



NEW ZEALAND HIGH COMMISSION

TE AKA AORERE
HONIARA

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MRP 101, MRP 503/005

The Chairman
Parliamentary Foreign Relations Committee
National Parliament
PO Box G19
Honiara
SOLOMON ISLANDS

Dear Hon Laurie Chan

Thank you for the invitation to make a submission into the Parliamentary Inquiry into the Facilitation of International Assistance Notice. We appreciate the Solomon Islands Government's commitment to consult RAMSI participating countries on the inquiry.

The terms of reference for the inquiry are broad. As we are not sure which areas of RAMSI's work the inquiry is likely to focus on, we have limited our comments to a few key points of importance to New Zealand and its participation in RAMSI. We would welcome the opportunity to remain engaged in the inquiry as its focus is further defined.

New Zealand/Solomon Islands Bilateral Relations

Solomon Islands is an important bilateral and regional partner for New Zealand and New Zealand's relationship with Solomon Islands has developed over many years of close association. The relationship has been enhanced in recent years by New Zealand's support and participation in the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) and increased bilateral aid programme with Solomon Islands. New Zealand is committed to continuing its support to the Solomon Islands bilaterally and through RAMSI.

Solomon Islands is an active participant in New Zealand's Recognised Seasonal Employer scheme and sent 238 workers to New Zealand in the first year of the scheme. The New Zealand Cabinet recently decided to designate Solomon Islands a Kick Start State under the scheme which will provide for

further facilitative measures to enable Solomon Islands workers to come to New Zealand in the future.

New Zealand's development cooperation relationship with Solomon Islands is New Zealand's largest bilateral programme and has undergone significant growth since RAMSI's arrival. The New Zealand Agency for International Development's (NZAID) bilateral allocation for the Solomon Islands has increased from approximately SBD 182 million in 2007/08 to SBD 194 million for 2008/09 and the total forecast bilateral allocation for 2009/10 is SBD 241 million. Further potential for scaling up in the longer term is expected. This allocation includes New Zealand's development and policing contributions to RAMSI.

NZAID is currently developing a new ten-year Development Strategy 2009-2018 for its Solomon Islands Development Assistance Programme. This will set the strategic direction/focus areas for NZAID's support to Solomon Islands for the next ten years for both its bilateral programmes and its contributions to RAMSI. The new Strategy will ensure close alignment with the Solomon Islands Government's national priorities as set out in the Medium Term Development Strategy and will determine how New Zealand can respond to Solomon Islands Government priorities, including rural economic growth. Consultations on the Strategy have been held in Honiara, with strong endorsement from the Solomon Islands Government of the NZAID programme and approach and constructive feedback on the Government's expectations of NZAID support. These ideas are currently being further developed and final consultation is expected in October. The current Solomon Islands strategy focuses on: improving education (quality primary education for all); broad-based economic growth (improved infrastructure, sustainable fisheries management and rural income generation); and strengthening governance (civil society, RAMSI).

New Zealand Police has three senior staff seconded to the Solomon Islands Police Force as part of a bilateral capacity building arrangement. New Zealand Police Assistant Commissioner Peter Marshall is seconded to the role of Deputy Commissioner for Operations and is currently the Acting Commissioner of the Solomon Islands Police Force. This position is supported by an Operations Advisor and a Corporate Services & Logistics Advisor.

New Zealand Support for RAMSI

RAMSI plays an important role in supporting stability in Solomon Islands and the security it provides has enabled donors to re-engage in support to Solomon Islands for social and economic development activities. New Zealand's total funding support to Solomon Islands for the year 2007/2008 is estimated at SBD 221 million (actual expenditure). SBD 101 million of this was provided in support of RAMSI activities.

New Zealand has been engaged in RAMSI since its inception in 2003 and is the second largest contributor to RAMSI (after Australia) in terms of personnel and funding assistance. 82 New Zealanders from a range of New Zealand agencies are currently working in RAMSI, including 43 New Zealand Defence Force personnel and 35 New Zealand Police personnel. New Zealand also supplies the Deputy Special Coordinator, two advisers to the Solomon Islands Inland Revenue Department and one adviser in the Economic Reform Unit. NZAID funds the provision of two High Court judges to the Solomon Islands High Court to complete the tension trials. The New Zealand Cabinet recently approved a further two year mandate for New Zealand's whole-of-government contributions to RAMSI to 30 September 2010, building on existing commitments in the security and development sectors.

New Zealand plays an active role in RAMSI's policy development, working closely with RAMSI, the Solomon Islands Government, Australia, the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat and Forum members.

Solomon Islands/RAMSI Partnership

Respect for the sovereignty of the Solomon Islands Government and a partnership approach are essential to RAMSI's success and sustainability. The Solomon Islands/RAMSI Partnership Framework will be an important mechanism for agreeing future priorities and ensuring shared ownership and mutual responsibility for RAMSI's programmes. The Framework should also help to set clear targets for the gradual phasedown and transition of RAMSI's programmes. New Zealand welcomes the positive approach the Solomon Islands Government has taken in its relationship with RAMSI and hopes that the Partnership Framework will help provide a strong foundation for continuing partnership.

New Zealand considers that RAMSI's existing mandate of law and justice, economic governance, and machinery of government activities remains appropriate and that longer-term growth and development activities should continue to be undertaken by bilateral and multilateral donors. RAMSI is making good progress towards its existing goals and we would not want to see its focus diverted to other areas, which could be better supported by other donors. For example, New Zealand is already providing support under its bilateral programme in the economic growth sector to transport infrastructure and fisheries reform and has been discussing with the Solomon Islands Government how this support can be improved and expanded over the coming years.

The development of the Solomon Islands Medium Term Development Strategy is also an important step in enabling long term development partners to align more closely with Solomon Islands priorities. It will be an essential tool in facilitating further discussion on the roles of RAMSI and multilateral and bilateral donors.

RAMSI's Regional Nature

RAMSI's regional nature continues to be one of its key strengths and New Zealand has been encouraged by the Forum's ongoing support for RAMSI. Forum engagement in RAMSI's policy formulation and representation by Forum member countries in RAMSI are essential components of RAMSI's regional nature.

The recent RAMSI PIF Task Force Review of RAMSI provided a useful external assessment of RAMSI's work and New Zealand welcomed the report and its recommendations. New mechanisms for consultation and coordination on RAMSI arising from the review (e.g. the Enhanced Consultative Mechanism and the Forum Ministers Standing Committee) are working well and provide important opportunities for Forum engagement in RAMSI.

Facilitation of International Assistance Act (FIAA)

New Zealand shares the assessment of the Forum Review Taskforce that changes to RAMSI's legislative framework are not needed at this time. Immunities granted to RAMSI personnel under the FIAA reflect fairly standard provisions for Status of Forces Agreements and a number of safeguards are in place to ensure that these are not abused.

The FIAA provides the legal underpinning for RAMSI's operations and as such is of significant importance to RAMSI contributing countries. Should the Solomon Islands Government wish to consider any changes to the Act, we would encourage the Government to consult closely with all RAMSI contributing countries. The FIAA also provides the domestic framework for the RAMSI Treaty so any changes to the FIAA could require changes to the RAMSI Treaty.

Thank you again for the opportunity to contribute a submission to the Committee's inquiry. We would welcome the opportunity to remain engaged in the inquiry as the focus of the review is further defined.

Yours sincerely



Deborah Panckhurst
New Zealand High Commissioner