

## **Pacific Maritime Boundaries Project—End of Investment Evaluation DFAT Management Response**

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### **Overview**

The Pacific Maritime Boundaries (PMB) Project (2017 – 2020: \$1.9 million) was funded by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) Official Development Assistance (ODA). The PMB Project aimed to contribute to sustainable economic growth, regional security, and food security by maintaining momentum by Pacific island countries (PICs) to secure maritime jurisdictional rights consistent with international law. The PMB Project was the latest phase of Australia’s longstanding support to establish maritime boundaries in the Pacific.

The PMB Project, implemented and managed by Geoscience Australia, contributed to a broader regional effort to assist the 14 Pacific island countries’ (PICs) to establish their maritime boundaries. This regional effort draws upon expertise and financial support from a number of organisations, including the Pacific Community (SPC), the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA), the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS), the Office of the Pacific Ocean Commissioner (OPOC), the Commonwealth Secretariat and the Global Resource Information Database (GRID)-Arendal. This collective effort is often referred to as the Pacific Maritime Boundaries ‘Consortium’.

The PMB Project focussed on two outcomes:

- Outcome 1: Greater certainty in relation to maritime boundaries and limits, and the rights, responsibilities and restrictions related to them
- Outcome 2: Improved systems for the capture, storage and public use of authoritative maritime boundary and other marine regulatory information.

In May 2020, DFAT and Geoscience Australia agreed to bring forward the end date of the Activity from 30 June 2021 to 30 June 2020 due to a number of factors, including the COVID-19 pandemic preventing planned activities from proceeding.

DFAT commissioned this End of Investment Evaluation of the PMB Project since:

- Australia’s support to establish maritime boundaries in the Pacific has continued for more than a decade and initial project design elements may no longer be relevant
- Progress in achieving measurable outcomes of the work relating to maritime boundaries in the Pacific appears to have slowed and a differing approach may be required to address the changing nature of the challenges faced
- DFAT is considering future support to establishing Pacific maritime boundaries and understanding the effectiveness of the PMB Project as an ODA investment will shape Australia’s future input to this work.

DFAT scheduled and managed the Evaluation, and external independent evaluators conducted the Evaluation from September – October 2020. The PMB Project Evaluation covered the duration of the PMB Project (July 2017 – June 2020).

The DFAT program managers prepared a response to the recommendations from the PMB Project Evaluation, as follows:

## Immediate priorities

Recommendation	DFAT Management Response
<b>1: Hold a roundtable discussion of this report:</b> DFAT should organise a roundtable meeting to consider the findings and recommendations made in this report. All Consortium Partners should be invited to attend.	<b>Agree.</b> DFAT organised a roundtable discussion between the external independent evaluators and the PMB Consortium Partners in December 2020, to reflect upon the outcomes of the PMB Project End of Investment Evaluation.
<b>2: Hold a facilitated workshop for Consortium Partners to develop a transition plan:</b> Consortium Partners should agree immediate priorities and corresponding strategies and ways of working to focus their efforts over the coming months prior to conclusion of a formal design process for the next phase of assistance.	<b>Agree.</b> During the December 2020 roundtable discussion with the PMB Consortium Partners, DFAT facilitated a discussion on developing a PMB Project transition plan for the next phase of Australia's Pacific maritime boundaries assistance, including on priorities, strategies, and ways of working.

## Design of the next phase of assistance

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<b>3: Determine a methodology for the formal design process for the next phase of assistance:</b> DFAT and SPC should jointly determine the process for the new design, which should be a partner-led design by SPC in collaboration with DFAT, GA and the Attorney-General's Department (AGD). There should be strong involvement of Consortium Partners including their representation on the design team, to provide an appropriate mix of technical advice from both Pacific and Australian perspectives.	<b>Agree.</b> DFAT undertook a partner-led investment design process with SPC for the next phase of Australian Government assistance for securing maritime boundaries in the Pacific.

## Design features

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<b>4: Transition the project management and administration role from GA to SPC, with GA playing a technical and quality assurance role going forward:</b> DFAT should provide programmatic funding to SPC to manage and administer support for PICs to determine their maritime boundaries. This recognises SPC's capability in managing the project coordination, monitoring, accountability, and communication. The approach also supports localisation and strengthening of Pacific regional organisations. The DFAT	<b>Agree.</b> DFAT worked with SPC through the investment design process to engage them as the managers and implementing partner for Australia's future support for Pacific maritime boundaries work. DFAT has also facilitated the continuing engagement of Australian agencies to provide specialist

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<p>representative who manages the relationship with SPC for core funding should be consulted with in the design of the next phase.</p>	<p>expertise to support the resolution of maritime boundaries in the Pacific.</p>
<p><b>5: Adjust the project’s approach to capacity development and support to PICs that meets the different and specific needs and priorities of each country:</b> Changes to the project’s capacity strengthening approach should be determined by the Consortium Partners in collaboration with the PICs involved in the project, based on an assessment of their needs and priorities. Changes may include adjusting the regional workshop model (e.g. changing the location and duration of the workshop as well as the number of countries attending and workshop focus (staged or thematic) and approach) and increased focus on national and subregional support. Changes proposed should account for practical considerations including the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on travel, travel costs, and access to any technology required to progress work.</p>	<p><b>Agree.</b> DFAT is encouraging SPC and other Consortium Partners to develop a targeted approach for delivering Pacific maritime boundaries support to PICs.</p>
<p><b>6: Allocate a portion of project funds for PICs to apply for ECS assistance and investigate mechanisms for PICs to access survey vessels to undertake this work:</b> The design of the next phase of assistance should make provision for adequate levels of budget to provide the required technical expertise and access to survey data that PICs that are ready to progress ECS work require. Assistance for ECS work should be combined with a diplomatic strategy to support effective engagement with the CLCS.</p>	<p><b>Agree.</b> DFAT notes that ECS (extended continental shelf) assistance was embedded in the PMB Project. DFAT remains committed to supporting PICs in settling their ECS claims and will continue working with SPC on how best to do this as through the new Pacific Maritime Boundaries investment.</p>
<p><b>7: Develop a political engagement and influencing strategy:</b> There is need to recognise the strategic importance and value of appropriately directed political influence on progressing negotiations and agreement of maritime boundaries. Various forms of influencing have occurred in support of progress. Partners recognise its importance and value, but it is not reflected in the current design. A strategy on political influencing should be developed as part of the new design, with the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS), among other actors, playing a key role. Experience gained so far from the different types of action undertaken provides a good starting point to inform the strategy.</p>	<p><b>Agree.</b> DFAT will work with SPC and the Consortium Partners to develop a political engagement strategy as part of the new Pacific Maritime Boundaries investment.</p>
<p><b>8: Ensure alignment with PIF Leaders’ commitments on sea level rise and climate change:</b> The design should align with relevant PIF Leaders’ commitments, project activities should be coordinated with the work of the newly established Forum Officials Committee (FOC) Specialist Sub-Committee on Sea Level Rise in relation to International Law (Terms of Reference for the Sub-Committee are currently being developed).</p>	<p><b>Agree.</b> DFAT notes its investment ‘Resilient Boundaries for the Blue Pacific’ with SPC as the implementing partner, and Australia’s engagement with the FOC Specialist Sub-Committee. DFAT’s and SPC’s participation in the FOC Specialist Sub-Committee ensures alignment between work related to sea level rise and Pacific maritime boundaries.</p>

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<p><b>9: Strengthen project governance to improve strategic oversight and accountability:</b> Project governance should be strengthened in the new design for greater clarity on strategic management and accountabilities between Consortium Partners and with participating PICs and regional organisations. As part of determining governance arrangements, the membership, role, and responsibilities of the Consortium should be reviewed to determine the merit of it being becoming a more formal governance body for the project.</p>	<p><b>Agree in part.</b> SPC, as the implementing partner for the next phase of Australia’s Pacific maritime boundaries support, will continue to coordinate with relevant CROP agencies and PICs to maximise maritime boundary outcomes in accordance with agreed priorities for the region. In 2020, the consortium partners discussed whether more formal governance arrangements, including formal Terms of Reference, are needed and decided against this. The need for more formal governance arrangements for the Consortium will be kept under review.</p>
<p><b>10: Develop a gender equality and social inclusion strategy:</b> There is opportunity to strengthen the approach to addressing gender equality and social inclusion. Development of a gender equality and social inclusion strategy should be incorporated into the design process, and a plan to manage implementation should be developed at the inception of the new phase.</p>	<p><b>Agree.</b> DFAT is committed to achieving gender equity and social inclusion outcomes in its aid programs. SPC has an organisation-wide Gender and Social Inclusion Policy which applies to its delivery of maritime boundaries support to the Pacific. DFAT will continue to work with SPC to improve gender and social inclusion outcomes in Pacific maritime boundaries support.</p>
<p><b>11: Strengthen monitoring, evaluation and learning:</b> Development of a monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) framework based on a project Theory of Change, should be incorporated into the design process to support improved understanding of progress and factors affecting the extent of progress. There is a need to strengthen MEL going forward to capture progress technically, and to better understand the contribution made to strengthening individual and institutional capacity, and in progressing legislation and influencing politically. MEL should also seek to capture how the project supports and reinforces other programs in areas related to and influenced by maritime boundary certainty. Findings and lessons learned should be used as part of a continuous improvement approach and to adjust strategy as needed.</p>	<p><b>Agree.</b> In transitioning Australia’s delivery of Pacific maritime boundaries work to SPC, DFAT supports strengthening and embedding monitoring, evaluation and learning processes (MELP) to ensure the continued effectiveness of Australia’s ODA investment, in line with SPC’s MELP Framework.</p>