

Political Reviews

The Region in Review: International Issues and Events, 2011

NIC MACLELLAN

Melanesia in Review: Issues and Events, 2011

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Throughout 2011, the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) celebrated the fortieth anniversary of its founding meeting, which was held in New Zealand (NZ) from 5 to 7 August 1971. Leaders such as Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara of Fiji, Sir Albert Henry of Cook Islands, and Hammer deRoburt of Nauru had created the Forum (then called the South Pacific Forum) because the colonial powers refused to allow “political” issues like nuclear testing and independence to be discussed at meetings of the South Pacific Commission (SPC).

Australia and New Zealand were founding members of the Forum and retain their influence today in the organization. But the anniversary celebrations have highlighted the changing membership, mandate, and capacity of the regional body.

The range of players in Forum activities has broadened, with non-independent Pacific Island nations incorporated into PIF meetings and multilateral agencies increasing their influence. This has added to the regional agenda and complicated decision making, as PIF Secretary-General Tuiloma Neroni Slade lamented: “We are seeing some progress in a number of areas in our region, but unfortunately the challenges don’t get any easier” (PIFS 2011e).

With Slade completing his first three-year term of office during 2011, the leadership of the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS) was debated

in the lead-up to the annual Forum meeting held in Auckland in September. In recent years, there have been widespread rumblings about the role the secretariat is playing with regard to Fiji, trade, and regional integration under the Pacific Plan. In 2011, this culminated in tentative moves to find an alternative candidate to Slade.

Members of the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) debated the nomination of former Fiji Minister of Foreign Affairs Kaliopate Tavola as a possible replacement, but PIF leaders were reluctant to issue an unprecedented criticism of the secretary-general by granting him just one term. Slade was unanimously reconfirmed for a second term at the Auckland leaders’ meeting.

There were other significant changes among senior PIFS staff in 2011. One of two deputy secretaries-general, Peter Forau of Solomon Islands, completed his term in March, moving to replace Papua New Guinea’s Rima Ravusiro as director general of the MSG Secretariat in Port Vila.

In June, Andie Fong Toy replaced Forau at the Forum, joining Feleti Teo of Tuvalu as deputy secretary-general. Fong Toy previously served in a number of legal and political positions in the secretariat, but her appointment was another regional milestone. As Tuiloma Neroni Slade noted, “I have much pleasure in congratulating and welcoming Ms. Fong Toy as the first woman to take up the position

of Deputy Secretary General” (PIFS 2011b).

By year’s end there were other significant changes, with Australians Rick Nimmo, director of political governance and security, and Tanya Chakriya Bowman, director of economic governance, ending their contracts. Some PIF member countries have criticized the secretariat’s role in regional trade negotiations, and the departure of Bowman, a former AusAID trade advisor, opens the way for a refocusing of negotiations on the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) with the European Union (EU).

In spite of recent critiques of their role (Bohane 2010), PIFS staff marked the fortieth anniversary with significant pride. Feleti Teo noted: “Some people have questioned the value of the Forum and its Secretariat and whether we will still exist in 40 years. I would like to think so. . . . Many of the challenges that we face can only be best addressed through regional integration and cooperation. There really is no other way” (PIFS 2011d).

The Forum’s formal membership links Australia, New Zealand, and the fourteen independent island states, with Fiji currently suspended from activities. However, it now has two associate members (the French dependencies of New Caledonia and French Polynesia) and other territories with observer status (Tokelau and Wallis and Futuna) or special observer status (Timor-Leste).

In recent years, these Pacific Island observers have jostled for space with multilateral agencies that have observer status, including the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, the Commonwealth, and the United

Nations (UN). Starting in 2012, the African Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) Secretariat and three US territories—American Samoa, Guam, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands—will also become observers.

In 2010, the US House of Representatives passed HR 2410, the State Department Authorization Act, which included provisions calling on US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton “to work with the Pacific Islands Forum to find appropriate affiliations for representatives of American Samoa, Guam, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands.” During her 2010 regional visit, Clinton agreed that these territories’ applications could go forward. With the Forum leaders’ significant decision in Auckland regarding the extension of observer status to three US dependencies in the region, just Pitcairn, West Papua, Hawai‘i, and Rapa Nui are left out.

With New Zealand hosting the Forum leaders’ meeting in Auckland to coincide with the opening of the Rugby World Cup, the fortieth anniversary became a major event. In a coup for PIF host NZ Prime Minister John Key, the regional meeting was attended for the first time by a UN leader, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon. On his way to New Zealand, the secretary-general visited Kiribati, Solomon Islands, and Australia.

Lauding Ban Ki-moon’s visit as “a historical milestone in the relationship between the Pacific region and the United Nations,” Samoan Prime Minister Tuilaepa Sa‘ilele Malielegaoi said: “The visit enabled the Secretary-General to see firsthand the scale of

the challenges facing vulnerable Pacific small island countries. . . . The fact that the Secretary-General is from the Asia-Pacific region and that the visit took place before the start of his second term, not at the end, were positive aspects that were not lost on the Pacific leaders” (Tuilaepa 2011).

Kiribati President Anote Tong hosted Ban Ki-moon in Tarawa. Drawing on this personal exposure, the secretary-general highlighted the particular vulnerability of low-lying atolls in subsequent speeches. In a joint communiqué, the secretary-general and PIF leaders “reaffirmed the unique and particular vulnerabilities and development needs of Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and emphasized the importance of enhanced coherence, coordination and responsiveness in the UN system’s support for SIDS” (PIF leaders and UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon 2011).

Alongside the UN secretary-general, there were other major players in the corridors in Auckland. The EU delegation led by European Commission President José Manuel Barroso and EU Climate Commissioner Connie Hedegaard jostled for space with Commonwealth Secretary-General Kamalesh Sharma and French Minister of Foreign and European Affairs Alain Juppé, the first French foreign minister to visit New Zealand in twenty-eight years. A fifty-strong US delegation, led by Deputy Secretary of State for Management and Resources Thomas Nides, passed through the corridors with Japan’s Parliamentary Senior Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs Tsuyoshi Yamaguchi and a Chinese delegation led by Vice Foreign Minister Cui Tankai.

The huge gathering in Auckland was top heavy, raising questions about whether political issues could be freely discussed by Island leaders without offending visiting delegations (Maclellan 2011b). Amid the rush of rugby fever and competing announcements from donor countries and development banks, it was sometimes hard for the Island states to make themselves heard—scheduled press conferences from the Small Islands States (SIS) caucus and the Pacific members of the ACP grouping (PACP) were both canceled without explanation.

If the annual meeting keeps expanding, one day the Islands might again wish to meet separately from the world’s major powers, as they did in 1971 after France banned “political” discussions at South Pacific Conferences. The freedom to speak out on Island concerns is significant at a time when two of the remaining colonial powers in the region—France and the United States—are pushing hard to influence the Forum’s agenda and rebuild links with PIF member countries.

The US government, fearful of the small but growing Chinese influence in the region, is mounting high-profile diplomatic initiatives. Secretary of State Clinton toured the region in late 2010 and President Barack Obama finally completed a twice-canceled Asia-Pacific tour in November 2011, with visits to Hawai‘i, Australia, and Indonesia.

The decision to grant observer status to US Pacific territories reflects this new engagement, although the US government’s focus on the Pacific Islands region, driven by strategic competition with China, should not be

overemphasized. Washington's limited attention to key Island concerns was highlighted in Auckland, when the US delegation proudly announced a token US\$21 million in funding for climate adaptation (the hosts were too polite to ask whether this was the same \$21 million that Secretary Clinton announced when she toured the region in 2010).

This year's Forum also highlighted the ongoing integration of New Caledonia, French Polynesia, and Wallis and Futuna into regional affairs. Alongside delegations led by President Harold Martin of New Caledonia and President Oscar Manutahi Temaru of French Polynesia, French Foreign Minister Juppé arrived for the post-Forum dialogue accompanied by key leaders from France's three Pacific dependencies (MacLellan 2011a).

France's regional relations have improved, with trade, aid, and military ties expanding across the region. As a major contributor to the European Development Fund, France is also using its influence in the European Union to leverage its colonial presence in the region (French Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2007). But despite these changes, long-standing issues of self-determination in the French Pacific will not go away.

In 2011 there was a major focus on French Polynesia, with President Temaru calling for his country to be reinscribed on the UN list of non-self-governing territories (a status New Caledonia obtained in December 1986, when, in the face of French opposition, Australia and New Zealand joined the Island nations to successfully lobby for New Caledonia's reinscription at the UN General

Assembly). After years of lobbying for regional support, Temaru's governing Union for Democracy (UPLD) coalition had a significant breakthrough in August: for the first time, the French Polynesia Assembly narrowly passed a resolution to support reinscription. Temaru then led a large delegation to Fiji and New Zealand in September, lobbying Pacific ministers and winning support from a majority of Forum Island Countries (FICS) to increase international monitoring of France's policies in French Polynesia.

This momentum notwithstanding, it was soon clear that Australia and New Zealand did not support Temaru's call for UN involvement. After the end of armed conflict in New Caledonia, a halt to nuclear testing in 1996, and the 1998 Noumea Accord, the two largest Forum members are reluctant to upset Paris. Australia is also casting a watchful eye on possible French lobbying against their bid for a rotating UN Security Council seat in 2013.

Australia and New Zealand reaffirmed existing policy from the 2006 Forum in Samoa, which supports the principle of French Polynesia's right to self-determination but encourages French Polynesia and France to seek agreement on how to realize French Polynesia's right to choose a new political status. This more cautious position prevailed again in Auckland, meaning that Papeete has not yet won the same right to international scrutiny that Noumea won twenty-five years ago. (In 2010, the governments of France and New Caledonia jointly hosted a regional seminar of the UN Special Committee on Decolonization in Noumea, but President Temaru was barred from entry into the meeting.)

In spite of the decision on reinscription, the French Pacific territories are seeking to upgrade their status within the Forum. Wallis and Futuna is seeking an upgrade from observer status to associate membership, while New Caledonia, currently an associate member, is seeking to become a full member. Even though the 2010 leaders' meeting in Vanuatu suggested that full membership was reserved for independent states, NZ Foreign Minister Murray McCully issued a joint statement with French Foreign Minister Juppé, stating that "New Zealand encouraged New Caledonia's interest in increasing engagement with the region and warmly welcomed the prospect of its full membership of the Pacific Islands Forum" (Maclellan 2011a, 23).

By January 2012, Australian Parliamentary Secretary for Pacific Island Affairs Richard Marles was in Paris to discuss New Caledonia's bid for full membership. Noumea's engagement with the region will also be boosted by the decision in 2011 to establish a network of delegates that will represent New Caledonia across the region and be based at French embassies in Vanuatu, Papua New Guinea, Fiji, New Zealand, and Australia.

Even as the Forum marked its fortieth birthday, intra-regional unity continued to be strained by competing agendas on trade and fisheries, as well as by varying responses to post-coup Fiji. Relations between some Melanesian and Polynesian leaders have suffered, with forthright polemics against the Fiji regime by Sāmoa's prime minister (Stuff 2011) and with Tonga's decision in May to send the patrol boat *Savea* to Fijian waters to

"rescue" Colonel Ratu Tevita Ului-lakeba Mara —son of the late Fijian president and a supporter-turned-critic of coup leader Voreqe Bainimarama.

One olive branch was proffered in September, when Forum leaders agreed "to permit Fiji to participate in PACER-Plus meetings at officials-level only, given Fiji's important economic role and links to prospects for broader regional economic integration" (Forum Communiqué 2011, item 34). However, Fiji Foreign Minister Ratu Inoke Kubuabola spurned this half-offer as ignoring Fiji's rights as a signatory to the 1992 PACER (Pacific Agreement on Closer Economic Relations) treaty.

All these pressures have spurred significant new initiatives by subregional groupings. Besides the long-standing coordination of the smallest Forum members as the Small Island States caucus, Micronesian leaders began to establish a secretariat in 2011 to formalize their regular Micronesian Chief Executives' Summit. A new Polynesian Alliance was created in November, linking Sāmoa, Niue, Cook Islands, Tuvalu, and Tonga, with the support of PIF observer countries like Wallis and Futuna, Tokelau, and French Polynesia. Sāmoa's prime minister hosted the inaugural meeting of the alliance and currently chairs the new grouping. Early plans for New Zealand to join the group did not eventuate, though New Zealand retains influence in Polynesia through the Te Vaka Moana fishing network (Lesa 2011).

It is too early to tell whether the new subregional grouping will grow into a counterweight to the Melanesian Spearhead Group. The larger

Melanesian nations retain significant influence in the Forum: even though the MSG Secretariat doesn't formally participate in Forum meetings as an observer, as the largest Island nations the Melanesian states still influence PIFS decisions, policy, and appointments.

MSG countries are driving new relationships internationally. Even though Timor-Leste is still primarily looking west to the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), Dili is cooperating with the Melanesian Spearhead Group on trade, climate change, and other issues. In February, MSG foreign ministers "endorsed applications for observership by Indonesia and Timor-Leste and agreed to seek an 'out of session' decision from the leaders to allow Indonesia and Timor-Leste to attend as observers at the March 2011 [MSG] leaders' summit" (Fiji Ministry of Information 2011).

In September, Timorese Prime Minister Xanana Gusmão visited the MSG Secretariat in Port Vila—the first visit by an overseas head of government since the secretariat was opened in 2008—and Timorese officials announced a US\$500,000-dollar grant for salaries and projects.

For many years, Indonesian diplomats have lobbied the Islands region from embassies in Canberra, Wellington, Beijing, and Tokyo, but now Jakarta is seeking more links on the ground. Indonesia's success in gaining observer status at the March MSG summit was followed the next month by the opening of its new embassy in Suva. The Sato Kilman government in Vanuatu is also forming closer ties with Indonesia, with the December signing in Jakarta of a Vanuatu-

Indonesia Development Cooperation Agreement. These moves have dismayed the West Papua National Council for Liberation, which has an information office in Port Vila, especially since the new cooperation agreement stresses Indonesian territorial integrity and sovereignty over West Papua and prohibits Vanuatu from interfering in Indonesia's "internal affairs." Indonesia's attainment of MSG observer status was a sharp blow for the West Papuan nationalist movement, which has been lobbying for that status for many years. Renewed human rights abuses by the Indonesian military and the shooting, beating, and jailing of peaceful protesters after October flag raisings in Jayapura (McLeod 2011) have not slowed this regional rapprochement.

Indonesia is not the only enhanced trade and diplomatic player. In 2011, South Korea tripled its development aid to the Islands region, from US\$300,000 to US\$1 million, as part of the Lee Myung-bak government's "New Asia Diplomacy" initiative. In June, Korean diplomats and representatives of fourteen Island nations gathered in Seoul for the first ever Korea-Pacific summit (*Vanuatu Independent* 2011), reinforcing Korean lobbying for a rotating UN Security Council seat.

The Bainimarama regime continues to widen its diplomatic and trade network. In April, Fiji was formally admitted to the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). It is the only Pacific Island member apart from Vanuatu, which has been a member since 1983. Fiji Minister of Foreign Affairs Ratu Inoke Kubuabola said joining this movement would help refocus Fiji's

relationships away from its traditional partners Australia and New Zealand and allow Suva to pursue its “Look North” policy through direct engagement with ASEAN countries and strengthened ties to Beijing (Radio Australia 2011a).

In response, as Chinese investment in the Pacific Islands reached US\$106.7 million in 2010, US officials looked to boost China-Taiwan competition. US Deputy Secretary of State Thomas Nides met Taiwan’s Vice Foreign Minister Ssu-tsun Shen on the sidelines of the Forum leaders’ meeting in Auckland, as Taiwan announced another US\$500,000 grant for eight Council of Regional Organizations of the Pacific (CROP) agencies in 2012. US Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Kurt Campbell later told congressional hearings that “we are actively exploring ways to raise the level of our meetings with Taiwan” (*Taiwan News* 2011).

Solomon Islands announced in March that it plans to establish an embassy in Havana, Cuba, while Vanuatu joined Nauru and Tuvalu in recognizing the Russian-backed regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, which Georgia considers integral parts of the country (although Port Vila later reversed its decision). Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov visited Canberra, Auckland, and Suva in early 2012, with Fiji’s regime organizing a multilateral meeting between Lavrov and Island foreign ministers.

In Australia, the diplomatic and trade initiatives of “nontraditional” players are prompting debate, with a range of think-tank reports criticizing the Julia Gillard government for its

lack of focus on regional affairs (Herr 2010; Herr and Bergin 2011; Hayward-Jones 2011a; Hayward-Jones 2011b).

Australia continues to maintain a significant role in regional affairs, through aid, investment, trade, and personnel. For instance, in April Graeme Wilson was replaced as RAMSI Special Coordinator by long-serving foreign affairs official Nicholas Coppel—the latest in a series of Australians to head the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands. But the constraints on Australian influence were highlighted when Fiji Prime Minister Bainimarama invited a representative from Luxembourg to attend the March MSG summit as a special guest; Australia is competing with Luxembourg—a fellow member of the UN Western European and Others Group—for a rotating seat on the UN Security Council in 2013.

A November 2011 report from the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) argued that “there are grounds for believing that the bases of Australia’s special relationship with the Pacific islands have been eroded.” The report highlighted the region’s dilemma over Fiji, arguing that the way “PIF-related sanctions are being subverted by other organizations, including the SPC, the FFA [Forum Fisheries Agency] and even RAMSI, demonstrates the impracticalities of the regional sanctions. They have proved dysfunctional for Australia and for its image in the region” (Herr and Bergin 2011, 59, 62).

Canberra policy on the Bainimarama coup was also discomfited by an opinion poll conducted in Fiji by the Sydney-based Lowy Institute for

International Policy, which reported that 66 percent of Fijians approved of the Bainimarama regime's performance (Hayward-Jones 2011c). This provoked a storm of debate over the process and validity of the poll, with sharp critiques from opponents of the regime (Narsey 2011), criticism from Australia's Parliamentary Secretary for Pacific Island Affairs (Marles 2011), and a vigorous defense by the Lowy Institute (Radio Australia 2011b).

By late 2011, the debate over Canberra's lack of direction led to criticism of Foreign Affairs Minister Kevin Rudd for ignoring the leadership turmoil between Sir Michael Somare and Peter O'Neill in Port Moresby (Callick 2012).

The Lowy Institute's polling is part of an increasing trend by donor, media, and academic institutions. RAMSI conducts a regular People's Survey to gauge support for the regional mission, while the Pacific Institute of Public Policy (PIPP) in Port Vila conducted phone polling across Melanesia in March, with interesting results: over 75 percent of people surveyed supported independence for West Papua but also welcomed ties to Australia. A majority of those surveyed in Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu, and Solomon Islands thought relationships with Australia were getting better, while in Fiji 42 percent thought they were getting worse (PIPP 2011, iv). Public opinion is also influenced by the significant spread of Internet technology, radio talkback, and blogging in urban centers across the region, especially among the young: Fiji has nearly 158,000 Facebook users, Solomon Islands has 18,920, while Papua New

Guinea doubled user numbers in the first six months of 2011 to 65,260 (Hayward-Jones, Cave, and Gaskin 2011, 11-13).

Pacific governments have a poor record in terms of signing international human rights agreements and, often, limited success in implementing them. But rights-based social policy is a growing area of regional coordination. The Forum has started a number of initiatives under the Pacific Education Development Framework and is implementing the Pacific Regional Strategy on Disability, with PIFS Disability Coordination Officer Frederick Miller coordinating support for an estimated 800,000 Pacific Islands people living with disabilities. In December, the first regional meeting on deportees was held in Fiji to discuss the social and legal implications for hundreds of offenders deported to the Islands from Pacific Rim nations after serving sentences for criminal offenses.

The struggle for women's rights continues, with advocacy for an end to gender-based violence, for better economic rights, and for more women in Parliament. After Forum leaders adopted policies on violence against women in 2009, the Forum Secretariat established the Reference Group to Address Sexual and Gender Based Violence, which conducted its first country visit to Tonga in March. The Pacific Network Against Violence Against Women, linking women's centers across the region, continues its work on the ground.

In 2011, four countries had no women in Parliament (Solomon Islands, Tuvalu, Federated States of Micronesia, and Nauru) and five countries had only one (Vanuatu, Papua

New Guinea, Tonga, Marshall Islands, and Cook Islands). After Forum research on women's lack of parliamentary representation (Huffer and others 2006), governments and women's organizations increased efforts to secure more seats for women.

Drawing on France's parity law, which guarantees seats for women in New Caledonia and French Polynesia (Bargel, Guyon, and Rettig 2008), Papua New Guinea initiated legislation to create twenty-two seats for women in time for the 2012 national elections. In Kiribati, a three-day parliamentary training for female candidates was conducted in August in advance of the November elections, followed by a mock Parliament for Women, the first such initiative in the region. A similar exercise followed in Marshall Islands in September, in the lead-up to elections for the Nitijela (Marshallese legislature).

These social initiatives rely on donor funding, but getting aid to the most vulnerable members of the community is an ongoing problem. For smaller states like Tuvalu, 50 percent of whose gross domestic product is aid, there are major concerns about donor coordination: Tuvalu has fifty-eight development partners but only seven staff in the government's planning office and one person in its Aid Management Unit.

Since the signing of the Cairns Compact on Strengthening Development Coordination in the Pacific in 2009, donors and Forum member countries have been focusing on aid effectiveness. This theme was highlighted when Australia, New Zealand, and ten Island countries participated in the Fourth High Level Forum on

Aid Effectiveness in Busan, South Korea in November.

All Small Islands States have provided self-assessments of their national planning, budgeting, and aid coordination, and throughout the year the Forum continued its series of peer reviews on aid effectiveness: Papua New Guinea, Sāmoa, and New Zealand reviewed Vanuatu; Sāmoa, Nauru, and Australia reviewed Niue; and Tonga, Vanuatu, and the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) reviewed Tuvalu.

Trade policy continues to be a major regional focus, with the Forum Secretariat and the World Trade Organization (WTO) convening a workshop in Port Vila in May to enable "Parliamentarians and business representatives from several Pacific island countries to gain greater understanding of the multilateral trading system" (PIFS 2011g).

After many years, 2011 saw the conclusion of negotiations on WTO accession by Sāmoa and Vanuatu. The process was fraught in both countries, with a major "Say No to WTO" campaign in Vanuatu, widespread community opposition to accession, and the sacking of Minister of Justice and Social Affairs Ralph Regenvanu, who refused to support cabinet policy in support of joining the World Trade Organization.

With the Doha global trade negotiations on hold, there was a new attempt to revive regional negotiations with the European Union on a fair and comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) (PIFS 2011e). Trade ministers met in Apia in February to set regional trade priorities and in July,

negotiators submitted the draft PACP–EU EPA legal text and eight additional market access offers to the European Commission. By the end of the year, the PACP lead spokesperson, Tongan Minister of Labour, Commerce, and Industries ‘Isileli Pulu, committed the region to negotiating a comprehensive EPA as a single region and concluding the negotiations in 2012 (PIFS 2011f).

However, while negotiations resume in 2012, prospects for a comprehensive deal are uncertain. The regional EPA was supposed to be finalized by December 2007, and only Papua New Guinea and Fiji have signed interim agreements. There are a range of contentious issues that have slowed negotiations, with the European Union reluctant to take on Pacific demands regarding labor mobility, the interpretation of “substantially all trade,” most-favored-nation clauses, rules of origin, and bilateral safeguards. Forum Secretary General Slade noted, “Fisheries issues are one of the key contentious issues for the Pacific region, and must be dealt with if we are to take the negotiations forward” (PIFS 2011a).

New efforts on EPA negotiations were contrasted with problems for the PACER-Plus negotiations with Australia and New Zealand. While talks continued, the proposed free trade agreement is foundering, hit by a series of delays and disputes, including the resignation of the chief trade advisor, allegations of Australian bullying over the funding of the Office of the Chief Trade Advisor (OCTA) in Port Vila, and a recommendation from Forum officials that leaders reject a bid to grant OCTA observer status with the Forum. The trade talks with Australia

and New Zealand have also drawn resources away from the EPA, with PACP trade negotiator Pulu stating, “These negotiations have stretched the already limited capacity of Pacific ACP States” (PIFS 2011c).

New Zealand trade academic Chris Noonan was appointed chief trade advisor at the 2009 Forum leaders’ meeting in Cairns. After his appointment, however, there were tensions between OCTA and PIFS staff responsible for trade policy. Noonan resigned in mid-2011, arguing, “There is a need for Australia and New Zealand to decide what to put on the table. At the moment, there is really nothing of value for the Forum Island Countries” (Maclellan 2011c). Scheduled negotiations in November were deferred as Noonan had not been replaced, though former WTO official Edwini Kessie was formally appointed as chief trade advisor in early 2012.

Another problem in the negotiations is a lack of engagement from the Australian government, even though officials keep pushing PACER-Plus along the rails. Minister for Trade Craig Emerson did not attend the 2011 Forum Trade Ministers’ Meeting, and PACER-Plus is not mentioned in the Gillard government’s new international trade policy, even though trade reform has been a pillar of Australia’s engagement with the Islands region since the late 1990s. Above all, the dispute with the Fiji regime continues to hamper talks, given that any serious move to promote regional economic integration must take account of Fiji’s key role in the region.

Fisheries policy is increasingly interconnected with regional trade talks and issues of environmental manage-

ment and security in the region's vast Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs). Within the EPA negotiations, changes to Rules of Origin and global sourcing for fresh and frozen fish are important objectives for some islands in the Pacific, with major players like Papua New Guinea working to maintain their markets in Europe.

There were major developments in 2011 with the regional coordination bodies in fisheries: the Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA) in Honiara; the eight-member Parties to the Nauru Agreement (PNA); and the new Polynesian grouping Te Vaka Moana. With three Pacific countries already striking bilateral agreements with European interests, there is a need to maintain common positions, especially from the PNA nations (Federated States of Micronesia, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, and Tuvalu). Parties to the Nauru Agreement was formed in 1982, only three years after the Forum Fisheries Agency was established, but it did not become a formal intergovernmental organization until 2010. It then created a permanent secretariat with headquarters in Majuro, funded initially by Papua New Guinea (which is responsible for about 40 percent of all fishery production in the Pacific region by value).

Through PNA, member states have agreed on a number of measures aiming for sustainable management of tuna stocks, including high seas closures, controls on Fish Aggregating Devices (FADs), 100 percent coverage of purse seine fishing vessels with observers, and a "Vessel Day Scheme" under which PNA countries agree on a limited number of fishing days for

the year. From January 2011, PNA declared the high seas areas "closed" for any purse seine vessels licensed to fish in PNA waters, increasing the value of resources within their EEZs.

Beyond European and Asian deep-water fishing nations, US vessels have been exploiting the vast resources of tuna in the Pacific, supporting canning in American Samoa and California. In negotiations during 2011, the US and Forum Island Countries began to renegotiate the South Pacific Tuna Treaty, which entered into force in 1988. In July, Port Moresby announced that it had invited China to become a partner in developing the PNG fisheries industry—an incentive for the United States to increase its offer.

Papua New Guinea's influence in PNA has seen the rise of the new Polynesian grouping Te Vaka Moana, a largely Polynesian cooperation initiative based on albacore tuna exploitation. The group includes New Zealand, Samoa, Cook Islands, Niue, Tokelau, and Tonga.

Throughout 2011, Island governments were preparing for the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), to be held in Brazil in June 2012 on the twentieth anniversary of the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development. With Rio+20 focused on "green growth," Pacific governments have flagged growing interest in the "blue economy" and the resources of the Pacific Ocean. A regional preparatory meeting for Rio+20, held in Apia in July 2011, adopted the theme of a "green economy in a blue world," with Pacific governments emphasizing the importance of sustainable management of

oceans and the conservation of ocean biodiversity and fisheries resources. In November, the Secretariat of the Pacific Community and thirty-six international research institutions published a major study on the effects of climate change on Pacific fisheries (Bell, Johnson, and Hobday 2011).

Major powers are increasing regional security initiatives, with enhanced maritime surveillance operations to detect illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing. Australia, France, New Zealand, and the United States established the Quadrilateral Defense Coordination Group to coordinate and synchronize surveillance for the FFA and its members. Australia has maintained its Pacific Patrol Boat program, while the US Coast Guard has negotiated “ship-rider” agreements with half of the FFA membership over the past two years. Regional cooperation includes exercises like the biennial Operation Kurukuru, last held in November 2010, covering over 12 million square kilometers of exclusive economic zones.

Alongside Fiji, Papua New Guinea also became a UN Troop Contributing Country in 2011. With Australia providing pre-deployment and force preparation training, Papua New Guinea Defense Force personnel deployed in October to the UN Mission in South Sudan and the African Union/United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur.

More than twenty-five years after their introduction, President Barack Obama called on the US Senate in May to ratify the protocols of the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty (Maclellan 2011d). Meanwhile, Pacific diplomats continued to focus on twenty-first century concerns

such as the link between security and climate change. On 3 June 2009, the UN General Assembly unanimously adopted a resolution initiated by Pacific diplomats on “Climate Change and Its Possible Security Implications.” The follow-up resolution came before the UN Security Council on 20 July 2011. Nauru’s then-president, Marcus Stephen, and Australia’s Richard Marles both lobbied for action, with support from Ban Ki-moon (Stephen 2011). However, it was rejected by Russia and China, and Island embassies were disappointed that Security Council members would not pass a binding resolution that would prompt further action.

After an initial deadlock at the December UN Framework Convention on Climate Change negotiations in Durban, there were some positive outcomes: First, participants agreed to seek a second commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol and a mandate for a new binding agreement by 2015, which would take effect in 2020; second, they agreed to move ahead with a Green Climate Fund and steady advances on Island priorities like a work program on Loss and Damage.

However, the new climate treaty proposed in Durban will take nearly a decade to come into force, with more time needed for ratification by key countries. Many scientists have stressed that postponing a new treaty until 2020 will further derail hopes of avoiding catastrophic climate change in the coming decades. With developed nations’ current commitments under Kyoto ending in December 2012, the Canadian government has already announced it will withdraw from the Kyoto Protocol.

Australia and New Zealand continue to provide the region with crucial “fast-start” climate finance, drawn from aid budgets rather than the “new and additional” funding pledged in Copenhagen, but this support is not matched by new commitments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. After Durban, Australia—the world’s largest coal exporter—is unlikely to make new commitments until a new treaty is finalized.

The Durban summit provided new evidence that many donors are not meeting their climate funding pledges: According to the United Kingdom’s Overseas Development Institute (ODI), the global amount of climate finance approved and disbursed in 2011 has dropped compared to 2010: approved funding fell from US\$2.34 billion to US\$1.8 billion, and disbursed funding from US\$502 million to US\$398 million (ODI 2011, 1). Kiribati President Anote Tong lamented delays in the provision of climate financing, telling the UN General Assembly: “Kiribati was one of the countries which did not sign the Copenhagen Accord because of what we saw as its serious shortcomings but [we] were subsequently persuaded to associate ourselves with it on the premise that doing so would trigger the flow of much needed adaptation funds which had been pledged. We continue to await these funds” (Tong 2011).

Pacific governments are moving forward with renewable energy programs, especially with funding through Japan’s Pacific Environment Community (PEC) Fund. In 2005, Japan pledged grants of 6.8 billion yen (US\$66 million) for solar power or desalination plants. In April a PEC

Project Management Unit was set up at the Forum Secretariat to administer the PEC Fund, and in June Sāmoa became the first country to access a US\$4 million grant for a solar photovoltaic project. By October, Tuvalu and Cook Islands had also received grants, with more to come in 2012.

Sāmoa Ambassador to the United States and Permanent Representative to the United Nations Ali’ioaiga Feturi Elisaia represented Small Island States through 2011 on the Transitional Committee for the Green Climate Fund, a new mechanism to channel climate financing to developing countries. Nauru’s UN Ambassador Marlene Moses was also appointed as chair of the Alliance of Small Island States. These are examples of better coordination and activity by Island ambassadors at the United Nations, supported by Papua New Guinea’s Robert Aisi, Fiji’s Peter Thomson, and former Vanuatu Prime Minister Donald Kalpokas.

In September, the Asia Group within the United Nations formally changed its name to the “Group of Asia and the Pacific Small Island Developing States,” a reflection of new diplomatic vibrancy and growing links between Forum Island Countries and Asian powers. As the ASPI regionalism report noted: “The increased prominence of PSIDS [Pacific Small Island Developing States] derives from the FICs’ preference for a form of engagement that excludes Australia and New Zealand, which would be included in any discussions under the PIF banner” (Herr and Bergin 2011, 23).

Finally, to end 2011 in a timely fashion, Sāmoa and Tokelau changed days on the last day of the year, cross-

ing westward over the international date line and removing Friday, 30 December 2011, from their history. Aren't there always some days *you* wish had never happened?

NIC MACLELLAN

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