



PACIFIC ISLANDS FORUM SECRETARIAT
Excelling Together for the People of the Pacific

**2019 PRIVATE SECTOR DIALOGUE WITH
PACIFIC ISLANDS FORUM LEADERS**
Funafuti, Tuvalu
14 August 2019

SUMMARY RECORD

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PACIFIC ISLANDS FORUM LEADERS**

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14 August 2019

Securing our Economic Future in the Pacific

Summary Record

The 2019 Private Sector Dialogue with Pacific Islands Forum Leaders was held in Funafuti on 14 August 2019. Forum Member Countries represented were Australia, Cook Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, French Polynesia, Kiribati, Nauru, New Caledonia, New Zealand, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Republic of Marshall Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu.

2. Private sector were represented by the Australia PNG Business Council, the Cook Islands Chamber of Commerce, the Fiji Commerce and Employers Federation, the Nauru Chamber of Commerce, the New Caledonia Confederation of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises, the New Zealand Pacific Cooperation Foundation, the Solomon Islands Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Tuvalu National Private Sector Organisation, the Vanuatu Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and the Pacific Island Private Sector Organisation (PIPSO).

3. The full list of participants is at [Annex A](#), and the programme and working procedures are at [Annex B](#).

4. The Dialogue was chaired by Honourable Enele Sosene Sopoaga, Prime Minister of Tuvalu and Chair of the 50th Pacific Islands Forum, and supported by the Pacific Islands Forum Secretary General, Dame Meg Taylor.

WELCOME REMARKS BY THE FORUM CHAIR

5. In his opening remarks, the Chair welcomed Leaders and noted that the Private Sector held their Caucus Meeting in Suva, Fiji on 12 August where three important areas of discussion were highlighted for Leaders' consideration: (1) Resilient Infrastructure for Climate Change and Economic Development; (2) Labour Mobility; and (3) Dialogue with Leaders.

6. The Dialogue theme resonated the need for Forum Governments to support and empower the private sector in the region in striving to "Securing our future in the Pacific" collaboratively.

OPENING STATEMENT BY THE TUVALU NATIONAL PRIVATE SECTOR ORGANISATION

7. Ms Eseta Soloseni, President of the Tuvalu National Private Sector Organisation, delivered an opening statement on behalf of private sector of Tuvalu.

8. As in almost all Pacific Island Countries, the public sector in Tuvalu continue to dominate economic activities. Tuvalu's private sector experienced major challenges in areas of transportation, distances to markets, skilled labour force, and access to finance. These challenges were further exacerbated by Tuvalu's vulnerability and susceptibility to climate change related risks and the increasing frequency, intensity and impact of natural disasters.

9. The Tuvalu National Private Sector Organisation called on Forum Governments to focus on the needs of local Small and Medium Enterprises. She stated that local businesses were disproportionately affected by high transportation costs and the lack of access to markets, and that Governments had a key role to support private sector growth in the region. Having said this, the role of Governments was appreciated and acknowledged for their efforts to support private sector growth.

10. The Tuvalu National Private Sector Organisation stated their support for the *Blue Pacific* narrative and all it stood for, and further, stated their support for the notion of a Blue Continent by working together to drive the changes desired as a region.

11. Ms Soloseni said that the private sector statement (presented in the subsequent session) was a reflection of collective thoughts and desires as local business leaders on three specific issues. She thanked the Government of Australia for providing the financial resources to support the Private Sector Dialogues, and also thanked the Forum Secretariat for their technical assistance and stewardship on this journey.

PRIVATE SECTOR STATEMENT

12. The Private Sector Statement was jointly delivered by Mr Stephen Lyon, the Chair of PIPSO, Ms Eseta Nadaikuitavuki, Vice President of the Fiji Employers and Commerce Federation, and Mr Jay Bartlett, President of the Solomon Islands Chamber of Commerce and Industry. The full statement is at [Annex B](#).

13. The Private Sector announced support for the *2050 Strategy and Vision for the Blue Pacific Continent* and committed support for inclusive dialogue with Leaders on the development of the Vision and Strategy.

14. The Private Sector noted the opportunities for Public Private Partnerships in the development and management of infrastructure assets and urged governments to, through their National Designated Authorities (NDAs), work in partnership with National Private Sector Organisations, to access the Private Sector component of the Green Climate Fund, for adaptation initiatives. The Private Sector sought Governments' support to task the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat to develop a regional policy to formalise the pathways for local and regional Public-Private Partnership opportunities, taking into consideration scale constraints at the national level.

15. The Private Sector called on Leaders to agree to a harmonised system that would ease transit visa requirements for the establishment of a single Pacific Business Travel Card. The Private Sector also requested Leaders to consider the establishment of a mechanism to identify the key barriers to labour mobility and a streamlined process for addressing these impediments. The

Private Sector committed to undertake an assessment of constraints to better identify labour mobility barriers, and to provide a report to the 2020 Pacific Islands Forum Meeting, in Vanuatu.

16. Recognising the important role of the Private Sector in informing policies related to economic development and climate change mitigation and adaptation, the Private Sector called for the continuation of the annual Private Sector Dialogue as part of the Forum Leaders' Agenda.

17. The Chair thanked the presenters and the statement, and summarised the key points and messages raised, as follows:

- *Resilient Infrastructure for Climate Change and Economic Development:*
 - The challenge of survival from the effects of climate change;
 - The importance of strengthening key public infrastructure;
 - Involvement of private sector in planning and implementation of infrastructure projects;
 - Ensuring transfer of skills, retaining as much revenue within the local economy;
 - Public Private Sector partnerships in development and management of infrastructure;
 - Development of regional policy to formalise pathways for Public Private Partnerships;

- *Labour mobility:*
 - Harmonising and introducing a single Pacific Business Travel Card in easing visa requirements;
 - Support on labour mobility, whilst encouraging and developing skills-set to compliment local industry and partner training;
 - Broader program to facilitate skilled and unskilled mobility within Forum Countries;
 - A call for support and establishment of a mechanism to identify key barriers to Labour Mobility to which the private sector will undertake assessments on these; and

- On the matter of *Dialogue with Leaders*, that the mechanism for the annual dialogue with political Leaders should continue as a standing agenda of Pacific Islands Forum Leaders' meetings, noting the critical role of private sector in economic development.

OPEN DIALOGUE

18. Honourable Rear Admiral Josaia Voreqe Bainimarama, Prime Minister of Fiji, acknowledged the private sector representatives and the informative presentations, emphasising the invaluable role the private sector played as the engine room driving our economies. This is why it was so important to continue to provide a space for these dialogues, allowing Leaders to find innovative ways to answer some of the challenges confronting our Pacific people today. Prime Minister Bainimarama commended private sector partners, the Secretariat and the Chair for the dialogue, and fully supported the calls made by private sector.

19. Prime Minister Bainimarama recommended that Leaders consider a small number of transformational regional projects or programmes, through an innovative partnership between governments, private sector and communities that would provide real solutions in Climate Change preparedness, contribute to the livelihoods of Pacific people and create world-class products linked to the region's unique natural resource base.

20. Prime Minister Bainimarama highlighted the need for innovative private-sector-led regional initiatives at a scale that would: build and adapt critical public and private infrastructure; train and improve the skills of Pacific workforces in sectors; and, provide employment anywhere in the region. It would also enable Pacific countries to strengthen and promote key sectors that could sustainably utilise shared resources such as in tourism, fisheries, manufacturing, agriculture and other areas where the region may have a natural advantage.

21. Prime Minister Bainimarama noted the significant commitment of potential financing from Australia, the Asian Development Bank and the Green Climate Fund, as well as added interests from many of our development partners. He urged Leaders and private sector not to think small, rather to address the impacts of climate change with vision, leadership and innovation. He encouraged embarking on a region-wide public private initiative that could transform a sector, contribute to the livelihoods of Pacific people, and create world-class products linked to the world-class, unique natural resource base that the Pacific was blessed with.

22. Honourable Tuilaepa Sailele Malielegaoi, Prime Minister of Samoa, recognised that many of the private sectors were small and the contributions to the economies were similarly limited. Support was therefore needed from governments. The proposal for regular engagement with government was very good because government needed to understand and appreciate the help needed, noting Government's own responsibilities and preoccupations. Private Sector were encouraged to play a more active part in engaging with Government. The issue of labour mobility and capacity development were also important for both Government and private sector. To advance development, Prime Minister Malielegaoi encouraged competition through encouraging Pacific companies to establish branches throughout the region and developing related advanced know-how.

23. Honourable Samuela 'Akilisi Pohiva, Prime Minister of Tonga, stated that given vulnerability to climate change risks and isolation, Pacific private sectors needed easy access to markets to Australia, New Zealand and other established markets. He recognised the informal sector, those not able to elevate to a more formal position and become part of the private sector.

24. Prime Minister Pohiva was thankful for the reminder that inadequate responses to climate change would comprise all other goals of the region.

25. Honourable Alex Hawke, MP, Minister for International Development and the Pacific and Assistant Defence Minister, Australia, referred to Australia's position on the Green Climate Fund and its announcement of a new AUD\$140 million funding for the private sector to develop a portfolio of about \$700 million to reinvest in climate projects that would make a meaningful contribution to climate resilience, including small scale bankable projects in waste management, renewable energy, power purchasing arrangements, agro-business investment, climate resilience, water management and reduction in industry emissions. Minister Hawke supported regional labour

mobility, informing that access to Australian labour market was increasing and that many businesses wanted to invest more in the Pacific.

26. Honourable Faustina K Rehuher-Marugg, Minister of State of Palau, sought views on establishing at national level a national authority or board within Government to work with private sector so that there was regular communication to further plans for economic development of the country.

27. Honourable Aupito William Sio, Minister for Pacific Peoples, New Zealand, re-emphasised the importance of the private sector in contributing to the region's economic development and supported appropriate initiatives. New Zealand reiterated its commitment of NZD\$300 million in climate related support over the next 3 years, with two thirds focused on the Pacific region. New Zealand supported the investment endeavours put forward, but noted the need for a two-way dialogue. New Zealand supported inclusive development in the Pacific, particularly for women and young people, and noted the important contribution private sector made to inclusive growth. In terms of the business travel card, New Zealand cautioned against duplication of regional business harmonisation provisions already granted in the PACER Plus agreement.

28. The Chair expressed the view that labour mobility should build and look beyond the provisions set out in the PACER Plus Agreement, noting solutions needed to address training opportunities, such as for seamanship, as job opportunities were limited due to trade policies, fuel importing costs, and other issues.

29. The Chair sought views from private sector on how it could assist these issues, for example, reducing costs through bulk purchasing. In Tuvalu, importing fuel was completely unsustainable. Similar issues were faced with pharmaceuticals and other commodities.

30. Her Excellency Hilda C. Heine, President of the Republic of the Marshall Islands, advised that her country needed a lot of labour and was looking for labour from both within and outside of the Marshall Islands.

31. Leaders also encouraged the Private Sector to have regular interactions with Government departments at the national level and expressed a genuine desire to work collaboratively with their respective National Private Sector Organisations.

32. Leaders emphasised the importance of supporting micro enterprises, noting the levels of development across Pacific Island economies.

33. In response to comments by Leaders, the Private Sector supported the need for, and the ongoing, two-way dialogue.

34. Private sector thanked Prime Minister Malielegaoi for his leadership at the regional dialogue as well as at national level through proactive engagement between the Samoan Government and the Samoa Chamber of Commerce, which strengthened business operation in Samoa. In terms of labour mobility, private sector noted the myriad of opportunities, including utilising national and regional work forces not only for labour but also for business opportunities.

35. The private sector noted Tonga's support with private sector development and the comments made relating to the informal sector, noting that private sector support was for everyone including the informal sector.

36. The private sector thanked Australia and New Zealand for the funding support and looked forward to information on private sector allocation within these funds and to progressing activities.

37. The private sector noted suggestions on bulk purchasing, further noting however the small size of Pacific economies. The move to renewable energy was interesting as it gave the opportunity to use the revenue within the region as opposed to overseas investment where the revenue was directed overseas. The private sector was grateful for the regional tender portal, established pursuant to a direction from the 2018 Forum Economic Ministers' Meeting. The private sector noted the difficulty in having visibility across infrastructure projects across the whole Pacific, so the portal would help Pacific private sector to be competitive.

38. The Private Sector supported the views expressed by Palau on the establishment of an advisory board within Government comprising government officials and private sector representatives in order to enhance cooperation and engagement.

CLOSING

39. The Chair thanked Leaders for their active participation and the Private Sector for the informative discussions. A closing prayer was given by the Tuvalu National Private Sector Organisation.

40. The Chair declared the Dialogue closed.

Funafuti, Tuvalu
14 August 2019

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

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Tuvalu, Funafuti
14 August 2019

PROGRAMME AND WORKING PROCEDURES

2019 PRIVATE SECTOR DIALOGUE WITH PACIFIC ISLANDS FORUM LEADERS

TIME	SESSION	FACILITATOR
14:00	Introduction of the Forum Leaders Dialogue with the region's private sector representatives	Forum Chair
14:10	Forum Chair invites the President, Tuvalu National Private Sector Organisation to deliver an Opening Statement	Forum Chair
14:15	Opening address to the Forum Leaders	Ms Eseta Soloseni
14:18	Forum Chair acknowledges the Opening Statement and invites the private sector representatives to deliver their Statements	Forum Chair Private sector reps: Steve Lyon, PIPSO Chair Eseta Nadaikuitakivi, Vice President, Fiji Employers & Commerce Federation Jay Bartlett, Chair, Solomon Islands Chamber of Industry & Commerce
14:35	Forum Chair acknowledges the presentation by the private sector. Forum Chair summarises the key topics / messages	Forum Chair
14:45	Open Dialogue begins Forum Chair invites Forum Leaders to respond to the private sector topics/messages	Forum Chair
15:10 – 15:20	Forum Chair thanks the Forum Leaders for their contributions and invites the private sector to respond to the interventions by the Forum Leaders	Forum Chair
15:20 – 15:30	Forum Leaders are given the opportunity to react to the response/s by the private sector	Forum Chair
15:30	Dialogue Ends Wrap up by Forum Chair Closing Prayer by TNPSO	Forum Chair
15:30	Group Photograph, Forum Leaders, SG and private sector delegates	

STATEMENT BY THE PRIVATE SECTOR

Introduction

1. Honourable Leaders, we extend our gratitude for giving us the opportunity to interact with yourselves and to present this statement. We have confined ourselves to three matters, which collectively we consider to be the top priorities – cognisant of your priority agenda.

2. Whilst the Pacific Islands vary greatly in their geographic size, population and resources there is commonality with respect to economic development challenges. Among these are geographic isolation, small domestic markets, limited opportunities for manufacturing, and the difficulty of obtaining and high cost of capital. Adding to these economic development challenges is climate change.

2050 Strategy and Vision for the Blue Pacific Continent

3. We recognise the theme of the Forum Leaders Meeting this year, *Securing our Future in the Pacific* as particularly timely, noting urgent challenges facing our region related to climate change, geopolitical competition, and economic security. These are issues that not only impact on our Governments and our people, but also us, as businesses. The Private Sector registers its full commitment to work with Forum Members and Leaders in seeking to deliver on the theme of this year's Forum through dialogue with Leaders, critical ways in which the Private Sector is best suited to supporting Forum Members in these endeavours.

4. The Private Sector notes that Forum Leaders will discuss the establishment of a *2050 vision and strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent*. We encourage Leaders efforts in this regard and **call for the central inclusion** of the Private Sector in the delivery of this vision and strategy, including through consultation on the development of the vision and strategy.

(a) Resilient Infrastructure for Climate Change and Economic Development

5. For most Pacific countries, climate change is the challenge of survival. Already prone to natural disasters, a proactive approach to adaptation is essential.

6. Pacific Islands economies will benefit from infrastructure upgrades and development. Key public sector areas are communications, water, energy and transport infrastructure including shipping. Strengthening infrastructure has social and economic benefits for communities and is essential for building resilience of our societies.

7. Local and regional Private Sector involvement in the planning and implementation of infrastructure projects as active partners and participants is imperative. In instances where offshore companies are engaged, local participation must be included. This will ensure transfer of skills and to retain as much revenue as possible within the local economy.

8. The Private Sector reiterates the opportunities for Public Private Partnerships in the development and management of infrastructure. We highlight current commitments from development partners to provide concessional lending and underwriting of Private Sector investment in PPPs, such as facilities offered by Australia.

9. The Private Sector **urges** all governments to work through National Designated Authorities (NDAs), in partnership with National Private Sector Organisations, to access the Private Sector component of the Green Climate Fund for adaptation in order to build resilience of Private Sector infrastructure against climatic impacts.

10. The Private Sector **calls** on the Governments of the Pacific to task the PIFS to develop a regional policy to formalize the pathways for local and regional Public-Private Partnership opportunities, taking into consideration scale constraints at the national level.

11. The Private Sector **requests** that the Governments of the Pacific to continue to work on integrating local Private Sector infrastructure resilience with national priorities and projects.

(b) Labour Mobility

12. Recalling the Private Sector Dialogue with Leaders in 2016 on this issue, we **welcome and thank** Australia for the introduction of the Pacific-Australia Travel Card, which has been recently introduced.

13. This card goes some way to advance the previous call of the Private Sector to establish a Forum-wide Business Travel Card. We now **encourage** New Zealand and Australia to continue to work as Forum Members to realise this vision, including the harmonization and introduction of a single Pacific Business Travel Card, and easing transit Visa requirements.

14. It is encouraging that Australia has now moved beyond unskilled labour to semi-skilled labour including in hospitality, fisheries and health sectors thus increasing the opportunity for skills transfer and urge New Zealand to do the same.

15. Labour mobility should not be restricted to providing labour to Australia and New Zealand, but also consider labour mobility between Pacific Island Countries. A broader program, like the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) Skills Movement Scheme of 2012, is needed to facilitate skilled and unskilled mobility between all Forum Countries.

16. We **call** for the establishment and support of a mechanism to identify the key barriers to labour mobility and make recommendations to address these issues. In conjunction with this, the Private Sector will undertake an assessment of constraints to better identify labour mobility barriers, and report to the next Forum.

(c) Dialogue with Leaders

17. It is crucial to maintain strong relations between the Private Sector and governments on national and regional levels. The Private Sector plays a strategic role in working with governments to formulate a regional response to development challenges and in progressing opportunities. The

Private Sector is a key partner in regional development, therefore we need to be actively engaged in the decision-making process at all levels.

18. Recognizing the fundamental role the Private Sector plays in economic development, it is essential that the annual dialogue with Political Leaders continue as a standing agenda of the Forum Leaders' meeting.

19. We **reaffirm** the benefits of the Forum Economic Ministers-Private Sector Dialogue and look forward to direct engagement with Forum Trade Ministers. We thank you – Forum Leaders, for this Dialogue and look forward to the 2020 Dialogue in Vanuatu and beyond.