TETRA TECH
International Development

Independent Evaluation of the Pacific Research Program Phase 2

Final Evaluation Report

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The evaluation team also wishes to pay respects to First Nations Elders, past and present, of the lands on which this evaluation was undertaken. Tetra Tech International Development recognises the traditional custodians of country, and their continuing connection to lands, waters and communities. We also acknowledge and honour the vanua, community leaders, elders and peoples of the Pacific Islands where this evaluation was undertaken. We recognise the unique relationships that Pacific peoples hold with their land, sea and living heritage - relationships that underpin wellbeing, governance and knowledge systems in each place. Through this acknowledgement, we commit to ongoing learning and understanding on our journey to reconciliation and decolonising approaches.

About the Evaluation Report

Storying and reStorying

Today, Pasifika is moving towards what is called 'reStorying'. The word '*Story*' encompasses many stories. Stories are at the heart of how Pasifika people provide cues to life, landmarks for migration and signs for orientation. The term captures Pasifika stories, including stories of movements of peoples, bodies, things, ideas, power, ideologies, relationships, material and immaterial, politics, economies, health and wellbeing, spiritualities, and cultures and languages in the Pasifika communities. Pasifika, as a diverse and distinctive region, deserves to have its place alongside other stories.

This evaluation is not just about evaluating a story or stories. It is about understanding the different strands of the PRP story woven by different peoples, from different contexts, space and time. It reflects that reStorying needs a performative process of deconstructing old stories and reconstructing new ones, to the point of actioning and applying these newly created ones to life and wellbeing. The prefix '*re*' reflects *re-visiting, re-imagining, re-claiming, re-positioning*, and *re-telling.* The suffix '*ing*' implies that the colonial story is still very much alive and therefore needs living responses.

This Evaluation Report is structured around these strands of reStorying: *revisiting, reimagining, repositioning,* and *retelling*. For more information about the reStorying approach, see Annex 6.

Abbreviations

AEC	Australian Electoral Commission
ANU	Australian National University
APS	Australian Public Service
AUD	Australian Dollar
CCF	Citizens' Constitutional Forum (Fiji)
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Australia)
Devpol	Development Policy Centre (ANU)
DPA	Department of Pacific Affairs (ANU)
DWU	Divine Word University (Papua New Guinea)
EOPO	End-of-Program Outcome
FCOSS	Fiji Council of Social Services
FTE	Full-Time Equivalent
GEDSI	Gender Equality, Disability, and Social Inclusion
HDR	Higher Degree by Research
KEQ	Key Evaluation Question
LM	Labour Mobility
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NIG	National Institute Grant (ANU)
NRI	National Research Institute (Papua New Guinea)
NSDTA	National Service Delivery Trends Assessment
NUS	National University of Samoa
NUV	National University of Vanuatu
OPD	Organisation of Persons with Disabilities
PALM	Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (Scheme)
PAS	Pacific Attitudes Survey
PEPE	Promoting Effective Public Expenditure (PNG)
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy
PNG	Papua New Guinea
PRC	Pacific Research Colloquium
PRP	Pacific Research Program
PRPSMG	PRP Strategic Management Group
PSC	Pacific Security College
SHSS	School of Humanities and Social Sciences (UPNG)
SIEC	Solomon Islands Electoral Commission
SINU	Solomon Islands National University
SPC	Pacific Community (formerly Secretariat of the Pacific Community)
SSGM	State, Society and Governance in Melanesia Program (ANU)
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNSW	University of New South Wales
UPNG	University of Papua New Guinea
USP	University of the South Pacific
VfM	Value for Money
WLI	Women Leading and Influencing (Australia Awards)

1 Minding the Story (Executive Summary)

1.1 About this Report

This Executive Summary presents the key findings, methodology, and recommendations from the independent evaluation of the Pacific Research Program Phase II (PRP II), commissioned by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and conducted by Tetra Tech International Development from August to December 2025. PRP II is an initiative designed to deepen Australia-Pacific research partnerships, strengthen Pacific-led research capacity, and enhance the production and use of evidence in policy and public debate across the region. Implemented by a consortium led by the Department of Pacific Affairs (Australian National University (ANU)), with the Development Policy Centre (ANU) and the Lowy Institute, PRP II conducts activities across multiple countries and institutions, supporting Pacific-focussed research that is inclusive, contextually relevant, and aligned with regional and national priorities.

This Evaluation Report will refer to "PRP" when referring to the current phase of delivery (2022-2027), except where a distinction from the previous phase i.e. PRP Phase I (2017-2022) is required.

1.2 Methodology

A mixed methods approach was adopted for this evaluation, including a document review, semi-structured interviews, inclusive dialogues, short case studies and sensemaking/validation workshops. For an overview of methodology, locations of data collection and stakeholders consulted see Annex 2.

The evaluation methodology was guided by the Kakala Research Framework, as developed by Konai Helu Thaman, Ana Taufe'ulungaki, and Seu'ula Johansson-Fua. This Kakala framework allowed the evaluation to reflect Pacific epistemologies while aligning with DFAT's requirements for utilisation-focussed, rigorous evaluation.

The evaluation process included:

- **Teu (preparation and design):** This stage involved conceptualising key questions together with Pacific consultants within the evaluation team and DFAT, which helped us design the evaluation and plan for the work.
- **Toli (gathering the flowers):** This stage involved the collaborative scoping with DFAT, Department of Pacific Affairs (ANU) and the evaluation team's Pacific Research Adviser and National Consultants, for the careful selection of relevant stakeholders for involvement in the evaluation. The evaluation team also analysed PRP documentation, reports, and outputs, which were coded against an analytical framework aligned with the key evaluation questions (KEQs).
- **Tui (weaving the garland):** In this evaluation, Tui encompassed the dialogical aspects of data collection, in conducting interviews, and Talanoa and reflective dialogues in Australia, Fiji, Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea (PNG), and remotely in Vanuatu and Samoa. A total of 69 stakeholders were consulted through 47 in-person and 22 remote interviews and focus group discussions. Participants included DFAT staff, PRP implementing partners, Pacific and Australian tertiary sector representatives, policy and development stakeholders, and media.
- **Luva (gifting the garland):** Luva has been applied through incorporating Indigenous Pacific and cultural framing as part of the evaluation, as well as through incorporating dissemination events of findings to enable discussion and return findings to a wider group of stakeholders (with approval from DFAT). Short case studies were developed to illustrate progress, enablers, and constraints in key thematic areas.
- **Malie (monitoring and reflection):** Through continuous reflective practice, our team have reflected on whether stakeholder discussions were meaningful and honest, and whether they served the needs of the communities. The team made real-time adjustments to the process, and updated data collection tools as required to ensure a utilisation-focussed approach whereby knowledge production was intended to serve the stakeholders it serves. Internal workshops were held to triangulate evidence, test findings, and ensure accuracy. The evaluation used a contribution lens, integrating Gender Equality, Disability, and Social Inclusion (GEDSI) considerations throughout.

Limitations: The evaluation was constrained by incomplete reporting for the most recent financial year (due to a shift from financial year to calendar year narrative and financial reporting for 2025 and 2026) variable stakeholder exposure to PRP activities, and some challenges in attributing outcomes to PRP versus other investments. Despite these, the evaluation draws on a robust evidence base and wide stakeholder engagement.

1.3 Findings

1.3.1 Revisiting: Effectiveness

PRP has made strong progress toward its three End-of-Program Outcomes (EOPOs):

EOPO1: Better informed Pacific policy makers

End of Program Outcome 1 (EOPO1) aimed to support Pacific policy makers to develop a deeper understanding of the Pacific development context and regional geo-politics, through the delivery of quality, well-targeted independent research that supports evidence-based policy making. It also aimed to deepen engagement between Pacific policy makers and researchers to support evidence-based policy making. Research was conducted across five thematic areas: Gender, Inclusion and Social Change (19 projects); Pacific Labour Mobility and Integration (17 projects); Politics, Governance and Economic Resilience (16 projects); Papua New Guinea, including Bougainville (11 projects); and Security, Regionalism and Geopolitics (19 projects). This saw PRP engage in 82 research projects over the period of 2022-2025.

This evaluation found that EOPO1 was partially achieved, with full achievement unlikely during the program duration. This assessment is based on the wording of the outcome and issues in the causal logic between activities and EOPOs, given EOPO 1 is focussed on Pacific policy makers and their deepened level of understanding of the Pacific, while program activities and MEL primarily focussed on conducting and publishing research.

Evidence available for this evaluation suggests that Australian (and particularly Canberra-based) policy makers were the primary intended stakeholder group for PRP research. Engagement with Pacific policy makers and DFAT Posts was less systematic than with Canberra-based stakeholders across all research themes, and opportunities remain to strengthen engagement with regional and national stakeholders, local communities and civil society. While the program logic does not define “Pacific policy makers”, wording in the Investment Design Document (IDD) indicates the program is intended to benefit both audiences.

Whilst the evaluation only considers EOPO1 as partially achieved, there is **strong evidence that PRP made good progress in producing high-quality, policy-relevant research and analysis across its five thematic areas.** PRP has produced 102 peer-reviewed publications published between 1 July 2022 – 31 December 2024 and 766 Pacific-focussed blog posts from 1 July 2022 – 31 October 2025, with a trend toward more policy-focused outputs. Large national and regional studies have addressed critical data gaps, particularly in PNG and Solomon Islands, supporting planning, budgeting, and reform. There are examples of research being used by national stakeholders to inform Pacific policy and practice, with evidence from elections research utilised by electoral commissions and parliamentary committees. Research on Pacific labour mobility and integration was particularly influential in shaping Australian and Pacific policy. Gender equity research has informed program design for DFAT’s leadership and governance projects in PNG.

While there are notable examples of research engagement and uptake in the Pacific, it is unclear the extent to which Pacific-based policy makers were consulted on their research priorities, and there is an opportunity to strengthen the balance between Australian and Pacific policy interests.

EOPO2: Stronger Pacific research partnerships and practice

End of Program Outcome 2 (EOPO2) aims to ensure that Pacific researchers and institutions are better equipped to undertake, manage, and drive Pacific research and deliver quality research outcomes. The program also aims to strengthen research networks and communities of practice through enhanced research and education partnerships.

PRP has made good progress on building individual researcher capacity, and fair progress on building institutional research capacity, with opportunities to strengthen institutional partnerships beyond project-based arrangements. Collaborative research was a key vehicle for strengthening the Pacific research ecosystem, noting much of the research collaboration and outputs occur more at the individual level rather than institutional level. This is common for academic research projects engaging specific expertise (including at Australian universities), and enabled researchers to participate efficiently noting bureaucratic challenges within their institutions, while institutional agreements are more common for academic staff capacity and professional development engagements.

Efforts to build research capacity include several initiatives, including the flagship Pacific Research Colloquium (PRC), and support for the Pacific Islands University Research Network and the Pacific Islands Political Science Association. In addition, PhD scholarships (with 54 per cent of the current cohort of Pacific heritage), collaborative research projects, embedded academics, Pacific Visitorships, and joint supervision models. Partnerships with national universities (e.g. SINU, UPNG, NUS and NUV) have deepened, and Pacific researchers are increasingly leading and co-authoring research. However, capacity-building remains uneven, and further efforts at the institutional level and coordination with other DFAT programs is needed to maximise impact and sustainability.

Risks to sustainability under EOPO2 include ongoing structural constraints to the ability of Pacific institutions to lead and publish research. These include high teaching loads, limited access to academic journals, insufficient incentives for research, and staff turnover (including brain drain). Smaller universities also report limited research

infrastructure (e.g. lab facilities, analytical software). Stakeholders noted the risk of ongoing reliance on international experts to lead Pacific research and provide mentoring and expertise.

EOPO3: Greater Pacific awareness

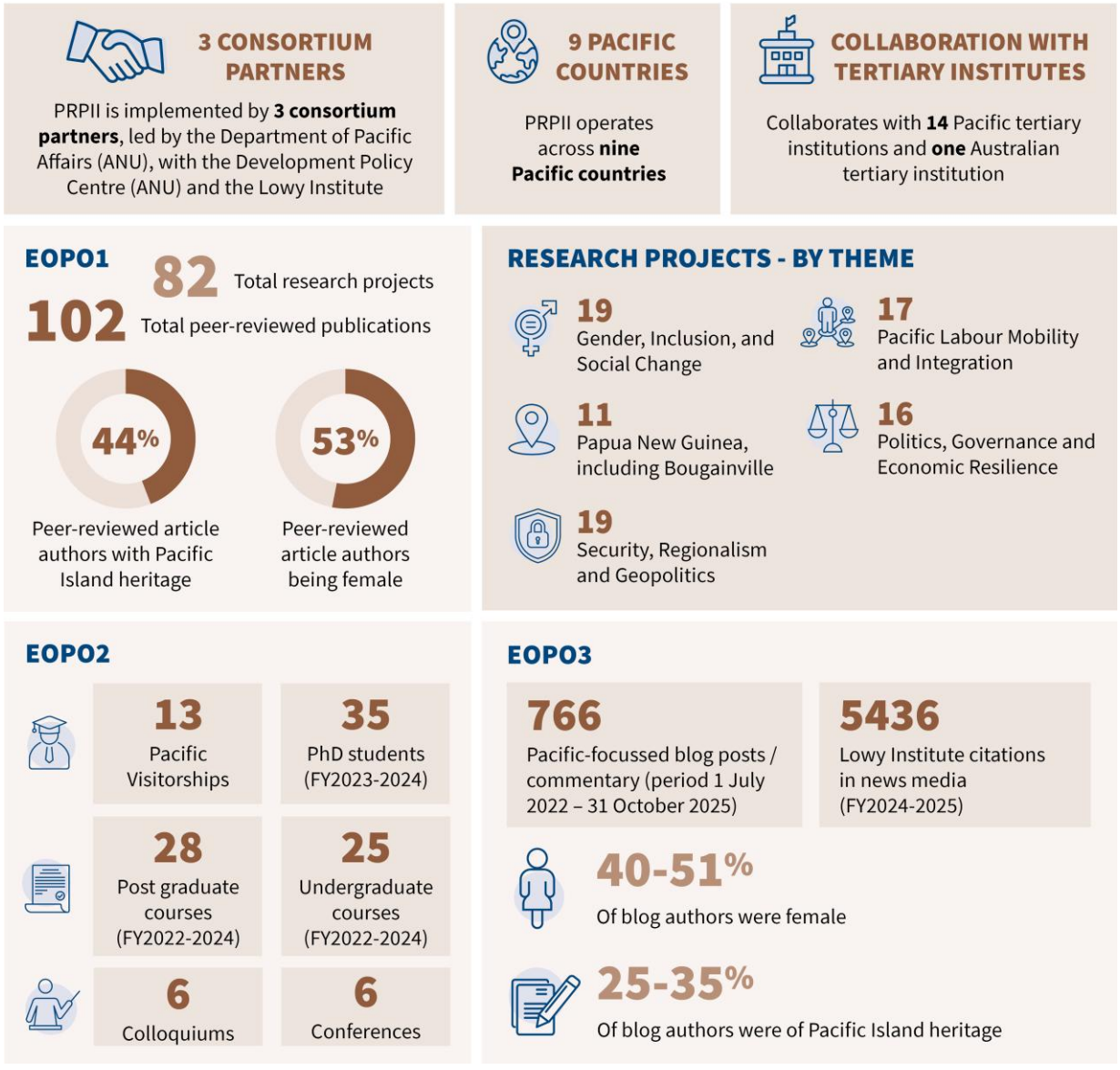
End of Program Outcome 3 aims to ensure that PRP research and analysis contribute to public debate and reaches a broader audience, therefore supporting greater Pacific awareness. This was achieved largely through the blog posts, podcasts, commentary and articles generated by consortium partners, particularly the Lowy Institute and Devpol. Consortium partners also built Pacific awareness in DFAT policy makers and the diplomatic community, including through requested briefings and contributions to the two-day "Understanding the Pacific" course.

This evaluation found that PRP has made **good progress on EOPO3. Multiple stakeholder groups noted the unique contribution being made by PRP-supported blog posts, articles, and commentary, which were regarded as a "trusted voice" that amplified Pacific perspectives to international audiences.** PRP researchers were published in major international outlets - for example 39 articles in 2022-2023, across outlets including the Wall Street Journal, Reuters, and the Washington Post, and republished in Pacific media outlets.

Citation data is also an important indicator of research reach. Citations in news media of Lowy Institutes' research publications and academics have increased year-on-year throughout the program, with PRP analysis and research cited 5,436 times in FY2024-25, nearly 5000 times in FY2023-2024, and 1,664 times in FY2022-23.

A key achievement of PRP has been the elevation of Pacific voices in public debate, which is seen across all consortium partners. One stakeholder noted: *"Seeing Pacific names as authors and co-authors is a very powerful thing, adds credence to the analysis."* Approximately 25 per cent of Lowy Interpreter blog posts having a Pacific Islands author. In FY2024-25, 35% of authors of Pacific-focused Devpolicy blog articles were of Pacific Islands heritage. As captured under EOPO1, Pacific Islands authorship has increased for DPA publications, with 44% of authors having Pacific Islands heritage in Phase II, compared to 32% in Phase I.

Figure 1: PRP II projects and activities



There is scope to further empower Pacific researchers, especially younger voices, to lead public commentary and analysis. There is still a tendency for Australian academics to be lead authors on publications and commentary related to Pacific issues.

Representation of women as authors on PRP blog posts has reached (or is approaching) gender parity. Across the program, 51% of all Pacific-focused Lowy Interpreter authors were female, while for the most recent year (FY2024-2025) 40% of authors of Pacific-focused Devpolicy blog articles were female.

PRP strengthened Pacific knowledge amongst policy makers and practitioners by delivering targeted briefings to diplomats, government officials, and regional agencies, with reporting indicating hundreds of briefings are held annually by consortium partners for diplomats, government agencies, private sector, media, multilateral and other development organisations. While the evaluation team was unable to capture or review feedback from briefed stakeholders, the high volume speaks to the reputation of and trust in consortium partners, and the value of their responsiveness and accessibility.

The program's support for Pacific Studies at ANU has contributed to growing enrolments and a unique pipeline of Pacific-aware graduates. It's unclear the extent to which ANU would be able to self-sustain the current extent of Pacific Studies courses should there be changes to the provision of government funding.

1.3.2 GEDSI Integration

PRP has positioned gender equality as a core principle across its research, policy engagement, partnerships and capacity development. PRP has mainstreamed gender equality across its activities, with a GEDSI Strategy institutionalising gender analysis and participation. While comprehensive, the GEDSI Strategy was delivered quite late in the program, in April 2024. Even before the strategy was finalised, dedicated research on Gender, Inclusion and Social Change saw 19 targeted GEDSI projects, with the majority of projects focussed on gender including women's experience of violence, labour mobility programs, political participation, leadership, and civic engagement.

Gender equality research has informed DFAT programming and policy, particularly on women's political participation, governance and leadership (e.g., PNG and Solomon Islands election studies and the PNG Improving Political Inclusion and Participation program (IPIP). The GEDSI strategy has articulated and strengthened internal systems, for example, requiring gender analysis in project proposals, embedding gender objectives in project design and event planning, and providing technical guidance via dedicated gender advisors - while PRP's investments in Pacific women's research leadership and regional knowledge assets (such as the Toksave Pacific Gender Resource) constitute a lasting program legacy.

Disability inclusion within PRP has been present but uneven and less institutionalised than gender work. Disability considerations appear intermittently in disaggregated data and some projects used accessible methods, but there are gaps related to consistency of rights-based framing, standardised adaptations to research to improve accessibility (for enumerators and participants), and no dedicated technical support for disability equity.

Key opportunities to strengthen GEDSI include formalising resourcing and oversight for GEDSI mainstreaming (including through a funded GEDSI advisor), embedding mandatory GEDSI requirements across templates and agreements, scaling co-designed partnerships with OPDs and other civil society groups, standardising accessibility and universal design for outputs and events, expanding disability-inclusive capacity building, and translating GEDSI evidence into clear research-to-policy pathways.

1.3.3 Efficiency

PRP's consortium model, co-funding arrangements, and flexible funding have enabled sound value for money. A noteworthy feature is the significant in-kind and direct contributions from ANU and the Lowy Institute, with a reduced indirect cost recovery rate ensuring more resources are invested in research and capacity building. The program leverages long-held relationships, existing research infrastructure, and co-funding from other research partners to deliver a high volume of outputs. However, the bulk of funding (and decision-making) remains in Canberra. Expenditure is generally on track, with minor underspends managed transparently. The program has adapted to staff turnover and budget pressures (such as rising costs) through flexible resource management.

PRP's governance processes are adequate but could be strengthened. While there are clear roles for consortium partners, the Strategic Management Group has not met as frequently as intended, and its structure is overly formal, minimising opportunities for robust discussions that inform strategic decisions. In consultation with DFAT, consortium partners have made efforts to reform the structure of the SMG meetings to provide more time for discussion of key issues. Most recently, this has included ensuring PRP thematic leads and DFAT focal points meet prior to the SMG meetings and preparing a two-page discussion highlights document for circulation with SMG meeting papers, with high-level research highlights the presented at the SMG meeting.

PRP's broad scope and high number of activities, combined with other DFAT investments in this space, as meant DFAT has not always had clear visibility of activities undertaken by consortium partners under PRP vs other

funding, nor of the full range of engagements between PRP and different parts of DFAT. Limited oversight has had implications for coordination, learning, and DFAT's ability to maximise value from the program.

Risk management has been embedded at all levels, with regular review of risk registers, alignment with DFAT and ANU standards, and context-specific safeguards for fieldwork in high-risk settings (such as PNG). However, recent incidents within one project highlighted room for improvement in risk management and reporting processes, with immediate action taken.

The program's MEL system supports learning and accountability and is a significant improvement on Phase 1, though the updated MEL framework and dedicated MEL resourcing was delivered well into the third year of the program. Resourcing challenges have impacted the comprehensiveness of progress reporting. No baseline was established to measure progress against End of Program Outcomes.

1.3.4 Repositioning: Appropriateness of PRP model, activities and partnerships

Overall, stakeholders directly engaged in PRP believed the model had provided significant benefits. They reflected the model was largely appropriate and effective for supporting Pacific research agendas, capacity building, policy engagement, and facilitating public awareness of Pacific issues. However, stakeholders did suggest refinements could be made to better support Pacific research priorities and strengthen institutional capacity development. Notably**, Pacific stakeholders wanted a greater role in setting the research agenda, and more direct access to research funding.**

Stakeholders outside PRP saw more gaps in the model. Australian tertiary stakeholders (external to PRP) were unsure whether having all funding concentrated to one tertiary institution, based in Australia, was the most effective or efficient way to drive Pacific institutional capacity development. Finally, civil society Pacific stakeholders identified the need for further engagement with Pacific stakeholders including communities, CSOs and rights-holder organisations to shape the research agenda.

The program location in Canberra facilitated close relationships and frequent interactions with PRP researchers and DFAT staff.

1.4 Retelling: Lessons and options for future consideration and reStorying

Based on the evaluation findings and stakeholder perspectives shared about the way forward, the following should be considered by DFAT and relevant stakeholders for a potential future phase of the PRP:

1. **Clarify intended audience and purpose**
   Future phases should clearly articulate whether the primary beneficiaries are DFAT, Australian policy makers and tertiary institutions, and / or Pacific policy makers and tertiary institutions, to guide program design and communication.
2. **Deepen Pacific voices and leadership**
   Intentionally include Pacific stakeholders in program design, research agenda-setting and delivery. Strengthen mechanisms for Pacific voices, including civil society, to shape research priorities and partnerships.
3. **Strategic institutional capacity development**
   Take a more strategic approach to institutional capacity development. Develop and resource a multi-year, co-owned capacity strengthening plan, including dual appointments, staff exchanges between Australian and Pacific tertiary institutions, and support for research infrastructure (e.g., journal access, analytical software). Map institutional strengths and gaps to provide a baseline and inform planning.
4. **Scope additional modalities to support Pacific-led research agendas and collaboration**
   In line with Australia's commitment to locally led development in its development program, future modalities could consider a 'twinning' system whereby implementing universities share programming with Pacific universities.
5. **Strengthen GEDSI integration**
   Systematically address disability inclusion, including increasing resourcing for technical support, and broaden the gender focus to include diverse experiences and masculinities. In line with the research priorities identified for any future phase, continue to mainstream GEDSI in research, especially labour mobility.
6. **Expand policy engagement approaches**
   Broaden engagement beyond Canberra-based stakeholders to more systematically include DFAT Posts and Pacific policy makers. Refresh policy dialogue forums and ensure research findings are shared at community and national levels.
7. **Prioritise resourcing towards addressing gaps in MEL**

   Focus on strengthening reporting against the MEL Framework and program learning processes. Consider additional case studies, including on gender equality.

2 Introduction

In July 2025, Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) commissioned Tetra Tech International Development ('Tetra Tech') to undertake an independent evaluation of the Pacific Research Program Phase II ('the Program'). The evaluation was undertaken from August 2025 to December 2025, with fieldwork undertaken in Canberra, Fiji, the Solomon Islands, and Papua New Guinea in September and October 2025. This Evaluation Report outlines the purpose and objectives of the evaluation and presents the key findings and recommendations in line with agreed key evaluation questions (KEQs).

2.1 The story of the Program

Background

PRP II is an initiative funded by the Australian Government through DFAT, with a total investment of AUD27.83 million. The program spans February 2022- to 31 January 2027 (initially June 2026), with a design phase during February-June 2022 and implementation commencing from 1 July 2022. Implemented by a consortium comprising the Department of Pacific Affairs (ANU), the Development Policy Centre (ANU), and the Lowy Institute, PRP II was intended to build on the foundational achievements of PRP I (2017–2022). The Program aims to deepen Australia-Pacific research partnerships and enhance the production and use of evidence in policy and public debate across the region. It is guided by three strategic pillars:

- Better informed Pacific policy makers
- Stronger Pacific research partnerships and practice
- Greater Pacific awareness.

This report will refer to "PRP" when referring to the current phase of delivery (2022-2027), except where a distinction from the previous phase is required.

PRP operates across nine Pacific countries[1] and in collaboration with 14 Pacific tertiary institutions[2] and one Australian tertiary institution[3]. Its core commitment is to support Pacific-led research that is inclusive, contextually relevant, and strategically aligned with regional and national development priorities.

PRP's objectives and outcomes

PRP is structured around three strategic pillars, each with a corresponding End-of-Program Outcome (EOPO). This logic underpins the PRP's three strategic pillars and corresponding End-of-Program Outcomes (EOPOs), illustrated in the PRP Program Logic (see Annex 1). Activities and outputs each year of delivery to date are presented in Annex 4.

Pillar 1: Better informed Pacific policy makers	Pillar 2: Stronger Pacific research partnerships and practice	Pillar 3: Greater Pacific awareness
EOPO1: Pacific policy makers develop a deeper understanding of the Pacific development context and regional geo-politics PRP supports the generation and dissemination of policy-relevant research that informs decision-making across sectors. **Key activities:** **PRP research under five core thematic areas:** – Gender, Inclusion and Social Change – Pacific Labour Mobility and Integration – Politics, Governance and Economic Resilience – Papua New Guinea, including Bougainville – Security, Regionalism and Geopolitics	**EOPO2: Pacific researchers and institutions are better equipped to undertake, manage and drive Pacific research** PRP invests in building the skills, systems, and networks of Pacific researchers and institutions. **Key activities:** **Capacity strengthening activities include:** – Research Colloquiums – Tailored workshops for researchers – HDR student program – PhD Scholarships – Faculty strengthening – teaching support – Pacific Research Fellowships (x2) – Pacific Visitorships from Pacific universities – Greg Taylor Scholarships (inc. mentoring) – Networks and partnership activities including seminars, workshops, events, conferences, Community of Practice, and alumni events	**EOPO3: PRP research and analysis contributes to public debate** PRP promotes public engagement with research to foster informed debate and inclusive development. **Key activities:** – **Public engagement activities:** Lowy Institute Interpreter articles, Devpolicy Blog, discussion papers, media commentary, contribution to external think tanks, and regular public seminar – **Policymaker and practitioner engagement activities:** Including tailored Devpolicy series, Lowy Policy Briefs, seminars, briefing to Australian government and diplomatic community, contribute to executive engagement course "Understanding the Pacific" – **Educators and student engagement activities:** Pacific teaching program, Pacific PhD program, guest lectures, campus-based seminars and teaching, and partnerships

[1] Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Fiji, Vanuatu, Samoa, Tonga, New Caledonia, French Polynesia

[2] Divine Word University, Lutheran University, PNG National Research Institute, University of Goroka, University of PNG, Solomon Islands National University, Fiji National University, Pasifika Community University, University of South Pacific, National University of Vanuatu, National University of Samoa, Tonga Tertiary Institute, University of New Caledonia, University of French Polynesia

[3] Swinburne University of Technology (based in Melbourne)

2.2 The story of the evaluation

2.2.1 Purpose and scope

As PRP approaches its final year, DFAT commissioned an independent evaluation to assess its performance and inform the design of a potential future phase. The evaluation provides DFAT with strengthened evidence for decision-making, and strategic advice on how it might support the growth of Pacific research and uptake of evidence throughout the region. The evaluation was also intended to be forward-looking and identify what future investments may be required to deepen higher education and research partnerships. The evaluation objectives were carefully selected in collaboration with DFAT during the inception phase of the evaluation in August 2025.

The evaluation's findings will guide a design team working with the Integration and Education Branch to plan the next phase of Australia's investment(s) in Pacific higher education partnerships. While informed by current arrangements, this new phase is expected to evolve, reflecting DFAT's aim to deepen partnerships between Pacific and Australian higher education and research institutions.

Geographic scope of the evaluation included consultations in Australia, Fiji, PNG and Solomon Islands, with remote engagement of key academic stakeholders in Samoa and Vanuatu.

Table 1: Objective 1 Key Evaluation Questions

Objective 1:	**Program implementation. To provide an independent assessment of the effectiveness and efficiency of PRP in achieving progress towards each EOPO**
Effectiveness	1. How effective has PRP been in achieving progress toward each of its three EOPOs?
GEDSI	2. How effectively were gender equality, disability, and social inclusion (GEDSI) integrated into PRP II?
Efficiency	3. To what extent has PRP efficiently utilised its financial and human resources to deliver activities and output across EOPOs?

Table 2: Objective 2 Key Evaluation Questions

Objective 2:	**Future opportunities and lessons learned. To provide an assessment, drawing on lessons from the PRP, of future opportunities for DFAT to invest in higher education partnerships.**
Relevance and Appropriateness	4. Is the current PRP model an appropriate modality to achieve development outcomes?
Relevance and Appropriateness	5. Are the current and proposed PRP activities and partnerships appropriate given sectoral needs and Australia's comparative advantage?

The evaluation covers the full implementation period of PRP II (2022-2027), with a particular focus on program activities and outcomes from July 2022 to September 2025. It examined all three strategic pillars, as well as the cross-cutting integration of GEDSI.

2.2.2 Methodology and approach

Cultural framing for this evaluation

This evaluation is grounded in the Pasifika Indigenous 'whole of life' philosophies that underpin knowing, being, and doing. The 'whole of life' philosophy is one that encompasses life, guides cultures, and directs praxis in most of the Pacific communities. In other words, it is a relational philosophy that underpins being and knowing of the Pacific peoples. For this evaluation, it provides a culturally grounded lens that complements DFAT's commitment to inclusive and sustainable development, while meeting OECD-DAC and DFAT Design and Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) standards.

The 'whole of life' philosophy is made up of five principles, including: (1) Coinherence, whereby Pacific peoples always believe that we are 'in' everything and everything is 'in' us; (2) Integration, whereby the Pacific peoples believe that knowledge is holistic, made up of every dimension of life, not just one dimension; (3) Mutuality, whereby Pacific peoples believe that knowledge is achieved through negotiating tensions and contradictions to find a unified meaning; (4) Restraint, whereby Pacific peoples believe that knowledge is processed only through pause and slowing down, therefore a gift, not a commodity; and (5) Continuity, whereby Pacific peoples believe that knowledge evolves and flows within a continuum where time moves as a unified whole.

Based on these principles, the evaluation team applied these foundations to interpret and assess knowledge. That in the Pacific, knowledge is always relational, interconnected, multidimensional and context driven. Knowledge is both tangible and intangible, sacred and material, concrete and spiritual. The philosophy was applied in the evaluation team's thinking and processes, in particular dealing with the peoples, cultures, relationships, protocols, partners, and knowledge systems of partners' communities. The evaluation considered PRP as part of a complex

research ecosystem with multiple actors, feedback loops and emergent outcomes. The philosophy informed the evaluators on analysis of the EOPOs, in particular whether the PRP has better equipped Pacific researchers and institutions to manage, drive Pacific research, and inform key core policy areas including future opportunities and investments.

Evaluation approach and stages

This philosophy underpinned and informed the usage of the Kakala Research Framework (as developed by Konai Helu Thaman, Ana Taufe'ulungaki, and Seu'ula Johansson-Fua) noting that every step or phase is designed in a way that they are not separate from each other. The Kakala framework allowed the evaluation to reflect Pacific epistemologies while aligning with DFAT's requirements for utilisation-focused, rigorous evaluation.

A mixed methods approach was adopted for this evaluation, including a document review, semi-structured interviews, inclusive dialogues, short case studies and sensemaking/validation workshops. For an overview of methodology, locations of data collection and stakeholders consulted, see Annex 2.

The evaluation process comprised of five interconnected stages:

- **Teu (preparation and design):** This stage involved conceptualising key questions together with Pacific consultants within the evaluation team and DFAT, which helped us design the evaluation and plan for the work.
- **Toli (gathering the flowers):** This stage involved the collaborative scoping with DFAT, Department of Pacific Affairs (ANU) and the evaluation team's Pacific Research Adviser and National Consultants, for the careful selection of relevant stakeholders for involvement in the evaluation. The evaluation team reviewed documentation provided by DFAT and PRP implementing partners. Data was analysed by coding relevant content against the Analytical Framework, aligned with the KEQs. In this evaluation, Toli included the opportunity for all evaluation team members to review of tools, selection and engagement of stakeholders for consultation, and preparatory document review. The evaluation team worked carefully with National Consultants to ensure informed consent, intentionality and cultural attunement.
- **Tui (weaving the garland):** In this evaluation, Tui encompassed the dialogical aspects of data collection, in conducting interviews, and Talanoa and reflective dialogues in Fiji, Solomon Islands and PNG. Throughout the in-country fieldwork, the evaluation leads supported collaborative processes of weaving together insights, voices and meanings and small dialogues that allowed for layered insights. It reflects dialogue, balance and co-construction that occurred together with Pacific consultants through ongoing debriefings during in-country fieldwork and through internal sensemaking workshops. GEDSI principles were embedded across all phases, ensuring access, participation and representation of diverse Pacific identities and lived realities. The evaluation team conducted 66 interviews and discussions in four countries (inc. Australia (Canberra), Solomon Islands, Fiji and PNG).
- **Luva (gifting the garland):** Luva was applied through incorporating Indigenous Pacific and cultural framing as part of the evaluation, as well as through incorporating dissemination events of findings to enable discussion and return findings to a wider group of stakeholders (pending final approval and stakeholder identification from DFAT). Selected from the document review and stakeholder interviews, short case studies further unpack some progress and achievements, demonstrating key enablers and constraints, to deepen understanding of PRP's contribution. This evaluation team acknowledges that any Indigenous knowledge remains owned by those who shared it. Where appropriate, light refreshments were shared with participants as part of gifting.
- **Malie (monitoring and reflection):** Through continuous reflective practice, our team have reflected on whether stakeholder discussions were meaningful and honest, and whether they served the needs of the communities. The team made real-time adjustments to the process, and updated data collection tools as required to ensure a utilisation-focussed approach whereby knowledge production was intended to serve the stakeholders it serves. The evaluation team held an internal sensemaking workshop to identify themes to develop evidence-based findings to KEQs, and a Validation Workshop with DFAT to check the accuracy of emerging findings in between two rounds of draft reporting.

The KEQs provided an overarching analytical framework for the data. Following in-country consultations, the team undertook more detailed analysis to triangulate evidence and draw out findings from the various sources against the evaluation's analytical framework.

2.2.3 Limitations

- While the evaluation was intended to cover implementation up to the present, the program had not yet completed annual reporting for 2024-2025. This is due to a shift from financial year to calendar year narrative and financial reporting for 2025 and 2026, initiated by DFAT in Amendment 2 to the ANU-DFAT funding agreement. Because of this change, six-monthly progress reporting was provided up to December 2024, and this was less detailed than the annual reports. Additionally, no reporting was available against the new MEL Framework, which was approved in October 2025.

- PRP encompasses a broad and diverse range of research activities within each thematic area (see Annex 4), with different projects engaging a variety of stakeholders. As a result, the evaluation was unable to capture comprehensive evidence on policy engagement or research uptake across the entire program.
- The evaluation team was unable to schedule consultations with all suggested stakeholders, despite making at least two attempts to contact each one. There was limited uptake from policy and development stakeholders. Furthermore, within some institutions, stakeholders had varying levels of exposure to PRP, leading to significant differences in the depth of insights provided during consultations. This was especially evident among DFAT Post and Pacific tertiary institution stakeholders.
- Recognition of PRP as a whole program was generally low among stakeholders, and there was often uncertainty about which activities were part of PRP versus other initiatives. Occasionally, stakeholders provided insights on activities that the evaluation team knew were funded under different investments. While steps were taken to ensure that findings in this report directly relate to PRP, it is possible that some mistaken attributions remain.

3 Strands of the Story (Findings)

3.1 A focus on 'reVisiting'

ReVisiting requires a return to the effectiveness of the past, not just to assess, but rather to bring the past in front of our minds' eyes to bear with the present and future, always reminding us that the past is open to the potential and that it is always a collective past. Therefore, every outcome is treated as a collective outcome but also open-ended with the possibility of improving and reimagining if there are any shortcomings. In this ReVisiting, this section provides an overview of progress, achievements, and challenges related to each of the Key Evaluation Questions, covering effectiveness, GEDSI, efficiency, relevance and appropriateness. It includes three brief Case Studies to highlight how the program's activities have contributed to outcomes, drawing on evidence collated for this evaluation.

3.2 Effectiveness

This section presents the findings and stories on how effective PRP has been in achieving progress toward each of its three EOPOs. This section considers the perspectives of stakeholders from a diverse range of stakeholders on what factors contributed to or hindered the progress of PRP. Through examples and short case studies, this section illustrates examples of positive change and the underlying and contributing factors for achieving the change. It assesses whether the diverse inputs and activities of the PRP have contributed to outcomes that are coherent and meaningful, and how the M&E systems contributed to this and supported decision-making. Finally, the sustainability of the PRP and its benefits are considered throughout this section, including how the PRP is meaningfully contributing to the education and research sectors across the Pacific region.

3.2.1 EOPO1: Pacific policy makers develop a deeper understanding of the Pacific development context and regional geopolitics

EOPO1 aimed to support Pacific policy makers to develop a deeper understanding through the delivery of quality, well-targeted independent research that supports evidence-based policy making. It also aimed to deepen engagement between Pacific policy makers and researchers to support evidence-based policy making.

This evaluation found that EOPO1 was partially achieved, with full achievement unlikely during the program duration. The assessment of "partially achieved" is based on two considerations. First, there are issues with the Program Logic, specifically wording of the outcome and gaps in the causal logic between activities, outputs and EOPOs. The EOPO's wording is focussed on Pacific policy makers and their deepened level of understanding of the Pacific, however the program activities primarily focus on conducting and publishing research. Second, while noting that research informs and provides an evidence base for Pacific policymaking, the MEL system similarly focuses on research outputs rather than systematically capturing policy engagements, or measuring changes to Pacific policy maker's understanding, leading to a gap in evidence of program-level outcomes. A baseline was not established to enable measurement of progress in policy maker's understandings of the Pacific or identify gaps in knowledge to guide planning of research activities and policy engagement approaches.

Evidence available for this evaluation suggests Australian (and particularly Canberra-based) policy makers were the primary intended stakeholder group for PRP research, with less evidence of engagement with DFAT Post or policy makers within the Pacific. Where Post was engaged, it tended to be at the project level, for example the Solomon Islands elections research and PNG telecommunications and NSDTA research. During PRP's design, DFAT identified five research themes that aligned to the legacy built from previous phases and DFAT's policy priorities in the region, and it's unclear the extent to which Pacific-based policy makers were consulted on their research priorities. While the program logic does not define "Pacific policy makers", the IDD outlines that EOPO1 will support "policy makers in Australia and partner countries deepen their understanding of both the Pacific development context and regional geo-politics" indicating the program is intended to benefit both audiences.

While EOPO1 was rated as **partially achieved**, there is **strong evidence that PRP made good progress in producing high-quality, policy-relevant research and analysis across its five thematic areas.** A considerable number of research projects were undertaken across each thematic area: Gender, Inclusion and Social Change (19 projects); Pacific Labour Mobility and Integration (17 projects); Politics, Governance and Economic Resilience (16 projects); Papua New Guinea, including Bougainville (11 projects); and Security, Regionalism and Geopolitics (19 projects). This saw PRP engage in 82 research projects over the period of 2022-2025.

PRP has produced 102 peer-reviewed publications (35 in 2022-2023, 48 in 2023-24, and 19 from July-Dec 2024) and an additional 766 Pacific-focussed blog posts from 1 July 2022 – 31 October 2025. While reporting was not available for the most recent financial year, data shows a trend towards an increase in policy-focused publications. DPA, for example, increased not only academic journals and book chapters, but publication of discussion papers (seven in 2023-2024, up from four in 2022-2023), two working papers and 17 "In Briefs" (up from six in 2022-2023). "In Brief" publications were noted by policy stakeholders as particularly accessible.

Nearly half of all DPA publications were authored by people of Pacific heritage (44%), which has increased from 32% in the program's previous phase (PRP Phase 1). Gender disaggregated data on authorship of publications

indicators that PRP achieved gender parity in authorship, with 53% of all DPA publication authors female (gender parity of blog publications is captured under EOPO3).

There was **mixed evidence of PRP's engagement with policy makers and practitioners, with engagements not comprehensively reported across the program outside the Focal Point Network.** The strongest evidence of engagement was seen under the Pacific Labour Mobility and Integration thematic area, an area with a significant policy interest from DFAT and regional stakeholders. Consortium stakeholders indicated a high volume of engagements with Canberra-based DFAT staff that span ad-hoc requests for advice, invitations for policy and program review, and membership on Technical Advisory Groups. Engagements were not systematically reported across other thematic areas. While PRP did report on stakeholders briefed (i.e. within annexes in progress reports), it's across all consortium partners and unclear what specific topics were covered.

Qualitative evidence from policy makers and Pacific tertiary stakeholders showed that there is growing research-to-policy engagement with some strong examples across select thematic areas, where there was strong alignment to interests of policy makers, implementing partner expertise and longer-term funding. For a selection of high-profile research projects, there is clear evidence DFAT and Pacific policy makers are engaging with and using this research evidence to inform the design of programs and legislation, and to improve operations of in-country services and operations (see "EOPO1: Examples of policy engagement and uptake and "Case Study 1"). Of the five thematic areas, there was stronger evidence of research engagement and uptake under Pacific Labour Mobility and Integration, followed by elections research under Politics, Governance and Economic Resilience. There was some evidence of engagement on gender research (within Gender, Inclusion and Social Change) and PNG and Bougainville (noting the significant engagement on PNG elections is captured under the Politics, Governance and Economic Resilience theme). There was less evidence on engagement and uptake under Security, Regionalism and Geopolitics. While there are notable examples of engagement and uptake of PRP evidence in the Pacific, there remains an opportunity to strengthen the balance between Australian and Pacific policy interests.

Case Study 1: Policy engagement and uptake from elections research in Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea

Elections research conducted by the PRP, a collaboration between ANU, Solomon Islands National University (SINU), and the National Research Institute (NRI) of Papua New Guinea (PNG), has enabled robust, policy-relevant election research that is directly shaping electoral policy and practice in both countries.

Solomon Islands: Research driving electoral reform and institutional strengthening

PRP-supported longitudinal election research in Solomon Islands has provided critical evidence for electoral reform and practice. The research tracked voter behaviour, polling day services, and inclusivity measures, and was highly valued by the Solomon Islands Electoral Commission (SIEC). SIEC has used the findings to inform proposed reforms to the definition of "ordinary resident" in the Election Act, aiming to better reflect voter mobility and improve the integrity of the electoral roll. These recommendations are now under parliamentary consideration ahead of the 2026 election.

The 2024 election research, co-designed and co-implemented by ANU and SINU, marked a step-change in local ownership since previous research, such as the 2019 study funded under PRP Phase 1. The partnership model - where SINU played a greater role in research design, data collection, and co-authorship - has ensured research relevance while building local capacity (see Case Study 2 for more information on capacity development). Public seminars and direct engagement with SIEC and other stakeholders have facilitated the uptake of findings, with SIEC staff noting that "***recommendations are always helpful***" in supporting policy reforms. Research has contributed to continuous improvements to election operations, including logistics and polling day improvements, and has been cited as a model for partnership-based research in the region.

Papua New Guinea: From research to parliamentary action and inclusive practice

In PNG, ANU has long-standing collaborations with NRI and other local partners to advance both the quality and policy impact of election research. The 2022 National General Election Observation project, supported by DFAT and involving NRI, ANU, Transparency International PNG, and others, resulted in a comprehensive, multi-agency report with 70 recommendations for electoral reform. For the first time, these recommendations were presented directly to a special parliamentary committee, which has agreed to publish its responses and proposed changes – an unprecedented step in ensuring research translates into policy action. The report is now in the public domain[4] and awaiting parliamentary debate. The report's literature review makes specific reference to ANU elections research and the contribution of PRP researchers at Canberra meetings in 2023.

NRI's leadership in the 2022 election research has also fostered a new approach to policy engagement: joint seminars, collaborative reporting, and ongoing dialogue with government agencies, including the Inter-Departmental Elections Committee and the Electoral Commission. This has shifted the model from one where

[4] Special-Parliamentary-Report-2023.pdf

research reports "sat unused" to one where evidence is actively used to inform government planning and parliamentary debate. The collaboration with ANU has also built research skills amongst emerging PNG researchers, creating a pipeline of future leaders in electoral policy and analysis.

Broader outcomes and lessons

Across both countries, PRP election research is now a critical resource for policy makers, donors, and practitioners. The Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) regularly refers to PRP reports, using them to validate policy advice and inform new proposals, such as expanding out-of-country voting and refining the definition of ordinary residence. Research outputs are widely disseminated through research reports, "In Brief" documents, and public seminars, making them accessible to policy stakeholders in Australia and the Pacific.

The partnership approach, which is grounded in trust, co-design, and long-term engagement, has been recognised as a model for the region.

Challenges and opportunities

Despite these successes, challenges remain. Funding is limited, and the Pacific is considered amongst the most expensive contexts to conduct research due to high logistical costs. There is also a need for ongoing capacity building of research partners, especially in data analysis and publication. There is a need for more systematic sharing of findings at the community level and for further support for Pacific-led research leadership. Local stakeholders have called for ongoing mentoring from ANU and other partners, as well as opportunities for exposure to electoral processes in other countries.

Stakeholders across all groups consulted (including DFAT, ANU, Australian and national electoral policy makers and Pacific universities) **valued PRP's contribution to the evidence base, particularly through the large national and regional studies that generated longitudinal and comparative datasets**. They noted the program has addressed critical data gaps in the Pacific, most notably in PNG and Solomon Islands, especially in areas including service delivery (NSDTA, and its predecessor PEPE), labour mobility, and elections, providing trend data that is used by governments and DFAT for planning, budgeting, and reform. These research topics were noted to be highly relevant to policy makers, building on the legacy from previous investments (PRP Phase 1 and SSGM) with the consortium and leveraging the strengths of DPA and Devpol. DFAT stakeholders working in labour mobility also highlighted the value of PRP's independent commentary and insights on the performance of Australian government policy and programs.

A key success of the program was the flexible and adaptive approach to research partnerships between the implementing partner and Pacific tertiary institutions for longer-term research projects and activities. PRP successfully used hybrid approaches to deliver research jointly with Pacific tertiary institutions, to enable projects to proceed despite institutional constraints- for example, working with USP (Vanuatu Campus) to overcome challenges related to employment of in-country enumerators (for the Pacific Attitudes Survey- Vanuatu). This enabled research to be undertaken in a variety of contexts and with partners with varying levels of institutional capacity.

EOPO1: Examples of policy engagement and uptake

- Findings from the Pacific Labour Mobility Survey (PLMS) were presented at regional meetings (such as the 2023 Pacific Labour Mobility Annual Meeting in Port Vila) and used to inform worker wellbeing guidelines in PACER Plus countries. Devpol staff convene the Pacific Labour Mobility Technical Working Group, a platform for regular policy dialogue between government, academic and multilateral stakeholders. Canberra-based DFAT staff refer to using the evidence on a weekly basis.
- Researchers were invited to consult with DFAT on design and implementation of the Pacific Engagement Visa, such as briefing the Office of the Pacific on issues related to the design. DPA researchers was consulted on design of the Falepili Mobility Pathway (FMP) and invited to the review committee.
- Stakeholders suggested that without ANU's Pacific Labour Mobility research and commentary, "there wouldn't be a Pacific Engagement Visa".
- Longitudinal research undertaken by DPA researchers on the impact of labour mobility (New Zealand and Australian schemes) on workers and families has informed Vanuatu's National Labour Mobility Policy & Action Plan 2024-2027, while research and advice by Devpol researchers have informed labour mobility strategies and pilots in Tonga, Niue and Solomon Islands.
- Evidence on how Pacific workers used remittances addressed a key information gap for DFAT, demonstrating that remittances were being used for education and human capital development. This data has been used in conversations with Pacific Island partners and internal DFAT stakeholders.
- Elections research has been highly influential of DFAT Post's bilateral support and policy positions, with desk and Post staff noting they refer to reports weekly. Within Pacific countries, elections research has informed continuous improvements of operations for the Solomon Islands Election Commission (SIEC), and in PNG, fed into national stakeholder's advocacy and advice on election reforms. Research also supported technical advisors at the Australian Electoral Commission to ensure their advice to SIEC is contextually informed (see Case Study 1: Elections research)

- While the program is still in early implementation, the NDSTA project in PNG involved government officers from the Ministries of Health and Education shaping the survey tool, with the addition of questions of policy interest. This is highly positive, given the importance of early engagement from policy stakeholders on future research uptake.
- Desktop research undertaken for this evaluation found evidence that PRP research has influenced the design of the Improving Political Inclusion and Participation (IPIP) program funded through the PNG Women Lead Program. IPIP's design documentation explicitly references PRP-funded research, particularly PNG's 2022 elections and women's leadership research. PRP evidence has also informed design of the Australia Awards Women Leading and Influencing program (see section 3.3: GEDSI integration for more information).
- The Pacific Attitudes Survey in Samoa (undertaken under the previous phase) has seen considerable engagement during the current phase, with NUS stakeholders publishing at least three articles that have informed local policy and academic dialogues. NUS has seen significant student engagement with PAS results, and utilised evidence to shape teaching and community-based activities in politics and climate change. Local political candidates have utilised PAS data to inform their policy positions.

Stakeholders suggested additional approaches that could increase policy relevance and uptake across the full PRP portfolio. For instance, PRP-supported conferences such as the Pacific Update and State of the Pacific are cited as important convenings building networks between researchers and policy makers, but stakeholders note these forums could be more policy-focused, Pacific-led and engage a broader audience of policy makers.

Canberra-based DFAT stakeholders noted the timelines for academic research did not always align to policy making. They reflected that evidence was not always accessible or tailored for policy uptake (within lengthy reports and journal articles). The focal point network, an approach piloted in PRP aiming to strengthen networks between PRP researchers and DFAT, had not fully delivered intended outcomes. This was due to frequent turnover of focal points, heavy workloads limiting engagement, and an overly formal structure of engagements. Policy makers suggested PRP explore more systematic pathways to connect evidence to policy making (e.g. tailored briefings, sustained dialogue). In contrast, under Pacific Labour Mobility, regular engagements between Devpol researchers and policy makers were working well, based on long-standing relationships and high levels of trust. Devpol publications were also noted to be particularly user-friendly.

There were missed opportunities for alignment with DFAT's existing programs and networks to support policy engagement. DFAT Post stakeholders noted they had limited engagement with PRP, potentially missing coordination and alignment with bilateral programs engaging in similar areas (e.g. education programs in Solomon Islands) and opportunities to feed into policy discussions. They also noted a limited coordination between ANU and DFAT ahead of in-country visits, which presented a risk with regards to DFAT's relationships with partner governments.

Pacific CSOs note that civil society and community perspectives are not consistently integrated into PRP's research agenda or events. They believe there is an opportunity for PRP to facilitate more regular policy dialogues in the region that bring together government, academia, CSOs and regional bodies, including to identify evidence gaps and future research topics. A few stakeholders reflected that the use of research in policy making could be increased by aligning research agendas to areas with greater evidence required for decision-making.

Finally, Pacific stakeholders reported that while research is disseminated at national and international levels, there is a need to strengthen feedback mechanisms to ensure findings are shared back with local communities and research participants. "***It would have been better to share the data in each of the data collection areas (Madang, Lae). Was only presented in Moresby and the elites – Electoral Commission and DFAT."***[5]

Sustainability of outcomes under EOPO1

PRP has fostered an ecosystem of Pacific-focused scholarship and policy engagement (albeit largely Canberra-centric). This ecosystem is underpinned by long-term institutional commitment to the region and deep partnerships held by ANU. Co-funding of research projects (for example, elections research being co-funded by PRP and Solomon Islands Post) further supports sustainability and demonstrates ongoing interest and efforts outside of PRP.

Enduring elements include the significant datasets and publications on areas of policy interest, notably on public expenditure in PNG (NSDTA), elections, and labour mobility programs (PLMS), enabling monitoring of trends over time. Other enduring elements include the policy and programs shaped by research evidence, as well as commentary and advice from PRP researchers.

Availability of research evidence in the public domain increases the likelihood of accessibility and longevity, through relevance to policy will reduce as evidence becomes dated, with new funding required for successive waves.

Risks to sustainability include dependence on a small number of dedicated individuals within Australian and Pacific institutions, who drive institutional partnerships and play pivotal roles in research across thematic areas. Heavy

[5] PNG Tertiary Institute stakeholder.

teaching loads amongst Pacific tertiary stakeholders creates barriers to publication and ability to pro-actively engage with local policy stakeholders.

3.2.2 EOPO2: Pacific researchers and institutions are better equipped to undertake, manage and drive Pacific research

EOPO2 aims to ensure that Pacific researchers and institutions are better equipped to undertake, manage, and drive Pacific research and deliver quality research outcomes. The Program also aims to strengthen research networks and communities of practice through enhanced research and education partnerships**. PRP has made good progress on building individual researcher capacity, and fair progress on building institutional research capacity,** with opportunities to strengthen institutional partnerships beyond project-based arrangements. The strength of evidence of progress against EOPO2 was mixed, primarily drawing on PRP program briefings and stakeholder consultations, however there was gaps in evidence available on outcomes related to partnerships and selected capacity strengthening initiatives.

Monitoring and reporting does not capture financial contributions provided to Pacific partners, nor in-kind contributions made by Pacific partners, however it appears that the majority of PRP funding remains within Australian-based consortium partners.

Collaborative research was a key vehicle for strengthening the Pacific research ecosystem, noting much of the research collaboration and outputs occur more at the individual level rather than institutional level. This is common for academic research projects engaging specific expertise (including at Australian universities), and enabled researchers to participate efficiently noting bureaucratic challenges within their institutions, while institutional agreements are more common for academic staff capacity and professional development engagements.

Notable examples are provided below under “EOPO2: Examples of collaborative research”.

EOPO2: Examples of collaborative research

- The Pacific Attitudes Survey (PAS) in Vanuatu, which was co-designed and implemented with University of South Pacific (USP), National University of Vanuatu (NUV) and Swinburne. NUV researchers provided key inputs into question development as well as interpretation of results.
- Successful collaborations were also seen on the PNG and Solomon Islands elections research (with NRI and SINU respectively), as well as the NSDTA research in PNG. In particularly, Solomon Islands stakeholders discussed how their roles in the research had changed over successive waves of election observations, with national researchers previously engaged as enumerators (2014, 2019) however the most recent wave saw SINU becoming more engaged in design, including adding topics of local interest (geopolitics and federalism), refining questions for the local context, and co-authoring reports *(for more information see Case Study 1).*
- PNG researchers from NRI and UoG reported that research conducted under PRP provided emerging researchers with valuable exposure to large, nationally significant research projects. The evaluation team noted several examples of researchers engaging through voluntary or private engagement (as opposed to institutional) if their institution did not facilitate their participation.

Flagship events conducted under EOPO2, such as State of the Pacific (held in Canberra) and Pacific Update (held in Fiji) were generally valued by researchers as platforms to present their work and connect with peers, noting there are opportunities for better engaging with policy makers. Policy makers and civil society representatives had mixed views on the value of the forums in terms of driving policy dialogue and whether the selection of papers considered the needs and interest of policy makers. Others noted that while topics like GEDSI were considered (i.e. through Panels), they did not have a significant focus. A few stakeholders encouraged having a diversity in the Panel selecting papers and abstracts for the conference to include policy makers and others, and to have more time for policy discussions rather than many short paper presentations. A strong mix of presentations by academic and non-academic researchers and policy makers could increase the utility and interest in these forums.

Efforts to build research capacity include several initiatives, including the flagship Pacific Research Colloquium (PRC), and support for the Pacific Islands University Research Network and the Pacific Islands Political Science Association. The PRC stands out as an effective mechanism for developing social research skills, exposure to Pacific research methodologies, and building networks within Pacific researchers. The high program is in high demand, seeing 230 applications for 25 places in 2024. The efforts to take the training to PNG in 2023 and Samoa in late 2025 is commendable. The Samoa PRC was characterised by co-delivery by NUS academic staff, who have all previously engaged in PRP activities including the Canberra-based PRC, Pacific Visiting Fellows and research collaborators.

PRP, through DPA’s higher degree by research (HDR) program, has played a significant role in developing the pipeline of future Pacific academics. The PhD program, with the largest cluster of Pacific-focussed PhD researchers in Australia, increasingly includes scholars with a Pacific Island heritage (54%, n=15 of the current

cohort). Analysis of previous graduates indicates that following graduation, Pacific students take up leadership roles national universities and government and often maintain their connection to ANU through collaborative research projects. Seven graduates work within DPA, including two with Pacific Islands heritage. The program's support for Pacific researchers to achieve formal qualifications, with academic supervision from global experts cannot be understated, and addresses a key gap within many Pacific tertiary institutions: limited institutional capacity for HDR programs, gaps in tertiary scholarship support from national governments, and an absence of topic expertise from qualified PhD supervisors within national universities. DPA endeavours to provide Pacific scholars with additional support to enrol and complete their studies, including alternative pathways to enrolment (such as initial enrolment in a MPhil, and recognition of previous professional experience), an emphasis on Pacific methodologies, and intentional pastoral care support. (Note: DPA also teaches into ANU's Pacific Studies undergraduate and post-graduate degrees, which are presented under EOPO3). In the current cohort of HDR students, 46 per cent are female.

Pacific PhD students in DPA, both current and graduated, noted that support has evolved in a positive direction over time. They valued the social support provided by other Pacific students, which contributed to a sense of community. However, some students highlighted challenges at the supervisory level, citing insufficient engagement and support from senior academics and the program itself. Additionally, there was a perception among some students that they did not have access to the same opportunities - such as leading projects and paid research work - as their peers.

Co-supervision represents another way to leverage ANU's expert academics beyond the limited number of students who can be directly enrolled within DPA. Examples include joint PhD supervision arrangements between ANU and USP (which USP is now replicating with other Australian universities, such as University of Adelaide), and ANU and Divine Word University in PNG. Importantly, the students maintained their enrolment within the national university. SINU was keen to see this model adopted at their university.

Pacific Visitorships and fellowships (ten in total) provided Pacific researchers with time, space and mentoring to undertake a discrete research project, develop their networks, and publish findings.

A unique capacity development approach was noted at UPNG, via a long-term embedded academic who taught undergrad and honours courses within the Political Science Program, School of Humanities and Social Sciences (SHSS). This academic's engagement pre-dated PRP, meeting a critical resourcing gap following the loss of several lecturers in short succession, which risked the School's ability to deliver these popular courses. UPNG leadership noted that the loss of key teaching staff had taken a decade to rebuild. Through his teaching, the embedded academic had identified high potential students within undergrad and honours programs, and supported them to apply for MPhil and PhDs overseas. So far six high-potential students had taken up HDR opportunities overseas (two to Japan and 4 to Australia, with three currently studying with DPA). They are considered the future leaders of SHSS, and two have contracts to return to UPNG as lecturers upon graduation.

DFAT Post stakeholders in two locations noted a missed opportunity to coordinate PRP capacity development support with other DFAT education programs, such as tertiary scholarship programs (Australia Awards in PNG) and tertiary education strengthening (bilateral programming in Solomon Islands).

The consortium model and long-term funding (from SSGM, and the two phases of PRP) have deepened long-standing tertiary partnerships, especially between ANU and the University of the South Pacific (USP) as the premier regional university, in addition to other national universities (UPNG, SINU, DWU, NUS, NUV) on specific projects. There was no baseline describing the nature and depth of partnerships at the beginning of PRP and therefore challenging to determine the extent to which PRP has deepened partnerships. Nevertheless, partnerships with longer-term funding and formal engagements (e.g. MoUs[6]) appeared to have the greatest impact and gains related to capacity development. At least three national universities have an MoU with ANU (UPNG, DWU, SINU). While stakeholders noted MoU's don't always translate to meaningful support or a sustained commitment, these conditions were in place for ANU's support though PRP, particularly UPNG and SINU.

However, there were opportunities for strengthening coordination and engagement. UPNG leadership were keen to see improved coordination of ANU's institutional support under the MoU, which spans at least two DFAT programs and ANU schools. In addition to PRP's support to the SHSS, Devpol was noted to have long-standing support for the School of Business and Public Policy (SBPP) through other DFAT funding. Both initiatives were viewed by stakeholders as effective in building a pipeline of scholars and policy experts, utilising different models and levels of resourcing. UPNG stakeholders noted there were missed opportunities for alignment and cross-learning, however had already seen improved collaboration under the MoU. Further pro-active engagement from UPNG, ANU, and DFAT may be required.

[6] It's not clear whether all MOUs referred by stakeholders were signed under PRP. For example, the MoU between the Devine Word University may have been signed under another program, however can be utilised for collaborations under the PRP. The evaluation team has not seen the specific details of the MoUs, including what activities are included within them.

While the implementing partners and some USP staff noted the ANU-USP partnership had flourished under PRP, it appears the relationships are confined to specific faculties and schools (such as the School of Government; School of Accounting, Finance and Economics). Some stakeholders (i.e. former USP staff and researchers) from other relevant faculties were unaware of PRP's research collaborations and other Australian support beyond the Pacific Update.

Pacific stakeholders shared reflections on the changing context for Pacific tertiary institutions. National universities are increasingly collaborating across the region. For example, NUV are currently collaborating with SINU, FNU, and USP to conduct research around gender and leadership, have collaborations with other Australian institutions (including with James Cook University and UNSW), and are frequently approached to sign MoUs with other universities. They also reflected on the challenges related to obtaining funding, with regional universities (such as USP) more dominant in procuring donor funds for research. National universities were keen to see more support in terms of both research funding and partnerships between national and other universities, rather than being dominated by a regional focus. Each national university offers distinct strengths and has their own priorities, which will be important to scope ahead of new partnerships.

Case Study 2: Strengthening research capacity at SINU

The partnership between the ANU and SINU under the PRP illustrates both the strengths and the evolving challenges of building Pacific-led research capacity. This collaboration has enabled SINU, established in 2013, to take significant steps toward establishing itself as a credible research institution, while also highlighting areas for further development and support.

Strengths of the partnership

A major achievement of this collaboration has been the successful implementation of three waves elections research, across 2014, 2019 and 2024. The research has provided critical insights into electoral processes, voter attitudes, and the broader political landscape in the Solomon Islands. This body of work has not only generated valuable data for policy makers and civil society but has also served as a practical training ground for SINU staff and students.

A key strength of the partnership is its focus on developing local leadership and research skills. SINU researchers have been directly involved in all stages of the elections research, from survey design to data collection and analysis. Over successive waves, SINU staff have played a greater role in refining research questions, team leadership, and co-authoring reports. This hands-on approach has enabled SINU staff to develop technical skills and research management experience under ANU's mentorship, contributing to a growing pipeline of Pacific researchers. Tangible evidence of the shift in capacity and leadership includes the reduction of ANU staff from 17 to seven between the 2019 and 2024 waves, and the full cohort of team leaders coming from SINU. In 2019, only ANU authors featured on the Observation Report, while in 2024, four SINU researchers appeared as authors.

The partnership has benefited from successive capacity development activities undertaken across PRP phases. For example, senior academics (including Heads of departments) participated in PRC in 2023, and subsequently drew on course content when undertaking elections research field work and drafting research reports. Other SINU academics have engaged with PRP through PhDs completed with DPA (under PRP Phase 1) as well as participating across multiple waves of elections research, first as an enumerator and more recently in leadership roles, including coordinating SINU's inputs and co-authoring reports.

Most recently, in 2025 DPA academics delivered a 3-day training course on HDR supervision for 21 SINU academics. Training will contribute to SINU's ability successfully enrol and train PhD and Masters by research students, following important policy changes at SINU enabling the university expand into research training courses. While SINU's PhD programs remain nascent, these capacity-building efforts and policy updates lay critical groundwork for future growth, enabling SINU to assume greater responsibility for research training and academic leadership. The upcoming Panatina Research Seminar, scheduled for November 2025, is the PRP's first country-specific dissemination activity, and will enable SINU to showcase their research evidence and capabilities.

The institutional partnership has been underpinned by key and long-standing relationships, in particular with an ANU academic who previously resided in Solomon Islands before joining DPA. Holding an adjunct role with SINU, this academic has brokered a stronger institutional partnership between ANU and SINU, which was formalised in an MoU in 2024.

Gaps and challenges

Despite these successes, some areas have not progressed as expected. SINU leadership see a key gap in PRP supporting research that directly addresses Solomon Islands policy questions (e.g. related to governance, social inclusion or economic resilience), with the research and outcomes "***owned by SINU***". They desire an approach whereby SINU academics gain experience in research design, data collection and publication under the mentorship of experienced ANU researchers. "***Adopting these initiatives will not only strengthen SINU's role in the PRP program but also leave a lasting legacy of an empowered national university that is actively contributing to the Pacific research ecosystem on its own terms"-*** *SINU University stakeholder.*

Further, academic exchange programs and joint supervision arrangements, envisioned as central to capacity building, have been delayed, and may be challenging to implement before the end of PRP in 2026. SINU would also appreciate ongoing mentorship of academic supervisors following on from the short course, to embed learning and support successful supervisory arrangements.

PRP's facilitation of the ANU and SINU partnership has laid important foundations for Pacific-led research and capacity development. By addressing current gaps and leveraging opportunities for local leadership, the partnership can deliver lasting benefits SINU and the broader Pacific research ecosystem.

Sustainability of outcomes under EOPO2

PRP has contributed to a deep investment in Pacific partnership and the capacity of Pacific scholars. Key elements likely to be sustained include the strong alumni networks, which continue to deliver core activities and maintain enduring connections across the Pacific and Australia. The program's emphasis on building relationships and partnerships - both among institutions and with Pacific scholars - has created a legacy of capacity development, with many alumni returning to senior roles in their home countries and contributing to ongoing research, teaching, and policy work. The model of mentorship and increasingly co-designed research projects ensures that skills, knowledge, and leadership are embedded locally, supporting a pipeline of Pacific researchers and practitioners, including future leadership within Pacific institutions. Sustainable investment is further evidenced by ongoing curriculum development and the integration of Pacific perspectives into research and teaching.

Risks to sustainability include ongoing structural constraints to the ability of Pacific institutions to lead and publish research. These include high teaching loads, limited access to academic journals, insufficient incentives for research, limited research funding, pay and conditions, and staff turnover (including brain drain). Smaller universities also report limited research infrastructure (e.g. lab facilities, analytical software).

Stakeholders noted the risk of ongoing reliance on international experts to lead Pacific research and provide mentoring and expertise. They wanted to see a more concerted effort to build capacity to the level where Pacific scholars and institutions can take leadership roles. Without ongoing, coordinated support and a clear strategy for decentralising leadership and embedding Pacific voices, the gains made under PRP could be eroded.

3.2.3 EOPO3: PRP research and analysis contributes to public debate

EOPO3 aims to ensure that PRP research and analysis contributes to public debate and reaches a broader audience, therefore supporting greater Pacific awareness. This was achieved largely through the blog posts, podcasts, commentary and articles generated by consortium partners, particularly the Lowy Institute and Devpol. Activities also included briefings for the Australian government and diplomatic community, and contributions to the two-day course delivered for DFAT's Diplomatic Academy "Understanding the Pacific", delivered by DPA staff and students (with increasing representation from Pacific presenters). Finally, EOPO3 contribution included teaching into Pacific courses and subjects (including the Pacific Studies undergraduate course, and Master of Pacific Studies), guest lectures, and campus-based seminars.

This evaluation finds that PRP has made good progress on EOPO3. Multiple stakeholder groups noted the unique contribution being made by PRP-supported blog posts, articles, and commentary, which were regarded as a "trusted voice" that amplified Pacific perspectives to international audiences. Specific examples of PRP research influencing public debate and opinion include the Pacific Labour Mobility Scheme, where a Canberra-based DFAT stakeholder noted the value of timely, evidence-based commentary from Devpol researchers in providing balance during a period of negative media coverage.

PRP researchers were cited in major international outlets - for example 39 articles in 2022-2023, across outlets including the Wall Street Journal, Reuters, and the Washington Post. Articles (such as Devpolicy blogs) were also republished by Pacific media outlets.

Citation data is also an important indicator of research reach. Citations in news media of Lowy Institutes' research publications and academics have increased year-on-year throughout the program, with PRP analysis and research cited 5,436 times in FY2024-25, nearly 5000 times in FY2023-2024, and 1,664 times in FY2022-23.

Media stakeholders noted the value of the blog posts and articles in their own reporting (i.e. alerting them to new research or analysis), as well as their general knowledge of the region, which in turn informs capacity strengthening work with Pacific media organisations (with DFAT funding). Articles on labour mobility and geo-politics reportedly had the highest levels of media interest. A key achievement of PRP has been the elevation of Pacific voices in public debate. One stakeholder noted: *"Seeing Pacific names as authors and co-authors is a very powerful thing, adds credence to the analysis."* This has been an area of dedicated focus for the program, with approximately 25 per cent of Lowy Interpreter blog posts having a Pacific author. In FY2024-25, 35% of authors of Pacific-focused Devpolicy blog articles were of Pacific Islands heritage. Pacific Islands authorship has increased for DPA publications, with 44% of authors having Pacific Islands heritage in Phase II, compared to 32% in Phase I.

While PRP has made progress in promoting Pacific authorship and perspectives, there is scope to further empower Pacific researchers and commentators, especially younger voices, to lead public debate. For example, a senior

PNG academic noted she'd ***"like to see young people coming to the point where they are making the commentaries for the media. Someone needs to be able to translate for the public, someone who understands political economy in PNG."*** There is still a tendency for Australian academics to be lead authors on publications and commentary related to Pacific issues.

Representation of women as authors on PRP blog posts has reached (or is approaching) gender parity. Across the program, 51% of all Pacific-focused Lowy Interpreter authors were female, while for the most recent year (FY2024-2025) 40% of authors of Pacific-focused Devpolicy blog articles were female.

PRP strengthened Pacific knowledge amongst policy makers and practitioners by delivering targeted briefings to diplomats, government officials, and regional agencies, with reporting indicating hundreds of briefings are held annually by consortium partners for diplomats, government agencies, private sector, media, multilateral and other development organisations. While the evaluation team was unable to capture or review feedback from briefed stakeholders, the high volume speaks to the reputation of and trust in consortium partners, and the value of their responsiveness and accessibility.

PRP-supported academics and students have contributed to DPA's delivery of "Understanding the Pacific", a 2-day short-course commissioned through DFAT's diplomatic academy (eight run since 2022 with DFAT funding). Feedback on this event was highly positive. One stakeholder consulted noted the continued importance of inclusion of Pacific voices (via PhD students) in the panel discussion.

Senior DFAT stakeholders reported that the blogs and articles were widely read within DFAT, with staff drawing on content for general awareness of the Pacific context and key challenges. Engagement across DFAT stakeholders varied depending on their area of focus, with those working in policy areas with the greatest alignment to PRP the most engaged (e.g. labour mobility, economic development), while others working in education noted little content relevant to their work.

ANU report that Pacific Studies courses (undergraduate and postgraduate level) are a key opportunity to educate and inform the Australian public about Pacific issues, and the activity is captured under the EOPO3 pillar of work. ANU's focus on Pacific-focussed teaching is unique amongst Australian universities at this point in time, with PRP funding building on earlier program support including the State, Society and Governance in Melanesia (SSGM Program (1996-2017) and PRP Phase 1 (2017-2021). ANU is the sole Australian university that teaches Pacific Studies as a standalone degree, while other Australian universities provide Pacific teaching through single subjects within mainstream degrees (e.g. International Relations, Community Development), Pacific-focussed short-courses, or courses specifically designed for Pacific Island professional staff.[7] In comparison, four of New Zealand's eight universities offer Pacific Studies courses. Key subjects within Pacific Studies courses are taught by DPA lecturers, with an increasing number of Pacific Islander lecturers supported either directly by PRP funding (3x Pacific Fellows) or ANU's ongoing commitment (1 ongoing senior academic role). PRP documentation shows enrolment in Pacific Studies Undergraduate Studies has been steadily growing, reaching a peak of 1,519 students in 2024 (full 2025 data was not yet available), with the most popular subjects taught by PRP-funded academics. Pacific Studies courses are presented as a key approach for ANU to educate and inform the Australian public about Pacific issues, and while there is an inherent public good associated with these courses, there is limited evidence available on student outcomes, for example graduate destinations or ongoing engagement with the region.

Stakeholders stress that without the support of PRP, which funds the majority of academic roles within the DPA, the ANU would be unable to sustain the same level of teaching and ultimately struggle to deliver a dedicated Pacific Studies course.

Sustainability of outcomes under EOPO3

Outcomes under EOPO3 appear more vulnerable to shifts in funding. While it is clear that there was high engagement and levels of trust in the publications resulting from PRP, it is less certain that engagement would continue without ongoing publication of timely and relevant analysis and commentary.

Delivery of ANU's Pacific Studies courses is heavily dependent on teaching from DPA personnel, which is predominantly funded through PRP. It's unclear the extent to which ANU would be able to self-sustain the current extent of Pacific Studies courses should there be changes to the provision of government funding.

[7] E.g. Pacific educators under the Bachelor of Education (Pacific Focus) and Associate degree in Teaching (Pacific Focus) through University of New England, or the Graduate Certificate in Fisheries Management and Development for staff from the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency staff through the University of Wollongong.

3.2.4 MEL system and resourcing

MEL system

The PRP MEL Plan and system was designed to support decision-making, accountability and learning, with a dual focus on organisational learning and DFAT accountability. This was an improvement from Phase 1, which did not have a MEL Plan that met DFAT's Design and Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning standards. The MEL approach has evolved during delivery of Phase II, with an initial MEL Plan approved in 2023, and an updated MEL Plan developed in 2025 to reflect a more streamlined approach and an increased emphasis on qualitative data and outcome monitoring. **However, MEL resourcing and implementation has been inconsistent, particularly in the first two years of PRP, which has resulted in some gaps in evidence on progress towards EOPOs, and impacted the comprehensiveness of reporting.**

As noted under Effectiveness, the EOPOs outlined in the Program Logic weren't articulated in a way that aligned with program activities or readily enabled monitoring and reporting. The early MEL framework included a large number of indicators, primarily quantitative measurement of outputs and activities, such number of research projects, publications, engagements with policy makers, and events with Pacific researchers, however these were not systematically reported on in progress reports. There were gaps in consistency of reporting on the total number of research projects, publications (of all types), and policy engagements per thematic area, which limited comprehensive understanding of the program's activities and achievements.

The 2023 MEL Plan outlined several MEL processes designed to monitor program performance, document evidence and support program learning, such establishment and regular meetings of the Pacific Implementing Partner's Group (an annual process to monitor the strategic context in the Pacific) and Results Workshops (including reflections by thematic area), however these processes were not reported in the subsequent years and it's unclear whether they were established.

In July 2024 the Program conducted a consortium-wide reflection and review workshops, led by MEL partners Ideate Consulting, which informed the FY2023-24 report and will conduct another such workshop to inform the 2025 annual reporting and learning process. There is also evidence of ongoing evaluation and feedback loops at the activity level, for example course evaluations feeding into continuous improvements.

The 2023 MEL Plan outlined a plan to complete two evaluative reviews each financial year from FY2023/2024, focused across themes, activities and at the program level. There was a delay in commencement with only one completed by the end of FY2024/2025. The updated 2025 MEL Plan referred to three case studies (two new), with one completed in early 2025 ("Disability Equity and Rights"), and two more finalisation during this evaluation ("From Insights to Impact: PRPII's approach to Pacific labour mobility and integration", and "Enduring Partnerships and Shared Learning: PRP's contribution to stronger Pacific research partnerships and practice). The case studies provide a depth of evidence on the program's contributions in specific areas and help validate the program's theory of change. The program would benefit from additional case studies documenting other areas of program focus, including gender equality and remaining thematic research areas. An updated tracer study[8] on PRC participants would be helpful following completion of the PNG and Samoa courses, including analysis of the comparative benefits of hosting country-specific cohorts. To date, case studies been largely positive and should seek to also document program learning, including areas where activities and partnerships have not yielded expected outcomes, to drive continuous improvement and support DFAT's strategic decision-making.

Evidence under EOPO1 emphasises publications of research, with less evidence of policy engagement. There are notable examples of evidence available on engagements between research and policy makers beyond publications (for example, Dev Policy's engagement with DFAT on Pacific Labour Mobility). However evidence of policy engagement was not comprehensively reported across the program, meaning it is unclear whether policy engagement is occurring across all research themes and projects, and with both Australian and Pacific stakeholders. PRP reports on Stakeholders Briefed through PRP (i.e. as an Annex in Annual Reports). The updated MEL framework has specific indicators related to DFAT engagement but not to Pacific policy stakeholders (see below).

The evaluation team notes some inconsistencies in how the MEL Framework categorises indicators and therefore captures evidence of progress towards outcomes. For example, the updated MEL Plan includes an indicator on engagement with Pacific policy makers *"# and type of engagements between PRPII researchers and Australian/Pacific Islands policy leaders and politicians*" under EOPO3, even though that indicator seems to fit better under EOPO1 ("Better informed Pacific Policy Makers"). Notably, EOPO1 includes an indicator related to engagement between PRP II and DFAT staff, but not policy makers more generally (including based in the Pacific), suggesting the program's focus is on Australian policy makers. Program reporting for 2024-2025 was not available

[8] The first tracer study was completed under PRP Phase 1

for the evaluation team the review, so it is unclear how these indicators have been monitored and reported, however there is room for further refinements to better document the program's efforts in this space.

There is no baseline available to measure progress in each EOPO. A lack of baseline makes it challenging to measure changes to Pacific policy maker's understanding of the Pacific developmental context (EOPO1) or progress in institutional capacity building or strengthened partnerships under EOPO2. Development of program baselines should be prioritised in any future phases.

MEL resourcing

MEL resourcing has been insufficient over the life of the program, with significant gaps in administrative and M&E resourcing in 2024. The Strategic M&E advisor engaged early in the program was overcommitted and could not fulfil their planned engagement, causing delays to finalising the MEL Plan and delivering DFAT reports. Roll out of the full MEL system following approval of the MEL Plan was also delayed. Delays in recruitment of a dedicated MEL advisor had implications for consistency of data collection and comprehensiveness of reporting across all aspects of the program and consortium partners. Consistency and quality of MEL reporting was also impacted by staffing changes and leave of key program personnel. While the program recently engaged an external provider for ongoing MEL support (Ideate Consulting), focussed efforts will be required to address gaps in MEL evidence and reporting for the remainder of the program.

Funding of MEL personnel and activities was not reported separately from program management (23% of overall funding) so it was not clear whether PRP MEL expenditure aligns with DFAT's expectations of four to seven per cent of program's implementation budget.[9]

Reflections on the theory of change and program logic

PRP's program logic has some issues that should be addressed in a future phase. The End of Program Outcomes, particularly EOPO1, were not articulated in a way that aligned with the program's focus or readily enabled monitoring and reporting. The Investment Design Document does not include an overarching Theory of Change for the program, although it does reference developing Theories of Change for each engagement area. These Theories of Change are articulated in Engagement Strategies annexed under the 2023 MEL Plan, through detailed analysis of the context and challenges relating to achievement of the EOPO, rather than as a clear "if-then" pathway between activities, IOs and EOPOs. Theories of Action additionally describe how the program will operationalise each Theory of Change. The Theories of Change are lengthy and descriptive, and would benefit from simplification, including through diagrams, to support shared understanding and monitoring of the assumptions underpinning the program's design.

Analysis for this evaluation has shown that the activities undertaken under PRP contribute to all EOPOs. For example, blog posts and articles supported under EOPO3 contribute to communicating research findings with policy makers (EOPO1), and the Pacific-focussed research conferences, while included under EOPO2, could also contribute to EOPO1 (with a more intentional focus on policy dialogue).

The evaluation team understands the program logic for PRP was created by a small group of stakeholders directly involved in delivery, with the thematic research areas established by DFAT. It would recommend a broader consultation for any future phase, to ensure broader perspectives including from policy makers and Pacific tertiary stakeholders, shape the program design and research priorities.

3.3 GEDSI integration

This section examines how effectively GEDSI was integrated into PRP, including the extent to which the program considered and promoted gender equality and disability equity in its efforts towards achieving EOPOs. The evaluation team also explored with key stakeholders how future research, activities and ways of working advance shared GEDSI goals.

Gender Equality Integration in PRP

PRP positions gender equality as a foundational principle guiding all program pillars, from research and policy engagement to partnerships and capacity development. This commitment was reinforced under the 2024 GEDSI Strategy, which institutionalised gender analysis, inclusion of women's perspectives, and gender-balanced participation across all activities. It is noteworthy that the GEDSI Strategy was formalised in April 2024, nearly two years into the program's current phase, however GEDSI research was being undertaken from the outset. It is unclear whether the GEDSI strategy has resulted in a re-prioritisation of GEDSI research projects, publications or policy engagements.

[9] As outlined in DFAT's Design, Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning standards, Standard 4.22

Even in the initial absence of a GEDSI strategy, PRP's strategic intent has translated into a strong body of gender-focussed research, resulting from the PRP's dedicated thematic area under EOPO1 (Gender, Inclusion and Social Change). With additional goals articulated in the GEDSI strategy, including mainstreaming GEDSI inclusive content and analysis across all pillars, promoting participation and leadership marginalised groups including women and LGBTQIA+ communities) in the implementation of investments, and applying an inclusive intersectional lens, PRP has endeavoured to ensure gender equality is treated not as an isolated theme but as a cross-cutting driver of program quality and relevance.

Institutionalising Gender Equality through the GEDSI Strategy

Since the strategy's approval, PRP has strengthened internal mechanisms to ensure systematic gender integration. Gender equality objectives have been embedded in research design, event planning, and partnership agreements. Each project proposal must include gender analysis and demonstrate how women's voices are represented in research processes and outputs.

Program progress reports indicate that PRP has transitioned from ad hoc gender mainstreaming to a more structured, institutionalised approach. Dedicated gender advisors provide technical guidance to researchers, and a DFAT representative ensures gender considerations remain central to program governance. The sustained focus on women's leadership, both in research and management, has positioned gender equality as a key measure of PRP's success. Continued investment in Pacific women's research capacity and regional collaboration will be essential to sustaining and expanding this progress beyond PRP.

Gender-Responsive Research and Policy Influence

A dedicated thematic area on Gender, Inclusion and Social Change research saw 19 targeted GEDSI projects delivered on topics including women's experience of violence, labour mobility programs, political participation, leadership, and civic engagement. PRP's influence on gender equality is most visible in the areas of political participation, governance, and leadership. Pacific-led research has informed civic awareness, policy discussions, and DFAT programming on women's participation in public life. Studies led by DPA researchers provided robust evidence on women's under-representation in politics, electoral barriers, and voter attitudes.

Desktop analysis conducted for this evaluation shows that PRP's gender research related to women's political participation and governance have informed DFAT's policy and programming. For example, in PNG (2022) and Solomon Islands (2024), PRP-supported election observation studies documented how structural, cultural, and logistical barriers limit women's ability to stand for election or vote freely. The findings informed advocacy for inclusive election management practices and contributed to national discussions on temporary special measures to increase women's representation. This evidence directly influenced the design of the *Improving Political Inclusion and Participation (IPIP)* project under the PNG Women Lead Program, which explicitly acknowledges its foundation in PRP-funded research. IPIP translates PRP research into practice through civic awareness, candidate mentoring, and institutional strengthening, demonstrating a clear research-to-policy pathway and reinforcing PRP's role as a key knowledge partner informing DFAT's gender equality investments in the Pacific.

In Vanuatu, PRP's partnership with the *Balance of Power* program has similarly applied research findings to shape actionable strategies on women's political leadership and youth engagement. Beyond the electoral sphere, PRP has also advanced gender equality through research on decentralisation, education, labour mobility, and governance systems, embedding gender-sensitive methodologies that have deepened understanding of how gender dynamics shape policy outcomes. The *PNG National Service Delivery Trends Assessment* exemplifies this approach, integrating GEDSI principles across research design, delivery, and reporting. Its inclusive methodology: incorporating sex, age, and disability-disaggregated data and gender balance across research teams reflects PRP's operational commitment to equity and participation.

A major regional legacy is the *Toksave Pacific Gender Resource,* an online repository of Pacific gender research developed with PRP and DFAT support and transferred to SPC in 2023 for long-term stewardship. Under the guidance of PRP-supported DPA academics, and leveraging funding from other investments, this transition represents PRP's commitment to sustaining Pacific-owned, accessible gender knowledge. In addition, PRP's gender-related evidence has informed the work of advocacy networks such as *Pacific Women in Politics (PacWIP)* and the *Australia Awards Women Leading and Influencing (WLI)* program, whose second-phase design (2023–2027) incorporated PRP findings on women's leadership, reintegration, and local coalition-building. These linkages illustrate PRP's bridging role between research, policy, and civil society.

*"**Influence is more visible in the electoral space, where the partnerships and research on women's political participation has empowered local activists and CSOs through access to data.**"* PRP Implementing Stakeholder.

Capacity Building and Women's Research Leadership

PRP's long-term contribution to gender equality is evident in its investment in Pacific women's research leadership. The program has supported a diverse and growing pipeline of women researchers through PhD scholarships,

research fellowships, and collaborative grants. Currently, eight Pacific women are pursuing doctoral studies at ANU's Department of Pacific Affairs, contributing directly to gender-informed policy discussions in their countries and the region. PRP also strengthened inclusive research practice through the PNG Research Colloquium (2023) and Pacific Research Colloquium (2024) both achieving near gender parity in participation, demonstrating the program's commitment to equitable access to academic and professional opportunities.

The cohort of PRP-supported women scholars illustrates the breadth of women's leadership cultivated through PRP support. Their research spans women's political representation, gender and security, and cultural diplomacy, providing timely evidence for governance, development, and regional cooperation. Complementing this, PRP's Pacific Research Fellows contribute directly to gender and governance research while mentoring emerging scholars across the Pacific. Together, these women represent a sustained pipeline of Pacific leaders advancing gender equality through evidence-based policy and scholarship.

PRP researchers also actively participate in policy dialogues and practitioner training, ensuring ongoing translation of research into practice. These include the Pacific Update, State of the Pacific Conferences, all designed to ensure that research evidence directly informs policymaking and strengthens practitioner capacity. Public engagement platforms such as the Lowy Interpreter have further amplified women's voices in public debate, ensuring gender balance in authorship and regional thought leadership.

Integration of Disability Equity in PRP

PRP's approach to disability equity and rights has been present but uneven. Disability considerations were present in several studies and reporting streams, most commonly as part of sex, age and disability disaggregation, but this inclusion has not been as systematic or visible as the program's gender work. Where outputs reference disability, the framing alternates between welfare-oriented and rights-based language; explicit use of Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) principles and a consistent rights-based narrative across all research and engagement products remains limited. Methodological adaptations to ensure meaningful inclusion of people with a range of impairments, such as accessible data collection tools, purposive sampling of persons with disabilities, or tailored ethical protocols, have been used in some projects but are not yet standard practice across PRP-funded activities.

Institutional mechanisms to support disability mainstreaming have begun to emerge since the 2024 GEDSI Strategy, but they are less developed than gender systems. The IDD referred to the program developing a Disability Inclusion Plan as an early deliverable, however it's unclear if this was developed or implemented. PRP has included disability-disaggregated reporting in certain studies and provided some technical guidance on inclusion. The program has also conducted an Evaluative Study on Disability Equity and Rights, the first case study completed under the MEL Plan, which highlighted achievements and elicited key program learning, including the need for a dedicated disability advisor, prioritisation of targeted disability research, and increased efforts for people with disabilities to shape pacific research and policy. There is no information available about how PRP plans to respond to review recommendations. Without intentional efforts to strengthen equity, disability considerations risk remaining optional rather than integral to PRP's operations and outcomes.

Engagement with persons with disabilities and Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) has strengthened the relevance of some research findings and added important lived-experience perspectives, for example within the PNG elections research. However, representation of persons with disabilities in leadership roles within research teams, advisory bodies or decision-making fora remains limited. Building more deliberate, well-resourced partnerships that remunerate and support OPD leadership would deepen legitimacy, improve accessibility of research processes, and help translate findings into locally owned practice.

Accessibility of PRP events and knowledge products varies. Some outputs and forums have adopted inclusive formats, captioned videos, sign language interpreters, plain-language summaries, or physical accessibility measures, but this is not consistent across conferences, workshops and publications. Digital, physical and language barriers have at times constrained full participation by people with diverse impairments. Applying universal design principles to events and dissemination, budgeting for reasonable accommodations, and making accessible versions a standard deliverable would materially increase participation and the reach of PRP evidence.

PRP's influence on policy and programming in relation to disability is emerging but less evident than its influence on gender policy. While disability-relevant evidence has informed discussions on service delivery and participation in some contexts, there are fewer clear examples of PRP research directly driving disability-specific policy reforms at national or regional levels. Strengthening research-to-policy pathways by supporting targeted policy-oriented disability studies, co-developing policy briefs with OPDs, and engaging disability focal points in government and regional bodies would help translate evidence into concrete program and policy changes.

Capacity development for disability-inclusive research approaches has been implemented in an ad hoc manner through occasional technical inputs and training. A more scaled approach integrating disability inclusion into capacity development initiatives, such as scholarships, fellowships, mentoring programs would raise baseline competence across the PRP research portfolio. Standardised training on accessible and inclusive approaches and ethics, combined with routine quality checks, would help ensure that disability-sensitive approaches are applied

consistently rather than only in isolated projects, and improve participation of people with disabilities as researchers as well as participants.

Priority actions to accelerate progress include formalising a disability mainstreaming action plan with resourced advisor role(s), embedding mandatory disability-inclusive requirements in project design and reporting, scaling partnerships with OPDs that prioritise co-design and leadership, standardising accessibility and universal design for events and outputs, strengthening disability-disaggregated data and inclusive methods, and integrating disability competencies related to inclusive research approaches into capacity-building initiatives. Together, these measures would help move PRP from intermittent inclusion to a rights-based, program-wide approach to disability equity.

Opportunities to strengthen GEDSI in PRP

There is a clear opportunity to move GEDSI from a strong programmatic commitment to an embedded operational practice by formalising resourcing and governance. Establishing a designated, funded GEDSI technical advisor with explicit responsibility for mainstreaming disability, gender and other inclusion priorities would create consistent oversight, enable quality assurance across project proposals and outputs, and ensure continuity when staff change. Embedding GEDSI requirements into project templates, partnership agreements and funding criteria will help make inclusion a non-negotiable element of program quality rather than an add-on.

The PRP's GEDSI portfolio is broad and primarily focussed on women's political representation, leadership and experience of violence, with a lower emphasis on disability and other social inclusion. Through this evaluation, Pacific stakeholders surfaced a number of additional topics they saw as priorities, including gender equality in tertiary education, workplace participation, and the lived experiences of women and men in Pacific contexts. They highlighted the importance of continued research into masculinities and gender-based violence (GBV) led by Pacific scholars, which has taken place under PRP. Disability stakeholders noted a significant gap in disability data and evidence to inform regional and national policy making. In terms of social inclusion, numerous stakeholders in Fiji noted the impact of Pacific labour programs on children, families and communities who remain behind, seeing this as a critical policy issue.

Strengthening data, methods and evidence generation is essential to deepen GEDSI's impact. PRP can standardise the routine collection and use of sex, age and disability-disaggregated data, adopt inclusive sampling approaches that ensure representation of people with different impairments and marginalised gender identities, and require accessible data collection tools and ethical protocols tailored to diverse participants. Investing in mixed-methods research that explicitly examines intersectional pathways (for example, how disability, gender and remoteness interact to shape outcomes) will produce actionable evidence for targeted policy and programming.

Participation, co-design and partnerships with civil society should be scaled and resourced to achieve more authentic inclusion. PRP should move beyond consultation by prioritising partnerships with OPDs, women's organisations, LGBTQIA+ groups and other representative networks as co-designers and co-implementers of research and capacity-building initiatives.

There are opportunities to make accessibility and inclusive communications standard practice across PRP. Universal design principles should guide event planning, publications, and digital platforms so that outputs are available in multiple formats (plain language, captioning, audio, large print, and translated versions, where relevant). Budget lines for reasonable accommodations and clear accessibility checklists will reduce ad hoc approaches and enable fuller participation by people with diverse impairments and language needs.

Capacity development can be expanded to ensure GEDSI competence is widespread among researchers, partners and governance stakeholders. Rather than ad hoc training, PRP can institutionalise curricula on disability-inclusive research methods, gender-sensitive analysis, and ethical engagement with marginalised groups into fellowships, scholarships, and mentoring programs. Embedding GEDSI competencies into performance frameworks for researchers and partners will help sustain practice change beyond individual projects.

To strengthen influence on policy and practice, PRP should develop deliberate research-to-policy pathways that translate GEDSI evidence into actionable recommendations and investments. Producing targeted policy briefs co-authored with local partners, facilitating policy dialogues with government GEDSI focal points, and piloting evidence-informed interventions with built-in monitoring will increase the likelihood that research drives tangible reforms and investment decisions at national and regional levels.

Monitoring, evaluation and learning present another opportunity. The case study documenting PRP's efforts relate to disability inclusion provided valuable learning, and a similar approach could be undertaken to document achievements and lessons related to gender equality and other areas of social inclusion. PRP can further incorporate participatory MEL approaches that involve the people and communities whose outcomes the program seeks to shift. Regular GEDSI learning reviews that surface what works and why, paired with accessible knowledge products, will accelerate improvements across the portfolio.

PRP's evolving practice would benefit from explicit alignment with contemporary operational guidance on disability-equitable investment design. The DFAT – CBM Australia Technical Partnership's Disability Equity in Investment Design Good Practice Note (July 2025) offers practical steps and checklists that PRP can adapt for the Pacific

context to strengthen assessment, design, implementation and MEL (DFAT – CBM Australia Technical Partnership, July 2025). Adopting and tailoring these tools would support more consistent institutionalisation of disability rights and equity across the program.

Finally, regional collaboration and sustainability should be prioritised to amplify GEDSI gains. Strengthening relationships with regional bodies and civil society networks (such as Pacific Island Association for NGOs (PIANGO), Fiji Council of Social Services (FCOSS), and Pacific Disability Forum (PDF)) will help institutionalise GEDSI knowledge and capacity beyond the life of individual projects. Investments that create enduring regional assets - repositories, training modules, and supported networks will sustain the program's GEDSI legacy and support Pacific-led ownership of inclusion agendas.

3.4 Efficiency

This section assesses the extent to which PRP has efficiently utilised its financial and human resources to deliver activities and output across EOPOs. It explored how resources were used across the program (and the three EOPOs to the extent the evidence allowed for). It also examined how the program changed across the years to understand the progress achieved, and how resource-related factors contributed or hindered progress.

3.4.1 Overview of resource utilisation

Overall, PRP's efficiency in utilising financial and human resources is rated as good, with evidence of sound value for money through co-funding, flexibility across program funding, and effective risk management. The consortium model has enabled the program to deliver a high volume and quality of outputs relative to inputs, with positive benefits for research, policy engagement, and capacity building across the Pacific region. The program's consortium model has enabled a high degree of co-funding, resource pooling, and harmonisation of efforts across research, teaching, and outreach activities. Ongoing challenges, such as administrative delays, budget pressures, and staffing gaps, have been managed through adaptive strategies and program governance mechanisms, ensuring continued progress towards EOPOs.

Expenditure patterns[10] indicate that 41% of the budget was allocated to EOPO1 (research and policy engagement), 18% to EOPO2 (capacity building), 9% to EOPO3 (outreach), with the remaining expenditure allocated for program management, MEL and indirect costs. Funding for program management and MEL appears appropriate, although it was not clear what proportion of program funding was allocated to MEL.

The majority of resources have been directed toward research and policy engagement (EOPO1), reflecting the program's core mandate, as well as the budget structure, which accounts for the majority of PRP personnel under Pillar 1 where staff costs are captured under their corresponding research theme. In practice, staff work flexibly across activities contributing to a range of EOPOs – for example, staff also supervise PhD students (EOPO2), teach into Pacific undergraduate and postgraduate courses (EOPO3) and publish commentary and blog posts (EOPO3). Capacity building (EOPO2) has also received substantial investment, particularly through PhD scholarships, and research training (including the Research Colloquium).

PRP has evolved its resource management and operational approaches since PRP Phase 1, in response to both internal and external factors. Key changes include:

- **Enhancing Local Engagement and Capacity:** There has been a deliberate shift towards deeper engagement with Pacific national universities and research institutes, recognising the importance of long-term investment in local capacity. This includes a trend towards co-designing research projects, embedding Pacific scholars in program activities, and supporting the development of new academic programs and research networks.
- **Strengthening Consortium Coherence:** The establishment of the PRP Strategic Management Group, DFAT's thematic focal points, and a Ways of Working document has improved coordination and alignment across partners, enhancing the efficiency of resource use and decision-making.
- **Adapting to Staffing and Funding Pressures:** The program has managed periods of staff turnover and budgetary constraints by reallocating resources, negotiating amendments with DFAT, and seeking alternative funding sources. For example, salary increases under the ANU Enterprise Agreement and rising travel costs have prompted proactive budget modelling and adjustments to FTE allocations.
- **Mainstreaming GEDSI:** PRP has mainstreamed Gender Equality, Disability, and Social Inclusion (GEDSI) considerations across all activities, with dedicated research leads and targeted initiatives (following development of the GEDSI strategy in 2024).
- **Risk Management** Risk management processes have been strengthened, particularly in response to fieldwork in high-risk contexts such as PNG, aiming to improve the safety and security of staff and partners.

[10] This breakdown of funding across EOPOs is available in the FY2022/2023 Annual Report but was not observed for other reporting periods.

3.4.2 Financial Resource Management

Although it is beyond the scope of this evaluation to present an assessment of the PRP's Value for Money (VfM), analysis indicates there are benefits to the program's funding model. PRP's funding structure is built on a co-investment model. This model has allowed for significant leveraging of resources, with direct DFAT funding augmented by ANU's in-kind and direct contributions. The program has consistently reported expenditure on track, with minor underspends (e.g., $800,000 in Year 3) managed through reallocation and transparent communication with DFAT. The program additionally leverages long-held relationships, existing research infrastructure, and co-funding from other research partners to deliver a high volume of outputs. However, the bulk of funding (and decision-making) remains in Canberra, rather than within the Pacific.

Each consortium member leverages PRP funding to access additional research funding, which further extends the reach of the program. This was apparent to the evaluation team on a project level (for example, 2024 Solomon Islands elections research, with substantial funding from Honiara Post), but evidence on the extent or total amount of leveraged funding was not available. The Lowy Institute has expanded focus on the Pacific in activities outside PRP, and their reputation for Pacific expertise has attracted further funding for Pacific-focused work, including philanthropic funding.

Finally, PRP leverages a broader network of ANU-funded researchers across the university to deliver activities, such as supervision of HDR students, mentoring of Pacific Research Colloquium students, and contributing to events. The number of staff making these contributions, or the value of inputs, was not available for analysis.

3.4.3 Flexible funding model

The funding model is highly flexible, with PRP providing flexible research funding that is shared between consortium partners and supports delivery of an annual workplan, in line with agreed research priorities set by DFAT at the commencement of PRPII. Stakeholders note the importance of flexible funding in supporting highly collaborative research (including with Pacific research partners), purposeful capacity strengthening, and the ability to respond to emerging policy priorities. This was contrasted with alternative funding scenarios common to Australian universities, where researchers are disincentivised from collaboration, partner capacity strengthening, and publications for a policy and public audience. The program has also enabled the space for researchers to respond to calls for their expertise and advice, for example through a Devpol researcher's review of the Falepili Mobility Pathway design.

Co-funding and partnership arrangements have been particularly effective in supporting large-scale, multi-country research projects, with costs and expertise shared among consortium partners and local institutions.

3.4.4 Human Resource Management

Overall, the majority of PRP funding is allocated to salaries, including:

- Academic staff:
  - 14.3 FTE research and teaching staff within DPA and Devpol programs at ANU, and 2.25 FTE research staff within the Lowy Institute in FY2025-2026.
- Professional staff:
  - PRP funded 1.4 FTE roles supporting research publication and communication, and 4.3 FTE on program management & support roles (MEL, financial management)

Staff funded by ANU and the Lowy Institute also contribute to the program.

The program has adapted to staff turnover and resourcing challenges by reallocating responsibilities, recruiting interim leads, and leveraging the broader academic and alumni networks of consortium partners. For example, during periods of short-staffing or parental leave, responsibilities were redistributed without significant disruption to program delivery.

Tertiary institutions have an inherent focus on building the capacity and careers of academic staff, which has been demonstrated through PRP. The project has enabled consortium partners to build research teams that support early career and emerging scholars (from Australia and the Pacific) to gain exposure to significant research programs, build their profile and expand their networks. For example, DPA's former PhD students (both Australian and Pacific) have been employed as Research Fellows, taking on increasing leadership in research projects and within the department.

The consortium's approach to personnel deployment - such as embedding researchers in Pacific institutions (UPNG), supporting joint teaching and research appointments, and engaging local partners in fieldwork - has maximised the impact of available human resources. The program's ability to draw on a pool of Pacific scholars and alumni has been critical to sustaining research and capacity-building activities, particularly in contexts with greater capacity gaps (such as PNG and Solomon Islands).

3.4.5 Program governance

PRP operates under a consortium model, led by Department of Pacific Affairs (ANU) in partnership with the Development Policy Centre (ANU) and the Lowy Institute. ANU serves as the primary implementer and agreement holder with DFAT, and both ANU and the Lowy Institute contribute significant co-funding to amplify PRP's overall budget. The consortium model itself is a key governance feature, enabling collaboration, leveraging complementary expertise, and maximising the reach and impact of research and capacity-building activities. Regular communication and shared platforms allow for joint research, teaching, and outreach, while avoiding duplication and administrative complexity. Stakeholders note that communication between DFAT and implementing partners was partially effective, with communication primarily through DPA. In some instances, communication and engagement with other consortium stakeholders (Devpol and Lowy Institute) could be strengthened.

PRP's governance processes are adequate but could be strengthened. Strategic oversight and coordination are provided by the PRP Strategic Management Group (PRPSMG), which is intended to meet quarterly and include representatives from all consortium partners and DFAT. While there are clear roles for consortium partners, the PRPSMG has not met as frequently as intended, and its structure is overly formal, minimising opportunities for robust discussions that inform strategic decisions. The PRPSMG's agenda covers program priorities, progress against outcomes, risk management, financial updates, and opportunities for engagement. The group's terms of reference were updated in 2024 to enable endorsement of large research proposals, while maintaining academic independence.

The program's financial arrangement as a grant (contribution funding) rather than contract (procurement) has had consequences for DFAT's oversight and contributed to governance complexity. Implementing partners hold independent relationships with various DFAT areas, and investment managers are not always aware of the full range of engagements and how DFAT is utilising the program. At times, DFAT has been unclear on the activities undertaken by consortium partners under PRP vs other funding. Limited oversight has impacted oversight, coordination, learning, and DFAT's ability to maximise value from the program.

Operational management is reinforced through regular working-level meetings between the PRP Senior Program Manager, DFAT Activity Manager, and other key personnel, typically on a monthly or fortnightly basis. These meetings address ongoing activities, personnel updates, budget, and contract management issues.

3.4.6 Risk management

PRP has established a robust, contextually relevant, and adaptive approach to risk management and safeguards, consistently aligning with both ANU and DFAT standards. The program's risk management framework is underpinned by the principle of 'do no harm' and is designed to address the complex and evolving operational environments in which PRP operates, particularly in high-risk contexts such as Papua New Guinea (PNG).

PRP's risk management is embedded at all levels of program governance. Risks are a standing item in all governance forums, including monthly consortium meetings and quarterly Strategic Management Group meetings, ensuring regular review and discussion of emerging risks and mitigation. The PRP Phase II MEL Plan has further strengthened these processes, with risk management, including budget tracking, a standard agenda item.

The PRP risk register is reviewed and updated at least quarterly, with escalation of high-level risks to the Management Committee. The risk register covers stakeholder, resource, contextual, political, legal and social risks, and includes fraud and safeguard risks as well as GEDSI considerations. A 2022 comparative assessment confirmed that PRP's risk, safeguards, and fraud frameworks are substantially compliant with DFAT's policies and standards

PRP's risk management plan is regularly updated to reflect changing conditions, including financial, safety, and security risks. For example, ongoing high travel costs and salary increases under the ANU Enterprise Agreement have been proactively modelled, with PRP seeking alternative funding and adjusting staffing levels as needed.

Safety and security are particularly relevant for field-based research in PNG, where the security situation can be volatile. In response to the 2023 kidnap-for-ransom incident in PNG (at another Australian university), PRP temporarily suspended travel and conducted a thorough review of consortium partners' travel risk policies. The review led to strengthened requirements for travel approval, including completion of ANU's WHS Hazard and Risk Assessment, preparation of Medevac/Contingency Plans, and enhanced reporting protocols. For high-risk research activities, such as the NSDTA in PNG, PRP has outsourced critical support services to managing contractors with specialist security expertise. However, recent incidents within PNG-based research have highlighted room for improvement in risk management and reporting processes.

3.5 Repositioning: Appropriateness of PRP model, activities and activities

This section assesses the extent to which PRP's model is an appropriate modality to achieve developmental outcomes. It explores what models best support Pacific research agendas, and what features are most important for a future research partnership. It outlines how the PRP identified people, knowledge and values (Toli – selecting). It also examines the lessons from PRP regarding the underpinning theory of change and program logic, and implications for future investments.

This section also explores the extent to which current and proposed PRP activities are appropriate, given sectoral needs and Australia's comparative advantage, and how it could be refined in future phases.

3.5.1 Overview of appropriateness of the model

On the whole, stakeholders with direct engagement with PRP (including consortium partners, and research and policy stakeholders within Australia and the Pacific) believed the model had provided benefits. They reflected the model was largely appropriate and effective for supporting Pacific-focussed research, capacity building of Pacific academics, policy engagement, and facilitating public awareness of Pacific issues. The consortium model delivered through three entities (ANU's DPA holding the primary relationship with DFAT, and co-delivering with Devpol, and Lowy Institute) was viewed as an asset. This evaluation did not find issues with coordination, and only minor issues related to communication between DFAT and other consortium partners, with each consortium partner bringing a distinct strength to the program.

However, stakeholders did suggest refinements could be made to better support Pacific research priorities and strengthen institutional capacity development. Notably, Pacific stakeholders wanted a greater role in setting the research agenda, and more direct access to research funding. They were grateful for the mentorship and support provided through the program to date, but believed it was time for them to be "in the driver's seat."

> ***We want ongoing mentoring from ANU on research into elections implementation and political systems, and support to conduct research seminars, however with NRI in the driver's seat***[11].
>
> ***SINU should propose a set of focused projects under PRP II. These proposed initiatives are aligned with PRP II's three strategic pillars, firmly grounded in SINU's own strategic priorities (so that they are SINU-driven rather than donor-driven), and relevant to the ANU Department of Pacific Affairs' research themes (ensuring ANU interest and expertise).***[12]

Stakeholders outside PRP saw more gaps in the model. Australian tertiary stakeholders (external to PRP) were unsure whether having all funding concentrated to one tertiary institution, based in Australia, was the most effective or efficient way to drive Pacific institutional capacity development. Pacific stakeholders representing regional bodies highlighted potential gaps in PRP's current engagement with communities, CSOs and rights-holder organisations to shape the research agenda, not only to participate as enumerators or research participants. Closer engagement with Pacific stakeholders (researchers, policy makers and development practitioners) was seen as key to ensure the thematic research priorities were aligned with the most pressing Pacific policy challenges.

The Canberra-based location of implementing partners was not explicitly stated as a benefit to the model, however it was notable the different levels of relationships and interactions between PRP researchers and DFAT staff based in Canberra compared to Post, with all three Pacific Posts consulted having limited engagement or awareness of the program. This also reflects the challenge of building and maintaining networks with policy makers in areas of high staff turnover, and that Post engagements tend to be at the project, rather than program, level.

PRP's engagement with other Australian tertiary institutions has been limited to date, focused on discrete research projects (Pacific Attitudes Surveys) with one other institution (Swinburne University of Technology). While some stakeholders noted challenges in broadening PRP's Australian institutional engagement, citing differences in administrative systems and limited concentration of Pacific expertise, this evaluation was not able to undertake a full exploration of barriers and opportunities. Nevertheless, other Australian tertiary institutions are already engaging with Pacific institutions to conduct research and capacity development initiatives, and there was a keen appetite to engage in a potential future phase.

PRP is currently delivered through grant funding arrangement, rather than through a contract akin to those entered into with managing contractors and other implementing partners. This arrangement enables further leveraging of Commonwealth funding and places an emphasis on flexibility and autonomy. The arrangement is also appropriate given the significant co-funding provided through ANU. However, the grant arrangement has varying implications on the extent of DFAT's oversight, management, and ability to direct aspects of PRP's delivery (such as delivery of program strategies, progress reports, and plans).

3.5.2 Key features to maintain

Key features of the current model that should be maintained:

- **A focus on Pacific partnerships and co-delivery** of research with Pacific tertiary institutions. PRP should continue to enable Pacific institutions to lead on project design, data collection, and dissemination in line with institutional interest and capacity.
- **Flexibility in the funding model** - this allowed consortium partners to identify new research projects within set themes, build research teams as required, amplify funding through additional research grants, undertake a

[11] PNG Tertiary institution stakeholder

[12] Solomon Islands tertiary institution stakeholder

range of capacity-development activities, support Pacific undergraduate, HDR and short-course teaching, and build and nurture partnerships.

- **Long-term support,** with PRPII building on years of previous programming. Long-term investment supported deep engagement and scalable partnerships, which is critical in the Pacific context where the research ecosystem is challenging. Maturing of research partnerships and networks, along with capacity strengthening initiatives, has led to clear examples of co-designed research and Pacific researchers taking up more senior roles.
- **A level of presence in Canberra**, to support research-policy networks and facilitate DFAT's access to researchers.
- **Emphasising Pacific methodologies and Indigenous traditional knowledge**, which were a valued feature of research training**.**
- **Academic independence** was highly valued across a diverse range of stakeholders- providing accountability and contestability to DFAT's programming and policy positions.
- **Increasing presence of Pacific academics in program delivery,** including in leadership, teaching and research roles within consortium partners, and in leadership roles on research activities.

Potential refinements to the model are included under section 3.6.

3.5.3 Did the Program carefully identify relevant people, knowledge, and values? (Toli – selecting)?

The program's approach to identifying and engaging relevant people, knowledge and values is a notable strength.

- **People:** Drawing on deep and long-standing relationships with in-country stakeholders, PRP has increasingly included Pacific Island scholars in research teams, training opportunities (e.g. PRC, PhD program), and in employment including offering tenure and promotion to a Pacific Fellow at ANU. Through successive phases of investment, PRP has contributed to the pipeline of Pacific scholars including through short-courses, post-graduate programs, Pacific Visitorships, and involvement to significant national research projects.
- **Knowledge:** Research projects are increasingly co-designed with Pacific partners, and research topics are responsive to both Pacific and Australian policy needs. For example, the NSDTA project involved government officers from health and education in shaping the survey tool, while national academics contributed to shaping approaches and questions for the Pacific Attitudes Surveys in Vanuatu and Samoa, and elections reach in Solomon Islands.
- **Values:** PRP has privileged Pacific methodologies and local ownership, which is particularly apparent in teaching Pacific Methodologies, by Pacific Fellows, within the Pacific Research Colloquium course. Several participants note it was the first time they had learned about these approaches.

However, Pacific stakeholders would like to see these approaches extended in future phases. They saw a need for even greater localisation, with more Pacific-led thematic research.

3.5.4 Are PRP activities still fit for purpose?

Overall, the PRP's activities have demonstrated broad alignment with Pacific sectoral needs and Australia's comparative advantage in research, higher education, and policy engagement. Many of PRP's activities, particularly its larger research projects, were seen to address critical gaps in data and evidence as well as build research capacity largely through its contributions to building a pipeline of Pacific scholars.

While current activities weren't seen to be inappropriate, stakeholders shared that that refinement and consolidation could strengthen development outcomes. Several queried the value of delivering a high volume of research activities, unsure of the extent to which projects were responding to specific demand from Pacific researchers or policy makers. Stakeholders from DFAT Post noted the missed opportunity to coordinate or align research and capacity strengthening activities to other DFAT programming, such as scholarships programs or other bilateral programs, given they were already engaging with a range of program and policy stakeholders within the same sectors.

Stakeholders agreed that the thematic priorities were broadly appropriate and aligned with DFAT and Pacific stakeholder's policy interests. Noting that PRP's coverage of issues such as geopolitics, labour mobility, and elections is robust, some stakeholders noted that engagement with certain thematic areas (e.g., education & health in Solomon Islands, and the social impacts of labour mobility in Fiji) could be further deepened to ensure relevance across the full spectrum of Pacific priorities. The evaluation notes Devpol is currently working on research relating to the social impacts of labour mobility through the PLMS2 research project, which was added in response to stakeholder feedback and guidance, with reporting due in the final year of the project.

As noted earlier, the program could take a more strategic approach to institutional capacity strengthening. The activities undertaken to date were valued by individual scholars and university leadership, however ongoing capacity challenges were noted and stakeholders were keen to see a more strategic, planned approach undertaken in partnership Pacific universities. For example, SINU's leadership proactively identified additional activities that could be delivered under PRP aligned with SINU's institutional goals. These are summarised in Case Study 2.

Refinements to the model and recommendations for additional support are described in Section 3.6.

3.6 Retelling: Lessons and options for future consideration and reStorying

Recommendation 1: Clarify intended audience and purpose

PRP delivers robust evidence that supports Pacific policymaking. However, research topics and policy engagement approaches primarily benefit Australian (DFAT) policy makers and tertiary institutions, with less emphasis on Pacific stakeholders. Should a future program be supported, it is critical that DFAT clearly articulates who the program is seeking to benefit- is it primarily intended for DFAT, for Pacific policy makers, or equally for both? This clarity will guide the future design and allow the program to more clearly communicate its purpose to stakeholders across the region.

Recommendation 2: Deepen Pacific voices and leadership

Any future Pacific program should intentionally include Pacific stakeholders in the design process, including tertiary institutions, regional bodies and policy makers.

The design should also include new or strengthened mechanisms to include Pacific voices throughout the program, for example in identifying new research priorities or partnership opportunities. Diverse Pacific voices, including those from civil society, representative organisations and communities, should be integrated where possible.

Recommendation 3: Strategic institutional capacity development

The program has contributed to developing a pipeline of high-calibre Pacific scholars, who will serve as future leaders in universities, government and civil society. While this approach has been effective, there remains a risk that Pacific academics remain working in Australia, and broader institutional barriers to managing and conducting research remain. A future phase of reStorying could include development and resourcing of a multi-year capacity strengthening/sharing plan. The plan should be co-developed and delivered, jointly owned, and where possible, address broader barriers to institutional capacity (i.e. access to journal articles, research software, support to offset teaching loads).

Plans could include activities such as dual appointments between Australian and Pacific Universities, and staff exchanges to address teaching/research workload imbalances. Embedding of Australian academics within Pacific institutions could support teaching, technical training and mentoring of academic staff, and co-authoring publications in line with priorities identified by Pacific stakeholders. Embedded staff would ideally undergo ‘cultural competency’ training, ideally provided through a Pacific institution.

Development of a baseline study, which maps institutional strengths, gaps and opportunities across the region, could inform planning end enable measuring of progress for future phases. Mapping should also include the gaps in research approaches used (i.e. Eurocentric research philosophies and criteria) that may constrain development of institutions in the region.

Recommendation 4: Scope additional modalities to support Pacific-led research agendas

There is a strong desire amongst Pacific stakeholders to be firmly in the driver’s seat of identifying, leading and delivering Pacific-focussed research. This aligns to Australia’s commitments to locally led development under Australia’s International Development Policy. Future models may need to move beyond just collaboration and coordination with Pacific institutions, into a ‘twinning’ system whereby implementing universities share programming with Pacific universities. This will allow PRP to move beyond a current Western model towards a more integrated and holistic approach, grounded in Pasifika ‘whole of life’ philosophy and principles of knowledge.

Refinements to the delivery modality should be informed through a detailed co-design process. Should the program remain focussed on deepening research and education partnerships across Australia and the Pacific, and enabling greater reach, impact and sustainability, options for further exploration include:

(1) Maintaining a similar consortium model to manage activities currently under EOPO2 and 3, while enhancing opportunities for other research and education institutions to provide services currently provided under EOPO1. This could be through a research grants program co-managed and governed by a combination of DFAT, a CROP agency (i.e. Pacific Island Forum Secretariat) and/or a Managing Contractor. There should be some eligibility criteria for those who can access the research grants, focusing on Pacific and Australian tertiary institutions that are willing to match funding and/or efforts and commit to longer-term research collaboration.

(2) Broadening the delivery modality to include a greater number Australian and Pacific universities for key priority research areas, with funding allocations to enable longer-term institutional partnerships and multi-year workplans. This approach could deliver the key activities currently included under EOPO1 and 2 that each have commitments for collaborative research and associated capacity strengthening activities (mentoring, two-way exchanges, HRD students, co-supervision, research fellows etc).

Scoping of alternative delivery modalities will need to balance impacts on other program components, such as the requirement for greater resourcing for program management (from DFAT and within the program), and delivery of teaching into Pacific Studies courses.

Pasifika philosophies embedded within PRP's teaching and approaches have been a strength and should continue. However, there is a need to also build the knowledge base of research end-users to understand and engage more deeply with Pacific research and frameworks. A greater awareness of the relational aspect of Pacific knowledge and research are crucial for the success of Pacific-led research under future phases.

Recommendation 5: Strengthen GEDSI integration throughout program

Aligned with stakeholder inputs related to the GEDSI research agenda, including research gaps, the next design could include the following:

- **Strengthen disability equity and inclusion:** Ensure disability equity is more systematically mainstreamed in program implementation, in line with recommendations made under the evaluative study: namely, prioritise and increase targeted disability, equity and rights related research; continue to increase efforts that create opportunities for people with disability to shape pacific research and policy; and appointing focal point to focus on the implementation of disability equity. Dedicated resources for technical advice related to disability inclusion is recommended should the expertise not already sit within the consortium. These should be prioritised for the remaining period of implementation. Additionally, in future iterations, the program should engage with regional and national OPDs and resource centres, including Diversity and Inclusion offices within Pacific universities, to build on existing expertise and initiatives for disability equity.
- **Broaden gender focus:** In line with Recommendation 2, a future phase should seek to ensure the Pacific voices are informing GEDSI research needs. This may expand topics beyond political representation and women's experience of violence to include broader gender issues heard through evaluation consultations, such as gender equality in tertiary education, workplace participation. It should continue to support research on masculinities and gender-based violence (GBV) led by Pacific scholars, ensuring cultural relevance and local ownership.
- **Mainstream GEDSI in Labour Mobility Research**: Continue to integrate GEDSI analysis into research on Pacific labour mobility, focusing on the diverse impacts on workers, their families, and communities. Use inclusive engagement strategies, including partnership with rights-holder groups to capture the full range of experiences, including those of women, people with disabilities, and other marginalised groups.

Recommendation 6: Expand policy engagement approaches and networks

Policy engagement networks and approaches should be broadened beyond the primary focus of Canberra-based policy stakeholders to greater leverage DFAT's in-country networks. Pro-active engagement with Post can support greater coordination and alignment between complementary programs (including Australia Awards and tertiary capacity strengthening programming), as well as engagement with Post's existing networks of policy makers, leaders, civil society and representative organisations (such as OPDs). This should be prioritised for the remaining program as well as future phases, to maximise engagement on research undertaken to date.

Drawing on the lessons from Pacific labour mobility and gender research theme, future phases should evolve policy engagement beyond the focal point network approach to be more tailored to the specific information needs, timelines, forums and networks of policy stakeholders within each thematic area.

Refreshing the format of the Pacific Update and including new policy engagement forums in other Pacific countries, modelled on the Solomon Islands Panatina Research Seminar, would create new opportunities for policy-dialogue.

Recommendation 7: Prioritise resourcing towards addressing gaps in MEL

In the last year of delivery, PRP should continue to prioritise MEL, with a focus on comprehensive reporting against the MEL Framework and strengthening program learning. The PRP should consider expanding case studies to capture additional areas of the PRP's influence, including contributions to gender equality.

3.6.1 How else could DFAT and the Australian Government support higher education partnerships?

Stakeholder recommendations for enhanced support include:

- **Increasing resourcing for Institutional Partnerships:** Many Pacific universities ***"don't have the resources to effectively manage the MOUs they have[13]"*** and partnerships can be seen as one-sided, with national institutions utilised for their networks and in-country reach rather for mutual benefit[14]. DFAT could provide

[13] DFAT Post Stakeholder

[14] Note that this was said about partnerships with Australian tertiary institutions more broadly, not specifically related to PRP

targeted funding and technical assistance to help Pacific institutions manage and benefit from these relationships.

- **Improve Access to Research Infrastructure:** Pacific researchers face barriers to accessing academic journals, data analysis software, and research funding. DFAT could work with Australian universities to expand journal access, provide technical training, and support grant application skill development (including with professional staff) to strengthen research infrastructure development in the Pacific. The program could also explore development of alternative publication platforms (i.e. Press) in Pacific universities, and development of research repositories to support access and uptake.
- **Strengthen Coordination Across DFAT Investments:** DFAT should ensure that PRP and other research and education investments are well-coordinated, share information, and avoid duplication (e.g., Stronger Education Together in Solomon Islands).

3.6.2 How refinements complement existing bilateral investments

The evaluation team did not see evidence of duplication with regards to Pacific research funding, with stakeholders noting limited national funding of research and diminishing donor funding following the dismantling of USAID. The research funding provided through PRP, other DFAT contributions (e.g. bilateral support to NDSTA and elections research) was viewed as critical, with stakeholders noting that without this funding, important research evidence wouldn't exist.

However, several complementary and potentially duplicative capacity strengthening initiatives were noted. There is a missed opportunity to coordinate post-graduate support with other mechanisms, such as the Australia Awards program, and other DFAT bilateral and program support for tertiary capacity strengthening. For example, ANU supports University of Papua New Guinea (UPNG) through two different initiatives, with PRP supporting SHSS and a different DFAT program (and ANU school) supporting the School of Business and Public Policy. While both been long-term and effective in building the pipeline of PhD qualified academics, they utilise different models and funding approaches, and there is an opportunity to strengthen coordination and cross-learning. Coordination exists across implementing partners, however UPNG note there's an opportunity to strengthen coordination from their side, which could potentially be progressed through the overarching MoU between ANU and UPNG.

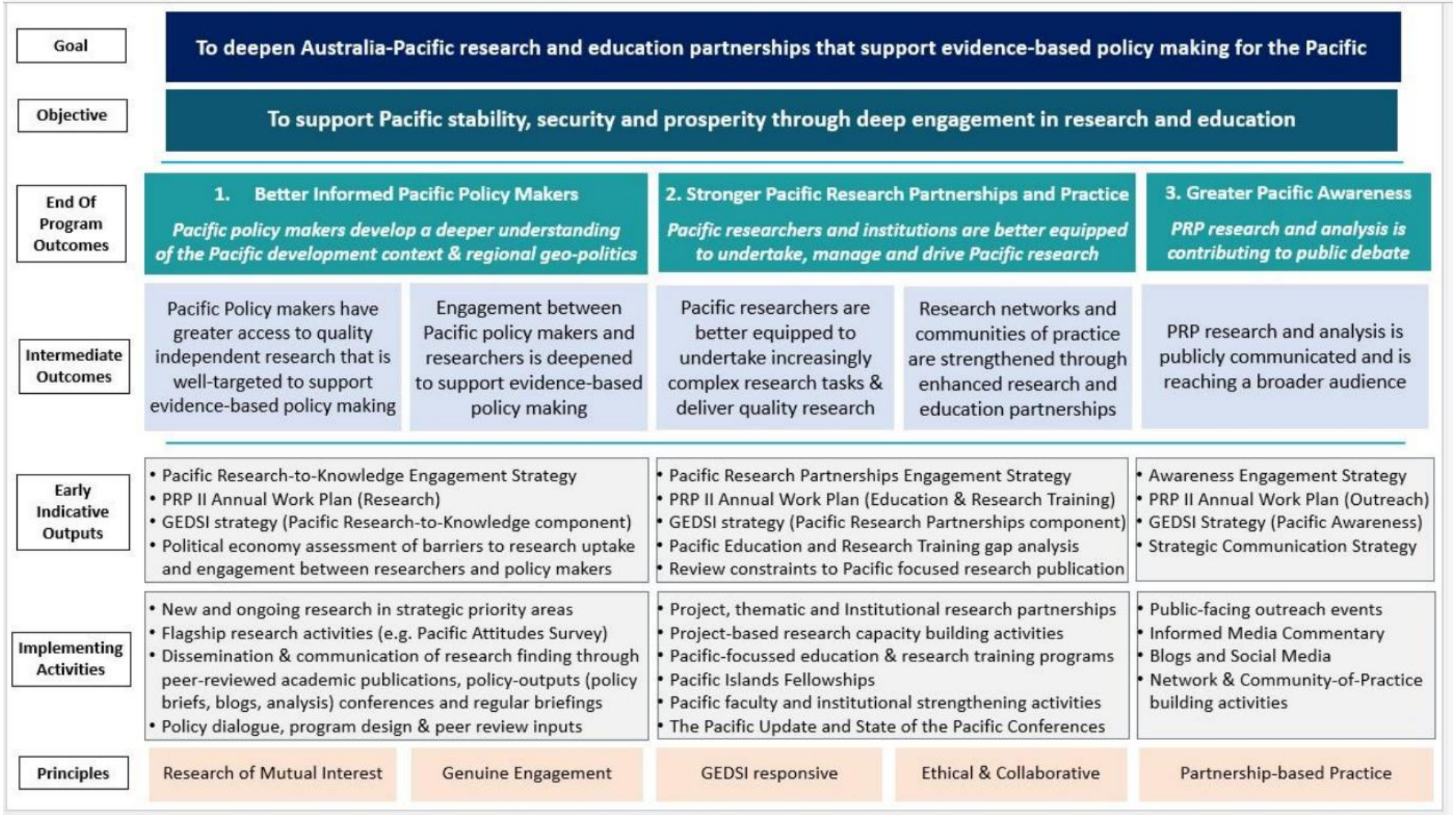
3.7 Conclusion: reStorying the PRP

The Pacific Research Program Phase II has demonstrated the value of long-term, flexible, and partnership-driven investment in Pacific-focussed research, policy engagement, and capacity development. By prioritising Pacific partnerships, co-delivery, and contextually relevant methodologies, PRP has contributed academically rigorous research that builds a stronger evidence base for policy, fostered a new generation of Pacific researchers, and elevated Pacific perspectives and voices in regional and international debates. These are strong foundations for future programming.

The Pacific tertiary institutional context has shifted dramatically since early phases of PRP and its predecessor SSGM, with Pacific Island countries continuing to establish, develop and evolve tertiary education systems. Meanwhile, Australia has strengthened its commitment to locally led development and supporting local leadership, as is articulated in Australia's International Development Policy. In response, future investments should build on the program's strengths while evolving towards a more locally led approach that responds to Pacific research agendas and deepens institutional capacity in line with partner priorities. A strengthened focus on coordination and dialogue amongst researchers and policy makers across Australia and the Pacific, and expanded stakeholder engagement (including with CSOs), will align research to local priorities and enhance engagement and uptake of evidence. By embracing these opportunities, DFAT and its partners can ensure that Pacific research continues to inform policy, empower local actors, and contribute to a more resilient, inclusive, and self-determined Pacific future.

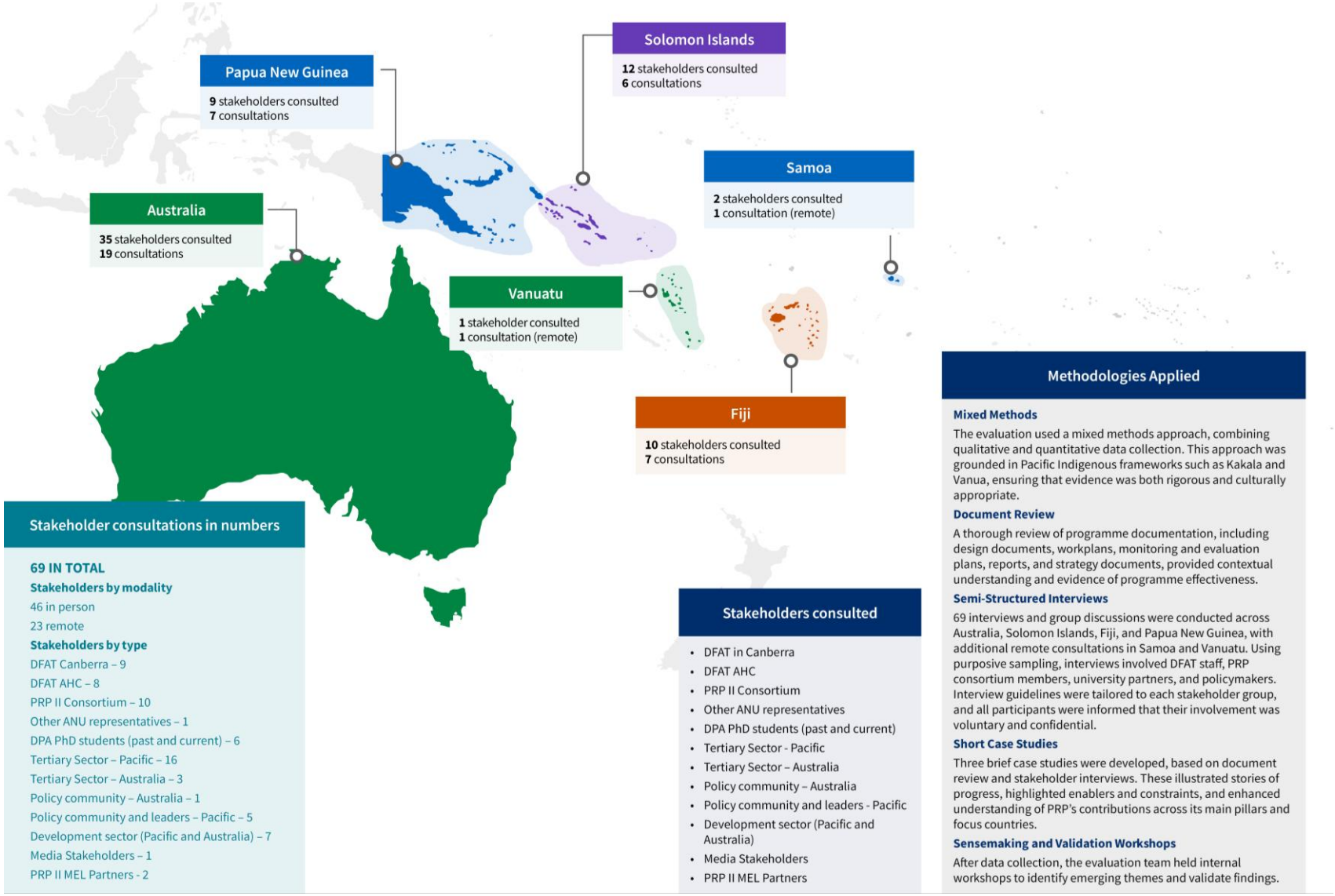
Annex 1: PRP II Program Logic

Figure 2: Pacific Research Program Phase 2 Program Logic



Annex 2: Methodology expanded

Figure 3: Map of stakeholder consultations and methodologies applied



Annex 3: Full set of evaluation questions

Key evaluation questions (KEQ) & Sub-questions

Objective 1 (reVisiting):	Program implementation. To provide an independent assessment of the effectiveness and efficiency of PRP II in achieving progress towards each EOPO.
Effectiveness	**1. How effective has PRP II been in achieving progress toward each of its three EOPOs?** a) What progress has been made toward each EOPO? b) What factors contributed to or hindered this progress? c) What are the most significant examples of positive change, and what was behind the success? d) Did the Program integrate diverse inputs into something coherent and meaningful? (Tui – weaving)? e) Has the M&E system been fit for purpose and been used to support decision-making, accountability and learning? f) Has the investment been sustainable, what are the risks to sustainability and how have they been managed? Did the Program give back respectfully and meaningfully to its communities? (Luva – Gifting)
GEDSI	**2. How effectively were gender equality, disability, and social inclusion (GEDSI) integrated into PRP II?** a) To what extent has this program considered and promoted gender equality in its efforts towards EOPOs? b) To what extent has this program considered and promoted disability equity in its efforts towards EOPOs? c) How can future research, activities, and ways of working advance shared GEDSI goals?
Efficiency	**3. To what extent has PRP II efficiently utilised its financial and human resources to deliver activities and output across EOPOs?** a) How were resources used across EOPOs? b) How did the program change across the years to achieve progress towards the EOPOs?

Objective 2 (reimagining):	Future opportunities and lessons learned. To provide an assessment, drawing on lessons from the PRP, of future opportunities for DFAT to invest in higher education partnerships.
Relevance and Appropriateness	**4. Is the current PRP model an appropriate modality to achieve development outcomes?** a) Is PRP an appropriate modality for its purpose? What models best support Pacific research agendas? b) Based on PRP's experience, what are the most important features of a future research partnership? c) Did the Program carefully identify relevant people, knowledge, and values? (Toli – selecting)? d) What are the lessons from PRP about the underpinning theory of change and program logic and how should these inform future investments?
Relevance and Appropriateness	**5. Are the current and proposed PRP activities and partnerships appropriate given sectoral needs and Australia's comparative advantage?** a) Are PRP activities still fit for purpose? b) How might PRP be refined in future phases to advance research outcomes and deepen tertiary sector partnerships between Australia and the Pacific? How do proposed refinements complement existing bilateral and regional investments? c) How else could DFAT and the Australian government better support higher education partnerships between Australian and Pacific tertiary and research institutions?

Annex 4: Summary of PRP outputs

EOPO1 – Better Informed Pacific policy Makers

Peer reviewed research publications	FY2022/23	FY2023/24	FY2024 (July-Dec)
Total publications	35	48[15]	19
Breakdown by Type	Book Chapters and Journal Articles – 23 • Gender, Inclusion and Social Change – 4 • Pacific Labour mobility and Integration – 2 • Politics, Governance and Economic Resilience – 4 • Papua New Guinea, including Bougainville – 1 • Security, Regionalism and Geopolitics – 9 Discussion Papers – 4 Working Papers – 2 In Briefs – 6[16]	Book Chapters and Journal Articles – 20 • Gender, Inclusion and Social Change – 4 • Pacific Labour mobility and Integration – 2 • Politics, Governance and Economic Resilience – 4 • Papua New Guinea, including Bougainville – 1 • Security, Regionalism and Geopolitics – 9 Discussion Papers – 7 Working Papers – 2 In Briefs – 17[17] Research Reports – 2	Book Chapters and Journal Articles – 10 Discussion Papers, Working Papers and In Briefs - 19[18]

[15] Annual Report FY 2023/24 – specifies 'at least 23 peer reviewed publications' however Table 1 lists 20 peer-reviewed publications comprising journal articles and noted "In FY2023/24 DPA significantly increased publication of its signature peer reviewed products, publishing seven Discussion Papers (up from four in FY2022/23), two Working Papers and seventeen In Briefs (up from six in FY2022/23), all of which were aligned with one or more of PRP's priority research areas". This has been captured and a calculated total of 45 peer-reviewed publications included for the purposes of this report (pages 11-12)

[16] Annual Report FY 2022/23

[17] Annual Report FY 2023/24

[18] 6 monthly Report 2024 notes 'DPA published 19 peer-reviewed publications in its Discussion Paper, In Brief and Working Paper series' and 'Across its research priority areas, PRPII published at least 10 peer reviewed publications (book chapters, journal articles)'

EOPO1 – Better Informed Pacific policy Makers

Research project / activity by Thematic Area	FY2022/23[19]	FY2023/24[20]	FY2024/25[21]
1) Gender, Inclusion, and Social Change	1. Gender dimensions of reducing violence and crime 2. Women's security and safety in the Pacific 3. Sexual violence against children in PNG**[22] 4. Australia's Pacific labour mobility programs: gender, safety and wellbeing 5. Demographic survey: Vanuatu women's involvement in Pacific labour mobility programs** 6. Sexual health education for seasonal workers** 7. Sexual health and consent amongst PALM workers** 8. Housing and health of Pacific communities in Australia and New Zealand 9. Women in Politics 10. Women candidates in Fiji elections** 11. Improving women's political participation in PNG** 12. Understanding votes for women in Vanuatu** 13. Disability inclusive research in practice: 2022 PNGNGE Case Study** 14. Towards effective programmatic support for women's leadership in the Pacific 15. Teachers, professionalism & male violence in schools in Bougainville and Solomon Islands** 16. 'When I go back' **Total: 16 (9 new and 7 ongoing)**	1. GEDSI Research Showcase (deferred) 2. Women & children's safety & security in the Pacific 3. Promoting health & housing security among 4. Pacific diaspora Communities 5. Women in politics 6. Improving women's political participation in PNG 7. Understanding votes for women in Vanuatu 8. Gender equality reforms in political institutions 9. Disability inclusive research in practice: 2022 PNG NGE Case Study 10. Towards effective programmatic support for women's leadership in the Pacific **Total: 9 (No new and 9 ongoing, 1 deferred)**	1. GEDSI Research Showcase (did not proceed) 2. Women & children's safety and security in the Pacific 3. Sexual violence against children in PNG 4. Housing and health of Pacific communities in Australia and New Zealand 5. Women in Politics 6. Improving women's political participation in PNG 7. Understanding votes for women in Vanuatu 8. Gender equality reforms in political institutions 9. Australian Gender Equality Strategy: Pacific Perspectives** 10. Disability inclusive research in practice: 2022 PNG NGE Case Study 11. Towards effective programmatic support for women's leadership in the Pacific 12. Reforming education, transforming SINU** 13. Postgraduate Supervision at SINU** **Total: 13 (3 new and 9 ongoing)**
2) Pacific Labour Mobility and Integration	1. The Pacific Labour Mobility Survey 2. Development impacts of PALM programs 3. The Remittance Diaries 4. Longitudinal Study of RSE/SWP workers 5. Analysis of Pacific migration using Australian administrative data 6. Migration attitudes and perceptions in Australia** 7. Evaluation of Pacific temporary migration programs in Australia 8. Lowy – Pacific Diaspora Survey and Research**	1. Pacific Labour Mobility Survey, Stage 1 2. The Remittance Diaries 3. Development impacts of PALM programs 4. Experimental impact evaluations—Enhancing Labour Mobility from PNG** 5. Remittance costs—issues and opportunities** 6. Reducing Remittance Costs in the Pacific** 7. Managing Tonga's labour supply: evidence from Tonga's 2021 Census of Population and Housing 8. Stocktake of Kiribati's LM opportunities post-COVID	1. Pacific Labour Mobility Survey, Wave One. 2. Pacific Labour Mobility Survey, Wave Two.** 3. The Remittance Diaries 4. Development impacts of PALM programs 5. Experimental impact evaluations—Enhancing Labour Mobility from PNG. 6. Remittance costs—issues and opportunities 7. Reducing Remittance Costs in the Pacific 8. Managing Tonga's labour supply: evidence from Tonga's 2021 Census of Population and Housing

[19] Information in this column is from the FY2022/23 workplan
[20] Information in this column is from the FY2023/24 workplan
[21] Information in this column is from the FY2024/25 workplan
[22] ** indicates a new project, all others are ongoing

Research project / activity by Thematic Area	FY2022/23[19]	FY2023/24[20]	FY2024/25[21]
	9. Permanent pathways for Pacific migration to Australia 10. Governance of temporary migration programs **Total: 10 (2 new and 8 ongoing)**	9. Longitudinal Study of RSE/SWP workers 10. Termination of pregnancy in the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility Scheme** 11. Pacific Australia Labour Mobility Scheme (PALM) workers in the Australian meat processing industry 12. Analysis of Pacific migration using Australian administrative data 13. Migration attitudes and perceptions in Australia 14. Evaluation of Pacific temporary migration programs in Australia 15. Permanent pathways for Pacific migration to Australia 16. Comparative seasonal worker programmes study** **Total: 16 (5 new and 11 ongoing)**	9. Navigating labour mobilities: seafarers after COVID-19** 10. Longitudinal Study of RSE/SWP workers 11. Reproductive justice and the PALM scheme 12. Pacific Australia Labour Mobility Scheme (PALM) workers in the Australian meat processing industry 13. Pacific Labour mobility worker wellbeing guiding principles and guidelines** 14. Development of an intra-Pacific labour mobility strategy for the Cooks Islands and Niu 15. Analysis of Pacific migration using Australian administrative data 16. Shifting migration attitudes and perceptions in Australia 17. Tongan Diaspora: Attitudes to the World 18. Permanent pathways for Pacific migration to Australia 19. Comparative seasonal worker programmes study **Total: 19 (2 new and 17 ongoing)**
3) Politics, Governance and Economic Resilience	1. Community governance, CDFs and local development in the Solomon Islands 2. Decentralisation sub-national governance and service delivery in Papua New Guinea 3. 2022 PNG NGE Observation 4. Fiji Elections Research** 5. Solomon Islands election study** 6. Pacific Attitudes Survey 7. Political participation in the Pacific 8. Domestic Politics of Climate Change 9. Climate Change Diplomacy 10. Pacific Economies & Economic Development 11. ANU-ADBI Pacific Research Partnership 12. Small Firm Diaries Fiji 13. Pacific Labour Migration & SME Development 14. Islands of Hope **Total: 14 (2 new and 12 ongoing)**	1. Community governance, CDFs and local development in Solomon Islands 2. 2022 PNG national election study 3. 2024 Solomon Islands national election study 4. Pacific Attitudes Survey 5. Village democracy in Southeast Asia and the Pacific** 6. Pacific Economies & Economic Development 7. Small Firm Diaries Fiji 8. ANU-ADBI Pacific Research Partnership 9. Resource management in the Pacific **Total: 9 (1 new and 8 ongoing)**	1. Community governance, CDFs and local development in Solomon Islands 2. 2022 PNG National General Elections (NGE) study 3. 2024 Solomon Islands national election study 4. Fostering inclusive participation in Solomon Islands politics and elections** 5. Pacific Attitudes Survey 6. Village democracy in Southeast Asia and the Pacific 7. Pacific Economies & Economic Development 8. Small Firm Diaries Fiji 9. ANU-ADBI Pacific Research Partnership **Total: 9 (1 new and 8 ongoing)**
4) Papua New Guinea, including Bougainville	1. Promoting Effective Public Expenditure in PNG** 2. Decentralisation and sub-national governance in PNG 3. Post-referendum consultations concerning the future political status of Bougainville	1. PNG Research Workshop** 2. PNG National Service Delivery Trends Assessment: PEPE II 3. Decentralisation, subnational governance and service delivery in Papua New Guinea	1. PNG Research Workshop 2. PNG National Service Delivery Trends Assessment: PEPE II (Phase I) 3. Decentralisation, subnational governance and service delivery in Papua New Guinea

Research project / activity by Thematic Area	FY2022/23[19]	FY2023/24[20]	FY2024/25[21]
	4. Crime, Justice and Safety 5. Assessing nature and extent of Armed Violence** 6. Digital PNG** 7. Governance of information and communication technologies 8. Internet access and quality **Total: 8 (3 new and 5 ongoing)**	4. Post-referendum consultations concerning the future status of Bougainville 5. Investigating crime and safety in PNG provinces** 6. Mobile telephone access, use and perceptions in Papua New Guinea 7. ICT governance in PNG 8. PNG digital connectivity: Issues in cyber security and safety **Total: 8 (2 new and 6 ongoing)**	4. Post-referendum consultations concerning the future status of Bougainville 5. Future Options for Bougainville independence** 6. Investigating crime and safety in PNG provinces 7. Mobile telephone access, use and perceptions in Papua New Guinea 8. ICT governance in PNG 9. PNG and Pacific islands digital connectivity: Issues in cyber security & safety **Total: 7 (1 new and 6 ongoing)**
5) Security, Regionalism and Geopolitics	1. Reflections on regional security and security cooperation in the Pacific** 2. Pacific security cooperation 3. Extra-territoriality in the Pacific** 4. Women and climate security 5. Securing information communication technologies in the Pacific 6. Regional networks addressing human security and Safety** 7. Regionalism and the 2012 Pacific Leaders' Declaration on Gender Equality** 8. Foreign Policy in the Pacific 9. Review of Indo-Pacific strategies of key donors and the inclusion of Pacific Island perspectives and priorities** 10. Increasing Australia's influence in a contested Pacific** 11. Oceanic diplomacy** 12. Pacific Negotiations 13. The continuing role and relevance of the Melanesian Spearhead Group? **Total: 13 (7 new and 6 ongoing)**	1. Pacific Security Cooperation 2. PNG Security - Public Seminar(s) 3. Climate Security and the Pacific Islands 4. Women and climate security 5. PRC Extraterritoriality in the Pacific 6. The Impact of New Chinese Businesses in the Pacific: Mapping the Construction Sector** 7. Corporate social responsibilities of overseas state-owned Chinese companies: the case of Ramu Nico in Papua New Guinea** 8. The US-China geostrategic competition in the North Pacific. 9. Geopolitics in the Pacific: The challenge of competitive co-existence 10. Political analyses of China's engagement in Solomon Islands, PNG and the Region 11. Chinese government scholarships and soft power in the Pacific 12. The impact of COVID-19 on China's foreign aid/foreign policy** 13. Solomon Islands' relations with China after the diplomatic switch in 2019 **(deferred)** 14. Oceanic Diplomacy 15. Climate Empowerment, Gender & Engagement (Australia-Pacific Islands)** 16. Climate Leadership (Australia-Pacific COP Bid)** 17. Building Australian Influence in the Pacific 18. Securing information communication technologies in the Pacific **Total: 18 (5 new and 13 ongoing)**	1. Pacific Security Cooperation 2. PNG Security - Public Seminar(s) 3. Climate Security and the Pacific Islands 4. PNG and Climate Security** 5. PRC Extraterritoriality in the Pacific 6. The Impact of New Chinese Businesses in the Pacific: Mapping the Construction Sector 7. Corporate social responsibilities of overseas state-owned Chinese companies: the case of Ramu Nico in Papua New Guinea 8. The US-China geostrategic competition in the North Pacific. 9. Geopolitics in the Pacific: The challenge of competitive co-existence 10. Geopolitics in the Pacific: Power Dynamics and Rivalries 11. Chinese government scholarships and soft power in the Pacific 12. Solomon Islands' relations with China after the diplomatic switch in 2019 **(deferred)** 13. Oceanic Diplomacy 14. Climate Empowerment, Gender & Engagement (Australia-Pacific Islands) 15. Climate Leadership (Australia-Pacific COP Bid) 16. Building Australian Influence in the Pacific 17. ICT infrastructure and security **Total: 17 (1 new, 15 ongoing and 1 deferred)**

EOPO2 - Stronger Pacific Research Partnerships and Practice

Outputs	FY2022/23[23]	FY2023/24[24]	FY2024/25[25]
Outputs to strengthen research capacity, networks and partnerships	**Colloquiums** • Pacific Research Colloquium 2022 (Canberra) – 4 male and 5 female participants among the 9 who completed one or more micro-credentials. • PNG Research Colloquium 2023 (Papua New Guinea) – 25 male and 22 female attendees in total, with 12 male and 10 female participants successfully completing one or more micro-credentials. **Undergraduate and Postgraduate Coursework** • 10 courses (Undergraduate) • 12 courses (post-graduate) **HRD program** • PhD students (total not specified) • **PhD Scholarships** - 5 PhD candidates **Faculty Strengthening with UPNG School of Humanities and Social Sciences** **Pacific Research Fellowships** **Pacific Visitorships** • Up to 4 (not specified) **Greg Taylor Scholarships** • 2 PNG scholars (not specified) **Lowy Pacific Aid Map Training and Awareness Raising** **Lowy Pacific Aid Map** **Training and Awareness Raising** **Conferences** • State of the Pacific 2022 • Pacific Update Conference **New research and education partnerships** • At least 10 collaborative research projects **Enhancing communities of practice and research** • 17 Research Seminars hosted by DPA	**Colloquiums** • Pacific Research Colloquium 2023 (Canberra) (no gender breakdown available) • PNG Research Colloquium 2024 (Papua New Guinea) (no gender breakdown available) **Undergraduate and Postgraduate coursework** • 11 courses (Undergraduate) • 12 courses (post-graduate) **HRD program** • PhD students (35 total) • **PhD Scholarships –** 4 PhD candidates **Faculty Strengthening with UPNG School of Humanities and Social Sciences** **Pacific Research Fellowships** **Pacific Visitorships (5)** **Greg Taylor Scholarships** • 2 PNG scholars (not specified) **New collaborations** • Revisiting the Papua New Guinea Dictionary of Biography (UPNG) • Democracy Re-imagined: Charting the Course for Fiji's Political Future? (USP, CCF) • Regional symposium on child safety (SPC) (did not proceed) • Oceanic Diplomacy (USP, UNC, Island Business, UFP, Taiwan University, NUS, DFAT, PU, UQ) **Conferences** • State of the Pacific 2024 (held in Sept 2024) • Pacific Update Conference 2024 **Enhancing communities of practice and research** • 29 Research Seminars hosted by DPA	**Colloquiums** • Pacific Research Colloquium 2024 (Canberra) (no gender breakdown available) • Research Colloquium 2025 (Samoa) **Undergraduate and Postgraduate Coursework taught by DPA** • 4 courses (Undergraduate) • 4 courses (post-graduate) **HRD program** • 28 PhD students (total) • **PhD Scholarships** – (not specified) **Faculty Strengthening with UPNG School of Humanities and Social Sciences** **Pacific Research Fellowships** **Pacific Visitorships (4)** **Greg Taylor Scholarships** (not specified) **Collaborations** • Revisiting the Papua New Guinea Dictionary of Biography (UPNG) • Democracy Re-imagined: Charting the Course for Fiji's Political Future? (USP, CCF) • Oceanic Diplomacy (USP, UNC, Island Business, UFP, Taiwan University, NUS, DFAT, PU, UQ) **Conferences** • State of the Pacific 2024 • Pacific Update Conference 2024 **Enhancing communities of practice and research** • Regular seminars (DPA, Devpol, Lowy) • 19 peer-reviewed publications

[23] Information in this column is from the FY2022/23 workplan
[24] Information in this column is from the FY2023/24 workplan
[25] Information in this column is from the FY2024/25 workplan

EOPO3 - PRP research and analysis contributes to public debate

Outputs	FY2022/23[26]	FY2023/24[27]	FY2024/25[28]
Outputs contributing to public debate and greater Pacific awareness	**Engagement with the public** • 96 Interpreter articles • 128 articles published on Development Policy Centre on Pacific issues • PRPII experts referenced in 39 news outlets • 7 episodes of the Pacific Change Makers podcast **Engagement with policy makers and practitioners** • 350 briefings to at least 120 stakeholders • First PRP Discussion Series in March 2023 • Roundtable discussion in December 2022 for participants of the Lowy Institute's Emerging Leaders Dialogue • A workshop on effective media engagement run by Lowy media in March 2023 **Engagement with educators and students** • Guest lectures • Hosting and supporting outreach events	**Engagement with the public** • Interpreter blogs, podcasts and media engagement **Engagement with policy makers and practitioners** • "Hundreds of briefings on Pacific issues" were provided to stakeholders • The 52nd Pacific Islands Forum Leaders Meeting and the Melanesian Spearhead Group Leaders Meeting were held • 2 workshops were hosted for DFAT's consultation process for the Papua New Guinea Development Partnership Plan **Engagement with educators and students** • Guest lectures • Hosting and supporting outreach events	**Engagement with the public** • 38 articles published on the Lowy Interpreter on Pacific issues • Interpreter articles reached over 275,000 users • 79 articles published on Development Policy Centre on Pacific issues • 6 episodes of Devpolicy Talks podcasts focusing on the Pacific **Engagement with policy makers and practitioners** • Findings from the Longitudinal Study of RSE/SWP workers were presented in Vanuatu, including a briefing to MP • DPA researchers briefed high-level diplomats, such as the Japanese ambassador, NATO delegation, and EU members • DPA Professor advised the PNG and Australian governments and the UN on the PNG-Bougainville post-referendum decision-making process **Engagement with educators and students** • Guest lectures • PRPII presence at NUS University Expo • PRPII staff attended launch of the Pacific Academy of Sciences and the book 'Sustainable Development in Small Islands' • PRPII worked with the University of Papua New Guinea (UPNG) and USP to facilitate field schools in PNG and Fiji, with plans for one in Vanuatu

[26] Information in this column is from the FY2022/23 workplan
[27] Information in this column is from the FY2023/24 workplan
[28] Information in this column is from the FY2024/25 workplan

Annex 5: Key documents reviewed

Documents provided by DFAT and ANU to date included in the document review are:

Investment Monitoring Reporting

- Investment Monitoring Reporting 2023-24
- Investment Monitoring Reporting 2024-25

Contract and amendments

- PRP II Agreement
- Amendment 1
- Amendment 2

Agreement and Workplans

- PRP II Program Logic
- PRP II Workplan 2021-22
- PRP II Workplan 2022-23
- PRP II Workplan 2023-24
- PRP II Workplan 2024-25
- MEL Plan (2023)
- Updated MEL Plan (draft)

Milestones/Deliverables

- National Service Delivery and Trends Assessment (NSDTA) proposal
- Pacific Labour Mobility Study Wave Two (PLMS2) Implementation Plan
- PRP II Evaluative Case Study – Disability Inclusion
- PRP II GEDSI Strategy
- PRP II Annual Report 2022-23
- PRP II Annual Report 2023-24
- 6-month progress report July-December 2023
- 6-month progress report July-December 2024
- PRP II Evaluative Case Study - From Insights to Impact: PRPII's approach to Pacific labour mobility and integration research and engagement
- PRP II Evaluative Case Study – Enduring Partnerships and Shared Learning: PRP's contribution to stronger Pacific research partnerships and practice"

Independent Evaluation Phase One

- Independent Evaluation PRP
- Independent Evaluation DFAT Management Response

DPA Briefing Notes

- Overview Brief
- An Effective Funding Model
- DPA HDR Program
- Pacific Research Colloquium
- Pacific Studies at ANU
- Responding to Pacific Research Priorities
- Understanding the Pacific
- PRC Revised
- A Holistic Approach to Delivery

PRP consortium partners publications were also provided and available for review.

Annex 6: Additional information about Storying and reStorying

This evaluation is not just about evaluating a story or stories. It is about understanding the different strands of the PRP story woven by different peoples, from different contexts, space and time.

Today, Pasifika is moving towards what is called 're-Story-ing'. The prefix '*re*' reflects *revisiting, reimagining, reclaiming, re-positioning*, and *retelling.* The word '*Story*' encompasses many stories. Stories are at the heart of how Pasifika people provide cues to life, landmarks for migration and signs for orientation. The term captures Pasifika stories, including stories of movements of peoples, bodies, things, ideas, power, ideologies, relationships, material and immaterial, politics, economies, health and wellbeing, spiritualities, and cultures and languages in the Pasifika communities. Pasifika as a diverse and distinctive region deserves to have its place alongside other stories. The suffix '*ing*' implies that the colonial story is still very much alive, and therefore needs living responses. It reflects that reStorying needs a performative process of deconstructing old stories and reconstructing new ones, to the point of actioning and applying these newly created ones to life and wellbeing. It reflects the vision that any reStorying is in constant motion, an ongoing process always subject to review and modification. It is never settled and rigid. In fact, this is the very nature of decentralised stories, which flow and drift from generation to generation.

reStorying in this independent evaluation of the PRP is about:

- ***Revisiting -*** Pasifika communities do this in their *talanoa* and research, a process of telling and altering stories. It is about revisiting Pasifika past and present, navigating through the disturbing and toxic currents that have shaped the oceanic waters and the undercurrents of its landscapes. Revisiting requires us to reimagine that the past is in front of our minds' eyes, always reminding us of its presence, alive in us, whether good or bad, all thanks to Epeli Hau'ofa who reminded us. Hence, we are not just revisiting a dead past and present. We walk with the past, present, and future in us. Revisiting offers new insights and renewed pathways into *re-membering* the forgotten spaces, events, people and communities. As Epeli Hau'ofa rightly contends, revisiting and re-membering our past enables us "to define and construct our pasts and present in our own ways" (2008, 61). A revisiting of the past and present from a distinct 'Pasifika/Oceanic way' is thus critical for Pasifika reStorying.
- ***Reimagining -*** Pasifika identities. Pasifika communities often do this through their process of seeking deep wisdom. The Samoan saying "the wisdom of the wise is negotiable while the wisdom of the fool is fixed" speaks of the flexibility to reimagine the world anew without being enslaved by fixed traditions and cultures. Pasifika identities, like any postcolonial identities, are constructed, categorised, and classified by the colonial desire to 'define' and 'frame' the colonized other. These definitions remain fixed and popularised in the mainstream narratives. Thus, Pasifika identities are painted as barbaric, savage, pagan, cruel, evil, uncivilized and so on. Recently, Pasifika has been branded in the development arena as small islands states, and in the climate narrative as the vulnerable Pacific and sinking islands. Problematising such colonial gaze of the Pasifika identities, Jione Havea states, "When Europeans saw our ancestors as savages and labelled their behaviours and practices as uncivilised – even calling Niue 'Savage Island' – they missed the opportunity to appreciate our koloa or richness, if beauty is in the eyes of the beholder, so too is savagery. Europeans failed to see the intimate connection between our customs and bodies, and the ceremonial and pleasurable in our cultures and religions" (2014, 97). Reimagining such constructed identities beyond colonial categories opens up new vistas of understanding beauty, richness, self-determination, resilience and resistance that is manifested in the biopolitics of the Pasifika identities including the oceans, mountains, birds, animals, people and monuments.
- ***Repositioning -*** We do this to sails in Pasifika navigation cultures. We reposition according to the surrounding drifts, currents, winds, changes and intended transformations. Repositioning entails re-envisioning a more holistic (re)search, which includes ocean and its living beings, forests and all its inhabitants, lands and the people. Because of its rich natural resources, Pasifika has been subjected to constant occupation and exploitation for centuries now. This has threatened the present and future of this richly diverse oceanic continent. Exploitation of the blue Pasifika, its resources, people and their livelihood by the colonial and neo-colonial development models, has caused enormous destruction that lurks the future of these 'beautiful' island countries. Therefore, there is a need to re-envision a future that not only saves Pasifika but also shares hope to the withering world. As Walter Lini reminds his Pasifika family, "The main effort will then be to really polish up our very own Pacific and Melanesia ideas, to make them the basis of unity in our country and within our region and to give us the necessary strength and direction to choose wisely what we want and do not want for the future" (as cited in Huffmann 2005, 3). Pasifika reStorying is the re-envisioning of such vision for an unthreatened future of Pasifika.
- reStorying is retelling and repurposing stories from a decolonial and relationality approach. As James Clifford claims, "If we are condemned to tell stories we cannot control, may we not, at least, tell stories we believe to be true" (1986, 121). The dominant colonial narratives have told the stories of Pasifika within the Euro-centric rigid framework of binary oppositions such as we-they, us-them, male-female, civilized-savage, saved-doomed, light-dark, white-black, Christian-nonChristian, and so on. Thus, they obviously misrepresented Pasifika.

Retelling and repurposing those stories from a Pasifika communities-oriented relational perspective has the potential to set the stage right for a better conversation and mutual co-existence because, as the Pasifika proponents of relationality rightly argue that relationality "is fundamental to the indigenous cultural and faith traditions of the Pacific people" (Vaai and Nabobo-Baba 2017, 6). Therefore, a decolonial and relational approach aims to rescue research from being misrepresented by binary-oppositions because relationality "is shaped by many relational values and principles of the Pacific itulagi, such as embodiment of life, interconnectedness of all, harmony, dialogical communication, practical reciprocity, reception of the other who is different, as well as truthfulness" (ibid., 11).

Annex 7: Figure alt text list

Alt text for Figure 1:

Overall layout: A grid of panels with icons and headings describing consortium partners, countries, tertiary collaborations, three End-of-Program Outcome (EOP) sections (EOP01, EOP02, EOP03), key/ongoing research projects by theme, and numeric metrics (projects, publications, authorship demographics, training activities, events, blog posts, citations, and percentages). All text and numbers below are transcribed exactly as they appear in the image.

Top row — three small panels:

- Panel 1: PRPII is implemented by 3 consortium partners, led by the Department of Pacific Affairs (ANU), with the Development Policy Centre (ANU) and the Lowy Institute
- Panel 2: PRPII operates across 9 Pacific countries
- Panel 3: Collaborates with 14 Pacific tertiary institutions and one Australian tertiary institution

Main grid — left column and right column panels

Left column, top of main grid — EOP01 panel (End of Program Outcome 1):

  - 102 Total research projects
  - 82 Total peer-reviewed publications

- Two circular charts with percentages beneath the totals:

  - 44% Peer-reviewed article authors with Pacific Island heritage
  - 53% Peer reviewed article authors being female

Right column, top of main grid — Key / ongoing research projects — by theme

  - 19 Gender, Inclusion, and Social Change
  - 11 Papua New Guinea, including Bougainville
  - 19 Security, Regionalism and Geopolitics
  - 17 Pacific Labour Mobility and Integration
  - 16 Politics, Governance and Economic Resilience

Middle row, left column — EOP02 panel (End of Program Outcome 2) (six small metric boxes arranged in two columns):

  - 13 Pacific Visitorships
  - 35 PhD students (FY2023-2024)
  - 28 Post graduate courses (FY2022-2024)
  - 25 Undergraduate courses (FY2022-2024)
  - 6 Colloquiums
  - 6 Conferences

Middle row, right column — EOP03 panel (End of Program Outcome 3) (three main metrics plus two percentage ranges):

  - 766 Pacific-focussed blog posts / commentary (period 1 July 2022 – 31 October 2025)
  - 5436 Lowy Institute citations in news media (FY2024-2025)
  - 40-51% of blog authors were female
  - 25-35% of blog authors were of Pacific Island heritage

Alt text for Figure 2: Pacific Research Program Phase 2 Program Logic

A horizontal, multi-row flowchart-style infographic with a dark blue header and multiple columns and rows of labelled boxes. The diagram presents the goal, objective, end-of-program outcomes, intermediate outcomes, early indicative outputs, implementing activities, and guiding principles of a Pacific research and education program. Layout runs top to bottom with three primary outcome columns across the page.

Top header (full-width, dark blue):

- Text: "To deepen Australia-Pacific research and education partnerships that support evidence-based policy making for the Pacific"

Below the header is a second full-width teal band:

- Text: "To support Pacific stability, security and prosperity through deep engagement in research and education"

A thin horizontal rule separates the objective from the rows below.

End of Program Outcomes row (three adjacent teal/green boxes, numbered 1–3):

1. Left box (teal, labelled "1. Better Informed Pacific Policy Makers"):
   - Subheading (italicized style in the box): "Pacific policy makers develop a deeper understanding of the Pacific development context & regional geo-politics"
2. Middle box (teal, labelled "2. Stronger Pacific Research Partnerships and Practice"):
   - Subheading: "Pacific researchers and institutions are better equipped to undertake, manage and drive Pacific research"
3. Right box (teal, labelled "3. Greater Pacific Awareness"):
   - Subheading: "PRP research and analysis is contributing to public debate"

Intermediate Outcomes row (four light blue boxes spanning the width under the three end outcomes; text in each box):

- Under column 1 (left-most area, aligned under outcome 1): "Pacific Policy makers have greater access to quality independent research that is well-targeted to support evidence-based policy making"
- Next box (between column 1 and 2, aligned under 1 and 2): "Engagement between Pacific policy makers and researchers is deepened to support evidence-based policy making"
- Next box (aligned under outcome 2): "Pacific researchers are better equipped to undertake increasingly complex research tasks & deliver quality research"
- Next box (aligned under outcome 2 and 3): "Research networks and communities of practice are strengthened through enhanced research and education partnerships"
- Final box on the right (aligned under outcome 3): "PRP research and analysis is publicly communicated and is reaching a broader audience"

A thin horizontal rule separates intermediate outcomes from the next section.

Early Indicative Outputs row (three columns of bulleted lists under each main outcome area):

- Left column (under outcome 1 / policy makers): Bulleted items:
  - "Pacific Research-to-Knowledge Engagement Strategy"
  - "PRP II Annual Work Plan (Research)"
  - "GEDSI strategy (Pacific Research-to-Knowledge component)"
  - "Political economy assessment of barriers to research uptake and engagement between researchers and policy makers"
- Middle column (under outcome 2 / researchers & partnerships): Bulleted items:
  - "Pacific Research Partnerships Engagement Strategy"
  - "PRP II Annual Work Plan (Education & Research Training)"
  - "GEDSI strategy (Pacific Research Partnerships component)"
  - "Pacific Education and Research Training gap analysis"
  - "Review constraints to Pacific focused research publication"
- Right column (under outcome 3 / awareness): Bulleted items:
  - "Awareness Engagement Strategy"
  - "PRP II Annual Work Plan (Outreach)"
  - "GEDSI Strategy (Pacific Awareness)"
  - "Strategic Communication Strategy"

A thin horizontal rule separates early outputs from implementing activities.

Implementing Activities row (three columns of text boxes aligned beneath the three outcome columns):

- Left column (activities supporting Better Informed Pacific Policy Makers): Bulleted items:
  - "New and ongoing research in strategic priority areas"
  - "Flagship research activities (e.g. Pacific Attitudes Survey)"
  - "Dissemination & communication of research findings through peer-reviewed academic publications, policy-outputs (policy briefs, blogs, analysis), conferences and regular briefings"
  - "Policy dialogue, program design & peer review inputs"

- Middle column (activities supporting Stronger Research Partnerships and Practice): Bulleted items:
  - "Project, thematic and institutional research partnerships"
  - "Project-based research capacity building activities"
  - "Pacific-focused education & research training programs"
  - "Pacific Islands Fellowships"
  - "Pacific faculty and institutional strengthening activities"
  - "The Pacific Update and State of the Pacific Conferences"
- Right column (activities supporting Greater Pacific Awareness): Bulleted items:
  - "Public-facing outreach events"
  - "Informed Media Commentary"
  - "Blogs and Social Media"
  - "Network & Community-of-Practice building activities"

A thin horizontal rule separates implementing activities from the principles row.

Principles row (a horizontal band of five light salmon/peach boxes across the bottom, each containing a short principle label):

- From left to right the labels read:
  1. "Research of Mutual Interest"
  2. "Genuine Engagement"
  3. "GEDSI responsive" (GEDSI likely stands for Gender Equality, Disability & Social Inclusion)
  4. "Ethical & Collaborative"
  5. "Partnership-based Practice"

Alt text for Figure 3: Map of stakeholder consultations and methodologies applied

Infographic map of Australia and the Pacific showing stakeholder consultations by country, with coloured country callouts and text boxes connected to each location. A large green silhouette of Australia sits at left; smaller coloured island shapes to the northeast represent Papua New Guinea (blue), Solomon Islands (purple), Vanuatu (green), Fiji (orange), and Samoa (blue). Each country callout lists the number of stakeholders consulted and the number of consultations:

- Australia – 35 stakeholders consulted, 19 consultations.
- Papua New Guinea – 9 stakeholders consulted, 7 consultations.
- Solomon Islands – 12 stakeholders consulted, 6 consultations.
- Fiji – 10 stakeholders consulted, 7 consultations.
- Samoa – 2 stakeholders consulted, 1 consultation (remote).
- Vanuatu – 1 stakeholder consulted, 1 consultation (remote).

Lower-left panel titled “Stakeholder consultations in numbers” notes 69 in total, 46 in person and 23 remote, and lists stakeholder types and counts (e.g., DFAT Canberra 9; PRP II Consortium 10; tertiary sector Pacific 16; development sector Pacific and Australia 7; media stakeholders 1; etc.). Right-side column titled “Methodologies Applied” summarizes the evaluation approach: Mixed Methods (combined qualitative and quantitative data, grounded in Pacific Indigenous frameworks), Document Review, Semi-Structured Interviews (69 interviews and group discussions across Australia, Solomon Islands, Fiji and Papua New Guinea, with remote consultations in Samoa and Vanuatu), Short Case Studies, and Sensemaking and Validation Workshops. Small legend-style box lists specific stakeholder groups consulted (DFAT, PRP II Consortium, ANU representatives, DPA PhD students, tertiary and policy communities, media, PRP II MEL partners).