

UK supports Pacific Island progress on Extended Continental Shelf

The UK Government has signed an agreement with the Pacific Community (SPC) for SBD\$2.9 million (£263,000) that will help Fiji, Vanuatu, Solomon Islands, and Tonga to secure the rights and responsibilities over their respective ocean spaces.

The ocean sustains a multitude of activities that fuel local, national and international economies, providing livelihoods and food security for 10 million Pacific Islanders across the region.

Pacific Island Countries (PICs) are the custodians of 20% of global maritime zones. To optimise the management, use and conservation of this vast ocean space, PICs require certainty over their maritime zones as defined by the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). This includes the extended continental shelf (ECS) areas beyond their 200 nautical mile exclusive economic zones (EEZs).

Clarifying sovereign rights over these ECS areas is crucial for the stability and development of PICs. Until these gaps in the world map are closed, PICs may not be in a position to fully protect their interests and achieve their blue economy aspirations.

The UK Government, through its Conflict, Stability and Security Fund (CSSF) will provide timely assistance in partnership with the Pacific Community (SPC) to build the capacity of PICs in all aspects of progressing their ECS submissions.

Currently, there are 10 PICs with 17 ECS submissions at various stages awaiting examination by the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (CLCS). Among these states, the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Tonga, and Fiji have two joint and three individual submissions awaiting examination – North Fiji Basin, Charlotte Banks, South Fiji Basin, Eastern Kermadec Ridge, and Western Lau-Colville Ridge.

British High Commissioner to Solomon Islands, Dr Brian Jones said:

We are glad to support this project which aims to help Pacific Island Countries ensure that their maritime zones are well defined. That will provide a basis for management and protection of these areas and enable sustainable use of marine resources to generate income and create employment, and ultimately contribute to the reduction of poverty.

PICs have worked individually and collaboratively to develop submissions and preliminary information to define the outermost limits of their continental shelves. They have been supported by the SPC and a consortium of partners in

the technical process and with the additional assistance from UK Government, work on ECS submissions can be further developed that will enable PICs to exercise their sovereign rights to explore, manage, or conserve seabed resources on the continental shelf extending beyond the EEZ.

Dr. Paula Vivili, Deputy Director-General Science and Capability said:

On behalf of the Pacific Maritime Boundaries consortium of partners, SPC welcomes this contribution from the UK Government to continue the vital work of supporting our member states to prepare and defend their ECS submissions. This will help countries achieve sustainable development goal Target 14.C– to enhance the conservation and sustainable use of the oceans and their resources by implementing UNCLOS– and it comes at a critical time in the development of regional ocean governance, at the beginning of the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development.

The ECS project will contribute to the broader Pacific Maritime Boundaries programme of work coordinated by SPC and supported by a consortium of partners, including the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, the Office of the Pacific Ocean Commissioner, the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA), the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), Geoscience Australia, Attorney General’s Department- Australia, University of Sydney, New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT), GRID-Arendal, as well as the European Union and Sweden through the Pacific European Union Marine Programme (PEUMP).

About CSSF

The British Government’s Conflict, Stability and Security Fund (CSSF) supports work around the world to address the sources of instability, address transnational threats and promote peace and security.

This year, 2021-22, the CSSF will provide £2m (SBD\$22.3m) for the Pacific region, to work with Pacific Island Countries and regional partners in support of an open, inclusive, resilient, prosperous and rules-based Pacific.

About SPC

The Pacific Community has been supporting sustainable development in the Pacific, through science, knowledge and innovation since 1947. It is the principal intergovernmental organisation in the region, owned and governed by its 26 member countries and territories. [Secretariat of the Pacific Community](#)