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**“The impersonal hand of government can never replace the helping hand of a neighbour”**

~ Hubert H. Humphrey

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### IN A NUTSHELL: AUSTRALIA'S FOREIGN POLICY WHITE PAPER & OUR PACIFIC NEIGHBOURS

On 23 November 2017, the Australian Government released its new [Foreign Policy White Paper](#). This is the first comprehensive white paper on Australia's international engagement since 2003. One of the most striking aspects of the paper is its explicit focus on the Pacific region.

Australia's 2017 Foreign Policy White Paper is a blueprint for the Australian Government's approach to the world in the next decade. Its purpose is to provide a framework that will guide the deployment of Australia's resources. The White Paper has been given the three dominant themes of **opportunity, security and strength**. In an unprecedented move, the paper contains [an entire chapter](#) on Australia's role within the Pacific (grouping Timor-Leste in alongside the conventional Oceania region).

According to [Professor Stephen Howes](#), Director of the Development Policy Centre at the Australian National University, this marks Australia's strongest commitment to the Pacific in a long time - more so than any previous White Paper. “It certainly gives a high profile to the Pacific and it singles out our relationship with the Pacific and deepening that relationship as one of the five top objectives for Australia,” said Howes. “So, I think that in itself is interesting. The Pacific doesn't normally have that high a profile in foreign policy discussions.”

#### What does this mean for the Pacific?

The government's approach towards the Pacific will be across three domains: **trade, security, and people-to-people links**. Here are some key points of interest from the paper which have the potential to greatly impact our Pacific neighbours:

- The role of Australian development aid has been considerably downplayed. [According to Annmaree O'Keeffe](#), a Fellow at the Lowy Institute, “*Diminished and marginalised* sums up the way Australia's development assistance program is treated in the Foreign Policy White Paper.

- There is a push to integrate Pacific countries into Australian and New Zealand economies and security institutions, which may be seen as a further step away from support for Pacific self-determination and agency.
- The White Paper calls for an increase in Australian exports of ‘high-quality’ coal and Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) to Asia while also seeking to lead the Pacific debate on climate policy.
- Australia is keen to prevent China from usurping its position as a leader in the region. [According to Shadow Defence Minister](#), Richard Marles, “You know, the Pacific has choices, and we can't take for granted that we will be the partner of choice forever.”

As Professor Howes says, “I think the real test will be in implementation, because the history of Australia's engagement with the Pacific is really one based around announcements.”

Sources: | [Australia's Foreign Policy White Paper: What does it mean for the Pacific Islands?](#), *Pacific Trade Invest*, 14 December 2017 | [Oceania's Place in Australia's New Foreign Policy White Paper](#), *The Diplomat*, Grant Wyeth, 1 December 2017 | [Pacific emphasised in Australian foreign policy white paper](#), *Radio New Zealand*, Jamie Tahana, 28 November 2017 | [Keep Calm and Step Up: The White Paper's message on the Pacific](#), *The Interpreter*, James Batley, 27 November 2017 | [The fall and fall of Australia's aid program](#), *The Interpreter*, Annmaree O'Keeffe, 24 November 2017 | ['Recolonising' the Pacific would stir security backlash](#), *Asia Pacific Report*, Michael Powles, 30 January 2018 | [Dodging the hard questions in the Pacific](#), *The Interpreter*, Nic Maclellan, 5 December 2017 | Edited by Kendall Benton-Collins.

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## CAN BLOCKCHAIN COMBAT ILLEGAL FISHING & SLAVERY IN THE TUNA INDUSTRY?

According to the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), commercial fishing is one of the most dangerous professions in the world with a high rate of injury and death due to unsafe working conditions along with numerous reports of corruption and human slavery. The buying and selling of Pacific tuna is either tracked by paper records, or not tracked at all.

In partnership with US-based software company [ConsenSys](#), information and communications technology implementer [TraSeable](#), and tuna fishing and processing company [Sea Quest Fiji Ltd](#), WWF has just launched a pilot project in the Pacific Islands tuna industry that will use blockchain technology to track the journey of tuna from ‘bait to plate’. A blockchain is a digital ledger that is distributed, decentralised, verifiable and irreversible. It can be used to record transactions of almost anything of value. Essentially, it is a shared database that everyone in the network can see and update. The aim is to help stop illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing and human rights abuses in the tuna industry.

“For years, there have been disturbing reports that consumers may have unknowingly bought tuna from illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing and, even worse, from operators who use slave labour,” says WWF-New Zealand Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Livia Esterhazy. “Through blockchain technology, soon a simple scan of tuna packaging using a smartphone app will tell the story of a tuna fish – where and when the fish was caught, by which vessel and fishing method. Consumers will have certainty that they’re buying legally-caught, sustainable tuna with no slave labour or oppressive conditions involved.”



WWF-Australia CEO, Dermot O’Gorman, said the technology would likely be ready for commercial use in the tuna industry by the end of the year.

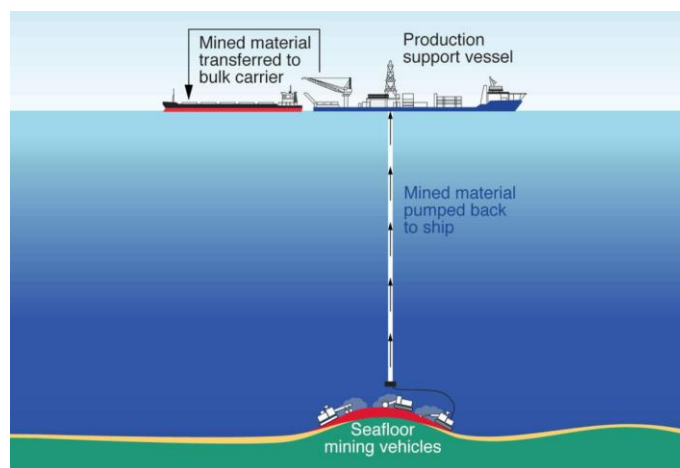
Sources: [WWF develops blockchain solution to improve transparency in tuna industry](#), *Financial Review*, Yolanda Redrup, 7 January 2018 | [How blockchain is strengthening tuna traceability to combat illegal fishing](#), *The Conversation*, Candice Visser and Quentin Hanich, 22 January 2018 | [New Blockchain Project has Potential to Revolutionise Seafood Industry](#), *WWF*, 8 January 2018 | Edited by Kendall Benton-Collins.

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## UPDATE: DEEP SEA MINING IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA

Back in October 2017, we published [an in-depth feature](#) on the proposed *Solwara 1* deep sea mining project in Papua New Guinea (PNG) run by Nautilus Minerals - a Canadian-based company primarily owned by Russian and Omani mining firms. The PNG Government has a 15% share in the project. If it goes ahead, it will be the first ever commercial deep sea mining project in history.

The Solwara (meaning “salt water” in Tok Pisin) mining site lies 29 kilometres off the coast of PNG in a volcanic area between the islands of New Britain and New Ireland. The site contains deposits of copper and gold which are of a much higher grade than is found on land. These deposits have been laid down over thousands of years around underwater hot springs, otherwise known as hydrothermal vents or chimneys. Since our previous feature in *Pacific Outlook*, the controversial project has had its timetable pushed back due to financial difficulties, and it has been plagued by internal strife and continues to receive public condemnation.



Nautilus [fell short of their target](#) to raise US\$41 million by the end of 2017, as well as an additional US\$270 million to build and deploy the seafloor production system for the project. On top of this, three key officials recently left Nautilus – Director Mark Horn resigned in October, followed by Non-Executive Chairman Russell Debney in December, and Vice-President for PNG operations Adam Wright last month. On 6 December, local communities launched legal proceedings against the PNG Government demanding the release of documents relating to the licensing of Nautilus and potential environmental, health and economic impacts from the *Solwara 1* project. Community members, represented by the Port Moresby-based [Centre for Environmental Law and Community Rights](#), claim they were not adequately consulted by Nautilus and were very concerned about the project’s potential impacts on people and the environment.

In January of this year, Arnold Amet, former PNG Attorney-General and Justice Minister, asked the government to end its partnership with Nautilus due to serious financial and environmental concerns. “By the company's own admission, the project is an experiment with unknown environmental and social consequences and uncertain profits. The past few months have really shown the extent to which financiers and our own communities in PNG reject this project,” said Amet.

Local and international scientists and environmental groups have also continued to express grave concern over the project. According to [a new study by researchers from the University of Exeter and Greenpeace](#), mining the ocean floor could do irreversible damage to deep sea ecosystems.

“Our knowledge of these ecosystems is still limited, but we know they’re very sensitive,” said Dr David Santillo, a marine biologist and senior Greenpeace scientist based at the University of Exeter. “Recovery from man-made disturbance could take decades, centuries or even millennia, if these ecosystems recover at all. As we learn more about deep sea ecosystems and the role of oceans in mitigating climate change, it seems wise to take precautions to avoid damage that could have long-lasting and unforeseen consequences.”

Government officials in PNG appear to be unmoved by either community protest or scientific research. In response to environmental concerns, PNG’s Mining Minister, Johnson Tuke argued, “This government is responsible. The environment context of it has to be taken on board, and proper due diligence has been conducted already, I suppose...I’m really not a marine biologist who has got a preview for you but to the layman understanding, and from what I learnt over the years with Nautilus, Nautilus has given us a feasibility study. That is the reason why the license was granted. And from what I know, there is a certain dark area [in the seabed to be mined] where it is out of photosynthesis. They say there is no life beyond that point.”

Minister Tuke’s statement reveals a gross misunderstanding of the deep sea environment and the complexity of this ecosystem. Hydrothermal vent systems around the world have been found to contain life which relies entirely on energy taken from chemicals (chemosynthesis) rather than from the sun (photosynthesis). When asked to comment on the *Solwara 1* project, world-renowned naturalist [Sir David Attenborough exclaimed](#), “That is where life began, and that we should be destroying these things [hydrothermal vents] is so deeply tragic...that humanity should just plough on with no regard for the consequences”.

On 20 February 2018, Nautilus announced that the Production Support Vessel to be used at the *Solwara 1* Site was almost complete. So, despite all resistance, Nautilus continues to plough ahead.

Sources: [Troubled Papua New Guinea deep-sea mine faces environmental challenge](#), *The Guardian*, 12 December 2017 | [Developer says PNG sea mining project to push through](#), *SciDev.Net*, Fatima Arkin, 5 February 2018 | [PNG’s Solwara 1 Hydrothermal vents: Sources of Riches from the Deep Blue Sea](#), *EMTV Online*, Joanita Nonwo, 8 January 2018 | [One in, one out at Nautilus Minerals](#), *Mining Journal*, 18 January 2018 | [Scientists Warns on Seabed Mining](#), *The Maritime Executive*, 22 January 2018 | [Nautilus vessel construction surpasses 75%](#), *Nautilus Minerals Inc. Press Release*, 20 February 2018 | Image – Proposed *Solwara 1* deep sea mining operations. Credit: [BBC News](#) | Edited by Kendall Benton-Collins.

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