing the Pacific Islands' Natural Resources

The majority of land resources in the Pacific Islands are found in Melanesia, namely PNG, Vanuatu, Fiji, New Caledonia and the Solomon Islands. These areas are rich in forestry and mining reserves. At present these nations rely very heavily on these resources and associated industries for revenue, yet reserves are being depleted at a rapid rate.

A key challenge for governments and the international community is to work alongside these communities to ensure that economic returns from natural resources are realised but that support is also provided for land management to prevent degradation and over-exploitation.

However not all of the Pacific Island countries have access to land resources. Countries such as Nauru, Kiribati, Tuvalu and parts of Micronesia suffer from acute shortages of productive land. As we will see in the next section, their economic future lies not with the land, but with the seas which surround their small atolls.

What about Climate Change and the Pacific?

The effects of climate change and the ability to adapt to this changing environment has been, and will continue to be the major issue for Pacific Island nations. For countries like Tuvalu and Kiribati, where much of the land is no more than 1.5 metres above sea level, any change in sea conditions has a tremendous impact on their land and their ability to sustain a livelihood.

A greater number of projects are focusing on strengthening sea walls and causeways to ensure that as much land is retained as possible and that road transport linkages between atolls are also maintained. Recent flooding in Tuvalu during a king tide event highlights the gravity of the situation to the many communities facing this crisis.

How then do we respond to this challenge?





THE SEA

'...the sea is as real as you and I...it shapes the nature of this planet...it is a major part of our sustenance...it is something that we all share in common wherever we are in Oceania (Pacific)... but above that level of everyday experience, the sea is our pathway to each other and to everyone else, the sea is our most powerful metaphor, the ocean is in us.'

Professor Epeli Hau'ofa, Director of Oceania Centre at the University of South Pacific

The sea is recognised as the life-blood of the Pacific region. There is a deep connection between Pacifica people and the ocean. It was by the sea, using wooden vessels that the first Pacifica people settled to the areas we now know as the Pacific nations.

"Cultures link us with the ocean and the ocean surrounds all Pacific Islands therefore, linking all the peoples together. We see the sea as not isolating us but as something connecting us. Common bonds shared help us to keep peace – networks of families, churches, people who have studied together."

Dr Manuka Henare Associate Dean Maori and Pacific Studies – University of Auckland
New Zealand



Economics and the Sea

The region's past, present and future relies heavily on the sea, and particularly fisheries, to provide for local subsistence economies and export industries. The Pacific is the largest tuna fishery in the world – accounting for about a third of the global catch. It accounts for approximately half of Pacific Island nations' exports.

Other countries exploit large areas of the sea for fishing and in return provide economic 'rent' to the Pacific Island nations in whose territorial boundaries they fish. This is vitally important for many Pacific Island nations due to the income it provides.

The fishing industry also provides employment for many Pacifica people, particularly in processing. However distance to markets in Europe and North America will continue to limit Pacific exports.



Maritime Training in Kiribati

Many of the Pacific's men and women, in keeping with their ancestors before them, derive an income from the ocean. In Kiribati, its young men are finishing their schooling, yet often not finding viable vocation options, particularly in the capital Tarawa. A large proportion of these young men enrol themselves in the Maritime Training Centre (MTC). The centre has 40 years of academic and technical expertise, equipping 150 aspiring seafarers each year with the necessary skills to work abroad and add to Kiribati's remittances.

MTC is one of many such training facilities throughout the Pacific. However its greatest challenge is to keep up with international shipping technology to ensure that it retains its competitive advantage as a premier seafarer training institute in the Pacific. The challenge for the young men who have grown up close to the sea is to find their way in new waters – across Asia, the Middle East and the Americas.

Source: EPLD Group 10 Report



Peril and Paradise

The sea is in many cases the bringer of good or bad weather to the Pacific Islands. The region is susceptible to damaging cyclones, volcanic activity and tsunamis. It is not always clear skies and picturesque sunsets over white sandy beaches and palm trees.

The sea may provide dangers to the Pacific Islands, it also provides opportunities. In many places, the unspoiled natural environments, combined with cultural traditions provide tangible opportunities in up-market resort tourism, eco-tourism, adventure tourism and family holidays. This is true for Pacific Island nations such as Fiji, Vanuatu, Samoa, New Caledonia, French Polynesia and Cook Islands, who depend on tourism as a key economic sector.





THE PEOPLE

Stretched over 165 million square kilometres and covering one third of the world's surface, the Pacific Ocean is home to Melanesian, Polynesian and Micronesian peoples.

Melanesia includes Papua New Guinea, the Solomons, Vanuatu, New Caledonia and Fiji; Polynesia includes Samoa, Cook Islands, Tonga, French Polynesia and Hawaii; and Micronesia includes the Marshall Islands, Nauru, Saipan, Kiribati, Palau and the Federated States of Micronesia (see map on page 1).

The first people to reach the Pacific Islands were the Papuans, who travelled through Southeast Asia and Indonesia to settle in New Guinea almost 50,000 years ago. Given their travel route, it is not surprising that the Papuans share the same ancestry with the earliest Australian Aboriginals. Much of the Pacific remained untouched by human discovery until 1500 BC when the Lapita people discovered ways to cross the sea through the use of wooden vessels. They quickly made their journey from the west to the east of the Pacific Ocean. It was not until 1521 AD that the first contact between Pacific Island people and Europeans was recorded.

Wantok? What's That?

Pacific Islanders place importance on ancestral ties. The wantok system, which means "one talk", affirms one's affiliation to a same clan and family. Through the wantok system, obligation and responsibilities are assigned to individuals and the privileges are also awarded. This wantok system ensures that all the available resources such as land and food are shared amongst everyone in the clan or family. The egalitarian concept of resource sharing functions as a safety net.

The wantok system does not just apply to the allocation of land and food. In fact, it affects everything from how people get a job to how much you pay for your taxi fare.

It's a form of conduct and thinking based on kinship affiliation. Although the wantok system may be challenged in today's Western society, the system is so strong that even the Pacific Islanders who move to Australia and New Zealand maintain their obligations to the wantok despite them being geographically distant from their extended families in their home country.

The wantok system can provide security to individuals. Their care for their clan and family members reinforce the Pacific people's collectivist values as opposed to the individualist values so common within Western societies. With social interactions becoming more diffused with the advancement of communication technologies like the internet and mobile phones, perhaps others can learn from the Pacific peoples about valuing family over self-interests.



Values of Respect, Integrity, Reciprocity and Solidarity

The ideals of egalitarianism and collectivism have prescribed a certain unique quality to the Pacifika people. In essence, an individual is a member of a family and a family is a member of a clan. A clan, alongside many other clans, form a country. The values that guide people through this social hierarchy are respect, integrity, reciprocity and solidarity.

- Respect is given to elders, chiefs, pastors, parents and others who are in authority. People respect them because of their status and obligations.
- Integrity is to ensure one's honour to their family and to their clan. Integrity can reaffirm one's membership with a family and clan.
- Reciprocity derives from the wantok system – you help others in need and in exchange they will help you when you are in need even though you don't know when you might need the help.
- Solidarity is about being part of the Pacifika identity and being united with the rest of the Pacific Islander peoples.



Giving Young Mums a Second Chance in Fiji

The Homes of Hope, on the slopes of the Wailoku area near Suva, is an accommodation facility for young single mothers who have been either forced out of their home or are victims of sexual violence.

The EPLD delegates met with Pastor Mark Roche and some of the supported and rehabilitated young women and their infants and young children who live at this Christian campus. Pastor Mark is on the first name terms with each of the 20 young women, who are experiencing all-encompassing support, acceptance and compassion. At the same time, they are gaining personal development, practical mothering skills, literacy, numeracy and vocational education, preparing them for employment and financial independence.

Several of the women spoke about newfound self-assurance and dignity, shocking stories of repeated sexual abuse; family violence; and the shame and guilt of being unmarried and pregnant.





*“Nobody can deliver sustainable
True development*

They shared their future aspirations, their pride in new skills, and their confidence as young capable mothers, and they were blossoming within the trusting secure environment of Homes of Hopes.

Reflecting on how people perceive these young women, one mother commented: “I was reading in the paper last week and a girl was saying that the girl should be blamed for being pregnant but it’s not just the girl’s fault. They have a different mentality about girls. People still look down on me but I’m moving on in life and I’m going where I want to go in life.”

While focused on rehabilitation of these women, Homes of Hope is also striving to establish cost efficient management and sustainable economic initiatives.

The young mothers are setting up cut flower gardens, baking for a hot bread bakery, conducting a school and planning other enterprises. They are proud of their achievements and can not hide their smiles: “I’ve got to where I want to be and I want to help other single mums. I want to help them and encourage them. I’m glad to be at Homes of Hope. Some of the skills they teach here is good for young people – for example, one of the skills here we’ve learnt is about abstinence to let people know that it can be done and move on with life.”

Leadership

Leadership in the Pacific can be best described by using the analogies of a canoe and a navigator.

The canoe represents the Pacific region. The navigator is seen as the leader and is defined as “a person engaged in setting the direction of a vessel”. Elements such as the tide, the currents, the weather, the winds and the stars which guide the course of the canoe symbolise the internal and external factors influencing the direction and speed of the canoe. These factors are likened to the issues we have to deal with in our societies.

The region’s asset is its people. It is the invaluable knowledge and skills of Pacifica people which forms the strong foundation for the canoe. Successful leaders are those who recognise and strengthen their people and navigate the canoe towards a common vision.





development to people because development is not a product. is a process of empowering people and communities to plan, implement and maintain a better future for themselves.”

Dame Carol Kidu, PNG Minister for Community Development



Leadership and Governance in Papua New Guinea

The Papua New Guineans are seeking good leadership at every level of government. They want to see people working in government who have the capacity to make decisions and ensure that people's needs are met. They seek leadership that is ethical, fair and inspirational. They seek systems that are transparent, accountable and effective.

People also seek a level of security that allows them to live and work to their best ability without fear. A society that respects the rules of law will ensure that people are protected. While transparency and accountability is a major problem within PNG, people want to see it strengthened to ensure the best future for their country. The fact that PNG has been a functioning democracy since 1975 is cause for hope, so too is the fact that the country has seen five years of stable government.

Developmentally, PNG is facing a clash of civilisations with a very traditional and subsistence village life on one hand, and on the other hot running water, electricity, e-mail and processed foods. This culture clash in the modes of production and distribution are profound and to force people to move so quickly into modern western society in itself is the development problem.

*'Let's fix problems and not fix excuses!'
- Let's navigate the future of our people together, peacefully, purposefully and productively. Let's ensure that our canoe is sturdy and sustainable and let's take everyone with us on this journey. Let's put the women and children first and ensure that those who are the most marginalized are given the navigational skills to set us on course. The destination is a region where all are educated, have access to the best possible health care, training and employment, where the natural resources are used wisely and not exploited and where government and governance works.*

Source: EPLD Study Tour 2 Report





THE CULTURE

Today, the people of the Pacific Islands are navigating through the waves of traditional and modern cultures. Traditional cultures are beliefs, values and ways of living that are innate within customs and wantok kinship ties. Modern cultures include the influences of globalisation and technology, and new ways of thinking.

European contact has undeniably changed the Pacific - religion, language, and ethnic and familial ties have been altered in significant ways. However, the traditional culture of the Pacific people has not been lost completely. Case studies that follow will show how traditions are being preserved and adapted to accommodate new modern influences.

What is culture?

Culture can be understood as a multilayered system of beliefs, ideas, customs and ways of living. Culture can be expressed through language, food, clothes, dance and music but culture can also be deeply rooted within how people think, react, behave and understand the world around them.

Culture is never static. Culture continues to evolve just as people learn and come into contact with people from other cultures. Pacific Island cultures have also changed and people have adapted different ways to revive and strengthen cultural traditions so that the younger generations can be proud of their heritage.

Theatre comes to life in Vanuatu

When a large percentage of the population has problems reading and writing, how do you communicate messages about issues that will impact people's lives? How do you make people realize that they can be part of the solution in solving problems that affect them?

According to Wan Smolbag, participatory theatre is the answer. What began as a small group of actors 18 years ago in Vanuatu, Wan Smolbag now travels around the Pacific Islands educating communities about social issues, human rights and HIV/AIDS. After researching just the extent of impact radio, television and newspapers have on communicating messages to the ordinary Ni Vanuatu population, it was evident that they weren't achieving the greatest coverage. However, people in Vanuatu enjoyed watching theatre because social, health and environmental issues were brought to life.

Based on the theatre of the oppressed, the theatrical pieces produced by Wan Smolbag directly engage the audience so as to make them feel that they are acting the part of the characters involved in the play. This form of theatre originated with the works of Augusto Boal, in which theatre was used to encourage people to learn to fight against oppression that they experience in their lives.

Wan Smolbag has successfully engaged children, young people, men and women of all ages in Vanuatu to realize that they can challenge the system that oppresses them. In 1998, Wan Smolbag was approached by the Electoral Commission of Vanuatu to create short plays to educate people about their voting rights and responsibilities. Within a short period, 90% of the villages in Vanuatu had watched the plays and became aware of the importance of voting.

Wan Smolbag is an excellent example of how creative channels such as theatre can be used to empower people to stand up for their rights.



From the WWW to the Grassroots: Facilitating Youth-led Development in the Pacific

With the use of the internet, over 210 members of the Youth for a Sustainable Future Pacifika (YSFP) across 20 Pacific Island countries have worked together to fight against poverty, illiteracy, gender inequality, HIV/AIDS, environmental degradation and corruption. Since 2003, YSFP has provided an avenue for young people in the Pacific to exchange ideas and create positive change within their communities. Much of the success of YSFP can be attributed to its focus on youth-led development, which recognises the enormous contributions young people make in supporting social and economic development.

The life of YSFP began four years ago when a group of Pacific youth realised that their voices weren't being heard at international youth forums. They identified that access to information and funding was severely limited in the Pacific. Hence there was a huge under representation of Pacific youth at key international forums, conferences and events. What this really meant was that young people in the Pacific did not have the opportunity to voice their concerns and take part in making decisions about youth development within their region.

To address the disadvantage experienced by Pacific youth, YSFP was formed as an online resource network with the aim of empowering young people and their communities in achieving the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Information about youth grants and events were supported by peer-based mentoring, in which YSFP members provided each other with support from writing project proposals right through to implementing and evaluating projects. In this way, young people had a strong sense of ownership over their projects rather than being merely 'target groups' or 'project recipients' as it happens with most donor-funded youth programs.

Armed with passion, energy and dedication, YSFP continues to play an instrumental role in creating opportunities for young people in the Pacific. Recently, they published a toolkit on how young people in the Pacific can take action on localizing the MDGs. In this way, the global agenda is brought into the local context so that people can see how the MDGs relates to them and their community. For example, Goal 2 Promote Universal Primary Education doesn't have much meaning and some people may consider it to be foreign jargon. But when you simplify it into the local context, Goal 2 means that all children should receive free education to help them grow to their full potential and expand their life opportunities.





NAVIGATING OUR FUTURE TOGETHER

The Pacific: a place of great geographic diversity, natural beauty and timeless traditions. Yet also a place where balance is needed to retain these traditional & customary practices, while still ensuring sustainable economic development & ongoing investment.

Many nations in the Pacific rely heavily on international aid to support their economies. The aim for Pacific Island nations is to become self-reliant and economically, socially and culturally rich. There is an urgent need to manage land resources to create wealth but also prevent degradation and over-exploitation. Key export industries for the region are tourism and fisheries; these must continue but in a sustainable manner.

Climate change will remain the biggest issue for the Pacific region. Coral atoll nations such as Tuvalu and Kiribati face relocation of thousands of people if rising sea levels continue. The implications of this are much greater than logistics; these people face loss of land gained through historical family and tribal ties, loss of 'wantok' and cultural practices and loss of self; given that Pacifica people's connection to land and sea is part of their soul.

In an ever changing world where globalisation is constantly transforming economic, social and political landscapes, the Pacific region must work together to navigate a path towards a sustainable and prosperous future for current and future generations. As the previous pages highlight, regional cooperation depends on common values of respect, integrity, reciprocity and solidarity.

As Australia engages in regional affairs, we must bear in mind that the journey to development and prosperity can not be taken alone. Just as a canoe needs a leader and a crew of paddlers, we need to go on the journey with everyone on board.

“Ma wei e to te waka o te matauranga?

Maku e to, mau e to, ma te whakarongo e to.

*Who will bear the canoe of knowledge?
I will, you will, all those who listen will.”*





What then can we, as Australians, do to support our Pacific neighbours?

There is so much we can do, starting from simple activities like:

- Learning about the historical links between Australia and the Pacific Islands. For example, during the late 19th century, many people from Vanuatu and Solomon Islands were brought into Queensland as labourers to work on sugar cane plantations.
- Embracing Pacific Island culture – such as dance, music, art, fashion and food. Why not take part in celebrating Pacific Island culture within your local community?
- As Australians we can also learn from our neighbours. Organise a community debate topic surrounding the egalitarian concept of ‘wantok’ versus today’s modern welfare state.
- Switching to green power from your electricity retailer. Leave the car at home and either ride, walk or catch the bus to work or school. Install long-life, energy efficient light bulbs and recycle, recycle, recycle. Climate change is a global problem.
- As individuals, businesses or corporations we could instil good business practices that result in a win-win situation for the economy, society and environment. Short term gains should be outweighed by long term investment in people.



Our journey does not end here. This is the beginning of our journey together, as Australians, as friends of the Pacific Islands, as human beings, and as citizens – we all have a role to play and our journey begins today.





Take the time to visit *Through Pacific Eyes* on the web at www.csaaustralia.com/throughpacificeyes

Additional information on the Pacific can be found at the following web links.

ABC	http://www.abc.net.au/ra/pacific/places/countries.htm
AusAID	http://www.ausaid.gov.au/country/southpacific.cfm
Asia Pacific Network	http://www.asiapac.org.fj
CSC Australia EPLD	http://www.csaaustralia.com/epld
Pacific Islands Report	http://pidp.eastwestcenter.org/pireport
Pacific Islands	http://www.pacificislands.cc
Pacific Peoples Partnership	http://www.pacificpeoplespartnership.org
Pacific Travel Guides	http://www.pacific-travel-guides.com
Secretariat for the Pacific Community	http://www.spc.int
Small Islands Voice	http://www.unesco.org/csi/smis/siv/sivindex.htm
UNESCO	http://www.unesco.org
Youth for a Sustainable Future Pacifika	http://www.pacifikayouth.org
Youth Visioning for Island Living	http://www.unesco.org/csi/YV/index.htm

