

# Proactive Release

Date: 4 July 2022

The following Cabinet Minute and related Cabinet paper have been proactively released by the Minister of Foreign Affairs:

Title:	Reference:
Minute of Decision - Report on Overseas Travel: Hon Nanaia Mahuta	CAB-22-MIN-0163
Report on Overseas Travel: Hon Nanaia Mahuta	Cabinet Paper

Some parts of this information release would not be appropriate to release and, if requested, would be withheld under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act). Where this is the case, the relevant sections of the Act that would apply have been identified. Where information has been withheld, no public interest has been identified that would outweigh the reasons for withholding it.

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- 6(b)(i): to protect the passing of information from another government on a confidential basis;
- 6(b)(ii): to protect the passing of information from an international organisation on a confidential basis;



# Cabinet

## Minute of Decision

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### Report on Overseas Travel: Hon Nanaia Mahuta

Portfolio                      Foreign Affairs

On 9 May 2022, Cabinet **noted** the report from Hon Nanaia Mahuta under CAB-22-SUB-0163 on her travel, from 28 to 31 March 2022, to Fiji for a bilateral visit.

Michael Webster  
Secretary of the Cabinet

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Office of the Minister of Foreign Affairs

Cabinet

## **Report to Cabinet: Minister of Foreign Affairs' Visit to Fiji: 28-31 March 2022**

- 1 I recommend that Cabinet note this report on my travel to Fiji, my first visit to the Pacific region during my tenure as Foreign Minister, due to the constraints of travel during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 2 The visit took place at a key time for the bilateral relationship and for the Pacific region as a whole, as parts of it began to emerge from the pandemic and focus on health and economic recovery. <sup>s6(a)</sup>

with the country which currently is Chair of the Pacific Islands Forum. In doing so, this visit underscored the importance of regionalism as a foundation for ensuring a resilient and secure Pacific region.

### **Report**

- 3 I undertook my first official visit to the Pacific region in my capacity as the Minister of Foreign Affairs from 28 to 31 March 2022. The trip carried significance, demonstrating the importance that this Government places on our reconnecting with Pacific whānau and reinforcing our new Pacific resilience engagement principles. Coupled with the visit by the Defence Minister earlier in the month, our visits signalled the value Aotearoa New Zealand places on high-level engagement and our partnership with Fiji.
- 4 The objectives for my visit were to:
  - 4.1 <sup>s6(a)</sup>
  - 4.2 make clear Aotearoa New Zealand's support for Pacific regionalism and the value we place on the Pacific Islands Forum;
  - 4.3 <sup>s6(a)</sup>
  - 4.4 highlight the important role the New Zealand International Development Cooperation programme plays supporting Fiji partners to deliver long-term social and economic resilience for the Fijian people.
- 5 The official programme included thirteen engagements covering four broad areas: regionalism, health, Fiji's upcoming general election, and resilience and climate change. Highlights included bilateral meetings with Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama, Attorney-General Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum and Health Minister Dr.

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Ifereimi Waqainabete; a talanoa with informal settlement community leaders; a meeting with Opposition party leaders; a Women Leader's roundtable lunch; delivering remarks at the Pacific Island Forum Secretariat; and whakawhanaungatanga with staff at the Official Residence.

- 6 Detailed reporting has been produced by the diplomatic post in Suva and circulated through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs & Trade's formal message system.

*Our bilateral relationship with Fiji*

- 7 The reason for my visit was clear. <sup>s6(a)</sup>  
Fiji is our largest commercial relationship in the Pacific: prior to COVID-19 it was a \$600m export market. <sup>s6(a)</sup>

Fiji hosts the Pacific's most important regional institutions and is the current Chair of the Pacific Islands Forum. <sup>s6(a)</sup>

- 8 To help develop a broader, deeper, and more resilient relationship with Fiji, Prime Minister Bainimarama and I signed the *Duavata Partnership – the Aotearoa New Zealand Fiji Statement of Partnership*. Duavata means "unity or togetherness" and the partnership commits our two countries to work together to achieve our goals on Partnership, Democracy and Values, Economic Resilience, Security, Social Well-being, and Climate Change and Disaster Resilience. The Duavata Partnership represents over a year of concerted background work at officials' level and provides a useful framework to track impact and priorities in our bilateral and regional relationship with Fiji.

*A country recovering from COVID-19...*

- 9 It was clear that COVID-19 has had a profound effect on Fiji, not only in terms of the health, social and economic impacts – all of which, as you know, have been severe – but also because of the loss of much of our connectivity. Aotearoa New Zealand's significant response to Fiji's COVID-19 outbreak has been well-received by Fiji. <sup>s6(a)</sup>

This was emphasised to me in my meeting with the Fiji Minister of Health Dr. Ifereimi Waqainabete and some of his front-line workers, where I was able to offer to Fiji a donation of 50,000 paediatric doses of the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine, alongside 50,000 Rapid Antigen Tests. We discussed further Fiji's longer-term COVID-19 policy shift to focus on COVID-19 as being endemic and on wider public health concerns, including non-communicable diseases.

*...and building a more resilient future...*

- 10 Like Aotearoa New Zealand, Fiji is focused on how to reconnect with the world. <sup>s6(a)</sup>  
New Zealand's vaccine and budget support had been crucial in leading to the reopening of Fiji's borders and in turn rebooting of the Fiji tourism sector, which makes up 40 percent of the country's GDP. A focus now for Fiji was looking at ways to foster more economic diversification and resilience. We exchanged views on plans to mitigate the effects of global inflation, labour mobility and PACER Plus.

- 11 Climate change was a theme through my meetings. <sup>s6(b)(i)</sup>

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was clear to me that addressing climate change will require new ways of thinking, including in how we collaborate, co-design and scale-up to deliver our pledged NZ\$1.3bn in climate assistance, of which 50% is tagged to the Pacific. At a talanoa with community leaders at an informal settlement funded by MFAT, Tamavua-i-Wai, I gained insights into the combined challenges of climate change, COVID-19, and the lack of access to water and sanitation services for communities in Fiji.

*...with a focus on upcoming elections*

- 12 Fiji's forthcoming election – its third since the return to democracy in 2014 – is due to take place sometime between July 2022 and January 2023. <sup>s6(a)</sup>

*Returning to its role as a regional leader*

- 13 The importance of a united Pacific region was a strong theme throughout the visit. I symbolically reaffirmed Aotearoa New Zealand's long-standing support for regional action through rededicating a whakairo (carving) that has been on the walls of the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat for 45 years, with no name or history through unveiling a plaque and revealing the history for the whakairo, which had been carved by Ngāti Porou master carver John (Hone) Taiapa. While at the Pacific Island Forum Secretariat, I underscored in an address and in discussions with Deputy Secretary General Dr. Filimon Manoni Aotearoa New Zealand's commitment to regionalism.
- 14 A large part of my meeting with Prime Minister Bainimarama, current Chair of the Pacific Islands Forum, was spent discussing specific regional issues. <sup>s6(b)(ii)</sup>

Throughout our discussions I reinforced how crucial regional cohesion was at this time.

*The importance of in-person engagement*

- 15 <sup>s6(a)</sup>

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<sup>s6(a)</sup>

**Proactive Release**

- 16 This paper will be proactively released as per Cabinet Office Circular CO(18)4 on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade's website. Proactive release is subject to redactions as appropriate under the Official Information Act 1982.

**Recommendations**

The Minister of Foreign Affairs recommends that Cabinet:

- 1 note this report.

Authorised for lodgement

Hon Nanaia Mahuta

Minita Take Aorere / Minister of Foreign Affairs