

## **Media release**

11 August 2008

# **Mr Greg Urwin PSM**

I was deeply saddened to learn that Mr Greg Urwin - who was both an outstanding Australian and a legend in the Pacific - had passed away during the weekend in Apia.

Mr Urwin made a very significant contribution to the development of Australia's relations with Pacific countries and to the advancement of regional cooperation in the Pacific throughout his distinguished career with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and, subsequently, as Secretary-General of the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat.

As an officer of the Department, Mr Urwin held a number of senior overseas appointments relating to the Pacific, including as Head of Mission in Samoa, Vanuatu and Fiji and as Deputy Head of Mission in Wellington.

In between his assignments in the region he held senior positions in the Department in Canberra, largely working on the Pacific.

Mr Urwin's remarkable achievements in advancing Australia's foreign policy interests in the Pacific region over a period of more than 20 years, serving successive Australian governments, were recognised with the awarding to him, in 2001, of the Public Service Medal for his "Outstanding Contribution to the Development of Australia's Relationship with the Pacific".

In 2003 Mr Urwin was appointed to the position of Secretary General of the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, whose membership comprises 16 independent and self-governing states in the South Pacific region. This was the first time an Australian had been appointed to this important position. His appointment, and subsequent reappointment for a second term in October 2006, reflected the very high regard and personal standing in which he was held by the countries of the Pacific. He took medical leave from the Forum Secretariat earlier this year.

In all these positions Mr Urwin made a very substantive and lasting contribution to the political, economic and social development of the Pacific region. His diplomatic skills, underpinned by a deep commitment to the Pacific and its people, were of the highest order. His self-effacing and informal manner complemented a sharp and creative intellect.

His strong strategic leadership in the Pacific as Secretary-General of the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, led to many major achievements, including the firm establishment of the Pacific Plan as the platform for ongoing, strengthened regional cooperation and integration for the benefit of the people of the Pacific.

Mr Urwin was also a pivotal actor in a number of other significant regional accomplishments including:

- the drafting of the Pacific Islands Forum's Biketawa Declaration in 2000, which provided, for the first time, a firm political basis for regional cooperation in the area of security.
- support for the Forum's Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) which is regarded, both within the Pacific and more broadly, as an outstanding example of successful regional cooperation in addressing a difficult political, security and economic situation in a member state.

Perhaps the best evidence of an effective diplomat is the strength of the relationships they build. Throughout his career, Greg Urwin genuinely engaged and maintained strong ties with those he worked with. He will be deeply missed and warmly remembered by his many friends, both in Australia and more widely in the Pacific. His gentle humour was infectious!

On behalf of the Australian government I extend my deepest sympathy to Mr Urwin's family at this very sad time for them. They can, however, be justly proud of Greg's exceptional career and the enduring contribution he has made to developing and strengthening the relations between the countries and peoples of the Pacific – a region of fundamental importance to Australia.

In due recognition for his great achievements, the Government will be represented at Mr Urwin's funeral later this week in Apia by the Parliamentary Secretary for International Development Assistance, the Hon Bob McMullan MP.

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