

Pacific Horticultural and Agricultural Market Access (PHAMA) Plus Final Evaluation

DFAT Management Response

This independent evaluation, commissioned by DFAT and MFAT, assessed the performance and achievements of Phase Two of the Pacific Horticultural and Agricultural Market Access Plus (PHAMA Plus) program which ran from July 2022 and will conclude in June 2026. The evaluation focused on the program's continued relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability, and performance in advancing gender equality, disability, and social inclusion (GEDSI) and climate resilience outcomes. It also examined options for future programming and strategic positioning of Australia and New Zealand's support to agricultural trade and market systems in the Pacific.

The evaluation covered nine Pacific Island countries—Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Niue, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu—and reflected on lessons from Papua New Guinea, where programming concluded in 2024. Data collection involved 126 key informant interviews, extensive document review, and fieldwork in Fiji, Tonga, and Vanuatu. Limitations included time constraints in-country and variable availability of historical documentation from early Phase Two.

The program's goal is to contribute to improved economic growth and rural livelihoods of Pacific households. It is implemented by DT Global under DFAT management, in partnership with MFAT, across ten countries. PHAMA Plus has three End-of-Program Outcomes (EOPOs):

1. Support for improved exporter performance
2. Support for strengthened market access and biosecurity systems; and
3. Support to supply side innovation

It represents a cumulative AUD 63.9 million investment across both phases, of which AUD 27.1 million covers the current phase.

The program combines technical assistance to private sector partners and government agencies—particularly biosecurity, agriculture and trade authorities—with a Market Systems Development (MSD) approach aimed at stimulating innovation and co-investment among private sector actors. Partnerships are structured around co-investment that seeks to align incentives between public and private stakeholders.

Key findings: PHAMA Plus remains highly relevant to Pacific economic priorities and Aid for Trade objectives, supporting climate-resilient growth and agricultural trade through biosecurity, export facilitation, and value chain competitiveness. Since 2023, effectiveness has improved significantly, benefiting thousands of households and driving export growth, systemic change in sectors like Vanuatu cacao and kava, and stronger gender and disability inclusion. The program offers good value for money and has improved efficiency through decentralisation and leadership changes, though resources remain stretched and sustainability uneven outside key sectors. Climate resilience and

regional advocacy are advancing, but greater private investment, collaboration with regional bodies, and systematic knowledge sharing are needed to ensure lasting impact beyond 2026. PHAMA Plus Phase Two has delivered credible achievements across relevance, effectiveness, and efficiency criteria, and has progressively evolved into a mature and adaptive Aid for Trade mechanism. Its strongest performance has been achieved where the program has maintained continuity, deepened engagement, and applied a genuinely systemic approach. Although early design ambiguity and staffing challenges limited initial momentum, the program now demonstrates clear pathways to market system transformation and growing local ownership. The longevity of Australian and New Zealand engagement through PHAMA and PHAMA Plus has positioned both governments as trusted partners in Pacific agricultural development and trade reform.

DFAT’s response to the Final Evaluation: As outlined below, DFAT accepts the evaluation’s findings and agrees with nine of the twelve recommendations and partially agrees with three. Details of the Management Response to each recommendation is included in the table on the next page.

Individual management response to the summary of recommendations

Recommendation	Responsible	Response	Action Plan
Recommendation 1 Ensure future programming in the agricultural trade landscape is not constrained by a purely export focus, and has the opportunity to work holistically within target sectors.	DFAT	Agree	DFAT agrees with recommendation 1.
Recommendation 2 Moving forward, more deliberate attention and resourcing should be directed towards supporting (or establishing) regional, sectorally focused Working Groups that act as a centrepiece for knowledge sharing around the region, while also respecting regional architecture and locally led initiatives through entities such as SPC and PIFS.	DFAT	Partially Agree	DFAT partially agree recommendation 2. Regional working groups require formal authority and recognition from regional entities to effectively deliberate and negotiate. While they are useful for knowledge sharing, they lack catalytic capacity without clear governance, technical capacity and resources. Strengthening these groups requires formal recognition, improved accountability, capacity building, sustainable funding, inclusive stakeholder engagement, and robust monitoring and evaluation systems to ensure they can drive meaningful regional outcomes. This will be considered further in design for future programming.
Recommendation 3 Any future agricultural program should take an explicitly sector-wide focus and look beyond individual firms. Program activities should begin with research and analysis of sectors that directly provide an initial vision for positive, inclusive and realistic change and an initial strategy to achieve that change. Finding partners willing to collaborate	DFAT	Agree	DFAT agrees with recommendation 3. While we acknowledge that we operate in thin markets and may ultimately work with many of the same partners, grounding the approach in research will enhance the effectiveness and inclusiveness of these partnerships.

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and try new things that could lead to sustained, inclusive changes should follow, not precede, vision and strategy. Interventions with partners should be ultimately aimed at improving the whole sector, not just the partner's domain. Partnerships might be with individual businesses but must embody a vision for sector wide change, with management of the approach needing to be adaptive.			
Recommendation 4 Any future program seeking to support agriculture and food security across the Pacific should be multi-country in nature, take a systems approach, and establish country teams in every country it works in. The minimum country team size in the smallest countries should be 3 people – comprising management, systems, MRM and inclusion capabilities, with a specialist 'bent' dependent on local priorities – with a minimum activity budget of \$200k per year. Each country team's focus (and specialist 'bent') would be determined by host government and D/MFAT priorities and mindful of other ongoing programs – for example agricultural productivity or exports or biosecurity or food security and/or nutrition for example – that would be subjected to a systems analysis leading to a vision, strategy and	DFAT	Partially Agree	DFAT agrees a multi-country approach and a single, consolidated agriculture-relations program will offer value for money and promote a coherent and holistic approach. DFAT commits to actively considering the recommended minimum country team size and activity budget as benchmark, but final decisions will occur through the design and relevant approval processes.

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partnerships/ interventions (with public, private or civil society actors). Having one ‘agricultural’ program in each country would alleviate and eliminate program coordination challenges over time and reduce the multiplicity of programs for posts to monitor. With potentially one contractor, and one supporting ‘hub’ whose primary function would be to support high quality systems analysis, action and learning in each country, the quality of in-country activity would be maintained at a high level. Key technical advisers would be spread across country teams, with the expectation of substantial travel. A TAG to support D/MFAT’s oversight and improvement of the program could add further value.			
Recommendation 5 Given the importance of BQS issues across the Pacific, and the scale of the challenge, a future program should assess current and future BQS needs against the array of ongoing support programs, and devise how best to fill gaps in the short term, but also with a longer term view of how to build better, more relevant and responsive BQS systems across the Pacific. A potentially separate program - closely linked to a BQS system building effort – should be responsible for supporting biosecurity emergency responses.	DFAT	Agree	DFAT agrees with recommendation 5. Future programs could focus on strengthening firm-level standards and quality control systems for resilience and risk mitigation, instead of being fully responsive to Pacific Island countries’ BQS. On a regional level, DAFF could coordinate with regional partners like SPC to build biosecurity capacity, improve incursion management and facilitate market access.

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Recommendation 6 Future programming should consider including an agri-tech focus recommendation, conducting careful analysis of all potential agri-tech opportunities and constraints and making strategic choices about the feasibility of addressing those constraints before intervening. Testing and introducing new agricultural technologies are a valid program activity but must include a robust analysis of the business case for the technology alongside a holistic analysis of the system into which the technology is being introduced, including farmer awareness and demand for the technology, the availability of appropriate financing and other issues known to affect adoption.	DFAT	Agree	DFAT agrees with recommendation 6. Technology will play a pivotal role in the future of programming, especially with the rise of AI and smart technologies. It is crucial that such technologies are practical, manageable, affordable and adapted to the unique conditions of Pacific environments to ensure sustainability and effectiveness.
Recommendation 7 Any future program should identify where private extension models may be appropriate to help address supply chain challenges, and pilot these with willing private partners.	DFAT	Agree	Any such approach should be carefully designed and supported by strong evidence that the identified private sector partners are both willing and capable of carrying out these responsibilities. It is critical that their participation is voluntary and not perceived as coercion or pressure for the broader benefit of the sector.
Recommendation 8 Further progress focused research on the Family Farm Team model to determine lesson learned in the context of PHAMA Plus, and also how it can best be applied in future programming on the agriculture and trade landscape.	DFAT	Agree	DFAT agrees with recommendation 8. This work is currently underway and lessons from this will inform GEDSI considerations in future programs.

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Recommendation 9 Any future program should ensure that robust Monitoring, Evaluation, Research, and Learning systems are in place early, and appropriately structured to capture the qualitative and quantitative data necessary for adaptive management. D/MFAT managers should conduct a formal, externally-supported assessment during the second year of program implementation to verify that these systems are in place and functional, clearly and broadly understood, and with appropriate incentives for all staff to fulfill them.	DFAT	Agree	DFAT agrees with this recommendation and will be considered further in designs for future programs.
Recommendation 10 Continue to tie off current programming – with TAG support – in ways that will ensure momentum can be maintained by successor programming.	DFAT	Partially agree	DFAT acknowledges the importance of the TAG in guiding the direction of the program however, ongoing engagement between Posts and the relevant Ministries of Agriculture, Trade, and Biosecurity Authorities will be guided by partner government priorities and how these align with Post’s individual development partnership plans.
Recommendation 11 Ensure clear and dynamic coordination of different programming efforts in SIS with the aim of ensuring synergies between different programs.	DFAT	Partially agree	The distinct challenges faced by Small Island States—such as limited capacity, high logistics costs, and vulnerability to external shocks—require tailored interventions that differ from those of middle to larger countries. While a unified program may struggle to address these disparities effectively, collaboration can still occur on shared issues like logistics, connectivity, and intra-regional trade.
Recommendation 12	DFAT	Agree	DFAT agrees with recommendation 12.

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Future programming should work to more fully institutionalise GEDSI as a core feature of agricultural market system development, recognizing the need for constant engagement and progression of issues of inclusion, dedicated GEDSI capacity, measurable inclusion targets, and inclusive business practices within all partnerships and sector strategies if women and people with disabilities actively participate in, and benefit from, agricultural trade and innovation.			Despite PHAMA Plus' improved performance on promoting gender equality over Phase 2, we will look to further strengthen and institutionalise GEDSI in future programs in line with commitments in Australia's International Development Policy.