



18TH FIJI AUSTRALIA BUSINESS FORUM

**Shangri-La's Fijian Resort
17th – 18th October 2005**

FIJI'S REALPOTENTIAL

COMMUNIQUE

The 18th Fiji Australia Business Forum of the Fiji Australia Business Council and the Australia Fiji Business Council was held on the 17th and 18th October 2005 at the Shangri-La Fijian Resort.

Some 100 delegates gathered to hear various speakers and participate in workshop sessions and various networking functions. The keynote speakers included the Hon. Prime Minister of Fiji Laisenia Qarase and Senator the Hon Sandy Macdonald, Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade of Australia. The other key note speaker was Mr Alan Dukes, Director General, Institute of European Affairs, Dublin, who briefed the Forum on the transformation of the Irish economy. Other presentations to the Forum were on the overall economy, key sectors within the economy, legal issues, telecommunications, health related issues and bilateral trade issues.

The Forum adopted the following key resolutions and action points to be pursued by both Councils during the following year.

Welcomed the establishment of a bilateral business and officials working group to examine impediments to business and trade to recommend solutions as a first step towards the achievement of our vision for a dynamic and vibrant full economic partnership.

To provide further assistance to the TCF industry in Fiji by the Australian government to lower the Rule of Origin to 25% under SPARTECA – TCF, the removal of the deeming provision, the inclusion of wool within SPARTECA – TCF, and the review of what is “local area content”.

Accelerate agricultural reform and crop innovation to expand import substitution, meet hotel consumption needs and become a net exporter.

Reform and simplify the tax system, including the introduction of a flat rate; the rapid introduction and expansion of technology to simplify tax return lodgment - in order to increase opportunities in the economy for business development and growth.

That further work be carried out to encourage the Government of Fiji to take steps to deregulate the telecommunications industry to allow greater competition and therefore achieve further cost reductions.

Adequately resource the law and justice sector to ensure greater certainty for business and speedy resolution of contractual and commercial disputes, and develop a formal mediation process.

That the Australian Government provide resources such as technical expertise to allow the Government of Fiji to expedite the review of out dated legislation in Fiji such as the Companies Act and trademark and copyright administration.

Reform the short and long term business visa and work permit process to create a more open and flexible market, including the introduction of a 60 day business visa to Fiji.

That the Fiji government accept that Foreign Direct Investment does not compromise its sovereignty; to implement further reforms in the investment approval process to expedite and streamline approvals; further review various investment incentives such as Tax Free Scheme and the Duty Suspension Scheme, and amend the Foreign Investment Act to reduce the number of currently reserved and restricted activities to encourage maximum foreign investment.

That the Forum endorses the implementation of the "Pacific Plan".

Focus on appropriate vocational skills based human resources development to meet the rapidly emerging needs of the private sector.

Again call on the Australian government to conclude a Film Co-production Treaty to facilitate growth in Fiji's emerging film and television production industry.

Ensure that investors and business have security of property rights.

Introduce measures to improve corporate governance including legislative reform, removal of conflicts of interest through overlapping appointments on government boards and in executive appointments; the establishment of a National Code of Corporate Governance and the creation of a culture of corporate compliance.

Endorsed the program of public sector reform currently being undertaken by the Fiji Public Service Commission.