

# UK boosts diplomatic ties in Australia and the Pacific as Minister Amanda Milling begins visit to the region

- UK announces new diplomatic presence in Western Australia to accelerate trade and investment with the region
- Comes after the UK doubled the number of British High Commissions across the Pacific Islands
- Visit will also underline the UK's commitment to the Indo-Pacific in light of the brutal invasion of Ukraine

The UK will boost diplomatic and trade ties in the Indo-Pacific as the UK Minister of Asia and the Middle East, Amanda Milling, today embarks on a regional tour of Australia, New Zealand and Vanuatu.

As part of the visit, Minister Milling is announcing plans to re-establish the diplomatic post of Consul General in Perth, Western Australia after nearly 20 years.

Western Australia is Australia's largest state accounting for 16% of Australia's GDP and hosts the highest percentage of British people of any state in the country, with 8.9% of the population born in the UK and 42% having British ancestry.

The new Consul General will be supported by the existing team of eight staff in Perth. Their roles cover trade, investment, consular and Scottish Development International.

The new post emphasizes the UK's commitment to Australia and the deepening trade and investment ties between the two countries following the Free Trade Agreement.

During the past three years the UK has doubled the number of British High Commissions across the Pacific Island Countries to six – Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Samoa and Vanuatu – underlining the importance of the Indo-Pacific to our economy, security and ambition to build a network of liberty as set out in the UK's Integrated Review.

Minister for Asia and the Middle East, Amanda Milling said:

We may be geographically far apart, but when it comes to our shared values, history, economic and security ties, the UK's partnerships with Australia, New Zealand and Vanuatu could hardly be closer.

Testament to that closeness is the UK's decision to strengthen our diplomatic footprint, re-establishing the diplomatic post of Consul General in Perth that I am delighted to announce today.

While in Australia, Minister Milling will visit Perth and Melbourne, holding meetings with representatives from the State and Federal Governments, business and industry leaders as well as representatives of the Indigenous community.

In Vanuatu, the Minister will meet President Nikenike Vurobaravu and Acting Prime Minister Ishmael Kalsakau, as well as formally opening the British High Commission in Port Vila.

Finally, in New Zealand, she will visit Auckland, Hamilton and Wellington, delivering a speech at the High Commission on the importance of UK's relationship with New Zealand alongside meetings with a number of representatives from across Government, business and Māori.

She will also be accompanied on many of her engagements by the UK's new High Commissioner to New Zealand and Governor of the Pitcairn, Henderson, Ducie and Oeno Islands, Ms Iona Thomas OBE, who presented her credentials in Wellington last week (3 August 2022).

British High Commissioner to Australia, H.E. Vicki Treadell, said:

The new diplomatic post in Perth after an almost 20 year gap recognises the importance of Western Australia to the UK. This is underlined by the fantastic work already being delivered by our Head of Perth Office and the Consulate team there on our shared focus on economic security and the clean energy transition, as well as our support for the large number of Brits in WA.

The Minister's visit follows an intensive period of engagement for the UK with its partners in the Pacific. In 2022, that includes visits to Australia by the UK Foreign Secretary Liz Truss, Defence Secretary Ben Wallace, and Chief of the Defence Staff Admiral Sir Tony Radakin KCB ADC. COP26 President Alok Sharma also visited Australia, Fiji and New Zealand last month (July 2022).

Prime Minister Boris Johnson also met Australian Prime Minister, Anthony Albanese, at the NATO Summit in Madrid and hosted New Zealand Prime Minister, Jacinda Ardern, in London last month.

The Minister arrives in Australia from Cambodia's capital Phnom Penh where she represented the UK at ASEAN, a meeting of influential countries in Southeast Asia. She signed-off a new UK-ASEAN agreement for deeper cooperation on trade and investment, defence and security – including maritime security and cyber – as well as climate change, girls' education, digital and science and technology.

As part of the agreement, the UK will scale-up development and security links in Southeast Asia, opening a regional British International Investment office in Singapore later this year to invest up to £500m in the Indo-Pacific. The UK is also offering training for countries in the region on security issues and maritime law, including from the Royal Navy.

- The Consul General is expected to take up post in Perth in 2023.
- The UK is also accredited to the Federated States of Micronesia, Marshall Islands, Kiribati, Nauru and Tuvalu. The UK Ambassador in the Philippines is accredited to Palau.
- Further to the successful Carrier Strike Group deployment in 2021, the UK has a permanent presence in the Indo-Pacific with the deployment of two Offshore Patrol Vessels. They have already provided aid and assistance in the Pacific region, delivering humanitarian supplies in Tonga, following the volcanic eruption in January 2022, and delivering Covid booster vaccinations and dental care to the people of the Pitcairn Islands in February 2022.