

AP4D Pacific Symposium

Australia and the Pacific: Shaping a Shared Future

Tuesday, 21 June 2022

MELISSA CONLEY TYLER: Hello. My name is Melissa Conley Tyler. I'm Program Lead at the Asia Pacific Development, Diplomacy and Defence Dialogue, and it's a great pleasure to welcome you here today to the AP4D Pacific Symposium. I'm speaking today from the land of the Ngunnawal and Ngambri people and I pay my respects to Elders past and present. I'm delighted that we have so many people who are joining us today. So, we have more than 160 people who have registered. We have members of the diplomatic corps who are with us, so if I could particularly acknowledge the High Commissioner for Papua New Guinea and the High Commissioner for Solomon Islands and many diplomatic colleagues who have decided to join us today.

We're delighted to have government representatives from Government in Australia and the region; we have AP4D Advisory Group members, who've been so important to our development; and we have the hardworking working group members who have produced the papers that we're launching today. So if I can thank everybody who has joined us and how much we appreciate the time that you're spending.

What we're going to be doing today with the Symposium is we'll start with a brief outline of where did AP4D come from and really why have people got behind it. We're then going to focus in on challenges and trends in the Pacific and we're going to be presenting to you the results of consultations over the last six months with more than 150 experts in defence development and diplomacy, and then to formally launch these papers, we'll have remarks from the Minister for International Development and the Pacific, and Minister for Defence Industry, the Honourable Pat Conroy MP, and from the Shadow Minister for Foreign Affairs, Senator the Honourable Simon Birmingham, and we're delighted to have both of them joining us.

You will see that we'll be putting this in chat so please do have a look at that throughout, and we have Q&A enabled, so when we get to our wonderful panel later on, we're looking forward to hearing your thoughts. But to kick us off, I'd like to turn now to the Co Chair of AP4D, Professor Michael Wesley, Deputy Vice Chancellor International at the University of Melbourne.

PROFESSOR MICHAEL WESLEY: Hello, everyone. I'm Michael Wesley from the University of Melbourne and I'm proud to be a Co Chair of AP4D and to welcome you all to this very special briefing event. This is the launch of the second component of AP4D's inaugural program, focussing on Australia and the Pacific, and it's funded by the Australian Civil-Military Centre.

AP4D began from a conversation in which we were discussing whether the three arms of Australian statecraft – diplomacy, defence and development assistance – were balanced in how we were resourcing them and how we were putting our attention towards them, and whether they were working together in areas of the world where we really require them to be working together well.

The idea was to convene a collaboration of specialists, people who think a lot about Australia and its international relations, who have real experience in manage package and commentating on Australia's foreign relations, and to bring them together and focus them on Australia's challenges in particular regions of the world and on particular issues that Australia needs to grapple with.

ACMC, I think, after a year of operation, I think I can say it's been an outstanding success. It's done incredibly important work on important topics. Prior to our focus on the Pacific, we had six months focus on Southeast Asia and really got important cut through in a real policy sense. I think we're starting to see some of the suggestions and some of the language and some of the concepts that AP4D has proposed start to come through in the language of policy makers and perhaps even in some of the policy initiatives that we're starting to see coming out of Canberra. There is real receptivity among policymakers and we've seen a real attention being paid to integrated statecraft as well.

The last thing I would say, before I hand over and let you hear the results of our work on the Pacific, is that this is an incredibly timely time to be considering Australian statecraft in the

Pacific. There has been real attention, and rightly so, to the different dynamic, and let's face it, the strategic competition in the Pacific region and I think our work with AP4D looking at different aspects of Australia's engagement in the Pacific is important and hopefully will have an effect on Australia's thinking on its way forward in the Pacific.

So thanks for listening. Thanks for coming along today and I really do hope that you get as much out of this launch and our work on the Pacific as we've hoped you would. Thanks very much.

MELISSA CONLEY TYLER: Thank you so much, Michael. That's greatly appreciated. And I should say I'm sure all of those words would be seconded by Marc Purcell, the other Co -chair of AP4D and CEO of the Australian Council for International Development. Again, if we look at how far we've come in this year, it's been extraordinary. And, of course, the reason we've been able to come so far is the support that we got early on, particularly on the funding side from the Australian Civil-Military Centre. So if I could now turn to Angela Fitzsimons, who is the Acting Executive Director of ACMC, to talk a little bit more about why ACMC are supporting this.

ANGELA FITZSIMONS: Thank you, Melissa. The Australian Civil-Military Centre is a small organisation located in Queanbeyan and administered by Defence that is charged with supporting the development of National civil-military police capabilities to prevent, prepare for and respond to conflicts and disasters. Within ACMC we have a very small research capability and we're able to contract projects such as AP4D. AP4D appeals to ACMC because it takes collaboration between communities within and outside Government on a journey to achieve better recognition. Both collaboration and integration are goals ACMC works to achieve. AP4D sits neatly with ACMC's mandate to support whole-of-government and civil society. We like to advocate for new thinking, for engagement between stakeholders and promotion of best practice.

The Pacific is acknowledged as remaining one of Australia's highest foreign policy priorities, and in the research we clearly hear the voices from the Pacific countries through the consultation that has occurred. The project tackles complex issues that matter to Pacific Island countries, such as climate change, permanent migration, the labour market and cyber. Thanks to all those who have contributed and given freely of their time and congratulations to Melissa for her achievement.

MELISSA CONLEY TYLER: That is very kind but I think it's very much a joint achievement the support that you've shown and so many people who have got behind it.

So I'd now like to turn to Richard Moore, who is the Founding Co-convener of AP4D, and I should say I'm sorry we don't have our other Founding Co-convener, and I should definitely recognise Bridi Rice, who is in Washington at the moment. But Richard is going to tell us a little bit more about what we've done at this first phase, particularly focussing on Southeast Asia papers and what we're seeing as a response from them. Over to you, Richard.

RICHARD MOORE: Thanks, Melissa. Look, I think the purpose here is essentially to allow participants to compare and contrast, and I think you'll see some of both. There are common themes which cut across the work that we've just done on Southeast Asia and in the Pacific but there's also unique elements.

We use the similar sort of collaborative approach of trying to bring together the different communities and outreach as well to regional spokespeople and individuals and communities and think tanks. The striking thing I think was the commonality in the diagnosis, both between the various communities in Australia and also between those communities and their counterparts in Southeast Asia, and the common conclusion was that rather ironically, and somewhat disturbingly, over the last couple of decades, as Southeast Asia has become actually more important to our interests, and particularly in more recent times, our attention to it has diminished, and there's all sorts of reasons for that which help to explain it, but there was unity in feeling that we had to address this to best defend our international interests.

This led to a vision in which Australia would become more invested in the region in its own right, an equal partner, heavily engaged, searching for common ground and building common architecture and thinking and programs that would make the region more secure, more prosperous and best able to interact with Australia and others to our mutual advantage.

This, in turn, led to the concept of working the shared interests. Obviously there's a huge diversity in the region, which often gets emphasised, and differences between us on different points, but there's also areas clearly where we can and should be working together. And when we put our minds to it, those fairly quickly were identified as the common need to

deal more effectively with COVID, not just the immediate impacts but the longer term impacts, and a feeling that really there was a lot of work to do there and we would need to put our shoulders to the wheel. Likewise on economic recovery, partly from the pandemic but also from a whole lot of adverse changes that are happening in the international political environment, and the potential for deglobalisation and more autarchy to really interrupt the development model in East Asia and the negative consequences that that might have.

Two of the groups dealt with security issues, one with what it meant to be an effective security partner, and particularly there the emphasis was on broadening our perceptions of security and making sure there was an emphasis not just on the hard security, which Australia's probably pretty well known for, but also for human security, climate security, health security, that these other dimensions are more to the fore than perhaps they have been in the recent past. We also did some work on civil-military collaboration and I think there the common element was that we bring civil society and military together quite effectively in responding to humanitarian emergencies, so there's an opportunity to deepen that, in ways that make it more effective, our responses to emergencies, but also deepening the understanding between these important actors.

Lastly, we felt that there was a need to look again at our strategic system in Australia, how we set our foreign relations priorities, how the various communities interact and make policy in real time, and the systems and skills and budgets that we deploy. So there was a lot of common ground and a feeling that we need the directions we need to travel. Now, the good news is that essentially we've seen some of this thinking already reflected in the way the new Government is thinking. You can see it in speeches that Senator Wong and Pat Conroy have given before the election. You could see it in proposals such as having a Southeast Asia envoy and also setting up an office that would really focus attention. We think these are all very welcome and they really reflect using all tools of statecraft but there is inevitably going to be a significant challenge in the follow through because, whilst we're looking for whole-of-nation approaches that really go way beyond what Government does, Government has to lead and it has to empower the other actors and coordinate them, and we think that this will be a significant challenge that we'll all have to contribute to in perpetuity because one of the big messages that we got from the region is they really would like more consistency from Australia and more follow through, thank you.

MELISSA CONLEY TYLER: Thank you, Richard. I think that gives us a great background on the process last time, the way we're seeing some of that reflected, but, of course, the challenges, which there always are.

So for our main event, we're now moving on to actual launch the four Options Paper and one Synthesis Report on Australia and the Pacific: Shaping a shared future. And I should just start by giving you a little background on the process that took to us this point. So for us, this started last November/December, when we did early research and did diagnostic sections, both with experts in the field and across Government to get a sense of receptivity. We then kicked off with a dialogue in February, which brought together people from across the three sectors to identify what are the key issues in Australia-Pacific relations, and we were very delighted, and conscious of responding to Pacific priorities, that the Pacific Island Forum Deputy Secretary General, Dr Manoni, was able to speak and give us background on the Pacific 2050 Strategy process.

From that, four key topics were identified and working groups started working away. Together I think there was more than 24 hours of meetings between them, with more than 50 people, and we were lucky enough then to get some response and some feedback from Government officials. The Office of the Pacific in DFAT very kindly hosted a work in progress roundtable in May and we had, I think, 17 officials from a handful of Departments who gave feedback to help us produce the papers that you are seeing today.

You'll see that we're very focused on making sure that we're responding to Pacific priorities. Each of the four groups had members based in the Pacific, which was extremely helpful, and we also worked with Griffith Asia Institute to run additional Pacific Voices Consultation to make sure that we were getting really useful feedback that we could put into the reports.

I think now is the moment where I get to thank every single one of the people who contributed. In some cases that means they went to all of the working group meetings and got heavily involved in the drafting process. In others, it might mean they came to a few meetings and shared their thoughts or they did a one on one interview to give their feedback that way, but we were absolutely delighted with the people who gave their time from the three sectors in Australia and in the region to help us work on these papers.

I would love to have them all speak but what we've done is we have asked a representative of each of the groups to join us today. So if I can welcome Wesley Morgan, who is from the Griffith Asia Institute, Elizabeth Kopel from the PNG National Research Institute, Joanne Wallis from the University of Adelaide, and Mihai Sora from the Lowy Institute for International Policy. So thank you all for joining us here today. They'll all be turning their cameras on so that we can talk.

So, Wes, I'll start with you, if I can. You were involved actually in two of the papers but looking at the climate paper, let's just kick us off, why is climate such a key issue in Australia Pacific relations?

WES MORGAN: Well, thank you, thank you, Melissa. In a warming world, climate policy is foreign policy and I don't think there's anywhere where that is more true than in the Pacific and in Australia's relations with the Pacific. And Pacific Island countries have been consistent and clear for two or three decades really that they see climate change as their key security threat, and Pacific countries have been lobbying at the UN Security Council for recognition by the international community that climate change is their key security threat and they've acted together as a block in global climate negotiations. People might not know that Nauru put forward the first draft of what became the Kyoto Protocol. The Marshall Islands was crucially important to achieving the Paris Agreement. So it has been central to the Pacific's security concerns for decades. And Australia, and perhaps until very recently, has not taken a particularly ambitious approach to climate change, and this has been a running sore in the relations for four decades really, since the late 1990s, and what it amounts to is something of a security mismatch.

So Richard talked earlier about Australia taking an inconsistent interest in the Pacific, and so in recent times we've seen Australia become deeply interested in the Pacific in the context of Australia's own security concerns: increasing geostrategic competition and the presence of China. But Pacific leaders, there's something of a mismatch, where Pacific leaders are saying, "Look, for us, climate change is our key security threat". Australia is saying, "Look, we're increasingly concerned about geopolitical competition", and that mismatch has undermined Australian strategy in the region. So Australia has attempted a 'Pacific Step-up', a whole series of new initiatives in recent years to cement Australia's place as a security partner of choice for Pacific countries, but Pacific leaders have said, "OK, to be our security partner of choice, we want to see you taking action on what we see

unequivocally as our key security threat". And so we've seen, you know, I'm not telling people things they don't know, we have seen that has been a tension in the relationship and so I think key to strengthening the relationship is overcoming those differences.

MELISSA CONLEY TYLER: Absolutely. And bringing that up to date, do you feel that a new Government has changed the tone? Are there areas from the papers, for example, where you'd see progress is being made or others where they might still need to be made, and I should say before you answer, please, all of our audience members, this is the time for you to put to start into question and answer, so if you have any questions for Wes or any of the other panel members, please do start putting them in. So, Wes?

WES MORGAN: Again, I'm not telling you things you don't know that we have seen a huge shift of tone. It was very striking that within hours of being elected, Prime Minister Albanese and Foreign Minister Penny Wong went to the Quad Leaders meeting in Tokyo. Whilst there, Albanese talked to leaders from Japan, from India and from the United States about climate change as an issue of national security, climate change as an issue of foreign policy. Australia's step up in ambition on climate change was welcomed by Quad Leaders and there was specific recognition of Australia's role supporting Pacific Island countries to deal with the impacts of climate change.

And then immediately after that, Penny Wong went to Suva. She's been to the Pacific I think three times now, visited four Pacific Island countries, and made it very clear that the new Government recognises climate change as a key security threat facing the Pacific, and actually recognised Pacific global leadership on climate change, and I think that's really significant. This is something that we really drew out in our paper on how Australia can be an effective climate ally, which is to recognise the role that the Pacific plays as a block in shaping global conversations on climate change, and to be an effective ally, Australia will need to learn to work with that block and with that leadership that is displayed by the Pacific, and there again there are some positive signs. The new Government has said that they want to co-host a UN climate summit with Pacific Island countries, and that would be a very big deal. These things have 20,000 plus people, up to 40,000 people come. The spotlight would be on Australia. But if we're co-hosting a UN climate summit, it would be on Australia as a climate ally with the Pacific, and I think we're going to see an ongoing conversation there because we've already seen Pacific leaders welcome the shift in tone from the Australian Government. The Samoan Prime Minister said "this brings Australia into closer

alignment with the rest of the Pacific". That was her wording. So that is welcomed but I think we're going to see an ongoing conversation.

If Australia is to be a true ally with the Pacific on climate change and to co-host COP potentially in two years time, the Pacific is going to be asking for more from Australia and the world is going to be watching, and I think our working paper lands in exactly that space with recommendations on how the Australian Government might be an effective climate ally for the Pacific.

MELISSA CONLEY TYLER: Thank you. I should say if there are other members of the working group who are with us, they should feel very free to share anything further they would like in the question and answer, and if you've got questions that you'd like answered, please put them in now. And we have our first one, thank you very much, anonymous attendee.

So, Joanne, I'm going to turn to you now. I've heard Wes talk about the messages that we are sending on climate. What about on the security front? What did the paper suggest should be some of the key messages Australia should be sending to the region on security?

JOANNE WALLIS: Thanks, Melissa, and thank you to the rest of my security working group colleagues. It was a very engaged and active group. I probably wasn't quite as active as some of my other colleagues were, so I credit them with a lot of the comments in that paper. We identified several key messages that Australia should be sending to the region. The first one was that Australia wants to develop a framework for understanding security in the Pacific that represents the full set of peace and security challenges that face the region, that we want to deepen our regional relationships and make sure that geopolitics doesn't obscure other aspects of our relationships with the Pacific, including other security concerns that the Pacific faces; that our engagement with the Pacific is valuable in its own right, not just because we're anxious about geopolitical competition; that Australia accepts that Pacific Island countries will engage with other partners but that Australia remains uniquely placed to draw on its wide ranging defence development and diplomatic relationships to support local and regional priorities in the Pacific; and an overriding theme throughout the paper is our support for well, Australia's support for Pacific regionalism should be very clear, including through the Pacific Islands Forum and its related agencies.

MELISSA CONLEY TYLER: Well, you just talked about that whole spectrum of security challenges as what we need to be working together on and develop a common framework on. Can you take us through what is that range? What does that look like from a Pacific perspective?

JOANNE WALLIS: We define security broadly, guided by the Boe Declaration, and, of course, our knowledge of the situation in the Pacific. So we covered everything from climate change; climate change was an overriding theme throughout our paper, although, of course, we have the separate paper on that; human security, gender inequality, environmental and resource security; transnational crime; cyber security; and so on and so forth. Quite a few members of our working group have a particular interest in peace building and conflict resolution, so we did spend quite a lot of time working through what role Australia could play in facilitating conflict resolution, mediation and peace building in the Pacific, and that was really important because that has slid off the radar in recent years because of the geopolitical concerns, but it remains of interest.

The report recommends this lovely idea, and I can't remember who framed it, of strategic humility and that Australia should seek to learn from Pacific Island countries' experiences and perspectives when making its Pacific policy. We also argue in the report that Australia and Pacific Island countries should try to develop a common sense of threats to peace and security in the region, but, of course, we need to recognise that there is a lot of regional diversity and there are diverging interests in the Pacific, particularly when it comes to which partners, external partners the Pacific Island countries engage with.

We made a proposal that a more collaborative approach for Australia would focus, as I mentioned before, on supporting Pacific regionalism and Pacific led initiatives that align with regional priority, and in part of the report we discussed the importance of the national security strategies that Pacific Island states have been developing in response to the 2018 Boe Declaration. The report argues that these provide an anchor for how Australia and other partners coordinate and deliver their security assistance.

I would note, we don't mention this in the report but it is worth noting that as a signatory to the Boe Declaration, Australia is also obliged to create one of these national security strategies, and we have not done so yet. This is a real opportunity for the new Labor Government to use the process of creating an Australian national security strategy as an

opportunity to have conversations with the Pacific about how Australia understands security and this would also bolster the regional security architecture that is coalescing around the Boe Declaration. It would be a very strong show of support by Australia if we abided by our undertaking in the Boe Declaration to create a strategy.

Finally, the report recommends that Australia could do more to improve its policy coherence and coordination, which, as we heard before, was also a theme in the South East Asia report, and this was particularly not only amongst Australian agencies but also with our partners as well when we're engaging in the region. Thanks.

MELISSA CONLEY TYLER: Thank you, Joanne. I think that's responded to I think an excellent question from Armon Hicks, who noted that in the Boe Declaration we talk about multifaceted security challenges, so it's not just climate. That is one but there is a whole range of security challenges, and that's something we definitely talk about. So please, people do keep putting in your questions. We love hearing from you.

So I'm going to turn now to Elizabeth. Now, you were involved in the Economies and Societies group, and I found the perspectives you shared around rural communities, daily widespread struggles for access to basic services, I found that really compelling. So from my perspective, I'm interested in hearing more what are the ways that Australia can Australian support can be leveraged to assist on those local priorities? What are the local priorities that we should be supporting more?

ELIZABETH KOPEL: Thank you. And thank you to all the people who were in the economics and societies working group. Local priorities for development to improve the welfare of people in isolated, scattered communities, some of them separated by oceans, so for the rural people which comprised the majority, basic services are not there. Basic services are missing, and without access to utilities, health, education, the services that are taken for granted in developed countries, because people are geographically isolated. Infrastructure is not there, financial services, access to markets, those services are missing. So for people in those communities, that's what matters to them. So support can be given, leveraged in areas that will benefit the most people at the least cost over time, over generations in the main areas that are focused on, and that means continuing with some of the work that Australia is already doing in some areas, like what's included in the report for continuing with the work of Cardno Market Development Facility, the UN women's work with

women in marketplaces. Pacific women lead those activities that are already happening and which can be leveraged to cover more populations across the region.

MELISSA CONLEY TYLER: Absolutely. Now, Elizabeth, the paper talks about Australia being a generational partner and seeing itself as a generational partner of the Pacific Economies and Societies. Can you tell me a bit more about what that means for you?

ELIZABETH KOPEL: For me, being a generational partner is like planting a young tree. When you plant a young tree, it takes time to grow. It needs water. It needs to be cleared of weeds and fertilised. If some branches are dying, it needs to be pruned. So it takes root. Such a tree will not be pushed over by the elements or killed. So for Australia, looking after the Pacific and being responsible is like growing that young tree. Similarly, being a generational partner would require Australia's commitment and guidance to invest time and resources in targeted areas of what matters most to the Pacific, be it in improving the lives of people, women, or in climate change. So as the lives of generations of Islanders change and improve, so too will be their perceptions, values and relationships with Australia. So such a relationship built on trust over generations will not be shaken easily by any external threats to the region. Thank you.

MELISSA CONLEY TYLER: To me that is a compelling vision, so thank you. Well, as I say, keep putting the questions in, for people who would like to give questions. So to our last of the panelists, to Mihai Sora, you were involved in the paper on Australia being a partner for digital resilience and transformation. Can you tell us more, why did you see digital as such a key issue for the Pacific?

MIHAI SORA: Thanks, Melissa, and like Elizabeth, Joanne and Wesley before me, I want to give full credit to the other members of the digital working group and the editing support that we had. I know my views were shaped a great deal just by that process alone. I came with my perspective, but together we came up with what I think is a fantastic paper and I learnt a great deal from that.

I think digital technology is increasingly a vital part of the puzzle in delivering better health and education outcomes, better governance, providing better access to economic opportunities, strengthening cultural and social links, identity, providing communications platforms in times of disaster, monitoring and responding to climate change, providing

banking and business opportunities, opportunities for young people. It can be a bridge across the geographic divides in the Pacific, connecting Pacific communities to global conversations. I mean, if we just stop for a second and think about how much we rely on digital technology in most aspects of our lives, and how much it's transformed our lives in such a short period of time, we begin to appreciate the impact that building digital connectivity and resilience in the Pacific could have if we improve access, safety and affordability. And I should caveat that with: of course there are risks and challenges that digital technology presents to social cohesion, governance, security of information and, most importantly, safety in communities. So it's a tool that can have positive and negative uses, and building social protections into this technology is an incredibly important part of the conversation.

MELISSA CONLEY TYLER: Absolutely. And so then what messages do you want people to take away from this paper?

MIHAI SORA: Look, building digital resilience and contributing to digital transformation in the Pacific can have multiplier effects across all domains - development, diplomacy, defence - but it will require creative partnerships between communities, regulators, technology companies, donors; relationships that might not in the past have been the most collaborative or constructive. It will require trust and actors will have to negotiate often competing imperatives, but there is tremendous potential to improve lives in the Pacific and, in so doing, also build stronger relationships for Australia. So for me it's a really exciting space that we can make a lot more progress in and mainstreaming, if you will, into existing activities. So I'm really excited about the future of the digital space in the Pacific.

MELISSA CONLEY TYLER: And I think having that balance came through the group, wasn't it, that of course there are very many challenges and they have to be dealt with but there's also a sense of what digital transformation can mean for the region. So I want to go to some more of our questions now. So we have one for Wes from Greg Thompson from the development community, which is around threat to the blue economy from inappropriate development. Would you like to respond to that, Wes?

WES MORGAN: I'll have a stab. One thing that I think is deeply fascinating about the Pacific is the connection that people have to the ocean as part of their identity. So the Pacific, there's thousands of islands, there's hundreds of different languages, but it really is

a common factor in Pacific culture, not everywhere, but certainly across Polynesia, this connection to the ocean and the sense of custodianship of the ocean, and that's quite different to Western conceptions of the open ocean. We've had centuries of legal norms that define the open ocean as belonging to no one and the high seas, and so the discussion about the economic development of the ocean arouses much debate in the Pacific and touches on this notion of people's custodianship of the ocean, and particularly controversial are any proposals around seabed mining, and this is I think what the question is getting to in part. Pacific civil society groups and Pacific churches have been essentially campaigning against seabed mining in the Pacific, and they have a case. They have a very important case. The Pacific Ocean, at the moment we don't have seabed mining anywhere in the Pacific, but there is something of a push from corporate actors who stand to benefit from this push for seabed mining in the Pacific and we really don't understand enough about how those activities would impact the marine ecosystem, and so we're seeing Pacific, not just civil society but civic leaders push for a moratorium on seabed mining in the Pacific. I'll stop there, sorry, but that's an attempt to answer the question.

MELISSA CONLEY TYLER: Absolutely, and at any point, I say these are issues that we're going to continue to be talking about rather than solving this one in an hour today. So I was thinking, Joanne, I don't know if you would like to respond to either of the questions from Angela on what's the weighting of the climate issue, for example in security issues in the region, or perhaps the question from Teddy Winn, where he's talking about where's the inconsistency in Australia's regional diplomacy, and what more do we need to do there? So anything you'd like to respond to in those, Joanne?

JOANNE WALLIS: Thank you. Well, I'll answer both. On climate it was a cross cutting issue across the entire security paper. As we know, climate impacts almost in every security challenge that Australia faces and the Pacific faces too, so it's not really a matter of prioritisation so much as it was just present in almost every issue that we discussed.

On Teddy's question about inconsistency, I mean this is a real challenge in Australian Pacific policy over many decades, in that it ebbs and flows, our interest and our focus on the region, and our commitment to the region, and I pray for a time when we just set a policy towards the Pacific and we stick with it. I think that's a real challenge.

I think there's a question James asked about the gaps between the visions and what would we recommend for the first steps for the new Labor Government. And implementation is what we need. There's a lot of announcements in Australia's Pacific policy. There has been for many decades. The ALP Government in the '80s under Gareth Evans was a policy of constructive commitment. We were going to change the way we dealt with the Pacific. That was then followed by a period of quite hard structural adjustment economic policies that Australia tried to implement in the Pacific. And then we saw Kevin Rudd in 2008 make the Port Moresby Declaration, which was another new era of Australia and Pacific. There were some changes the Seasonal Worker Program, the Pacific Partnerships For Development and then Labor lost Government. And then we had the Pacific Family. We really just need now to not only have the marketing slogan. We need to have a consistent, clear policy that governments of both political stripes stick to because we can't continue to ebb and flow in our attention to the Pacific. It's just not sustainable.

MELISSA CONLEY TYLER: It comes through that this is a long term clear, consistent priority and we need the attention. So Elizabeth, we've got a couple of questions here, one from Teddy Winn about the idea of Australia "depatronising" its relations with the Pacific, listening to more specific voices and what would an indication look like that Australia is ready to listen, and another one from an anonymous attendee about the importance of leveraging Indigenous communities in Australia and their deep and enduring engagement with Pacific counterparts as part of Australia's integration in the region. So if you would like to respond to those?

ELIZABETH KOPEL: Thank you. I'll respond to Teddy's first. Depatronising, I think that would work best if Pacific voices are represented in decisions that are made in Australia. There's many Pacific Islanders already living and working in Australia. There are Pacific academics and experts in the region that are already in Australia working and living, studying, and there are Pacific institutions. Just like the way this working group started, it had input from Pacific islanders, Pacific people contributed to this, so in the policy making process, if Pacific voices are represented, it won't look like Australia is coming with ready made answers to solve Pacific problems, but it will be integrated into the policy making process so that Australia's interests are represented, Pacific interests are represented, and that will be a positive way of moving forward.

And with the second question, we did talk about Indigenous, the role of Indigenous art and culture, knowledge sharing, and the need for more engagement with Pacific Islanders, and

those voices on their own will not work. Again, it needs to be streamlined into policy, the policy making process, so the Pacific department within DFAT would have to lead that, but it must be led by Government policy for it to be working, otherwise it will be not with authority, so it must be set in policy for working, for Pacific Island people and the Indigenous people to work together, whether it's for dealing with disasters like bushfires or floods and stuff like that. There's a lot of knowledge in there. There's culture sharing. There's so many things where the Indigenous people and Pacific Islanders can work together, but that has to be set by Government policy.

MELISSA CONLEY TYLER: Agreed. And just to respond to some of the questions that are coming in on that, with the adoption, the formal adoption, of a First Nations foreign policy, which now Foreign Minister Wong did during the election campaign, I understand there's a new unit, office, of First Nations foreign policy being set up within DFAT and I think there is a huge potential for that, particularly in the Pacific relationships. In response to Chris Roche's question, I think that will be going in parallel with a reconciliation process in Australia which, I think, will add to the credibility with which that will be seen in the region.

Now, for Mihai, we have a question around the infrastructure side. So in the digital and transformation paper, we talk about Australia's role in infrastructure. Can you tell us more what that looks like?

MIHAI SORA: Absolutely. Look, there's a very broad spectrum of digital connectivity, access to digital services in the Pacific. So in some instances we're talking about electrification basic access to fundamental infrastructure that precedes that digital connectivity. In other cases, all the way at the end of the spectrum where we're talking about specific campaigns and excellent case studies, online programs that deliver either benefit or support to small businesses or contribute to online safety or other health messages.

Australia has engaged in some infrastructure investments in the Pacific, so notable recent projects are Telstra's acquisition of Digicel. I think it remains to be seen how that activity will play out, but there's certainly a great deal of potential there, and from our perspective in the working group, we don't want to be a cheerleader for that project automatically, but if it can deliver improved and more affordable connectivity for communities in Papua New Guinea and other Pacific countries where that carrier will operate, that would be a terrific outcome.

Australia has invested in under sea cables linking Solomon Islands to Australia and Papua New Guinea. So there's a real range of projects that Australia can support and coordinate on, and a huge diversity of need there as well.

MELISSA CONLEY TYLER: Fantastic. Thank you. And, look, we've come to the time where I'm going to have to send some of our questioners to look at the papers. The idea of today wasn't to answer every single one of your questions. It was to whet your appetite so that you will go to the website, www.asiapacific4d.com, have a look at these fantastic papers and see what they cover. And I can say, Bill, yes, they absolutely look at building people to people and community to community relationships. Helen Hill, I think there's a lot in there particularly on issues like succession of the Independent movements and what Australia should be doing to plan for that. We definitely talk about youth issues, so thank you, Yashi, for that comment. And, of course, this will be no surprise, Angela, yes, China does come up in the papers. So I commend the papers to all of you.

What I think I'll finish with, for our panelists, is just if I can take us back to James Cox's question. James was one of our hyperactive working group members who contributed to multiple papers. He asked us where we see the biggest gap between the vision in the paper and where we are now. So can I just get a couple of sentences from each of you on what's that biggest gap that you'd like to see progressing over the next three years. So, Wes, to start with you.

WES MORGAN: Can I be the last to answer? I hadn't thought of that one.

MELISSA CONLEY TYLER: Absolutely. We'll go backwards. To Mihai, you are now first. What do you think is the biggest gap in the vision of the paper that you see now like to work on?

MIHAI SORA: The digital space is moving so quickly that we have Governments at all levels in Australia struggling to keep up with that pace of change and I think the biggest gap is an Australian recognition of how quickly the digital space in the Pacific is also changing and in connecting all of the different activities and the actors that are already present in the Pacific with policy decisions from Australia.

MELISSA CONLEY TYLER: Thank you. And Elizabeth, where's the biggest gap you see and that you would like to see worked on?

ELIZABETH KOPEL: For me, the biggest gap is Australia actually engaging with Pacific islanders to have their voices represented in its development priorities in the Pacific in areas that and ways that it does not already do. So to have policy written in to how it can take it forward.

MELISSA CONLEY TYLER: Thank you. Joanne?

JOANNE WALLIS: I think the concept that I mentioned of the strategic humility. A lot of the recommendations we make in the reports do require humility of Australia and I'm not sure we're quite in a space yet where we're willing to make ourselves, to be humble you have to make yourself vulnerable, admit your failings, your own fallibility, and admit that you don't have all the answers. And I think that we're along the road to getting there but I'm not quite sure that we are there yet enough to admit that we don't have all the answers. The Pacific has plenty of answers that we need to listen more to and perhaps change things that we do as a result. So I think on that road to humility.

MELISSA CONLEY TYLER: And Wes, just a couple of sentences.

WES MORGAN: I won't do justice to all the work that went into our paper on climate and there was a lot of, I commend it to people to read but I think the biggest gap will remain the conception of Australia's National interest, which for so long has been tied to the idea of Australia as a fossil fuel exporter, and we've seen the new Australian Government talk about Australia becoming a clean energy superpower, and I think that is where Australia will go, as the world transitions to net zero. We will revisit our interests and, when we do so, that gap will begin to close and we can align ourselves more closely with the Pacific, but that conception is the gap.

MELISSA CONLEY TYLER: Now, we have given this clear idea of what we want them to do, I think it's the perfect timing to turn to our politicians. So we have a message from the Minister for International Development and the Pacific, and Minister for defence industry, Pat Conroy MP, and we deeply appreciate him taking the time to support this launch.

MINISTER FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND THE PACIFIC AND

MINISTER FOR DEFENCE INDUSTRY HON PAT CONROY MP: Hi, I'm Australia's Minister for International Development and the Pacific, and Minister for defence industry, Pat Conroy. I am speaking to you from Ngunnawal country and I would like to pay my respect to Elders past, present and future. Congratulations to AP4D on the launch of their terrific pacific program. Absolutely core to shaping our shared future in the Pacific is a whole-of-nation effort drawing together all of our national assets, not just across Government but the private sector, civil society and academia. The work of AP4D in bringing together the development, diplomacy and defence communities is timely and important. It brings a breadth of knowledge and innovative ideas to the table.

The complexity of issues we face is growing. As the Foreign Minister has said, the triple challenges of climate and COVID and strategic contests will challenge us in new ways. We are committed to listening and working in partnership with our Pacific family to face these shared challenges together. Nowhere is an integrated approach more critical than in tackling climate change, described in the Pacific Island Forum's Boe Declaration as the single greatest threat to livelihood, security and wellbeing of the peoples of the Pacific. We're already feeling its impacts, from the flooding and erosion of low-lying atolls of Tuvalu to the Black Summer bushfires in Australia and recent flooding across Queensland and northern New South Wales.

Under the Albanese Government, Australia's deeply committed to taking real and significant climate action at home and to re-establishing Australia as a climate leader internationally. At the same time, of course, the Pacific is grappling with global economic insecurity and the long-term impacts of the pandemic.

In the last few months, we've seen the clear ways in which development, diplomacy and defence issues are intersecting in the Pacific. The much sharper global geostrategic circumstances make it clear, this trend isn't going to pass any time soon. As we have been for decades, Australia will remain a long-term partner for the Pacific. Foreign Minister Penny Wong's early visits to Fiji, Samoa and Tonga have emphasised the new energy we are bringing to that partnership, and I look forward to visiting myself very soon.

Our goal fundamentally is the work together with our Pacific family to support its long-term stability, security and prosperity. I'm very glad that AP4D's work in the Pacific will help

elevate the critical issues in front of us and provide expert advice and assistance on how Australia can best play our part to advance our shared prosperity and security. I wish you well with the work ahead and I look forward to our continued engagement. Thank you.

MELISSA CONLEY TYLER: And warm thanks to the Minister for recording that message before he went off on his first international visit. I'll now turn to the message from Shadow Minister for Foreign Affairs, Senator the Honourable Simon Birmingham.

SHADOW MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS SENATOR THE HON SIMON

BIRMINGHAM: Congratulations to the Asia-Pacific Development, Diplomacy and Defence Dialogue on the release of Australia and the Pacific Shaping the Future. This is a very valuable document that comes at a very important time for our nation. Australia and Pacific nations share so much. We are crucial partners together with a range of common aspirations and goals. The need for us to work together on critical questions and issues, of sustainability, of development, of cooperation in terms of regional peace and stability, these are all crucial aspects for which we must continue to work hand in glove with one another, and respectful partners, as equal partners in our region and engagement right throughout the world.

I'm very much committed to pursuing our shared goals with Pacific partners. I'm very proud of the fact that the previous Government enhanced Australia's diplomatic footprint across the Pacific and, in doing so, establish six additional missions in Pacific Island nations, ensuring that Australia is the only country with missions across all Pacific Island forum nations. We must use that footprint to work closely on those shared goals as respectful and powerful partners cooperating together on the world stage.

Shaping a shared future is a very timely and important document. This provides a challenging, thoughtful blueprint for people to consider the future direction of Pacific policy. This document, I'm pleased to see, identifies threats and weaknesses, as well as the vision, challenges and opportunities that we face for the future.

I look forward very much to working with the Dialogue to studying carefully this research brief but also the other reports and work that you do that is of such value to our foreign policy debate; to building upon the legacy of Marise Payne and my successors in the Foreign Policy portfolio within the Coalition; and to working as cooperatively as possible

with the Government to ensure that, wherever possible, Australia speaks with one voice, takes forward common ground that builds the type of successful partnership we need for the future.

Thank you once again for the work that you've undertaken. Congratulations on this report and I look forward to working with you, as I do to consulting with all of our Pacific partners, to ensure the approach we take into the future is one that yields the maximum benefits for a peaceful, prosperous and stable region and all who live within it.

MELISSA CONLEY TYLER: Thank you to the Shadow Minister and to the Minister for their comments. It just is left for me to conclude by thanking all of our speakers today and thanking everyone who got us to this point: the Founding Co-conveners, our Co-chairs, our Advisory Group members, our working group members, our editorial panel and everyone involved in the process. We particularly want to single out the thanks to APMC for their vision in funding this program, for the ACFID staff who spend their time supporting this initiative, and for our superb AP4D team for getting us to this point. We would love to stay in contact with you as we continue. We have just in the last month confirmed another couple of projects continuing our work on the Pacific and Southeast Asia, so please do stay in contact, subscribe to our mailing list, visit our website, connect on social media so we can stay in contact to take this forward. Thank you so much for joining us today and we look forward to continuing to work with you to improve Australia's statecraft into the future.