

Proactive Release

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The following Cabinet papers and related Cabinet minutes have been proactively released by the Minister of Foreign Affairs

Title	Reference
<i>Cabinet Minute of Decision – Report on Overseas Travel: Rt Hon Winston Peters - August 2024</i>	CAB-24-MIN-0359
<i>Report on Overseas Travel: Rt Hon Winston Peters - 8 to 15 August 2024</i>	

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Cabinet

Minute of Decision

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Report on Overseas Travel: Rt Hon Winston Peters - August 2024

Portfolio Foreign Affairs

On 23 September 2024, Cabinet **noted** the report from the Rt Hon Winston Peters under CAB-24-SUB-0359 on his travel, from 8 to 15 August 2024, to:

- 1 Suva, Fiji, to attend the Pacific Island Forum Foreign Ministers Meeting;
- 2 the Republic of the Marshall Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, and Palau to undertake bilateral visits.

Diana Hawker
for Secretary of the Cabinet

Proactively Released by the Minister of Foreign Affairs

~~Restricted~~

Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs
Chair, Cabinet

Report on Overseas Travel: Rt Hon Winston Peters - 8 to 15 August 2024

This paper recommends that Cabinet note this report on travel to Fiji, the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI), the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), and Palau from Thursday 8 August to Thursday 15 August 2024.

Report

- 1 The purpose of the travel was to enable New Zealand participation in the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) Foreign Ministers Meeting in Suva, Fiji; followed by bilateral visits to the three Micronesian countries in the Northern Pacific that have constitutional, historical, and social connections to the United States: the Marshall Islands, Micronesia, and Palau.
- 2 The New Zealand delegation included Chair of the Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee (FADTC), Tim van de Molen; Chair of the Labour Pacific Caucus, Hon Jenny Salesa; and FADTC Member Teanau Tuiono of the Green Party.

2024 Pacific Islands Forum Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Suva, Fiji

- 3 The PIF Foreign Ministers Meeting was held on 9 August. All Forum Members attended in person with the exception of Palau (which participated virtually). The Foreign Ministers Meeting, alongside other PIF Ministerial meetings, agrees the agenda for the annual PIF Leaders Meeting. Foreign Ministers were asked to make decisions on a number of substantive issues, including on a set of recommendations stemming from the ongoing Review of Pacific Regional Architecture, ^{s6(b)(ii)} next steps on the Pacific Policing Initiative, and the situation in New Caledonia. Our participation at the Foreign Ministers Meeting enabled New Zealand's engagement in meaningful discussions on these, and other, ongoing regional challenges ahead of the Prime Minister's travel to Tonga for PIF Leaders.
- 4 The PIF is central to New Zealand's engagement in the Pacific ^{s6(a)} Our participation in the Foreign Ministers Meeting signalled New Zealand's continuing commitment to a strong and unified Forum, and a resilient and secure Pacific region. It also enabled progress on our policy priorities for the PIF, including strengthening Forum centrality, advancing discussions on regional security priorities, and reinforcing Pacific leadership on climate ambition and resilience.
- 5 Alongside Australia, New Zealand used the Foreign Ministers Meeting as a platform for announcing our respective contributions to the Pacific Humanitarian Warehousing Programme. A total of \$47.5 million (including NZ\$20 million from New Zealand) will go toward the establishment of

humanitarian relief warehouses in 14 Pacific Island countries and Timor-Leste. This initiative places Pacific countries at the centre of responses. It will give countries access to humanitarian relief supplies within 48 hours of a disaster to help meet immediate needs following an emergency and is a practical demonstration of how New Zealand and Australia are working together to address our shared challenges.

Reconnecting with the North Pacific

6 Following the Foreign Ministers Meeting, the New Zealand delegation travelled to the Marshall Islands, FSM and Palau. This enabled New Zealand to substantively reconnect with Micronesian countries and highlight our enduring commitment to all corners of the Blue Pacific Continent. Prior to this visit, and aside from attendance at regional meetings and conferences, it had been 17 years since New Zealand's last stand-alone Ministerial-level bilateral visit to the North Pacific – the 2007 Pacific Mission, which included the Marshall Islands. There are no records of bilateral Ministerial visits to Palau or FSM before this trip.

7 s6(a)

This visit was critical to identifying tangible ways to demonstrate our commitment to supporting Micronesian engagement with the PIF.

8 The delegation met with all three North Pacific representatives who attended the subsequent PIF Leaders Meeting (held in Tonga from 26–30 August): RMI President Hilda Heine; FSM President Wesley Simina; and Palauan Minister of State (foreign minister equivalent) Gustav Aitaro. Connectivity was raised as a significant issue by all three partners. Limited air connections are seen as an impediment to their development and PIF unity, a theme that was impressed upon the New Zealand delegation throughout the tour. President Heine's route to PIF Leaders was illustrative: Majuro – Hawaii – Los Angeles – Fiji – Tonga – a journey that would take about 5 hours if flown non-stop.

9 In response to these challenges, New Zealand arranged Royal New Zealand Airforce flights to collect and return North Pacific leaders to the PIF Leaders Meeting. By providing transport assistance, New Zealand has provided support which has both been deeply useful for the three North Pacific states and their leadership, s6(b)(i)

The offer of transportation support was a direct result of insights gained during the visit, and shows the value face-to-face engagements in deepening New Zealand's understanding of Pacific partners' challenges and how we might meaningfully address them to achieve our shared objectives.

10 Throughout the visit, the delegation emphasised the increased energy and focus New Zealand is bringing to the Pacific; the alignment between our

respective histories, values and interests; and the importance of small state cooperation (including through regional institutions) as a means of protecting our collective interests in a less stable world. North Pacific partners reciprocated by reaffirming the value they attach to working with New Zealand as a long standing and trusted Pacific partner.

The Republic of the Marshall Islands

- 11 In the Marshall Islands, the delegation met with President Hilda Heine and Minister-in-Assistance, Bremity Lakjohn (deputy prime minister-equivalent); held a working lunch with Minister of Foreign Affairs, Kalani Kaneko; and met with Senators at the Nitijela (parliament), which included an impromptu tour of the chamber hosted by Vice Speaker Issac Zacharias. The delegation also engaged with several RMI Cabinet Ministers and Senators at a generously hosted welcome function on the Sunday evening.
- 12 Political leaders acknowledged the long-term investments New Zealand had made in RMI and the evolution of the bilateral partnership. Our support to the Marshall Islands Marine Resource Authority remains an important pillar of New Zealand's development partnership and was highlighted in the series of engagements.
- 13 Climate change was also a key feature of discussion, and the visit afforded the opportunity to launch New Zealand's support for a new RMI Climate Change Resilience initiative¹. President Heine highlighted the important leadership role New Zealand had played in supporting Pacific advocacy on climate change.

The Federated States of Micronesia

- 14 In FSM, the delegation met with President Simina and Vice President Palik; were hosted to lunch by Secretary of Foreign Affairs (minister-equivalent) Robert and Department of Foreign Affairs staff; paid a courtesy call on the Speaker of Congress and the FSM Congressional Committee of Foreign Affairs; and celebrated 36 years of New Zealand-FSM diplomatic ties at a large reception hosted by the President.
- 15 Vice President Palik summarised the relationship in his remarks as "one which is cherished by Micronesians. We continue to see you as a big brother in our region." This sentiment was echoed in the bilateral meeting with President Simina, who made multiple references to New Zealand's positive engagement in fisheries, scholarships, and early childhood development. On the latter, the visit provided a platform to launch New Zealand's NZ\$4.4 million early childhood development and water, sanitation, and hygiene project at a festive event at Nett Elementary School. The project will be implemented by the United

¹ New Zealand has committed NZD\$6.18million to support the *RMI Addressing Climate Change Loss and Damage* activity. This activity will: improve adaptation planning via Light Detection and Ranging surveys and shoreline analysis, providing vital data for stakeholders to understand coastal risks and develop adaptation strategies; enhance the capacity of the RMI Government by establishing a National Loss and Damage Team; and support the development of Marshallese Language Arts booklets and educational curriculum, to improve the promotion and preservation of Marshallese cultural knowledge otherwise at risk of being lost to climate-related loss and damage.

Nations Children's Fund to help improve early childhood outcomes across the North Pacific.

- 16 FSM is the only country of the three visited that has a diplomatic relationship with China (RMI and Palau recognise Taiwan). s6(a)

Palau

- 17 In Palau, the delegation held a bilateral meeting with President Whipps and a range of senior Cabinet Ministers; were hosted to a working lunch with Vice President Sengebau Sr and Minister of State Aitaro; and attended an official dinner hosted by President Whipps to celebrate 30 years of diplomatic ties. On the final morning, Aitaro generously led a personalised visit for the delegation to the UNESCO-listed and ecologically renowned Rock Islands.
- 18 While the President light-heartedly observed that New Zealand and Palau were "at the opposite ends of Blue Continent and didn't see that much of each other", he also made a point of stepping through the range of bilateral and regional connections that provided substance to the relationship. In particular, he acknowledged the important work being undertaken on marine spatial planning – a \$1.7m announcement was made during the visit; the value Palau attached to New Zealand scholarships; and the importance of having a likeminded partner to swap notes with on regional trends. The President also noted the upcoming 30th anniversary of Palau's independence and reiterated invitations to the Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister to attend.

Proactive release

This Cabinet paper would be proactively released as per Cabinet Office Circular CO(18) 4, on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade's website. Proactive release is subject to redaction as appropriate under the Official Information Act 1982.

Recommendation

It is recommended that Cabinet note this report.

Authorised for lodgement

Rt Hon Winston Peters

Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs