

Australia Solomon Islands Partnership for Justice Mid-Term Review

February – May 2025

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

Acronyms	Definition
AGC	Attorney General's Chambers
AGD	Attorney-General's Department, Australia
AFP	Australian Federal Police
ASI	Adam Smith International
ASIPJ	Australia Solomon Islands Partnership for Justice
CLC	Community Legal Centre
CSSI	Correctional Services of Solomon Islands
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Australia
EOPO	End-of-program outcome
GEDSI	Gender equality, disability and social inclusion
IO	Intermediate outcome
JIMS	Justice Information Management System
JSSF	Justice Sector Strategic Framework
MERL	Monitoring, Evaluation, Research and Learning
MJLA	Ministry of Justice and Legal Affairs
MTR	Mid-Term Review
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
ODPP	Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions
PRG	Program Reference Group
PPD	Police Prosecution Department
PSO	Public Solicitor's Office
RAPPP	Royal Solomon Islands Police Force-AFP Policing Partnership Program
RAMSI	Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands
RSIPF	Royal Solomon Islands Police Force
SIG	Solomon Islands Government
SIWLA	Solomon Islands Women Lawyers Association

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Purpose of the Mid-Term Review

This is an independent mid-term review (MTR) of the Australia Solomon Islands Partnership for Justice (ASIPJ). It was commissioned by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and conducted over February – May 2025. The purpose of the MTR is to assess the program’s relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability; review the program’s approach to and progress towards achieving gender equality, disability and social inclusion (GEDSI) outcomes, noting disruptions to the program’s implementation; and to provide insights for future program iterations going forward.

Approach taken to the Mid-Term Review

The review was completed by three independent evaluators. The methodology featured document review, interviews with key project stakeholders, and validation conversations to test findings and clarify details with select stakeholders. The full methodology is set out in the Evaluation Plan at Annex 2.

Key Findings

Relevance: There is universal agreement that the program is highly relevant to the needs of the Solomon Islands law and justice sector and there is a clear rationale for continued Australian investment. The program is highly responsive to the priorities of the justice sector: ASIPJ listens, refines, and then reflects-back in its assistance that which the sector has articulated is needed, how, and when. This is widely valued across the sector and has built trust, openness, and a confidence within the sector to engage with ASIPJ. There is a need to ensure that program support is strategically balanced across the justice system, particularly in the context of the Solomon Islands Government’s (SIG) planned expansion of the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force (RSIPF).

Effectiveness: The program is now widely considered to be progressing well. Melanesian twinning arrangements, for example with the Public Solicitor’s Office in Papua New Guinea and Legal Aid Commission Fiji, are innovative and inspired. These arrangements leverage the unique Melanesian connections and affinities between the Melanesian group of countries. The Monitoring, Evaluation, Research and Learning (MERL) system is fit-for-purpose and supports information needs for sound program management. In a further program phase, it will be important for the MERL system to seek to measure the end user’s experience of accessing justice in Solomon Islands. While noting the central focus of the program is on building the justice delivery capacity of Solomon Islands Government (SIG) justice sector agencies, it is important to know if and how this is enhancing access to justice and if change is occurring.

Efficiency: There is room for improvement in the program’s efficiency. In terms of program governance, the Program Reference Group (PRG) is working well as a high-level mechanism for advice, cross-sector collaboration, direction setting and decision making for the program. The PRG is comprised of one Australian Government official (Minister Counsellor, Australian High Commission, Honiara) and four senior SIG officials (Chief Justice, Attorney General, Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Justice and Legal Affairs (MJLA), and Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Police, National Security and Correctional Services) – this small grouping enables the PRG to operate in a streamlined, strategic way. However, as the heads of justice agencies are not members of the PRG, there is a missed opportunity to have their voices heard and their input into decision-making in a systematic and coordinated way.

As it relates to program management, the performance of the managing contractor is assessed as strong, with the personnel engaged for key positions in program management regarded as particularly high performing.

However, the consortium arrangement has introduced inefficiencies that have thwarted the team's ability to deliver with the limited resources they have.

Sustainability: The long-term sustainability of the program's benefits is not assured at this point but with increased SIG ownership and further Australian investment the prospects will be much improved. Program support for leadership as well as efforts to share costs with justice sector agencies enhance ASIPJ's sustainability, such as the recent co-funding of the High Court refurbishment. The Justice Information Management System (JIMS) poses challenges for sustainability. There are varying levels of enthusiasm, uptake and implementation of JIMS across the policing and justice sector, and across different geographic areas. For those agencies using JIMS, it is a helpful tool for case management, planning, and resourcing.

However, for JIMS to work properly, it requires good uptake across the entire sector by individuals and teams holding critical information and data that needs to be captured for the system-wide benefits to be realised. If uptake is limited, there will be data gaps that could lead to a lack of trust in the reliability of data and call into question the system's usefulness, with the risk that this would further limit uptake. The ASIPJ team is already addressing this through targeted work with "super users" (technically skilled individuals in key roles) within justice sector institutions to build ownership, encourage uptake and support the sustainability of JIMS. An additional avenue to address the issues of data reliability and sustainability would be through formal oversight responsibility for the consistent rollout of JIMS and the proper handling and use of information in the JIMS system resting with a senior person within SIG.

GEDSI: ASIPJ is successful at creating spaces for GEDSI outcomes and there is evidence of progress. For example, ASIPJ facilitated the implementation of the Family Protection Act through strengthened prosecutorial guidelines, training programs, and judicial reforms. Also, the program supported the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions (ODPP) to launch its Pikinini Video, enhancing engagement with child witnesses and improving trauma-informed prosecution practices. Further, ASIPJ supported the establishment of the Solomon Islands Women Lawyers Association (SIWLA).

The Case for Increasing ASIPJ's Budget: Consultations revealed a clear valuing of sustained Australian Government support to the law and justice sector and a strong desire for ASIPJ to continue beyond 2025. The program is now progressing well and there is momentum, traction and results; relationships and trust are evident and there is enthusiasm for ASIPJ's support; and there are change makers in the sector and program with vision, energy and influence. So, it is timely and there is opportunity for DFAT to elevate ASIPJ in priority across its assistance to Solomon Islands. In fact, without increased support for the justice sector, the Australian Government's past investment in RAMSI and any future investment in SIG's RSIPF expansion will not achieve the sustained benefits expected.

Recommendations

This report makes a series of recommendations to DFAT in addressing the key findings of the evaluation. These recommendations are set out in brief directly below and explained and elaborated upon in detail within the main text of this report.

Relevance

1. Create one guiding document for ASIPJ.
2. Incorporate greater rigour into the process for applying for program support.
3. Ensure that program support is strategically balanced across the justice system.

4. Enhance civil society engagement in support of improved access to justice.
5. Support the sector to plan and prepare for emerging and pressing issues.

Effectiveness

6. Expand Melanesian twinning opportunities across SIG justice sector agencies
7. Extend Melanesian twinning arrangements to non-state organisations.
8. Measure the end user's experience of accessing justice.

Efficiency

9. Broaden input into PRG decision-making.
10. Move to a single, streamlined contracting arrangement.
11. Review the case for each adviser role.

Sustainability

12. Seek to share costs with SIG where possible and appropriate.
13. Commit to further significant and sustained support for JIMS.
14. Establish a formal oversight responsibility for JIMS within SIG.

The Case for Increasing ASIPJ's Budget

15. Increase ASIPJ's budget.
16. Develop an infrastructure and equipment strategy for ASIPJ.

First Nations Participation and Engagement

17. Increase links with community legal centres in Australia.

INTRODUCTION

About this document

This document presents the findings of an independent mid-term review (MTR) of the Australia Solomon Islands Partnership for Justice (ASIPJ). The review was commissioned by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and conducted over February – May 2025. The purpose of the MTR is to assess the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of the program, and to make recommendations for the continuous improvement of Australia's law and justice development assistance to Solomon Islands. Interwoven throughout the assessment is an analysis of the extent to which ASIPJ successfully promotes gender equality, disability and social inclusion (GEDSI) outcomes.

The findings and recommendations contained in this report result from: (i) Desk-based review of ASIPJ program documentation; (ii) Consultations in Honiara over 30 March – 4 April 2025. Consultations were held with key program stakeholders: Solomon Islands Government (SIG) policing and justice sector leads, civil society representatives (non-governmental organisations (NGOs) as well as Women and Young Lawyers Associations), DFAT and Australian Federal Police (AFP) representatives, ASIPJ Program Team and advisers, managing contractor representatives and other "consortium" members. Online consultations were held over March-April 2025 with program stakeholders based outside of Honiara; (iii) Validation meetings in Honiara with DFAT and the Program Reference Group (PRG) to test and discuss the MTR team's key findings and recommendations.

While the primary audience for this report is DFAT, it is a short, concise report intended for wide readership by all key program stakeholders.

Background to the MTR

ASIPJ is a four-year, AUD20 million investment (2022-2025), with a two-year option to extend the current contract. ASIPJ's goal is that Solomon Islands and Australia partner to promote peace, safety and socio-economic development by strengthening law and justice services in Solomon Islands. In pursuit of this goal, the objective of ASIPJ is that Australia will support Solomon Island justice partners to contribute to safer communities.

ASIPJ has two end-of-program (EOPO) outcomes:

- EOPO 1: SIG justice agencies have improved capacity to perform their core functions and enhance access to justice.
- EOPO 2: SIG justice agencies are increasingly sensitive and responsive to the needs of women, girls and others vulnerable to family and sexual violence.

ASIPJ has four intermediate outcomes (IOs):

- IO 1: Skills of current and emerging leaders and staff in SIG justice partner agencies are developed and enhanced.
- IO 2: Systems and processes of SIG justice partners are built and strengthened to support core agency functions and access to justice services.
- IO 3: Cross-sector collaboration is occurring and working to deliver justice services more effectively and inclusively.

- IO 4: Community engagement and outreach by SIG justice partners is increasingly accessible and inclusive.

ASIPJ is supported by DFAT and implemented by a consortium comprising Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu (Deloitte) (managing contractor and technical delivery), Adam Smith International (ASI) (operational and delivery), and Ninti One (Indigenous engagement). ASIPJ works with other Australian funded programs including Australian AFP through the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force-AFP Policing Partnership Program (RAPPP) and the Attorney-General's Department through its Pacific Law and Justice Program.

ASIPJ is governed by the PRG comprised of four senior SIG officials (Chief Justice, Attorney General, Permanent Secretary of MJLA, and Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Police, National Security and Correctional Services) and one Australian Government official (Minister Counsellor, Australian High Commission, Honiara).

DFAT is responsible for providing strategic direction to ASIPJ and ensuring that funded activities contribute to program outcomes. DFAT maintains regular direct engagement with relevant senior SIG stakeholders and other partners. DFAT is also responsible for responding to and managing the impact of Australian and SIG policy changes on ASIPJ.

The design of ASIPJ was undertaken in 2022, involving consultations with a wide range of stakeholders and building on over 25 years of Australian law and justice assistance in Solomon Islands. ASIPJ then underwent a significant budget reduction for the period July 2023 to December 2025, from AUD32m to AUD18.5m. This reduction meant a decrease to the program's personnel profile, planned activities and operations. At this time, ASIPJ underwent a Design Refresh through which its focus was tightened around three areas:

- Support for SIG justice agencies to perform core functions
- Access to justice in targeted provincial locations
- Gender equality, disability and social inclusion.

Context and objectives for the MTR

ASIPJ's implementation experienced disruptions to design and commencement, owing to COVID-19, the budget reduction and Design Refresh. These disruptions impacted workplan and activity implementation during 2022 and 2023, with full implementation occurring throughout 2024 and 2025.

In December 2024, Prime Minister Jeremiah Manele and Prime Minister Anthony Albanese announced a new partnership to grow the size and capability of the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force (RSIPF). The potential for growth in law enforcement in Solomon Islands is assumed to bring downstream impacts and demands on the law and justice sector including for the offices of the Public Solicitor and Prosecutor, Judiciary and Correctional Service of the Solomon Islands (CSSI).

In this context, the objective of the MTR is two-fold:

1. Assess, in the context of these disruptions, the extent to which results have been achieved against the EOPOs and IOs at this point of ASIPJ's implementation, and

2. Provide clear recommendations for changes to program implementation and management, including to inform future program iterations.

Review methodology

The MTR was conducted by three independent consultants whose Terms of Reference is set out in Annex 1. The detailed review methodology is in Annex 2.

KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Relevance

Relationships, responsiveness and program focus

Findings

Strong relationships are at the heart of the program's success. The priority given to building relationships based on trust and respect has resulted in strong ties being formed, across all parts of the sector. These strong ties also include DFAT and the Program Team – they have developed respectful relationships with key players in the Solomon Islands justice sector and facilitated the sectors' relationships with justice institutions in Australia and Melanesia. Relationships have been central to ASIPJ's momentum and traction and are the key enabler for ASIPJ's relevance, impact, effectiveness and sustainability.

The program is highly responsive to the needs and priorities of the justice sector. The MTR Team's interviews and observations showed that ASIPJ listens, refines, and then reflects-back in its assistance that which the sector has articulated is needed, how, and when. This is widely valued by key players across the sector and has built trust, openness, and a confidence within the sector to engage with ASIPJ.

Further adding to ASIPJ's relevance is that the needs and priorities articulated to the Review Team were generally consistent with the ASIPJ Program Design Document (2022) and Design Refresh (2023). Therefore, it is appropriate to maintain the existing program focus, approach, strategic framing and intent as it relates to law and justice investments and activities under ASIPJ. Also, subject to any changes required because of strategic alignment with other DFAT development programs, Ministry of Justice and Legal Affairs (MJLA's) Justice Sector Strategic Framework, or change to the program budget, the MTR team recommends no or only minor revisions be made to the program logic; and the way program outcomes are articulated is clear and helpful.

There is a need to continuously assess and keep sharpening program focus around three priority areas, building on the accepted recommendations of the Design Refresh:

1. Support for SIG justice agencies to perform core functions
2. Access to justice in targeted provincial locations
3. GEDSI, particularly around family and sexual violence and support for "Step by Step" implementation.

Consultations made clear that these areas remain the appropriate focus for ASIPJ. This focus aligns with priorities of Solomon Islands and Australian Governments, and where there is opportunity for impact and evidence of progress.

Progress to date warrants an increase in support for enhanced access to justice in targeted provincial locations. Though this can be costly, it is consistent with the need to ensure all provinces benefit from the program

regardless of location. The time and cost of travelling to Honiara will be prohibitive for most disadvantaged parts of the community, and the state of provincial and island facilities used for public services do not reflect their importance or significance to the fabric of governance. Increasing program support for provincial access to justice could include more support for state justice agencies to provide services outside of Honiara, community legal education and awareness activities, and possible engagement with non-state actors and institutions on law and justice issues.

Recommendation 1. Create one guiding document for ASIPJ. The Design Refresh should serve as the blueprint for the next phase. Once the MTR is completed and DFAT has issued its management response, and there is clarity on budget for the next phase of the program, one document should be created as the overarching guiding document for the program. It should incorporate the accepted and relevant findings and recommendations of this MTR, the Design Refresh document (2023) and original Program Design Document (2022). The audience for this document would be: DFAT, managing contractor, ASIPJ Program Team and all ASIPJ partners. The purpose is to have a clear, Single Source of Truth guiding program implementation, decision-making and collaboration.

*In the event of significant budget increase (see recommendation 15), further design work may be required to inform development of the above-described document.

Prioritising and balancing program support across the justice system

Findings

The program is valued by senior people in the agencies being supported, but how does DFAT and the Program Team know if they're supporting the right things? The process for seeking and securing program support is varied yet has largely been able to respond to urgent requests. This flexibility has allowed the Program to nimbly respond to perceived need. There is, however, still a need to demonstrate the rigour of deciding whether to support the requests, whether from regular or less commonly supported, or new, partners. Frequent users have suggested a one-page template has been useful or might be useful to bring some structure to a process that has been able to respond quickly but ultimately needs validation to ensure the requests meet the existing priorities and criteria. Those suggesting this have not been asking for more bureaucracy to be injected into the program but for a short, sharp, streamlined step that makes the activity selection process clearer and simpler for all parties. (Certainly, there is some risk that overburdensome administrative processes may slow and possibly deter engagement. There is a need for the Program Team to determine a contextually appropriate process. DFAT's Community Justice Fund in Papua New Guinea may offer some instructive lessons.)

Further, there is a case for requests for larger activities with less urgent decision-making timeframes, such as the Attorney-General's Conference of Parties, website and education program, to be considered against alternative opportunities to spend the funds.

Recommendation:

Recommendation 2. Incorporate greater rigour into the process for applying for program support. ASIPJ should consider how to incorporate greater rigour into the process for applying for program support, without losing the much-valued flexibility and responsiveness. This would enhance and test the approval of support, both for ongoing programmatic work and urgent requests for assistance. The MTR Team recommends there are well-understood criteria that targets program support at activities that enable the requesting organisation to achieve their core functions. This dispels any concern that relationships and flexibility distort decision-making to the end goal of access to justice.

Balance of support across the justice system in the context of SIG's RSIPF expansion

Findings

There is a need to ensure that program support is strategically balanced across the justice system. CSSI and Police Prosecution Department (PPD) are two areas which appear impacted by an acute lack of attention in the context of the proposed expansion of the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force (RSIPF). Yet they are very aligned in terms of function and history. CSSI, in particular, experienced strong support through the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) in terms of facilities and Advisers, given the increase in inmates during that time. But this support has fallen dramatically since the end of RAMSI, leaving a service responsible for the care and well-being of inmates in rapidly deteriorating facilities, which periodically attracts the radar of human rights bodies. Rehabilitation of inmates is a critical aspect of Corrections and consideration is needed to ensure a range of options are available, as well as preparing inmates for reintegration into society, including support to limit recidivism. (Note the program's focus for CSSI is on supporting the development of leadership and technical capability and succession planning, though the program still supports CSSI with its priority infrastructure needs.)

Both CSSI and PPD will be directly impacted by any expansion of police numbers, and both will be affected by the downstream effects of more charges, more prosecutions, more cases and more inmates thus increasing the passage of people through their doors. In anticipation of such impact, further attention will be needed to ensure the two organisations can withstand the weight of such and are fit for purpose.

Between the two institutions stands the Magistrates Court whose Judges will decide any charges and have the power to impose custodial sentences. The MTR Team heard anecdotes of charges of family and sexual violence being downgraded by police prosecutors to common assault, attracting a lower sentence and avoiding the 'no drop' policy. (The 'no drop' policy means that family and sexual violence charges cannot be withdrawn when requested by a victim, often in response to pressure from the charged person or other family members.) This highlights the need for ongoing training to be consistent with the country's commitment to respond effectively to family and sexual violence, RSIPF's commitment to those values for its organisation and the excellent work being undertaken by the DPP with the Pikinini Video.

The entire law and justice system, particularly PPD, Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions (ODPP), Public Solicitor's Office (PSO), the Judiciary and CSSI, will be directly impacted by any expansion of police numbers. Indeed, they will be affected by the downstream effects of more charges, more prosecutions, more cases and more inmates, thereby increasing the passage of people through their doors. In anticipation of such impact, further attention will be needed to ensure organisations can withstand the weight of such and are fit for purpose.

Recommendation:

Recommendation 3. Ensure that program support is strategically balanced across the justice system:

Consideration should be given to the agencies impacted by any increase in police numbers including Police Prosecutions, Office of the Director of Police Prosecutions, Public Solicitor's Office, Magistrates Court, High Court and CSSI, to assess their capacity, training and infrastructure needs so they are fit for purpose once the downstream effects of more police present themselves..

The modelling exercise to understand the downstream impacts of RSIPF expansion on the justice system (already included in the ASIPJ workplan for 2025) presents a strategic opportunity for engagement and forward planning on this issue. The methodology used for the modelling will be key: a participatory approach that brings together key police and justice stakeholders, including SIG policing and justice sector leads, AFP, DFAT and ASIPJ leadership is recommended.

Civil society engagement and support for vulnerable groups

Finding:

The MTR Team did not find a defined path for civil society organisations to access ASIPJ support.

Recommendation:

Recommendation 4. Enhance pathways for civil society organisations to seek program support. There is a need to ensure that civil society organisations (including grassroots bodies) supporting the justice needs of vulnerable groups have access and confidence to seek support and assistance from ASIPJ as and when required.

Emerging and pressing issues

Finding:

The ongoing need for the justice sector to address emerging issues including climate change, artificial intelligence, cyber security and crime, people trafficking and the proliferation of drug imports and transshipment in the Pacific region is pressing and urgent and will impact on the justice sector and the program in some form. Australia is already supporting the sector on cybercrime legislation (through another Australian aid program) and transnational crime (ASIPJ is providing support to update the Dangerous Drugs Act).

Recommendation:

Recommendation 5. Support the sector to plan and prepare for emerging and pressing issues. In a further phase of the program, there is opportunity for ASIPJ to support the sector to plan and prepare, in a measured and strategic way, starting with linking the sector into existing DFAT and other relevant development initiatives. There are other Australian aid programs in Solomon Islands/the Pacific region (for example, security, cyber, climate) with synergies to ASIPJ – it will be important to capitalise on these links and ensure strategic coherence across Australia's assistance.

Effectiveness

Progress against outcomes

Findings:

The program is now widely considered to be progressing well; program documentation and consultations provided many success stories. For example, ASIPJ's 2024 Annual Program Performance Report aptly provides many noteworthy examples, as follows:

An unprecedented seven Cabinet papers were... drafted and submitted under the program's support, contributing to key policy and legislative discussions. Significantly, 2024 progress on review of agency mandates delivers one of the eight priorities for the MJLA under the 100 Days Priorities Program. It has also been identified as 'the most significant constitutional reform process since independence'.

ASIPJ's support for institutional reforms has led to significant shifts in the capacity of justice agencies to perform their core functions. ODPP and CSSI demonstrated improved strategic planning and operational oversight. The Justice Information Management System (JIMS) has been fully operationalized at CSSI Tetere, enhancing prisoner management and reporting capabilities. The system also supports the judiciary through an e-Filing service launched in January 2025. The Legislative Drafting Division (LDD) at the Attorney General's Chambers (AGC) has increased its capacity to respond to legislative demands, supported by mentoring and

training programs. The Legal Digital Reprint and Consolidation Project (LDRCP) provided access to updated legislation, significantly improving legal clarity and accessibility.

ASIPJ facilitated the implementation of the Family Protection Act (FPA) through strengthened prosecutorial guidelines, training programs, and judicial reforms. ODPD launched the Pikinini Video, enhancing engagement with child witnesses and improving trauma-informed prosecution practices. The Solomon Islands Women Lawyers Association (SIWLA) was established, marking a milestone in gender equity within the justice sector. Magistrate Courts updated their Bench Book to improve the handling of FPA protection orders, while the ... PSO reinvigorated its legal clinic for people with disabilities. More than 570 justice personnel participated in professional development initiatives, including continuing legal education (CLE) and leadership training programs... [E]leven court circuits were supported, expanding access to formal justice services in remote areas. Family and sexual violence awareness campaigns and community outreach programs improved public engagement with justice services.¹

Because the program is now progressing well, it is appropriate and prudent to maintain the same high-level program structure.

However, the program has faced significant challenges (changes and delays) that have greatly impacted on the extent of progress towards program outcomes. Challenges include substantial (approximately 40%) budget reduction, reduced personnel, and delays to implementation due to: COVID-19 pandemic, program reprofiling and design refresh process, Pacific Games and Solomon Islands General Elections.

The terms of reference for the MTR charge the Review Team with assessing ASIPJ's progress against intermediate and end-of-program outcomes. While ASIPJ is now progressing well, the extent of progress should not be overstated where some two years of implementation were lost amidst those challenges.

Melanesian twinning and locally led development

Findings:

Melanesian twinning arrangements, for example with the Public Solicitor's Office in PNG and Legal Aid Commission Fiji, are inspired because these arrangements leverage the unique Melanesian connections and affinities between the Melanesian group of countries. Twinning participants interviewed by the Review Team reflected on their appreciation of the positive and reciprocal relationship and the value of troubleshooting shared challenges. These arrangements are impactful and are a working example of sector ownership of program support.

Melanesian twinning arrangements are also reported to be more sustainable than previous twinning arrangements with Australian and New Zealand institutions. There is evidence of lasting connections and ongoing collaboration across Melanesian countries in support of ongoing sharing of good practices and troubleshooting. The model is an excellent alternative and/or complement to Adviser support.

ASIPJ's support for Melanesian twinning is considered effective with the program simply "getting behind" and financially backing these initiatives where requested.

The appointment of a highly effective Melanesian Team Leader for ASIPJ has also been well received by key program stakeholders, with a natural affinity for the Solomon Island context shown by the Team Leader coupled with his many years of relevant experience in Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu and Fiji. This has facilitated strong

¹ Text is drawn from the 2024 ASIPJ Annual Program Performance Report. The ASIPJ Annual Program Performance Reports are detailed, quality reports providing in-depth reporting on program progress, including tracking of progress towards outcomes. This MTR report is not intended to replicate or reproduce information contained in those annual reports.

relationships between the program and sector which has, in turn, facilitated meaningful stakeholder engagement, mutual respect and trust. Also, the recruitment of two highly experienced and well-regarded Solomon Islands citizens further helps to build broad trust in ASIPJ as well as enhancing the quality and relevance of outcomes and avoiding the risk of any social or cultural *faux pas* in the delivery of their functions. These roles are remunerated as international advisers in fair recognition of the value of their expertise. It will be important to continue to ensure that the Program Team has strong Solomon Islands and Melanesian representation in key roles.

Recommendations:

Recommendation 6. Expand Melanesian twinning opportunities across SIG Justice sector agencies. In a further phase of the program, Melanesian twinning should be encouraged to continue to provide this invaluable and effective opportunity to as many parts of the justice sector as possible.

Recommendation 7. Extend Melanesian twinning arrangements to non-state organisations. Extending twinning arrangements to non-state organisations such as the Women and Young Lawyers Associations as well as legal clinics/community legal centres will likely reap similar benefits and synergies.

Monitoring, Evaluation, Research and Learning (MERL)

Findings:

The MERL system is fit-for-purpose and supports information needs for sound program management. Also, consultations confirmed that the program logic contains a well-articulated, clear strategic intent for the program, particularly through its inclusion of a small number of clearly articulated intermediate and end-of-program outcomes. The program logic was refined and simplified through the Design Refresh. The program logic may not need to be amended in a further phase of the program, subject to SIG and program priorities.

The MERL system does not seek to measure the end user's experience of accessing justice in Solomon Islands. While noting the central focus of the program is on building the justice delivery capacity of SIG justice sector agencies, it is important to know if and how this is enhancing access to justice and if change is occurring.

Recommendations:

Recommendation 8. Measure the end user's experience of accessing justice. Measure the end user's experience of accessing justice, including in targeted provincial locations (subject to the implementation of Recommendation 2). This should be done in a collaborative way with sector representatives and civil society, for example, Solomon Islands National University. The methodology itself may be a powerful community engagement and legal education tool.

Efficiency

Program governance

Findings:

The PRG is working well as a high-level mechanism for advice, cross-sector collaboration, direction setting and decision making for the program. The PRG approves annual work plans and budgets, having authority and oversight over procedural requests and approvals processes.

With only four members – Chief Justice; Attorney General; Permanent Secretary for Justice and Legal Affairs; and Permanent Secretary for Police, National Security and Correctional Services – the PRG operates in a streamlined and strategic way. However, as the heads of justice agencies are not members of the PRG, there is a missed opportunity to have their voices heard and their input into decision-making in a systematic and coordinated way.

Recommendations:

Recommendation 9. Broaden input into PRG decision-making: Coinciding with a new phase of the program, the architecture around the PRG be enhanced as follows:

- Maintain a small PRG as the primary SIG governance body for the program
- Create a pre-PRG meeting of the heads of justice agencies to provide targeted input to the decisions being considered at each PRG meeting, to further streamline decision-making and execution.
- Provide opportunity for civil society input into the pre-PRG deliberations, so that the PRG has the benefit of wider community views before program decisions are made.

Program management

Findings:

The performance of the managing contractor is assessed as strong, with the personnel engaged for key positions in program management regarded as particularly high performing.

However, the consortium arrangement has introduced inefficiencies that have thwarted the team's ability to deliver with the limited resources they have. First, having the managing contractor (Deloitte) and primary sub-contractor (Adam Smith International (ASI)) with different systems and processes creates additional work for the post refresh team and delays in time-critical processes such as procurement and invoicing. Second, the specific global footprint, responsibilities and time zones of the primary sub-contractor (ASI) – i.e. program management in Thailand, finance in Pakistan, legal in the UK – creates insurmountable challenges for the program operations team in delivering important and time critical outputs. Third, the program operations team has delivered outstanding service in these difficult circumstances, but often with a high human cost and reputational damage.

Recommendations:

Recommendation 10. Move to a single, streamlined contracting arrangement: In the next phase of the program, there should be a single, streamlined contracting arrangement that facilitates and does not interrupt the work of the high-performing team. The contracting arrangement will need to remove 'double handling' and inefficiencies that have arisen from multiple systems, processes and time-zones. DFAT should negotiate a new

head contract with the managing contractor with new arrangements for program management support, with accountability for improved efficiency resting with the managing contractor.

Note that while the Review Team did consider the option of a new approach to the market for the managing contractor role, it concluded that it would not be advisable or necessary in this case given: 1) the time delay and disruption this would bring to the positive momentum under way; and 2) the option for a contract extension in the current contract with the managing contractor meaning a further procurement process is not required.

Program delivery

Findings:

Since the reduction in program budget and Design Refresh the Program Team has demonstrated impressive capacity to deliver “more with less”. The move away from a predominantly adviser-based model to a responsive, catalytic activity-based approach has delivered good value for money by supporting professional development, timely procurement of goods and services, research and learning, and partnership broking, while still having capacity for a mixture of embedded and short-term Technical Advisers. The MTR Team heard that the advisers currently in place are appreciated by their SIG counterparts but notes the high cost to the budget of each adviser and the potential alternative uses of these funds for more demand-driven, catalytic activities. Regular review of the value of all adviser positions and alternative ways of harnessing their skills would be prudent. In a further phase of the program, the shift to a more flexible and responsive approach could be continued in order to provide catalytic support to as many parts of the justice sector as possible.

Twinning with Melanesian neighbours and Australia (High Court and Federal Court) has been a game changer that has cost relatively little for the beneficial relationships that have formed and show positive signs of continuing. With some of the funding being provided from outside the aid budget to Solomon Islands, Melanesian twinning has provided an unexpected efficiency boost. (Specifically, Papua New Guinea’s Public Solicitor’s Office has self-funded exchanges and the Australia-Papua New Guinea Law and Justice Partnership have provided funding.)

Recommendations:

Recommendation 11. Review the case for each adviser role: At the end of 2025, serious consideration should be given to each adviser role and the case for continuation either as long-term, short-term or remote (or a variation of one of more model).

Sustainability

Leadership and change makers

Findings:

Leaders in the justice sector have formed a cohort of talented, energetic people who are committed to progress and development, but there is a need to support and enhance their capacity to do so and achieve the core functions of their respective roles. The justice sector has change makers in place who are receiving and valuing support. The ability of the program to respond to their personal development needs as well as the needs of their agencies is transformative, including through the Maxwell Leadership Program and DISC Assessment Tool.

In a further phase, the program should continue to identify and support leadership in current and emerging leaders across the justice system. Training and tools focused on development of individual leadership and

management skills should continue to be supported as well as the positive impact which this will have on their current functions and duties.

Cost-sharing

Finding:

There is a clear expectation (and articulated by many Solomon Islanders interviewed for the MTR as a matter of pride) for SIG to lead and contribute to all aspects of justice delivery, and a corresponding appetite for sharing of costs between the sector and ASIPJ.

Recommendations:

Recommendation 12. Seek to share costs with SIG: The program should seek to share costs with justice sector agencies to build ownership of the assistance provided, thereby helping to ensure that the benefits last. The size of the financial co-contribution should be determined according to that which can be afforded rather than application of a rigid set percentage amount for all cost-sharing.

Justice Information Management System (JIMS)

Findings:

Consultations revealed varying levels of enthusiasm, uptake and implementation of JIMS across policing and justice sector institutions, and across different geographic areas. Consultations showed that for those agencies utilising JIMS, it is a helpful tool for case management, planning, and resourcing. However, for JIMS to work properly, it requires good uptake across every policing and justice sector institution by individuals and teams holding critical information and data that needs to be captured for the system-wide benefits to be realised. If uptake is limited, there will be data gaps that could lead to a lack of trust in the reliability of data and call into question the system's usefulness, with the risk that this would further limit uptake. The ASIPJ team is already addressing this through targeted work with "super users" – technically-skilled individuals in key roles - within justice sector institutions to build ownership, encourage uptake and support the sustainability of JIMS. An additional avenue to deal with the issues of trust and sustainability would be through formal oversight responsibility for the consistent rollout of JIMS the proper handling and use of information in the JIMS system resting with a senior person within SIG. ASIPJ could help by linking SIG with a similar function in Australia for advice and support.

Recommendations:

Recommendation 13. Commit to further significant and sustained support for JIMS: To build on the program's significant investment in JIMS over the past ten years, in a further phase of the program, ASIPJ should continue its significant and sustained support for JIMS, with technical improvements and bugs resolved.

Recommendation 14. Establish a formal oversight responsibility for JIMS within SIG: Establishing a formal oversight responsibility within SIG would support the consistent rollout of JIMS and help to increase uptake and trust in the reliability of data.

The Case for Increasing ASIPJ's Budget

Consultations revealed a clear valuing of sustained Australian Government support to the law and justice sector and a strong desire for ASIPJ to continue beyond 2025. Overall, the program is now progressing well and there is momentum, traction and results; relationships and trust are evident and there is enthusiasm for ASIPJ's support; and there are change makers in the sector and program with vision, energy and influence. So, it is timely and there is opportunity for DFAT to elevate ASIPJ in priority across its assistance to Solomon Islands. In fact, without increased support for the justice sector, the Australian Government's past investment in RAMSI and any future investment in SIG's RSIPF expansion will not achieve the sustained benefits expected.

There is demand for increased program support and a strong rationale for Australian government to consider this given: (i) program momentum and traction that now exists with significant opportunities for impact, (ii) strong relationships and existence of a cohort of leaders and agents of change, (iii) SIG's planned RSIPF expansion and the downstream impacts on the justice sector, (iv) RAMSI legacy that has left an expectation of large-scale, ongoing support; and (v) Solomon Islands has placed justice (and sharing of how justice is approached in the region) on the agenda for the upcoming Pacific Islands Leaders Meeting, to be held in Honiara in September 2025. This presents an opportunity to showcase Australia's long running and innovative assistance to the sector.

The following factors give rise to a need for increased program expenditure: first, planned growth in the size of the RSIPF from its current size of 1,500 to 3,000 (or potentially 5000 – a figure conveyed to the Review Team) by 2032 will have significant downstream impacts, including substantial costs, for the whole justice system. This is felt particularly deeply in prosecutions, corrections and court functions where an expected increase in police activity (especially arrests) would overwhelm current arrangements. In response, there is an imperative and opportunity for increased resourcing for ASIPJ in its next phase. There is a need for planning and engagement on the ramifications of the RSIPF increase, and for subsequent support for the required growth in the justice system. In addition to the practical considerations, there is an ethical dimension at play for Australia to consider the consequences of its policing assistance. There is also reputational risk to consider if Australian assistance is seen, in the future, to have been unbalanced and therefore not as effective as it could have been.

Second, ASIPJ is successful at creating spaces for GEDSI outcomes and there is evidence of progress. To capitalise on momentum as well as the significant need in Solomon Islands, the Review Team recommends increased spending on GEDSI as part of the proposed increased resourcing for ASIPJ, both through allocation of a greater proportion of program funding to GEDSI as well as an overall growth in budget. Substantial donor spending on GEDSI is justified on the basis that (i) there is limited SIG funding for GEDSI outcomes, (ii) significant need, particularly the high incidence of gender-based violence and limited justice services for survivors of violence as well as people with disability, (iii) ASIPJ is achieving traction on GEDSI, so it is opportune to continue. It is also recommended that ASIPJ, through DFAT, links more closely with DFAT's Gender Equality investment.

Third, requests for infrastructure and equipment need to be considered seriously. This was a key issue and priority raised in consultations with sector representatives. While ASIPJ's current budget does not allow for infrastructure expenditure, a future phase of the program will require an infrastructure and equipment strategy as deterioration continues and increased policing places pressure on the justice system. Again, this is related to the expansion of the RSIPF which the MTR Team understands will have a strong focus on new infrastructure. Without related infrastructure improvements in other parts of the justice system, the return on the investment in RSIPF infrastructure will be constrained.

Fourth, if the program is seriously committed to really improving provincial access to justice, significant budget increase will be required for real change.

In the event of a significant budget increase, further program design work may be required.

Note, however, that an increase in ASIPJ budget would need to be considered in the context of SIG priorities and may have implications for other Australian aid programs in Solomon Islands.

Recommendations:

Recommendation 15. Increase ASIPJ's budget: In response to the above-listed factors, increase ASIPJ budget.

Recommendation 16. Develop an infrastructure and equipment strategy for ASIPJ: A future phase of the program will require an infrastructure and equipment strategy as deterioration continues and increased policing places pressure on the justice system.

First Nations Participation and Engagement

Findings:

The inclusion of a First Nations component in ASIPJ is a positive initiative that has the potential to create enduring relationships and bring two-way learnings for the benefit of both the Solomon Islands, and First Nations communities in Australia. The expected focus over the remainder of 2025 on reintegration of prisoners back into the community has great potential and feedback from this can help inform planning for the next phase of ASIPJ.

An area of potential enhanced engagement is with community legal centres (CLCs) in Australia to support the interest in Solomon Islands for their own network of community legal centres. Some initial connections have been made with the Inala Community Legal Service in Queensland and could be further developed in the next phase of ASIPJ. Ninti One has also identified two First Nations gender-based violence specialist CLCs, Queensland Indigenous Family Violence Legal Service (QIFVLS) and Djirra, which may also offer valuable expertise and instruction around providing culturally safe, accessible, and respectful legal support to survivors of gender-based violence. Where ASIPJ engages with CLCs in Australia, care must be taken around, and consideration given to cultural load and not overburdening or overloading, without compensation, already under-resourced CLCs.

Recommendation:

Recommendation 17. Increase links with community legal centres in Australia: Explore linking with the peak body for CLCs in Australia, Community Legal Centres Australia. Such a collaboration may offer an additional way (beyond Ninti One) to connect effectively with the large network and range of community legal centres operating in Australia (approximately 160 community legal centres in Australia), and to expose relevant actors in Solomon Islands to different models of community justice delivery and support for access to justice.

Conclusion

The positive nature of the findings of this independent MTR report reflects a program which is meeting its objectives, forming sustainable pathways for the future, and making a real time difference. In such a context, the recommendations in this report simply seek to ensure the achievements continue and any practical constraints are addressed and eliminated. Recommendations are also intended to support the continuous check of activities against each agencies core priorities, ensuring balance and a consistency of care and attention to those priorities across the whole sector, and reflected in better outcomes for the end users of the sector's activities and services.

ANNEX 1: TERMS OF REFERENCE

Available as a separate attachment.

ANNEX 2: MTR PLAN

Available as a separate attachment.

ANNEX 3: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Available as a separate attachment.

ANNEX 4: LIST OF INDIVIDUALS AND ORGANISATIONS CONSULTED

Available as a separate attachment.