

This Policy Brief is in two parts. First, it summarises findings on five key questions that underpinned the research into the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI), drawing directly on our interviews with many of RAMSI's leadership figures, from both the policing and diplomatic sides, and from all periods of RAMSI's existence starting in 2003 and continuing through to 2017.

Second, this paper makes a short set of recommendations aimed at capturing best practice from the involvement of Pacific Islands personnel in RAMSI, and at sustaining and consolidating the gains made for policing both in individual police forces in the Pacific, and for relationships between police forces in the region. These recommendations are largely addressed to the AFP although some of them may have broader relevance.

1. What are the lessons learned from RAMSI about the deployment of a multi-police force operation in the Pacific?

This project was not a history of the PPF although it clearly touches on many aspects of the way the PPF was run and managed. The focus here is on the Pacific Islands contingent (PI contingent), which was always a relatively small part of the Participating Police Force (PPF), and on the policy and practical questions this posed.

Pre-deployment Training (PDT) for RAMSI evolved over time with additions and adaptations reflecting learning from Solomon Islands, from the AFP's Canberra Majura facility and from broader international practice. While the PDT evolved over time, almost all of those we consulted, from all phases of RAMSI, spoke positively of their experience. PDT was acknowledged as building both individual skills and a sense of team spirit and camaraderie among participants which was invaluable to PPF members deployed in the field. The form of PDT that had evolved by the end of the mission

provides an invaluable basis for future deployments of a similar nature.

While most members of the PPF shared a broadly common background in British colonial institutions and English law, each policing organisation had its own distinct professional culture and style of policing. A minority of former PPF members interviewed reflected that PDT could have been enhanced by a stronger focus on, and acknowledgement of, the practical challenges of operating in a multinational policing mission. Most Pacific Islands PPF members recognised that Pijin language skills were invaluable in mission and some said that they would have benefited from more opportunity to develop language skills prior to deployment. While members from PNG and Vanuatu already had the basic language skills with their own national versions of Pijin, others acquired some Solomon Islands Pijin in country either on the job or through attending classes. While some ability to communicate in the local language was critical for all deployees — including Australians and New Zealanders — interacting with Solomon Islanders, it should be acknowledged that there are practical limits to the amount of time that can be set aside for language training. Similarly, a number of Pacific Islanders emphasised the potential value in having greater involvement by Solomon Islanders in PDT briefings, including around cultural aspects and other local conditions. Such involvement, which happened in the later stages, would have been beneficial in PDT throughout the mission.

Including Pacific Islanders in the PPF

It was clear from the start to RAMSI's leaders that Pacific Islanders were seen as crucial to RAMSI's success. This was certainly one of the most consistent themes in all our interviews with key stakeholders. The value that Pacific Islanders brought to the operation had a number of aspects. In one sense it was symbolic, signalling the regional character of the mission; in

doing so, it also underpinned RAMSI's legitimacy in the eyes of ordinary Solomon Islanders and the broader Pacific community and effectively countering critiques that RAMSI was an exclusively Australian (or ANZAC) undertaking. The PI contingent provided additional policing skills although these were not always fully utilised. Perhaps most important of all, Pacific Islanders were seen as bringing unique cultural and communications skills to an operation in which public outreach, community engagement and confidence building were critical to success.

An early PPF Commander noted: 'I thought that their contribution far outweighed the numbers of police that they actually provided.' This sentiment was echoed on many occasions. Some comments suggested, however, that PPF leaders were not always confident that this view was shared by all their fellow countrymen and women, and that some of these failed to appreciate and take advantage of the presence of Pacific Islanders in the PPF to improve their own knowledge, skills and ability to operate effectively in the Solomon Islands context.

Pacific Islanders worked in frontline roles alongside Australians and New Zealanders from the outset, particularly in the outposts that were established in every province of Solomon Islands. Some Pacific Islanders felt that the team-based approach adopted by the PPF (that is, focusing on skills and ability to perform a task, rather than rank) could have been better explained prior to deployment. While a number of senior PI contingent members appreciated the rationale behind the team approach, they nevertheless felt that there was more scope for using experienced Pacific Islanders as team leaders.

Overall, the lessons under this heading may seem self-evident but they are worth registering formally. While it may have been possible in some areas to enhance the role of Pacific Islands police (see below), the core lesson is that operating alongside Pacific Islanders in a policing coalition paid rich dividends both for RAMSI and the AFP. As argued by one former PPF commander, this was a lesson that was not taken into account in the Enhanced Cooperation Program (ECP) in Papua New Guinea launched shortly after RAMSI deployed but which ended up suffering a very different fate.

Special arrangements for Pacific Islanders?

Not all key RAMSI leadership personnel considered that the PPF made *optimal* use of its Pacific Islands personnel. Over time, numerous factors affected how and where Pacific Islanders were deployed in the mission. These included 1) Pacific Islanders' specific skillsets and/or lack of skills (which ranged widely between and within contributing countries); 2) the year of deployment (i.e. broadly speaking with a much stronger focus on executive policing in the early years, and a correspondingly greater focus on capacity-building in the later years); and 3) pressures external to RAMSI (for instance the preference on the part of Solomon Islands prime ministers for their close personal protection units to be staffed by Pacific Islanders rather than Australians or New Zealanders).

This meant that Pacific Islanders could not always be placed in their preferred positions, including those which gave them direct contact with Solomon Islands communities or police colleagues. There was clearly a phase in the later part of the mission when a relatively high proportion of Pacific Islanders were assigned to Guadalcanal Beach Resort (GBR) base security — 'Zulu 7' duties. This disappointed some officers expecting greater engagement with the Solomon Islands community and meant that their deployment failed to meet their expectations. There were, of course, perfectly justifiable operational reasons for PPF placements: it was unrealistic to expect a perfect match between the demand for skills in the PPF and the supply. And, after all, the primary goal of the PPF in the second part of the mission was to build the capacity of the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force (RSIPF), not that of the PI contingent.

As the mission evolved, greater recognition was made of the PI contingent as a distinct element of the PPF and one that required specific management responses. Such steps included:

- » the establishment in 2010 of the PI contingent commander position, and the inclusion of that position as a member of the PPF executive
- » the establishment of a dedicated PI contingent welfare officer
- » attempts to institute better selection procedures by, for example, approaching sending commands to provide officers with specific skill sets
- » organising more social and cultural activities at the main GBR base (for example, 'Pacific Nights').

These steps did not necessarily solve the problem of how and where to deploy Pacific Islanders in the PPF to best effect but they did provide a stronger foundation for addressing those issues and for taking Pacific Islander views into account.

What is policing about?

From the start, PPF members — both in the leadership and rank and file — juggled conceptions of policing in which ‘nobody was above the law’ and in which enforcement played a central role; and policing as a problem-solving, community-based activity which could see resolutions reached at the local level without recourse to the courts. The latter recognised that Solomon Islands communities, as with others in the Pacific Islands, had their own capabilities and distinct approaches for managing everyday disputes. The PPF leadership did not see these conceptions as mutually exclusive. The leadership looked to the PI contingent to bring cultural competence (negotiation, discussion, patience) in a Pacific setting into the overall PPF skillset, as the following three quotes from senior Australian PPF leaders suggest:

‘This is where, I think, you saw the incredible contribution of the non-Australia and non-New Zealand Pacific Island countries. They were familiar with the chiefly system. They were fantastic in terms of attendance and bringing about reconciliation ceremonies. We had a lot of reconciliation ceremonies where we chose to respect the customary law rather than arresting or charging someone under the criminal law. And they were great at brokering those sort of agreements.’ (Interview #6; 2003/04)

‘...we call what we do today community policing. They’ve [Pacific Islanders] been doing it since dot. It’s the sit down, have a cup of coffee, it’s the discuss[ion], it’s meet with the chiefs, it’s what they do.’ (Interview #7; 2004/05)

‘My personal view is that they gave us a very good understanding of Pacific policing methodologies and approaches, customs, that understanding of the intersection between custom law and the rule of law in a legislative sense, and how that’s dealt with variously across the Pacific and how the mesh of those comes together.’ (Interview #12)

While many interviewees appreciated the need and value of operating pragmatically within a local context characterised by legal pluralism, other Pacific Islanders endorsed the idea that ‘the law is the law’ and should be applied universally and impartially, and that police should not be part of community-level discussions leading to compensation payments as part of locally-led resolution.

A number of Pacific Islands members of the PPF told us they felt the PPF leadership (and/or the ‘Australian way’ of policing) did not leave enough leeway for the sort of problem-solving, community-based policing they felt comfortable with and which they thought was more appropriate to the circumstances in Solomon Islands. At no stage did this make RAMSI unworkable or lead to serious disagreements. Even so, it was felt keenly by some Pacific Islanders, especially the Melanesians:

‘Sure there were some negative things but I praise Australia for its leadership. Even so, the Australian policing concept won’t work in Pacific societies. There’s a need to adapt the curriculum, also the work plan.’ (Interview #86; 2010)

The lesson here is not necessarily that this is was a problem to which a definitive solution needed to be, or could be, found. Rather, it highlights the need for open discussion and acknowledgement as part of a pragmatic effort to find the best way of policing a country such as Solomon Islands. While RAMSI has now concluded, such differences have not gone away and, indeed, have a long history going back to colonial times. The RSIPF has been actively considering such issues in its own strategic planning processes, including through the formulation and rollout of its crime prevention strategy, which entails extensive engagement with community leadership and longstanding local approaches to dispute management. Policing in the region needs a continuing conversation around these issues (see below).

2. What are the lessons learned from RAMSI about the role of women officers in the PPF in the prevention of community violence and violence against women?

The experience of the female Pacific Islander police officers who took part in this research varied considerably, depending in particular on the status and role of

female police in their home organisations. While they understood and appreciated the AFP's best-practice approach to gender equality, some less experienced female members of the PPF nevertheless felt personally challenged by the expectation that they should perform the full range of policing duties alongside men. That said, virtually all female police surveyed or interviewed felt that their confidence in their own skills and abilities as police officers had been boosted by their participation in RAMSI.

Most female Pacific Islands officers acknowledged that Solomon Islands was coming off a low base in terms of the role of women police in the RSIPF, and in the management of issues such as gender and family-based violence. Many felt that their presence had improved community perceptions around the part of police in matters of family-based violence, and that they had served as role models for a generation of younger Solomon Islands police. There was also some corroborative evidence for this from interviews with Solomon Islands police.

It cannot be claimed that RAMSI alone was responsible for raising the profile of gender, and gender-based violence issues on the regional police agenda. At the very least however, the RAMSI experience shared by scores of Pacific Islander police at both leadership and rank-and-file levels over the past 14 years has helped to reinforce the importance of gender and gender-related issues in Pacific police forces. As such RAMSI has provided a platform for further work in this area (as indeed in other areas – see below).

3. How has the RAMSI experience affected the quality and integrity of Pacific Islands' policing and police forces?

Individual participants in the PPF reported a wide range of professional benefits flowing from their experiences. While these varied between individuals, the positive benefits were felt almost universally. Some of the most commonly-cited benefits included: improved communications skills, both written and spoken, along with enhanced self-confidence; team-building skills; skills and knowledge in areas as varied as planning, report writing and record keeping, driving, investigations, command and control, detainee management, use of force; and a greater appreciation and understanding of the importance of professional standards and behaviour.

Most former PI contingent members reported that they had been able to use what they had learnt in RAMSI back in their own police forces. Indeed, we heard a number of examples of officers returning home to work in areas of direct relevance to their RAMSI experience. A number of Pacific Islands chiefs of police agreed that officers returning from RAMSI deployments appeared to be more confident and professional, and were able to cite ways in which their forces had benefited.

Other less tangible, but by no means trivial, benefits of service in RAMSI include an enhanced sense of pride in good police work and a strong sense of identification with a broader 'police family'.

While important to distinguish between the impact of the RAMSI experience on individual police officers and its impact on police organisations, the latter is much more difficult to ascertain. The research revealed widely divergent views on this question of impact at the level of police organisations. In general, it appears that the benefits flowing from participation in RAMSI were most noticeable in the police forces of the smaller contributing countries. This makes sense intuitively, given that the smaller countries will in most cases have sent a larger proportion of their total police numbers to RAMSI than the larger countries, meaning that any impact at the organisational level would have a proportionately larger impact.

A number of respondents said that returning to their home police force after RAMSI was a somewhat dispiriting experience. Some felt that they were unable to utilise newly acquired skills and knowledge in their home organisation. Reasons given included a shortage of relevant resources (some respondents described the transition back home as going from a feast to a famine), or because more senior staff were not aware of, or interested in, new skillsets acquired on deployment.

While difficult to generalise, where new skills and knowledge were applied on return to home police organisations, this tended to occur in an ad hoc rather than systematic way. In these circumstances it is legitimate to ask how sustainable the dividends of RAMSI are likely to be. Are there steps that could or should have been taken at the time of return, or that could still be taken, now that RAMSI has concluded, to maximise RAMSI's positive impacts over a longer timeframe? We return to these questions below.

4. How has RAMSI affected the degree and quality of relationships among police forces in the region?

It is very difficult to measure this, especially at an institutional level. The evidence we have captured is largely qualitative but suggests:

- » An almost universal sense of pride among Pacific Islanders in having taken part in a collective regional policing undertaking, resulting in an intangible — at times latent, but nevertheless lasting — shared bond among PPF participants. For many, participation in the PPF was talked about as being a life-defining experience.
- » As noted above, a strong sense of belonging to a broader ‘police family’ was reinforced among participants in the PPF. This was particularly so, given that relatively few PI contingent members had experience of other regional or international deployments, unlike many of their Australian and New Zealand counterparts.
- » In the majority of cases, a sense of gratitude and respect for the way the AFP led and managed the PPF, and a feeling of stronger links between individual Pacific police forces and the AFP.
- » In a number of cases, personal links between former PPF members from different Pacific Island countries were established and maintained for some time beyond the period of deployment, although in other instances such links did not seem to have been actively maintained.

RAMSI contributed to the sense of a ‘police community’ within the region among those who participated, and provided a platform for future cooperation between and among regional police organisations. It is plausible that without the RAMSI experience, we would not have seen examples of police-to-police development among Pacific Islands forces such as the Cook Islands Police delivering command and control training to other regional police services, or the RSIPF providing use of force and public order management training to Nauru and Sāmoa. Some interviewees provided examples of regional investigations benefiting from maintained professional connections first established during RAMSI. Several respondents told us that cooperation within regional police cooperation mechanisms that stood outside RAMSI, such as the Pacific Islands Chiefs of Police (PICP) Women’s Advisory Network, and the

Pacific network of Transnational Crime Centres (TCCs), had been enhanced as a result of the building of trust and relationships between individual officers within RAMSI.

Beyond these findings, we found little evidence that RAMSI contributed in a structural or a systematic way to police networking in the Pacific. While police networking is fostered in a number of ways in the region, this may have been a missed opportunity.

5. How can the RAMSI experience be consolidated to enhance the future connectivity and effectiveness of Pacific policing?

‘I’m sure I had an impact in my work in community policing in Malaita. It really helped my career [back] in Vanuatu. We really should keep together as one team. It gives us voice, it makes an impact. Our leaders recognise [that] we can help ourselves.’ (Interview #81; 2003)

It is possible to point to a range of management initiatives that would likely have reinforced RAMSI’s impact on the capacity of Pacific police services, and on future police cooperation in the region, had they been implemented in parallel with RAMSI itself. Now that RAMSI has concluded, however, the time for implementing such measures has largely passed. Even so, it is worth noting for the record, and for future reference, that many of those who participated in this research were strong advocates of:

- » a more systematic end of mission debriefing, aimed at capturing lessons learned progressively and iteratively as the operation matured
- » better, or in many cases, the introduction of any, procedures around reintegration back into home police services in order systematically to understand and exploit the benefits derived from RAMSI deployments, both at an individual and an organisational level.

While it is likely that the introduction of such processes would in many cases have required the support of the AFP as part of existing bilateral assistance programs, the costs associated would have been relatively modest and would in any event have been consistent with Australia’s broad capacity-building objectives in the region.

There are some steps that can be taken which could harness the remaining goodwill generated by RAMSI and which would assist in reinforcing the mission's professional dividends. Whatever substantive gains RAMSI has made to policing in the region are likely to erode if not reinforced over the medium to long-term.

Our experience was that PPF veterans from the Pacific Islands were, by and large, keen to reflect on their experiences in RAMSI, that they had points they were keen to convey, and, finally, that they had not really had an organised opportunity to do so since their return from deployment to the PPF.

There was considerable enthusiasm among those we interviewed and surveyed for more structured and well-supported regional policing networks that build on the strong desire of many PPF members to remain connected to the regional policing community and to continue developing their skills. Many thought that such networks could help them problem-solve, share policing experiences and raise awareness of regional training opportunities. Some respondents explicitly referred to the example of the PICP Women's Advisory Network, and wondered if there was space for a broader, non-gender based, professional network.

While some of those we interviewed mused on the value of a regional police academy, more seemed to favour a model of regional police capacity-building that was based on 'learning-by-doing' and inclusive of a range of nations taking on training roles, rather than privileging one place or one training institute. Most saw value in more regional policing opportunities, not just in UN missions but in their own region where the experience of RAMSI had inspired and created a commitment to working with *wantoks*¹ and neighbours, and an enthusiasm to continue to develop appropriate policing approaches that fit the culturally distinct and resource-limited contexts of the region.

The enthusiasm to reflect suggests that there could be much to gain from a more extensive and structured reflection process involving, among others, PPF veterans from diverse countries, from different periods and at various ranks and career stages, in order to ensure that the RAMSI legacy for regional policing is sustained.

We note that at their meeting in Samoa in September 2017 Pacific Islands Forum leaders tasked the forum Secretariat to initiate region-wide consultations on developing a 'Biketawa Plus' declaration 'as a founda-

tion for strategic future regional responses recognising the importance of an expanded concept of security'. This decision owes much to regional reflection on and satisfaction with the success of RAMSI, and the process mandated by forum leaders would give added relevance to any structured post-RAMSI activities initiated by the AFP.

Endnote

1. The pidgin term *wantok* connotes one who speaks the same language (literally, 'one talk') and, in popular usage, describes the relations of obligations binding together relatives, and members of the same clan or tribal grouping.

Pacific policing recommendations

1. In planning for and implementing regional deployments, the AFP should, as a matter of policy and doctrine, actively seek and facilitate the involvement of Pacific Islands police personnel. The engagement of Pacific Islands police should be considered both for large multi-country missions as well as for more specific, targeted activities.

Even in the latter case, while some short term additional costs may be required, these would be outweighed in the longer term by the dividends in terms of network- and relationship-building.

2. In working operationally with Pacific Islands police forces, but particularly in a deployment setting, the AFP should actively consider what targeted management measures might be necessary to cater for the specific needs of Pacific Islands personnel and/or contingents.

Such measures might differ from operation to operation and activity to activity, but they can nevertheless play a role in optimising performance and relationships. They might acknowledge, for example, the different family and cultural obligations facing many Pacific Islanders, compared with their Australian counterparts; or the reluctance of some Pacific Islanders to assert themselves in large formal meetings where they are in a minority.

At the same time the AFP should ensure that it, and particularly senior managers in the field, are conscious of the diversity that exists within the Pacific itself.

3. In addition, and taking into account national security requirements, in joint deployment settings the AFP should actively include senior Pacific Islands police in shared leadership and management structures as early as possible. This will build trust as well as leadership skills.

4. Pre-deployment training for RAMSI provided by the AFP was clearly best-practice or close to it; the AFP should ensure that knowledge of that program, and the lessons learned as it developed over the RAMSI years, are not lost.

The AFP should ensure that cultural and (to the extent possible) language training forms part of training, whether provided prior to or during deployment.

5. The AFP should consider hosting one or more workshops involving a selection of former PPF members from a range of participating countries. Possible workshop themes might include 'How can the region sustain and build on the relationships created through RAMSI?' and/or 'What has RAMSI taught us about policing in a Pacific context?'

Such workshops would demonstrate the AFP's commitment to deepening its knowledge and understanding about the region, would promote shared understanding among up-and-coming police leaders about policing in the region, and would reinforce existing networks and relationships.

The outcome of such peer-to-peer learning events would presumably be of interest to the Pacific Police Training Advisory Group (PPTAG), the membership of which is closely (although not exactly) aligned to participation in RAMSI. Workshop outcomes could be taken into account in the PPTAG's discussions and plans.

6. Short of major operational deployments, the AFP should — where appropriate, through the PICP network - foster a conversation among Pacific Islands police forces aimed at identifying opportunities for deployment-based training and learning through intra-regional exchanges and placements.

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