



SOUTH PACIFIC DEFENCE MINISTERS' MEETING

Auckland, New Zealand, 1 – 3 October 2024

JOINT COMMUNIQUE

Defence Ministers or their representatives from Australia, Chile, Fiji, France, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea and Tonga gathered in Auckland for the ninth annual South Pacific Defence Ministers' Meeting (SPDMM) from 1 to 3 October 2024. They were joined by observers from Japan, the United Kingdom and the United States, as well as Mr Baron Waqa, Secretary General of the Pacific Islands Forum, as a special guest.

The SPDMM is the premier defence ministerial dialogue in the South Pacific and an important forum to enhance cooperation and drive Pacific-led responses to shared regional security challenges.

This year's theme focused on '*collectively looking to the future: our region in 2050.*' Common themes from the discussion were climate change and its impacts, maritime security and strategic competition. Members exchanged assessments on the top regional security challenges now and in the future, considered the role of emerging technology, and reaffirmed the value of operational collaboration between the militaries of the South Pacific as a contribution to a secure and resilient region.

Members recommitted to enhance their ability to jointly respond to climate-induced disasters, meet the increased demand for rapid and effective Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief response, address maritime security threats, such as illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing and transnational crime across their vast exclusive economic zones, and tackle cyber threats, alongside other agencies.

Interoperability and collective action

Members recognised the impressive decades long record of collective action amongst the militaries of the Pacific in response to disasters and security incidents. Upon request, they have co-deployed to help communities recover from cyclones, earthquakes, landslides, volcanic eruptions, bushfires and floods and to return stability.

Building on this foundation, members endorsed the detailed concept for the Pacific Response Group – or PRG – and called for it to be established immediately. They agreed that the PRG would be a regional asset that would, upon request, enable more effective co-deployments in an increasingly disaster-prone region. They thanked Chiefs of Defence for stewarding the development of the concept throughout the year and noted the benefits for interoperability.

Members noted that the establishment of the PRG would provide greater certainty and predictability to Pacific island countries in advance of an incident and strengthen Pacific-led regional response capabilities, consistent with the Pacific Islands Forum *2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent*.

Members endorsed the proposal for the PRG's Pacific Special Advisory Team (PSAT) – a small rapidly deployable group available to support civilian authorities and other organisations in an affected state to plan a disaster response and identify potential follow-on tasks – to be co-located in Brisbane during the upcoming high-risk weather season for rapid mobilisation. Members noted the PSAT would participate in Exercise CROIX-DU-SUD in April and May 2025. Members asked the SPDMM Secretariat to socialise the PRG and its PSAT construct with Pacific Islands Forum members and develop a shared

understanding of how the PRG could operate in each jurisdiction. They asked that an update on the evolution of the PRG be provided at SPDMM 2025.

Members accepted the Secretariat's report on the POVAI ENDEAVOUR Framework. They welcomed the use of Regional Exercise LONGREACH 2024 in Brisbane to validate the PRG detailed concept and recognised that all SPDMM members and observers had participated for the first time. Members endorsed updates to the Framework.

Maritime security

Members thanked the representatives from the Republic of Fiji Military Forces and New Zealand Defence Intelligence for delivering the annual intelligence brief on behalf of the Oceania Directorates of Military Intelligence Meeting (ODMIM) on maritime security.

Members discussed how to improve their collective ability to build up maritime situational and maritime domain awareness regionally, including through the use of emerging technology and enhanced information sharing. Members noted the updates provided on existing ship-riding cooperation between SPDMM members and observers and committed to continuing to work together to enhance it. Members asked the Secretariat to prepare a stocktake of existing cooperation and identify potential gaps and opportunities, including through leveraging expertise.

Training and academic network

Members reaffirmed their support for the SPDMM Regional Training Framework as a means to improve coordination of the individual and collective training courses on offer to personnel across the SPDMM community. They welcomed the intent to launch the framework as an interactive online platform in early 2025 and noted the value of training for both interoperability and the deepening of people to people links.

Members noted and appreciated Chile's work to establish the SPDMM Academic Cooperation Network and committed to continuing support for this initiative in 2025. They noted the potential for this project to enhance cooperation links among the academic defence institutions and researchers of South Pacific countries.

Non-traditional security issues

Members welcomed the release of the publication '*How militaries across the South Pacific are responding to non-traditional security threats*', telling the story of how SPDMM members have responded to the non-traditional security challenges prioritised in the *Boe Declaration on Regional Security*.

People-to-people links

Members highlighted the relevance of the Women, Peace and Security agenda and agreed on the need to consider its principles in addressing the current and future challenges faced by Pacific militaries, including in recruitment and military career progression.

Members commended the establishment of the Pacific Defence Faith Network at the inaugural Defence Faith Forum held in Auckland in June 2024. They noted that faith was an important part of Pacific societies and welcomed faith-based engagement between Pacific militaries as a means of enhancing people-to-people links. They thanked Australia for offering to host the forum in 2025.

Members welcomed Australia's update on the Future Leaders' Summit to be held in Australia in 2025. The Summit will bring together young leaders – civilian and military – from across the SPDMM membership to connect, network, and share perspectives on the regional security environment.

Coordinating with regional architecture

Members conveyed their sincere appreciation to the Pacific Islands Forum Secretary General, Mr Baron Waqa, for attending the meeting as a special guest and committed to regular mutual exchanges between the two fora.

Members discussed a New Zealand proposal to make defence-related meetings in the South Pacific more coordinated and efficient. Members tasked the Intersessional Working Group and the Secretariat to work with New Zealand to further study the issue and identify the best mechanism to achieve this aim.

Members thanked New Zealand for hosting SPDMM 2024 in New Zealand and agreed that Chile would host the SPDMM in 2025.