

28 March 2023

s 47E(d)

PACIFIC UNION PROPOSAL

ISSUES

Pacific Union proposal

KEY MESSAGES

Will you consider introducing a European Union style arrangement with the Pacific?

- Australia recognises the shared benefits that come from closer integration with Pacific island countries.
- We are committed to further strengthening our deep linkages with Pacific peoples, leaders, and governments, as well as with regional organisations and institutions
 - as a member of the region's premier leader-led organisation – the Pacific Islands Forum – we regularly engage with other Pacific leaders on how we can work together to build a stronger and more united Pacific family.
- We are listening to the Pacific family and responding to calls for greater access to Australia.
- That's why we are introducing the Pacific Engagement Visa (PEV) - a new permanent residency visa providing up to 3,000 visas each year for nationals of Pacific island countries and Timor-Leste
 - as permanent residents, PEV holders will be able to live, work and study in Australia
 - and importantly, move freely between Australia and their home countries, encouraging greater cultural, business, investment, and educational exchange.
- We are also expanding and improving the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) scheme to provide greater access to Australia's labour markets.
- These new initiatives complement existing efforts to enhance integration through trade and economic linkages, education, sports, and church partnerships
 - the Pacific Agreement on Closer Economic Relations Plus (PACER Plus) provides a platform to deepen economic integration in the Pacific.
- The Australian Government will continue to listen and work in partnership with our Pacific family to
 - strengthen two-way trade, regional cooperation, and people-to-people links

Prepared By:

Name: s 22(1)(a)(ii)
Branch: PYS/EIB
Phone: s 22(1)(a)(ii)

Cleared By:

Name: Celeste Powell
Position: AS EIB
Branch/Division: OTP | IED | Education and Integration Branch
Phone: s 22(1)(a)(ii)

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- achieve our shared interest in creating a peaceful, prosperous, and resilient region.

Background

On 28 March 2023, Peter Hartcher (Sydney Morning Herald) reported on Samoan Prime Minister Fiame Naomi Mata'afa's proposal that Australia and New Zealand work with Pacific islands nationals to create a European Union-style 'Pacific Union' bloc. This proposal was raised by Prime Minister Fiame in the Q&A session following her speech to the Lowy Institute (the '2023 FDC Pacific Lecture') in Canberra on 20 March 2023. Fiame reportedly said the work agenda to form a Pacific Union would be dominated by free trade, free investment, and free people movement and would bind Pacific nations in a shared future. It would help Australia stabilise its strategic surrounds against pressure from Beijing and provide a pathway for Pacific island countries to overcome poverty and the effects of climate change.

The article stated that "members of the Albanese cabinet" were broadly in favour of deeper Pacific islands integration at all levels, and quoted one Cabinet member as saying: "Anything that integrates the region more fully strengthens our defence against China's influence". However, the article also suggested Fiame's proposal was "too much too soon for the Albanese Government" and quoted Fiame as saying: "[Foreign Minister] Penny Wong didn't say anything when I suggested we will do a common market-type arrangement".

A similar report by Matthew Knott was published in the Sydney Morning Herald on 21 March 2023. That article stated Fiame initially raised this proposal at the Pacific Islands Forum Special Leaders' Meeting in February 2023.

s 33(a)(iii)

Prepared By:

Name: s 22(1)(a)(ii)
Branch: PYS/EIB
Phone: s 22(1)(a)(ii)

Cleared By:

Name: Celeste Powell
Position: AS EIB
Branch/Division: OTP | IED | Education and Integration Branch
Phone: s 22(1)(a)(ii)