



SOUTH PACIFIC
DEFENCE MINISTERS' MEETING



GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORK



Last Updated: 24 September 2026

PURPOSE

1. The Ministers of Defence of Australia, Chile, the French Republic, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, the Kingdom of Tonga and the Republic of Fiji, hereinafter referred to as ‘the Members’, have mutually consented to conduct regular South Pacific Defence Ministers’ Meetings, hereinafter referred to as the ‘SPDMM’.
2. The SPDMM is intended to provide a forum for regional Defence Ministers to discuss common security challenges, as well as identify ways to improve cooperation and coordination on regional defence issues. The SPDMM represents a key forum to support the design and implementation of the regional defence and security architecture.
3. The Chiefs of Defence of the Members will also meet annually, separately to (either before or after) the SPDMM.
4. This Governance Framework provides guidance for the conduct of the SPDMM, and aims to ensure it complements existing regional organisations, particularly the Pacific Islands Forum.

OBJECTIVES

5. The SPDMM aims to provide an opportunity for Members to:
 - a. Discuss regional security challenges;
 - b. Discuss regional and global security developments of mutual interest;
 - c. Discuss each Member’s defence engagement initiatives in the region and opportunities to support enhanced regionalism; and
 - d. Pursue initiatives and activities to support enhanced cooperation and coordination on regional security, including through the POVAI ENDEAVOUR Framework for Cooperation.

TIMING AND FORMAT

6. The SPDMM will take place annually, either in person or virtually.
7. The agenda may be divided into open sessions (which observers can attend) and closed sessions (from which observers and guests are excluded).
8. All decisions will be made by consensus of the Members.
9. English is the official language in which SPDMM and Intersessional Working Group discussions and information-sharing will be conducted.

MEMBERSHIP

Observer Status

10. The SPDMM observers comprise Japan, the United Kingdom and the United States of America.
11. Observers may attend open sessions of meetings and may be invited to contribute to specified discussions. Observers will be excluded from closed sessions.
12. Observers cannot participate in decision-making and do not have voting rights.

Requests for Membership and Observer Status

13. Requests for SPDMM membership or observer status must be made in writing to the Secretariat (Australia), and should comply with any procedures agreed by the Members (see Annex B and C).
14. The Secretariat (Australia) is responsible for promptly sharing written requests for membership or observer status to Members and the Intersessional Working Group for consideration.
15. Members may endorse requests for membership or observer status out of session or request a discussion at the next SPDMM.
16. Following a discussion at a SPDMM, the decision as to whether to accept a request for membership or observer status may be subject to a vote in a closed session. As per paragraph 8, consensus is required to admit a member or observer.
17. The Secretariat will be responsible for communicating the outcome to the requesting State or organisation.

SECRETARIAT

18. Australia will provide secretariat support to the SPDMM. This will be staffed by the Department of Defence. Other members may provide secretariat support to Australia as required.
19. The Secretariat will liaise with Members' respective points of contact (or such other points of contact as may be nominated by the respective Members) to:
 - a. Provide administrative support to the host Member throughout the preparation for, and conduct of, SPDMM;
 - b. Support the host to produce a communiqué after each SPDMM and keep a record of agreed outcomes; and
 - c. Promulgate the outcomes arising from each SPDMM.
20. The Secretariat will remain the single point of contact for SPDMM matters.
 - a. It is the responsibility of the Members to keep the Secretariat informed of the details for their respective points of contact.

INTEGRATION WITH OTHER REGIONAL BODIES

21. The Secretariat will liaise closely with other relevant regional bodies (such as the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF)) and provide written and verbal briefings as necessary. The PIF Secretary General will be invited to attend SPDMM as a guest and to observe open sessions.

22. Members may ask the Secretariat to invite individuals including a representative from a regional body to attend and/or brief the SPDMM on relevant issues as a guest and to observe its open sessions. Guests may be invited to contribute to discussions, but cannot participate in decision-making. Guests are excluded from closed sessions.

23. An analyst from the Oceania Directorates of Military Intelligence Meeting (ODMIM) and a representative from the ODMIM Secretariat will be invited to attend SPDMM as guests and to provide an annual analytical brief to SPDMM on a self-selected topic, or on a topic identified by SPDMM.

HOST MEMBER RESPONSIBILITY

24. The host Member will be responsible for the following:

- a. Issuing formal invitations to Members and Observers and, if approved by all Members, other States or organisations on a case by case basis;
- b. Chairing the SPDMM;
- c. Providing a conference venue or virtual platform and ensuring all necessary administrative arrangements for the conference venue or virtual platform;
- d. Providing a draft agenda that is to be endorsed by all Members before the commencement of the SPDMM (Annex A refers);
- e. Providing a Record of Discussion for approval by all Members;
- f. Producing a communiqué after each SPDMM in a reasonable timeframe; and
- g. Releasing information to the news media concerning the SPDMM and related activities. This will be done in accordance with the host Member's own procedures, and in consultation with other Members.

STANDARD AGENDA

25. The agenda for each SPDMM will depend on the prevailing regional and operational circumstances.

26. The SPDMM should reflect consideration of activities and initiatives in other bilateral/multilateral fora, but should not duplicate these.

27. Although not prescriptive, discussions will normally include:

- a. Regional security;
- b. Joint exercises;
- c. Maritime security; and
- d. Review of, and planning for, activities under the POVAI ENDEAVOUR Framework for Cooperation.

SECURITY

28. The level of classification of material discussed at the SPDMM will be subject to prior approval by Members. As a general rule, presentations, discussions, comments and minutes taken at SPDMM will be “OFFICIAL”.

29. Hard copies of any presentations will be handed to the Secretariat in advance of the SPDMM. Further copies will be distributed by the Secretariat with the Record of Discussion at the conclusion of the SPDMM.

LEGAL STATUS OF THE GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORK

30. This Governance Framework is non-legally binding and does not create any legal rights or obligations between the Members [or Observers].

AMENDMENT AND REVIEW

31. Review of this Governance Framework may be initiated at any time by written request of any Member or via decision at a SPDMM. Any amendments to the Governance Framework must be approved by consensus in accordance with paragraph 8.

WITHDRAWAL AND TERMINATION

32. Any Member may withdraw from this Governance Framework by giving the other Members thirty (30) days written notice of its intention to do so through the Secretariat. Withdrawal from the Governance Framework constitutes withdrawal from the SPDMM.

33. Members may mutually determine to terminate this Governance Framework at any time in writing.

EFFECTIVE DATE

34. This Governance Framework will come into effect on the date of endorsement by all existing Members.

ANNEXES

- A. Example Agenda
- B. Principles for the Admission of Observers
- C. Criteria for SPDMM Membership and Observer Status

EXAMPLE AGENDA

South Pacific Defence Ministers' Meeting

[DD MMM YYYY]
[Host city, Host nation]

PROPOSED AGENDA

1. Welcoming Remarks

Welcome visiting Defence Ministers' and outline host views on the goals of the meeting.

2. Climate Change [Standing agenda item – agreed at SPDMM 2024]

3. Women, Peace and Security [Standing agenda item – agreed at SPDMM 2019, incorporated 8 July 2025]

4. [Agenda Item 4]

[Explanatory Note]

5. [Agenda Item 5]

[Explanatory Note]

6. [Agenda Item 6]

[Explanatory Note]

7. [Agenda Item 7]

[Explanatory Note]

8. Concluding Remarks

Overview of discussions, including a summary of steps required to enhance cooperation across the regional defence forces.

South Pacific Defence Ministers' Meeting (SPDMM) Principles for the Admission of Observers

1. ABOUT

1.1 Without restricting the discretion of Members, this annex to the SPDMM Governance Framework is designed to enable Members to consider requests for observer status in an effective, transparent and consistent manner.

1.2 It should be read in conjunction with the SPDMM Governance Framework, particularly paragraphs 10 to 17.

2. GUIDING PRINCIPLES

2.1 In considering whether to support a request by a country or international organisation for observer status of SPDMM, Members should take account of the applicant's credentials in relation to:

- a) advancing the purpose and objectives of SPDMM;
- b) engagement with existing regional architecture, most notably the Pacific Islands Forum;
- c) reinforcing the pre-eminence of Pacific-led responses to Pacific security challenges, consistent with the Boe Declaration on Regional Security;
- d) connections to the Pacific, including diplomatic presence, engagement strategies, and a shared commitment to transparency in declaring security, economic, political, and strategic interests;
- e) a demonstrable record of, and commitment to, cooperation and coordination on regional security and defence issues, Pacific norms and values, and consistent with the *Blue Pacific Principles for Dialogue and Engagement*.

2.2 Members should consider whether there would be a strategic and/or operational benefit to SPDMM as the result of a grant of observer status.



Criteria for SPDMM Membership and Observer Status

****The following should be read in conjunction with the Governance Framework including its Principles for the Admission of Observers.*

Requests for Observer Status

1. A country or intergovernmental organisation wishing to apply for observer status ('the applicant') to the South Pacific Defence Ministers' Meeting (SPDMM) will provide their application to the SPDMM Secretariat by email (spdmm.secretariat@defence.gov.au) no later than 31 March in the year in which they wish their application to be considered.
2. The application should demonstrate their credentials in relation to:
 - a) advancing the purpose and objectives of the SPDMM;
 - b) meaningful and respectful engagement with existing regional architecture, most notably the Pacific Islands Forum;
 - c) reinforcing their commitment to the pre-eminence of Pacific-led responses to Pacific security challenges, consistent with the *Boe Declaration on Regional Security*;
 - d) established defence connections to the South Pacific, including diplomatic presence, engagement strategies, and a shared commitment to transparency in declaring security, economic, political, and strategic interests;
 - e) a demonstrable record of, and commitment to, cooperation and coordination on regional security and defence issues, Pacific norms and values, consistent with the Blue Pacific Principles for Dialogue and Engagement; and
 - f) how the applicant would provide value or contribute to SPDMM in a way that is not achievable through engagement at other fora.
3. In considering an application, Members are encouraged to assess the application against the criteria set out in paragraph 2. Members should also consider, amongst other things, if the applicant is located in the South Pacific or has responsibilities for the administration of territories in the South Pacific region, as well as the strategic and/or operational impact to the SPDMM if observer status was granted.

4. Being granted observer status is not a guaranteed pathway to SPDMM membership.

Requests for Membership

5. Only existing observers to the SPDMM may apply for membership. Observers must maintain their observer status for at least two years before applying to be a member.

6. Notwithstanding paragraph 4, a Pacific Islands Forum member country that establishes a military may apply for membership to the SPDMM even if it is not an observer.
7. An observer wishing to apply for membership will provide their application to the SPDMM Secretariat by email (spdmm.secretariat@defence.gov.au) no later than 31 March in the year in which they wish their application to be considered.
8. The application should demonstrate their credentials in relation to:
 - a) its demonstrated Pacific identity and how they embody Pacific values and norms
 - b) its contribution to SPDMM as an observer in advancing the purpose, objectives and agreed initiatives of the SPDMM;
 - c) its meaningful and respectful engagement with existing regional architecture, most notably the Pacific Islands Forum;
 - d) its commitment to the pre-eminence of Pacific-led responses to Pacific security challenges, consistent with the *Boe Declaration on Regional Security*;
 - e) established defence connections to the South Pacific, including diplomatic presence, engagement strategies, and a shared commitment to transparency in declaring security, economic, political, and strategic interests; and
 - f) its demonstrable record of, and commitment to, cooperation and coordination on regional security and defence issues, Pacific norms and values, consistent with the Blue Pacific Principles for Dialogue and Engagement; and
 - g) how the applicant would provide value or contributions to SPDMM that are not achievable as a SPDMM observer.
9. In considering an application, Members are encouraged to assess:
 - a) the strength of the applicant's credentials in respect to the criteria in paragraph 7;
 - b) whether the applicant is located in the South Pacific or has responsibilities for the administration of territories in the South Pacific region;
 - c) the strategic and/or operational impact of membership to the SPDMM;
 - d) the impact admission would have on the progression of existing initiatives within the SPDMM; and
 - e) any other relevant factors.