

Evaluation of the Office of the Pacific Ocean Commissioner

DFAT Management Response

Overview

The Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) entered into a Grant Arrangement with the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS) to fund the Office of the Pacific Ocean Commissioner (OPOC) in December 2017. This followed a Delegated Cooperation Agreement for joint funding to OPOC between DFAT and the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT) signed in November 2017.

The total value of the Grant Arrangement is AU\$2,320,000, which comprises Official Development Assistance (ODA) funding from both Australia (AU\$690,000) and New Zealand (AU\$1,630,000). In March 2021, the parties agreed to a no-cost extension to the Grant Arrangement to 15 December 2021.

DFAT and MFAT's investment in OPOC supports the mandate from PIF Leaders for 'Good Ocean Governance', articulated in the 2010 Framework for a Pacific Oceanscape (Strategic Priority 2):

Establishment of a Regional Ocean Commissioner, with dedicated professional support, would provide the necessary high-level representation and commitment that is urgently required to ensure dedicated advocacy and attention to ocean priorities, decisions and processes at national, regional and international levels.

Reflecting this mandate, DFAT commissioned the evaluation to assess the extent to which DFAT and MFAT's investment in OPOC has been an effective way to assist advocacy and attention to Pacific Ocean priorities, decisions and processes at national, regional and international levels.

The evaluation sought to inform DFAT and MFAT, as well as other PIF members, on options for future support. The evaluation was also designed to complement a report by the Pacific Ocean Commissioner (POC) for PIF Leaders: (*Blue Pacific Ocean Report 2021*), and was intended to be informative for PIF Leaders and the Ocean Commissioner.

DFAT scheduled and managed the evaluation. The evaluation was undertaken by an independent evaluation team from Strategic Development Group, conducted from October 2020 to January 2021. The evaluation was undertaken in close consultation with OPOC and MFAT.

DFAT has prepared a response to the recommendations from the OPOC evaluation, below. This response is supported by OPOC and MFAT.

Recommendation	Response	Explanation	Action plan	Timeframe
1. Clarify OPOC's mandate, priorities and responsibilities and strategically engage and communicate these clearly to key stakeholders , with a view to gaining stronger stakeholder commitment on engagement with the POC and OPOC and contributing guidance in setting forward workplans.	Agree	DFAT agrees that OPOC's mandate should be reviewed and clarified by regional stakeholders (especially PIF Leaders and CROPs) to ensure it continues to meet needs and expectations.	<p>OPOC will develop a short strategy that articulates its purpose, areas of focus, and ways of working, which can be circulated among key regional and international stakeholders.</p> <p>DFAT will recommend, for the consideration of OPOC and the POC, that they:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish a system for regular consultations with Forum Leaders (for example reinstate an update from the POC as a standing item on the FOC agenda) and engage other stakeholders (such as through the Pacific Ocean Alliance – POA) to review progress against OPOC's mandate. • Support a review of regional ocean governance, including (but not limited to) OPOC's mandate, purpose and institutional arrangements, and the effective and complementary functioning of the POA. 	To be undertaken in the next phase of OPOC. ¹
2. Refine the POC and OPOC's institutional arrangements to align with OPOC's clarified mandate (Recommendation 1 above).	Partially agree	DFAT recognises that the current institutional arrangements may need to further evolve. DFAT supports a comprehensive <i>review</i> of these arrangements, driven by Forum Leaders.	<p>DFAT will support OPOC to propose options for future consideration.</p> <p>See Recommendation 1 re actions associated with a regional ocean governance review.</p>	To be undertaken in the next phase of OPOC

¹ OPOC 5-10 Year Strategy has been mandated by FOC for development and to be tabled at the Pre-Forum FOC in July 2022

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3. Provide OPOC with the requisite budget and staffing profile (covering policy, technical, communications, and administrative skills) to effectively deliver on OPOC's agreed scope of work in the short-term. Over the longer term, ensure OPOC's budget and staffing profile remain aligned with any revisions to OPOC's mandate (per Recommendations 1 and 2 above).	Agree ²	<p>DFAT agreed to maintain OPOC's existing budget and staffing profile under its funding arrangement which concluded 15 December 2021. This was sufficient to deliver its agreed scope of work.</p> <p>Subject to clarification of OPOC's mandate by PIF Leaders, DFAT agrees that OPOC's budget and staffing profile should be designed to support effective delivery of its agreed work functions.</p>	<p>DFAT will continue to engage with MFAT on a collaborative approach to future funding options for OPOC.</p> <p>DFAT will recommend, for the consideration of OPOC and the POC, that they:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore options for diversifying OPOC's funding base. • Develop a strategy for reaching financial sustainability. • Consider the current OPOC staff profile, in particular the need for an additional senior officer(s) to strengthen access to quality technical and policy expertise. 	To be undertaken in the next phase of OPOC
4. Strengthen collaboration with the POA: there is potential for OPOC to more effectively draw on POA resources and engage with POA members to help inform OPOC's work. But given POA membership is a 'broad church', a clear OPOC/POA delineation is essential to limit duplication, confusion and even tension. Implementation of	Agree	<p>DFAT supports OPOC strengthening collaboration with POA members.</p> <p>DFAT agrees this would be supported by a clarified mandate for OPOC (Recommendation 1), and a clear articulation of the respective functions of OPOC and POA that would emerge from a review of regional ocean governance (Recommendation 2).</p> <p>Strengthening OPOC/POA collaboration is consistent with</p>	<p>DFAT will recommend, for the consideration of OPOC and the POC, that they:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinate development of a regional ocean engagement strategy. This strategy would identify approaches for effective engagement between OPOC and other Pacific regional organisations who are members of the POA • Clarify the respective roles of OPOC and the POA. <p>See Recommendation 2 re actions associated with a regional ocean governance review.</p>	To be undertaken in the next phase of OPOC

² Pending financial decision

Recommendation	Response	Explanation	Action plan	Timeframe
Recommendations 1 and 2 above should assist with OPOC/POA delineation, enabling stronger OPOC/POA collaboration over the medium term.		strengthening OPOC's access to quality technical and policy expertise (Rec 3 action plan).		
5. Strengthen GESI: upon implementation of Recommendations 1-3 above, OPOC should consider developing a simple GESI strategy and implementation plan to ensure OPOC incorporates GESI when planning and delivering its work (including events, thematic areas and communications). Noting OPOC's limited capabilities in this area, GESI advisers from PIFS, DFAT and/or MFAT may support this process.	Agree	DFAT is committed to achieving gender equity and social inclusion outcomes in its aid investments.	<p>DFAT will recommend, for the consideration of OPOC and the POC, that they seek advice on incorporating GESI considerations into OPOC's new strategic plan which is under development.</p> <p>In the immediate-short term, OPOC will consider opportunities to progress gender mainstreaming actions such as improvement in reporting of gender disaggregated data and use of gender-sensitive language in policy statements, reports and other knowledge products.</p>	To be undertaken in the next phase of OPOC
6. Strengthen monitoring, evaluation and learning in relation to OPOC's performance, to ensure it remains aligned to emerging regional priorities. These efforts should be tied to	Agree	<p>DFAT supports fit-for-purpose monitoring, evaluation and learning for all of its ODA investments.</p> <p>DFAT supports processes that identify lessons-learned that will assist a</p>	DFAT will recommend, for the consideration of OPOC and the POC, that they design a framework, supported with appropriate M&E capacity, for monitoring its performance and sharing key findings with stakeholders annually in a suitable format. The framework would be aligned to the PIFS M&E framework which is under development.	To be undertaken in the next phase of OPOC

Recommendation	Response	Explanation	Action plan	Timeframe
OPOC's work developing its website and dashboard for tracking ocean initiatives that align with the strategic priorities of the 2010 Framework for a Pacific Oceanscape (FPO).		broader review of Pacific regional governance architecture.		