



PACER Plus
Joint Committee

EIGHTH MEETING OF THE PACER PLUS JOINT COMMITTEE

5-6 May, 2025

Solomon Kitano Mendana Hotel

Honiara, Solomon Islands

OUTCOMES DOCUMENT

1. The Eighth Meeting of the PACER Plus Joint Committee (PPJC.08) was convened on 5-6 May 2025 at the Solomon Kitano Mendana Hotel, Honiara, Solomon Islands. The Meeting was attended by officials from Australia, Cook Islands, Kiribati, New Zealand, Niue, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu. Also present at the Meeting were representatives of the PACER Plus Implementation Unit (PPIU). The full list of delegates is provided in [Annex 1](#).
2. The Meeting was Chaired by Ambassador Collin Beck, Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and External Trade, Government of Solomon Islands.

Opening Session

3. The Chair delivered the opening remarks and welcomed PACER Parties to Solomon Islands. The Chair reaffirmed the significance of PACER Plus and the timeliness of the meeting to proactively dialogue in a time of uncertainty in the multilateral trade environment. He reminded the Meeting that PACER Plus was envisioned as a pathway toward deepening economic integration across the Blue Pacific Continent, by creating a predictable and rules- based trade environment, and by unlocking targeted development assistance through the Development and Economic Cooperation (DEC) Work Programme. He encouraged the Meeting to take stock of the achievements to date and opportunities to further enhance the potential of PACER Plus to increase economic regional integration in the Pacific. The Chair emphasized to Parties the need to be resolute in their decision to review the past, reimagine PACER Plus and how to position the Agreement to deliver better outcomes and meaningful impact in its next phase.

4. In his introductory remarks, Mr Roy Lagolago, the Head of the PPIU expressed the Secretariat and Parties' appreciation to the Government of Solomon Islands for hosting the meeting. He also expressed gratitude to the Joint Committee (JC) for providing the strategic direction required to progress the implementation of the Development and Economic Cooperation (DEC) Work Programme over the last four years. The Head of PPIU reiterated the PPIU's commitment to continue serving Parties in the implementation of their commitments under the Agreement and work towards delivering tangible outcomes for their respective economies and communities.
5. The Meeting expressed their gratitude to the Government of Solomon Islands for their excellent hosting of the meeting.

Adoption of Agenda

6. The Meeting adopted the agenda as presented, attached as Annex 2.

Report of the Head of the PPIU on the DEC Work Programme implementation

7. The Head of the PPIU provided the Meeting with a reflection on the DEC Work Programme over the past four years. The Report highlighted key activities, outputs, impact and outreach under the PACER Plus Trade in Goods, Trade in Services and Investment, and Labour Mobility components from 2021 to 2025.
8. In response to the verbal reflection by the Head of PPIU, the Meeting noted that:
 - i. Implementation, particularly in the first two years, was significantly challenged by the onset of COVID and natural disasters, and the impact of these events continue to hamper socio-economic development across the region.
 - ii. Changes in the geo-political environment continue to be a challenge at the national, regional and multilateral levels, requiring agility and responsiveness in the operations of the PPIU and the implementation of members' priority activities.
 - iii. After four years of the DEC implementation, PACER Plus is now an integral part of the regional trade architecture. It has added value to existing regional and national trade frameworks through targeted regulatory reforms, capacity building and support to the private sector.
 - iv. Going forward to 2025-2030, enhancing the impact of the PACER Plus continues to be the priority focus of the PPIU, as informed and led by PACER Plus Parties.
 - v. Accession of new Pacific Islands Forum Members is a continued priority and to be managed alongside delivery of existing Members priorities under the DEC Work Programme.

9. In addition, the Meeting further:
 - i. Requested that the Report of the Head of PPIU be made in writing for future meetings of the Joint Committee.
 - ii. Acknowledged the integral role of the PACER Plus in the regional trade landscape and architecture and urged the PPIU to continue to effectively participate in the current review of the regional trade architecture by the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS).
 - iii. Reiterated the shared expected outcome of increasing exports of goods and services and labour mobility opportunities, and the need for the PPIU to closely work with Parties to address constraints including to market access and addressing supply side challenges.
 - iv. Reaffirmed the critical role of PACER Plus in strengthening a rules-based trading system in the Pacific, and the need for Parties to effectively consider how to leverage the Agreement to address increased uncertainties and volatility in the current trade environment particularly at the multilateral level.
10. The Joint Committee:
 - i. Noted the verbal reflection of the Head of the PPIU on the DEC Work Programme implementation; and
 - ii. Directed the Head of the PPIU to provide a written report in subsequent JC meetings.

Report on the implementation of the Development and Economic Cooperation Work Programme

11. The meeting considered the Reports of the PACER Plus Subsidiary Bodies - Committee on Trade in Goods, Rules of Origin and Customs Procedures, Committee on Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS), Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT), Committee on Services, Movement of Natural Persons and Investment (SMNPI), and Labour Mobility Working Group (LMWG). The Subsidiary Committees met in March 2025 and considered the status of implementation of the FY24/25 Annual Plan, progress towards implementation of PACER Plus obligations and the strategic priorities for the next DEC Work Programme 2025-2030.
12. During the discussions, the Meeting:
 - i. Commended the work of the Subsidiary Committees in supporting the implementation of PACER Plus commitments, providing broader economic and trade related updates, and facilitating information and knowledge sharing amongst Parties.
 - ii. Highlighted the Parties' capacity constraints that have an impact on the implementation of their obligations as well as participation in Subsidiary Committee meetings. Capacity building therefore remains a top priority for Parties including targeted training and support for contact points and private sector. The role of National Coordinators continues to be an integral capacity for support for Parties and should be considered in the next iteration of the DEC Work Programme.

- iii. Noted the need to ensure consistency and observation of approval processes of the governance structure.
 - iv. Acknowledged the growing influence of labour mobility in the regional economic context, and the significance of the PACER Plus Arrangement on Labour Mobility (ALM) in the regional trade and development architecture. There is a need to ensure that future PLMAM events remain sustainable and fit for purpose, and the scale, design and frequency of the PLMAM should be considered in the context of the new ALM.
 - v. Supported the proposed prioritization of trade data to monitor progress towards the objectives of the PACER Plus and to inform decision making at the national and regional levels.
13. The Meeting further highlighted the importance of coordination between the PPIU and the PIFS. It commended the progress made to date culminating in the recent endorsement of PPIU's Observer status by the 2025 Forum Trade Officials Meeting. Parties were encouraged to continue to support the subsequent proposal for approval by the 2025 Forum Trade Ministers Meeting.
14. **The Joint Committee** considered and noted the reports of the PACER Plus Subsidiary Bodies as follows:
- i. Report of the Committee on Trade in Goods, Rules of Origin and Customs Procedures;
 - ii. Report of the Committee on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures and Technical Barriers to Trade;
 - iii. Report of Committee on Services, Movement of Natural Persons and Investment; and
 - iv. Report of the PACER Plus Labour Mobility Working Group.

Report of the Eleventh Budget Committee Meeting

15. The Meeting considered the brief Report of the eleventh meeting of the PACER Plus Budget Committee (PPBC), which was convened virtually on 16 April 2025. The report was presented by the Chair of the PPBC, Mr, Joe Pakoa, Director for External Trade, Vanuatu Ministry of Foreign Affairs, International Cooperation and External Trade.
16. The Meeting noted the substantive items discussed during the PPBC which included the: Progress Report on Annual Plan FY24-25, FY24-25 Financial Report to date, External Audit Report FY23-24, PACER Plus Implementation Unit Internal Audit, Updated PPIU Risk Register to March 2025, Corporate Review Progress, Monitoring, Evaluation, Learning and Adaptation (MELA) Update, Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion (GEDSI), PPIU Operations Manual, Revised Budget for FY2024-2025 Annual Plan and Proposed High-level Strategic Priorities for Post-2025.
17. The Meeting acknowledged the work of the Budget Committee and noted the Budget Committee's request for further time to consider the PPIU Operations Manual version 6.0 and Corporate Review, and for these to be presented to the JC for consideration.

18. During the discussions, the Meeting:

- i. Recognized the various reviews and assessments of the PPIU and their value in identifying areas for improvement. To optimize this value, the PPIU was encouraged to strategically consolidate and take stock of recommended reforms, and for the Joint Committee to support the effective integration of these outcomes in the revamp of the PPIU organizational structure and operations.
- ii. Commended and encouraged ongoing commitment by the PPIU to financial accountability and transparency.
- iii. Noted the Corrective Action Plan for the PPIU Internal Audit. In this regard, advised the PPIU to assess the practicality of all recommendations while maintaining a flexible approach, for example, travel per diems and taking into account further risks that may arise from implementing the recommendations.
- iv. Recognized the importance of the PACER Plus Monitoring, Evaluation, Learning and Adaptation (MELA) framework and the need to strengthen the implementation capacity of the PPIU.

19. **The Joint Committee:**

- i. Approved the Outcomes of 11th Meeting of the Budget Committee.

External Audit Report FY23-24

- ii. Considered the discussions and decisions of the Budget Committee on 16 April 2025 on the PPIU Annual Audit Report and Financial Statements for the fiscal year ended 30 June 2024.
- iii. Approved the PPIU Annual Audit Report and Financial Statements for the fiscal year ended 30 June 2024.

PACER Plus Implementation Unit Internal Audit

- iv. Considered the discussions and decisions of the 11th Budget Committee Meeting on 16 April on the Internal Audit Report.
- v. Noted the Corrective Action Plan for the PPIU Internal Audit.

Corporate Review Progress

- vi. Noted the draft Report on the Independent Corporate Review of the PACER Plus Implementation Unit.
- vii. Noted the recommendations provided in the report.

Monitoring, Evaluation, Learning and Adaptation (MELA)

- viii. Noted the need for 'internal' MELA support to be adopted in future iterations of the PPIU organisational structure.
- ix. Noted the planned approach for strategic engagement of the private sector, including establishment of priority criteria for SME support under the DEC Work Programme, and

expanded communications programming targeting private sector platforms and collaboration with regional partners.

- x. Noted the more comprehensive approach to capacity building activities, including roll out (and adequate resourcing) of the LMS and more robust activity design and planning procedures. These will be accompanied with greater information sharing and support for future interventions amongst Parties.

Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion (GEDSI)

- xi. Noted the Concept Note for upcoming Inclusive Trade Roadmap.
- xii. Noted the GEDSI Data Quality Assessment and resourcing requirements for PPIU.
- xiii. Noted the current findings from GEDSI-related output level data, and future reporting on technical assistance findings relevant to inclusive outputs of the DEC Work Programme.

PPIU Operations Manual

- xiv. Considered the discussions and decisions of the 11th Budget Committee Meeting on 16 April 2025 on the Revised Operations Manual.
- xv. Noted that the Budget Committee's consideration of the Operations Manual has been extended, and approval of the draft is pending.
- xvi. Agreed to consider and approve the Operational Manual version 6.0 out of session.

Revised FY24-25 Annual Plan and Budget

- 20. The PPIU presented the Revised Budget for FY2024-2025, which was revised downward from the Approved Budget of AUD 12.9million to AUD 11.8million. As per the directions of the 7th meeting of the PACER Plus Budget Committee, the PPIU undertook a review of activities, in consultation with Parties, to eliminate the reported budget deficit of AUD \$1.28million. The Revised FY24-25 Budget of \$A11.8M accounts for \$A2.4M (20%) for PPIU Personnel Costs, \$A0.4M (4%) for Operational Costs, and \$A9.2M (76%) for Activities.
- 21. In their discussions, the Meeting:
 - i. Emphasized the extensive volume of work pending implementation before December 2025 and the need for closer coordination between Parties, the PPIU and Donor Parties to ensure implementation and that allocated funding is fully utilized.
 - ii. Noted the opportunity for reallocation of budget from activities that may not be implemented by December 2025.
 - iii. Called for PPIU to undertake closer consultations with individual Parties before engaging regional partners on the design of national activities which affect Parties.
 - iv. Noted the clarification provided by the PPIU that the initial PLMAM Budget of AUD300K was reduced by JC Decision to AUD200K. Under the Revised Budget, this was increased

- to AUD 300K and derived from savings from other Labour Mobility activities implemented to date.
- v. Noted the need to avail adequate time for the Budget Committee to review detailed financial documents and make informed decisions.
22. **The Joint Committee** considered and approved the Revised Budget for FY 2024-2025.

Renewal of the IA for the DEC for PACER Plus

23. The Meeting noted the decision of PACER Plus Ministers at their meeting in November 2024 mandating the formulation of high-level strategic priorities for the next DEC Work Programme cycle as provided in Annex 3. These strategic priorities were endorsed by Subsidiary Bodies after considering gaps and opportunities arising from the implementation of the current DEC Work Programme.
24. In their discussion, the Meeting:
- i. Requested that greater emphasis is placed on export development, the strengthening of value chains, reduction of shipping and trade logistics costs, and targeted skills development.
 - ii. Underscored the importance of targeted private sector support and the need for these to be integrated into the high-level strategic priorities for Trade in Goods, SPS and TBT.
 - iii. Recognized the significance of digital trade as a potential economic driver for the Pacific warranting its prioritization in the high-level strategic priorities for Trade in Services.
 - iv. Emphasised the need for strategic priorities to be aligned to quantifiable targets for 2030 within the MELA Framework with clear baseline data, and for future activities to be practical, measurable, and designed to deliver sustainable outcomes that support Parties' trade aspirations.
 - v. Reiterated the need for ongoing consultations to strategically align national trade policy frameworks to the PACER Plus high-level strategic priorities.
 - vi. Reiterated PACER Plus as a key mechanism for regional economic integration in line with the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent. Increasing the membership of PACER Plus is a key strategic priority where Parties will continue to advocate and encourage new members.
 - vii. Acknowledged the varying absorptive capacities of Parties and the value of National Coordinators to support the Trade Departments of Parties.

25. **The Joint Committee:**

- i. Considered the proposed the PACER Plus high-level Strategic Priorities that were discussed and approved by the Subsidiary Bodies and the Budget Committee as provided in Annex 3.
- ii. Approved the proposed PACER Plus high-level Strategic Priorities with inputs from Parties.
- iii. Approved the Revised Action Plan for Renewal of the Implementing Arrangement for DEC under PACER Plus.

Donor Update on Post-2025 DEC Work Programme (Australia and New Zealand)

26. The Meeting noted an update from the donors, Australia and New Zealand, regarding the 2025-2030 support to the next PACER Plus Development and Economic Cooperation Work Programme. In their updates, Australia and New Zealand expressed their strong commitment and in-principle support for PACER Plus 2025-2030. Funding support however, is subject to the completion of internal processes by both governments before a formal announcement of their financial commitment for PACER Plus 2025-2030.

27. In their discussion, the Meeting:

- i. Expressed their gratitude to the governments of Australia and New Zealand for the current funding under the PACER Plus DEC Work Programme and their expressed support for PACER Plus 2025—2030.
- ii. Noted the presentation given by Mr David Swete Kelly (Team Leader), Sustineo regarding the independent review of Australia's PACER Plus investment. This review will inform the design process required by the Australian government to determine their funding support for PACER Plus 2025-2030.
- iii. Requested that funding support for PACER Plus 2025-2030 should be at a level that can effectively transform the trade landscape, increase Parties' gains from trade and increase economic integration.
- iv. Recognized the commitment by Principal Donors to consider additional funding that supports the accession of new Forum Island Countries into PACER Plus and their inclusion in the DEC Work Programme.
- v. Noted the opportunity for improved coordination with other Aid-For-Trade initiatives.
- vi. Encouraged consideration of separate funding support for the ALM as directed by PACER Plus Ministers.
- vii. Noted the underspend of existing funding poses a potential risk to the level of future funding support for PACER Plus as donor governments would be assessing the return on investment against the current DEC Work Programme.

28. The Joint Committee:

- i. Noted Australia and New Zealand's in-principle support for PACER Plus 2025-2030.
- ii. Noted the update provided by Australia and New Zealand in relation to funding support for PACER Plus 2025-2030.
- iii. Agreed to continue engaging in the processes undertaken by Australia and New Zealand regarding funding support for PACER Plus 2025-2030.
- iv. Noted the commitment by Parties to utilise the remaining funds in line with the approved Revised Budget FY2024-2025 and continue to mitigate any inherent risks.

Ninth Joint Committee Meeting

29. The Meeting noted that the next Joint Committee meeting will be dependent on the advice of the Principal Donors confirmation of funding under the Action Plan for the Renewal of the Implementing Arrangement for DEC under PACER Plus, and is tentatively scheduled for October 2025.
30. The Meeting noted Solomon Islands ongoing commitment to the role of JC Chair and that the PPIU will advise on the date and venue of the next Joint Committee meeting in due course.

Any Other Business

31. The Meeting noted the update by New Zealand on the completion of the Performance Review of the Head of the PPIU for FY2023-2024. The Meeting further noted that the membership of the sub-committee for FY2024-2025 would comprise of the former Chair of the JC (Samoa), current Chair of the JC (Solomon Islands) and principal donors (Australia and New Zealand), with the opportunity for other Parties to join as per the Policy for the Evaluation of the Performance of the Head of the PPIU.
32. The Meeting adopted the following statement:
 - i. At this time of increasing economic turbulence and significant challenges to the rules-based trading order, Parties to PACER Plus reaffirm the central and indispensable role of the World Trade Organisation at the core of the rules-based trading system, which has provided the foundations on which PACER Plus sits.
 - ii. We affirm our commitment to a transparent, non-discriminatory, and open rules-based multilateral trading system which provides certainty and predictability for businesses, builds trust and confidence among consumers, and underpins the growth of international trade and development.

- iii. In the face of mounting challenges, including disruptions in global supply chains, rising protectionism and climate change, our collective commitment to these principles and the maintenance of trade openness is more crucial than ever.
- iv. We also reaffirm our commitment to provide special and differential treatment, appropriately tailored to individual need, to Small Island Developing States particularly those whose food security and livelihood are most at risk from these escalating challenges. We also recognize that targeted and flexible support is essential to ensure their full and effective participation in the global trading system.

Closing Session

- 33. The Chair thanked the delegations for the frank and constructive discussions over the two days that have shaped the Outcomes that Parties have adopted. The Chair encouraged the Parties to commit to implementing the remaining activities under the current DEC Work Programme and actively participate in shaping the next DEC ensuring that it is more strategic, impactful and attune to the needs of Parties.
 - 34. The Meeting thanked the Chair for leadership and guidance of the Meeting and expressed their gratitude to the Government of Solomon Islands and the staff of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and External Trade for their excellent hosting of the meeting.
-