The Pacific We See

A Framework For Our Shared Future

2025

oikoumene PASIFIKA

micah





An Invitation

Let us journey together toward a flourishing Blue Pacific







We invite you to see the Pacific as we see it – through the eyes of faith, relationship, and shared hope.

Across the lands and seas of our region, our people long for a future where communities and creation can flourish together.

Over the past three years, this movement of Pacific Australian Emerging Leaders has grown from the voices of a few into the shared vision of many.

What began as conversations between emerging leaders has become *The Pacific We See Framework*, a way of seeing and acting that we hope can guide us for the years ahead.

We offer this Framework as a gift of hope and partnership. It is shaped by the wisdom of our elders, the courage of our young people, and the conviction that faith calls us not only to prayer but also to participation in the healing of our world.

This is not a policy document to be shelved, but a living invitation to act.

It invites communities, faith groups, governments, academia, cultural institutions, businesses, and development partners to share responsibility for our common future.

It asks all of us, in our different roles, to walk together with humility, courage, and love for the people and places we call home.

Together, we see a Pacific of peace, justice, and harmony.

Together, we commit to help make it real.

We invite you to join us.

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Introduction

Why this framework matters

In 2022, *The Pacific We See* began as a listening exercise among the first Pacific Australia Emerging Leaders Summit (PAELS) delegates. Through talanoa, prayer, and reflection, they named the issues affecting their communities and envisioned the Pacific they hoped to see.

In 2023, the theme of *Genuine Partnership* guided deeper conversations on what it means to move from consultation to shared leadership, coinciding with the launch of Australia's International Development Policy.

In 2024, the report drew significant reflection from our First Nations emerging leaders on the lessons learned through applying First Nations approaches to foreign policy within the network. It also sought to align with the *2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent*, the collective plan of Pacific Islands Forum members for a secure, prosperous, and resilient region. This step connected our youth-led reflections with the region's long-term agenda.

Now, in 2025, we take another step. *The Pacific We See – A Framework for Our Shared Future* moves beyond annual reporting toward a shared platform for action. It provides common language for emerging leaders, faith groups, and policymakers to address the transformations our region needs.

Over these three years, this work has been shaped by the voices and visions of emerging leaders from across our Pacific family. They come from Pacific Island nations, First Nations Australians, the Pacific diaspora, and the wider Australian community.

Our region is rich in multiculturalism. It is home to people from across the globe, from many faiths and cultural traditions, who now call our Blue Pacific home.

Together, we have sought to create a vision and framework that reflect the challenges, aspirations, and ideas of all these contexts. We recognise that our shared flourishing depends on one another.

This Framework draws on the outcomes of regional gatherings, faith statements, and community consultations. It reflects both the realities we face and the hope we hold – a shared Pacific where social, ecological, and spiritual wellbeing are restored.

What Is the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent?

Adopted by Pacific Islands Forum leaders in 2022, the ***2050 Strategy*** sets out a vision for a "resilient Pacific region of peace, harmony, security, social inclusion and prosperity."

The Strategy identifies seven thematic areas: Political Leadership and Regionalism; People-Centred Development; Peace and Security; Resource and Economic Development; Climate Change and Disasters; Ocean and Environment; and Technology and Connectivity.

Our Framework draws direct links to these themes and helps young leaders understand how their work fits within the region's shared agenda.

How To Read This Framework

This Framework is both a reflection of where we are and an invitation to what we are becoming. It sets shared directions, not final answers, and should be read as a living work in progress shaped by ongoing dialogue and relationship.

1. A foundation for conversation, not a finished policy.

Our five Calls to Action reflect the change our emerging leaders long to see. They are not yet detailed policy proposals but shared priorities that mark where we seek to listen, collaborate, and shape solutions together. These calls will continue to deepen as the Network grows and partners join in their development.

2. A tool for empowerment and connection.

The Framework is designed primarily to equip our emerging leaders to share their stories and insights. It seeks to honour the diversity of contexts across our region – from small islands to cities, from First Nations to diaspora – while drawing together the shared challenges that call for collective action.

3. A focus on transformation, not just outcomes.

At its heart, this Framework points to the deeper shifts our region must pursue – not just quick fixes or policy announcements, but long-term transformations in the way we live, lead, and relate. These transformations are grounded in Pasifika and Indigenous cultural and faith-based models of change – including *Do Kamo*[1]*, Reweaving the Ecological Mat (REM)*[2], and the *Whole of Life*[3] way. Each of these calls us to see development as the renewal of relationship: with people, creation, and Creator.

4. A living framework that grows through relationship.

Each story shared, conversation held, and connection made adds a new thread to the mat. As delegates, alumni, and partners engage with it – from faith leaders and politicians to our youth and elders – the Framework will continue to evolve. Its strength lies not in being finished, but in being continually woven through shared use and purpose.

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1. Pacific Conference of Churches (2022). Outcome Statement of the 12th General Assembly of the Pacific Conference of Churches, Noumea. The PCC reaffirmed the "Do Kamo" vision as a theological foundation for renewal and right relationship across the Pacific.
2. Bird, L., Saiki, E., & Ratunabuabua, E. (2019). Reweaving the Ecological Mat: Toward an Ecological Framework for Development. Suva, Fiji: Pacific Theological College.
3. A concept popularised and explored through the teachings of the Pasifika Communities University, Suva, Fiji – and further articulated in The "Whole of Life" Way: Unburying vakatabu philosophies and theologies for Pasifika development (Upolu Lumā Vaai & Aisake Casimira, eds., Pacific Theological College Press, 2024).

2



Who We Are

We are emerging leaders from across the Pacific family, connected by faith and a shared mission to ensure a safer, more just, and sustainable future for our region.

The Pacific Australian Emerging Leaders Network (PAELN) is a partnership between Micah Australia and the Pacific Conference of Churches (PCC), with support from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) through its Office of the Pacific.

Building on decades of partnership between churches and civil society, PAELN strengthens people-to-people ties and promotes leadership and dialogue rooted in faith, culture, and regional solidarity.

Our network brings together young leaders (aged 22 to 35) from Pacific Island nations, First Nations communities in Australia, the Pacific diaspora, and the wider Australian society. It connects, equips, and amplifies these leaders through three core areas:

- **Strengthening Connections** – Cultivating strong and enduring ties among emerging leaders across the Pacific. These relationships foster collaboration on regional development issues and deepen bonds as part of a true Pacific family.
- **Empowering Leadership** – Equipping emerging leaders with the skills, knowledge, and capacity to engage meaningfully in civic and political life at local, national, and regional levels.
- **Influencing Decision-Making** – Amplifying the voices of young leaders to ensure their perspectives and lived experiences inform political, social, and economic decisions on sustainable development across the region.

Our network is also guided by a group of respected Elders who journey alongside us, sharing cultural knowledge, wisdom, and pastoral care. Their presence reminds us that leadership in the Pacific is always intergenerational – shaped by those who have gone before and sustained by those who walk beside us.

Since 2022, 120 emerging leaders have joined this journey. Each brings their own heritage, faith, and hope for the future of our shared Pacific.



Emerging leaders meeting take part in First Nations learning and cultural exchange during PAELS (2024) [Image: Micah].

Our 2025 Summit Delegation

Each year, representatives from the Pacific Australia Emerging Leaders Network (PAELN) – including new members and alumni – gather in Canberra for the Pacific Australian Emerging Leaders Summit (PAELS).

The Summit is a seven-day experience of formation, dialogue, and political engagement. Delegates take part in cultural exchange, leadership workshops, faith reflection, and meetings with Australian and Pacific leaders. Together, they explore how faith and leadership can shape a safer, more just, and sustainable Blue Pacific.

This year's Summit brings together:

- 25 delegates from 17 Pacific Island nations
- 10 delegates from First Nations communities in Australia
- 12 delegates from Pacific diaspora communities in Australia
- 10 delegates from the wider Australian family
- 8 elders who journey with delegates

PAELS is more than an event. It is the heartbeat of our network – where emerging leaders deepen relationships, affirm shared values, and carry their learning back into communities across the region.

Our Network in Action



Olivia Baro (Fiji)

Commission on the Status of Women (CSW69)

Olivia attended CSW69 in New York, which brought together governments and civil society to accelerate gender equality worldwide. She spoke to the experiences of Pacific young women working for peace, climate justice, and human rights, ensuring their perspectives shaped global policy conversations *(pictured far right, image: DIVA for Equality*).



Mikenzie Ling (First Nations)

Uniting Church Climate Conference

Mikenzie shared on Land is a Mother, Creation is our kin – exploring how Aboriginal cultural values and practices of right relationship shape understandings of kinship with creation. Her address called the Church to a deeper theology of ecological care and justice *(image: Uniting Church NSW/ACT)*.



Raul Sugunananthan (Australia)

Sydney Alliance Assembly

Raul helped organise more than 800 community members from faith, union, diaspora, and community organisations in Western Sydney to engage directly with federal MPs on affordable housing and climate action. This collective advocacy contributed to a $2.3 billion federal commitment for household batteries *(image: Sydney Alliance)*.



Rose Parker (Diaspora) & Cynthia Kotsin (PNG)

Books4Bougainville

Through The Root Crop, a grassroots initiative amplifying Pacific-led action, Rose and Cynthia launched *Books4Bougainville* – a campaign providing educational resources to students in the Autonomous Region of Bougainville, bridging diaspora and Pacific communities through practical solidarity and shared purpose.



Sladen Jieta (Marshall Islands)

National Youth Convention

Sladen helped coordinate the United Church of Christ Congregational National Youth Convention, which gathered more than 1,800 young people from across the Marshall Islands, Guam, Hawai‘i, and the United States. Sessions focused on governance, ecological stewardship, and social and economic justice *(image: PCC)*.

Our Network in Action



Nafi Ulunikorotabu –

Conference of States Parties on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (COSP18)

Nafi joined the Pacific Disability Forum (PDF) delegation to COSP18 in New York – one of the world's most significant forums for advancing disability rights. As a first-time participant, Nafi highlighted the importance of stronger Pacific representation in global decision-making and the need to turn commitments into action *(image: Pacific Disability Forum)*.



Talicia Minniecon (First Nations) & Kim Allen (PNG)

Pacific Climate Media and Traditional Knowledge Program

Talicia and Kim were selected for this program supported by ABC International Development. Talicia has shared stories of Zenadth Kes women preserving coconut weaving traditions and emerging artists, while Kim has documented Ware Island women in Papua New Guinea crafting clay pots, as well as the traditional practice of Gwala – natural regeneration – in Milne Bay Province. Together, their storytelling blends art, culture, and climate advocacy, amplifying Indigenous and Pacific voices *(image: ABC International Development)*.



Viro Xulue (Kanaky)

United Nations Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (EMRIP)

Viro attended the 18th Session of EMRIP in Geneva, where he presented on the situation in Kanaky (New Caledonia). His intervention called attention to ongoing human rights violations and the need to advance peaceful self-determination under international law. Viro also completed certification in Indigenous Law and UN Monitoring Mechanisms, equipping him to continue advocating for Kanak rights on the global stage *(image: PCC)*.



Michael Guka (PNG)

Deep-Sea Mining Moratorium

Working alongside Hon. Gary Juffa, Governor of Oro Province, Michael contributed to the successful campaign urging Papua New Guinea's government to reject deep-sea mining. The Prime Minister released a national statement reaffirming PNG's commitment to protecting the ocean floor *(image: supplied by Michael Guka*).



Ashley Wild (Australia)

Drought Preparedness Training, Palau

As part of the Bureau of Meteorology's Climate and Oceans Support Program in the Pacific (COSPPac), Ashley delivered drought preparedness training to the Palau National Weather Service. His work supports local meteorologists to improve community forecasting, planning, and resilience – helping Pacific nations strengthen early warning systems and climate adaptation at the local level *(image: supplied by Ashley Wild)*.

3

Our Vision and Its Foundations

A flourishing Pacific where all our people, communities, and creation thrive together.

This vision is grounded in Pacific and First Nations understandings of life as interconnected – spiritual, cultural, social, ecological, and economic dimensions woven into one whole.

It expresses the conviction that true development is not only material but relational: the renewal of right relationships with each other, with creation, and with God. Flourishing is not an individual pursuit but a communal one, sustained through balance, reciprocity, and care.

Our foundations draw on three streams of wisdom:

- **Faith**, which gives meaning to our work.
- **Holistic approaches**, which recognise the spiritual, cultural, and ecological unity of life.
- **Ancestral leadership** of Indigenous and First Nations peoples, who teach us how to live in balance with the land and sea.

Together, these shape a theology of hope that honours creation as sacred and measures wellbeing through the strength of relationships and community.

Theological Foundations – Do Kamo and Reweaving the Ecological Mat

Do Kamo

Adopted as the theological theme of the Pacific Conference of Churches' 12th General Assembly in Kanaky (2023), *Do Kamo* – meaning "authentic humanity" in the Kanak tradition – calls Pacific peoples into a continual journey of transformation in Christ. The Assembly theme, "Do Kamo: Khrist! Transform Us Into Your Authentic Humanity," affirmed a vision of humanity that is relational, ecological, and spiritual rather than individual or fixed. It recognises that human flourishing emerges through harmony with others, with land and ocean, and with the Creator. The PCC describes *Do Kamo* as a guiding ethic that "prophetically shapes alternative futures rooted deeply in Christ, community, and creation – guiding the region toward renewed justice, ecological integrity, and communal wholeness."

Reweaving the Ecological Mat (REM)

Developed through the Pacific Theological College and the Pacific Conference of Churches (Bird, Saiki & Ratunabuabua, 2020), *Reweaving the Ecological Mat (REM)* offers an ecological framework for development grounded in both Christian theology and Pacific Indigenous wisdom. The "mat" symbolises the fabric of life – the relationships between people and land, faith and governance, and past and future generations. REM teaches that environmental sustainability is not merely technical policy but a sacred moral duty, calling communities to restore right relationship with creation. It challenges Western models that privilege economic growth over communal wellbeing and outlines the moral and prophetic responsibility of the Church to act as leaders in creation care and ecological justice.

Emerging leaders and partners at a co-design workshop on the Pacific Australian Emerging Leaders Network, Fiji (2024) [Image: Micah Australia].



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Our Values

Four core values guide our Framework. They shape how we lead, how we work together, and how we engage across the region.

These values have been identified and refined by our emerging leaders through three years of dialogue – through real conversations and honest wrestling with what matters most.

Together, they show what is required to achieve authentic and lasting progress for our shared Pacific.

Artworks: Rowena Seutatia MacDonald



Genuine Partnership

We must engage one another from a place of respect and a desire for real relationship, not transaction. We honour one another's histories, cultures, and beliefs, valuing local leadership and remaining accountable to our communities. In our work across the region, we seek not to speak *at* or *for* others, but to *talanoa*, *tok stori*, and *yarn* with them.



Inclusion

Every person bears the image of God within our Pacific family. Inclusion is therefore not a courtesy; it is the measure of justice and a reflection of our true character. We commit ourselves to go beyond inclusion as simply providing a seat at the table or around the mat, and to actively create opportunities and hold space for those often excluded in our region – women, children, and people with disabilities – to speak and to lead.



Self-Determination

The struggle for self-determination continues for many peoples and nations across our region. For some, this still means the pursuit of full political independence and the completion of decolonisation. But self-determination is also more than political status. It is the freedom to live in harmony with creation, to govern one's own affairs, and to pursue development that honours local languages, knowledge, and identity. It means resisting coercive external pressures and prescriptive approaches. We commit to self-determination in its full sense, standing with every community in the pursuit of dignity and peace.



Stewardship

We are caretakers of creation, entrusted with the lands, seas, and cultures that sustain life. Stewardship calls us to live with gratitude, wisdom, and restraint, knowing that what we hold is not ours alone but a gift shared across generations. To care for creation is an act of worship and of justice. It requires that we balance what we take with what we give back, ensuring that our peoples and our planet can flourish together.

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The Three Key Issues We See

Seeing Our Shared Pacific Flourish

Across the lands and seas of our shared Blue Pacific – from Pacific Island nations to First Nations Australians, the Pacific diaspora, and the wider Australian family – our peoples face complex and interwoven challenges.

Through our first three years of dialogue, prayer, and community reflection, three themes have emerged again and again among our emerging leaders. They resonate deeply with what we have heard from our elders and seen reflected in the outcome statements of our senior church leaders.

These three issues are not isolated crises. They are outward signs of deeper fractures in the relationships that sustain life – our relationships with one another, with creation, with the Creator, and with systems of power and governance. The Pacific and First Nations worldviews draw on an understanding that these connections are sacred, not merely institutional. When one strand is torn, the whole mat begins to unravel.

By naming these issues – **Rising Social Harm**, **Ecological Destruction**, and **Challenges to Sovereignty** – we are not seeking to simplify the collective story of our Blue Pacific. Rather, we are offering a shared lens through which our leaders, churches, governments, and partners can work together toward transformation.



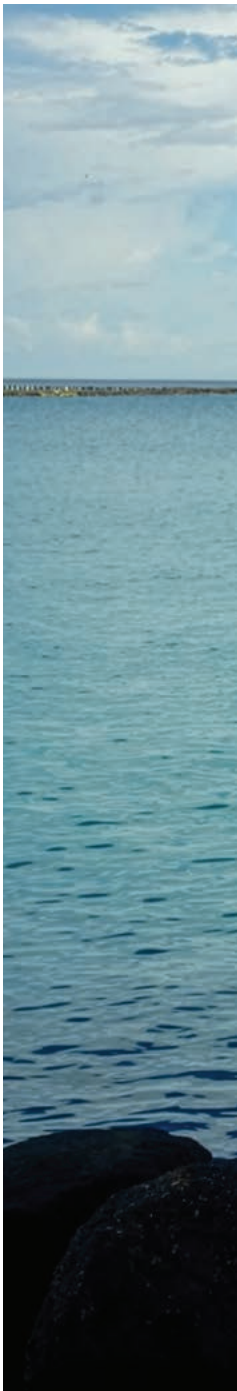


Learning together on Viwa Island during the Regional Ecumenical Youth Gathering, Fiji (2024) [Image: Rowena Macdonald].

1. Rising Social Harm

Across the Pacific, social pressures are deepening. Migration, urbanisation, economic uncertainty, and online exposure are reshaping the patterns of daily life. Families once bound by communal rhythm and shared responsibility are now stretched across borders. With that dislocation comes new forms of vulnerability – from violence and addiction to loneliness and despair.

These are not merely social problems; they are spiritual wounds. In both Pacific and First Nations worldviews, wellbeing is communal. It flows from the strength of families and communities living in right relationship with one another and with creation. When those bonds are strained, individuals suffer, and so too does the whole.



Emerging leader Lily Teafa works tirelessly to ensure the safety, connection, and wellbeing of young people on her island of Tuvalu (2024).


I AM AN ADVOCATE OF
women's
rights

1. Rising Social Harm

What We See

Across our region, we are witnessing communities grappling with rapid social change and the pressures it brings. Drug and alcohol abuse are rising, along with rates of HIV and sexually transmitted infections. In Fiji, new HIV diagnoses tripled in 2024, while in PNG, seven babies a day are infected through mother-to-child transmission (UNAIDS). Online exploitation and digital harm are spreading quickly, especially among youth, and two in three women in the Pacific experience violence in their lifetime (UN Women).

Large-scale labour migration has brought opportunity but also separation, with more than 30,000 Pacific Islanders now working in Australia under the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) scheme. Families are divided, leaving children and spouses to shoulder the cost of distance.

Within Australia, our First Nations and Pacific diaspora communities carry their own stories of struggle and strength. Pacific diaspora families often navigate complex questions of identity, belonging, and intergenerational expectation – balancing deep cultural pride with the pressures of life far from home. For First Nations peoples, the continuing impacts of colonisation, dislocation, and systemic injustice shape social outcomes, yet their leadership and community-led models of justice and restoration offer wisdom for the region as a whole.

Across all these contexts, churches, families, and young people remain at the centre of care, prevention, and renewal. We see communities drawing on traditional and faith-based practices to restore relationship and dignity – the same foundations that have sustained Pacific and Indigenous societies for generations.

Why It Matters

When the social fabric tears, trauma multiplies. Mental health crises rise, trust within communities declines, and young people lose their sense of belonging. These harms cannot be healed by policy alone; they require spiritual care, cultural renewal, and communal leadership that begins at the grassroots.

Transformation Required – *From Social Harm to Communal Wholeness*

We are called to move from disconnection to wholeness – to reweave the strands of belonging through faith, culture, and care. Wholeness in the Pacific and First Nations sense is not individual achievement; it is a shared state of wellbeing rooted in relationship.

Together with churches, elders, and youth across the region, we are helping nurture hope where trauma has taken hold and rebuild the strength of families and communities as the heartbeat of our societies.

Emerging Leaders Responding

Through our network, we are part of and witnessing examples of:

- Faith communities offering trauma-informed and culturally grounded care and counselling.
- Youth leaders and groups running awareness campaigns on cyber-safety, gender-based violence, and mental health.
- Advocates and alumni promoting informed, ethical, and family-centred approaches to labour mobility and migration.

PIF 2050 Strategy Connections:





2. Ecological Destruction

Across our shared Blue Pacific, the land and sea are crying out. Once-stable seasons are shifting, shorelines are washing away, and storms are growing stronger. The places that have shaped our stories, sustained our families, and hold the memories of our ancestors are under threat.

This is not only an environmental crisis; it is a spiritual one. For Pacific and First Nations peoples, creation is not separate from humanity – it is kin. To harm the land or sea is to harm the self. To care for creation is to honour the Creator.



The Australian Wa‘a canoe lands at Kualoa Beach, Hawai‘i, symbolising Pacific–First Nations solidarity on climate action (2024) [Image: Benjamin Warlngundu Ellis].

2. Ecological Destruction

What We See

Across our communities, we are already living the realities of a changing climate. Rising seas swallow homes and gardens. Saltwater seeps into wells, and traditional crops fail under unpredictable weather. Some families have already moved, forced to leave behind ancestral lands that can no longer sustain life.

Extractive industries deepen the damage. Logging, mining, and fossil-fuel exploration continue to degrade ecosystems across the region, with serious impacts on forests, rivers, and reefs. Deep-sea mining threatens to scar the ocean floor before we even understand its life. Across the Pacific, biodiversity is in decline, coral reefs are dying, and nuclear waste dumping continues to endanger fragile marine environments.

In Australia, First Nations communities confront the ongoing impact of land clearing, sacred site destruction, water diversion, and resource extraction on Country. For many, these wounds are inseparable from the history of colonisation – yet their custodianship offers a model for renewal rooted in spiritual balance and deep ecological care.

Our Pacific diaspora communities, too, feel the ache of environmental loss both where they live and from afar. They watch their islands change – through screens, stories, and the voices of family – carrying the grief of distance even as they work to protect the region that still holds their hearts.

Across all these contexts, we see young and Indigenous peoples standing at the forefront. From organising village-based climate-resilience projects to engaging in global discussions on deep-sea mining, we are reminding the world that our peoples are not powerless in the face of ecological destruction. We are stewards of what we have inherited, committed to protecting and renewing it for the generations to come.

Why It Matters

Ecological destruction cuts to the heart of identity. It severs the ties between people and place, erodes cultural continuity, and weakens food systems that have sustained generations. For Pacific and First Nations peoples, land and sea are sacred trusts passed between ancestors and descendants. When these are exploited or lost, it is not only livelihoods that disappear, but memory and belonging.

The ecological crisis also exposes global inequities. The Pacific contributes less than 0.03 percent of global emissions yet bears the heaviest consequences. Justice requires that the world listen – not with sympathy, but with accountability – to the wisdom of those who have long lived in harmony with creation.

Transformation Required – *From Extraction to Ecological Harmony*

We are called to move from extraction to harmony – from exploiting creation to restoring right relationship with it. This transformation demands humility: a recognition that the earth is not a resource to be consumed but a gift to be cared for.

Restoring harmony will not be achieved simply by advancing technology to keep pace with ecological destruction, but through repentance, restraint, and reverence. We must learn again to see the world as sacred – to balance what we take with what we give back, and to measure progress not by profit, but by the flourishing of life.

Together with churches, faith communities, and local leaders, we are helping model this change. From replanting mangroves and restoring reefs to advocating for environmental justice on the world stage, the work of healing has begun.

Emerging Leaders Responding

Through our network, we are part of and witnessing examples of:

- Youth leaders coordinating local climate-resilience projects and amplifying regional advocacy for ocean protection, nuclear justice, and climate action.
- Faith and community groups restoring degraded land, replanting mangroves, and teaching ecological stewardship as discipleship.
- Artists, storytellers, and advocates using cultural expression to call for environmental renewal and shared responsibility.

PIF 2050 Strategy Connections:



3. Challenges to Sovereignty

Across our Blue Pacific, sovereignty is not just a matter of borders or flags – it is the ability of our peoples to make decisions freely, without coercion, and in ways that honour our values, lands, and relationships.

It is expressed in how we govern, trade, care for creation, and protect our shared ocean.

For many communities across the Pacific, sovereignty is both a political and spiritual calling: a mandate to steward what has been entrusted to us by our ancestors and by God.



Pacific emerging leaders welcomed to Country by Ngunnawal Elder Aunty Serena Williams, PAELS (2023) [Image: Junior Peleseuma].



3. Challenges to Sovereignty

What We See

Pacific sovereignty faces new and complex pressures, alongside historical and ongoing struggles. The increasing presence of external powers in the region – through defence partnerships, resource extraction, and geopolitical competition – has reignited concerns about strategic dependency and loss of agency. In some cases, development financing and security agreements have been pursued without full transparency or community consent.

Across our region, the journey toward full self-determination remains unfinished. Several Pacific territories continue to live under varying degrees of external administration. Each has its own story, history, and aspirations, but all share a desire for dignity, participation, and the freedom to shape their own future.

The Pacific Islands Forum's *2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent* reaffirms the region's collective commitment to "self-determination and sovereignty for all Pacific peoples." Likewise, the Pacific Conference of Churches (PCC) and its Regional Ecumenical Youth Council (REYC) have called for continued accompaniment and dialogue to ensure these aspirations are pursued peacefully and inclusively.

Economic pressures also limit sovereignty. The risk of developing heavy reliance on aid, remittances, and imports leaves many nations vulnerable to external shocks and policy influence.

The experience of First Nations communities in Australia reflects these same struggles. Sovereignty has never been ceded, and the journey of self-determination continues amid structural inequities that still stand in the way of closing the gap. Their ongoing leadership offers wisdom and inspiration for our region, reminding all of us that sovereignty is inseparable from identity, history, culture, and spiritual relationship with the land and sea.

Diaspora communities also carry this responsibility in new ways. Living between cultures, they navigate questions of belonging, representation, responsibility and loyalty – embodying both the tension and the possibility of shared regional identity.

Why It Matters

When sovereignty is weakened, trust erodes, and external agendas can overshadow local priorities. The result is a loss of control over resources and decision-making that directly affect communities' futures. Genuine sovereignty means having the space and capacity to choose – to define development on our own terms and to partner from a position of dignity, not dependency.

True peace and security in the Pacific will never be achieved by military build-up or competition for influence. It will be achieved when every community has the freedom, means, and respect to govern its own affairs in harmony with others.

Transformation Required – *From Colonisation to Self-Determined Sovereignty*

We are called to move from the legacies of colonisation to relationships of genuine partnership – from being recipients of decisions to co-authors of our shared future. This transformation requires both humility and courage: humility from those with power to listen, and courage from those who must speak and act with conviction.

Sovereignty is not isolation; it is interdependence freely chosen. It flourishes when nations cooperate on equal terms, when aid builds capability rather than control, and when every policy is measured by how it strengthens local leadership and long-term resilience.

Together with our churches, elders, and leaders, we seek a Pacific where sovereignty is lived out not through dominance, but through mutual respect – where self-determination and solidarity walk hand in hand.

Emerging Leaders Responding

Through our network, we are part of and witnessing examples of:

- Emerging leaders engaging in negotiations, dialogue, and reconciliation efforts to advance sovereignty in non-self-governing territories.
- Churches and civil society promoting peace, demilitarisation, and ethical governance in regional and national decision-making.
- Youth leaders building bridges of solidarity, connecting movements for justice and self-determination across Australia and the Pacific.

PIF 2050 Strategy Connections:



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What We Are Calling For – Our Five Calls to Action

Our Five Calls to Action set the direction for where we, as emerging leaders, believe our region must go. As this report marks the first publication of *The Pacific We See Framework*, these Calls are not intended as exhaustive policies or finished plans, but as initial markers – signposts toward the kind of cooperation, leadership, and transformation that our shared Pacific future requires.

Each Call arises from the lived experience of our members across the Pacific Islands, First Nations Australians, the Pacific diaspora, and the wider Australian family. Together, they reflect what we have seen, what we have learned from our elders and partners, and what we now seek to achieve together.

This Framework is, and will remain, a living document. As new voices join the conversation and new partnerships take shape, these Calls will deepen and expand. Their purpose is to open doors for collaboration – not to close debate – and to remind all of us that the work of justice, peace, and stewardship is never finished.

We invite governments, regional organisations, businesses, churches, civil society, and communities to receive these Calls as an invitation – to listen, to dialogue, and to act with us for the flourishing of our shared Blue Pacific.



Emerging leader Nafi Ulunikorotabu speaks on disability inclusion during PAELS (2024) [Image: Micah].

1. Strengthening Regional Cooperation

The vision of the 2050 *Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent* calls us to act as one family – united by geography, history, and a shared future.

We affirm the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) as the region's central architecture for collective action and welcome Australia's stated commitment to the PIF's vision of "a resilient Pacific region of peace, harmony, security, social inclusion, and prosperity that ensures all Pacific peoples can lead free, healthy, and productive lives."

However, regionalism must deliver not only coordination but fairness – ensuring that cooperation strengthens equity, inclusion, and shared responsibility across our Blue Pacific.

True regionalism begins not in institutions but in relationships: between nations, peoples, and generations who share the same ocean home. The strength of our regional cooperation will be measured by how well it serves the wellbeing of our peoples and protects the integrity of our environment.

Across the Pacific, churches, youth, and civil society are asking that regionalism remain grounded in talanoa, accountability, and genuine partnership.

The Pacific Conference of Churches' (PCC) evaluation of the 2025 PIF Leaders' Meeting reminds us that policy must flow from dialogue, not be imposed from above. We share that vision for an inclusive and participatory Pacific community where every voice matters – from remote island communities and villages to the centres of power in Canberra and Suva alike.

As emerging leaders, we call on Australia and all PIF members to strengthen cooperation that:

- Centres people before policy, ensuring regional priorities are driven by community-defined needs.
- Upholds shared values of justice, self-determination, and stewardship across all initiatives.
- Respects diverse faith, cultural, and knowledge systems as vital to regional governance.

A stronger Blue Pacific will not come from declarations alone, but from relationships marked by humility, mutual respect, and shared responsibility.

Emerging leaders meeting with Tonga's Deputy High Commisioner, Mr Curtis Tu'ihalangingie during PAELS 2024 (Image: DFAT)

Where the Gaps Remain: Key Insights from the PCC Evaluation of PIFLM54 (2025)

The Pacific Conference of Churches' assessment of the 2025 Pacific Islands Forum Leaders' Meeting – which reflects the PCC's close relationship with the Regional Ecumenical Youth Council (REYC) and the Pacific Australia Emerging Leaders Network (PAELN) – highlights several practical gaps between the Forum's stated aspirations and its implementation mechanisms:

- **Institutionalised participation:** Civil-society, faith, and youth-led organisations are still often invited after decisions are made, not as co-creators. A permanent mechanism for dialogue – such as a PIFS–CSO Joint Working Group or youth advisory seat – remains absent.
- **Demilitarisation and deep-sea mining safeguards:** While PIFLM54 reaffirmed peace and ocean stewardship, it stopped short of adopting binding measures such as regional demilitarisation benchmarks or a moratorium on deep-sea mining. In this context, demilitarisation does not mean abolishing national defence forces but re-centring security on human and ecological wellbeing – reducing external military competition and directing resources toward peacebuilding, resilience, and climate action.
- **Disability inclusion and trauma-informed practice:** The Communiqué recognised Women, Peace and Security but did not embed cross-pillar standards for disability access, child protection, or GBV response.
- **Community-access financing:** The Pacific Resilience Facility (PRF) is a major step forward, but without a defined community-access window, many local and faith actors remain unable to deliver funds directly to frontline work.

For policymakers, the PCC's evaluation offers an important companion to official Forum outcomes – helping identify where commitments of vision still require mechanisms of delivery, and where partnership with churches and civil society can close the gap between aspiration and action.



2. Centering Indigenous and First Nations Knowledge

Indigenous knowledge must not be seen as belonging to the past but as a source of wisdom for our present challenges and shared future. Across the Pacific and Australia, First Nations and Indigenous communities have sustained creation, culture, and governance through knowledge systems refined over thousands of years.

Our Framework calls for these wisdom traditions to be recognised not only as heritage but as living sources of policy and innovation. They offer models of stewardship, restorative justice, and intergenerational governance that our region and our world urgently need.

In our *2024 Pacific We See Report* (pp. 10–13), our emerging leaders reflected on what it has meant to engage with and implement a First Nations foreign policy within our own network. We have learned that genuine partnership begins with trust – taking time to build relationships before programs. It requires creating space for First Nations leaders to shape decisions, not only advise them, and valuing their cultural wisdom as knowledge in its own right. We recognised the importance of truth-telling, and of remaining open to the discomfort and complexity that come with confronting histories of harm.



Above all, we have learned that this work is never finished: embedding First Nations perspectives demands ongoing dialogue, humility, and a willingness to listen and adapt together.

We welcome the publication of the *2025 DFAT Guidance Note: Our Development Cooperation Is Enhanced by First Nations Australians' Perspectives*. This represents a significant step toward embedding Indigenous values and expertise across Australia's foreign policy. Likewise, we affirm Pacific initiatives that restore Indigenous governance – from Fiji's Great Council of Chiefs to youth-led cultural revival projects that reconnect identity, faith, and environment.

We call on Australia and all development partners to:

- Embed Indigenous and First Nations perspectives across all regional cooperation frameworks and policy design.
- Invest in sustained knowledge exchange between Pacific and Australian Indigenous leaders, communities, and institutions.
- Support Pacific peoples and territories as they pursue locally defined pathways toward self-determination, ensuring these processes are peaceful, inclusive, and grounded in consent.
- Ensure Indigenous peoples' right to lead in decisions that affect their lands, waters, and futures.

True partnership with Indigenous peoples strengthens the moral and spiritual foundations of our region. It reminds all of us who now call the Blue Pacific home, of our shared responsibility – to care for the land, the sea, and one another.

Delegates learning about the history of First Nations Australians, PAELS (2023) [Image: Junior Peleseuma].



3. Elevating Youth Leadership

Across the Blue Pacific, young people make up the majority of our population, yet too often remain at the margins of decision-making.

The region's population is projected to grow from 12.3 million in 2020 to 19.5 million by 2050, with most under the age of 35 (SPC Statistics for Development Division, 2020). This "youth bulge" brings both promise and pressure: it can drive innovation and renewal, or – if opportunities are denied – deepen cycles of disempowerment. High youth unemployment, even among the educated, shows that economies have not kept pace with population growth. Meeting this moment requires more than economic development and jobs; it calls for belonging, mentorship, and genuine voice in shaping the region's future.

Our Pacific Australian Emerging Leaders Network (PAELN) was created to help bring that voice. Since 2022, more than 120 emerging leaders from across our region – representing Pacific Island nations, First Nations, Pacific diaspora, and the wider Australian family – have taken part in this journey. Together, we have held over 170 meetings with Australian parliamentarians and Pacific diplomats, sharing stories and solutions grounded in community experience and faith.

Earlier sections of this report highlight examples of these emerging leaders in action, demonstrating how their leadership is strengthening governance, community resilience, and regional cooperation. Many of our alumni are now leading initiatives across the region in peace and security, gender equality, inclusion, self-determination, and ecological renewal. They serve as policy advisers, NGO leaders, gender advocates, religious leaders, teachers, and private sector entrepreneurs – embodying the kind of leadership our region needs.

However, we know that opportunities for youth leadership are not evenly shared. Some young people today have unprecedented access to education, digital platforms, and leadership networks, allowing them to bring new ideas and energy into national and regional spaces. Yet too often, these same opportunities circulate among a small



Melissa Bule, Vice-Chair of the Pacific Youth Council, addresses delegates, PAELS (2023) [Image: Junior Peleseuma].

group of already-connected youth, leaving many others unseen. True transformation requires widening the circle – intentionally creating pathways for young people from rural villages, outer islands, and marginalised communities to participate, contribute, and lead.

Faith communities have long been spaces where young people discover purpose and agency. The Pacific Conference of Churches' Regional Ecumenical Youth Council (REYC) is a powerful example. Established in 2021, the REYC held its first in-person gathering in February 2025, bringing together youth leaders from 32 member churches and nine national councils of churches, alongside First Nations, diaspora, and Australian delegates from PAELN, with support through the Australian Government's Pacific Church Partnerships Program (PCPP). The gathering's theme – *Do Kamo: Embracing Your True Identity – A Journey of Authenticity* – affirmed young people's calling to live out their faith through action, stewardship, and justice.

The *REYC Gathering Outcome Statement (2025)* called for deeper intergenerational dialogue, stronger youth representation in church and regional decision-making, and urgent responses to ecological and social harm. These outcomes were endorsed by the Pacific Church Leaders' Meeting (PCLM) in March 2025, marking the first time that a delegation of youth representatives had addressed the PCLM directly. The meeting's outcome document commended REYC's contribution and affirmed their statement.

Looking ahead, the REYC is focused on establishing its structure and co-creating programs that respond to the key priorities identified by Pacific youth, ensuring meaningful participation at all levels of decision-making. The upcoming Strategic Planning Meeting in April 2026 marks a pivotal step: a time to consolidate the REYC's vision, affirm its leadership, and chart a course that honours the spiritual, cultural, and political realities of Pacific youth. The REYC's ongoing engagement with the Pacific Church Leaders' Meeting is a call to deepen intergenerational solidarity, strengthen partnerships, and ensure the REYC is equipped to sustain its mission.

At the broader regional level, coordination of youth participation is being renewed through the Pacific Youth Council (PYC). Hosted by the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC), the PYC is leading consultations to develop the *Pacific Youth Development Framework II (PYDF II): 2026–2035*, the successor to the first framework (2014–2023). This process offers a chance to revitalise National Youth Councils and reconnect them across the region.

When PAELS delegates met with officials from the Minister for Youth's office in 2024, both sides saw promise in exchanging tools for consultation, digital participation, and youth-policy design – as well as strengthening links with Australia's Office for Youth and its Youth Advisory Groups.

We also recognise the importance of ensuring that young people with disabilities are not only included but equipped and supported to lead. Since its inception, the PAELN has sought to champion young advocates with disability, working alongside the Pacific Disability Forum (PDF), CBM Australia, and Pacific organisations of persons with disabilities (OPDs). These partnerships have shown that genuine inclusion goes beyond access – it requires shared leadership, mutual learning, and advocacy grounded in lived experience. As the Australian Government shifts its focus from disability inclusion to disability equity, we are committed to deepening collaboration with the PDF, CBM, regional OPDs, and their youth representatives, ensuring that the inclusion of all Pacific young people remains central to *The Pacific We See* Framework.

Emerging leaders meeting with Mr Graham Perret MP during PAELS (2024) [Image: Micah].



The emerging landscape of youth leadership in the Pacific is not fragmented but complementary – each initiative adds its own thread to the mat. Together, they form a shared ecosystem of leadership:

- **PAELN** – connects emerging leaders from Pacific Island nations, First Nations Australians, the Pacific diaspora, and the wider Australian community, equipping them to engage confidently in civic life and regional cooperation through faith, culture, and shared purpose.
- **REYC** – anchors faith-based youth leadership across the region through the Pacific Conference of Churches, empowering young people to lead with authenticity, advocate for justice, and strengthen intergenerational dialogue within church and community life.
- **PYC** – advances youth engagement with Pacific governments and Youth Ministers through the Secretariat of the Pacific Community, coordinating regional youth policy and amplifying youth voices into the Pacific Islands Forum and the *2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent*.
- **PDF** – supports youth with disabilities and organisations of persons with disabilities (OPDs) across the Pacific disability movement to take their seat at the table, advocating for an inclusive and equitable Pacific where the human rights of all persons with disabilities are fully realised.

Together, these platforms reflect the shared strength and diversity of Pacific youth and the potential for genuine partnership between governments, churches, and civil society. They already demonstrate examples of what meaningful participation looks like when young people are trusted and supported to lead.

We therefore call for Australia, Pacific governments, and regional institutions to:

- Further institutionalise youth participation across regional, national, and faith structures, ensuring young people are co-creators in shaping policy and governance, not occasional consultees.
- Sustain long-term funding for youth-led initiatives – including PAELN, REYC, and PYC – through mechanisms such as the Pacific Church Partnerships Program and the forthcoming *Pacific Youth Development Framework II*.
- Foster intergenerational dialogue and mentorship between elders, leaders, and youth within political, church, and community life.
- Strengthen collaboration between Pacific and Australian youth councils, learning from one another's approaches to representation, consultation, and civic participation.

In addition to these priorities, there are clear opportunities to align leadership pathways across existing programs. Connecting youth initiatives such as PAELN and REYC with established opportunities under the Australia Awards and the Australia Awards Pacific Scholarships would enable emerging leaders to continue their growth through education, exchange, and practice – further strengthening long-term leadership pathways across the region.

The future of our Pacific is already being shaped by young leaders in every community. By choosing to listen, invest, and walk beside us, governments, churches, and partners can help unlock the full potential of a generation ready to serve and lead.

4. Partnering with Churches and Faith-Based Organisations as Essential Actors

In the Pacific, faith is not a separate sphere of life; it is the ground from which leadership, justice, and community flow.

Churches are among the most trusted and enduring institutions in our region. They run schools, hospitals, and disaster-response programs, and they are present in every village – often where government reach is limited.

Churches and faith-based organisations (FBOs) are vital to the social and moral fabric of the Pacific and are recognised by Pacific governments, the Pacific Islands Forum, the United Nations, and – increasingly – the Australian Government as essential actors in the region's development.

They contribute across multiple areas:

- **Community development:** Delivering education, health, and social services that strengthen local resilience.
- **Climate resilience:** Mobilising communities for adaptation, advocacy, and just energy transitions.
- **People-to-people engagement:** Strengthening cultural and spiritual ties between Australia and the Pacific – including, and especially, between First Nations peoples and Indigenous communities across our region.
- **Migrant and worker support:** Ensuring the wellbeing of Pacific workers and families across borders.
- **Policy dialogue:** Informing regional and Australian policy on development, labour mobility, gender, disability inclusion and climate.

We affirm that effective regional cooperation must recognise churches and FBOs as essential development partners, not optional stakeholders. Their networks sustain both physical and spiritual wellbeing, and their moral authority can mobilise collective action on key issues in ways few others can.

The Australian Government's Pacific Church Partnerships Program (PCPP), now in Phase 2 (2024–2027), is a strong example of this approach.

The PCPP was designed to strengthen relationships between Pacific and Australian churches, promote youth and women's leadership, and support faith-based responses to gender-based violence, climate change, and community wellbeing.

It has also fostered platforms such as the Pacific Church Partnership Advisory Network (PCPAN), our Pacific Australian Emerging Leaders Network (PAELN), and partnerships with the Pacific Conference of Churches and Pacific Communities University. Together, these



Cynthia Kotsin shares how the Church in Papua New Guinea is supporting young people to flourish, Fiji (2024) [Image: Rowena Macdonald].

initiatives are beginning to demonstrate what genuine partnership looks like in practice – collaborative, relational, and understanding of the central role of the Church in the spiritual and community life of the Pacific.

The Church Agencies Network Disaster Operations (CAN DO) consortium, through its humanitarian responses and disaster-preparedness programs, also exemplifies the capacity and credibility of faith-based partnerships. Since its establishment in 2015, with AUD $43 million in DFAT support, primarily focused on the Indo-Pacific, CAN DO has partnered with 95 local churches and community organisations across 19 countries, reaching more than 4.4 million people through 50 humanitarian and disaster-risk-reduction projects. Its work combines technical excellence with deep cultural and theological understanding, demonstrating how faith-based networks can strengthen both community resilience and spiritual wellbeing in times of crisis.

For example, after Tropical Cyclone Harold in 2020, CAN DO's partners in Tonga trained more than 65 chaplains and service providers in post-disaster psychosocial support and trauma counselling, laying the foundations for Tonga's National Disaster Recovery Chaplaincy Network (DCRN), which continues to work alongside government and service providers – including in the response to the 2022 Hunga Ha'apai volcanic eruption and tsunami.

These partnerships show how development and humanitarian responses are strengthened by faith-informed approaches that reflect the spiritual and communal realities of the Pacific.

As emerging leaders, we call for Australia and all regional partners to:

- Continue and strengthen the Pacific Church Partnerships Program beyond its current Phase 2 (2024–2027), embedding it as a long-term feature of Australia's regional cooperation.
- Engage churches and FBOs early in policy design, ensuring strategies are faith-literate, inclusive, and locally grounded.
- Invest in long-term partnership mechanisms – such as the CAN DO consortium – rather than short-term projects, recognising the reach, stability, and community trust that faith institutions bring.
- Acknowledge that faith and culture are part of the solution, drawing on their values and wisdom to strengthen governance and decision-making.

When faith communities are seen as partners in policy – not only as implementers of aid – transformation reaches deeper, endures longer, and reflects the shared values that bind our Pacific family.

5. Securing Long-Term Investment

Real transformation and deep partnership require sustained and predictable commitment. To meet our shared regional goals, we must ensure long-term investment that builds capability, not dependency.

In 2025–26, the Australian Government will deliver $5.1 billion in Official Development Assistance (ODA) – including a record $2.16 billion for the Pacific – reaffirming its position as the region's largest and most comprehensive development partner. This investment focuses on economic resilience, climate action, and health security. These priorities align closely with the vision of the PIF's *2050 Strategy* for a peaceful, inclusive, and climate-resilient region.

However, while Australia's total aid spend has grown, ODA now represents only 0.65% of the federal budget and 0.18% of GNI – the lowest shares in Australia's history. As traditional partners such as the United States withdraw funding from the region and from critical multilateral institutions including the World Health Organization and UNAIDS, maintaining Australia's leadership and reliability becomes even more vital to regional stability and public health.

Investment in climate resilience remains a key priority for our network, particularly through mechanisms such as the recently launched Pacific Resilience Facility (PRF) – a first-of-its-kind, Pacific-led, managed, and owned financing mechanism that supports adaptation, disaster preparedness, and loss-and-damage response. With Australia's $100 million foundational contribution, this model points to the future: resourcing local priorities through trust-based, regionally managed approaches.

We call for the Australian Government to:

- Sustain predictable, multi-year aid commitments that reach communities directly.
- Restore Official Development Assistance (ODA) to at least 1% of the federal budget – noting that while total aid spending has grown in dollar terms, it now represents only 0.65% of the budget and 0.18% of GNI, the lowest shares in Australia's history – ensuring that the Pacific remains a central priority.
- Align investment with the *2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent* so that funding supports regional cooperation, resilience, and equity.

High-quality, Pacific-led development is the surest way to prevent crises before they occur – and to secure a safer, more just, and sustainable region for all.

Women delegates from across the Pacific and Australia at the Regional Ecumenical Youth Council Summit, Fiji (2024) [Image: Rowena Macdonald].



The Pacific We See

Let us journey together toward a flourishing Blue Pacific





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