

Regional Programme
Australia and the Pacific
Activities

20

25

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The Konrad Adenauer Stiftung

The Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS) is a German political foundation with a vision of promoting international dialogue, sustainable development, good governance, capacity building, and regional integration, as well as enhancing understanding of the key drivers of global developments. KAS is named after the first Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany, Konrad Adenauer, who embodied Christian-social, conservative and liberal traditions. His legacy is associated with Germany's democratic reconstruction, reconciliation with France, the anchoring of German foreign policy in the transatlantic community of values, the pursuit of European unity, and Germany's orientation towards a social market economy.

German political foundations occupy a distinctive place in the international landscape. KAS is associated with Germany's Christian Democratic Union (CDU) party and brings particular expertise in the fields of democracy building and political dialogue. While each foundation is affiliated with a political party, the foundations are organisationally, legally, and financially independent. They receive public funding from the German Government, and their international activities are broadly aligned with Germany's foreign policy goals.

Through its international activities and projects carried out in collaboration with local partners, KAS makes a substantial contribution to international cooperation, ensuring that Germany lives up to its growing responsibility in the world. Particularly in development policy, our work aims to motivate and empower young people to shape their own future by strengthening democracy and the rule of law, and by promoting the principles of a just social market economy. This includes capacity building in areas such as the development of sustainable democratic structures and constitutional reform, as well as support of human rights and peace processes. To this end, we collaborate with government institutions, policy-makers, centre-oriented political parties, civil society organisations, academia, and the media sector.

A further pillar underpinning the political work is research and consultancy. This is more than just giving advice on current political affairs. We conduct research on the implications of political developments and seek to inform the policy-making process to contribute towards the development of far-sighted, sustainable policies that can help prevent crises.

Worldwide work and Activities in Australia and the Pacific

KAS is currently present in around 120 countries, with more than 100 offices across six continents. Through our global networks and longstanding partnerships, we seek to contribute to knowledge exchange and policy development in line with our values and objectives.

Across the Asia-Pacific region, KAS reflects Germany's commitment to a rules-based order, international cooperation and responsible, concerted leadership. As current global developments, including an increasingly volatile security environment, underscore the shared interests of Europe and Australia, KAS's Regional Programme for Australia and the Pacific seeks to foster durable collaboration through dialogue among parliamentarians, government representatives, and leading experts from academia and think tanks, complemented by political analysis and policy advice.

For the European Union in general, and Germany in particular, dialogue with Australia and New Zealand is especially important given the strength of our bilateral and regional relationships. Our shared values and common interests in shaping and upholding the rules-based order provide significant opportunities for closer partnership. Our programmes therefore focus on collaboration and knowledge-sharing to strengthen our collective resilience and our capacity to develop solutions to the pressing problems of our time.



A Word from the Director

Dear Reader,

The year 2025 marked important political developments in Australia and across the Pacific region. In Australia, the May parliamentary elections returned the incumbent federal government with a clear mandate, reinforcing expectations of stability and continuity in foreign and security policy.

At the same time, national elections and political transitions took place in several Pacific island states – including Vanuatu, Nauru, and Tonga – unfolding against a backdrop of structural vulnerability and increasing geopolitical competition for influence in the region. While these developments were primarily shaped by domestic dynamics, external actors – most notably China, but also Australia, the United States, Japan, and New Zealand – intensified their efforts to expand political, economic, and security influence across the “Blue Pacific”.

Within this evolving regional context, Australia succeeded in further deepening its bilateral relations with a number of Pacific Island states, notably through the conclusion of new and expanded security partnerships in the region. In parallel, New Zealand also strengthened its security and development engagement in the Pacific, closely coordinating with regional partners. Taken together, these developments reflect a substantial expansion of partnership-based relations as well as a strengthening of the collective voice of Pacific Island states. Germany, too, has increasingly positioned itself as a reliable partner and is intensifying its engagement and cooperation with countries in the region.

These political highlights and strategic decisions extend far beyond isolated national choices. They have direct implications for the future of democratic governance, regional stability, and the rules-based international order in an era of growing global uncertainty. Overlapping military, political, and economic risks are narrowing international room for manoeuvre – from Europe to the Indo-Pacific. Russia's ongoing war of aggression against Ukraine, heightened great power rivalry, and rising tensions around Taiwan and in the South China Sea, alongside continued escalation in the Middle East, underscore how closely interconnected today's international crises have become. Against this backdrop, close cooperation among like-minded partners such as Australia, New Zealand, Germany, and Europe is gaining strategic importance. Credible partnerships and coordinated political action are essential prerequisites for peace, stability, and a resilient international order.

In close cooperation with our partners, we implemented a wide range of political dialogue formats in 2025. Conferences brought together high-level representatives from politics, academia, and civil society to initiate strategic discussions, with a particular focus in Australia

and New Zealand on security and defence policy, as well as strengthening resilience in the Pacific. Workshops enabled practical, interactive exchange and the joint development of concrete solutions, especially in areas such as good governance, regional integration, and crisis resilience. Seminars fostered in-depth engagement with specific topics, supporting political education and the targeted networking of key stakeholders. Together, these formats strengthened dialogue, mutual understanding, and shared resilience across the region.

Against this backdrop, I am very grateful to have assumed leadership of the KAS Australia and the Pacific in August 2025 and to be able to build upon the successful projects and strong networks developed in previous years. My special thanks go to my predecessor, Bertil Wenger, who, together with our colleagues on the ground, decisively shaped the work of the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung in Australia and the Pacific. Under his leadership, KAS significantly intensified political exchange between Germany, the European Union, and Australia, particularly in the fields of foreign, security, and defence policy.

Among the highlights of our work in 2025 were political dialogue programmes in Australia and across the Pacific involving Members of the German Bundestag and Members of the European Parliament, including representatives of foreign and security policy committees. These initiatives would not have been possible without the close and trust-based cooperation with our partners in governments, think tanks, academia, and civil society.

Building on these achievements, we at KAS Australia and the Pacific look to the future with confidence. Together with our partners, we will continue to contribute to a more stable,

predictable, and secure international order. On behalf of the entire team, I would like to sincerely thank you for your continued trust in and support for the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung Australia and the Pacific.

I hope you find this annual report informative and engaging.

Yours sincerely,

Sabina Wölkner

Director

KAS Australia and the Pacific

2025 Office Visits and Meetings



Australia

28 February – 8 March 2025

Dialogue Programme to Australia by Volkmar Klein MP

At the invitation of KAS Australia and the Pacific, Mr Volkmar Klein, Member of the German Parliament and Vice-Chair of the German-Pacific Parliamentary Group, undertook his final official visit to Australia from 28 February - 8 March 2025.

During his visit, he met key partners central to German-Australian relations.

In Perth, Mr Klein had the opportunity to meet the former Minister for Defence, Senator Linda Reynolds, and the former Minister for the Public Service, Ben Morton, to discuss the implications of the German elections, the upcoming Australian elections, the recent meeting between US President Trump and the Ukrainian President Zelenskyy, and related matters. A roundtable discussion in cooperation with the Perth USAsia Center provided the participants with the opportunity to discuss geopolitics in the Indo-Pacific, the implications for Germany and Europe of the US administration's decision to suspend any support for Ukraine, and other matters. The meetings were complemented by a luncheon discussion with the CEO of Neometals, Christopher Reed, and representatives of Moerk Water, a German company in Australia providing clean water to African countries and Pacific Island States. Further, Mr Klein paid a visit to Hofmann Engineering's Australian headquarters, and was kindly offered a tour of their impressive production facilities. Day 2 in Perth concluded with a lively dinner discussion with the German Honorary Consul, Gabriele Maluga, and representatives from the business sector. Another highlight of his stay in Perth was the visit of the Jewish Center, where Mr Klein learnt about the Center's history and current activities.

Overall, the programme was centred on strengthening the Germany-EU-Australia strategic partnership, with a strong focus on foreign, security, defence, and development policy.





13 March 2025

Germany and Australia: Navigating Opportunities and Challenges Post-Bundestag Election

The snap election in Germany on 23 February 2025 resulted in a victory for the CDU/CSU, paving the way for its return to federal government.

The election also saw the far-right party Alternative for Germany (AfD) gaining a concerning margin of seats in the Bundestag. A coalition government negotiation process was finalised with Friedrich Merz of CDU becoming the new German Chancellor. Australia, on the other hand, also held its general election in May 2025.

A strong, enduring, and reliable partnership between Germany and Australia could not be more vital in such a turbulent time. Following the German election, KAS Australia and the Pacific hosted a forum to discuss Germany and Australia relations amidst this new context, exploring potential opportunities and challenges, and how both countries can navigate this complexity together to defend the rules-based international order and advance mutual interests in the region and the world.

Participants were thoroughly briefed on the outcome of the German federal election, highlighting key takeaways and the coalition negotiations between the CDU/CSU and SPD. We explored future scenarios for the upcoming government, along with its policy direction in navigating complex geopolitical challenges. This included discussions on Europe's relationship with the United States, European defence strategies, and the EU's stance on the Russian-Ukrainian war and peace negotiations.

Our guests actively engaged in the discussion, posing insightful questions and contributing perspectives on how Australia views these developments. This event provided vital information to our key Australian partners—policy experts and decision-makers—enhancing their understanding of the current developments in Germany and the European Union under the forthcoming CDU-led government.

The forum was also an opportunity for our director, Bertil Wenger, to bid his farewell to our partners after his three and a half years serving KAS Australia and the Pacific. The team and partners highly appreciated his leadership and the lasting impact he's made on our work in Australia and the Pacific region.



10 April 2025

Marimari Screening

KAS Australia and the Pacific, in cooperation with Handmade Productions Aotearoa, was pleased to host a screening of Marimari, a documentary on sorcery accusation related violence (SARV) in Papua New Guinea.

Through the observational lens of Kiwi documentary filmmaker Paul Wolfram (Handmade Productions), the audience was taken deep into lushly forested landscapes to hear first-hand accounts from both survivors and perpetrators.

The screening was complemented by a conversation with the filmmaker Paul Wolfram and Miranda Forsyth from the Australian National University, who provided the audience with further insights, including on legislative initiatives such as the repeal of the Sorcery Act (2013) and the introduction of the Glasman Act (2022).



28–29 October 2025

Fourth Annual KAS Australia and the Pacific Security Conference *'International Order at Crossroads: Democracy, Migration and the Future of Global Governance'*

We held our fourth KAS Australia and the Pacific Security Conference on German-Indo-Pacific common security concerns in Canberra, supported by the Australian Institute of International Affairs (AIIA), the Centre for Future Defence and National Security (Deakin University), and the ANU National Security College.



Never since the Cold War have we seen such relentless turmoil in global politics as we do today. The Russian war on Ukraine has been ongoing for three years and continues to pose an imminent threat to European security. The Middle East remains an unstable region, with the Israel-Palestine crisis as the most predominant issue dividing the world. While on the other side of the globe, unpredictable and shifting policies in foreign affairs and trade among the superpowers are creating spillover effects in the Southeast Asian and Pacific regions.

The liberal international world order is under distressing attacks from all sides, not only from its adversaries but also from some who have previously been called its strongest allies. While the authoritarianism trend is on the rise across many parts of the world, the one-time leader of democracy is seemingly turning their back on those fighting hard to defend it, causing unease among its partners through erratic and contradictory messaging, and, once again, calling into question its reliability in times of crisis.

In addition to state-level dilemmas, we are also witnessing other critical impacts that the international system is facing. International and multilateral institutions such as the United Nations and its agencies, the World Health Organization, and the Paris Agreement, among others, are facing existential threats caused by membership and funding withdrawal.

The rules-based order, as we know it, appears to be standing at a defining moment. The question is whether history will record the current period as a genuine turning point for the liberal international order or simply as a temporary phase of heightened turbulence.

The conference brought together parliamentarians, experts, practitioners, and representatives from relevant government institutions and the diplomatic corps for open, policy-relevant exchanges and discussions on common security concerns, potential areas of future cooperation, and effective strategies for dealing with the current international security environment. It examined issues ranging from regional conflicts and geopolitical tensions to (economic) interdependence, and the challenges of weighing up national and international interests, exploring innovative strategies and collaborative frameworks that can reconcile seemingly divergent objectives.

We were delighted to have the Hon Melissa Price MP, Shadow Minister for Defence Industry and Shadow Minister for Defence Personnel, and Michael Gahler MEP, EU Parliament Permanent Rapporteur on Ukraine and Member of the Foreign Affairs Committee, as keynote speakers for our event.





26–31 October 2025

EU-German Delegation Visit

We were delighted to welcome a small delegation from Europe to Australia as part of our Security Conference programme.

Michael Gahler MEP, Permanent Rapporteur on Ukraine, Dr. Peter Hefe, Policy Director at the Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies, and Felix Neumann, Policy Advisor for Counter-Terrorism and Counter-Extremism at KAS Berlin, began their visit in Sydney, with a focus on Counter-Terrorism and Extremism-related issues. In a series of briefings and roundtable discussions with experts and business representatives, we explored current areas of common concern, such as the increased manifestation of nationalist, right-wing, and left-wing extremist positions in the wake of cost-of-living crises and the Israel-Gaza war. We gained valuable insights into the history of terrorism and terrorism policy in Australia.

Meeting partners included German Consul General Felix Schwarz, Dr Andrew Maher from the University of New South Wales, the directors of Praxis Advisory, as well as Honorary Senior Research Fellow Lise Waldek and Prof Julian Droogan from Macquarie University's Department of Security Studies and Criminology.

The discussions highlighted that Germany and Australia are facing shared challenges and parallel trends in the extremism landscape, making strengthened exchange and cooperation highly beneficial for both.

From Sydney, the delegation went on to Canberra, where the programme focused on foreign and security policy-related issues, including maritime and energy security, with current developments in the Russia-Ukraine war, questions regarding the US alliance, and regional conflicts in and around the South China Sea at the forefront of the debates.

The discussions once again highlighted how deeply connected our two regions are, with events in one region sending its ripple effects into the other, and with disruptive actors like Russia and China trying to gain influence in both regions by means of increased grey-zone activities.



Our shared concerns mean that both Australia and Europe could significantly benefit from closer cooperation on security and defence through the creation of strategic synergies that could enhance both regions’ resilience. This cooperation does not necessarily relate to military capabilities but could include partnerships in the energy sector, shared intelligence, and more coordinated policy responses to emerging threats like cyberattacks and disinformation.

Meeting partners in Canberra included members of parliament as well as members of the Diplomatic Corps, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade representatives, foreign policy and security experts, and business representatives.

Our delegates were particularly impressed by the Australian War Memorial, where they attended the Last Post Ceremony and MEP Gahler laid a wreath.

Our delegates concluded their Australia visit in Perth, supported by German Honorary Consul Dr Gabriele Maluga, where they attended the official launch ceremony of NUSHIP Pilbara, the first Arafura Class Offshore Patrol Vessel constructed in WA, based on the Lürssen PV80 design. It was great to see this very noticeable outcome of shared international expertise.

The group then met with founder and CEO of StratQ, Paul Myler - who kindly shared his expertise on US foreign policy decision-making, and the Russia-Ukraine war – before engaging in a lively discussion on education, cybersecurity and autonomous systems with Professor of Cyber Security Helge Janicke (Edith Cowan University), and Professor Thomas Bräunl from the Faculty of Engineering and Mathematical Sciences at the University of Western Australia.

The day ended with a quick visit to beautiful Kings Park and the State War Memorial.

We are immensely grateful to all our meeting partners who took the time throughout the week to share their expertise and engage in solution-oriented debates on issues that are of increasing importance to both our regions. We are looking forward to continuing the discussions in the future.





6 November 2025

Fourth Pacific Meet & Greet in Canberra

We were pleased to host the fourth Pacific Meet & Greet in Canberra under the theme “Navigating Change: Perspectives from Germany, Europe and the Pacific on Development and Dialogue.”

Originally launched during the pandemic as a space for Pacific engagement, the gathering has since grown into a dynamic platform for dialogue, collaboration, and shared learning on regional and global challenges.

In her opening remarks, Sabina Wölkner, Director of KAS Australia and the Pacific, connected Germany and the EU’s “Zeitenwende” with the Pacific’s “Ocean of Peace Declaration”, noting that these are complementary pillars of a human-centred security vision in today’s fast-changing world.

We extend our gratitude to the Pacific, German, and European diplomats, researchers, academics, and business representatives for contributing to a lively discussion on climate-related security risks and the need for sustainable solutions.

17 November 2025

AIIA National Conference

‘A World Disrupted: Australia and Global Reordering’

As in previous years, KAS Australia and the Pacific was proud to support the Australian Institute of International Affairs’ Annual National Conference.

It is Australia’s premier event on Australian foreign policy and attracts high-level participants who help shape Australia’s politics, including ministers, academics, senior government officials and business leaders.

Under the heading of A World Disrupted: Australia and Global Reordering, acknowledging the shifts in order globally and the need for a comprehensive national security approach, the conference focused on international foreign and security policy challenges as well as on the problem of increasing domestic fragmentation.

The panel sessions examined themes ranging from security to trade and economic concerns, including the impact of recent US policies on regional power dynamics, the role and (in)capacities of multinational institutions, and the effects of domestic polarisation on foreign policy decision-making.

The Gala dinner included a keynote by Foreign Minister Penny Wong, who provided a comprehensive overview of Australia’s foreign policy approach. In this, the Australian government is prioritising regional relations and commitments, increasing cooperation and security partnerships with neighbours such as Japan, South Korea, Indonesia, and India, as well as engaging with Pacific Islands nations. The Minister stressed that the change and disruption we were witnessing in the regional environment was permanent, and that, in view of this, an emphasis on the four ‘R’s of resilience, region, relationships, and rules, would be a priority for government in its strategic counter-threat policy decision-making.



4 November 2025

Lowy Lecture

KAS Australia and the Pacific was delighted to attend the 2025 Lowy Lecture held at Sydney Town Hall.

The keynote address was given by Mike Burgess, the Director-General of the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO), who has also served in the past at the Joint Defence Facility Pine Gap. Mr Burgess said that the three main security concerns remained espionage, foreign interference, and violent extremism. Addressing these threats would require a whole of society approach: "Your business might not be national security but that does not mean national security isn't your business." Whilst individual grievances were on the rise, social cohesion was in decline: "The aggrieved, the opportunistic, and the cunning are ripping our social fabric." People, he said, had lost their ability to converse, to disagree, and to compromise. In terms of external threats, he noted that there were at least three countries willing and able to carry out politically motivated assassinations in Australia. And, his agency had foiled an elaborate plot by one foreign country to convince several Australian citizens to spy on their country. Australia continued to maintain strong intelligence relationships with many countries and organisations; the relationship with the United States was as strong as ever. Asked about the value of Five Eyes for Australia, he suggested its members benefited greatly from the comprehensive intelligence sharing, noting his own country contributed significantly.



New Zealand and the Pacific

24–28 February 2025

Workshops on Political Parties and Democracy in the Pacific

Samoa

KAS Australia and the Pacific was pleased to launch the second iteration of its workshops on political parties and democracy in the Pacific region this year. Led by Dr Wilhelm Hofmeister – Lecturer at the Institute of Social Sciences and Fellow of the Party Research Institute of the University of Düsseldorf – the first round of workshops took place in Apia.

Samoa Umbrella Organisation of NGOs (SUNGO), the Samoa and Tokelau Association of Recyclers (STAR), as well as representatives from the media and business sector. The German Honorary Consul, Stefan Szegedi, was also in attendance, along with two scholars from the University of the South Pacific (USP) in Suva.

Topics ranged from the history of democracy to threats facing modern democracy and political parties, including corruption and populism. Participants also developed strategies for their respective organisations using SWOT analysis and discussed the role that artificial intelligence might play in their future work. Dr Hofmeister emphasised the importance of civil society organisations to any democracy and acknowledged there is no one-size-fits all approach.

The workshops in Apia coincided with both the general elections in Germany and a vote of no confidence against the Prime Minister of Samoa, both of which are important features of democratic political systems.

Fiji

Themed “Democracy and Political Parties in Fiji - Challenges and Opportunities”, the workshops attracted representatives from the National Federation Party and the People’s Alliance Party this year. Topics included the state of democracy; the two pillars of democracy – political parties and civic engagement and participation; party development and reform; and pathways to action.

The discussion highlighted some of the challenges facing Fiji’s democracy, including coordination among the three governing parties in the coalition government, reconciliation between indigenous iTaukei and Indo-Fijians, and the balancing of Western law with customary law, indigenous rights, and traditions. Participants also conducted SWOT analysis of their respective parties and discussed political strategy, party communication, and party funding.

KAS Australia and the Pacific would like to thank Dr Wilhelm Hofmeister of the University of Düsseldorf for once again leading the workshops this year.





20 February 2025

Pacific Islands Political Studies Association's (PIPSA) Conference

KAS Australia and the Pacific was pleased to support the 2025 Pacific Islands Political Studies Association's (PIPSA) Conference this year.

Themed “The Pacific Islands: Zone of Peace or Ocean of Discontent?”, the Conference was kicked off by an inspiring speech from New Zealand's Deputy Prime Minister, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Sir Winston Peters, giving an overview of New Zealand's policies in its region.

The DPM stressed his country's ongoing commitment to needs-based development assistance, the need to reset its relationship with the Cook Islands, and the challenges posed by New Caledonia's multi-ethnic society. He concluded that, despite numerous challenges, the Pacific family would always find a way ahead. The conference also featured various expert speakers from all over the Pacific region, including the Norfolk Islands.

In the course of numerous panel discussions and roundtables, the participants had ample opportunity to discuss Pacific affairs, including China and Taiwan, the rise of defence diplomacy, and postcolonial relations as seen from the Pacific Islands.

The Vice Chancellor of the National University of the Solomon Islands, Transform Aqorau, delivered a keynote speech that was pragmatic, passionate, and inspiring at the same time. He emphasised that the Pacific region was not a battleground or a chessboard, advocated for Pacific voices and solidarity informed by independent Pacific research, and concluded that the Pacific region was a zone of peace and opportunities, not discontent.

24 March 2025

Pacific Legal Challenges – Maritime Borders and Statehood

KAS Australia and the Pacific, in cooperation with the Embassy of Latvia in Australia, delivered a Roundtable on “Pacific Legal Challenges – Maritime Borders and Statehood” at the Fiji Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) and the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) Secretariat in Suva.

Sea-level rise poses a significant challenge to the international legal framework governing statehood, sovereignty, and human rights. The issue is currently under discussion at the International Law Commission (ILC), with conclusions expected in the Commission’s upcoming session. As Pacific Island nations are at the frontline of climate change, understanding the legal ramifications of sea-level rise is crucial for policy formulation, diplomatic engagement, and regional advocacy.

The keynote speaker was Professor Martins Paparinskis, Latvia’s first-ever representative at the ILC (more precisely, a member of the ILC’s Working Group on Sea-Level Rise in Relation to International Law) and Professor of Public International Law at University College London. Professor Paparinskis has also actively contributed to discussions on the law of the sea, statehood, and human rights. This, and his role as lead counsel for Latvia in the International Court of Justice (ICJ) advisory proceedings on Obligations of States with respect to climate change, meant that he could provide deep expertise and valuable insights into international legal developments on the issue.

In his presentation, Professor Paparinskis set the scene by referring to the 1933 Montevideo Convention on the Rights and Duties of States, which outlines the four criteria for statehood: a permanent population, a defined territory, a government, and the capacity to enter into relations with other states. The expert went on to explain the preliminary findings of the ILC, with a final report scheduled to be released later this year. The discussion featured HE Mārgers Krams, Ambassador of Latvia to Australia and Special Envoy to the Pacific, the Deputy Speaker of the Parliament of Fiji and Assistant Minister for Foreign Affairs, the Hon Lenora Qereqeretabua, the Permanent Secretary of MOFA, Dr Raijeli Taga, and other high-profile representatives from the Ministry, as well as experts from various Fijian universities.





24 March 2025

NZIIA Conference Panel on Security in the Pacific Region

KAS Australia and the Pacific has supported the NZIIA Conference again this year.

Themed 'Aotearoa New Zealand's Foreign & Trade Policy in Contested Spaces – Prosperity, Security, Values', the conference was opened by Dr James Kember, the Chair of NZIIA, who set the scene by quoting the Roman Emperor Hadrian: 'Peace through strength. Failing that, peace through threat.'

In the Opening Session, the Ukrainian Ambassador to New Zealand, HE Vasyl Myroshnychenko, reminded the audience that Ukraine had given up its nuclear arsenal in the 1990s, and called for a strong and united response by like-minded countries to Russia's aggression. The Asia New Zealand Foundation presented the results of its survey on New Zealanders' perceptions of Asia and Asian peoples, showing that Aotearoa's Asia literacy had increased.

Further, a range of keynote speakers and high-profile experts from New Zealand, Australia, the USA, Mexico, India, and the Pacific region addressed topics including New Zealand's foreign policy reset, the changing international order, climate change, trade and economics, and Trump 2.0.

The KAS-sponsored panel on security in the Pacific region focused on the various dimensions of security, including human, economic, climate, and financial security, as well as rising geopolitical competition in the region and related challenges. More specifically, the MFAT representative outlined New Zealand's engagement with the Pacific, including the PNG–Bougainville independence negotiations scheduled to be held in New Zealand the following week, and beyond the region, including Prime Minister Luxon's attendance at the upcoming NATO Summit.

Dr Anna Powles from Massey University highlighted the dual challenge of external geopolitical pressure and internal friction. Sione Tekiteki from Auckland University of Technology, previously a long-term employee of the PIF Secretariat, emphasised the need to consider Pacific perspectives at the domestic level, including the challenges posed by small populations and limited capacities. She also expressed concern that bilateral agreements might affect the conclusion of regional treaties.

Professor Steven Ratuva from the University of Canterbury addressed the insecurity caused by climate change, noting that it had become a political issue increasingly leveraged by great powers. The CEO of Starboard Maritime Intelligence demonstrated his company's monitoring of illegal maritime activities, including illegal fishing, in the Pacific region and around the world.

The conference concluded with a keynote address by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Rt Hon Winston Peters, who outlined New Zealand's foreign policy reset. Foreign and trade policy, he noted, may seem abstract, but it affects New Zealanders in their everyday lives. In his view, it is incumbent on New Zealand to chart its own course, while recognising that current challenges also present significant opportunities.



3–5 June 2025

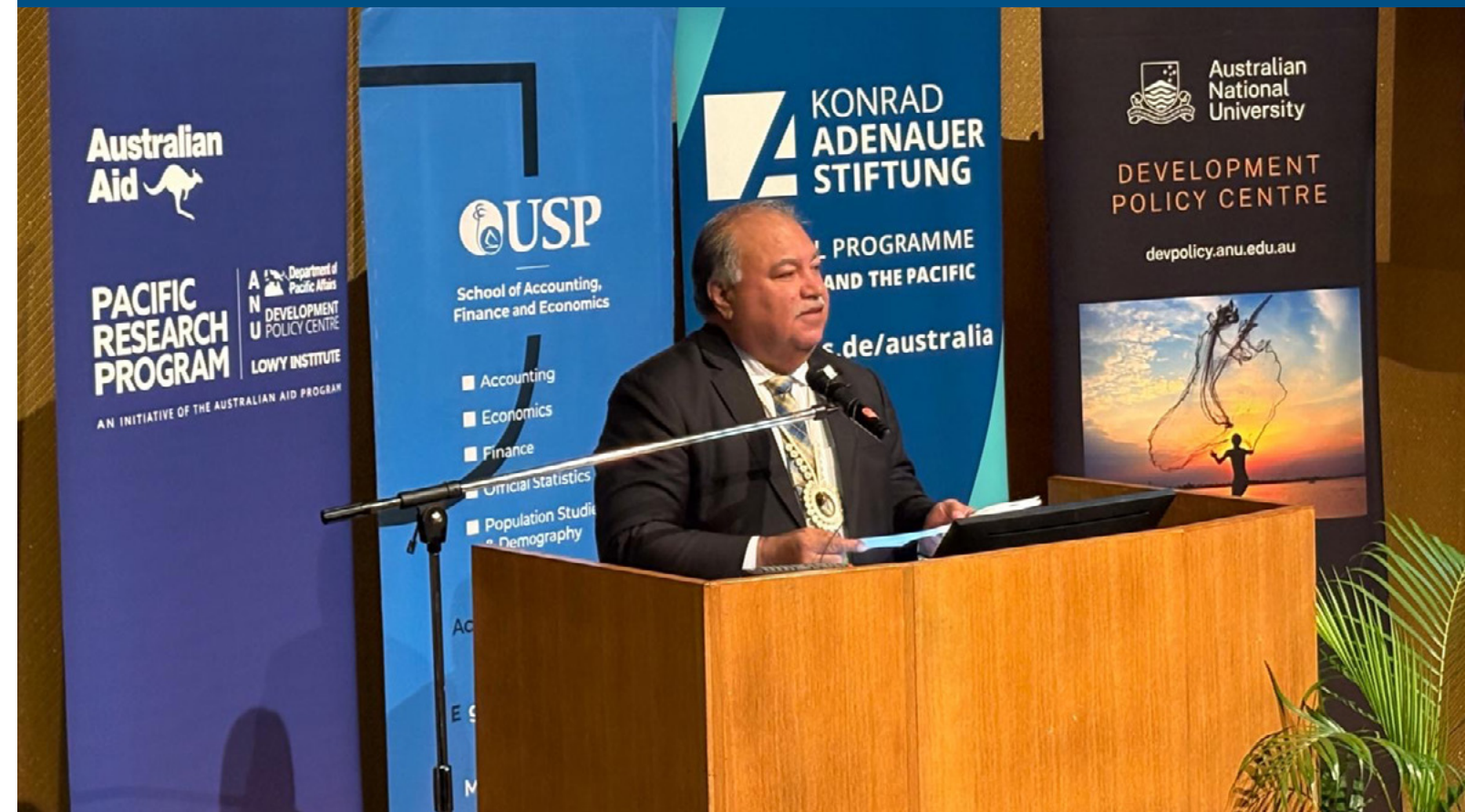
Pacific Update

KAS Australia and the Pacific has supported the Pacific Update again this year.

Dubbed the premier forum for the discussion of economic, social, political and environmental issues in the Pacific region, the three-day conference featured various high-profile speakers, including the Secretary General of the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) Secretariat and former President of Nauru, the Hon Baron Waqa, who outlined his vision for the Pacific region, including a rules-based order that meets the region's needs.

The presentations covered a range of topics again, including 'Regional Integration and Governance', for example through the 2050 Blue Pacific Strategy; 'Corruption in the Pacific', including discussion of the need for a new definition; and 'The Future of Work', examining how Fiji and other Pacific Island countries can build a labour market that is more inclusive, adaptive and future-ready. Notably, the conference also featured a panel on 'The Potential of AI in Policymaking and Development in the Pacific', which introduced 'Dragonfly Thinking' as an AI-powered framework for approaching complex issues. Day three was dedicated to a workshop on Pacific migration research, featuring keynote speakers from the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the Solomon Islands Ministry of Foreign Affairs and External Trade, who outlined current Pacific migration trends and policies from their respective national perspectives.

Attendees included academics, experts, students, government representatives, decision makers, representatives from the media, and NGOs.





27-29 June 2025

Otago Foreign Policy School

Themed 'Small Powers and Strategic Competition in the Indo-Pacific', the first day of the conference featured numerous expert speakers, including Patrick Koellner from the University of Hamburg, who provided the audience with an understanding of the varying definitions of 'small powers' and 'agency' that exist in international relations theory.

Kai He from Griffith University gave his account of small powers and the international order transition, referring to diplomacy as the weapon of the weak, and proposing that small states avoid entanglement in military competition, selectively engage in institutional competition, and actively defend and shape the international order. Dr Sandra Tarte from the University of the South Pacific (USP) discussed Fiji's role in advancing regional stability in an era of geopolitical competition and tension, referring, among other things, to the concept of 'Ocean of Peace' proposed by Fijian Prime Minister, Sitiveni Rabuka.

Dr Sarina Theys from USP discussed the agency of Pacific Island states in addressing climate change, citing the Falepili Union Treaty between Australia and Tuvalu as an example. The second day of the conference featured, among others, Nilanthi Samaranayake, who presented her research on the approaches of selected small East Asian countries to strategic competition in the Indian Ocean, including Sri Lanka's management of its relations with India, for example through a protocol of prior consultation on Chinese vessels visiting its ports.

Professor Kuik Cheng-Kwee from the National University of Malaysia discussed, among other issues, whether the notion of 'small powers' was an oxymoron. He noted that small states did not usually have the means to determine outcomes based on their needs, but could exercise greater agency collectively, for example through ASEAN. Dr Anna Powles from Massey University focused on the 2050 Blue Pacific Strategy as a response to rising geopolitical competition and as an effort to reorder security in the Pacific region. While the foreign policy approach of Pacific Islands states – 'friends to all, enemy to none' – remained a useful tool, questions surrounding regional power remained unresolved, and tensions persisted among the three subregions, as evidenced, for example, by the 'Micronexit'.

The keynote address was delivered remotely by the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Winston Peters, who outlined New Zealand's independent foreign policy in general and its Pacific Reset in particular, emphasising that small states matter and that their voices should be heard. Hosted by KAS Australia and the Pacific, the expert speakers and a number of attendees also had the opportunity to continue their discussions over a conference dinner.



1-3 July 2025

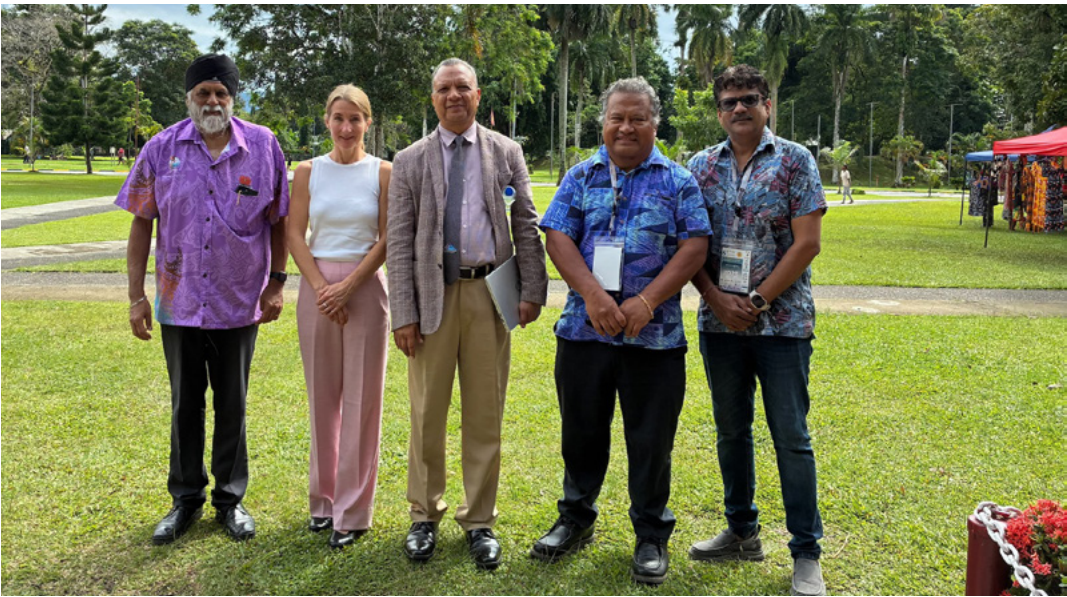
Sixth Pacific Islands Universities Research Network (PIURN) Conference

Themed ‘Harnessing technologies for the safe and sustainable development of the Pacific’, the Sixth PIURN Conference was held at the Papua New Guinea University of Technology (PNGUoT) in Lae and brought together researchers from across the Pacific.

In his opening address, the Vice Chancellor of PNGUoT, Professor Ora Renagi, emphasised the role of higher education in improving standards of living and stressed that ‘together it was possible’. One of the keynote addresses was delivered by the Deputy Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea (PNG), John Rosso. He described the conference theme as reflecting the convergence of modern technologies and traditional knowledge. The research conducted by members of the Network, he noted, generated the facts and figures needed to inform sound policies, which in turn served as an engine of development.

He also contrasted living in Washington, DC, with life in a PNG village, noting that conventional economic measures did not necessarily capture differences in living costs and access to basic resources; in a village, for example, housing and access to water might involve little to no direct cost. He also referred to Peru’s impressive agricultural exports, observing that PNG had fertile land but comparatively few agricultural exports, potentially reflecting factors such as limited access to pesticides and the high import standards of third countries.

The French Ambassador, Pierre Fournier, quoted Victor Hugo: ‘He who opens a school door closes a prison door’. The President and Vice Chancellor of the University of the South Pacific (USP), Professor Pal Ahluwalia, spoke about the need for the decolonisation of the Pacific region. He referred to statistics indicating that social science research from the Global South was often underrepresented in international rankings, which were predominantly based on research outputs from the Global North. The Pacific region, he said, needed to be part of global development while also standing up for its own interests. He concluded by calling for actionable strategies and policies to create a brighter future for the Pacific region.





4-5 September 2025

EU-Pacific Business Forum

KAS Australia and the Pacific had the pleasure of witnessing the inaugural EU-Pacific Business Forum held on 4-5 September 2025 in Nadi.

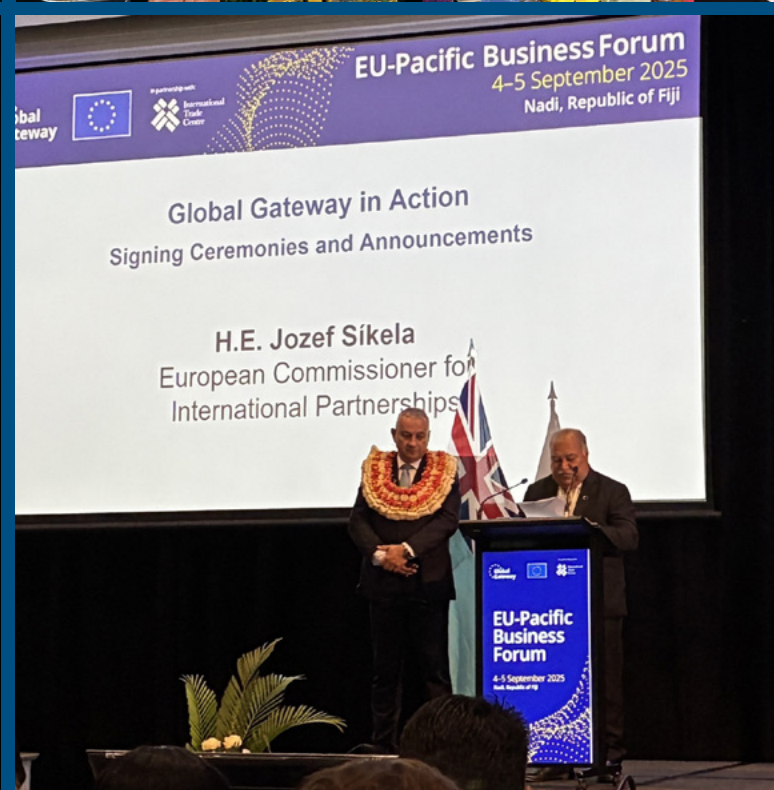
The Forum convened public and private sector operators from the EU and Pacific countries and territories to increase trade and investment between the two regions.

The two-day interactive event focused on the EU's Global Gateway initiative and featured plenary and thematic sessions on blue economy, digital connectivity, renewable energy, and climate change, as well as food processing and agriculture. The sessions were complemented by business-to-business (B2B) and business-to-government (B2G) networking meetings to foster tangible business outcomes. Development finance institutions showcased the opportunities linked to the European Fund for Sustainable Development (EFSD+), a financing tool of the EU's Global Gateway initiative.

The Forum took place two years after the signing of the Samoa (post-Cotonou) Agreement in Apia and immediately before the 2025 Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) Leaders Meeting in Honiara. The event gained particular importance after the PIF's decision to implement the Leaders Meeting without the participation of any of the dialogue partners.

High-level representatives from the EU included the EU Commissioner for International Partnerships, HE Jozef Sikela, who highlighted shared values and the opportunities that come with the EU's Global Gateway initiative. High-level representatives from the Pacific Region included the Secretary General of the PIF Secretariat, the Hon Baron Waqa, the Deputy Prime Minister of Fiji, the Hon Manoa Kamikamica, the President of Palau, the Hon Surangel Whipps Jr., and the President of French Polynesia (Tahiti), the Hon Moetai Brotherson, who focused on the achievements that the PIF member states in general and their respective countries in particular have achieved to date.

The participants agreed that challenges remain, including the EU's sanitary and phytosanitary standards, and the Pacific Islands states' limited capacities and lack of suitable legislation. As part of the solution, greater regional integration and collaboration was offered, which the EU Ambassador, HE Barbara Plinkert, stated would flow through the veins of the EU.



8–12 September 2025

The 54th Pacific Islands Forum Leaders Meeting (PIFLM)

KAS Australia and the Pacific was pleased to attend the Opening Ceremony of the 54th PIFLM, held in Honiara from 8–12 September 2025.

Held under the theme ‘Umi Tugeda: Act Now for an Integrated Blue Pacific Continent’, the 2025 PIFLM was unusual in that dialogue partners did not participate in the event. Keynote addresses were delivered by the Prime Minister of Tonga, the Hon Aisake Eke; the Secretary General of the PIF Secretariat, the Hon Baron Waqa; and the Prime Minister of the Solomon Islands, the Hon Jeremiah Manele. They emphasised the importance of Pacific regional solidarity in addressing the challenges facing the region, including the effects of climate change. Notably, Prime Minister Manele acknowledged the value of partners and partnerships, noting that PIF members looked forward to engaging with their partners again at the next opportunity. According to the Prime Minister Manele, key outcomes of the high-level meetings included the signing of the Pacific Resilience Facility, the adoption of the Ocean of Peace Declaration and the Labour Mobility Principles, as well as progress on reforms to the regional architecture.

KAS Australia and the Pacific was also invited to attend various side events hosted by the Islands Knowledge Institute of the Solomon Islands (IKI) in connection with the Forum. IKI is one of KAS Australia and the Pacific’s cooperation partners in the Solomon Islands. In the words of its founders, the think tank was set up ‘to build knowledge created by island peoples within island spaces’.

The week-long side events covered a range of themes, including kava and its protection as a geographical indication of origin, the creation of a Melanesian ocean reserve, and opportunities presented by indigenous constitutionalism. Speakers included the Minister for Climate Change Adaptation of Vanuatu, the Hon Ralph Regenvanu, as well as other ministers and members of parliament. Attendees also included representatives of the West Papuan independence movement, civil society organisations, the media, and youth organisations.





23-24 October 2025

First EU-NZ Business Summit

KAS Australia and the Pacific had the pleasure of attending the first EU-NZ Business Summit held on 23-24 October 2025 in Auckland.

The high-level, invitation-only gathering brought together more than 450 top business leaders and political decision-makers to explore new partnerships and accelerate market expansion. Keynote speakers included the Rt Hon Christopher Luxon, Prime Minister of New Zealand; the Hon Todd McClay, Minister for Trade and Investment; and the EU Commissioner for Trade, Maroš Šefčovič. They highlighted, among other things, the strong performance of the EU-New Zealand Free Trade Agreement (FTA) in its first full year of operation and the benefits of New Zealand's participation in Horizon Europe, the world's largest research and innovation programme.

Following his recent meeting with the President of the EU Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, Prime Minister Luxon continued his advocacy for closer cooperation between the EU, the members of the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), and the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), noting that together they would account for close to forty percent of global trade.

In response, the EU Commissioner for Trade announced that he would attend the CPTPP Trade Ministers' meeting in Australia the following month to explore greater cooperation in safeguarding free trade. The Summit also featured panels on 'Clean Tech and Renewable Innovation', 'Investment and Infrastructure', 'Advanced Technologies', and 'Aerospace and Defence', with speakers from businesses in the EU and New Zealand, including Airbus, Maersk, Ericsson, Zespri, and Rocket Lab.

The Summit was complemented by numerous side events, including a seminar by the French Embassy on 'Decarbonising Transportation' and an event by the New Zealand Europe Business Council (NZEBC), which provided a platform for Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries to showcase their economies. The EU Commissioner for Trade also announced that the Summit would continue in Brussels the following year – an invitation that New Zealand's Minister for Trade was quick to accept.



Meet the team



Sabina Wölkner
Director, KAS Australia and the Pacific

“I am very grateful to have assumed leadership of the KAS Australia and the Pacific in August 2025 and to continue building on the successful foundations established over the previous years. Together with my team and our valued partners, I look forward to advancing our shared commitment to a more stable, predictable, and secure international order.”



Sophia Brook
Senior Policy Adviser (Foreign & Security Policy, Defence, Counter-Terrorism, Cybersecurity)

“With a background in international relations, my focus is on the Australian political landscape, Australian defence and security issues, competition and geostrategic uncertainty in the Indo-Pacific, and Australian-German/European cooperation. My work at KAS offers me the opportunity to lead a variety of engaging projects that enhance our understanding of great power competition and strategic interests in the Indo-Pacific region and what they mean for Australia, Germany, and European relations.”



Geniebel Gacusan
Finance and Administrative Manager

“I have worked with not-for-profit organisations focused on community service before joining KAS. Having an accounting background, I am responsible for the financial management side and any accounting-related matters to support the team in completing the KAS yearly measures. It is a great opportunity to be part of KAS and to see all the contributions they bring in Australia, the Pacific Region, and Worldwide.”



Chhayheng Soth
Events and Communications Coordinator

“This year has truly been one of transition and growth in my journey with Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS). Moving from the KAS Cambodia Office to the Regional Programme Australia and the Pacific, and from the Foreign and Security Policy portfolio to supporting broader programmes and communications, has been a meaningful highlight. I am grateful for the continued opportunity to contribute to KAS’s work, and I look forward to making the most of my remaining time in Canberra with KAS Australia and the Pacific.”



Eva Wagner
Senior Policy Adviser
(Governance and Rule of Law)

“Being a German lawyer admitted to the bar, KAS Australia provides me with the opportunity to see the world from a broader viewpoint. Working in international relations, at the intersection of law, politics and economics, remains as exciting and rewarding as it was on my first day. I look forward to continue fostering the mutual understanding and cooperation between the two countries and regions that I call home.”



Klaudia Simon
Office Manager

“This year, my role centred on keeping our office running smoothly and ensuring a well-organised environment for the team. Working across a range of operational tasks reinforced my commitment to supporting a reliable and positive workplace, as well as KAS’s mission in Australia and the Pacific.”



Review in Pictures 2025



Foreign and Liaison Offices of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung



CP = Country Programme
RP = Regional Sector Programme
LO = Liaison Office





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REGIONAL PROGRAMME
AUSTRALIA AND THE PACIFIC

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AUSTRALIA AND THE PACIFIC

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