

LOWY  
INSTITUTE

---

# Shared History, Shared Future

## THE NEXT 50 YEARS OF AUSTRALIA-PAPUA NEW GUINEA RELATIONS

Outcomes from the 2025 Australia-Papua New Guinea  
Network Emerging Leaders Dialogue

26-30 May 2025, Port Moresby

 **AUS-PNG  
NETWORK**





# Emerging Leaders Dialogue

2  
5



*Port Moresby*  
26–30 May 2025

LOWY  
INSTITUTE

# LOWY INSTITUTE

---

The Lowy Institute is an independent, nonpartisan international policy think tank. The Institute provides high-quality research and distinctive perspectives on the issues and trends shaping Australia's role in the world.





EMERGING  
LEADERS 2025

Published 19 November 2025

Lowy Institute  
31 Bligh Street  
Sydney NSW 2000

[auspng.lowyinstitute.org](http://auspng.lowyinstitute.org)  
+61 8238 9000

Conveners: Oliver Nobetau, Chae Jeong, and Mihai Sora  
Design & Photography: Jaygo Creative

Version 2025-11-19



PAPUA NEW GUINEA  
PARLIAMENT HOUSE



---

# Contents

Executive summary	7
Key recommendations of the Emerging Leaders	8
About the Emerging Leaders Dialogue	9
Introduction	10
Security	11
Trade and investment	12
Culture	13
Development	14
Education	15
Health	16
Diaspora	17
Conclusion	18
Participant biographies	19
Acknowledgements	26

---

## Executive summary

This year's Aus–PNG Network Emerging Leaders Dialogue brought together a diverse cohort of policymakers, business leaders, and civil society representatives to reflect on the evolving relationship between both nations. Their discussions reaffirmed that while Australia and Papua New Guinea (PNG) share a long and intimate history, the future of the partnership must be defined by equality, respect, and shared ambition, rather than dependency.

Participants agreed that the bilateral relationship stands at a moment of renewal. The Pukpuk Treaty, deepening trade ties, and growing people-to-people connections all signal an opportunity to move beyond a framework of bilateral aid to one of genuine collaboration. The Dialogue's central insight was that history must *inform* but not *constrain* the relationship's future.

Security cooperation remains a cornerstone of the partnership. Participants welcomed ongoing defence collaboration and called for greater focus on building PNG's independent capability, especially in policing and internal security. Expanding cooperation to non-traditional domains such as cyber, disaster response, and climate resilience was seen as critical to achieving lasting stability in PNG.

Economic engagement was viewed as essential to transforming the relationship. Participants urged greater bilateral focus on investment-led growth, supported by stronger regulatory frameworks, digital infrastructure, and financial integrity. Labour mobility, small business support, and diaspora engagement were identified as key vehicles for sustainable economic empowerment.

Mutual cultural understanding was described as the bedrock of trust between both nations. Participants called for more authentic storytelling about Papua New Guinea in

Australian media, as well as greater reciprocity in artistic and educational exchanges. Sport, language, and cultural festivals were highlighted as effective avenues for connection.

Education emerged as a unifying theme across all discussions. Participants stressed that both countries benefit from young people equipped with mutual understanding and practical skills. Reforms in curriculum design, teacher training, vocational pathways, and tertiary partnerships were seen as essential to unlocking long-term opportunity.

Health cooperation was recognised as both a moral and economic imperative. Participants encouraged further support to systems-focused partnerships that strengthen local capacity, particularly in workforce development, mental health services, and rural access. Collaboration with faith-based and community health providers was viewed as central to achieving inclusive outcomes.

Finally, diaspora communities were identified as an untapped strategic asset. Participants encouraged both governments to strengthen diaspora engagement, ensuring that PNG professionals, entrepreneurs, and cultural leaders in Australia can contribute meaningfully to PNG's development and representation abroad.

Across all themes, participants shared a conviction that partnership must be built on mutual capability and cultural respect. The Dialogue concluded that a truly modern relationship will depend not only on strategic alignment but on daily acts of collaboration, understanding, and trust that bind two nations with a shared past and a shared future.

---

## Key recommendations of the Emerging Leaders

1. Ratify and implement the PNG–Australia Mutual Defence Treaty with equal emphasis on internal security and community security.
2. Shift the focus of the relationship from aid to trade by further supporting small-to-medium enterprise growth, diaspora investment, and agricultural exports.
3. Embed Papua New Guinean content into the Australian school curriculum and deepen tertiary education partnerships.
4. Strengthen PNG’s primary healthcare system by further investing in local workforce training and rural service delivery.
5. Create a formal PNG-Australia Diaspora Engagement Strategy to harness the skills, networks, and capital of PNG communities in Australia.



---

# About the Emerging Leaders Dialogue

Twenty young and emerging leaders from Papua New Guinea and Australia gathered in Port Moresby from 26–30 May for the 2025 Australia–Papua New Guinea Network Emerging Leaders Dialogue.

The Dialogue is the annual flagship event of the Australia–Papua New Guinea Network, a Lowy Institute project supported by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, which aims to build links and understanding between Australia and PNG.

Participants were selected in a highly competitive process, with hundreds of applications submitted to the Australia–Papua New Guinea Network. By design of this year’s theme, the selected cohort represented a range of industries, sectors, and experience, including government, trade and investment, international development, media, finance, health, defence, business, and infrastructure.

This outcomes report is a summary of the discussions held. All participants contributed to the compilation of this report. Notes have been provided on a non-attributable basis.

## Conveners



**Oliver Nobetau**  
Project Director of the  
Australia–PNG Network



**Chae Jeong**  
Research Assistant for the  
Australia–PNG Network



**Mihai Sora**  
Director of the Pacific  
Islands Program

---

# Introduction

Assessments of the health of the Australia–Papua New Guinea relationship tend to surface each time PNG’s independence anniversary comes around. Looking back over commentary from as early as the mid-1940s, the themes are familiar: a partnership seen as one-sided, Australians accused of knowing little about Papua New Guineans, and a sense that the relationship consistently falls short of its potential.

It is an easy conclusion to reach if we focus only on high-profile flashpoints at single moments in time. From disputes around the Panguna copper mine in Bougainville that ultimately led to the protracted conflict known as the “Bougainville Crisis”, to national debates about the Australian-funded Manus Island detention centre, both countries have weathered controversy. When viewed through the prism of government-to-government deals alone, it can seem as though nothing is improving.

This report offers a different perspective: that an almost exclusive focus on the future can prevent us from appreciating how far the relationship has already travelled. Seen in its entirety, the story of the past 50 years is one of gradual, if uneven, progress. The many forms this partnership has taken over time do not signal a weak foundation; rather, they reflect its dynamism and its capacity to be remodelled as our societies and our priorities change.

Throughout PNG’s modern history, Australia has been a constant presence: as a colonial administrator before 1975, through periods of economic boom and bust, during a civil war, and more recently as an increasingly important development and security partner.

Over the next 50 years, PNG will seek to rebalance this relationship and present itself more clearly as an equal partner.

That ambition depends on continued internal cultural growth, including a deeper understanding of its own strengths and what it brings to the table. It also rests on an appreciation that Australia, too, is evolving.

As PNG Prime Minister James Marape reminded the Australian Parliament in 2024, Australia had recently emerged from colonisation, when it was entrusted with administering Papua and New Guinea — itself an emerging nation learning how to govern.

Geography guarantees that Australia and PNG will remain closely connected. But whether that connection is recognised and valued is something that shifts over time. For this reason, it is crucial to listen to the voices of those who represent a new generation in the relationship. These are people who no longer see the partnership purely in binary, state-to-state terms, but in how it shapes the lives and opportunities of citizens in both countries. Many have lived, studied, or worked across PNG and Australia. They include the emerging leaders who took part in this year’s Dialogue.

A long-term vision for the next 50 years of the relationship is important. Yet it will ultimately be realised through practical actions taken by individuals — actions that cumulatively shape and redefine the partnership, helping to rebalance the scale. In this sense, the future of Australia–Papua New Guinea relations will be grounded not only in shared values, but shared *value*.



# Security

“PNG has an aspiration to increase its own capabilities and play a proactive regional security role, reflecting mutual trust and a deepened strategic partnership with Australia.”

Security cooperation remains one of the most advanced and enduring pillars of the Australia–PNG relationship. Participants described the current state of defence ties as “in rudely good health”, marked by deep interoperability, sustained investment by the Australian Defence Force (ADF), and extensive training and operational linkages across both nations. The Mutual Defence Treaty was viewed as an inflection point — an opportunity to deepen cooperation, but also a moment to critically reflect on balance, sovereignty, and trust.

The Dialogue participants recognised Papua New Guinea’s aspiration to become a proactive regional security contributor. This ambition was underscored by the PNG Defence Force’s recent participation in regional operations and its proposal to host training centres for Pacific Island nations. The cultural concept of “dinau” — a moral debt of service — was raised as an important motivation behind PNG’s desire to support Australian operations.

At the same time, participants cautioned that reliance on the ADF for logistics and operational support has occasionally hindered PNGDF’s progress towards genuine self-reliance. Many argued that future cooperation should continue to emphasise capability building over capability supplementation. Embedding PNGDF members in ADF institutions, and vice versa, was seen as a viable pathway to deepen professional ties and foster long-term mutual capability.

Participants also urged greater attention to internal security in PNG. With persistent instability in the Highlands, limited policing in border provinces, and weak subnational

governance, many saw domestic threats as the most immediate security challenge facing PNG. Policing partnerships, particularly between the Royal Papua New Guinea Constabulary and Australian agencies, were seen as critical. Some suggested these efforts should be prioritised even above the defence relationship.

Discussions on non-traditional threats, such as cyber insecurity, climate-induced displacement, and natural disasters, featured prominently. Participants advocated for a broad conceptualisation of security, arguing that law and order, institutional resilience, and climate preparedness are essential components of PNG’s national stability.

The Dialogue also acknowledged historical sensitivities. While the Kokoda legacy remains a symbol of Australia–PNG solidarity, participants urged for a more inclusive narrative — one that recognises the contributions of Indigenous soldiers and avoids romanticising a complex past. Some expressed concern that Australia too often assumes closeness in the relationship without recognising underlying scepticism among PNG’s political class.



# Trade and investment

“PNG needs to reduce reliance on its extractive industries through economic diversification into agriculture, fisheries, tourism, and downstream processing.”

Economic development was discussed not just as a financial imperative, but as a pathway to dignity, opportunity, and self-determination. Across the Dialogue, participants expressed a desire to reframe the Australia–PNG economic relationship from one of aid dependency to one centred on investment, trade, and shared prosperity.

Participants were clear-eyed about the structural barriers to investment in PNG: unreliable power supply, weak regulatory enforcement, inadequate digital infrastructure, and high logistical costs. In particular, the risk of PNG being grey-listed by the Financial Action Task Force was seen as a looming crisis with serious implications for banking access, investor confidence, and financial inclusion. There was strong consensus that Australia should play a more assertive role in assisting PNG regulators to enforce anti-money laundering and counter-terrorism financing laws.

Labour mobility was another area of focus. Dialogue members supported PNG’s expanded participation in schemes such as the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) program. However, they noted that access in PNG to the scheme remains limited and fragmented. Some proposed the creation of a dedicated PNG Engagement Visa, allowing for greater movement of skilled and semi-skilled workers. This was framed not merely as an economic issue, but as a recognition of PNG’s capacity to contribute meaningfully to the Australian workforce.

Participants discussed the need for economic diversification, particularly in agriculture, fisheries, tourism, and value-added processing. Many noted the success of PNG manufacturers in securing near-wins in Australian supply chains, with targeted support seen as the final hurdle to competitiveness. Support for small-to-medium enterprises, especially through seed funding and business development services, was seen as essential to driving domestic entrepreneurship.

Diaspora engagement emerged as a key opportunity. PNG communities in Australia possess unique advantages — capital, networks, and cultural fluency — that can serve as bridges to bilateral trade. Participants called for formal platforms to connect the diaspora with opportunities for investment and mentorship.

Tourism was raised as an underdeveloped sector with strong potential. PNG’s natural assets, such as pristine surfing and diving locations, and cultural festivals, remain largely unknown to Australian audiences. Participants suggested coordinated marketing strategies with Australian tourism boards, improved domestic airline access, and partnerships with online travel agencies could build awareness of these assets.

Finally, participants advocated for a “value of partnership” model in government procurement, where cultural acumen, local experience, and developmental impact are given greater weight than price alone.



# Culture

*“There is a recognised need to preserve and promote Indigenous cultures while also fostering a shared contemporary cultural identity that reflects the evolving relationship.”*

Culture was described by participants as the bedrock of the bilateral relationship — something not ancillary to development or diplomacy, but foundational. Participants emphasised that without cultural understanding, progress in trade, education, or governance would be transactional at best and misaligned at worst.

There was strong consensus that most Australians have a limited understanding of Papua New Guinean culture. For many participants, this disconnect fuels unbalanced perceptions of PNG as a place of deficiency rather than dynamism. They urged Australian institutions to continue to invest in public storytelling that moves beyond poverty narratives and reflects the country’s rich diversity, resilience, and creativity.

Language was raised as a key entry point. While Tok Pisin and Hiri Motu are widely spoken in PNG, there are more than 800 languages across the country. Participants saw language preservation not just as cultural maintenance, but as nation-building. They recommended that Australia support language digitisation projects, archival efforts, and the integration of local languages into media and education in PNG.

Sports diplomacy was championed as a powerful tool for connection. Rugby league remains a cultural touchpoint shared across both countries, with strong emotional resonance in PNG. Participants proposed greater use of sport to foster bilateral exchange, including scholarships, player development programs, and community-based tournaments that include both male and female athletes.

Participants also discussed the need for greater cultural reciprocity. While PNG students and creatives frequently engage with Australia, the flow in the opposite direction is limited. Some called for bilateral cultural exchange programs for artists, musicians, and filmmakers. Others encouraged the continued promotion of dedicated Pacific-focused programming on Australian public broadcasters, similar to the ongoing efforts of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation.

The role of the diaspora was also explored in this context. Cultural festivals and community organisations were recognised as important vehicles for sustaining cultural identity and promoting PNG in the Australian public imagination. Participants encouraged both governments to support diaspora-led cultural initiatives as part of their wider public diplomacy strategies.

More broadly, participants spoke of culture as a form of soft power — one that, if mobilised authentically, could reframe the bilateral relationship in the minds of ordinary citizens. Culture, they argued, must be elevated as a strategic asset.



# Development

“The development program shouldn’t be expected to fully resolve PNG’s development challenges. It can only supplement domestic efforts.”

Australia remains PNG’s largest development partner — a defining characteristic of the bilateral relationship since PNG’s independence. Over the past five decades, the partnership has taken many forms. It is currently guided by the Australia–Papua New Guinea Development Partnership Plan 2024–2029 and supported by the PNG–Australia Comprehensive Strategic and Economic Partnership, the Australia–Papua New Guinea Bilateral Security Agreement, and PNG’s Medium-Term Development Plan IV.

Given the breadth of the development program, participants explored its impact on specific sectors during the week-long residency. As part of the Dialogue, participants had the opportunity to engage with Australian High Commission officials to gain an understanding of the scope, and how the program operates in practice.

Participants were particularly interested in identifying the most effective area of development assistance, with education emerging as one of the most tangible success stories. Beyond tertiary scholarships and vocational pathways, participants noted a desire to see a stronger focus on secondary-school partnerships and exchanges, reviving the people-to-people connections that have historically reinforced bilateral ties.

While Australia’s development investment in PNG continues to increase annually, participants expressed a desire for stronger monitoring and evaluation systems to ensure impacts remain commensurate with investment.

It was also acknowledged that PNG continues to face significant development challenges, and that external support should complement, rather than replace, domestic responsibilities. Development assistance should therefore be seen as additive to PNG’s own initiatives, not a substitute for them.

Looking ahead, participants expressed a strong desire to “shift the dial from aid to trade”. This involves designing projects that strengthen the capacity of PNG businesses to engage in higher levels of trade with Australia, to define the relationship more by economic partnership than development dependency. As PNG grows this capacity, and reliance on aid diminishes, the transition will remain a continuous work in progress.



# Education

“PNG needs to reform its education system to promote entrepreneurship and personal development, enabling its citizens to contribute directly to nation-building.”

Education was a recurring theme throughout the Dialogue, viewed as the cornerstone for long-term development and bilateral understanding. Participants reflected on both the promise and the limitations of current educational systems in PNG and Australia.

A core insight was the imbalance in regional literacy: while most Papua New Guineans grow up knowing about Australia — its politics, sport, and culture — Australian students often have little exposure to PNG. This asymmetry, participants argued, undermines mutual understanding. It was widely supported that Papua New Guinean perspectives should be embedded in the Australian school curriculum, particularly in humanities, civics, and geography. Doing so would not only enhance cultural competence but also affirm the identities of PNG and Pacific-background students in Australian classrooms.

Within PNG, educational inequality and low retention rates continue to present serious barriers to opportunity. Despite fee-free education policies, many families still face financial burdens, and rural schools remain under-resourced. Participants emphasised the need to invest in teacher training, particularly for early childhood educators, and to explore models where Australian educators deliver in-country training.

The youth bulge in PNG was consistently cited as both a challenge and a chance to shift national trajectories. Participants called for an expansion of vocational education and training (VET) programs, particularly in alignment with PNG’s economic goals in agriculture,

fisheries, and tourism. Apprenticeships, industry certifications, and entrepreneurship-focused education were seen as crucial to equipping youth with the tools for self-reliance.

Tertiary education partnerships, such as the long-standing relationship between the Australian National University and the University of Papua New Guinea, were recognised as models worth scaling. Participants proposed greater digital delivery of tertiary courses, through platforms such as Coursera or LinkedIn Learning, to improve access and affordability, particularly for students balancing study and employment.

Participants also acknowledged a need for curriculum reform within PNG. The absence of national historical events such as the Bougainville Crisis in the education syllabus was seen as a missed opportunity to foster national consciousness and civic engagement. Others recommended the recognition of cultural knowledge holders and integration of traditional knowledge into school systems.

Faith-based institutions were recognised for their role in delivering essential education in remote areas. Participants recommended governments continue to strategically partner with these actors to strengthen reach and effectiveness.

Ultimately, participants framed education as a national investment. An educated population, they argued, is critical not only for individual advancement but for building a robust and resilient economy.



# Health

*“Across PNG, there is low confidence and trust in the management and capacities of hospitals and clinics.”*

Health was discussed as a frontline development issue and a fundamental enabler of national productivity. Participants described PNG’s health system as severely under-resourced but full of potential, particularly if grounded in community-based service delivery and supported through long-term capacity building.

The Dialogue highlighted three critical challenges: workforce shortages, unreliable infrastructure, and uneven access to basic services. Many rural clinics lack electricity, transport, and sufficient staffing, resulting in preventable illness and mortality. Participants stressed that investment in infrastructure must be paired with investment in people — especially nurses, community health workers, and allied health professionals.

Workforce development was seen as the most pressing priority. Participants recommended expanding scholarships for PNG nationals in clinical specialisations such as midwifery, anaesthesiology, and mental health. Joint training programs and exchange placements between PNG and Australian institutions were viewed as valuable, not just for skill transfer, but for relationship-building between professional networks.

Participants also highlighted the vital role of faith-based health providers in PNG. Churches operate a significant proportion of the country’s health facilities, particularly in remote areas. Strengthening partnerships between government, religious organisations, and non-governmental organisations was seen as key to improving service reach and sustainability.

Mental health was identified as an emerging issue, particularly for young people and women. Participants noted the lack of dedicated mental health services, as well as the stigma surrounding mental illness. They called for culturally appropriate mental health campaigns and increased training for frontline responders.

Some participants proposed that Australia support the development of a PNG Health Workforce Plan — similar to Australia’s own health workforce strategy — to map current gaps and align training pathways with national health priorities.

Participants advocated for a model of health partnership focused on systems strengthening, continuous professional development, and inclusive policy design. In this framing, health cooperation is not just aid — it is joint investment in national resilience.



# Diaspora

*“The PNG diaspora in Australia represents a significant, yet often untapped, resource for bilateral relations, possessing valuable skills, networks, and capital.”*

Diaspora communities occupy a unique and often under-utilised space in the Australia–Papua New Guinea relationship. Participants viewed the PNG diaspora in Australia not just as a demographic fact, but as a strategic asset capable of strengthening trade, investment, cultural diplomacy, and people-to-people ties. Their reflections pointed to the need for deliberate engagement strategies that unlock the diaspora’s full potential.

As Australia’s Pacific-facing policies expand, so too will the size and influence of the PNG diaspora. Yet many participants noted that engagement remains ad hoc and inconsistent. The diaspora’s contributions — through remittances, market intelligence, professional expertise, and cultural advocacy — are often under-recognised. There was a clear appetite for new platforms that connect diaspora communities to national development priorities in PNG.

The Dialogue also highlighted the challenges faced by Papua New Guineans living abroad. Many diaspora members — particularly those that have obtained Australian citizenship — face bureaucratic barriers that limit their ability to travel or invest back in PNG.

Participants also spoke of the diaspora’s role in shaping perceptions of PNG in Australia. With limited public understanding of PNG among Australians, the diaspora can act as cultural interpreters, public advocates, and knowledge brokers. To do so, they require institutional support, recognition, and sustained connection with developments in PNG.

Concerns were also raised about the lack of structured pathways for diaspora professionals to contribute their skills back into PNG’s development programs. Despite their familiarity with both contexts, diaspora experts are often overlooked in favour of international consultants. Participants urged that bilateral initiatives should actively recruit from the PNG diaspora, particularly in sectors such as education, business, and health — where candidates are suitably qualified.

Cultural connection across generations was another key theme. Some participants noted that younger diaspora members are increasingly disconnected from language, culture, and traditional knowledge. Others expressed concern that PNG-based citizens do not always view the diaspora as credible or legitimate contributors. These mutual perceptions, unless addressed, risk fragmenting what could otherwise be a powerful resource for national renewal.

There was a strong view that a more deliberate policy posture from both governments is required — one that sees the diaspora not simply as an audience to be addressed, but as partners in the bilateral relationship.



# Conclusion

The 2025 Australia–Papua New Guinea Network Emerging Leaders Dialogue affirmed that the relationship between the two nations is anchored in history but animated by people. While the bilateral partnership has long been framed through development cooperation and strategic necessity, participants called for a more balanced and future-focused approach — one grounded in shared capability, cultural understanding, and enduring trust.

Throughout the Dialogue, participants reflected that partnership cannot be sustained by government policy alone. It requires networks of people who see each other not as beneficiaries or benefactors, but as equals working towards common purpose. This belief was evident across every discussion, whether on defence, trade, culture, education, or health. Each conversation reflected a desire to replace the language of aid with the language of collaboration.

The Dialogue also made clear that progress depends on inclusion. Women, youth, faith communities, and diaspora groups all bring unique insight and agency that must be recognised in shaping the next chapter of the bilateral relationship. Their participation ensures that policy is grounded in the lived realities of those it seeks to serve.

Above all, participants agreed that the future of the Australia–Papua New Guinea relationship will be defined by the actions taken to nurture and grow it. The shared values of resilience, generosity, and mutual respect that have long underpinned the partnership remain the foundation upon which new forms of cooperation can be built.

As both countries navigate an increasingly uncertain regional environment, this Dialogue serves as a reminder that lasting security and prosperity are found in mutual understanding, not geographical proximity. The task ahead is to turn conversation into action and to ensure that ties between Australia and Papua New Guinea continue to evolve with the same depth, honesty, and friendship that have sustained them for generations.



# Participant biographies



## Hilda Audubo

Hilda is Deputy Director of Public Health in Morobe Province, PNG. A dentist by training, she holds dual Masters degrees in Public Health and Business from James Cook University. She led medical services during the Covid-19 pandemic and has delivered outreach dental care in remote PNG. Hilda's leadership in health governance has earned her national and international awards. She is also a certified scuba diver who finds joy exploring PNG's marine biodiversity.



## Anthea Berry

Anthea works with Trade and Investment Queensland's Pacific team to strengthen ties through trade, investment, and education. With a background at QUT, Griffith, and Education Queensland International, she has deep experience in promoting Queensland's institutions internationally. Having spent her childhood in Papua New Guinea, Anthea brings a personal connection to the Pacific. She holds a Master of International Relations and a Bachelor of Social Science and is passionate about fostering impactful partnerships across the region.



## Jake Bobone

Jake is a Combat Engineer Platoon Commander in the Papua New Guinea Defence Force. He earned a degree in Political Science from the University of Papua New Guinea in 2019 and trained at the Royal Military College, Duntroon, graduating in 2021. Jake has completed multiple stability and security operations. Dedicated to regional cooperation and national development, he aspires to help shape a stronger, more capable PNGDF, with enhanced contributions to regional peace and Pacific security.

# Participant biographies



## Lauren Burke

Lauren is a lawyer at the Australian Attorney-General's Department, specialising in law of the sea and international environmental law. She advises the Pacific Maritime Boundaries Project, helping Pacific nations secure maritime rights under international law. She has also researched Pacific fisheries law at ANCORS. Lauren holds a Master of Laws in International Law and a Rhodes Academy diploma. She is passionate about legal frameworks that support Pacific sovereignty and ocean stewardship.



## Jarrod Chan

Jarrod is Chief Strategy Officer at Unloan, Commonwealth Bank's largest venture and has held leadership roles across consulting, banking, and international development. He was Head of Strategy at Nesta (UK), an Advisor to the Head of UNESCO Myanmar, and launched a new venture for GradAustralia. Jarrod studied Finance at the University of Sydney and began his career in management consulting. His family history spans generations in PNG, beginning with his great-grandfather's migration from China to Rabaul. Jarrod remains passionate about PNG's regional role and the PNG–Australia relationship.



## John Chow

John is the Managing Director of Lae Biscuit Company and co-founder of the Chow Foundation. A sixth-generation Papua New Guinean Chinese, he holds a Master of Management from the University of Sydney. Through business and philanthropy, he advances access to education and health in PNG. The Foundation's projects include an early childhood library in Lae. John's leadership reflects a commitment to community values, family legacy, and the long-term development of PNG's future.

# Participant biographies



## Hansley Gumbaketi

Hansley is a trained urban planner and development professional committed to infrastructure advancement in PNG. After studying in Queensland, he returned to PNG to work in property development, logistics, and hospitality. Hansley promotes the arts, performing regularly at Moresby Arts Theatre, and uses poetry to express his experience navigating life in and outside PNG. He is passionate about urban development and how towns and cities can unlock sustainable growth across the region.



## Victoria Kili

Victoria is an Engineering Geologist at GHD in Perth, with more than 14 years' experience across PNG, Australia, and New Zealand. Her expertise spans mining, infrastructure, and disaster risk reduction. She has contributed to Australian-funded projects in PNG and State initiatives in Australia. Victoria holds a BSc in Earth Science from UPNG and a Master of Engineering Geology from Canterbury. She also teaches online courses at UPNG, improving access to geoscience education.



## Ingrid Kuman

Ingrid is Executive Manager at the PNG Tourism Promotion Authority, leading its Policy and Strategic Planning Division. With more than 11 years in the sector, she was instrumental in developing PNG's Tourism Sector Development Plan 2022–2026 and drafting the National Tourism Policy 2025. She holds postgraduate qualifications in international relations and an MBA. Ingrid is passionate about unlocking the economic potential of tourism and driving structural reform in PNG's visitor economy.

# Participant biographies



## William Leben

William is a Senior Analyst at the Development Intelligence Lab and Expert Associate at ANU's National Security College. A General Sir John Monash Scholar, he holds an MPhil in Development Studies from Oxford and served as an Army officer in Iraq. His research spans Australian foreign policy, future conflict, and climate impacts. He is also an aspiring fiction author with a deep interest in PNG's history and Australia's regional responsibilities.



## Michaela Long

Michaela is Investment and Communications Manager at Pacific Trade Invest (PTI) Australia. With experience in government, private, and for-purpose sectors, she builds partnerships that enable private sector growth in the Blue Pacific. A Fijian-Australian based in Sydney, Michaela brings cross-cultural insight and regional depth. She is a 2024 Social Impact Fellow and supports Pacific-led initiatives focused on impact measurement, values alignment, and long-term inclusive development through purpose-driven leadership.



## Renata Mari

Renata is Project Manager for ABC International Development's Media Development Initiative (MDI) in PNG, a capacity-building program funded through the PNG-Australia partnership. With more than 15 years in PNG's media sector — including print, radio, TV, digital, music, and communications — Renata brings valuable insight and strong stakeholder relationships. Her leadership has helped drive improvements in journalism standards and media content quality across PNG.

# Participant biographies



## Alexander Matthews

Alex is an emergency medicine registrar based in Alice Springs. A University of Queensland graduate, he has worked in public health across the Philippines, Timor-Leste, and PNG. He recently served at Port Moresby General Hospital through the Australian Volunteers Program. Alex is passionate about global health, equity, and social justice, and has undertaken research on scabies eradication. He hopes to honour cross-cultural ties and continue working with vulnerable communities worldwide.



## Jack O'Shea

Jack is a seasoned international development leader focused on health systems in PNG and the Pacific. He has more than ten years' experience, including Covid-19 response work with WHO and current leadership at International SOS. Jack began his PNG journey in Kimbe with Australian Doctors International. Known for his collaborative leadership and deep respect for Pacific cultures, Jack is passionate about locally informed solutions to strengthen regional health and development outcomes.



## Isidore Sitapai Pasanai

Isidore is Acting Director for Trade and Investment at the PNG APEC Secretariat, within the Department of Prime Minister & NEC. He previously worked as a Research Officer at the PNG National Research Institute. Isidore holds a BA in PNG Studies and International Relations (Divine World University), a Trade Policy Certificate (University of Auckland), and has completed Foreign Service training (University of Victoria, Wellington). He interned at the APEC Secretariat in Singapore and was part of PNG's 2018 APEC Policy Team.

# Participant biographies



## Abigail Pepson

Abigail is a Senior Portfolio Manager at BSP Capital, the investment arm of BSP Financial Group, focusing on PNG superannuation fund management. She holds a Business Analysis (Finance) degree from the University of Waikato and has nine years' experience in finance — including roles in compliance and anti-money laundering. Abigail is passionate about sustainable development in PNG and supports local non-profits advancing education, community, empowerment, and economic growth.



## Kelly Samof

Kelly is an economist at the Asian Development Bank's PNG Resident Mission, where he supports economic resilience and inclusive growth. A former lecturer at UPNG, he helped nearly 150 students graduate through the ANU-UPNG partnership. His research spans public finance and resource economics. Outside of work, Kelly is a national volleyball player for PNG. He believes in education, teamwork, and sport as tools for nation-building and social transformation.



## Dan Smith

Dan is Deputy Editor at ABC International, where he leads Pacific-focused coverage and digital content strategy. With more than a decade in journalism, Dan's work connects audiences across the Pacific Islands, particularly Papua New Guinea. He is passionate about storytelling that amplifies under-represented voices and highlights regional issues. Through his editorial leadership, ABC International deepens its role in building informed Pacific communities through accessible, culturally resonant content.

# Participant biographies



## Jennifer Star

Jennifer is an education specialist with 18 years of experience in teacher training and curriculum development across Asia and the Pacific. At 21, she founded Tara.Ed, which improved education access for more than 20,000 students in rural India, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan. She holds an OAM for her contribution to international education. Jennifer believes in empowering teachers to build globally competent youth and enhance regional partnerships through strengthened education systems.



## Melanie Wratten

Melanie is Program Manager of RECSI, supporting emergency care clinicians across the Pacific and Timor-Leste. A specialist in international development and public health, she has led capacity-building programs in PNG, Fiji, and Vanuatu. Melanie’s work focuses on systems strengthening and cross-sector partnerships. With postgraduate qualifications in development, evaluation, and public health, she is committed to improving regional health outcomes through collaboration and culturally grounded approaches.



Rear Admiral Philip Polewara DMS CBE, Chief of the Papua New Guinea Defence Force



## Acknowledgements

This Report is published under the Australia–Papua New Guinea Network project, part of the Lowy Institute’s Pacific Islands Program, supported by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. The views expressed in this publication are those of the Dialogue participants and not necessarily the views of the Lowy Institute or the governments of Papua New Guinea or Australia.



# Emerging Leaders Dialogue

25



Port Moresby  
26-30 May 2025

LOWY  
INSTITUTE



EFFECT WITHIN AND WITHOUT THE COUNTRY FOR THE PEACE  
OF PAPUA NEW GUINEA AND THE WELFARE OF THE PEOPLE







#EILD25

[auspng.lowyinstitute.org](https://auspng.lowyinstitute.org)

**LOWY  
INSTITUTE**

 **AUS-PNG  
NETWORK**