



Pacific Island Reference Group (PIRG)
Address: PO Box 5811
WEST END QLD 4101

Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/groups/pirgseq/>
'One Voice' - Newsletter (Monthly)

18 October 2012

**Re: Meeting between Pacific Island Reference Group Inc (PIRG) and the
New Zealand Commissioners & Australia Commissioners: Strengthening trans
–Tasman Economic Relations Productivity Commission.
Canberra 16 October 2012.**

We would acknowledge the traditional owners of this land on which we are meeting this afternoon. We would also like to thank you for this opportunity to comment on your paper.

Background

The Pacific Island Reference Group Inc (PIRG) is a network of members from various Pacific Island communities in South East Queensland. The PIRG was established in 2008 as a result of the Vaka Pasifika: Communities and Leaders Forum which identified the need for a Reference Group to highlight and address socioeconomic issues experienced by members within the Pacific Islanders communities. The overall aim of PIRG is to represent the voice and views of Queensland-based Pacific Island Nation organisations, communities and individuals, working collectively together with all levels of government and other agencies; encouraging the importance of forming strategies, implementing dynamic programs, support and assistance with all levels of government and other agencies; for the well being of the people of the Pacific.

This submission is the view of PIRG and members of the Pacific Islanders communities and Services in the SE Queensland region. These views have been collated from experiences related to the cross border movement of people specified in the Trans Tasman Closer Economic Relations Trade Agreements.

General Comments

PIRG recognises that the Trans Tasman Close Economic Relations (CER) Trade arrangements play a significant role in the trade and economic sector of Australia and New Zealand. The recommendations outlined in the draft commission report on strengthening governance of the CER, the need to address the limited research and to have regular reviews of the current systems is endorsed by PIRG.

The issues raised in our submission arise from those that were highlighted by members of Pacific Islanders communities affected by the Trans Tasman Travel Arrangements (TTTA). All following comments are specific issues raised by Pacific peoples involved in cross border movement of people.

Section 4.6: Cross Border Movement of People and Supplementary Paper D

- There is a need for research on the social impact of the current TTTA on short term and long term travel for New Zealand citizens travelling to Australia. We believe socially beneficial arrangements need to be part of this analysis as social benefits are better indicators of successful economic relations.
- Another issue that can also be considered as a means of strengthening trans –Tasman economic relations is in the matter of **educational quality and levels**. We think that it may be time to commence some form of education standardization in particular those in the secondary education system. This is suggested so that students can have the opportunity to study in either country especially those coming from New Zealand. From PIRG's point of view we think this will help encourage NZ PIs to have a good idea of what is expected of one when coming into the Australian society and consequent engagement with the education system. Moreover, in the case of students who may need to return to NZ for tertiary studies if that is more affordable option – then it is hoped that the qualifications attained in NZ are still recognised here in Australia. However, accessing tertiary education here in Australia (if that is their choice) will be the preferred option if systems of financial support are in place.
- The current policies for permanent residency and citizenship still favour the formally qualified and economically well off. With the current barriers to permanent residency and citizenship due to existing policies, is it possible for people coming over from NZ post March 2001 to be considered under other pre-requisites such as – if they did come over to Australia to meet a “demand driven” or “supply driven” need from Australia at **any time** (not only when they are applying for that visa) for that to be included as part of their application assessment. I believe that this is fairness on humanitarian grounds as these people have and may still be contributing to Australia economy. This will remove the need for Australia to change rules for accessing social security.
- In view of strengthening CER between the two countries – this need to translate to citizens of both countries of being privileged to live in either country. Whereas the current scenario does place PIs here in Queensland in a marginalised position especially those who do not have formal skills. The inability to apply for PR or citizenship status, the inability to access further education to improve their skills or for their children to access educational opportunities at tertiary institutions, and the inability to access safety nets for their communities. Within this scenario, there are socio economic impacts such as financial hardship, stresses on family relationship resulting in increase of domestic violence, overcrowding of domestic living arrangements

resulting in increase in numbers in homelessness and youths under “police alerts”, community orders and of course in custody.

- **Q 4.6 – The Commissions seek information about the numbers of New Zealanders who have been affected by the lack of access to certain welfare payments in Australia and the numbers who have return to New Zealand as a consequences.**

The following examples are a few of the experiences of Pacific Islanders travelling under the TTTA. Although these are a small number of examples there is a need to research and address the socio impact of such arrangements.

Through QPWIN work we have two documented case studies of families living in the greater Brisbane area. One is of a family that arrived in Australia in 2005 who were then met with a bad turn for health issues and loss of employment through fire that led to the loss of their sources of income. They could not access any social security benefits and were left to trying to survive on family payment for their 2 sons for 6 months.

The other case was of a domestic violence situation where the woman –after leaving that domestic arrangement had to rely on friends of her family for lodging and survival. We also have 3 documented case studies involving the inability to access disability payments. We are willing to do this study if given time and support to do more thorough pilot in the South East EQ region.

Case Study: Increase numbers of Maori & Pacific Island young people being homeless in the inner city of Brisbane;

Brisbane Youth Service (BYS)

Current Numbers:

- 13 – 15 Pacific Islander young people at the moment.
- 30 - 35 approximately during last 12 months.
- Group changes and numbers vary – connection with community, detention, accommodation
- Gender: 50 / 50 approx at the moment. Changes
- Age: 15 – 23

Where are people from

- National groups / Cultural Identity
 - Most identify as Maori or Samoan. Also Tonga and Cook Island.
- Local connection points
 - Mostly Logan City, Inala, Sunnybank, Ipswich

Homelessness Issues

- Varies – not a constant group.
- Sleeping rough in and around CBD, couch surfing, squatting.

- Barriers – income, overcrowding, group dynamic and identity.
- Cultural and family disconnection.

Australian Red Cross – Night Cafe (The Power of Humanity)

The young that attends the service

Last quarter:

- 9% identified as either Maori, Samoan, Tongan or Cook Islander (previous quarter = 35%) – number not this high pre 2009
- 45% identified as CALD/Other
- 13% identified as ATSI
- 35% female, 65% male
- Vary in age:
 - 12-14 years old 1%
 - 15-17 years old 36%
 - 18-20 years old 35%
 - 21-25 years old 26%
 - 26-35 years old 2%

Common Themes

- No entitlement to Centrelink
- Rough sleeping, squats, couch surfing
- Committing crime to survive
- Drug and alcohol use
- Strong social connections
- Violence within groups

Clients - Planned Support / Case Management September 2011 to September 2012

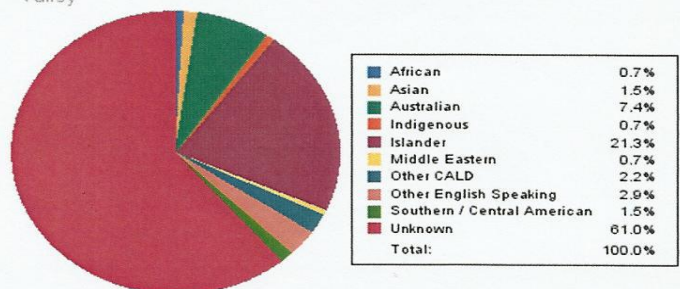


Cultural Background of young people engaged in Planned Support / Case Management September 2011 to September 2012

Client Background Categories	Female	Male	Total
African	1	0	1
Asian	1	1	2
Australian	5	5	10
Indigenous	0	1	1
Islander	16	13	29
Middle Eastern	1	0	1
Other CALD	1	2	3
Other English Speaking	2	2	4
Southern / Central American	2	0	2
Unknown	38	45	83
Total	67	69	136

Total Clients by Background

For Totals for Youth Outreach Service (YOS), Fortitude Valley



Note: As a % of clients across ALL YOS sites 'Islander' young people account for 10.2% of clients.

Drop-in Statistics (Fortitude Valley) – July 2011 to June 2012

- 4273 contacts through drop-in (51% male and 49% female)
- Monthly average of contacts 356 within Drop-in, with an average of 125 young people each month.
- Age range for drop-in is 12 to 20 years with most young people aged 16 to 20 years. That is, 15% aged 12 to 15 years, 38% aged 16 to 17 years, 42% aged 18 to 20 years and the remainder over 20 years.
- 1705 contacts with PI young people.
- Cultural breakdown; 53% Maori, 31% Samoan, 10% Samoan / Tongan and 6% Cook Islands.
- Communities of Origin; South of Brisbane (Logan / Beenleigh) and South West Corridor (Inala and Ipswich) predominately with some young people from Deception Bay region (not many from this region come to Fortitude Valley site and may access YOS at other sites).
- Some young people may have lived with family in particular areas and are unable to return to that home/community/family for a number of reasons. In some cases the immediate family is no longer in that area or returned overseas. Alternatively the young person has been out of home for some time and they are trying to find their 'community'.

NSW & QLD Corrections - Pacific Island Youth Issues

Talanoa Open Community Forum 2010 – NSW

There appears to be key elements or trends with increasing numbers of offenders in Custody;

- ✓ - Youthfulness of the Pacific offenders
- ✓ - Seriousness of the offences committed by the Pacific offenders

NSW Corrections Stats – 2009

Country of Origin	Numbers	Country of Origin	Numbers
NZ	191	Tonga	96
Samoa	86	Fiji	81
Maori	75	Cook island	24
PNG	6	Hawaii	1
Total of 560 (2009)			

QLD Stats – Serco SQCC 08/2012 - Survey with Inmates

- ✓ Approximately have 40 Pacific Island inmates
- ✓ Age: 18yrs to 25yrs – 70%
- ✓ Education Level: Secondary – 90%
- ✓ Community Local: Logan – 60%

List of Offence/ s :

- Affray
- Aggravated Robbery
- Assault
- Assault Occasioning Actual Bodily Harm - A. O. A. B. H
- Assault Police
- Armed Robbery with Offensive Weapon
- Break & Enter to Commit Serious Offence
- Common Assault
- Contravene AVO
- Drive Whilst Disqualified
- Grievous Bodily Harm
- Maliciously Destroy Property
- Manslaughter
- Possession of Prohibited Drug
- Possession of Shortened Firearms
- Resist Arrest
- Robbery
- Robbery in Company
- Steal from Person
- Steal Motor Vehicle
- Supply Prohibited Drug
- Trafficking

❖ ***90% of these offenders are placed under Deportation Orders.***

- Q.4.7 - How significant a risk is 'back door' immigration?
Given its significance to the evolution of the trans-Tasman labour market, would there be net benefits from closer alignment of the two countries' migration policies?
What would be the difficulties/issues in seeking to achieve this?
Would there be value in developing a framework of principles to guide access to social security under the Trans-Tasman Travel Arrangement?
What changes to Australian Government social security limits could promote a better balance between prevention of government transfer shopping and equal treatment?**

Quite a significant number of PIs are in this category lacking in vocational skills and qualifications which does impact on their employment and educational opportunities. We believe that further research is required to gain better knowledge of the extent of this issue. PIRG is able to be involved in this consultation with our PI people to achieve this.

Q 4.8 – The Commissions seek further information on the costs and risks to New Zealand Superannuation from return migration from Australia.

- Anecdotal evidence from PI perspective shows that the older generation still prefer to “retire” to the islands. However, this is another area that further research is necessary and PIRG is willing to be involved in such a research in Queensland.

The following recommendations were those included in the PIRG submission on Access and Equity Inquiry panel in February 2012. The inclusion of these recommendations in this submission is important as it impacts on the CER.

PIRG Recommendations Submitted – Access and Equity Inquiry Panel 02/2012

Recommendation 1

That a data collection system be developed across all government departments to assist in assist in improving cultural responsiveness so they are able to identify and monitor key issues affecting Pacific Island and other CALD groups.

We commend Queensland Health and Legal Aid Queensland, LAQ for their commitment in collecting ethno specific data, which determine whether many CALD groups are access their services so as to inform their intervention.

Recommendation 2

Education is one of the key factors that bridges the gap between the divide. We recommend that HECS/HELP be open to New Zealand SCV (Special Category Visa) holders so that children will be able to access higher education. Given that HELP is a student loan, repayment is mandatory; thus, if recipients decide to go to NZ, there is a Trans Tasman system in place for debt collection.

Recommendation 3

Engagement of bi-cultural workers across Government Departments especially services that Government are encouraging Pacific Islanders/ Maori people to access. Employ Pacific Islands/ Maori people as teacher aids, youth workers liaison workers to facilitate relationship between school community and other agencies.

Recommendation 4

There is a need for coordinated information sharing across government departments in order to improve service responsiveness to the needs of Pacific Islanders/ Maori people

Conclusion

PIRG believes that there is systemic gap in policy implementation to cater for the needs of Pacific Islanders and Maori communities that have moved from New Zealand under the TTTA.

Currently there is a lack of commitment for a whole of Government approach and strategy for development and implementation where all relevant systems are

coordinated through out government departments and agencies. The ad hoc policy initiatives which have resulted in patchy commitments by individual Government departments depending on which CALD community group is the being prioritised.

The numbers of Pacific Islander /Maori groups are continuing to increase in Queensland, along with the increasing levels of disadvantages. PIRG believes that mitigating the future exponential costs within the health, welfare, education and justice system would significantly diminish if some of recommendations were implemented.

End of Report.

List of Organisations and Community Groups that assisted and supports this Report.

- Brisbane City Council
- Brisbane Youth Service
- Cook Island Community
- Dept of Community Service (DOCS)
- Ethnic Communities Council of Queensland (ECCQ)
- Griffith University
- Logan City Council
- Maori/ New Zealand Community Queensland
- MultiLink Community Service Inc
- Niue Community
- Pacific LIPI – Inala Youth Service (IYS)
- Pacific Pioneers
- Police Ethnic Advisory Group (PEAG) - Logan
- Queensland Pacific Island Workers Network (QPIWN)
- Red Cross Brisbane
- Salvation Army – Youth Off Street Service (YOSS)
- Samoan Community Queensland
- Southern Qld Correctional Centre (SERCO)
- Tongan Community Queensland
- Tuvalu Community Queensland
- Uniting Care Community Organisation
- Voice of Samoa (4EB 98.1FM)
- Youth for Human Rights (YHR)

Contact

For more information about this submission, or to meet with PIRG please contact

Community Development Worker - Kalisi Bese