

SOUTH PACIFIC FORUM

CANBERRA, 23-25 FEBRUARY, 1972

COMMUNIQUE

The President of Nauru, the Prime Ministers of Western Samoa, Tonga and Fiji, the Premier of the Cook Islands, and the Australian and New Zealand Ministers for Foreign Affairs met in Canberra from 23-25 February for informal discussion of many issues affecting the lives and welfare of the peoples of the South Pacific. All participants acknowledged the value of meeting again to build upon the foundations laid at the inaugural session of the Forum held in Wellington in 1971.

This second meeting advanced the process of mutual consultation and represented a further stage in the sympathetic understanding of each other's problems and in willing collaboration in practical measures directed to their solution. The advantages of co-operation and the opportunity of easy and informal exchanges were found to reinforce a sense of regional identity and common purpose, directed to the advancement of all the peoples of the region.

TRADE

The Forum recognised that a prime trade objective of the region was to endeavour to change the pattern whereby the territories previously dependent had supplied raw materials to metropolitan countries but were unable to manufacture many of the goods they required. Some methods of modifying the pattern could be increased inter-island trade, increased investment in the islands, joint ventures providing for the manufacture in the islands of components made for products in the developed countries, and consideration of trade barriers affecting island goods.

The Forum reached agreement in principle to the establishment of a Bureau to deal with trade and related matters, to be located in Suva, subject to supervision by a committee, which would itself report and make recommendations to the Forum on matters deriving from the work of the Bureau.

The Forum agreed that the fundamental purpose of the Bureau would be to ensure that the process of consultation on trade and related matters among Members of the South Pacific Forum is on a continuing basis and that projects considered useful from a regional viewpoint can be swiftly implemented.

The principal functions of the Bureau, which would be of limited size, would be to:

1. Identify the opportunities for a modification of present trade patterns in the South Pacific region, and between the region and other countries, having in mind the objectives of regional trade expansion.
2. Carry out necessary investigations in connection with development of free trade among the Island members of the Forum.

3. Study the development plans and policies of Forum Members in an effort to promote co-operation in the region; and to investigate the scope for regional development planning aimed among other things at a rationalisation of manufacturing and processing industries and the achievement of economies of scale in certain regional enterprises.
4. Establish an advisory service on sources of technical assistance, aid and investment finance, both official and private, that are available to Members of the Forum.
5. Undertake studies of regional transport, as necessary, and help co-ordinate the action, both government and private, in this sector.
6. Advise and assist Member Governments with the operation of a regional trade and tourist promotion service.
7. Provide a means of regular and rapid consultation among the islands on the region's import requirements to enable the bulk ordering of essential imports by official agencies.
8. Act as a clearing house for information on trade, production, and economic development in the region and in areas outside the region which are of interest to Members of the Forum.
9. Carry out research and statistical studies on production and trade on a continuing basis as requested by the Committee.
10. Undertake such other functions as may be decided by the members of the Forum from time to time.

It was agreed that care should be taken to avoid unnecessary duplication of activities with other multinational bodies in the region. Costs of the Bureau would be apportioned on the basis of one third each to Australia, New Zealand and the Islands as a group.

LAW OF THE SEA

The Forum discussed Law of the Sea, including territorial waters, the archipelago principle, rights of innocent passage, control over fisheries, and measures to control pollution in the Pacific. There was a broad measure of agreement on general interests and objectives and it was agreed to continue consultation in the Preparatory Committee for the Law of the Sea Conference. The Forum supported the stand of Tonga in relation to Minerva Reef and noted that the legal steps to be taken were being put under study.

IMMIGRATION

The Forum heard statements by Island leaders outlining the immigration difficulties of Island people in the areas of permanent entry, training opportunities, temporary employment and visitors permits. The Australian Minister of Immigration and the New Zealand Foreign Minister explained their immigration policies and undertook to

give sympathetic consideration to allowing more people from the Islands to enter their countries for training in technical skills unavailable in their home countries.

CIVIL AVIATION

There was a general exchange of views on civil aviation in the South Pacific introduced by Western Samoa, in which all delegations took part.

The Forum recognised the importance of aviation communications in the isolated situation of Pacific islands and the advantages of solidarity were stressed. Emphasis was placed on the importance of co-operation among the countries represented in the interests of the airlines and the peoples of the region. The attention of the Forum was drawn to the special problems of those who were not members of the regional consortium.

The Forum noted the discussions held in Melbourne last September between Ministers of Civil Aviation had been valuable in furthering cooperation in regional air transport and the intention that such meetings should be held in future at regular intervals.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS

The Forum received a paper on telecommunications prepared by Australia and New Zealand and learned that a decision had been taken against the southward extension through Kwajalein of a submarine cable. It was resolved that the South Pacific Commission be invited to conduct further studies in consultation with island territories including estimated revenue, estimated costs to members, and possible sources of finance for the various methods of communication. Fiji undertook to raise the matter at the forthcoming South Pacific Conference.

OCEANIC RESOURCES

The Forum studied an Information Paper on the steps being taken to commence a pilot project aimed at 'farming' the lagoons and atolls of the Cook Islands.

SHIPPING

The Forum noted the need to keep under review possible impediments to the development of shipping services within the region.

EDUCATION

The Forum recognised the importance of Education and that it should always appear on the agenda of meetings, particularly with regard to the University of the South Pacific. The Forum received the report of an international mission on Medical Education in the South Pacific, and a draft letter from the Chairman of the University Grants Committee to the Vice Chancellor of the University, for information. Attention was drawn to the fact that the University was not taking advantage of salary supplementation schemes offered by some countries. Members with representatives on the Council of the University were invited to urge the use of this resource.

REGIONAL COOPERATION

There was general acceptance of the importance of consultation and of the need to develop a habit of collaboration. The Forum received a paper by Australia listing the International Organisations in the South Pacific. It was considered that the new South Pacific Bureau for Economic Co-operation could amplify and tabulate the list and include individual projects throughout the region.

REGIONAL DISASTER FUND

The Forum approved the establishment of a regional disaster fund for the Island Members, to be built up over 12 years to a total of \$500,000. The Island Members would contribute equally to the fund.

FUTURE-MEETINGS

It was agreed to accept the offer of the Government of Fiji to be host at the next meeting of the Forum to be held in Suva in September 1972.

FINAL PRESS COMMUNIQUE

The President of Nauru, the Prime Ministers of New Zealand, Western Samoa and Fiji, the Premier of the Cook Islands, the Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Minister of Lands of Tonga met in Suva from 12-14 September of the third meeting of the South Pacific Forum.

This meeting, the first to be held in the Islands was welcomed by participants as reflecting the acceptance of the Forum as permanent regional institution. It was also appropriate that the meeting should be held in the capital of one of its Island members where the Bureau for Economic Co-operation is to be located.

As at the first two meetings in Wellington and Canberra, discussion centred on matters of immediate and practical concern. The measures which were considered were directed towards the social and economic well-being of the peoples of the member countries, with special emphasis on ways and means of developing mutual trade.

The South Pacific Bureau for Economic Co-operation

The Forum decided to conclude as soon as possible an Agreement for the establishment of a South Pacific Bureau for Economic Co-operation and approved the terms of a draft text which they initialled. They undertook to recommend its adoption to their governments.

The Forum confirmed the appointment of the Honourable Mahe Tupouniua, Minister of Finance in Tonga, as Director and appointed Mr. K.W. Piddington, formerly Head of the Economic Division of the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to be Deputy Director. They will be starting work in Suva in November.

Membership of Forum and Bureau

While upholding the principle that membership of the Forum should be restricted to decision-makers from independent or self-governing countries, members wished to find a way in which a country such as Papua New Guinea, which expects to become self-governing by the end of 1973, and which has expressed a genuine interest in becoming a member of the Forum, can be associated with it at an earlier date.

The Forum considered that it would be inappropriate to establish different types of membership in either the Forum or the Bureau. Prospective members could be invited to attend its own meetings as observers in the period immediately prior to achieving self-government. It noted the request made by Mr. Michael Somare, Chief Minister of Papua New Guinea forwarded to Fiji, the host Government, raising the question of attendance at the Forum. The Forum decided to invite Papua New Guinea to attend future Forum meetings –as an observer until such time as it not the criterion for full membership at self-government or independence. Membership of the Forum need not be restricted to members *of the* Forum, providing that the Forum itself decides to approve an application from a non-member. The services of the Bureau should, however, be available to territories in the region who are not members whether or not they contribute financially.

Trade and Economic Co operation

The Forum considered how regional co-operation in trade and economic matters might be strengthened and discussed the possibility of arrangements amongst Forum members to facilitate trade and economic development.

It is appropriate that the co -operation of the Forum countries should have culminated in the formation of the Bureau of Economic Co operation at a time when the enlargement of the EEC has made changes necessary in the trading patterns of Forum Countries.

The options available to certain Island member of the Forum in regard to their future relations with the enlarged EEC were discussed. Members recognised that it would be necessary to weigh up carefully the respective advantages and disadvantages of these options bearing in mind possible regional arrangements in the longer term.

Ways must be found to strengthen economics of Island members of the Forum by extending the production and processing industries. In particular, special consideration should be given to:

- the development of further processing of primary products
- the rationalisation of import substitution industries
- the establishment of export – oriented manufacturing industries

The Forum decided that the Bureau for Economic, Co-operation should be asked to carry out a Commodity by commodity and an industry by industry study to identify where and in what manner development might take place. This study will examine exports by Island numbers within the region and look at export possibilities beyond the South Pacific, It will take into account quarantine and commercial regulation besides tariffs.

The Bureau is also asked to report on the factors which need to be taken into account in deciding whether on what conditions Fiji, Tonga and Western Samoa should seek association status with the EEC.

Forum members acknowledged the need to make the use of existing opportunities such as

those available under the General Scheme of Preferences for developing countries.

Australia and New Zealand expressed their willingness to work closely with island members and the Bureau in finding solutions to the many important trade and economic matters which they must now face. This could include such assistance as co-operation in assisting fair commercial access to each other's market for agreed commodities. Facilitation of investment and encouragement of co-operation in consultancy services, in design and construction projects including joint ventures with a maximum practicable use of Island resources
Supporting the negotiation of international agreements to improve the conditions of trade in primary products.

The Forum discussion highlighted the fact that no single or simple action is likely to solve trade problems. There must be continuing action over a wide range of activities if the islands are to expand and diversify their trade in the region and in wider world markets.

Nuclear Testing

The question of nuclear weapons tests was extensively discussed in the light of the series of tests recently concluded by France.

Members were unanimous in expressing their deep concern that the French Government should have failed so significantly to accord recognition to the wishes of the peoples of the South Pacific area despite the views so clearly indicated by both government and peoples. The fact the radioactive fallout from this year's series was low because of the nature of the test explosions carried out did not lessen their opposition, which would remain unaltered until such time as a firm assurance was given that the South Pacific would not be used as a site for further experimentation of this kind with its resulting implications for men and his environment and in particular the marine environment.

Members exchanged views as to the ways and means by which they could pursue their common objective of bringing to an end all nuclear weapons tests in all environments by any country. The Prime Minister of New Zealand and the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Australia informed the meeting of the steps being taken by the two Governments to invite Pacific member states of the United Nations similarly concerned about this matter to meet in New York during the early stages of the forthcoming session of the General Assembly and outlined the approach which they intended to adopt. The warm support of other Forum members was voiced for this initiative.

Law of the Sea

The Forum discussed a number of issues concerning the Law of the sea including the breadth of the territorial sea, the question of resources jurisdiction over a wider area of sea and of the sea bed, a special regime for archipelago states and rights of passage through waters subject to the jurisdiction of coastal states. They agreed that there was a large area of common interest among members of the Forum and that there should continue to be close consultation among them in relation to the prospective Conference on the Law of the Sea.

Members of the Forum recognised Tonga's historical association with the Minerva Reefs, welcomed the Tongan Governments continuing interest in the area and agreed that there could be no question of recognising other claims, and specifically that of the Ocean Life Research Foundation, to sovereignty over the reefs.

University of the South Pacific

The Forum agreed that, because they contribute to University finances, regional representation on the 1972 University Salaries Committee should be increased to four so that members can be appointed from Tonga and the British Solomon Islands in addition to Fiji and Samoa.

Telecommunications

The Forum noted that the UNDP has recruited two experts, to study telecommunications improvements and that their reports will be considered at a Technical Meeting in 1974.

The Forum took the opportunity to discuss the report of a UNDP visiting mission which has recommended the establishment of a regional development bank which will be an item on the agenda of the forthcoming South Pacific Conference in Apia

Regional Shipping

The Forum considered a paper reporting the results of a recent Seminar on Shipping held in Western Samoa. Members discussed the possibility of a regional shipping line, inflationary increases in freight rates, the need to improve present services, and a number of features about the trade of the region which should be taken into account in deciding what kind of shipping services are required.

The Forum commissioned the Bureau to carry out further studies into the financial and operational structure of regional shipping line. An important objective of the study would be to determine the extent to which such line would be economically viable and to make recommendations in ways and means of achieving this aim. The Forum noted the suggestion that Australia might be able to assist in the study to be made by the Bureau. It accepted with appreciation Australia's offer to do whatever it could to assist.

Demographic Problems

The Forum reviewed the cause and effect of population problems, particularly those arising from education systems not adapted to contemporary needs, and supported an approach to UNESCO to organise a Conference in conjunction with the South Pacific Commission, to consider population problems, urbanisation and resettlement in the Pacific region.

Tourism

The Forum discussed the effects of tourism in the region and supported a proposal, to be discussed at the South Pacific Conference in Apia that UNESCO might be asked to undertake a study of tourism in the South Pacific with particular reference to its impact on the way of life of the islands.

Next Meeting

Members gratefully accepted the invitation of the Prime Minister of Western Samoa to hold the next meeting of the Forum in Apia before the 1973 South Pacific Conference.