

2024 Independent Mid-term Review and Evaluation of the Pacific Ocean Litter Project

Joint Management Response from Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW)

Summary of Management Response

The Australian Government welcomes the findings and recommendations of the 2024 mid-term review and evaluation of the Pacific Ocean Litter Project (POLP, 2019-2027). The independent review provides an important evaluation of the POLP's progress at the mid-point of the project. The review reflects on challenges faced in implementation and progress to date, and provides constructive recommendations concerning governance, relevance, effectiveness, gender equity, disability and social inclusion (GEDSI), and sustainability.

Responses to recommendations of the mid-term review are provided in the table below.

Joint Management Response – Mid-term review and evaluation of the Pacific Ocean Litter Project (POLP)

Recommendations	Response	Explanation	Action	Timeframe
1. Ensure that DFAT's and DCCEE's respective roles and responsibilities at the POLP Officer level are clear and reflect DCCEE's decision-making responsibilities for project implementation and decisions requiring referral to DFAT	Agree	The mid-term review identified that there is lack of clarity about what strategic funding decisions can be made by DCCEE without consulting DFAT. This needs to be clarified in the project's governance structure.	DCCEE and DFAT will update respective roles and responsibilities in the project's governance structure, including to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Confirm DFAT's role in providing high level oversight of strategic direction and risk management in accordance with Australian development program objectives and requirements. - Confirm DCCEE's role as the Australian Government implementation partner for providing strategic direction and technical advice to the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP), including decision-making for POLP activities. 	June 2025
2. Update the governance structure and roles to reflect oversight of the POLP PIM funding, DFAT's current resourcing at the POLP Officer level and the Project Advisory Group's role	Agree in part	<p>DFAT have an agreement with SPREP for employment of the POLP Project Implementation Manager.</p> <p>The project's governance structure requires updating to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reflect the reprioritisation of resource allocation in light of DCCEE resourcing. - Remove the Project Advisory Group and update sources of expert advice for technical matters and quality review. 	<p>DCCEE and DFAT will update the project's governance structure to reflect DFAT's oversight of PIM funding and resourcing at officer level in light of DCCEE resourcing.</p> <p>A Project Advisory Group was not established at the beginning of project and would be an additional impost on the workload of the POLP Project Management Unit (PMU) at a time when all PMU resources are needed to progress national implementation priorities.</p> <p>The Australian Government considers that independent, expert advice should be</p>	August 2025

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			<p>sought on as needs basis. E.g., expertise may be required for MERL, GEDSI and compliance and enforcement activities.</p> <p>A regular donor roundtable would be useful for coordination of waste and pollution projects (refer to Rec 7).</p>	
3. Ensure that there are clear guidelines on the allocation of PMU resources for SPREP WMPC events and activities that benefit POLP's implementation	Agree	The mid-term review identified that there is a risk that POLP's focus and resources can be drawn into other SPREP programs at a level that may diminish POLP's focus and outcomes.	<p>Project partners agree that POLP will prioritise implementation of national activities for the remainder of the project.</p> <p>Expenditure on events and regional activities will be carefully considered by DCCEEW in approval of POLP annual work plans and budgets.</p> <p>Events that are not included in the approved annual work plan and budget, or exceed a 10% variance allowance, will be further considered by DCCEEW.</p> <p>Variances to the approved AWPB will not require DFAT review and approval unless DCCEEW consider they pose a risk that needs to be elevated.</p>	Ongoing
4. Ensure that the approach to pilot country implementation includes appropriate processes, guidance and support to accommodate national governance	Agree	The mid-term review identified that POLP's guidance about national governance arrangements and processes for pilot PICs could be strengthened and formalised.	DCCEEW will work with the POLP PMU to provide guidance to Pacific island ministries and National Project Officers about processes for engagement in POLP activities.	Ongoing

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arrangements (and limitations), including requirements and expectations for governance and reporting			Reporting templates have been provided to participating ministries and National Project Officers to support governance and reporting requirements. Additional support will be provided through MERL guidance for implementation and reporting on national-level activities.	
5. Ensure that requirements and expectations for PIC data collection and reporting are formalised, and consider a common MEL platform for collecting and reporting PIC MEL data	Agree in part	The mid-term review identified that while the project's approach to monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) is underpinned by a comprehensive and detailed MEL framework, data collection, monitoring and reporting is resource intensive and reliant on the timeliness, utility and quality of data and reports shared between all POLP partners. The review also noted the collection and reporting of MEL data in Pacific island countries is adapted to local contexts and capacity. But there is likely value in standardisation of local data collection, reporting requirements and tools.	DCCEEW will work with the POLP PMU to provide additional expert MEL support to strengthen monitoring, evaluation and reporting of POLP activities in cooperation with participating Pacific island countries. Coastal monitoring activities to be delivered in 2025-26 in partnership with the CSIRO will provide a standardised survey methodology for the region and help build the capacity of Pacific island countries and National Project Officers (NPOs) to monitor, evaluate and learn from the implementation of on-ground activities and build MERL capability for delivery and reporting on other national-level POLP activities.	Ongoing
6. Consider additional MEL expertise / support to strengthen the approach to MEL, including streamlining, aggregation of MEL results for	Agree	As POLP's implementation progresses, monitoring and evaluation will become more demanding and complex. Additional MEL expertise could	DCCEEW will work with the POLP PMU to source additional monitoring, evaluation, reporting and learning support for project implementation, balancing this against efforts to deliver program outputs, including	June 2025

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similar activities in PICs, strengthening the measurement of GEDSI outcomes, improving the depth and quality of reports and focusing on long-term outcomes and impacts		support aggregation and reporting on results.	exploring fee for service expertise to review activity plans and support analysis/learnings in reporting.	
7. Consider establishing a more formal mechanism for coordination of donor activities through existing SPREP structures or using the reactivated technical Project Advisory Group with representation from other donor and development partners	Agree in part	Project coordination could be formalised through mechanisms such as regular donor and development partner meetings and opportunities to build on existing SPREP resources and mechanism for structured coordination.	<p>The donor roundtable at the 4th Clean Pacific Roundtable hosted by SPREP was a useful meeting to share information about existing and proposed donor activities to address waste and pollution in the region.</p> <p>DCCEEW will work with SPREP to facilitate more regular virtual donor meetings for improved coordination with SPREP donor partners on waste and pollution development projects.</p>	Ongoing
8. Continue to accelerate national implementation through a priority focus on finalising LOAs and consider enhancing the PMU's technical capacity to provide on-ground support until NPOs are established	Agree	The mid-term review identified that delays in recruiting National Project Officers (NPOs) will have a significant impact on implementation progress, and there may be a need to boost the PMU's technical capacity to provide on-ground assistance until NPOs are established.	<p>The PMU has the technical capacity to support PICs in implementation of national activities, however it is resource intensive and requires travel.</p> <p>Australia approved recruitment of an administrative support officer for the PMU, with an appointment being made in July 2024.</p> <p>DCCEEW is working with the POLP PMU to support NPO induction processes and finalisation of national implementation plans, which are being developed by NPOs</p>	Ongoing

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			in cooperation with the POLP PMU for delivery of national-level activities.	
9. Ensure implementation in remaining PICs includes realistic timeframes, and support and capacity building to address the challenges in national implementation	Agree	Pacific island countries face several challenges in implementation, including processes and capacity constraints in national governments, logistical challenges, other competing priorities, availability of local expertise and specialist facilities and delays in recruiting NPOs.	Australia's preference is for the POLP PMU to focus on supporting national implementation in countries with NPOs in place, however, other countries will also be supported if activities can be delivered in cooperation with National Focal Points and other partners to support capacity.	Ongoing
10. Consider establishing a regional committee or 'community of practice' for PICs, with formal channels and processes for communication, information dissemination and collaboration	Agree in part	This would enable Pacific island country experiences to share knowledge about the development of national activities that are relevant and responsive to local needs, priorities and capacities can be leveraged.	Noting the potential for communities of practice to be an additional impost on the limited resources and capacity of Pacific island governments, the PMU will develop a community of practice for NPOs. This will help NPOs to share experiences about the development and implementation of national activities in their countries, build capacity and respond to the priorities of the countries that NPOs are working in to deliver POLP activities. The POLP PMU is also developing a plastics webpage for SPREP's website to share information and seek feedback about regional actions to address plastic pollution.	Ongoing
11. Utilise specialist GEDSI expertise to strengthen POLP's approach to GEDSI in	Agree	The mid-term review found that access to specialist GEDSI expertise is needed to strengthen	SPREP have a new Gender Adviser and are finalising their GEDSI policy. The Gender Adviser will support a 'people-centred'	Ongoing

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implementing activities, collecting disaggregated data and measuring results		POLP's approach to GEDSI programming and reporting.	approach to country-level activity planning for the POLP through provision of advice and assistance to the POLP PMU and NPOs.	
12. Ensure the focus on national-level implementation addresses the key directions for sustainability that are identified in this report	Agree	<p>The mid-term review identified the following focus areas for national-level implementation to support the project's sustainability:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • supporting new or improved SUP regulations, and related compliance and enforcement mechanisms • supporting the development of standards and certification arrangements • engaging with local communities, including rural and remote communities • supporting local producers to overcome competitive disadvantages to sustainable alternatives compared to mass-produced and cheaper imports (for example through tariffs and import restrictions) • education and awareness activities • capacity building required to support sustainability, such as strengthening national governance arrangements, developing local expertise, 	Australia agrees with the focus areas to address project sustainability and will continue to work with the POLP PMU to support development and implementation of activities for SUP legislative bans, standards and certification processes to reduce SUPs in the Pacific tourism sector, and build regional awareness and capacity to reduce and replace SUPs with sustainable substitutes, among other activities in cooperation with Pacific island governments and communities.	Ongoing

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		simplifying compliance arrangements and knowledge and skills transfer to local authorities and communities.		
13. For the future delivery of POLP, consider locating POLP's focus as an integrated component of SPREP's WMPC program	Agree	The Australian Government is currently reviewing the SPREP funding support mechanism under the Partnership Arrangement and considering moving to a more programmatic approach. For the next phase of POLP, and as the project matures, it may be more advantageous to deliver POLP as part of an integrated WPMC program. In this case, POLP's funding arrangements, the respective roles and responsibilities of DFAT, DCCEEW and SPREP, and the associated governance structure, will need to be reviewed, discussed and revised.	Australia will consider this recommendation with respect to the findings of the mid-term review of the Australia-SPREP Partnership Arrangement and discuss with SPREP POLP arrangements as required to meet broader policy and development objectives.	December 2025