

Proactive Release

27/06/2023

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

Title	Reference
<i>Cabinet Minute of Decision – Report on Overseas Travel: Hon Carmel Sepuloni, Hon Barbara Edmonds and Hon James Shaw</i>	CAB-23-MIN-0173
<i>Report on Overseas Travel: Hon Carmel Sepuloni, Hon Barbara Edmonds and Hon James Shaw</i>	

This information has been released without redactions.



Cabinet

Minute of Decision

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Report on Overseas Travel: Hon Carmel Sepuloni, Hon Barbara Edmonds and Hon James Shaw

Portfolio **Associate Foreign Affairs (Pacific Region)**

On 15 May 2023, Cabinet **noted** the report from Hon Carmel Sepuloni under CAB-23-SUB-0173 on her travel, together with Hon Barbara Edmonds and Hon James Shaw, from 16 to 21 April 2023, to Solomon Islands, Fiji, and Tonga for the 2023 Pacific Mission.

Rachel Hayward
Secretary of the Cabinet

Proactively Released by the Associate Minister of Foreign Affairs

In Confidence

Office of the Deputy Prime Minister

Chair, Cabinet

Report on Overseas Travel: Hon Carmel Sepuloni, Hon Barbara Edmonds and Hon James Shaw

- 1 I recommend that Cabinet note this report on travel by myself, Hon Barbara Edmonds and Hon James Shaw to Solomon Islands, Fiji and Tonga for the 2023 Pacific Mission.

Report

- 2 I led a diverse delegation to Solomon Islands, Fiji and Tonga from 16-21 April for the Pacific Mission, accompanied by Hon Barbara Edmonds and Hon James Shaw. The delegation comprised of Labour, Green and ACT MPs, Iwi representatives, members of Aotearoa New Zealand Pacific communities, members of the business and development communities, and officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Ministry for Pacific Peoples, and other NZ Inc. agencies.
- 3 The theme for the Mission was 'Reconnection, Resilience and Partnership', emphasising the shared whakapapa links throughout the region. It delivered on the objectives outlined in the Cabinet paper seeking approval for the visit, which were to:
 - 3.1 Reinforce Aotearoa New Zealand as a natural partner for Solomon Islands, Fiji and Tonga;
 - 3.2 Meet with senior political leaders to strengthen in-person relationships; and discuss the pressing issues facing our region - such as climate change, responding to natural disasters, and economic resilience in a post-COVID context;
 - 3.3 Reinforce the mutual value of connections between Aotearoa New Zealand civil society, business, community, parliamentarians and media and their counterparts in Solomon Islands, Fiji and Tonga;
 - 3.4 Showcase the contribution that Aotearoa New Zealand's International Development Cooperation activities play to support partner led long-term social, economic and cultural resilience.
- 4 A key focus for the Mission was to strengthen relationships and underscore the importance of Pacific unity. It showcased the breadth of our relationships across political, economic and development sectors.
- 5 My discussions with Pacific leaders traversed a wide range of issues and reflected the depth and breadth of Aotearoa New Zealand's relationships with Solomon Islands, Fiji and Tonga. Key themes of the discussions included labour

mobility and visas, tertiary education opportunities, the importance of a peaceful and unified Pacific region, economic resilience, and the shared challenges of tackling climate change.

- 6 The presence of Hon Barbara Edmonds and Hon James Shaw was well received and reinforced the importance of our Pacific engagement to the Pacific partners that we visited. They were actively engaged in the programme and used the opportunity to undertake relevant portfolio calls. On climate change, engagement during the Mission further highlighted the pressing need for more and more easily accessible funding and action on climate programmes, and for this to be delivered in partnership with local people. Recent contributions from Aotearoa New Zealand were acknowledged.
- 7 I want to express my thanks to the New Zealand Defence Force for their support and use of the Royal New Zealand Air Force Boeing 757 for the Mission.

Solomon Islands: 16-18 April

- 8 The Mission began in Solomon Islands where I made a courtesy call on Governor-General Vunagi, and met Prime Minister Sogavare and Foreign Minister Manele. Both Prime Minister Sogavare and Foreign Minister Manele expressed their thanks for Aotearoa New Zealand's support of Solomon Islands' development priorities, particularly in fisheries, aviation, labour mobility and climate change. They outlined what they saw as further opportunities for Aotearoa New Zealand to support initiatives in education and geothermal energy.
- 9 The Prime Minister noted his Government's focus on trying to address the budget deficit. The upcoming National General elections and hosting of the upcoming Pacific Games (a first for Solomon Islands) were both expensive but highly important. Prime Minister Sogavare and Foreign Minister Manele also both spoke on domestic and regional security issues.
- 10 Other key issues discussed included climate change, labour mobility, fisheries, immigration, Pacific Islands Forum dynamics, cost of living pressures, and the progress of negotiations on the Air Services Agreement.
- 11 The delegation visited development projects, met with RSE workers and Manaaki New Zealand Scholarships alumni, attended a climate change panel discussion, unveiled a plaque honouring New Zealanders who fought in Solomon Islands during WWII, and visited the Forum Fisheries Agency.
- 12 During the visit to Solomon Islands:
 - 12.1 I announced NZ\$3 million to support Solomon Islands' hosting of the 2023 Pacific Games.
 - 12.2 I announced a NZ\$15 million commitment to the UN Capital Development Fund's 'Local Adaptive Climate Living Facility (LoCAL)' initiative to support provincial climate change adaptation initiatives.
 - 12.3 Minister Edmonds announced NZ\$2.4 million in funding to support the SPC-led Pacific Youth Engagement, Empowerment and Economic Pathways Project in Solomon Islands and Tonga.

Fiji: 18-19 April

- 13 My visit to Fiji built on the early and warm high-level political exchanges between Fiji and Aotearoa New Zealand since the new Fiji government was elected in December.
- 14 Hon Barbara Edmonds, Hon James Shaw and I met Deputy Prime Ministers Manoa Kamikamica and Biman Prasad, and Minister for Disaster Management and Rural Development Sakiasi Ditoka. This discussion was robust and engaging with Aotearoa New Zealand seen as a “natural partner” for Fiji.
- 15 Key issues discussed included the economic outlook and recovery, labour mobility, climate change, security and geopolitics, trade, the University of the South Pacific and release of treated water from the Fukushima nuclear power station. The Fijian Ministers also reflected on Fiji’s economy and politics.
- 16 While I was unable to meet Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka again as he was ill, I passed on the standing invitation for him to visit Aotearoa New Zealand.
- 17 Hon Barbara Edmonds met the Fiji Minister of Health and Medical Services, Atonio Lalabalavu, and discussed climate resilient infrastructure, capacity development in the health sector, and solutions to tackling non-communicable diseases. Hon James Shaw was a VIP guest speaker at a Fiji Climate Change Relocation Trust Fund launch event, alongside Deputy Prime Minister Kamikamica.
- 18 MPs Hon Jenny Salesa, Teanau Tuiono and Nicole McKee paid a courtesy call on the Speaker of Parliament before meeting a cross-party group of Fijian MPs. The talanoa between the MPs included an engaging discussion that covered good Select Committee practice and women’s political participation. Hon Jenny Salesa extended an invitation to Fiji’s Foreign Affairs and Defence committee to visit the Aotearoa New Zealand Parliament.
- 19 I was pleased to be able to visit the University of the South Pacific with the delegation where I announced a new 10 year partnership with the university, along with NZ\$35 million in core funding support over the next five years. The delegation also visited HART Community Housing, a development project Aotearoa New Zealand is supporting to improve food security in Fiji, and a talanoa on reconnecting businesses and economies.

Tonga: 19-21 April

- 20 A highlight was the warmth with which I, along with our delegation, were received in Tonga. The Tongan Government recognised my familial ties to Tonga and acknowledged me as a ‘daughter of Tonga’. Many others on the delegation had strong ties to Tonga, reinforcing the strength of our existing connections and special relationships with our Pacific whānau.
- 21 My meeting with the Prime Minister of Tonga, Hon Hu’akavameiliku and Cabinet Ministers, together with Hon Barbara Edmonds and Hon James Shaw, was positive and engaging. The Prime Minister described the relationship with Aotearoa New Zealand as one that “Tonga is very proud of”. Our respective challenges in recovering from extreme natural events were acknowledged. The

Prime Minister expressed his gratitude for Aotearoa New Zealand's response and support to the Hunga Tonga-Hunga Ha'apai volcanic eruption and tsunami.

- 22 Key issues discussed included the economic outlook and recovery, climate change, movement of people, education (including the previously raised request for a Pacific tertiary fee), development cooperation, fisheries, human rights and regional matters.
- 23 In addition to health, rural development and economic development site visits, a school visit and a visit to the Police College, the delegation attended a tree-planting ceremony at the Hihifo Coastal Area affected by the 2022 tsunami. Here I announced NZ\$30 million funding to support the Pacific Community Climate Change Flagship Programme, which supports our larger regional climate finance programme.
- 24 On the last evening of the Mission the delegation was honoured with a dinner event hosted by the Government of Tonga.

Proactive release

- 25 I propose to proactively release this paper within 30 business days with redactions made in accordance with the Official Information Act 1982.

Recommendation

I recommend that Cabinet note this report.

Authorised for lodgement

Hon Carmel Sepuloni

Deputy Prime Minister

Associate Minister of Foreign Affairs (Pacific Region)