

Joint Statement on Defence Cooperation in the Pacific region

The close defence relations between Australia and New Zealand are enduring and deeply rooted in our shared military history. In 2018, our two Defence Ministers reaffirmed our mutual commitment to this alliance through a refreshed Joint Statement on Closer Defence Relations.

We identified in the Statement three focus areas, which have guided our continued joint work, including through the Building Partner Capacity mission in Iraq, and our other shared Middle East contributions. Particularly pertinent, however, are our enduring interests and links to our own neighbourhood, the Pacific region, where we share a long history of contributing to a stable and prosperous region.

Building on the 2018 Joint Statement, we express our intentions to work together in the Pacific region, in line with Australia's 'Pacific Step-Up' and New Zealand's 'Pacific Reset'. New Zealand's 2018 Strategic Defence Policy Statement, released since last year's Joint Statement, also supports this work. As the region's largest security contributors, it is paramount that our focus on the Pacific is clearly communicated, policies and planning closely consulted, and engagement and activities well-coordinated.

We prioritise our commitment to the security goals jointly agreed with our Pacific partners in the *Boe Declaration*. The Declaration reflects the security priorities of all the nations in our region. We support the expanded concept of security outlined in it and will, in line with its goals, prioritise the building of resilience to disasters and climate change.

Principles-based approach

Our work together in the Pacific follows the principles-based approach outlined in the 2018 Joint Statement. We are two sovereign, independent nations working together to support the security and prosperity of the nations of our immediate region. Our engagement with regional partners is open, enduring, and based on mutual respect and genuine partnerships.

We will continue our longstanding operations in the region and focus on providing contributions to Pacific partners that are valued and sustainable. We will closely coordinate our efforts from Ministerial-level down to working-level across our defence organisations.

Existing regional architecture, and particularly the South Pacific Defence Ministers' Meeting, provide important forums through which we can collaborate and build trust with Pacific partners to effectively tackle key regional and sub-regional issues and support the international rules-based order.

Outcomes

Building on the three focus areas in the 2018 Joint Statement, we note our joint intentions for our work together in the South Pacific.

Focus area 1: We have the collective ability to influence security outcomes in the Pacific.

We will build interoperability, and trust with each other and our regional partners, to collectively respond to the common security challenges and threats recognised under the Boe Declaration. We will deepen people-to-people ties and shared understanding of the evolving threats facing the region.

Focus area 2: We maintain strong, interoperable forces and capabilities to respond to requests for security assistance from the Pacific countries.

Our defence forces can operate seamlessly together and are able to respond quickly and effectively to assist our Pacific partners in times of need. Our planning supporting these operations focussed on the areas most critical to the Pacific region, and we will continue to develop complementary capabilities well suited to regional needs. We will leverage and learn from our past responses.

Focus area 3: Enhance Pacific resilience and self-reliance through our respective capacity building programmes.

We aim to positively contribute to the security and stability of the Pacific through coordinating our respective defence cooperation and capacity building programs to build resilience and self-reliance in Pacific countries. We support the sovereign capability of Pacific countries to secure their own national interests and also build the capability to assist each other.

Implementing our cooperation

We will jointly identify and harness opportunities for building and sustaining key initiatives that support Pacific security.

Our Defence Forces will continue to work closely to support maritime security in the region, and conduct training and exercises with Pacific partners to build interoperability and maritime domain awareness.

New Zealand will continue to support, and look for further opportunities to cooperate under, Australia's Pacific Maritime Security Program by providing niche capabilities, skills and personnel, including two maritime advisors in the Cook Islands.

Australia and New Zealand will continue to build on initiatives to advance the Women, Peace and Security agenda, as an outcome of the South Pacific Defence Ministers' Meeting. This will include a Women in Pacific Defence Forces Seminar that New Zealand will co-host with Samoa in Apia. Australia hosted the first seminar in 2017.

We will explore opportunities for training and capacity-building activities that meet Pacific Island country priorities. Australia's new Pacific Support Company will provide training requested by Pacific Island military and security forces. New Zealand will continue to support leadership development among Pacific Island country security partners, building on previous successful work in this area.

Through the Australia-New Zealand defence relationship structure, we will further explore practical areas of cooperation which will contribute towards these intended outcomes. We will consult with Pacific countries through regional dialogues and meetings to review and evaluate these intentions.