

Pacific Islands Forum is coming to Cairns

Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd will chair this year's Pacific Islands Forum leaders' meeting in Cairns, Queensland from 4–7 August, as Lucy Horodny reports.

This is the first time since 1994 that Australia has hosted the annual meeting of Pacific leaders, which rotates to a different member country each year.

Up until 1 May 2009 the Forum comprised 16 independent and self-governing Pacific states: Australia, the Cook Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, the Marshall Islands, Nauru, New Zealand, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, the Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu. On 1 May 2009 Fiji's membership was suspended because its military government did not meet a Forum deadline to set a date for democratic elections this year.

Pacific Partnerships for Development

Australia's interests lie in a stable, prosperous and growing Pacific neighbourhood.

Since Prime Minister Rudd's signing of the Port Moresby Declaration in March 2008 Australia has strengthened its engagement with Pacific island nations through a number of Pacific Partnerships for Development.

These provide a framework for Australia and Pacific island nations to commit jointly to shared development goals, including economic growth and more rapid progress towards the Millennium Development Goals.

The Pacific Partnerships for Development are a core component of Australia's development assistance program to the Pacific, which in 2008–09 was almost \$1 billion.

They pay special attention to improving economic infrastructure, enhancing private sector development and achieving better outcomes in health and education.

To date, partnerships have been signed with Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, Kiribati and Samoa.

History of the Pacific Islands Forum

The Pacific Islands Forum was established as part of the program of decolonisation in the Pacific. In 1947, the six colonial governments in the South Pacific established the South Pacific Commission, which discussed developmental—but not political—matters.

From the mid-1960s, Ratu Mara, the head of Fiji's colonial legislature, agitated for a mechanism for island countries to address common issues from a regional perspective and to give their collective views greater weight in the international community. Australia was sympathetic to this idea and, along with the Cook Islands, Fiji, Nauru, New Zealand, Samoa and Tonga, established the South Pacific Forum, which first met in Wellington, New Zealand in 1971. The organisation's name was changed in 2000 to the Pacific Islands Forum to better represent its membership, which now includes states from both the southern and northern Pacific.

Aside from political matters, Forum meetings have focused heavily on regional trade and economic issues. More recently, good governance and security have become part of the Forum's agenda.

by Roger Wheatley

AusAID, Port Moresby

The Australian Government is encouraging economic growth in the Asia–Pacific region through the Enterprise Challenge Fund.

Two businesses in Papua New Guinea (PNG), Port Moresby-based Paradise Spices Ltd and Lae-based Mainland Holdings Ltd, have been awarded funding from the Enterprise Challenge Fund (ECF).

Paradise Spices—\$170,000

Paradise Spices is a family run company that has been involved in the agriculture sector in PNG since 1987 and exporting vanilla beans for 10 years. The company's Managing Director, Micky Puritau, said the \$170,000 funding it receives will enable Paradise Spices to establish a solvent extraction facility at its Port Moresby site to produce pure vanilla extract, vanilla oleoresin (a naturally occurring mixture of resin and essential oil) and other spices.

He said the facility would be the first of its kind in PNG and that it would create a larger and more reliable market for the farmers.

Part of the plan for the project is to gain international quality standard certification. Once achieved, it is expected that this will lead to greater export opportunities.

Mainland Holdings—\$453,745

Mainland Holdings is a well established national agribusiness company in PNG with 37 years of experience working with smallholder farmers.

Mainland will use the \$453,745 funding it receives to establish a processing plant to convert fresh