



Media Release

BOB McMULLAN MP

PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE
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Australia to work with Pacific on land policy reform

The Australian Government is to provide A\$54 million over four years for a Pacific Land Program to support governments in the region that wish to strengthen or improve their land systems.

“This funding, which was announced in the recent Australian budget, will provide practical assistance to governments dealing with complex issues relating to land policy reform,” said Australia’s Parliamentary Secretary for International Development Assistance, Bob McMullan.

Mr McMullan said Australian assistance will be guided by two fundamental principles: first, Australia will only support reforms that recognise the continuing importance of customary tenure; and, second, land policy reform must be driven by Pacific island governments and communities, not by donors.

Mr McMullan is in Vanuatu for a two-day Pacific land policy conference. The *Making Land Work* conference will be attended by government ministers, officials, landowners and other groups from around the Pacific region with a stake or interest in land issues.

“Pacific governments are under pressure to reconcile new and competing interests relating to land ownership and land use with the customary systems that have served their people for countless generations,” he said. “These pressures include new technologies, rapid population growth and social change. Our program is designed to provide support to governments undertaking reforms to strengthen and improve their land systems and deal with these pressures.”

The Pacific Land Program will increase the skills and knowledge of people working in land departments and non-government organisations. It will include assistance for dispute resolution and helping customary owners negotiate on a more even basis with investors and developers. The program will initially provide support to Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu, Solomon Islands and Timor-Leste. Assistance will also be provided on a regional level for education and training and to help countries respond to problems associated with growing urbanisation such as squatter settlements.

“Uncertainty over land ownership and land use constrains social and economic development and reduces the prospects of greater investment and higher living standards,” said Mr McMullan. “It can be a trigger for wider conflict, and conflict tends to exacerbate poverty.”

Mr McMullan will launch a two-volume publication *Making Land Work* prepared by the Australian Agency for International Development, AusAID, based on consultations with more than 80 specialists and practitioners in land and development from the region, including Australia and New Zealand.

The publication provides an overview of matters that countries are likely to face if they choose to reform their land policies and institutions. It includes case studies that look at problems and innovative practices in land tenure and administration across the Pacific.

‘This is an excellent resource for policy-makers,’ says Mr McMullan. ‘It draws lessons from international experience around the Pacific and will stimulate ideas on policy options.’

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