



FORUM ECONOMIC MINISTERS MEETING

22 - 23 July 2025

Suva, Fiji

AGENDA ITEM 4: THE 2050 STRATEGY FOR THE BLUE PACIFIC CONTINENT AND THE REVIEW OF THE REGIONAL ARCHITECTURE

Purpose and Recommendations

Purpose

This paper proposes an elevated role for Forum Economic Ministers in the implementation of the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent (2050 Strategy), through its leadership of the Pacific Roadmap for Economic Development (PRED). In doing so, the paper reflects on the growing call for strengthened sectoral collaboration in support of transformative development outcomes for the region, and the ways in which this can be synergised through these two strategic regional framings.

Summary

- Endorsed by Forum Leaders in 2022, the 2050 Strategy provides the political and strategic direction and vision for the Pacific region and reaffirms economic transformation and resilience as key underlying themes for regionalism.
- The Review of the Regional Architecture (RRA) presents an opportunity to interrogate whether the current regional system is fit for purpose and able to drive the Leaders vision for the region.
- The PRED presents a pragmatic framework to operationalise the Leaders Vision for Resource and Economic Development (RED) as encapsulated in the 2050 Strategy.
- Taken together, the two regional policy instruments, supported by the RRA, frame the opportunity for the region to use economic development as a catalyst for deepened regionalism in the Pacific, and to draw together the ambitions and aspirations of key development and enabling sectors.

A. Problem/Opportunity Identification

1. When Forum Leaders first convened in 1971, they understood that there could be shared solutions to the common problems that they faced in fields such as shipping, aviation, trade, education, and tourism¹. Since then, Pacific economies have continued to navigate long-standing structural constraints — small domestic markets, geographic isolation, limited diversification, and high exposure to external shocks. These challenges have been further

¹ 1971 Forum Leaders Summary Record, paragraph 2.

compounded by global crises, from the COVID-19 pandemic to the escalating impacts of climate change and geostrategic tensions.

2. However, amid these pressures are critical opportunities: the region has a clear, collectively endorsed vision for transformation in the 2050 Strategy, and a concrete implementation pathway in the PRED. When combined, these present a timely occasion to reshape the regional institutional landscape through the RRA. Taken together, these three regional frameworks present Forum Economic Ministers with a strategic window to drive a new era of strengthened and deepened Pacific regionalism — one that is more integrated, resilient, fit for purpose, and able to effectively deliver sustainable development outcomes for the region in an increasingly fluid geostrategic environment.

B. Strategic Context and Background

3. In its 54 years of regional cooperation as the Pacific Islands Forum, economic development efforts have remained largely fragmented and have been characterised by sectoral silos and duplication of initiatives. While the region has seen important progress in areas such as fisheries revenue sharing, labour mobility, and trade facilitation, these gains have not always been part of a focused and collectively supported regional economic development framework. Fragmentation has weakened coordination, diluted impacts, and made it harder to leverage resources and expertise effectively across the region. Consequently, this approach has limited the region’s ability to maximise collective economic potential.

4. Similarly, Forum Economic Ministers have not consistently been positioned at the centre of regional integration conversations. Although the FEMM has served as a key platform for economic dialogue, its potential to drive cross-sectoral policy coherence and to guide the economic dimensions of regionalism has not been fully realised. The FEMM’s limited involvement in shaping regional mechanisms has constrained the region’s ability to align strategic vision with economic policy and financing tools. In an increasingly complex, uncertain, and competitive global environment, marked by economic shocks, geopolitical tensions, and climate-related risks, this gap represents a critical, missed opportunity, for the Pacific to collectively frame and advocate for its economic interests with greater coherence and impact.

5. The endorsement of 2050 Strategy (2022) and its Implementation Plan (2023) sets out the long-term goals, related outcomes, and Regional Collective Actions (RCAs) that will support the achievement of our vision. As the region transitions to align to the 2050 Strategy, and to ensure that the regional system is positioned for effective delivery, the Council of Regional Organisations of the Pacific (CROP), and international and development partners, are also aligning their delivery to the 2050 Strategy and 2050 IP.

C. Linkage to Current Regional Initiatives

6. In response to this context, the PRED offers a timely and strategic opportunity to reset the region’s economic trajectory. Endorsed by Forum Economic Ministers in March 2025, the PRED provides a coherent framework to guide collective action, strengthen policy cohesion, improve policy coordination, and align regional and national efforts around the three focus areas of: Economic Integration for Resilience, Stability and Growth; Financial Integration for Resilience and Access; Raising Capacities.

7. The PRED operationalises the economic aspirations of the 2050 Strategy by providing clear priorities, indicators, and pathways for implementation. It also presents a platform for Forum Economic Ministers to play a central role in shaping regional economic integration. The 2050 Strategy and the complementary PRED, signals a critical shift towards a more strategic, cohesive, and whole-of-region approach to driving sustainable economic development for the region.

8. Increasingly, there is a strong call from sectoral meetings such as Fisheries, Aviation, and Tourism, to move beyond fragmented, sector-specific development, to strengthened cross-sectoral collaboration in the Pacific region, in order to drive and achieve transformative outcomes. This aligns with Forum Economic Ministers discussions over the last two years on revitalising a more integrated approach to Pacific regionalism. These discussions demonstrate a shared recognition that the Pacific cannot achieve sustainable economic development in isolation, and that regional approaches remain essential to overcoming structural challenges and achieving economies of scale. However, to move from commitments to delivery, there is a need for stronger economic leadership, greater policy coherence, and coordinated action across sectors.

Aviation

9. The 3rd Regional Aviation Ministers Meeting (RAMM3) hosted in February 2025, underscored the critical role of aviation as a strategic enabler of regional economic integration—linking trade, tourism, labour mobility, and essential services. Ministers highlighted persistent financing constraints, and called for scalable investment models. They also discussed a proposal by the Government of Tuvalu on a Cooperative Regional Aviation Framework, which would include joint procurement and shared services. RAMM3 also discussed the need to elevate aviation-tourism integration into the FEMM agenda, and reaffirmed the urgent need for aviation workforce development.

Information, Communication and Technology

10. Digital transformation is increasingly recognised as foundational to inclusive economic development, yet progress across the region remains uneven and fragmented. The Pacific ICT Ministers Dialogue and the adoption of the Lagatoi Declaration underscored the need for a more integrated approach to digital infrastructure, cybersecurity, innovation, and skills development. These elements are critical to enabling connectivity and private sector development. Without connected systems across the region, common standards, and coordinated investment, the digital divides will persist and will continue to constrain the region's competitiveness.

Tourism

11. Tourism remains one of the region's most important economic sectors. The Council of Tourism Ministers have reaffirmed the importance of building resilient and sustainable tourism ecosystems, particularly through climate-resilient infrastructure, digital transformation of SMEs, and enhanced air connectivity. Ministers also committed to adopting harmonised data and policy frameworks to better coordinate development and marketing efforts. These priorities reaffirm the need to address cross-border challenges such as market access, airline viability, and climate shocks.

12. These sectoral discussions reaffirm the critical opportunity to use the 2050 Strategy and primarily the PRED, as unifying frameworks that link regional aspirations with practical implementation across sectors. Noting the Forum Economic Ministers strategic oversight of the PRED, it is well positioned to guide how regional priorities are financed, governed, and connected, to ensure that regionalism is not just a political vision, but an operational reality. Deepened regionalism, grounded in economic coordination and shared outcomes, is essential to delivering resilience, prosperity, and self-determination for the Blue Pacific Continent.

D. Policy Analysis – Operationalising the 2050 Strategy

13. The implementation of the 2050 Strategy has now entered a critical operational phase. The 2050IP articulates the RCAs that are required by 2030 to drive transformational change across key thematic areas, with economic and trade development central to delivering improved socio-economic wellbeing for all Pacific peoples.

14. The 2050 Strategy recognises that Pacific-led, resilient, and diversified economic models — supported by digital innovation, sustainable resource use, and strengthened trade, are essential to reducing aid dependence and achieving long-term prosperity. As the 2050 Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) Plan moves into the implementation phase, the RRA offers a timely opportunity to assess whether current regional systems are fit-for-purpose to support the Leader’s vision, including for a more integrated region. This process is pivotal to deepening regionalism, strengthening economic coordination, and collective action, to better address shared challenges and to unlock the full potential of the Blue Pacific Continent.

Refining the Regional System: Opportunities from the Review of the Regional Architecture

15. Directed by Forum Leaders in 2019, the RRA aims to ensure that there is a fit-for-purpose regional system in place to support Forum Leaders’ long-term 2050 Vision. Work on the RRA began in earnest in 2024, sequenced with the endorsement of the 2050 Strategy and the 2050IP. It provides the opportunity to comprehensively consider the effectiveness, relevance and adaptability of the current architecture, to effectively deliver the transformative outcomes as envisioned by Forum Leaders’ in the 2050 Strategy.

16. An update on the progress and processes for the RRA is provided at **Annex 1**. A key product from this process will be the Leader’s consideration of the Report of the ongoing *High Level Political Talanoa* at the 54th Pacific Islands Forum Leaders Meeting (54PIFLM). The Report will cover four (4) political issues including: (i) Political Leadership and Unity; (ii) Membership; (iii) Rationalisation; and (iv) Deepening Regionalism.

17. The RRA provides an important opportunity to reform the regional architecture in support of cross-sectoral collaboration, and to streamline decision-making, coordinate appropriate partnerships for regional initiatives, and enhance coordination between economic, infrastructure, digital, and environmental agendas. Given the central role of Forum Economic Ministers in shaping and overseeing the economic agenda of the region, it is imperative this work is brought to the attention of Economic Ministers to enable strategic guidance

Looking forward to the 54PIFLM, Solomon Islands

18. The Government of the Solomon Islands has set the theme for the 54PIFLM as *Iumi Tugeda: Act Now for an Integrated Blue Pacific Continent*. The theme reaffirms the urgency of translating the region's shared vision into decisive action, especially as it relates to deepening regionalism. In light of the ongoing sectoral discussions, the operationalisation of the 2050 Strategy and the consideration of the regional system, Forum Economic Ministers may wish to discuss how best to frame a collective contribution on these matters through the outcomes of this meeting, to inform Forum Leaders discussions in September.

E. Consultation

19. Consultations on the ongoing implementation of the 2050 Strategy and the facilitation of the RRA have been widespread and remain ongoing. The key focal points for both pieces of work are officials from Foreign Affairs and the Office of the Prime Minister, where relevant. However, the Secretariat has continually socialised the progress of this work at various sectoral discussions and meetings.

F. Resourcing Requirements

20. There is a need to further discuss resourcing requirements, particularly in terms of human resources, expertise, CROP collaboration, and available budgetary support.

G. Regional Governance Implications

21. The RRA will likely have regional governance implications. These will become clearer once the Report of the High-Level Political Talanoa is considered by Leaders. Next Steps

22. Economic Ministers discussions and advice to Leaders on this paper will inform the Forum Leaders considerations at the 54PIFLM in September in Honiara, Solomon Islands.

*Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat
Suva, Fiji
18 July 2025*

UPDATE ON THE FACILITATION OF THE REVIEW OF THE REGIONAL ARCHITECTURE

1. The RRA was mandated by Forum Leaders at the 50th Pacific Islands Forum in Tuvalu in 2019 alongside the direction to develop the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent. Consistent with Members guidance, the work on the RRA was sequenced with the development of the 2050 Strategy (endorsed in July 2022) and its Implementation Plan (endorsed in November 2023). Therefore, work on the RRA began in earnest in 2024.
2. Under the direct oversight of Members, the RRA is being delivered through a 4-phased approach that covers the following:
 - a) **Phase 1:** To understand the current regional architecture, a desktop analysis was undertaken on the existing regional reports facilitated to date (January – March 2024);
 - b) **Phase 2:** To support a more coordinated, collaborative and coherent regional system, key systematic changes were recommended and endorsed by Leaders to support strengthened coordination across the current regional system (April – June 2024);
 - c) **Phase 3:** To support a fit-for-purpose regional system and address the political to be addressed by Leaders, Phase 3 will focus on political talanoa across the region to respond to the 4 questions that have been identified (January 2025 – August 2026), noting that the High-Level Political Talanoa Report will be delivered at the 54PIFLM in September 2025; and
 - d) **Phase 4:** Will focus on the development of a transition plan for the regional system moving forward (post-54PIFLM).

Current Discussions and Approach

3. Phase 3 of the RRA, as framed through the Leaders Communique, will consider the following:
 - a. The implementation of the Phase 2 Recommendations (to be implemented over 2025 and 2026);
 - b. The mapping of the non-CROP agencies;
 - c. The elaboration of the Partnership and Engagement Mechanism; and
 - d. The consideration of the key political issues that shape and impact the regional architecture with the intent to ensure a fully effective fit for purpose regional architecture.
4. In considering the scope of Phase 3, Members agreed to prioritise two key deliverables in time for the 54th Pacific Islands Forum Meeting: the elaboration of the Partnership and Engagement Mechanism (refer to 3 above) as well as the consideration of the key political issues that shape and impact the regional architecture (refer to 4 above).

Partnership and Engagement Mechanism

5. The concept for the partnership and engagement mechanism was endorsed by Forum Leaders in 2024 (**Annex 1**). It collapses the Forum Dialogue Partners and Forum Observers categories into a single partnership mechanism. Further, it proposes the tiering of the partners into two tiers:

- 1.) Strategic Partners
 - a. Sovereign Partners (focused on Forum Dialogue Partners)
 - b. Inter-Governmental Organisations (similar to Forum Observers)

- 2.) Sector Development Partners
 - a. Sovereign Partners (focused on Forum Dialogue Partners)
 - b. Inter-Governmental Organisations (similar to Forum Observers)

6. Over quarter 1 of 2025, Forum Members have settled four broad criteria for the partnership mechanism on the understanding that this will be finalised together with the tiering implications once the exercise is complete. The four broad criteria are:

- a. Demonstrated connections to the region with demonstrable commitment to advancing the vision and priorities of the Leaders of the Pacific Islands Forum as reflected in the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent through established regional mechanisms, including in development assistance, trade and investment promotion, knowledge transfer and technical cooperation, people to people exchange.
- b. Long-term forward commitment to the Pacific region as demonstrated through foreign policy commitments, engagement strategies, diplomatic missions and engagement with regional organisations, and transparency in declaring economic, political, and strategic interests in engaging in the region.
- c. Shared interests and common positions on international issues and a commitment to using global networks and membership of international organisations to support Forum priorities.
- d. Commitment to engaging with the Pacific Islands Forum in accordance with the Blue Pacific Principles for Dialogue and Engagement and engagement principles.

7. Work continues to progress on the partnership mechanism and the immediate next steps in the coming month, include:

- The release of the partnership template to partners;
- The collation and tiering of partners based on their feedback; and
- Consultation with Members on the tiering impact.

8. Whilst a process has been designed for the categorisation of partners, the final decision will be at the political discretion of Leaders.

High-Level Political Talanoa Process

9. The Terms of Reference for the High-Level Political Talanoa is provided at **Annex 2** and provide the parameters for work and consultations of the High-Level Persons Group

(HLPG) that was endorsed by Forum Leaders. Representing each of the sub-regions, the HLPG comprises:

- a) Peseta Noumea Simi of Samoa
- b) The Hon. Gerald Zackios of the Republic of the Marshall Islands
- c) Sir Dr Jimmie Rodgers of Solomon Islands

10. As set out in the TORs, the HLPT will focus on four political questions:

- a. **Rationalising the Regional Architecture to foster increased effectiveness and efficiency:** Is there scope to rationalise CROP Agencies and / or review CROP Agency membership? Is there scope to more formally recognise regional institutions, networks and associations that fall outside the CROP Network, as well as partners and other stakeholders who effectively support the implementation of the 2050 Strategy?
- b. **Political Leadership and Unity:** How can Leaders ensure that there is collective political leadership that is aligned to international law and unity to overcome shared challenges and disputes, as well as to maintain collective momentum on the 2050 Strategy? Are there key issues that divide the Forum Membership that need to be addressed?
- c. **Forum Membership and Criteria:** Is the current Forum membership appropriate to effectively lead delivery of the 2050 Strategy? What is the ongoing relevance of the Forum Criteria for the Forum Associate Membership and Observer category?
- d. **Strengthened Regionalism:** What can be done to promote and achieve regional integration in key sectors, given that the concept and practice of regionalism has remained mostly at the level of cooperation and coordination between Forum members around specific issues or in a limited number of sectors? What can be done to balance national sovereignty issues against the potential economic benefits of integration?

11. The HLPT is targeted at political-level conversations supported by Senior Officials, as and where necessary. The HLPG has completed 14 countries to date (as at 11 July 2025).

12. In terms of next steps, the HLPT will conclude its consultation phase in the first week of July and will work to release a draft report from the political Talanoa by mid-July.

13. Forum Leaders are expected to discuss the outcomes of the HLPT and the consolidation of views around the four questions at their Retreat in Solomon Islands in September.