

## Morrison to unveil broad suite of measures to boost Australia's influence in the Pacific

Written by Michelle Grattan, Professorial Fellow, University of Canberra

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Scott Morrison on Thursday will announce an extensive suite of military, diplomatic, financial and people-to-people initiatives in a major boost to Australia's role in the Pacific.

They include setting up a \$2 billion infrastructure financing facility to promote development in the region.

The facility - coming hard on the heels of Labor proposing a government-backed infrastructure investment bank to assist the Pacific - would provide grant and loan financing for telecommunications, transport, energy, water and similar projects.

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***Read more:*** [\*\*Shorten proposes investment bank to help Pacific nations' development\*\*](#)

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The military initiatives include an Australian Defence Force Pacific Mobile Training Team and more naval deployments, while diplomatic missions will be opened in Palau, the Marshall Islands, French Polynesia, Niue and the Cook Islands.

The Pacific push is against the background of China's growing involvement in the area. But the government also points to issues of potential instability in some countries, and the Islamic State terrorism threat in the broader Indo-Asia Pacific region.

The announcement comes ahead of the APEC meeting in Port Moresby on November 17-18, and it follows Australia and Papua New Guinea agreeing on a joint redevelopment of the naval base on Manus Island.

In Thursday's speech at Lavarack base at Townsville, released ahead of delivery, Morrison

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says: “My government is returning the Pacific to where it should be – front and centre of Australia’s strategic outlook, foreign policy and personal connections, including at the highest levels of government”.

Morrison says it is time to “open a new chapter in relations with our Pacific family”.

“Australia has an abiding interest in a Southwest Pacific that is secure strategically, stable economically and sovereign politically”.

The region is “where Australia can make the biggest difference in world affairs” - but too often had taken its influence for granted.

Morrison says that in future the ADF, which already has a pivotal role, will play an even greater one with partner countries in training, capacity building, exercises and on “building interoperability to respond together to the security challenges we face”.

The proposed rotational ADF Pacific Mobile Training Team will be based in Australia, travelling to places in the Pacific, when invited, to undertake training and engagement with other forces.

Work with regional partners would be in areas such as disaster response, peacekeeping, infantry skills, engineering and logistics.

Morrison says the Navy will be deployed more to the Pacific to conduct training and exercises with other countries. “This will enable them to take advantage of the new Guardian Class Patrol Boats we are gifting to them, to support regional security”.

Ties with Pacific police forces are to be strengthened, with a new Pacific faculty at the Australian Institute of Police Management that will help train future police leaders.

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To deepen people-to-people links with Pacific security forces, there will be annual meetings of defence and police and border security chiefs.

A security alumni network will be set up to maintain connections with those who have taken part in the Defence Cooperation Program over decades.

Military sporting engagements will be expanded, as will general sporting links with a new sports program.

Announcing the new diplomatic posts, Morrison says “this will mean Australia is represented in every member country of the Pacific Islands Forum”. He stresses also that the government wants “our best and brightest, young and experienced diplomats alike, working on the Pacific”.

As well as the infrastructure financing facility, Morrison is announcing that the government will seek parliamentary approval for Australia’s export financing agency, Efic, to have an extra \$1 billion in callable capital and more flexibility to support investments in the region that benefit Australia’s national interest.

This would “enhance Efic’s ability to support Australian SMEs to be active in the region. Private capital, entrepreneurialism and open markets are crucial to our mutual prosperity,” Morrison says.

He says it is estimated the Pacific region will need US\$3.1 billion annually in investment to 2030.

Morrison says the government will work with Australia’s commercial media operators to enable people in Pacific countries to have “access to more quality Australian content on TV and other platforms.

"This will include lifestyle programs, news, current affairs, children’s content, drama and

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potentially sports. This is an initial step towards providing more Australian content that is highly valued by the Pacific community," he says.

On 2GB [Morrison on Wednesday](#) had to defend Pacific countries from broadcaster Alan Jones' attack on them as "rent seekers".

Jones lashed out after Morrison gave the importance of the Paris climate agreement to these countries as one reason for Australia not leaving the agreement.

"Do you think all these rent-seekers in the Pacific should get money that you've said you're not going to contribute to Paris. ... They're rent-seekers, they just want money," Jones said.

Morrison replied: "I don't think that's very respectful to the Pacific Islands, Alan, I really don't, and I don't share that view. They're part of the world in which we live here and we've always been doing the right thing by them and we think back to Papua New Guinea, they did the right thing by us when it came to our Diggers.

"So we have a very special relationship with the Pacific and we need to, for our own interest as well as that it's part of the community and family of nations we live in in this part of the world. We do the right thing by them, they'll do the right thing by us."

*Michelle Grattan does not work for, consult, own shares in or receive funding from any company or organization that would benefit from this article, and has disclosed no relevant affiliations beyond their academic appointment.*

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