

PACIFIC AGREEMENT ON CLOSER ECONOMIC RELATIONS PLUS

MINISTERIAL MEETING: 13 FEBRUARY 2020

PP.MIN.001/C/FINAL

FIRST MEETING OF MINISTERS

Suva, Fiji

COMMUNIQUÉ

We, the Ministerial representatives¹ of the Signatories of the *Pacific Agreement on Closer Economic Relations Plus* (PACER Plus), convened on 13 February 2020, to discuss progress towards entry into force and implementation of the PACER Plus Agreement (the “Agreement”). Our meeting was chaired by Hon. Mark Brown, Deputy Prime Minister of the Cook Islands.

BUILDING A CLOSER ECONOMIC PARTNERSHIP FOR OUR BLUE PACIFIC CONTINENT

2. We believe in the strong potential to further deepen and enhance our ties of friendship and cooperation through a strengthened partnership that brings further economic and social benefits and improved living standards for all peoples in the Pacific Region.

3. To that end, we recall the negotiations for our *Pacific Agreement on Closer Economic Relations Plus* which were concluded on 20 April 2017. PACER Plus embodies our shared desire to foster a stable and predictable environment for trade and investment in our Blue Pacific.

4. Noting that this is our first meeting since we gathered together in Nuku’alofa to sign PACER Plus and its associated instruments on 14 June 2017, we confirm our shared desire to bring PACER Plus into force as expeditiously as possible and no later than the second half of this year.

Progress towards Entry into Force

5. The Agreement requires that no fewer than eight negotiating parties have notified the Depository in writing of the completion of their internal requirements in order for it to enter into force 60 days after the date that eighth notification is received

6. We welcome the role of the Readiness Package (AUD \$7.7 million), jointly funded by Australia and New Zealand, in assisting countries to undertake the domestic actions needed to ratify

¹ See Annex 1 for the List of Representatives



the Agreement and prepare for its entry into force. We note that, the Readiness Package has included activities such as:

- a. support for domestic outreach and engagement through the Pacific Island Forum Secretariat;
- b. support on transparency obligations including through the development of trade portals for Pacific signatories delivered by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD);
- c. support for revenue reform through the Pacific Financial Technical Advisory Committee;
- d. legislative reviews to identify gaps between current legislation and PACER Plus obligations;
- e. training and development of a manual for Customs officials on rules of origin, and customs legislative support, delivered by the Oceania Customs Organisation;
- f. transposition of PACER Plus tariff schedules and product specific rules into the most recent international Harmonised Commodity Description and Coding System (HS2017) delivered through the Oceania Customs Organisation; and
- g. engaging Trade Advisers to help manage ratification.

7. In addition to the Readiness Package, Australia and New Zealand are funding new Customs software (ASYCUDA World) for six PACER Plus signatories.

8. We note the significant effort made by countries to complete their internal requirements and that to date New Zealand, Australia, Samoa, and Kiribati have notified the Depository.

9. We are determined to secure the remaining [4] ratifications so that our Agreement can enter into force this year. In that regard, we urge those who have yet to do so, to renew their efforts to complete their processes as soon as possible. We stand ready to act as a community of nations to support each other in this endeavour.

10. We express our appreciation to the Kingdom of Tonga for their ongoing role as the Depository for our Agreement.

Future membership

11. We reconfirm our shared desire for PACER Plus to be an inclusive agreement for the Blue Pacific. Once our Agreement enters into force, it will be open to accession or association by other States, separate customs territories or self-governing entities on the basis of the acceptance of all of



the provisions of our Agreement and its Annexes and negotiation of agreed schedules of commitments.

12. We are committed to working with those negotiating parties who are not yet signatories to assist them in joining PACER Plus. We recall that our Agreement provides for accession on an expedited basis for those Forum Island Countries who participated in the negotiations but were unable to sign by the time the Agreement enters into force, following agreement on schedules of commitments.

13. In addition to the negotiating parties who have yet to sign PACER Plus, we also welcome expansion of the Agreement to other partners who share our commitment to foster a stable and predictable environment for trade and investment in our Blue Pacific.

Labour Mobility Arrangement

14. We recall that the conclusion of a Labour Mobility Arrangement was a key outcome from the PACER Plus negotiations. We welcome implementation of our Labour Mobility Arrangement and the Pacific Labour Mobility Annual Meeting (PLMAM) that has been established under the Arrangement.

15. The most recent PLMAM was held 7-9 October in Auckland.² Under the theme of *He Waka Eke Noa: A canoe we are all in together*, PACER Plus Signatories, observers, industry and civil society representatives, and relevant stakeholders came together to discuss the opportunities, challenges and actions on Pacific labour mobility.

16. We take note of and endorse the *Outcome Statement* from PLMAM 2019. We reaffirm our commitment to ensuring the PLMAM remains an open and inclusive forum for regional dialogue while preserving its benefits for the implementation of labour mobility advantages for PACER Plus members. We welcome the in-principle decision by officials to host the Labour Mobility Secretariat within the PACER Plus Implementation Unit noting that this will provide opportunities for cooperation, efficiencies and synergies.

17. We take note that Samoa will host the next PLMAM in 2020.

INCREASING THE TRADE CAPACITY AND CAPABILITY OF OUR ECONOMIES

Development and Economic Cooperation

18. A key aspect of our Agreement is its Development and Economic Cooperation Work Programme. This 5-year Work Programme will further support the sustainable development of our economies. As part of this, we will establish a PACER Plus Implementation Unit to help us implement

² The PLMAM has also been held in Brisbane (2017) and Honiara (2018). A Special PLMAM was held in Christchurch in 2016.



PACER Plus and its Development and Economic Cooperation Work Programme. We confirm that this Work Programme and its funding will be for the benefit of all Forum Island Countries who are Parties to PACER Plus irrespective of their development status.

19. We are grateful to the Advisory Committee (consisting of Australia, Kiribati, New Zealand, and Tuvalu) for their work in progressing the establishment of the Implementation Unit. Given the importance of development and economic cooperation in fulfilling the potential of PACER Plus for the Pacific, we are mindful of the need to ensure that the Implementation Unit is ready to support us without any undue delay once the Agreement enters into force.

20. We welcome the expressions of interest from Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, and Vanuatu to host the Implementation Unit. We note that the decision on which country will host the Implementation Unit will be based on merit and will be limited to those countries which have ratified the Agreement by 30 June. In addition, our decision on which organisation will deliver the Implementation Unit will be based on good procurement practice.

21. We instruct our officials to renew their efforts to ensure hosting arrangements are confirmed and the Implementation Unit established in a timely manner to support implementation of the Agreement once PACER Plus enters into force.



ANNEX 1**List of Representatives**

- (i) Hon Simon Birmingham, Minister for Trade, Tourism and Investment, Australia
- (ii) Hon Mark Brown, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Cook Islands
- (iii) H.E. David Teaabo, High Commissioner of Kiribati to Fiji
- (iv) Hon Lionel Rouwen Aingimea, President and Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Nauru
- (v) Hon David Parker, Minister for Trade and Export Growth, New Zealand
- (vi) Hon Lautafi Fio Selafi Purcell, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Labour, Samoa
- (vii) Hon Jeremiah Manele, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Solomon Islands
- (viii) Hon Samiu Vaipulu, Minister for Trade and Economic Development, Kingdom of Tonga
- (ix) Hon Minute Alapati Taupo, Minister for Fisheries and Trade, Tuvalu
- (x) Hon Ralph Regenvanu, Minister of Foreign Affairs, International Cooperation and External Trade, Vanuatu

