

Recommendations and Management Response arising from Pacific Aviation Program Evaluation

Sustainable Pacific Air Connectivity Program (SPACP) and Sustainable Pacific Aviation Program (SPA) 2020 to 2024

DFAT Management has reviewed the findings of the *Pacific Aviation Program Evaluation: Sustainable Pacific Air Connectivity Program and Sustainable Pacific Aviation Program 2022 to 2024* (Report). DFAT Management acknowledges the analysis undertaken through the evaluation process and notes the challenges in obtaining access to data and stakeholders to inform the report. Management notes that DFAT's support to Pacific aviation was an urgent response to the severe disruptions of the COVID-19 pandemic and required the development and implementation of innovative and technically complex activities.

The Report identifies strengths and weaknesses in the way the SPACP and SPA were implemented. The Australia-Pacific Partnerships for Aviation (P4A) program, which was designed during 2023 and 2024, before this evaluation process commenced, identified opportunities to strengthen program objectives, systems and mechanisms which align with recommendations set out in the Report. However, there are a number of recommendations, as noted below, that Management will consider incorporating into the P4A Program. The following table sets out Management's response to the recommendations in detail.

Table 1: Independent evaluation recommendations and DFAT management response

Recommendation	Responsible	Response	Actions
Recommendation 1: Maintain DFAT capacity to respond to aviation crises, backed by specific funding, capacities and MEL indicators to determine the success of short-term emergency interventions (Findings 1, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 11) (Strategic, medium priority).	DFAT	Agree	The P4A program has maintained the capacity to be responsive to aviation crises, with a 5-year funding commitment and mechanisms enabling it to pivot to respond to aviation crises, including specialist aviation and advisory panels. Whilst current indicators do not include short term emergency interventions specifically, these would be reflected throughout the MEL system, for example, supporting connectivity for delivery of humanitarian food supplies.

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Recommendation 2: DFAT's Pacific Aviation Team should strengthen the regional delivery approach, ownership by local stakeholders and program sustainability by aligning program priorities and delivery modalities more closely with Pacific priorities. This will mean rebalancing investments away from direct delivery towards building coalitions and implementing primarily through partners (Findings 4, 6, 8, 9, 12 and 14) (Strategic, high priority).	DFAT	Agree	The P4A program has a number of mechanisms for ensuring Pacific priorities are a key consideration for determining program activities. Consultations with Pacific states and regional bodies have contributed to activity planning, while ongoing engagement and flexibility enables the program to respond to emerging needs. Delivery modalities have expanded to program workplans by Australian Government aviation-related agencies, a technical aviation and multi-disciplinary advisory pool, ongoing funding and strategic support to the Pacific Aviation Safety Office, participation in regional forums, and coordination with other donors, including ICAO and New Zealand. A Policy Reference Group has been established with representatives from aviation regulators and the ministries from the Pacific to provide guidance to program delivery.
Recommendation 2 a: Increase engagement with Australian government agencies that have Pacific aviation responsibilities to agree a whole of government approach that informs how Australia engages in aviation markets and strengthen coherence with Australia's broader policy engagement on the Regional Aviation Ministers Meeting, the ICAO council and PASO (Findings 8, 12 and 14	DFAT and other Australian Government Agencies	Agree	The P4A program has arrangements with Air Services Australia, the Australian Transport Safety Bureau, Bureau of Meteorology and Civil Aviation Safety Authority. These arrangements include dedicated funding to the end of the program. Activities are set out in annual workplans, and are embedded into program planning, MEL and communications plans. The P4A program liaises routinely with the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Cities and Regional Development to ensure policy alignment prior to regional forums such as Regional Aviation Ministers Meetings and PASO Council meetings. P4A representatives also collaborate closely with the ICAO-PSIDS Liaison Office in Nadi, a position funded in part by DITRDCA.

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Recommendation 2 b: Agree more measurable, strategic objectives with Pacific and aviation stakeholders that align with the regional architecture. Consider replacing Intermediate Outcomes (IOs) in the program logic with these priorities (Findings 2, 4, 10, 13 and 14).	DFAT	Agree	The P4A program acknowledges the importance of agreeing measurable, strategic objectives with Pacific and aviation stakeholders that align with the regional architecture. The program logic's intermediate outcomes are reflective of commitments at the regional level. P4A maximises opportunities to progress regional solutions, such as support to PASO, collaboration with ICAO on the Implementation Support Roadmap and initiatives to build the Pacific aviation workforce.
Recommendation 2 c: Consult Australian and Pacific partners to incorporate expert perspectives in the selection of appropriate partners, aiming to reduce the reliance on technical advisers (Findings 4, 6, 12 and 14).	DFAT	Noted, and agreed in principle	Where feasible, the program consults Pacific partners when engaging or procuring expertise and technical advice. A Policy Reference Group has been established with representatives from Pacific aviation regulators and the ministries to provide guidance on program delivery. Alongside technical advisers, Australian Government agencies also offer technical expertise to program partners, and shape internal activity planning and development (for example, reviewing terms of reference, or adviser outputs). Specific expertise is drawn from a multi-disciplinary pool to respond to specific tasks, alongside P4A policy advisers who work in specific countries and who are highly valued by the relevant Pacific Government and stakeholders.
Recommendation 2 d: Establish coordination and governance systems that identify and consider Pacific priorities in decision making, and promote transparency of decision-making (Findings 4, 12 and 14).	DFAT	Agree	A Policy Reference Group has been established with representatives from aviation regulators and the ministries from the Pacific to provide feedback and guidance on program delivery. The program logic establishes clearly the scope of the program's activities and its objectives. A public-facing program website, Facebook page and

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			LinkedIn have increased awareness and understanding of the program.
Recommendation 2 e: Consider establishing a Strategic Advisory Group with representatives of relevant agencies to support coordination, prioritisation, ownership and governance. Recommended membership: DITRDCA, International Civil Aviation Authority (ICAO), PASO, Pacific Regional Infrastructure Facility (PRIF), a representative of a Pacific Island Country and a development bank (Findings 8 and 14).	DFAT	Noted, and agreed in principle	The P4A program currently has robust governance systems in place, including a Program Executive Committee, comprising senior executives in DFAT, and chaired by the relevant First Assistant Secretary. Other government departments attend where relevant. The P4A Program has a whole of Australian Government working group comprising program partners such as BOM, ATSB, CASA and ASA, which coordinates program activities and establishes priorities for the program. DFAT regularly engages directly and substantively with DITRDCA, ICAO, PASO and the World Bank. It is also a member of the PRIF Transport Working Group. Alongside the Policy Reference Group, DFAT engages regularly and directly with Partner governments, regulators and aviation stakeholders. A Strategic Advisory Group, in addition to the above governance mechanisms, would be a duplication.
Recommendation 2 f: Prioritise planning for the next phase of the air connectivity routes financially supported by DFAT, to allow stakeholders and travellers to plan in advance, maximise the potential for sustainability and minimise future disruptions (Findings 4 and 14).	DFAT	Agreed	DFAT recognises the importance of maximising success and sustainability through longer-term planning. The P4A program has moved from shorter to longer term contracts for supporting connectivity in the North Pacific to the South Pacific (and Australia). This has enabled longer term planning by the provider of the service, for example in promoting and selling tickets. The current North Pacific Connector (NPC) route is currently being tendered and will be for a 2-year period instead of a 1-year contract. A North Pacific Aviation Summit was held in Canberra in March

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			2026. Representatives from all NPC countries met with the intent to identify initiatives to support NPC sustainability.
Recommendation 2g: When considering future financial support to air connectivity in the Pacific, consult with DITRDCA and contract an expert route analysis to inform the decision, including likely liability, time to handover and any remaining community service obligations (Findings 8 and 13).	DFAT	Noted	DFAT draws on appropriate expertise to inform financial support to air connectivity, including from CASA and private sector experts. Economic analysis has been procured to utilise data collected towards air connectivity support, and to inform future program support, including route analysis. The upcoming tender for the NPC requires proposals to include details related to the operation of scheduled commercial flights between Australia, Nauru, Kiribati, FSM, RMI and Palau.
Recommendation 2 h: Review the P4A roles and responsibilities across DFAT Canberra, DFAT Nadi Office and the Managing Contractor for clarity and value add (Section 3.4) (Findings 8, 10, 12).	DFAT	Agree	DFAT Canberra, DFAT Nadi and the Managing Contractor continue to actively engage on managing P4A roles and responsibilities, and ways of working. There are regular meetings between DFAT, the Managing Contractor, and implementing partners. The Program Office in Nadi has been established, with DFAT Nadi and the Managing Contractor operating together out of this office. A Program Conference every 12-18 months brings program implementing partners together to discuss program initiatives and help clarify roles and responsibilities.
Recommendation 3: review investments in aviation safety and strengthen the approach to risk management (Finding 6, 7, 8, 12 and 13) (Operational, high priority).	DFAT	Agree	DFAT agrees with the importance of robust risk management and will consider opportunities to strengthen the approach to aviation safety activities.
Recommendation 3 a: Re-balance support for aviation safety investments to align more closely with regional	DFAT	Agree	Through the P4A Program, DFAT has arrangements with Australian Government aviation related agencies to provide technical expertise to the Pacific. It also has a funding

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aviation safety architecture, in particular to agencies that lead aviation safety e.g. PASO, CASA, rather than individual advisers through PRES (Findings 6, 12 and 14).			arrangement with PASO, supporting its regulatory oversight to its members and strengthening service delivery and capacity of this safety-focused regional organisation. P4A coordinates closely with ICAO, drawing on its expertise and supporting its work in the Pacific. Individual advisers and their expertise support the investments but do not lead on aviation safety.
Recommendation 3 b: Seek an expert internal review or audit of the program's approach to risk management to identify opportunities to ensure alignment with DFAT standards, with a focus on aviation safety. If agreed by the internal expert, engage an aviation industry expert to develop a tailored activity level risk management framework that combines industry standard risk tools with capacity assessment approaches. Apply this risk framework at activity level (Finding 12).	DFAT	Agree/Noted	DFAT recognises that the risks inherent in an aviation program are significant and the new P4A Program's governance arrangements are therefore designed to address risk at the strategic, program, country and activity levels. The Program Executive Committee, comprising senior executive of the Office of the Pacific, meets routinely to oversight the program direction and implementation, with risk management a standing agenda item. Risk registers are maintained by DFAT, and the Managing Contractor covering strategic, programmatic and operational risks. Risk is discussed at a range of different management meetings. To the extent that the program deals with aviation safety risks, these are managed by subject matter experts, regional organisations such as the Pacific Aviation Safety Office, and Australian Government agencies with aviation safety responsibilities. DFAT will consider engaging an industry aviation safety adviser to ensure alignment with DFAT standards and to develop an activity level risk management framework for aviation safety activities.
Recommendation 3 c: Ensure the governance system (Recommendation	DFAT	Agree	In line with the above, DFAT will consider this recommendation further for the P4A program. P4A

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2d) provides appropriate technical skill and oversight of aviation safety risks (Finding 12).			governance mechanisms currently consider risk as a standing agenda item, including risks arising from personnel, activities and the external aviation environment.
Recommendation 3 d: Review advisory rosters and strengthen project controls to ensure that advisers are only providing support on areas they would be qualified to deliver in Australia or Pacific Countries, especially related to aviation safety (Findings 6, 7 and 12).	DFAT	Agree	DFAT will continue to review on a rolling basis adviser rosters and consider additional project controls to strengthen risk mitigation in relation to advisory support. A Technical Advisory Panel is used to draw on specialised expertise. DFAT has contractual mechanisms in place to ensure that individual advisers provide advice within their areas of expertise, and has broadened its access to aviation expertise through the establishment of a specialist advisory panel.
Recommendation 4: Complete the interim GEDSI strategy and ensure it is agreed with stakeholders (see Recommendation 2) (Finding 9). Given DFAT's increased attention to climate change, consider also agreeing an approach to climate change with stakeholders. (Strategic, medium priority).	DFAT	Agree	A GEDSI strategy and Gender Action Plan has been developed for the P4A program, with country analyses. The Managing Contractor senior management team includes a Communications, Performance and Inclusion Lead, with deep expertise in GEDSI in the Pacific, with support of MEL and inclusion specialist, and access to a multi-disciplinary pool to respond to specific tasks. Resourcing for activities in gender equality, disability equity and climate change are part of the annual work plan.
Recommendation 5: Strengthen governance and MEL systems to ensure evidence and learning informs program decision-making and achievement of	DFAT	Agree	A robust MEL system has been developed for the P4A program, guided by a short-term adviser with depth of experience and expertise in Monitoring and Evaluation, and with a full-time MEL and Inclusion Specialist engaged by the

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EOPOs, in line with DFAT standards (Findings 6, 7, 9, 12 and 13) (Operational, medium priority).			Managing Contractor. The results of the MEL Framework are reflected in 6-monthly reports, and 'review and reflect' sessions, as well as case studies and other in-depth analysis of program activities. Evidence and learning from MEL informs program decision making.