Regional Perspectives Research Project – Communication Plan

Introduction

The Regional Perspectives Research Project is about listening to, and learning from, Pacific stories on a range of topics that reflect Pacific priorities, including relationships with other countries.

This research is a collaboration led by the University of Adelaide (UoA) with a team of researchers based in Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, and Australia. Funding for the research comes from Australia's civilian defence research agency, the Defence Science and Technology Group (DSTG). DSTG is seeking to understand more about what matters to Pacific peoples and how Australia can engage with the region more productively.

This research aims to be mutually beneficial and has been co-designed by Pacific and Australian researchers. It hopes to learn from the people of Solomon Islands and Vanuatu to inform Australian policymaking and engage in ways that are respectful and beneficial for research participants and their communities. It will also seek to provide a platform for Pacific voices to be amplified.

The project will seek to foster local agency, including the framing of key topics/issues within local experiences and perspectives. The project also acknowledges the reality of multiple perspectives across and within provinces. Reflecting this, the UoA has (and will further) develop collaborative relationships with Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, and Australian research partners for the in-country aspects of the project.

The success of the project will depend on our research partners in Solomon Islands, Jennifer Wate and Development Services Exchange, and Vanuatu, Linda Kenni and her team, and the research participants they identify and work with, having confidence that the project is mutually beneficial, and that the Australia-based project team is trustworthy. There may be caution in Solomon Islands and Vanuatu about the intentions of the project, and this will be best mitigated by being as transparent as possible about the project.

Guiding principles

Therefore, there will be two guiding principles underpinning the Communication Plan.

The first guiding principle is **transparency about the project**. The most important tool of this transparency will be a publicly accessible interactive web-based resource outlining information relating to the project:

- Aims;
- Personnel;
- Funding;
- Methodology;
- Summary data and findings; and
- How the project findings will be analysed and used.

In addition to the information, the web-based resource will, through photographs, audio recordings, and interactive visual data sources such as graphs, charts, and maps, present summary project data as it is collected and analysed. Care will be taken to ensure the design of the web-based resource is accessible and can be easily navigated by Pacific communities where unreliable internet connectivity is a reality.

The web-based resource will be visually interesting to enhance interest and engagement but formatted so that it is easily accessible by commonly used devices including smartphone, reflecting that many people in the Pacific primarily access the internet via their phones.

The second guiding principle is the **prioritisation and foregrounding of Pacific voices and perspectives**. This reflects DSTG's commitment to the principle of co-creation between Australia-based and Pacific researchers, rather than following the pattern of the extraction of data from the Pacific by Australian researchers. Therefore, whenever possible, the lead author of publications or other public communications arising from this project should be either:

- Jennifer Wate and Development Services Exchange;
- Linda Kenni and her local team;
- Maima Koro and/or Derek Futaiasi, the UoA Pacific Research Fellows; or
- Priestley Habru and/or William Waqavakatoga, the UoA project PhD Scholars.

Other members of the Australia-based project team: Joanne Wallis, Tess Newton Cain, James Cox, and DSTG team members, should always be listed as second (or subsequent) authors.

As the findings of this project will have significant policy implications for Australia, its partners, and Pacific Island states and people, policy papers that develop key aspects of the project (such as its methodology, which will be unique, or its key findings, as they develop) will be published. These policy papers will enhance broader understanding of the project and its findings and will be particularly valuable to Defence (and other Australian government and partner government) staff seeking to deliver nuanced, informed policy advice relating to Pacific perspectives of Australia, strategic competition, coercion, and grey-zone activities in the Pacific Islands.

When appropriate, op-eds, submissions to government inquiries, and academic journal articles will also be published.

The third principle is a commitment to '**do no harm**' during the research project. Key to achieving this will be ensuring that all communications follow the project Cultural Protocol and Research Ethics Protocol.

Communication with Pacific stakeholders

Detailed guidance concerning how communications with Pacific stakeholders should be conducted is set out on the Matrix of Communications below.

General public

The web-based resource will be the most important way that information about the project and its findings are communicated to the general public in the Pacific Islands. However, working with Jennifer Wate and Development Services Exchange, and Linda Kenni and her team, we will also organise public events and other communication mechanisms (such as radio interviews or newspaper articles) to publicise the project findings.

This may also include sharing access links of the web-based resource with key stakeholders such as Defence, local partner organisations, and within the UoA.

Where appropriate, the project team will ensure materials are translated into Bislama or Pidgin.

Research partners

Our local research partners in Solomon Islands, Jennifer Wate and Development Services Exchange, and Vanuatu, Linda Kenni and her team, are sub-contracted directly by the UoA. This is the most appropriate way to recognise their equal standing with the Australia-based research partners, and reflective of the esteem in which they are held. Their advice and expertise are highly valued and respected.

The Australia-based researchers, Joanne Wallis, Maima Koro, Derek Futaiasi, Tess Newton Cain, James Cox, and DSTG staff, will communicate with Jennifer Wate and Development Services Exchange, and Linda Kenni and her local team via email, telephone calls, and Zoom meetings. It is anticipated that at least some of the Australia-based research team will also travel to Solomon Islands and Vanuatu to meet our local partners in person, and that Jennifer and Linda will be invited to travel to Australia.

As Defence is keen to ensure that Jennifer Wate and Development Services Exchange, and Linda Kenni and her team, co-create the project and maintain a sense of ownership over the data gathered, they will be encouraged to use the data they gather for their own purposes, including in their publications and to support their advocacy. Following the Risk Management Table (below), Defence's role in commissioning the research which generated the source data should not be highlighted without an appropriate disclaimer that the views expressed in the publication are the authors and do not reflect that of the Australian Government or Department of Defence.

Participants

The participation of research participants will be governed by the UoA Human Research Ethics protocol, which requires that this project receives approval before data is collected. The UoA ethics procedure requires that research participants are provided with an Information

Sheet that provides detail relating to the project before they agree to participate. This Information Sheet will be translated into local languages, as required. Jennifer Wate and Development Services Exchange, and Linda Kenni and her local team, will also verbally introduce the project to research participants in Solomon Islands and Vanuatu respectively.

Research participants will also be directed to the web-based resource for further information about the development of the project and the data as it is collected. We will seek advice from Jennifer Wate and Development Services Exchange, and Linda Kenni and her team, about the most suitable way to report project findings back to participants.

State governments

Approvals will be required from the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu governments for the research to be conducted. These approvals will require UoA to provide information relating to the project to the regulatory authorities. In the interests of building and maintaining good relationships with the respective governments, they will also be offered updates on the project findings, including a briefing before and at the end of the project with relevant key stakeholders.

Regional organisations

Several regional organisations, including the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat and Secretariat of the Pacific Community, are likely to be interested in the project and its findings. The Australia-based research team will write to relevant organisations and introduce them to the project, and then provide updates about the project findings as they develop. Relevant organisations will also be offered briefings at the end of the project.

Communication with Australian stakeholders

A detailed description of how communications with Australian stakeholders should be conducted is set out on the Matrix of Communications below.

Australian government

Other Australian government agencies are likely to be interested in the project outcomes. They will have access to the web-based resource, and any policy papers produced under the project will be distributed to interested government stakeholders. Australian government officials will also be invited to participate in the two workshops to be held at the UoA.

Broader public, academia, think tanks, and the media

The project findings will also be of interest to the broader Australian public, and specifically to academia, think tanks and the media. They will have access to the web-based resource, and any policy papers produced under the project will be distributed to interested academic and think tank stakeholders. Interested and expert Australian academics will be invited to participate in the second workshop. Academic publications will also be generated during the project, and project personnel may present project findings at academic conferences. Again, following the Risk Management Table, Defence's role in commissioning the research which generated the source data should not be highlighted without an appropriate disclaimer that the views expressed in the publication are the authors and do not reflect that of the Australian Government or Department of Defence.

Currency

This is a living document and will be revised during implementation of the project to ensure it remains relevant and is fit-for-purpose.

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