



Australia Fiji Business Council



19TH AUSTRALIA FIJI BUSINESS FORUM

COMMUNIQUE

FIJI AND AUSTRALIA: CLOSER ECONOMIC RELATIONS

The 19th Australia Fiji Business Forum was held at Ramada Pelican Waters, Sunshine Coast, Australia, from 8 to 10 October.

The theme of the Forum was “Fiji and Australia: Closer Economic Relations”. More than 100 delegates and partners attended.

The Forum was honoured to have the presence of the Prime Minister of Fiji, Hon Laisenia Qarase, the Fiji Minister for Foreign Affairs and External Trade, Hon Kaliopate Tavola, the Fiji Minister for Tourism and Transport, Hon Tomasi Vuetilovoni, the Fiji Minister for Commerce and Industry, Hon Adi Sivia Qoro, and the Australian Parliamentary Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Hon Teresa Gambaro, and to be addressed by them and a range of other distinguished and eminent speakers in their various fields.

The Forum made the following resolutions:

- strongly endorsed the agreement reached by the Prime Ministers of Fiji and Australia at their meeting in Canberra in September 2006 to explore means for revitalising the economic relationship between Australia and Fiji, urged both governments to work together to set down the framework for a long term closer economic relationship along the lines of ANZCERTA, and committed the Councils to work with governments towards this objective.
- commended the government and the Reserve Bank of Fiji for their prudent economic, monetary and fiscal management and endorsed its continuation, especially the reduction of national debt and reduction of civil service costs, but noted there is a growing perception that Fiji is becoming expensive compared to competing tourist destinations and that exchange rate policy might be a contributing factor, partly due to its relationship to the Australian dollar.
- welcomed progress towards completion of the National Export Development Strategy, and urged the government to co-ordinate the implementation of all economic development strategies with a clear focus, energy and vigour.
- noted the reforms so far undertaken by the Fiji government in the telecommunications sector, but urged the pace of reform be accelerated and competition introduced to ensure Fiji does not fall further behind global cost and technological competitiveness in this sector.
- noted the draft bill before Fiji parliament known as the Qoliqoli Bill, and urged the Fiji government to ensure that the process of consultation with stakeholders continues and that no action is taken which might reduce the value of existing investments in Fiji and inhibit future foreign investment.

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- called on the Australian government to take measures to allow unskilled workers from Fiji short term access to the Australian labour market through the implementation of a pilot program.
- recognized the considerable opportunities in the agricultural sector, and called on the Fiji government to remove impediments to greater foreign investment in the sector including through removal of the local equity requirements, the creation of incentives for investment in the sector, and to encourage the development of import substitution to provide greater quantities of locally grown fresh produce for Fiji domestic and tourist consumption.
- endorsed measures currently in process to conclude a Bilateral Quarantine Agreement, and urged governments to move quickly to finalise and implement this Agreement and then to conclude and implement a supporting animal health protocol to enable access by Fiji to animal genetic material and the implementation of the Codex Standard.
- called for greater co-operation between Australian and Fiji government agencies to ensure a proper scientific basis for SPS assessment of Fiji exports.
- called on the Australian government to enter into negotiations to improve bilateral taxation and related fiscal arrangements to enhance further Australia private investment into Fiji.
- urged the Fiji government to implement measures to improve corporate governance and eliminate corrupt practices in government and private procurement and other processes, including through the establishment of an appropriately resourced anti-corruption unit in the Fiji Police, and all businesses in Fiji to reject corrupt approaches.
- encouraged the Fiji government to continue and intensify the process of business regulation reform to improve the ease of doing business, and to move towards a more open economy following models such as Ireland and Singapore with streamlined foreign investment, immigration and work permit processes.
- commended the work being done by the Fiji Police to implement community relations and policing programs including PCYCs as a means of tackling crime problems at the grass roots, and called on the Fiji government to provide adequate funding to the Fiji Police to ensure that the law and order situation is conducive to business and investment and for dealing with white collar and transnational crime.
- welcomed forthcoming improvements to the issue of visas and work permits by the Fiji Government.

The Councils agreed to hold the 20th Australia Fiji Business Forum in Fiji in 2007.