



## DFAT Management Response to the Independent Mid Term Review of Australia's Partnership with the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Program 2025

### Context

The Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Program (SPREP) is the Pacific regional organisation mandated to lead on environmental and climate change issues. SPREP is a treaty-based organisation with strong buy-in and ownership, particularly from its Pacific island members.

Australia is a founding member of SPREP, since its formal establishment in 1993 and is a signatory to the SPREP Agreement (1993). The Government of Australia (GoA) and SPREP Partnership Agreement (2021 to 2031) was signed by the Minister for International Development (MIDP) and applies to all GoA development activities with SPREP in the Pacific.

### The Evaluation

The Pacific Climate Section (PCL) in Office of the Pacific (OTP) commissioned an independent mid-term review of Australia's Partnership with the SPREP. The Strategic Development Group Pty Ltd was contracted to conduct the evaluation between September 2024 and April 2025<sup>1</sup>.

The overall purpose of the MTR was to assess progress of the current Grant Arrangement (10 June 2021 – 30 June 2025) under the Partnership between the Government of Australia and the SPREP and broader program and project funding and to inform the next core funding arrangement. Key elements of the partnership include:

- Partnership Arrangement (2021-2031), a non-financial partnership document outlining objectives, commitments, roles and responsibilities of GoA and SPREP
- Grant Arrangement 76930/1 (2021-2025), an investment of AUD 17.2 million in core funding that is flexible and non-conditional
- Non-core funding of various projects, managed under separate grant arrangements.

The purpose of the MTR was to assess whether the Arrangement meets its intended objectives, as noted above, along with the high-level objectives set out under Section 3 of the Partnership Arrangement.

The scope of the MTR covers the Partnership Agreement, including the current Grant Arrangement for core funding (2021-present), along with program and project funding since 2021. The MTR considered consultation mechanisms, governance arrangements, and all aspects of the Partnership Arrangement, the Grant Arrangement and program and projects since 2021. The MTR did not specifically focus on SPREP itself, except in support of the assessment of the Partnership.

The overarching findings of the review are as follows:

- The Partnership is considered valuable, positive and relevant to all parties in achieving their objectives, and the long-standing, well-established relationship is key to this sentiment.
- The Partnership is a complex amalgamation of financial and non-financial agreements, including core and non-core funding, which impacts efficiency, effectiveness and coherence, and could be streamlined in future iterations.
- Australia's expectations for the Partnership, as defined in the Partnership Arrangement and Grant Arrangement documentation, align with SPREP's priorities in supporting delivery of SPREP's Strategic Plan.

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<sup>1</sup> The report represents the independent views of the consultants and not necessarily the views of DFAT or SPREP.



- The financial elements of the Partnership are well defined and understood by all parties. The non-financial supports provided by Australia could be more clearly captured and articulated within the Partnership.
- There are opportunities to streamline, realign and rebalance the Partnership, to improve clarity of obligations, responsibilities and progress.

DFAT will implement the review findings with SPREP under the new multi-year core funding arrangement and programmatic funding arrangement with SPREP in 2025.

**DFAT Management response to specific evaluation recommendations**

Recommendation	Response	Explanation	Action Plan
1. GoA and SPREP work closely together to simplify the modality in design and implementation, including objectives and results tracking, of the Partnership and Grant Arrangements.	Agree	Overall, there is strong evidence that the Partnership Arrangement, Grant Arrangement and non-core grant funding are highly relevant to SPREP, GoA and SPREP Member countries. Evidence suggests there are opportunities to streamline the funding modalities and simplify the objectives.	DFAT will work to progress a more streamlined Partnership modality, including entering into a new five-year core funding arrangement and amalgamating our program funding to SPREP under one programmatic grant.
2. It is recommended that the existing annual bilateral meetings, as part of the High-Level Consultation’s, are strengthened to incorporate a Partnership Health Check to reflect on the Partnership and agree on plans to strengthen the process and delivery of the partnership, capturing and sharing with each other.	Agree	The Partnership Arrangement provides somewhat for review and reflection of the partnership, however there are opportunities for the partnerships discussions to be improved with a more intentional approach, in line with a “Partnership Health Check”, to support the principles that guide the partnership in terms of ways of working together to function effectively and in the spirit of the overall objectives of the partnership. A form of a regular health check can support the GoA’s commitment to ‘articulate clear expectations of the Partnership with SPREP through regular, open dialogue’, and it is intended to manage and maintain the partnership.	SPREP and GoA will add a designated Partnership ‘Health Check’ into the existing annual High-Level Consultations, with additional structure and capture of agreements and commitments made.



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3. It is recommended that the GoA and SPREP agree on how they will work together to support SPREP’s regional service delivery and the implementation of the SPREP Strategic Plan, including identifying non-financial cooperation from GoA.	Agree	Evidence suggests that much of the non-financial support provided by GoA to SPREP is implicit, in that it is not well documented nor captured. This valued element of the arrangement would benefit from clearer articulation.	Support for SPREP regional service delivery and the implementation of the SPREP Strategic Plan, including identifying non-financial cooperation from GoA will be added as standing agenda items to the Partnership “Health Check”.
4. It is recommended that DFAT and DCCEEW discuss and agree on roles, responsibilities and communications pathways for each entry point into SPREP, to ensure a united GoA approach to the Partnership.	Agree	DFAT acknowledges that achievement of our broader development objectives would benefit from a more coordinated approach to our engagement with SPREP. There is evidence to suggest that the roles and responsibilities of the GoA parties as set out in the documentation could be more clearly articulated and better aligned with the strengths of each agency to deliver a more effective Partnership for all parties.	GoA will develop a roles and responsibilities document to be presented and finalised at the upcoming HLC’s in May 2025. DFAT will consider adding this document as a Annex to the next Partnership Arrangement.
5. It is recommended that where Australia bilaterally funds similar programs in the region with other organisations and through other CROP agencies, GoA considers and communicates resourcing coordination with SPREP to improve efficiencies and clarity.	Agree	GoA could be more proactive in supporting coordination with similar programs and initiatives it funds with regional agencies, through other donors and also bilaterally to ensure effective and efficient regional service delivery and prevent duplication.	A GoA update on relevant new programs and initiatives it funds will be added as standing agenda items to the Partnership “Health Check”. DFAT will also commit to continuing ongoing conversations with GoA focal points for other CROP organisations.
6. It is recommended that GoA work closely with SPREP as a member and partner to contribute to SPREP’s Strategic Plan and other policies and regional frameworks, including supporting systems and processes.	Agree	As SPREP works towards its next Strategic Plan, there are opportunities for partners, including GoA to embed the priorities and objectives of the partnership into this new Strategic Plan, where possible, to create space to be responsive to those mutual objectives.	GoA will work closely with SPREP to contribute to SPREP’s Strategic Plan and other policies and regional frameworks, including supporting systems and processes.



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7. It is recommended that both Partners continue to engage with other CROPs to identify and leverage opportunities to achieve economies of scale and sharing resources where appropriate, in programming and corporate areas of implementation.	Agree	There is strong evidence for positive engagement in the region. SPREP has a clear mandate within the busy space of CROP agencies in the environment and climate space, although with smaller teams and budgets compared with other agencies doing similar work (e.g. SPC), so coordination is challenging. Goodwill between agencies “can only go so far” according to some stakeholder insights, and there is an opportunity for clearer arrangements at CROP level for coordination and responsibilities where mandates overlap.	GoA and SPREP continue to support coordination with regional agencies, discuss alignment and share information, in an effort to coordinate and reduce duplication.
8. It is recommended that the Partnership develops a clearer articulation of bilateral and shared risks as part of the Partnership, to assist with safeguarding compliance and other risk management, to be taken forward in more detail at implementation.	Agree	Clear articulation of GEDSI, due diligence and safeguarding risks, with implementation of SPREP gender policy commitments	DFAT will add risks to the Partnership Health Check to be reported on annually at the HLC’s.
9. It is recommended that SPREP optimises the GEDSI secondee/advisor position to respond to remaining gaps and instrumentalize implementation.	Agree	Despite evidence of some improvements, GEDSI progress remains slow, and implementation challenges persist. The review of SPREP’s 2016 gender policy has been completed, including input from DFAT as part of development workshops. However, there have been delays in the finalisation of this policy and enactment of commitments. Consultations articulated the slow and incremental nature of policy change efforts within SPREP, a challenge that is compounded by the need for socialisation and buy-in from SPREP member countries.	GoA will continue to encourage the Gender Specialist role to be used strategically in support of the partnership’s GEDSI objectives. DFAT will add GEDSI to the Partnership Health Check to be reported on annually at the HLC’s.



Recommendation	Response	Explanation	Action Plan
10. It is recommended that as part of HLCs, NZ and GoA consider aligning expectations of SPREP around due diligence, particularly PSEAH, and Child Protection.	Agree	Safeguarding and due diligence risks remain for DFAT, particularly relating to PSEAH and Child Protection. Currently, there is little articulation of these risks as part of the Partnership Agreement. While GEDSI is captured as an overarching partnership objective, the partnership would benefit from clearer articulation of overarching risks at the agreement level to assist with joint mitigation of these risks and ensure safeguard compliance. This would enable DFAT to place GEDSI requirements and compliance more centrally within the partnership and provide an accountability tool in the absence of formal reporting mechanisms.	DFAT will add due diligence risks to the Partnership Health Check to be reported on annually at the HLC's and will consider adding better articulation of due diligence risk in the next Partnership Agreement.