

JOINT COMMUNIQUE

South Pacific Defence Ministers' Meeting

Friday, 08 October 2021

Defence Ministers from Australia, Chile, Fiji, France, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea and Tonga met via videoconference for the annual South Pacific Defence Ministers' Meeting on 8 October 2021.

Ministers reaffirmed the value of the forum as a platform to enhance cooperation amongst defence partners with a shared interest in a peaceful, secure and resilient Pacific.

Ministers noted that COVID-19 had changed the regional security landscape and welcomed the briefing from the Oceania Directorates of Military Intelligence Meeting on the pandemic's impact on security forces. Ministers exchanged updates on how their militaries were contributing to domestic pandemic response and shared lessons learnt.

The continued dominance of non-traditional security threats such as climate change and natural disasters was acknowledged by all, as was the importance of effective collective action in response. Ministers noted the many ways in which members were addressing these threats and endorsed the proposal from New Zealand to compile examples in a publication.

Ministers thanked Fiji for progressing work towards a Regional Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) Response Framework. They agreed to pursue three, inter-related initiatives: Defence Standard Operating Procedures for HADR response in the Pacific; an annual regional tabletop exercise; and a lessons-learned register.

Ministers affirmed the importance of the POVAI ENDEAVOUR Framework (2015) as a way to improve coordination between militaries in the Pacific and enhance interoperability. They agreed to refresh the Framework and to develop a new capstone exercise series centred on maritime security, HADR and peacekeeping.

Ministers also agreed to develop a protection of information-sharing arrangement to make it easier to share information within the SPDMM.

Ministers welcomed the grant of observer status to Japan and agreed that Tonga would host the next meeting in 2022.

Participants included: the Hon Peter Dutton MP, Australian Minister for Defence, the Hon Inia Batikoto Seruiratu, Fijian Minister for Defence, National Security and

Policing, the Hon Madame Florence Parly, French Minister for the Armed Forces, the Hon Saki Soloma, Papua New Guinea Minister for Energy and Minister representing the Prime Minister and Minister for Defence, the Hon Reverend Dr Pohiva Tu'i'onetoa, Prime Minister of Tonga and Acting Minister for Defence, the Hon Peeni Henare, New Zealand Minister for Defence, and Mr George Brown, Head of International Relations, Chilean Ministry of Defence.