

PACIFIC WOMEN LEAD MID-TERM REVIEW MANAGEMENT RESPONSE

JOINT MANAGEMENT RESPONSE FROM PACIFIC WOMEN LEAD GOVERNANCE BOARD, DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND TRADE (DFAT), THE PACIFIC COMMUNITY (SPC), AND PWL ENABLING SERVICES (PWLES)

We welcome the independent mid-term review findings and acknowledge the recommendations for the Pacific Women Lead (PWL) program. We value the favourable observations made in the mid-term review, and the conclusion that ‘the PWL modality is a fit-for-purpose, highly relevant, and effective approach to accelerating and consolidating regional gender equality efforts, distinguished by its Pacific-led, collaborative and adaptive design that reflects the complexity of advancing gender equality across the region’. To reflect PWL’s shared management and partnership approach, the PWL Governance Board, DFAT, SPC, and the Pacific Women Lead Enabling Services (PWLES) have responded to the recommendations in the management actions table below. Of the nine recommendations, seven have been agreed, and two have been partially agreed. This joint management response outlines the agreed actions that will be taken forward.

Management Actions

For the remainder of the current phase (until end of June 2026)

Recommendation	Level of agreement ¹	Governance Board	DFAT	SPC	PWLES	Timeframe
1) Improve coordination between PWL components to enhance efficiency and effectiveness: a) Initiate quarterly strategic convenings with component leads and key stakeholders, including SPC, PIFS, PWLES, Women’s Funds, DFAT and the PWL Governance Board. These convenings should: - provide a formal platform for high-level coordination, strategic planning, and oversight of the Whole-of-Program (WOP) - align with existing regional convenings organised by SPC	Agree	1a) The Board agrees quarterly strategic convenings are essential to improving coordination across the program. The Board will prioritise and actively participate in these scheduled meetings. These convenings will also serve as a key platform for the Board to raise awareness of Board Discretionary Grants among other PWL components. 1b) The Board agrees this is an important recommendation, given the scale of funding to UN agencies. To strengthen coordination, the Board will invite UN programs to present	1a) DFAT agrees and will implement this recommendation with partners working with PWLES, to convene a quarterly strategic convening with component leads and key stakeholders. 1b) DFAT will liaise with the four UN programs to explore opportunities for further collaboration and to minimise duplication.	1a) SPC agrees a quarterly strategic convening is necessary to improve coordination. SPC will prioritise and participate in these convenings. 1b) SPC agrees with this recommendation and will work with the UN agencies through the following mechanisms: - UN Women through their facilitated Pacific Gender Coordination Group, Pacific Gender Technical Working Group and as a partner in PPEVAWG - As co-convenor of the ARAW we will build greater visibility and engagement with UN agencies. - Work with UNICEF and UNFPA on the adolescent unplanned pregnancy work and with UNDP on Temporary Special Measures	1a) PWLES agrees with this recommendation and will lead in convening a meeting with component leads. PWLES will chair the first meeting, which will serve as a forum for high-level planning and oversight of the WOP. During this initial meeting, participants will agree on the ongoing chairing and management	Q3 2025

¹ Levels of Agreement: agree; partially agree; disagree.

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and PIFS to ensure logistical efficiency - establish clear mechanisms within these quarterly strategic convenings for tracking and acting on key decisions made by component leads and key stakeholders to enhance effectiveness. b) Enhance the visibility and engagement of UN agency programs by: - inviting UN representatives to regular PWL convenings - establishing regular information-sharing mechanisms between UN agencies and other PWL components - mapping UN-funded initiatives alongside PWL grants to minimise duplication and identify collaboration opportunities.		and brief the Board on their work and potential areas for collaboration at least once per year. Where appropriate, the Board will also extend these invitations to other PWL components to foster broader communication and joint engagement.		Link grant partners with UN agencies who are undertaking similar work, to identify areas of collaboration and information-sharing.	arrangements. The meeting will be held alongside the 2025 Annual Reflection and Analysis Workshop. 1b) PWLES agrees with this recommendation and will take steps to ensure greater visibility and engagement at the 2025 ARAW and all future whole of PWL convenings. PWLES will explore how to incorporate a mapping exercise to support this work, including assessing whether it could be carried out through the PWLES QTAG.	
2) Strengthen the strategic value of the PWL Governance Board: a) Redesign the Board's Terms of Reference (ToR) to clarify its role in: - providing strategic advice and oversight - strengthening communication channels with DFAT and program components	Agree	2a) and b) The Board agreed in its meeting on 8 April 2024 that the Board's TOR be reviewed and updated, including to respond to the MTR recommendations. As part of this process, the role of the Secretariat will also be considered.	2a) and b) DFAT will engage an independent consultant to work collaboratively with SPC, DFAT and the Governance Board to redesign the TOR for the Governance Board, Chairperson, and Secretariat. This process will clarify their purpose, roles and responsibilities, communication channels with other program components, and propose improvements to	2a) and b) SPC agrees with this recommendation and as the secretariat is taking key steps to strengthen this work. These include: - Work with DFAT and the Board to revise the TOR and take action to respond to recommendations. - Through the update of the TOR, SPC will work with DFAT to review and revise SPC's role as the Secretariat. - Seek opportunities to further strengthen the Board's capacity and capability, through training and coaching.	2a) and b) PWLES agrees with this recommendation and remains available to support the Board, SPC or DFAT as required to implement this recommendation.	Q4 2025

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- aligning with principles of Pacific-led programming and ownership. b) Revise the Secretariat's role to ensure effective support for the Board, including: - reviewing its selection and management to align with the Board's revised mandate - establishing clear performance expectations and accountability mechanisms.			operations and accountability processes. While the above work is underway, DFAT and SPC will meet regularly to strengthen communications and support for the Governance Board.	- In parallel, SPC will review its Governance training for Committee of Representatives of Governments and Administrations (CRGA) that presents an opportunity for cross learning and update to governance training across different sectors and governance board mechanisms.		
3. Ensure continuity and minimise disruptions in SPC grants by signing a no cost extension to enable SPC grantees to implement their full contract budgets and developing a transition plan to bridge grants into the next phase.	Agree	The Board supports the signing of a no-cost extension for existing SPC-managed grants where needed, to allow partners to fully implement their approved activities and utilise their contract budgets. The Board also agrees that a clear and coordinated transition plan is required to bridge current grants into the next phase of PWL.	Acknowledging the delays in the grant processes (as discussed within the report), DFAT and SPC have already entered into a no cost extension to enable grantees greater implementation time. DFAT considers the grants a core component of Pacific-led development in PWL, and will continue to focus on ensuring their efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability, including most appropriate delivery modalities, during transition planning for any future phases of the program.	Since the completion of the MTR, SPC has signed a no-cost extension with DFAT to enable SPC grantees to implement their contract budgets. SPC is working with sub-grantees through this process. SPC and DFAT will work with sub-grantees on the transition to the next phase. SPC continues to strengthen its grants and procurement capabilities, under the OneSPC Transformation Programme. This includes having a dedicated team within OMD who have strong technical capabilities to support grants throughout pre award, award and post award stages, and will continue to work closely with the PWL at SPC programme to improve efficiency and identify solutions suited to SPC and its implementing partners. Additionally, a new Grants Committee, separate from the Procurement Committee, is now meeting fortnightly. In Q4 2025, detailed onboarding guidance will be provided to new grantees. New grants management software is under consideration for Q3–Q4 2025.	PWLES agrees with this recommendation and remains available to support SPC to strengthen continuity and minimise disruptions, as needed.	Q1 2025 and beyond
4. Develop a PWL climate change strategy to integrate climate change	Agree	The Board acknowledges that climate change is one of the	DFAT agrees with this recommendation, which	SPC supports and endorses the response by DFAT and PWLES, to seek opportunities	PWLES has engaged a QTAG partner to	Q3 2025

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considerations across PWL programming to: - identify key entry points for climate change considerations across PWL programming - strengthen collaboration between PWL and climate-focused organisations - align the strategy with regional climate policies and funding mechanisms		most pressing challenges in the Pacific and is closely connected to gender equality. It supports creating a guidance note to help partners embed climate considerations into their programs.	aligns with Australia's International Development Policy, and has engaged PWLES to develop a Climate Change Guidance Note that focuses on integrating climate change considerations into existing PWL gender equality initiatives.	to strengthen the gender and climate change nexus. SPC can support this through the SPC Flagships. SPC's Gender Equality and Climate Change Flagships will continue to work together to strengthen programming and seek opportunities for deeper collaboration, to then share lessons learned across the PWL portfolio.	develop a Climate Change Guidance Note, which will support partners to integrate climate change. Consultations got underway in May 2025, and the Guidance Note will be socialised with partners at the 2025 ARAW.	
5. Ensure continuity of PWLES' support by DFAT initiating a procurement process with an expanded scope of services to engage a PWL Enabling Services Contractor for the next phase of the PWL program. This will enable the PWL Enabling Services Contractor to sustain and expand technical advisory, MEL, and program management support for partners, ensuring the program continues to benefit from technical expertise and trusted relationships in the region.	Agree	The Board affirms the importance of sustaining and enhancing the MEL and technical advisory functions of the PWLES. The Board acknowledges the value PWLES has brought to strengthening learning, partner support, and accountability across the program.	DFAT will commence a procurement process to engage a PWLES contractor for the next phase.	SPC supports and endorses the response by DFAT	PWLES supports and endorses the response by DFAT	Q2 2026

For the next phase (from July 2026)

Recommendation	Level of agreement ²	Governance Board	DFAT	SPC	PWLES	Timeframe
6. Maintain Pacific-led ownership as a core principle of PWL and cross-cutting driver of impact: a) DFAT to continue supporting Pacific-owned programming by: - embedding lessons learned from this phase into future program design. b) Retain SPC as the key implementing partner, ensuring: - clearer alignment of expectations between SPC and DFAT - increased visibility and strategic positioning of the Gender Equality Flagship - strengthened grant management processes. c) Sustain and enhance PWLES' MEL and technical advisory roles, ensuring: - PWLES team composition continues to demonstrate Pacific ownership in Phase II.	Agree	6 a-c) The PWL Board strongly agrees with this recommendation and reaffirms that Pacific-led ownership must remain central to PWL's effectiveness and sustainability. The Board welcomes DFAT's commitment to embedding lessons from this phase into future design and supports the continued role of SPC as the lead implementing partner, given its position as a Pacific-owned institution with strong convening and technical capacity.	6a) DFAT is committed to maintaining Pacific ownership as a core principle of PWL and will draw on lessons from the MTR and other evaluative processes to continue supporting Pacific-owned programming under PWL. 6b) DFAT acknowledges the unique and valuable role that SPC plays in the Pacific region and respects the mandate they hold given by member states. DFAT will continue to consider this value for future phases of PWL. 6c) DFAT will ensure that locally led development principles are important criteria in the upcoming PWLES procurement process, and that the PWLES continues to prioritise and demonstrate Pacific ownership.	SPC remains best placed to lead the implementation of PWL. SPC will continue to strengthen alignment of expectations through regular strategic dialogue and improved documentation of roles, responsibilities, and mutual accountabilities. SPC, through the OneSPC Transformation Programme, is also continuing to improve grant management processes, including recruitment of technical specialists, updates to the Grants Policy, and improved onboarding and guidance for grantees. SPC will continue to support visibility, alignment and positioning of the Gender Equality Flagship through coordinated communications and engagement with regional stakeholders, unified and coordinated MEL mechanisms and reporting processes. SPC seeks to continue partnership brokering with DFAT to strengthen relationships and to streamline payment milestones and grant agreements under the PWL portfolio and implemented by SPC. SPC will continue to work closely with PWLES in MEL to find ways to move the PWL database to SPC's Pacific Data Hub, for the data to be used by CROP agencies in reporting against regional gender equality commitments.	6a-c) PWLES agrees with this recommendation, including sustaining and enhanced MEL and technical advisory services, while continuing to demonstrate Pacific ownership in Phase II. In the lead-up to Phase II, PWLES will document and communicate lessons learned from its MEL and technical support approaches, including the value of regionally based facilitation and adaptive learning processes and maintain a strong Pacific-led team.	Q3 2026 and beyond
7. Refine PWL's funding and support mechanisms based on program strengths and demand:	Partially agree	7a) In line with recommendation 1, the Board will invite representatives from Women's Funds to participate in selected Governance Board	7a) DFAT notes the recommendation to increase funding to Women's Funds and acknowledges alignment	7a) and b) SPC will prioritize government grant partnerships, alongside select CSO engagements, and will work closely with other portfolio partners to continue	PWLES agrees with 7a and 7b. 7c) The upcoming tender process will	Q2 2026 and beyond

² Levels of Agreement: agree; partially agree; disagree.

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a) Increase funding to the Women's Funds, in particular increasing funds to PFF to: • expand regional reach and flexible support for women's CSOs • enhance flexibility in responding to emerging gender equality challenges. b) Focus SPC grants on areas of unique strategic value, ensuring: • prioritisation of national government partnerships and strategic CSO engagement • better alignment with SPC's operational capacity and mandate. c) Expand and improve the coordination of technical advisory and MEL support by: • expanding PWLES' role in MEL, advisory support, communications and program management where required by DFAT bilateral posts • increasing funding for PWLES based on assessed demand • strengthening collaboration between SPC, PWLES and UN agencies.		meetings. This will help strengthen collaboration and ensure that Board discussions and decisions actively support and amplify the role of women's CSOs in addressing gender equality challenges in regional convenings. The Board supports SPC, DFAT and PWLES responses to 7b) and 7c).	with Australia's International Strategy for Gender Equity, which includes a commitment to increase funding for women's rights organisations. 7b) DFAT notes this recommendation and will work with SPC to consider how best to use SPC resources and systems to support strategic grants that are aligned with PWL outcomes and Pacific priorities, and leverage SPC's unique and valuable mandate in the region. 7c) Through the upcoming PWLES tendering process, DFAT will ensure adequate resources to enable an expanded role in MEL, advisory support, communications and program management. See management response to recommendation 1b) for how DFAT will strengthen and support collaboration between SPC, PWLES and UN agencies.	cohesion and connections between government and CSOs. As convenors of the ARAW, PWLES and SPC will ensure UN agencies are integrated into the 2025 program to strengthen collaboration and transparency of regional UN programs under PWL	provide the opportunity for PWLES to propose an expanded PWLES role, including MEL, advisory support, communications and program management. Through recommendation 2b PWLES will address strengthened collaboration with SPC and UN agencies.	
8. Strengthen national- and sub-regional level engagement to drive transformational change: a) Support national- and sub-regional level coordination	Partially agree	The Board agrees with this recommendation and as experienced gender equality advocates from across the Pacific, Governance Board members will actively participate in their respective	8a) DFAT agrees that country-level and sub-regional coordination on gender equality is key to aligning regional and country-level priorities and driving transformational	8a) SPC will continue to work and support national level coordination when invited to do so. This includes through existing member government grants and ensuring the work is aligned to sub-regional and regional commitments.	While PWLES agrees with this recommendation in principle, PWLES' current mandate and resourcing allow for support to	Q2 2026 and beyond

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mechanisms for gender equality by: - identifying and reinforcing existing convenings rather than creating new ones - enhancing collaboration between SPC, UN agencies, PIFS and government bodies. b) Introduce national-level PWL outcomes reporting to: - improve visibility of country-level progress into regional reporting - strengthen national-level coordination and collaboration between gender partners at the national-level.		PWL national and sub-regional level convenings to strengthen collaboration and bring greater visibility to the Governance Board's role within PWL.	change. DFAT, through PWL, will continue to support PIFS and SPC in their coordination and technical support roles at national, sub-regional and regional levels, including by reinforcing existing convenings and enhancing collaboration between SPC, UN agencies, PIFS and government bodies. 8b) To improve visibility of country-level progress, DFAT will explore with PWLES how to best leverage the existing evidence base, and the option of national-level PWL outcomes reporting for select countries and strengthen coordination across its regional network of Posts.	SPC will also continue to work through existing mechanisms and convenings, such as the Regional Review of Architecture (RRA) and SPC's recent Independent Institutional Review (IIR). SPC is also currently undertaking a Ministerial Review to support the RRA process. Through PWL funding, SPC supported the Micronesian Islands Forum in the soon to be launched subregional Gender Equality Framework. As a result of this work, the Melanesian Spearhead Group has requested similar support from SPC to further the draft of the Melanesian Gender Equality Framework. After the co-convening of the 15th Triennial Conference, 8th Ministers for Women and 3rd PIF Women Leaders meeting in 2024, and the Pacific CEDAW Technical Cooperation Session in 2025, SPC has continued to increase collaboration with PIFS, particularly through MERL, implementation and convening processes.	regional MEL activities. Pilots for national-level outcomes reporting has taken place in Tuvalu and Palau. While PWLES agrees with the recommendation to introduce national-level outcomes reporting, resources under the next phase are needed to enable this expanded mandate.	
9. Update the PWL program logic to reflect key lessons and strategic priorities: a) Integrate Pacific-led programming and ownership as a cross-cutting driver of impact rather than a standalone outcome b) Strengthen national and subregional coordination as a pathway to aligning regional and country-level priorities c) Expand the regional programs WEE focus beyond women market vendors to include micro and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). While the regional	Agree	9a) The Governance Board supports this recommendation and looks forward to the opportunity to review and provide feedback on the updated program logic. The Governance Board supports DFAT, SPC and PWLES responses to 9b) – d).	9a) - d) DFAT acknowledges these findings, and reaffirms its commitment to each of these priorities, which align with Pacific priorities and are reflected in Australia's policies, including Australia's International Gender Equality Strategy. DFAT will ensure that the PWLES procurement incorporates the recommended PWL program logic update as an early milestone.	9a)-9d) SPC is in support of this recommendation, with specific details mentioned in recommendation 8.	9a) The up-coming tender process will provide the opportunity to propose next steps for how to review the logic. 9b-d) PWLES agrees with these recommendations and will work with lead components to support their implementation.	Q2 2026 and beyond

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program has successfully supported women market vendors, there is an opportunity to broaden support to women-led micro and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Expanding the program's focus will enhance economic opportunities for a wider range of women entrepreneurs, fostering greater financial independence and outcomes. d) Maintain a broad focus on quality health services while keeping SRHR as a priority area.						