



New Zealand, Latin America, and the Blue Pacific

Final Report

1 July 2024



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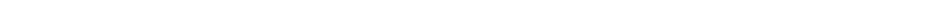
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Cover image: Majuro, Marshall Islands, by John Capper



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Preface

This report has been prepared for the Latin America Centre of Asia-Pacific Excellence by John Capper and Mei Lin Harley from MartinJenkins (Martin, Jenkins & Associates Ltd).

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We are recognised as experts in the business of government. We have worked for a wide range of public-sector organisations from both central and local government, and we also advise business and non-profit clients on engaging with government.

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Established in 1993, we are a privately owned New Zealand limited liability company, with offices in Wellington and Auckland. Our firm is governed by a Board made up of Partners and Independent Directors. Our Independent Directors are Sophia Gunn and Chair David Prentice. Our Partners are Sarah Baddeley, Nick Carlaw, Allana Coulon, Nick Davis, Michael Mills and Richard Tait.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Blue Pacific is a strategic and increasingly contested region

The Pacific Ocean is a vast area containing a multitude of island countries and territories, peoples, cultures and languages, and resources. In recent years a growing number of external actors have been engaging with the Pacific region to pursue a range of economic and security interests. The Pacific is becoming more complex and contested.

...seeking new approaches to managing the growing interest

On their own, the island countries in the Pacific have limited capacity to manage the growing interest in the region.

In response, they have articulated the concept of "the Blue Pacific". The Pacific is becoming more intentional, and working more as a collective, in how, and towards whom, it directs its effort.

New Zealand has significant national interests in the security, stability, and wellbeing of the Pacific

Aotearoa New Zealand is in and of the Pacific. With a Pasifika population in New Zealand of over 380,000 people, the country has national interests in the security, stability, and wellbeing of the region. New Zealand and the Pacific nations address a range of these shared interests through established forums and other mechanisms.

New Zealand has a long history of partnering with the Pacific Island nations, providing significant funding to Pacific government agencies, regional agencies, and NGOs.

Latin American interest in the Pacific Island countries has been limited and episodic to date

To date, Latin American engagement with Pacific Island countries has been limited and focused on a few specific areas (such as fisheries management). However, given the growing global interest in the region and its resources, there are opportunities and benefits to increasing Latin American engagement in this region.



There are shared interests, and places where these opportunities can be discussed

There are a range of shared interests that could see increased Latin American interest and engagement in the region, including in peace and security, and ocean and environment issues, with a focus on fisheries. Latin America also has some important cultural connections in Polynesia.

There are existing mechanisms where engagement on these issues can and does occur. Those Latin American countries that are already engaging in the region channel their interactions mainly through these. Given the wide regional buy-in and adherence to these mechanisms, any future engagement should follow the same approach of using them.

It is in New Zealand's interests to engage with Latin America on the Blue Pacific for a range of reasons

New Zealand has an opportunity to shape how Latin America thinks about and engages with the Pacific in a way that is aligned with New Zealand's shared interests in the region and also bolsters and adds value to New Zealand's existing relationships with Latin American countries. This means working through established mechanisms in ways that align with the Pacific's development aspirations, and that do not add to the growing geopolitical challenges the region is experiencing.

Latin American countries see New Zealand as having good understanding and relationships with the Pacific. Playing to this strength bolsters New Zealand's value proposition as a partner to Latin American countries.

New Zealand can help Latin American countries engage more effectively with the Blue Pacific

Using that value proposition, New Zealand can work with Latin American countries to help shape and align their engagement with regional norms in the Pacific, ensuring scarce Pacific official bandwidth is not taken up with misaligned approaches.

This also would ensure that Latin American countries are more likely to engage meaningfully with the region on the issues of shared interest, and are seen as credible in the region.

There are different ways that New Zealand can assist in Latin American engagement with Pacific countries

There are a range of ways New Zealand can leverage its reputation as having a deep understanding of the Pacific alongside its relationships in Latin America to protect its, and the Pacific's, interests, including official bilateral and multilateral networks, people-to-people links, and institutional connections.



INTRODUCTION

Scope and approach

This report examines opportunities and likely benefits for greater collaboration between New Zealand, Latin America, and the island countries and territories of the Blue Pacific

The aim of this report, commissioned by the Latin America Centre of Asia-Pacific Excellence (CAPE), is to examine the potential for New Zealand, Latin America, and the nations of the Pacific to collaborate on issues of shared interest, including examining the benefits that could result and the possible mechanisms for this collaboration. The CAPE has commissioned the research to:

- provide insights into areas and sectors with the highest potential for collaboration
- explore economic, geopolitical, and socio-cultural factors that drive collaboration
- examine barriers to collaborative efforts
- identify the potential benefits that collaboration may deliver, and
- identify incentives that may be needed to foster collaboration.

This report is one of a series focussing on collaboration between New Zealand and Latin American countries

This report is one of a series of papers commissioned by the CAPE in the past several months to delve into the various connections and potential for greater collaboration between New Zealand and the countries of Latin America, and should be read as a part of this wider project. The other papers are:

- MartinJenkins' 2024 report "Trans-Tasman collaboration to build ties with Latin America"
- Allen and Clarke's 2024 report "Potential for Latin American contributions to New Zealand's economic resilience and sustainability: supply chain and clean energy opportunities"
- NZIER's 2024 report "Latin America: Lifting our sights—encouraging cooperation in an age of uncertainty", and
- Sense Partners' 2022 report "New Zealand and Latin America: Update on the trade relationship, barriers, and opportunities with Latin America".

All the reports can be accessed at <https://cape.org.nz/resources/latin-america/>



The report puts the Blue Pacific region's interests and challenges at the centre

As with the other papers recently commissioned by CAPE, the intention of this work is to consider the topic from the point of view of New Zealand's interests, which in the Pacific region are significant and varied, and meaningful for both foreign policy and domestic policy. However, this report deviates from this approach by placing at its centre, the Pacific region's key interests and challenges as defined in the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent endorsed by the Pacific Island Forum in 2022. Many of these interests and challenges are shared by New Zealand.

The New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade Strategic Direction, Pacific goal, takes a similar approach:

- Promote a peaceful, prosperous and resilient Pacific in which Aotearoa New Zealand's interests and influence are safeguarded.¹

The goal begins by placing the interests and wellbeing of the Pacific first which is then followed by a more standard statement of diplomatic tradecraft. This approach underlines that New Zealand seeks to use its influence to advance a peaceful, prosperous, and resilient Pacific, because that is in New Zealand's own interests.

A strategic, long-term approach to collaborating with Latin America offers New Zealand significant opportunities

In the case of Latin America, New Zealand's interests are not nearly as broad, but as is argued in other papers in this series, New Zealand's relationships with Latin America offer significant opportunities for New Zealand if approached strategically and with the long term in mind.

The existing engagement between Latin American countries and the nations of the Pacific is thin and episodic at best, including those Latin American countries with a Pacific coastline. Basing the report on an assessment of the Pacific and New Zealand's shared interests leads to a consideration of what value proposition New Zealand's deep experience in the Pacific region offers to its Latin American partners.

The report asks whether there is scope to leverage this Pacific knowledge to a greater extent in New Zealand's relationships in Latin America to add a further strand to its engagement with countries in the continent.

This report considers opportunities for collaboration from the perspective of the Pacific region's agreed priorities

In the case of the Pacific, which contains a range of island countries with varying interests in and views on regional and international issues, the approach in this paper is to examine the

1 Our strategic direction | New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (mfat.govt.nz).



question of beneficial collaboration through the lens of regionally agreed and articulated priorities.

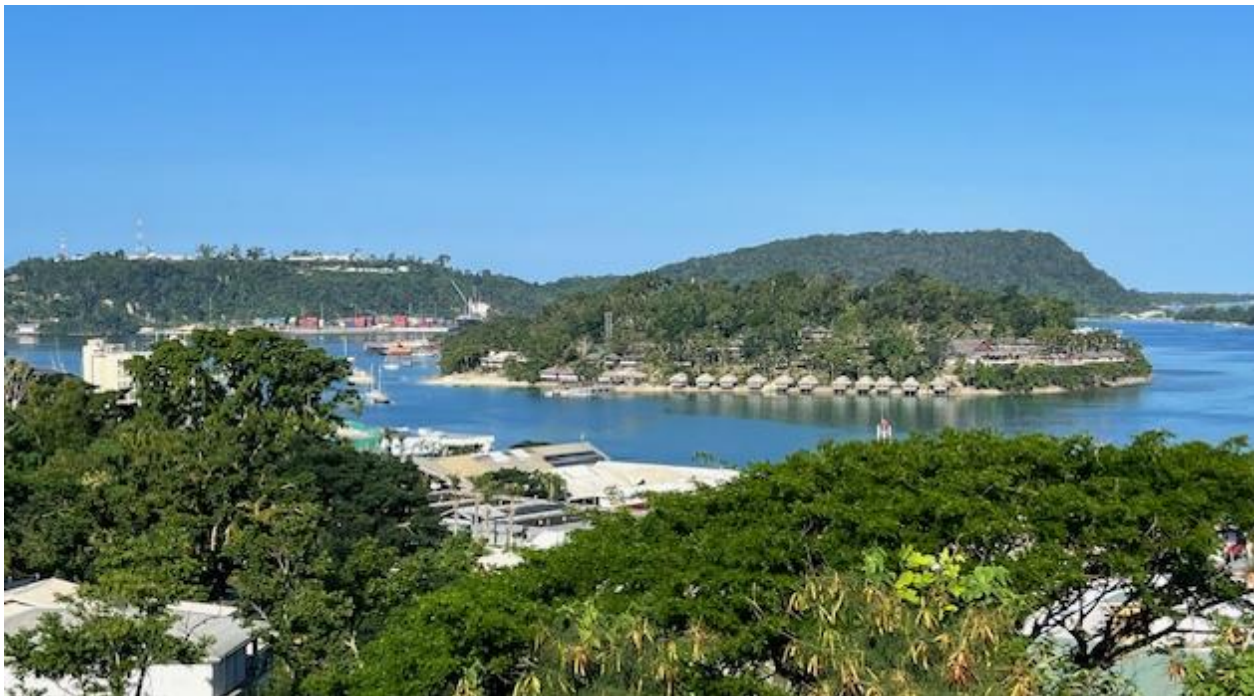
In order to understand whether New Zealand has an opportunity to shape how Latin American nations engage with the Pacific region, and what the benefits might be, the approach is to:

- put the Pacific in the centre by first of all understanding what the Pacific is, and what its unique context and interests are
- seek to understand the interests of the three parties – New Zealand, Latin America and the Pacific –and where they align
- capture the various forums and mechanisms that exist for collaboration to occur
- consider whether the current limited and sporadic Latin American engagement in the Pacific may increase over time due to those interests growing or changing in importance
- consider the benefits of closer collaboration and understanding among New Zealand, Latin America and the Pacific on a specific set of issues of shared interest, and
- examine how New Zealand might seek to influence and engage Latin American countries' approaches toward the Pacific.

Expert input has been important in developing this report

This report has been drafted with the greatly appreciated input of a small group of New Zealand, Pacific and Latin American experts who provided their time and perspectives. A list of those interviewed is included as an appendix.

Image 1. Port Vila, Vanuatu by John Capper



The central questions to be answered

CAPE intends these papers to provide useful insights for government, business, and other organisations in making decisions on the resources New Zealand Inc directs to its relationships with Latin America.

Central questions to be answered:

- 1 What are the benefits for New Zealand, Latin America, and the Pacific Islands from closer collaboration on issues of shared interest?
- 2 How can New Zealand shape how Latin American countries engage with the Pacific Islands in a way that both aligns with New Zealand's interests and also benefits the Pacific?

Image 2. Tokoriki Island, Fiji by Gary Runn via Unsplash



THE BLUE PACIFIC: A STRATEGIC AND COMPLEX REGION

1. The issues affecting the Pacific region, mirroring trends across the globe, are becoming more complex and contested.
2. In response, Pacific Island countries are working to coordinate their efforts to address challenges, and those of their partners, through the creation of the 2050 Blue Pacific Strategy.
3. Three areas of the Strategy require cooperation and input from external partners: peace and security; climate change and disasters; and oceans and environment.
4. For the Pacific Islands, a greater range of partners can mean more opportunity, but engaging meaningfully with them takes bandwidth the region does not have.

A complex and increasingly contested island region

The Pacific is an ocean, a region, and an identity with the term used interchangeably. A passenger on a trans-Pacific flight between the Americas and New Zealand will see on their flight map a vast expanse of blue, and may imagine an empty ocean dotted with small, paradisaical islands. Indeed, the explorer Ferdinand Magellan named the ocean the Mare Pacificum, or "peaceful sea", in the 1500s. For many who do not know either the ocean or the region, this is the impression that comes to mind: a benign and empty ocean separating New Zealand, Australia, Asia, and the Americas.

The reality is a long way from that impression. The ocean may be at times peaceful but sometimes too it is a force of violent destruction due to the many weather systems and seismic fault lines that cross it. Politically, the Pacific is a complex region that has over recent years become a more contested place.

The Pacific as a geographic region includes those countries on the eastern rim of the ocean in Latin America.

Figure 1. Pacific Ocean



Source: Free World Maps
<https://www.freeworldmaps.net/ocean/pacific/>



This report focuses on the Blue Pacific which are the island nations

The Blue Pacific identity is very much one associated with those that live in or are from the island nations and territories of the region. The term "Blue Pacific" is based on the idea that the Pacific Ocean and its many island nations and territories are a single and interconnected entity united by shared challenges and opportunities. The Blue Pacific Strategy (described below) crystallises this concept.

The three subregions of the Pacific—Melanesia, Polynesia, and Micronesia—contain a wide array of nations and territories with vastly different geographies, cultures, identities, languages, histories, and systems of governance. The region's largest country (excluding Australia and New Zealand), Papua New Guinea, has a population over 9 million speaking over 800 languages, inhabiting half of the mountainous island of New Guinea and numerous offshore islands, while Niue on the other hand has a population of less than 2000 on a raised coral atoll of 260 square kilometres. The region contains independent nations, countries in free association with larger powers, and territories administered by metropolitan powers.

Geographically, linguistically, politically, and culturally, the Pacific may well be the most varied region on Earth.

Figure 2. The Blue Pacific—from the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent



What is the "Blue Pacific" concept and what does it mean for the Pacific?

The concept refers to the Pacific as a "blue continent"—the view that the Pacific Island countries and territories are not just a collection of small individual states, but a region that is connected and united by shared interests and a shared dependence on the Pacific Ocean.²

This Blue Pacific identity was first used by the Pacific Islands Forum leaders at its meeting in Samoa in 2017. In 2022 the Pacific Forum Leaders endorsed the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent³, followed by the endorsement of the Implementation Plan in 2023⁴. This Strategy refers to the region as large oceanic countries and territories that are custodians of nearly 20% of the Earth's surface. This is a region of global strategic significance, with increasing geopolitical competition, and interest in the region's ecological and natural resources (also referred to as the "Blue Economy"⁵).

"Oceania is us. We are the sea. We are the ocean. We should not be defined by the smallness of our islands, but the greatness of our oceans." —*Epeli Hau'ofa*

How the region is working together to advance the Blue Pacific strategy

The concept of the Blue Pacific Continent is based on the principle of Pacific regionalism. The Pacific Island countries and territories have a long history of working together for shared stewardship of the Pacific Ocean and strengthening collective resilience to shared challenges including climate change, and peace and security.

The 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent sets out the region's long-term approach to working together as a region, and as countries and territories, communities, and people of the Pacific. It frames their regional cooperation and broader action around seven key thematic areas which are designed and developed to support the achievement of their vision.

Key to the successful implementation of this strategy is regional, multilateral, and global agencies and development partners working together effectively in their support to the Pacific Island countries and territories. The term 'regional architecture' refers to how these agencies are organised and work together. At the apex of this architecture is the Pacific Islands Forum. Given the level of interest and engagement by many partners in this region, there is an ongoing and increasing challenge in fragmentation and duplication of effort and investment across the region.

The Pacific Islands Forum leaders have launched a Review of Regional Architecture to improve alignment, coherence, and coordination among these agencies. This will improve the effectiveness and efficiency of their contributions to outcomes and goals set out in the 2050 Strategy.

What it means for other countries seeking to engage the Pacific

At the 50th Pacific Islands Forum Meeting in Tuvalu in 2019, Forum Leaders endorsed the Blue Pacific Principles to guide Pacific Islands Forum Dialogue and Engagement, including with Dialogue Partners.

The current Review of Regional Architecture will also look at how the Pacific Island Forum interacts with international partners and stakeholders to progress regionalism. The aim is to achieve a strengthened and coordinated approach to partnerships at the political, sectoral

² <https://www.pln.com.au/single-post/what-is-the-blue-pacific-and-why-is-it-important>.

³ <https://forumsec.org/sites/default/files/2023-11/PIFS-2050-Strategy-Blue-Pacific-Continent-WEB-5Aug2022-1.pdf>.

⁴ https://forumsec.org/sites/default/files/2024-03/2050-Strategy-Implementation-Plan_2023-2030.pdf.

⁵ <https://forumsec.org/sites/default/files/2023-11/PIFS-2050-Strategy-Blue-Pacific-Continent-WEB-5Aug2022-1.pdf>.

⁶ <https://www.pln.com.au/single-post/what-is-the-blue-pacific-and-why-is-it-important>.



and programmatic level. This includes assessing existing and future partnerships in terms of level of meaningful contribution to the goals and outcomes set out in the 2050 Strategy.

These principles for partner engagement are:

- 1 **One Blue Pacific**—recognising and engaging with the full Forum Membership.
- 2 **Regional priorities**—embedding and progressing the Forum's regional priorities.
- 3 **Partnership approach**—joint planning, programming and delivery by both the Pacific Islands Forum and the Forum Dialogue Partner(s).
- 4 **Utilising existing mechanisms**—aligning with, and seeking to build-off existing regional and international mechanisms, processes and meetings.
- 5 **Collective outcomes and impact**—developing joint outcomes statements and outlining a clear process for follow-up and implementation.

Pacific Island nations cooperating around shared challenges and interests

Despite all those differences, and the long distances between Pacific Island countries and territories, they share some common challenges and interests. To combine efforts and cooperate on these challenges, the governments and administrations of the Pacific have established a system of regional organisations.

The Pacific Islands Forum, or PIF, is the pre-eminent grouping of the island nations of the region. It brings together leaders and governments from 18 Pacific countries and territories, including New Zealand and Australia, to foster cooperation on shared challenges, and to represent the interests of its members externally. Its annual leaders meeting results in a declaration on issues of shared interest, which the Forum and its sister organisations are then tasked with addressing. The annual meeting also includes a space in which external actors, or "Dialogue Partners", can engage.

The Pacific Islands Forum and the various declarations issued by the leaders and governments of the Pacific provide clearly defined and agreed expressions of what matters to the region, what challenges it is facing as a collective, what support the region is seeking from its external partners, and what key trends its members expect to see in the future.

It is important that external partners coordinate their approaches to the Blue Pacific and engage with the region through established mechanisms

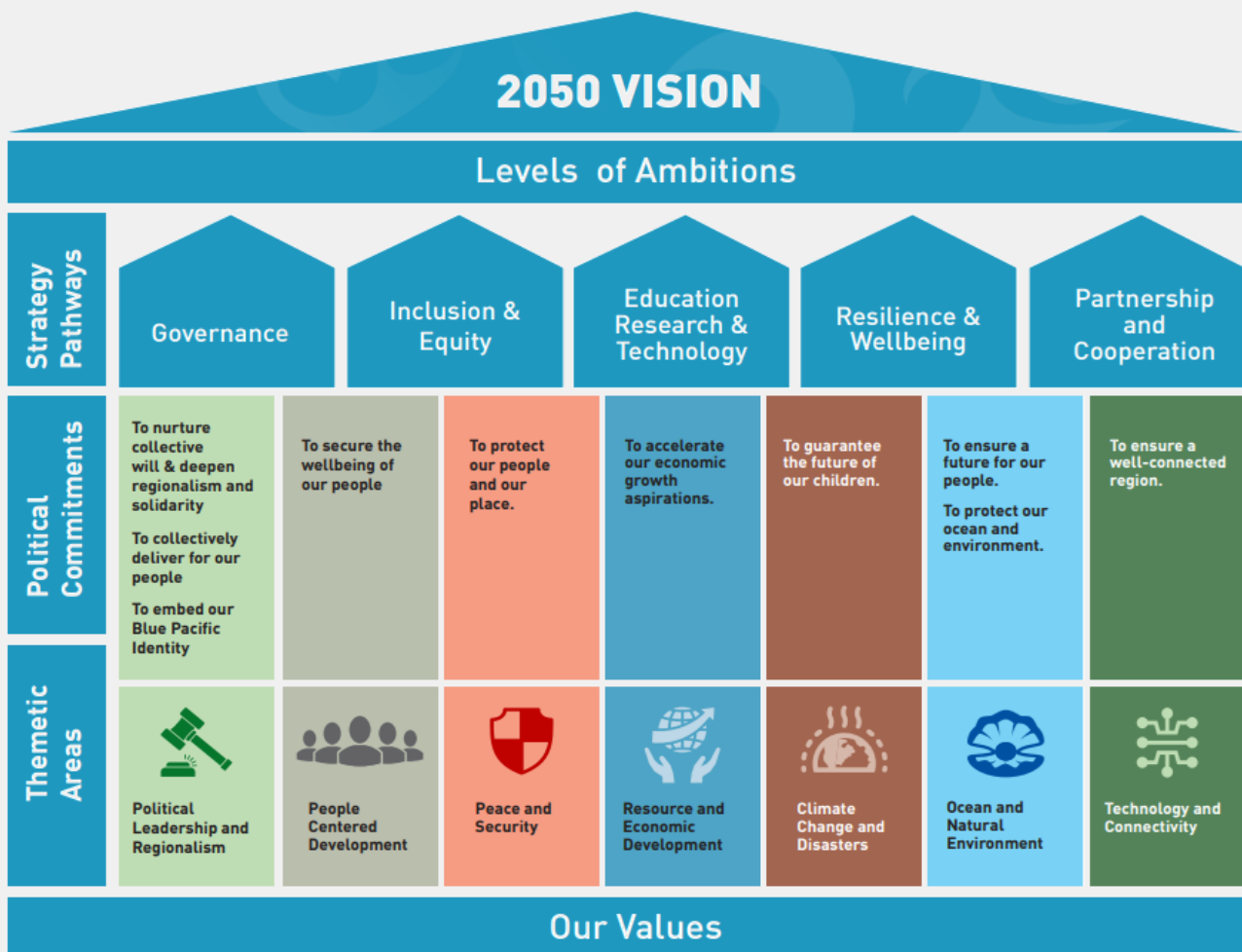
This collective expression of key issues is very important for external partners and how they engage with the region. Many Pacific Island governments have very limited capacity due to their small size and a crowded calendar of national and regional meetings, and so their bandwidth for engaging effectively with a myriad of external actors, whether government or non-government, is minimal at best.



It is in the interests of the Pacific Island countries that external partners coordinate in how they engage with the region. The strategies the region has crafted make it clear what the region's agreed priorities are, and the mechanisms the region has established provide the avenues through which to engage. The Blue Pacific strategy is the most important strategy for the region today.

The 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent

Figure 33. 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent: Key thematic areas



The 2050 Strategy lists seven thematic areas for the Pacific region, giving an insight into the issues of greatest importance:

- Political leadership and regionalism
- People-centred development
- Peace and security



- Resources and economic development
- Climate change and disasters
- Ocean and environment, and
- Technology and connectivity.

Of these thematic areas, three stand out as requiring the region to effectively engage with actors outside of its membership:

- Peace and security
- Ocean and environment, and
- Climate change and disasters.

Three stand-out issues for Pacific engagement with external partners

1. Peace and security

Major World War II battles were fought in the Pacific, and the legacy of that time can be seen across the islands. For example, many of the airfields in the region were built at that time. But post-war the Pacific saw its place in the world shift from battleground to an oceanic region more befitting of its name—in the decades after World War II the Pacific was considered benign, with some major powers reducing or removing their diplomatic missions through the second half of the twentieth century.

In the 21st century, however, the rest of the world is again showing increased interest. The 2050 Blue Pacific Strategy notes that the region faces “a number of multifaceted security and political challenges and a dynamic geopolitical environment”⁷. Geostategic competition, playing out across the region in different ways, is noted as impacting regional politics and security.

This competition is resulting in increased interest in the region and a greater number of state and non-state actors seeking to engage with and influence Pacific Island countries for a variety of reasons. The Boe Declaration on Regional Security⁸ recognises an expanded concept of security, including human, cyber and environmental security, and frames regional responses to emerging security issues.

In this sense, the Pacific region's security is impacted by wider external forces such as great power competition, transnational organised crime, and the increasing impact of human-induced climate change (see next heading). The proliferation of actors seeking to engage with the Pacific is leading to a range of risks, as well as opportunities.

⁷ Pacific Islands Forum 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent page 17.

⁸ Adopted by the Pacific Island Forum Leaders in 2018.



Some of the areas where global peace and security issues affect the region due to the actions of external forces include:

- **Geopolitical rivalry**—Pacific governments worry geopolitical competition may lead to militarisation in the region. Increasing levels of debt can create dependence and vulnerability (so called "debt diplomacy"). However, as noted in a recent report by the Lowy Institute "unmanaged competition for influence among key development partners can compromise good governance and privilege geopolitical posturing over local priorities".⁹
- **Diplomatic recognition**—A number of Pacific countries recognise and maintain diplomatic relations with Taiwan. In recent years Solomon Islands, Kiribati, and Nauru have switched diplomatic relations to China. Tuvalu, Marshall Islands, and Palau are the three Taiwan allies remaining in the region. This competition can affect governance and reduce coordination between donors, as development aid funding can be used to gain influence rather than achieve progress toward sustainable development goals.
- **Lobbying for UN votes**—Pacific countries represent 12 votes in the UN General Assembly, a significant voting bloc. Countries seeking Pacific support may engage bilaterally with individual Pacific nations, or with the collective through the Pacific Island Forum. While lobbying itself does not directly threaten the region's security, at times efforts to influence voting undermine good governance and so create sociopolitical stress.
- **Transnational crime**—The Pacific Ocean provides routes for shipments of contraband, and narcotics, with the Pacific countries at times used for transshipment. The Lowy institute describes drug trafficking as one of the most serious security issues facing the Pacific region, with a Pacific "drug highway" linking producers and consumers in Asia, Latin America, Australia and New Zealand, with a significant increase in the flow of drugs in recent years.¹⁰ Some Pacific countries have also become markets, and are dealing with the associated crime and public health issues. With under-resourced security agencies and systems, Pacific countries often struggle to effectively manage and counter organised crime.

2. Ocean and environment

The Pacific Ocean ecosystem is of vital economic and cultural significance to Pacific peoples and countries. Globally the Pacific Ocean produces two-thirds of the world's tuna catches, most of the catch is taken in the Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) of Pacific Island countries¹¹.

As the Blue Pacific Strategy states: "The region continues to face issues linked to the depletion of some ocean resources and the degradation of marine ecosystem. This has led to security concerns; land and ocean pollution; lack of waste management and disposal; and inefficient use of energy."¹² One of the Strategy's priorities is to ensure the region's

⁹ Lowy Institute, "Geopolitics in the Pacific Islands: Playing for Advantage", Meg Keen and Alan Tidwell, January 2024.

¹⁰ Lowy Institute *Drug Trafficking in the Pacific Islands: the Impact of Transnational Crime 2022*.

¹¹ <https://www.wcpfc.int/doc/wcpfc-tuna-fishery-yearbook-2022>.

¹² Pacific Islands Forum 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent page 27.



partners commit to protecting the Pacific's environment and resources (including its fisheries) from exploitation, degradation and pollution.

Many of the problems affecting the Pacific Ocean ecosystem are caused by nations outside the region. Illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing by distant water fishing nations, plastic pollution, deep-sea mining, and nuclear testing in the Pacific are all examples of external threats to the wellbeing of the ecosystem and to the people of the Pacific.

Image 3. Pacific tuna onboard tuna tagging research vessel, Kiribati EEZ, by Shelton Harley



3. Climate change and disasters

Many Pacific Island countries are some of the world's most vulnerable to natural disasters and climate change. Indeed, some low-lying atoll nations such as Kiribati and Tuvalu are existentially threatened by sea-level rise. The frequent cyclones that affect the Pacific, made more intense due to the warming ocean, can cause widespread damage. Many countries in the region are also vulnerable to earthquakes and tsunamis.

Pacific Island countries seek to have their voices heard globally on climate change. The small size and limited diplomatic resources of most Pacific countries mean their voices are not heard as loudly or clearly as they should be, given how much impact climate change is having on their lands and peoples. It is vitally important to the Pacific that the world's major



emitters of greenhouse gases understand the threat of climate change and act accordingly. By combining their voices and acting as a bloc where possible, the Pacific has a greater chance of being heard.

Similarly, when major disasters strike, most Pacific countries do not have the resources or equipment needed to mount effective response and recovery actions. It would not make sense for each individual country to have the expensive military and other assets needed to access hard-to-reach areas, and so combining efforts, or working with larger external partners that can provide equipment and trained responders, is an essential part of humanitarian and disaster response in the region.

The cost of recovery, especially after a significant disaster, can be beyond the means of a small country. They need finance from large international development banks and other external partners to support longer-term recovery, with grant or concessional terms to avoid unsustainably high levels of debt.

Key Pacific regional organisations

The issues identified in the Blue Pacific Strategy above are complex, involving powerful state and non-state actors, including some Latin American countries in specific areas that will be discussed below.

The Pacific region has established a system of regional organisations and agreements to manage the array of challenges it is facing. New Zealand is a member and donor in many of them. Latin American countries engage episodically, issue by issue. The key organisations and agreements which provide avenues for external actors to engage on the areas above with the Pacific are listed below.

Pacific Islands Forum

The Pacific Islands Forum brings its 18 countries and territories together to address pressing issues and challenges. Its secretariat manages a range of high-level officials and ministers' meetings, culminating in the annual leaders meeting.

Members (18): Australia, Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, French Polynesia, Kiribati, Nauru, New Caledonia, New Zealand, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Republic of Marshall Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu.

Engagement with Latin America: The Forum has 21 Dialogue Partners from around the world that are given space to strategically engage and to contribute to discussions and initiatives aimed at regional development and security. Of the 21, only two are from Latin America: Chile and Cuba. The Forum Secretariat is currently developing an MOU with CARICOM Secretariat to deepen collaboration and exchange with Caribbean countries. The PIF led a Pacific Island delegation to the Fourth International Conference on Small Island Developing States (SIDS4) held recently in Antigua and Barbuda¹³.

¹³ <https://forumsec.org/publications/remarks-pacific-islands-forum-statement-sids4>.



The Pacific Community (SPC)

The Pacific Community (also known as the SPC) supports the sustainable development of its members through providing science, research and technology expertise. Much of its work is directed at addressing climate change, oceans and environment issues.

Members (27): American Samoa, Australia, Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, France, French Polynesia, Guam, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, New Caledonia, New Zealand, Niue, Northern Mariana Islands, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Pitcairn Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu, United Kingdom, United States, Vanuatu, Wallis and Futuna.

Engagement with Latin America: A few instances of technical collaboration over the years with CARICOM and some Latin American countries in specific areas such as agriculture, disaster risk management, and statistics.

Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP)

SPREP is the regional organisation charged with protecting and managing the environment and natural resources of the Pacific.

There has been minimal, if any, Latin American engagement with the organisation. However, given the growing importance of understanding the environmental and food security impacts of a range of marine and climate related issues, this may change in the future.

SPREP has 21 Pacific island member countries and territories: American Samoa, Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, French Polynesia, Guam, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, New Caledonia, Niue, Northern Marianas, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu and Wallis & Futuna) and five metropolitan countries (Australia, France, New Zealand, United Kingdom and United States of America) with direct interests in the region.

Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA)

The FFA drives regional cooperation to create and enable the maximum long term social and economic benefit from the sustainable use of the region's shared offshore fishery resources. The agency acts as an advisory body to its members and receives significant support from Australia and New Zealand with surveillance activities combatting IUU fishing.

Members (17): Australia, Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, New Zealand, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu.



NEW ZEALAND AND LATIN AMERICA IN THE PACIFIC

1. New Zealand as a Pacific country is closely connected with the region. Issues that affect the Pacific region also affect New Zealand.
2. Although there is only limited engagement between the Pacific and Latin America, there are several areas where interests align. This has resulted in some Latin American countries working with the region through existing regional organisations.
3. In a more contested world, some Latin American countries may seek to engage more closely with the region on issues of shared interest.
4. New Zealand has an opportunity to work with Latin American countries that are seeking to engage with the region, to ensure they do so in a way that respects the established mechanisms, avoids unintended consequences, and achieves benefits for all.

New Zealand as a Pacific country

New Zealand sees itself as a Pacific country, is a founding member of many of the Pacific regional organisations, and is a key bilateral and regional donor partner. Many of the issues that affect the Pacific affect New Zealand. New Zealand has large, diverse Pasifika diaspora populations (over 380,000 Pasifika people live in New Zealand) as well as many and varied economic, security, and people-to-people connections with the region, and this adds a domestic policy element to New Zealand's foreign policy as it relates to the Pacific region. Much has been written on New Zealand's extensive engagement with the Pacific, and this report will not repeat it.

New Zealand provides significant support to the Pacific: around 60% of New Zealand's annual aid budget of more than NZ\$1 billion goes to the region. When the Pacific suffers from a humanitarian or economic disaster, be it natural or man-made, much of the impact is felt in New Zealand—within government, across civil society and business, and in the homes and families of the Pasifika diasporas across the country.

The New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade's strategic goal for the Pacific (first introduced above in the introduction to this paper) identifies an additional interest in relation to how external partners engage with the Pacific:

- Promote a peaceful, prosperous and resilient Pacific in which Aotearoa New Zealand's interests and influence are safeguarded.



New Zealand seeks to promote good governance in the region as an integral part of how the Pacific Island countries will achieve their sustainable development goals. Key to this is encouraging external partners to engage with the Pacific through the established mechanisms, and to focus on the key priorities that Pacific governments have articulated and agreed through their extensive consultation processes. This is to reduce the risk that their engagement will compete for the limited capacity in fragile Pacific administrations, leading to costly incoherence and missed opportunities—or worse, that their engagement will undermine good governance and so create instability.

Latin America's relationship with the island nations of the Pacific region has been limited to date, as the membership lists of the regional organisations and mechanisms above show. However, there are some genuine shared interests and opportunities to increase engagement.

Shared interests and New Zealand's role

The three areas this report has highlighted—oceans and the environment, peace and security; climate change and disasters—are the most relevant when considering where there may be opportunities for collaboration between the Pacific, Latin America, and New Zealand.

In all of the three areas highlighted, there are opportunities for Latin American countries to increase their engagement with the Pacific through the existing mechanisms.

Oceans and the environment

The Latin American countries with a Pacific coast share two key interests with the Pacific region and New Zealand in this area: fisheries and marine pollution.

Fisheries management

Perhaps more than any other issue, fisheries management may drive engagement between the Pacific, New Zealand, and Latin America.

Globally the Pacific Ocean produces two-thirds of the world's tuna catches, 52% from the western Pacific and 14% from the eastern Pacific Ocean¹⁴. In the west the region is primarily covered by the EEZs of Pacific Island countries and income from tuna is critical to national economies. In the east there are large regions of high seas and the resources are currently important to many Latin American countries, but particularly Ecuador, Mexico, and Panama.

Currently these fisheries are managed by two separate Tuna Regional Fisheries Management Organisations (T-RFMOs), the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC)

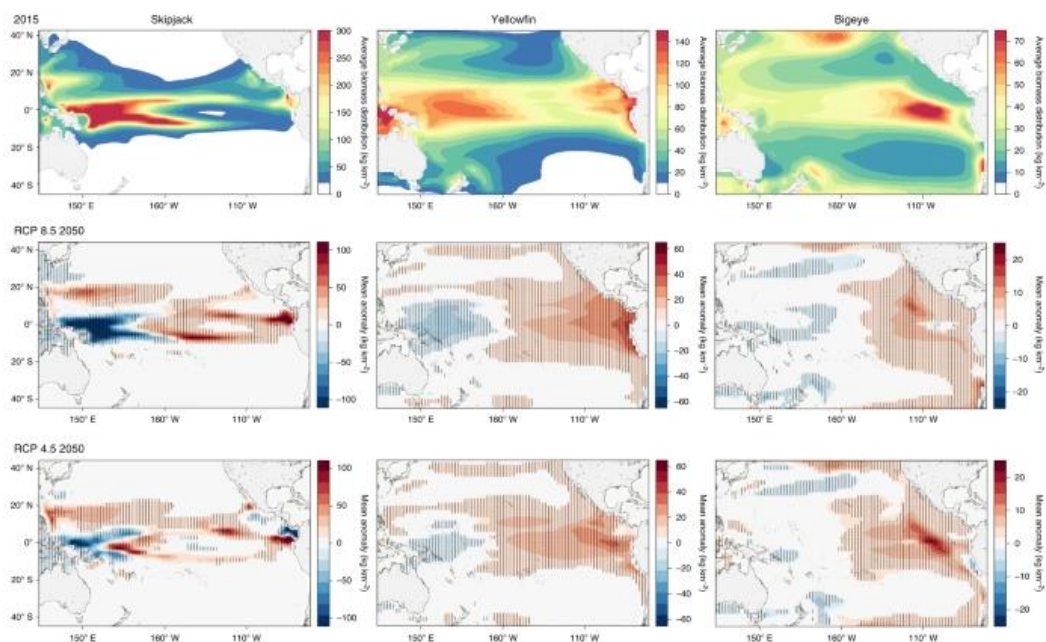
¹⁴ <https://www.wcpfc.int/doc/wcpfc-tuna-fishery-yearbook-2022>.



and the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC). Currently one Pacific Island country (Vanuatu) is a member of the IATTC, but five Latin American countries are either Cooperating non-members (Ecuador, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Panama) or Observers (Mexico) in the WCPFC.

The WCPFC and IATTC members seek to work together where possible, recognising already that the species they manage move backwards and forwards across the 'lines in the ocean'. Currently the balance of the fisheries resources are strongly in favour of the WCPFC, but recent studies¹⁵ examining the potential impact of climate change on the distribution of tuna resources shows the potential for a very significant shift from west to the east (from the WCPFC to the IATTC) and from EEZs to areas that are primarily high-seas. Aside from impacts on countries in the region (mostly negative for Pacific Island countries but relatively more positive for Latin American countries), sustainable management of tropical Pacific tuna resources will also be challenged by these shifts and closer collaboration between WCPFC and the IATTC (and their members) will be necessary.

Figure 4. Projects effects of climate change on the distributions of the three tuna species caught by purse-seine fishing in the Pacific Ocean (Red indicates increase, blue indicates decrease)¹⁶



Average biomass distributions (kg km^{-2}) of skipjack, yellowfin and bigeye tuna in the Pacific Ocean basin for 2015 (2011–2020) (top row) and mean anomalies (kg km^{-2}) from the average 2015 biomass distribution of each tuna species projected to occur by 2050 (2044–2053) under two emissions scenarios, RCP 8.5 (middle row) and RCP 4.5 (bottom row). Shading indicates areas where projections from all four ESMS ([Methods](#)) agree in the sign of change, excluding near-zero changes (white zones).

¹⁵ Bell, J.D., Senina, I., Adams, T. et al. Pathways to sustaining tuna-dependent Pacific Island economies during climate change. *Nat Sustain* 4, 900–910 (2021).

¹⁶ *Ibid.*



The interconnectedness of fish stocks with the fishing practices and behaviours of distant water fishing nations is a complex issue. Understanding fisheries requires scientific research, and managing it effectively requires agreement between nations. The Pacific is significantly impacted by these dynamics. The nations on Latin America's Pacific coast may see fisheries management in the Pacific as increasingly important to their economic interests.

Given the complex mix of political, economic, and scientific factors in the management of fisheries, any increased engagement from Latin American countries on fisheries management in the Pacific would require careful diplomacy and deep awareness of how the issue affects the different parts of the region in different ways. As the science evolves and understanding of how climate change affects fisheries increases, New Zealand will have an important role to play in guiding engagement by Latin American countries in the region to align with the region's interests.

The Marine Biodiversity of Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction Agreement (BBNJ)

The Agreement under the UN Convention of the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) focuses on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction. The treaty aims to address threats such as climate change, pollution, over-fishing, habitat destruction, and acidification. The potential benefits for the Pacific region include:

- Fair and equitable sharing of benefits related to marine genetic resources
- Enhanced conservation efforts to protect marine ecosystems on which Pacific food security depends
- Rigorous assessments of environmental impact, and
- Capacity building and technology exchange.

These two examples indicate how these developing oceans issues may provide a meaningful and important platform for future engagement involving Latin American countries in the Pacific.

South Pacific Regional Fisheries Management Organisation

SPRFMO is an inter-governmental organisation that works to ensure the long-term conservation and sustainable use of the fishery resources of the South Pacific, and to safeguard the marine ecosystems in which the resources are found. It was established in 2012 following discussions between New Zealand, Australia and Chile on the conservation and management of resources in the South Pacific.

SPRFMO's members include Pacific coast Latin American countries, and its regulatory framework governs conservation and management practices of a number of species primarily found in the eastern Pacific off the coast of Chile and Peru. The organisation is primarily focused on those eastern Pacific resources that have significant economic and food security benefits for Latin American countries and distant water fishing nations.

Only two Pacific countries are members due to the fact that most Pacific nations focus on coastal fisheries or highly migratory species such as tuna for their economic and food security. However, with fish species' behaviour changing due to climate change, SPRFMO



and engagement with Latin American countries could become more relevant and necessary in the future.

Marine pollution

Marine pollution is the other ocean and marine issue that is significant for the whole Pacific region. Pacific Island countries contribute a negligible amount of plastic pollution, but many are significantly impacted by marine plastic washing up on their shores. Microplastics and "forever chemicals" from plastics are entering the marine food chain in greater amounts, with the impact on both the fisheries resource and the health of the end consumer not yet fully understood.

There is both an opportunity and a need for greater engagement on marine-pollution issues, including through shared approaches to science and research. New Zealand can play a role facilitating scientific collaboration between Latin American researchers interested in the Pacific and the relevant Pacific regional agencies that focus on marine and environment issues, as well as ensuring that any research is informed by Pacific priorities. The negotiations in the UN system to develop an internationally legally binding treaty on plastic pollution including in the marine environment is one area where the interests of all nations with a Pacific coast are aligned.

Deep-sea mining

This relatively new method of resource extraction through removing underwater rocks known as polymetallic nodules which contain valuable minerals is causing tension between ocean protection and economic growth objectives. Some Pacific Island states, dependent on blue economy sectors such as fishing and tourism, worry about the consequences of mining, while others see economic opportunity. The impact on migratory fish patterns, marine biodiversity, and long-term ecosystem health remains understudied.

The Pacific has a long and complex history with extractive industries: from phosphates in Nauru and Kiribati to logging across Melanesia. The potential governance and environmental impacts of this newer and less understood extractive process underline the importance of the Pacific voice on deep sea mining being at the centre of any decision making going forward.

Climate change and disasters

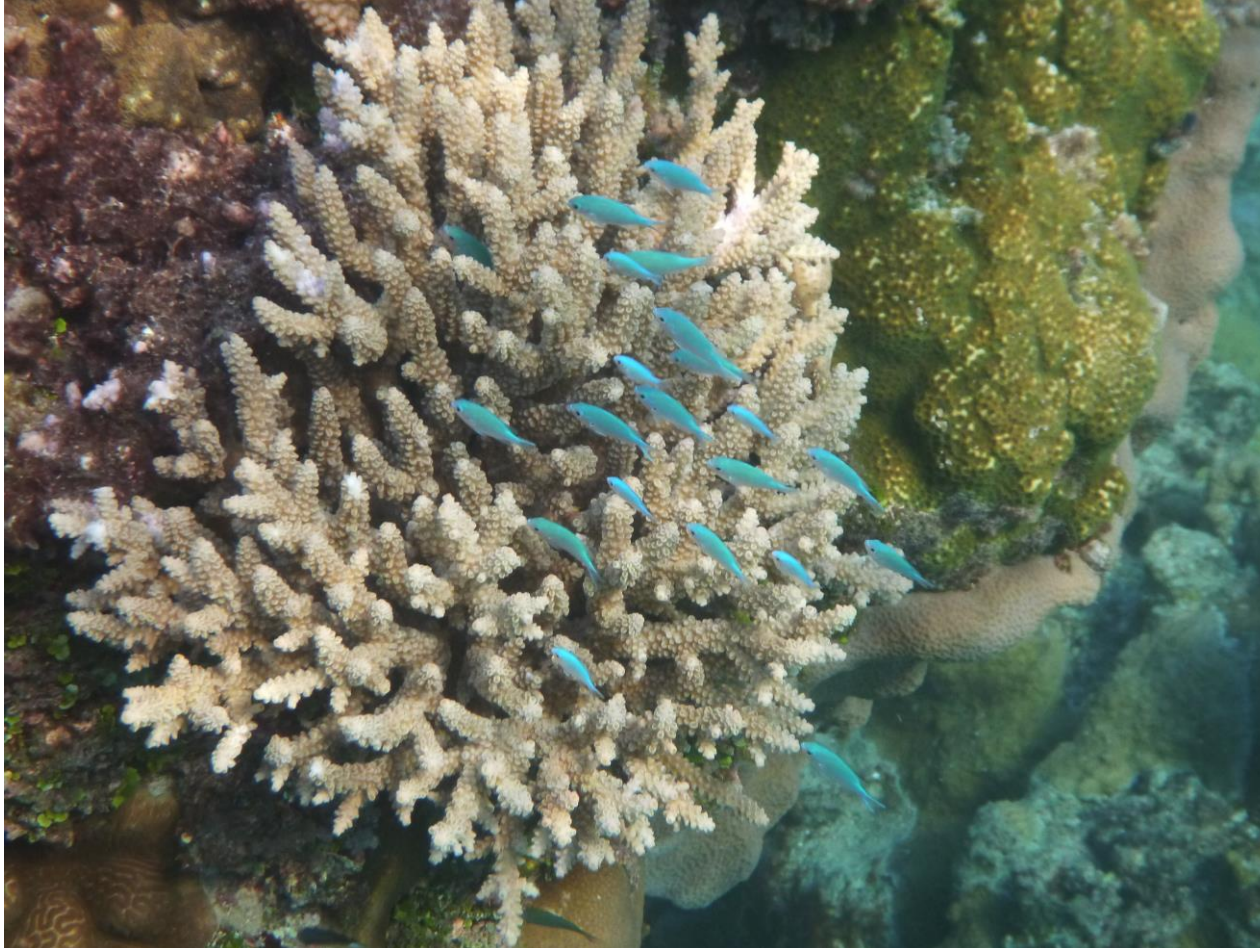
The Pacific seeks to influence major global polluters to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions. They have typically focussed their efforts through multilateral discussions and negotiations. However, outside the Pacific region the existential urgency of global progress on climate change and emissions for the region is not widely understood.

Some Latin American countries could be allies in negotiations, in particular the three G20 members: Brazil, Mexico, and Argentina. No Pacific nation has resident diplomatic representation in Latin America. In this case, New Zealand could help articulate the interests and positions of the Pacific in Latin America. This could also involve supporting Pacific



region representatives to travel to G20 capitals in Latin America (or vice-versa) as part of the Pacific effort to raise awareness, and supporting them to engage in the margins of key multilateral meetings.

Image 4. Coral reef, Lifou Island, New Caledonia, by Mei Lin Harley



Peace and security

In an increasingly contested world, some Latin American countries may seek to engage and influence the Pacific region. The Pacific offers a number of UN votes, and can also bring a further voice to multilateral discussions on issues such as nuclear disarmament, climate change and the environment—the region could therefore become a more strategic focus for Latin American lobbying efforts.

The growth of transnational organised crime networks accessing sea routes across the Pacific may see a potential for further discussions and collaboration on security issues between the New Zealand, the Pacific, and Latin America. Narcotics is a good example: Latin America as the source, the Pacific as the locations and routes for trans-shipment, and New Zealand or Australia as the market.

Search and rescue zones are another component of the peace and security picture. New Zealand, Tahiti, and Chile have vast, abutting zones of responsibility.



The South Pacific Defence Ministers' Meeting is a forum to increase cooperation among defence partners and to collectively address Pacific security challenges. There are currently three Pacific countries (Fiji, PNG and Tonga) involved along with New Zealand, Chile, Australia, and France. Some of the issues the SPDMM discusses include training and capacity building, disaster response, and illegal fishing.

The Pacific: A unique strand in New Zealand's relationships with Latin America

New Zealand's relationships with Latin America can be described as "modest economic relationships, along with relatively broad official engagement through a range of international forums supported by a limited but active diplomatic footprint".¹⁷ Throughout the series of reports commissioned by the CAPE, an argument is made for more meaningful, sustained, and strategic engagement by New Zealand with Latin America, to enable New Zealand to realise the trade and economic opportunities and the benefits of closer cooperation on a range of issues of shared interest.

As discussed in the previous section there are particular shared interests in the areas of fisheries, marine pollution, and transnational organised crime. New Zealand's support for beneficial engagement between the Pacific and Latin America in these areas could add a valuable and strategic strand to its relationships in Latin America, while also protecting its interests in the Pacific region. This is particularly relevant at a time when geopolitical forces are increasing external interest and engagement in the Pacific region.

New Zealand has effectively reinforced its position as a knowledgeable and valued interlocutor on Pacific issues in recent years, built on a foundation of the extensive connections that bind New Zealand into the region and of its broad diplomatic network across Pacific countries. The Pacific Reset in 2018 was at the time a significant reorientation of New Zealand's foreign and development policy effort toward the Pacific, and an important focus was on influencing third-party actors as they engaged with the region.

New Zealand's diplomatic approach, driven by its longstanding commitment to multilateral processes and democratic principles and by its experience with managing environmental challenges, is to use its soft power to facilitate dialogue and encourage countries to adhere to established international norms. This approach is well calibrated to facilitating engagement between, on the one hand, the smaller Pacific nations with limited capacity to engage externally and, on the other, larger powers such as those in Latin America who may be seeking to understand or engage with the region.

¹⁷ Trans-Tasman collaboration to build ties with Latin America, MartinJenkins, 2024.



Benefits of a more strategic engagement between the three regions

Benefits for the Pacific



There are a range of benefits to the Pacific if Latin American countries engaging with the region on issues of shared interest are better informed.

<p>Coherence and alignment with existing processes and priorities</p>	<p>Pacific governments and leaders have collaborated through the organisations and mechanisms they have collectively developed in the region to identify shared interests and challenges, and to chart mutually agreed approaches to managing them.</p> <p>It is in their interests that other countries which seek to engage with the region do so through these existing organisations and mechanisms, and that they direct their efforts and resources toward areas that align with regional priorities.</p> <p>A number of new partners are seeking to engage the Pacific region as the world becomes a more contested place. This could potentially create an unnecessary burden on Pacific governments that have limited capacity.</p> <p>If Latin American countries were to increase their engagement with the region, focussing their efforts on agreed priorities through existing mechanisms offers potential for benefit. Where there are existing shared interests such as fisheries and marine pollution and transnational organised crime, there is benefit for the Pacific in engaging with Latin American countries that are well-informed about the region's perspectives and priorities.</p> <p>Where external partners are offering financial or technical support, it is in the region's interests to get maximum value. Uncoordinated approaches can burden scarce administrative capacity, leading to poor results. Ensuring external partners invest in the things the region needs provides more impact.</p>
<p>Ensuring the Pacific voice is heard</p>	<p>The Pacific is seriously threatened by the impacts of climate change, with sea-level rise an existential threat for several low-lying atolls (and in some cases entire countries). Oceans issues, such as marine pollution and deep-sea mining, potentially have significant impacts on the Pacific. The region's food security depends on a healthy marine environment and effective fisheries management practices.</p> <p>The Pacific region needs to influence as many global partners as possible to make them aware of the consequences of decisions taken outside of the region that impact the island countries and territories. On climate change, the Pacific needs to see meaningful actions to reduce emissions and to provide the smaller, more vulnerable Pacific Island countries with the</p>



	<p>financial and technical support they will need as the impacts become more severe.</p> <p>On other issues such as deep-sea mining and marine pollution, the Pacific voice is an essential part of the international discussion, but is sometimes not heard as loudly as it should be.</p> <p>Latin American countries are not currently priority partners on global issues for the Pacific region. However, given for example that Argentina, Mexico, and Brazil are members of the G20 and several Latin American countries are prominent in international forums, there is merit in ensuring the Pacific voice is heard as widely as possible.</p>
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Benefits for New Zealand



There are a range of benefits to New Zealand from developing a more strategic Pacific strand to its relationship with Latin America.

Ensuring New Zealand's voice is heard on Pacific issues	<p>As a proliferation of actors seeks to engage with the Pacific region. One powerful way of safeguarding its interests is ensuring that any nascent engagement by other regions or countries with the Pacific, in this case Latin America, is informed by New Zealand's views and unique knowledge of the region.</p>
Value proposition to Latin American countries	<p>Should New Zealand seek a more strategic relationship with Latin America to advance its interests, it must seek to bolster its value proposition to Latin American countries. Its relatively small market means it needs to base its value proposition on values and ideas rather than as a significant market for goods and services.</p> <p>New Zealand has a broadly positive reputation in Latin America, and is seen as an example of best practice in a number of areas, such as democracy and human rights, agricultural innovation, renewable energy, and education.</p> <p>New Zealand can build on its positive reputation and as a partner of choice through positioning the Pacific as a strand to the relationship, based around areas of shared interest, namely peace and security; climate change and disasters; and oceans and the environment.</p>
Protecting the interests of the Pacific region	<p>New Zealand can provide constructive advice and support to Latin American countries on how to engage in the Pacific, based on its deep knowledge of the region and its existing mechanisms.</p>



Benefits for Latin America

For Latin American countries seeking to engage with the Pacific region, there are a range of benefits to be had from working with New Zealand to advance specific shared interests.



<p>Advancing interests</p>	<p>Some Latin American countries have genuine interests in the Pacific region, mainly focused on the three areas, peace and security, climate change, and oceans and environment. Should they decide to increase their engagement or to engage on new issues such as deep-sea mining, they will be more likely to achieve results if they engage in the right way. This most likely means engaging through existing processes and in a way that is aligned with the Pacific region's interests. New Zealand offers connections into the Pacific and experience with how the Pacific works, and can provide insight into where interests align.</p>
<p>Engaging with respect</p>	<p>In order to achieve impact, it is essential that external actors engage with the Pacific region in culturally appropriate and informed ways. Most external actors do not have resident diplomatic missions or diasporas of Pacific peoples in their countries, and so their level of cultural understanding may be limited. New Zealand can offer insight and guidance on cultural protocols and on how to engage with respect, to ensure that its Latin American partners get access to the necessary conversations.</p>
<p>Avoiding unintended consequences</p>	<p>A Latin American country engaging with the Pacific region will naturally want to influence the region toward achieving a specific goal in the country's national interest, as all countries do. However, it will also not want to unintentionally cause harm through incoherent and unaligned approaches or through actions that are not informed by the geopolitical dynamics playing out across the Pacific.</p>



FACILITATING DEEPER ENGAGEMENT WITH THE PACIFIC

As it seeks to ensure the Pacific is part of its official and non-official engagement with Latin America, New Zealand needs to do this in a deliberate and strategic way to advance its reputation as a Pacific centre of excellence. There are a range of ways that New Zealand can do this:

- at the official government-to-government level through bilateral and multilateral connections and initiatives that already exist, with a specific focus on international negotiations or processes that have an impact on the Pacific
- through people-to-people connections, focussing on the Polynesian cultural links that already exist, and
- through institutions and organisations that engage with Latin America, such as science and research organisations.

Taking a strategic approach would require ensuring that the Pacific element is woven across all the various strands in the relationship between New Zealand and Latin American countries. By focussing on those three areas where there are shared interests, New Zealand can build the relevance of the Pacific to Latin American countries that currently do not focus on the region, and by extension promote the value of New Zealand's deep understanding of and connection with the region.

Official government-to-government

New Zealand could proactively ensure its Latin American partners are kept informed of key developments and dynamics in the Pacific region, for example by providing foreign ministries with briefings before and following meetings of Pacific Islands Forum leaders and ensuring Pacific perspectives on international processes and negotiations are better understood.

Focussing on the three key areas identified in this report, New Zealand could ensure that Latin American partners that have direct interests in the Pacific (most likely those with Pacific coastlines or fishing fleets active in the region, or involved in other food security or economic activities) are kept aware of the impact and implications of regional processes and dynamics.

With the impact of climate change expected to result in a significant shift of important tuna resources from the western to the eastern Pacific, closer collaboration between NZ, Latin American and Pacific Island countries in sustainable fisheries management will be important. This includes discussions at the bilateral and trilateral level between governments, at the regional level with FFA and PNA as Pacific fisheries regional institutions, and at the



multilateral level with the WCPFC and IATTC as regional fisheries management commissions.

New Zealand could advocate for greater Latin American attention and participation using existing regional mechanisms in the specific areas and processes where their involvement would bring benefit to the Pacific.

Latin American diplomatic missions in New Zealand

A number of Latin American countries have diplomatic missions in Wellington with Ambassadors having cross-accreditations into the Pacific. These missions play a key role in bridging understanding between the Latin American countries, the Pacific, and New Zealand.

The cross-accreditations provide Ambassadors an opportunity to understand and report back to capitals on the Blue Pacific priorities and New Zealand's specific interests in the region.

Identifying areas for further cooperation would involve working closely with these diplomatic missions.

Image 5. Hanga Roa, Easter Island/Rapa Nui by Chris Hoare via Flickr



People-to-people

A number of small or local initiatives based on people-to-people links have helped build understanding and awareness between Latin America and the Pacific. Although small and focussed on specific events or individuals, these links are the first building blocks of any relationship based on mutual understanding.

Some of these initiatives are cultural, focussed on the cultural connection between Rapa Nui (as part of Chile) and Polynesia. Rapa Nui forms a type of cultural bridge into Chile: it is geographically and culturally distant from Latin America, but also politically integrated. Chileans who may want to understand more about one of the indigenous groups that make up Chile's diverse society have an opportunity to think about and engage with the Pacific region more generally. This can be achieved through supporting business, artistic and cultural connections between Māori and Rapa Nui when possible.

The protection and advancement of the many and varied Pacific cultures is also an important part of the Blue Pacific Strategy. Cultural practices and traditional knowledge are acknowledged as integral to how the Pacific can respond to managing the many challenges it is facing.

The cultural links between the Pacific and some of its neighbours are important and significant for individual countries and regions. In particular, the connections between Rapa Nui, New Zealand, French Polynesia and Hawaii (sometimes referred to as the Polynesian Triangle) are important and see a range of interactions and exchanges.

This Polynesian connection is unique in how it brings together a part of Chile with New Zealand and the Pacific, and offers the potential for further collaboration and exchange, including more widely into mainland Latin America as the continent's cultural connections with the Pacific become more widely understood.

Rapa Nui is a member of the Council of Pacific Arts and Culture which provides an opportunity to enhance engagement with other Pacific countries.

Figure 5. Polynesian Triangle by Gringer via Wikipedia Commons



Rapa Nui sent a large delegation to the recent Festival of Pacific Arts held in Hawai'i (FestPAC 2024)¹⁸ which was a success and a powerful demonstration of the impact of the Pacific Island nations coming together to celebrate the richness and diversity of their cultures.

Image 6. Rapa Nui and New Zealand booths at FestPAC 2024, by Shelton Harley



Image 7. Rapa Nui booth at FestPAC 2024, by Shelton Harley



¹⁸ <https://www.festpachawaii.org/delegations>.



Institutions and organisations

Supporting and encouraging academic exchanges represents a significant opportunity. This could include research collaboration on climate change and ocean and marine issues, and scholarships between Latin America and New Zealand with a focus on Pacific issues, including those issues highlighted in this report.¹⁹

There would be benefit in encouraging Latin American students and researchers to understand more about the ecosystems of the Pacific Ocean, the issues affecting biodiversity and marine pollution. These students and researchers could return to their home countries and increase awareness about the importance of the Pacific Ocean and about the impact that policy decisions made by Latin American governments have on the ecosystems and peoples across the Pacific.

Cuban doctors- An example of Latin American involvement in Pacific health and People-Centred Development

Cuba has for many years engaged in "medical internationalism" or "doctor diplomacy", sending its medical workforce around the world for both humanitarian and ideological reasons. The Pacific has benefitted from this "south-south cooperation". While there has been debate on the reasons behind the Cuban approach, the impact in the many Pacific countries that have received the around 50 Cuban doctors that have served in the region has been significant, language issues aside. The Cuban approach has also resulted in many Pacific medical trainees travel to Cuba to continue their studies. The COVID pandemic saw the end of the programme.

¹⁹ For example, the New Zealand Prime Minister's Scholarships for Asia and Latin America offer opportunities for New Zealanders to study in Brazil, Colombia, Mexico and Chile.



CONCLUSION

New Zealand needs to take a strategic, long-term approach to its relationships with Latin America

As has been argued in earlier papers in this series commissioned by the CAPE, there are a range of reasons why New Zealand should take a strategic and long-term approach to its relationships with Latin America.

At present, the day-to-day management of the relationship sits mainly with the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, alongside some of the other agencies with interests in the Latin America market such as Education New Zealand and New Zealand Trade and Enterprise. The argument made throughout this series of papers is that while this current approach is sufficient to maintain the current state, it is not sufficient for a longer-term, more strategic ambition based on the opportunities Latin America offers New Zealand and could offer in the future.

A long-term strategic approach has paid dividends in the case of other regions where New Zealand has, over many years, successfully built broad-based relationships that lead to enduring trade and economic relationships and enable an exchange of ideas, people and innovation. There have been times when Latin America has been in the spotlight in New Zealand, but the interest has not been sustained. The closing of the Latin America CAPE later in 2024 will see the disappearance of one of the few entities that has the mission, expertise and capacity to add depth and breadth to the relationship beyond the official level.

New Zealand's extensive connections with the Pacific region can be an important strand in New Zealand's relationship with Latin American countries

As the world becomes a more contested place, the Pacific is attracting more attention and engagement from non-traditional partners.

Latin American countries may seek to increase their engagement with the Pacific as climate change, fisheries, geopolitics, and transnational crime, for example, bring a greater focus on the region. It is in the Pacific's interests, New Zealand's interests, and Latin America's interests that any engagement has positive results. New Zealand has a unique role to play in ensuring that happens.

New Zealand has the opportunity to weave the Pacific into its relationships in Latin America in a proactive, future-focussed way, to ensure that it is seen as a partner of choice on matters involving the Pacific.

In this way, New Zealand can encourage Latin American countries to engage in a collaborative and mutually-beneficial way on the things that matter to the region, working effectively through established mechanisms.



Image 8. Tarawa, Kiribati, by John Capper



APPENDIX 1: INTERVIEW LIST

We would like to take the opportunity to acknowledge and thank the following people who gave their time and insights to this report:

Amber Walters	Inter-Parliamentary Relations Team Lead and Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Pacific Regional Secretary, Office of the Clerk of the House of Representatives
Bronwen Golder	Director at Pew Global Oceans Legacy New Zealand
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Lupesina Koro	Engineer, Aurecon (and former Prime Minister's Scholar to Latin America)
H.E. Manahi Pakarati Novoa	Ambassador of Chile to New Zealand
Marina Illingworth	Engagement Advisor, Multilateral, Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat
Linda Te Puni	Unit Manager – Latin America New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade
Terry Meikle	International development consultant
Dr Tracey Epps	International lawyer and trade policy consultant



MARTIN JENKINS



Wellington T +64 4 499 6130

Level 1, City Chambers, Cnr Johnston and Featherston Streets, Wellington 6011, PO Box 5256, Wellington 6140, New Zealand

Auckland T +64 9 915 1360

Level 16, 41 Shortland Street, Auckland 1010, New Zealand

info@martinjenkins.co.nz martinjenkins.co.nz