

DISASTER GOVERNANCE IN THE SOUTHWEST PACIFIC

PERSPECTIVES, CHALLENGES, AND FUTURE PATHWAYS FOR ASEAN

Policy Report

November 2019

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and Christopher Chen

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S. RAJARATNAM
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary	1
Introduction	2
Fiji	4
Tonga	5
Disaster Management Landscape in Fiji and Tonga	6
Future Developments	11
Policy Recommendations	12
About the Authors	13
About the Centre for Non-Traditional Security Studies	12
About the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies	14
Appendix	15

Executive Summary

The Southwest Pacific is considered one of the most vulnerable regions in the world to natural hazards. Five of the Pacific Island States rank among the top 20 most-at-risk countries in the World Risk Index, with Vanuatu and Tonga ranking first and second respectively. The Southwest Pacific neighbours Southeast Asia, and both regions are exposed to a variety of natural hazards, resulting in significant damage and loss of lives annually. This shared vulnerability raises the potential to create a coalition of affected states from the Asia-Pacific to shape the global debate on the effects of climate-induced disasters and extreme weather events. ASEAN's One ASEAN One Response (OAOR) vision of responding to disasters as one inside and outside the region could apply to the Southwest Pacific as an important region to explore how this vision can be realised.

This policy report explores disaster governance in the Southwest Pacific as an area of potential cooperation for ASEAN. Particular attention is paid to Fiji and Tonga, both of which, like their counterparts in ASEAN, have standing militaries that are first responders in disasters. Fiji is also home to the headquarters of regional organisations and, therefore, the centre of regional cooperation in the Southwest Pacific.

Introduction

The Southwest Pacific is home to 15 small island states and approximately 2.7 million people. Owing to a combination of geographical location and socioeconomic factors, states in this region are particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change and extreme weather events. Many of them are located close to the cyclone belt. As such, they are exposed to a high frequency of tropical cyclones and are especially susceptible to flooding and storm damage. The economic realities of these island states make it harder for them to prepare for and recover from the impact of large-scale disasters, which might slow down or even regress socioeconomic progress in a country for generations. Many countries in the region have low GDP growth, are highly reliant on external financing, and have underdeveloped disaster-resilient infrastructure.

The Pacific Island States (PIS) are known as Small Island Developing States (SIDS). The SIDS are particularly vulnerable to disasters and the effects of climate change (see Appendix 1). On average, disasters in the region result in 14 per cent damage to a country's GDP and affect 11 per cent of its population.¹ Countries in the Southwest Pacific and ASEAN face similar vulnerabilities and disaster governance challenges. For instance, both regions are afflicted by similar types of disasters, such as storm surges and cyclones. They are also susceptible to the effects of climate change. A recent report indicated that, by the year 2050, rising sea levels could affect over 300 million people living along coastal areas,² which include most Southeast Asian states and the PIS. With this common challenge, there are important opportunities for inter-regional cooperation in disaster management and climate security, collectively referred to as disaster governance. This policy report presents policy-relevant observations and recommendations for stakeholders participating in disaster governance activities in the Southwest Pacific and their ASEAN counterparts.

In particular, this policy report explores disaster governance in two Southwest PIS: Fiji and Tonga, both of which, like their counterparts in ASEAN, have standing militaries that are first responders in disaster management. Disaster management refers to the “organisation and management of resources and

¹ Lee Dongyeol, Zhang Huan and Chau Nguyen, “The Economic Impact of Natural Disasters in Pacific Island Countries: Adaptation and Preparedness”, IMF Working Paper 18, (2018), p. 1-37.

² See Climate Central, “Flooded Future: Global vulnerability to sea level rise worse than previously understood”, 29 October 2019, <https://climatecentral.org/news/report-flooded-future-global-vulnerability-to-sea-level-rise-worse-than-previously-understood>.

responsibilities for dealing with all humanitarian aspects of emergencies, in particular preparedness, response and recovery in order to lessen the impact of disasters”.³ This report takes a multi-stakeholder approach to reflect the way society as a whole engages in disaster governance in the Southwest Pacific and ASEAN.

This policy report is based on desk research and 36 in-depth, semi-structured interviews — 21 in Suva, Fiji, and 15 in Nuku’alofa, Tonga — conducted with multiple stakeholders from 23 August to 6 September 2019.

³ See International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), “About Disaster Management”, <https://www.ifrc.org/en/what-we-do/disaster-management/about-disaster-management/>.

Fiji

Fiji is an archipelagic country, made up of more than 320 islands. Its land mass is a mix of mountainous and volcanic terrain. It has a population of 883,483, 56.248 per cent of whom reside in urban areas. Most of the population live on the two largest islands, Viti Levu and Vanua Levu. After Papua New Guinea, Fiji is the second largest country in the Southwest Pacific. It is also one of the wealthier countries and is widely considered the geographic centre of the region. Hence, it has historically served as the regional hub for banking services, communications, flights, and shipping to other Pacific nations. Its economy is predominantly reliant on agriculture and tourism.

Despite its larger size and relatively more developed status, Fiji is still susceptible to external shocks and disasters, ranking 10th out of 172 countries on the World Risk Index 2018. It is widely exposed to natural hazards, particularly tropical cyclones. An average of 12 to 15 tropical cyclones strike the country every decade. These are usually accompanied by high-intensity rainfall, which results in widespread flooding. On average, Fiji is expected to incur about US\$85 million a year in losses due to disasters.⁴

⁴ Government of Fiji, "Fiji Post-Disaster Needs Assessment: Tropical Cyclone Winston, February 20, 2016", May 2016, [https://www.gfdr.org/sites/default/files/publication/Post%20Disaster%20Needs%20Assessments%20CYCLONE%20WINSTON%20Fiji%202016%20\(Online%20Version\).pdf](https://www.gfdr.org/sites/default/files/publication/Post%20Disaster%20Needs%20Assessments%20CYCLONE%20WINSTON%20Fiji%202016%20(Online%20Version).pdf).

Tonga

Tonga is a small kingdom that consists of 172 islands, of which 36 are inhabited. It has a population of 103,197, 23 per cent of whom reside in urban areas. Most of the population live on the main island of Tongatapu, which is where the country's capital, Nuku'alofa, is located. As a SIDS, Tonga's trade potential is severely hampered by its remoteness and insularity. Its economy is predominantly based on agriculture and fishing, with tourism gradually becoming an important source of income. The economy is heavily reliant on overseas aid and remittances sent by migrant Tongans.

As with other PIS, Tonga is affected by rising sea levels and tropical cyclones. It ranks 2nd on the World Risk Index 2018. On average, it is expected to incur about US\$15.5 million a year in losses due to earthquakes and tropical cyclones.⁵ This figure could increase if the impact of climate change is considered.

⁵ Government of Tonga, "Post-Disaster Rapid Assessment: Tropical Cyclone Gita, February 12, 2018", Reproduced on ReliefWeb, 2018, <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/tonga-pdna-tc-gita-2018.pdf>.

Disaster Management Landscape in Fiji and Tonga

Apart from their respective national civilian organisations that manage disasters, the governments of Fiji and Tonga are supported in disaster management by traditional humanitarian actors like the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, UN agencies, and international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) and domestic NGOs. Non-traditional humanitarian actors such as regional bodies, faith-based organisations and national militaries further augment the system.

Government

(i) Fiji

The main disaster management legal and policy framework in Fiji is provided by the National Disaster Management Act 1998. This, along with the National Disaster Management Plan 1995, serves to guide and frame Fiji's national disaster management strategy.

The National Disaster Management Plan 1995 outlines the organisational structure and the roles and responsibilities of government bodies in Fiji that are responsible for disaster management (see Appendix 2).

(ii) Tonga

Tonga's National Emergency Management Plan provides the framework for whole-of-government emergency management (see Appendix 3). The National Emergency Management Office (NEMO) is the lead agency responsible for coordinating immediate operational responses to disasters while the Ministry of Infrastructure oversees long-term recovery and reconstruction efforts.

UN Agencies, INGOs and NGOs

UN agencies, INGOs, NGOs and the Red Cross Movement participate actively in disaster response efforts in the Pacific. During peacetime, most of these organisations implement development programmes in the region. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Pacific Office, UN Population Fund (UNFPA) Pacific Sub-Regional Office, UN Women Multi-Country Office, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) Pacific, and the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) Sub-Regional Office for the Pacific are all based in Suva.

In Tonga, the UN presence consists of a United Nations Joint Presence Office (UNJPO) in Nuku'alofa. UNJPOs usually consist of a single national UN Country Coordination Officer. Therefore, in the event of a disaster, UN capacity in the affected state might be overwhelmed.

Pacific Humanitarian Team

The Pacific Humanitarian Team (PHT) is a network of humanitarian organisations that work together to assist PIS in disaster preparedness and response. Apart from NGOs and humanitarian organisations, core members of the network include UN agencies and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. The wider network includes national governments, regional faith-based civil society organisations, donor agencies, the private sector, and academia.⁶

In recent years, countries in the Southwest Pacific have established their own national cluster systems. The PHT provides support to these national clusters as well as to governments. For example, in the immediate aftermath of Tropical Cyclone Gita in Tonga, upon government request, the PHT in Suva mobilised to provide technical assistance and coordination support. The PHT strives to facilitate international humanitarian assistance in support of response efforts at the national, sub-national and community levels.

An issue raised during interviews in Tonga was the suitability of the current national cluster system. There are currently 10 clusters⁷ in Tonga, a situation which, given the country's relatively small size, results in overlapping responsibilities of organisations and agencies. This is problematic when the cluster system is activated. For instance, in the aftermath of Tropical Cyclone Gita, a UN staffer was asked to attend three concurrent cluster meetings. Calls have been made for a reassessment of the viability of having so many clusters in the PIS, where capacity and manpower are often limited.

⁶ Pacific Humanitarian Team, "The Pacific Humanitarian Team: From Commitment to Action", Reproduced on ReliefWeb, 2018, https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/PHT_220917_1_to_print.pdf.

⁷ These are: Logistics, Food Security, Communications, Health and Sanitation, Safety and Protection, Education, Essential Services, Shelter, Economic and Social Recovery, and Reconstruction.

Regional bodies

The Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) is the region's main political and economic policy organisation. It fosters cooperation between regional governments and promotes collaboration with international partners. Climate change and disaster risk management are PIF priorities. The Pacific Community (SPC) is the main scientific and technical organisation in the Pacific with the mandate to coordinate disaster risk management initiatives.

During the fieldwork for this report, the “Framework for Resilient Development in the Pacific: An Integrated Approach to Address Climate Change and Disaster Risk Management” (FRDP) was identified as the key regional document. It aims to provide high-level strategic guidance to different stakeholder groups on how to enhance resilience to climate change and disasters in ways that contribute to and are embedded in sustainable development.⁸ It is seen as a forward-thinking and progressive framework that offers insights for ASEAN.

Military

Apart from Papua New Guinea, Fiji and Tonga are the only countries in the Pacific with militaries. The Republic of Fiji Military Forces (RFMF) and His Majesty's Armed Forces (HMAF) of Tonga are very active in disaster preparedness, response and recovery efforts. Both militaries generally enjoy positive community perception owing to their peacetime involvement in rural and community development projects. For example, the RFMF's engineer unit is heavily involved in construction and building projects throughout Fiji. Fiji's participation in international peacekeeping efforts also helps to give its military gravitas. In terms of regional assistance, the RFMF offers aid to other Pacific countries in times of need.

Both militaries want to expand their operations, specifically in terms of Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR). The RFMF has a Fiji Emergency Medical Assistance Team (FEMAT) and are in the process of assessment for it to be internationally recognised. In Tonga, the HMAF are planning to establish a medical corps. They are also seeking to participate as military observers in international peacekeeping or HADR exercises. Interviewees noted that they rely on training offers from partners. Therefore,

⁸ Pacific Community (SPC), “Framework for Resilient Development in the Pacific: An Integrated Approach to Address Climate Change and Disaster Risk Management (FRDP) 2017-2030”, 2016, http://gsd.spc.int/frdp/assets/FRDP_2016_Resilient_Dev_pacific.pdf.

joint training programmes would be a good way to facilitate knowledge sharing between ASEAN and PIS on disaster governance (see Appendix 4).

Faith-based organisations

Faith-Based Organisations (FBOs) play a very important role in disaster governance in the Pacific. Some 90 per cent of Tongans and 65 per cent of Fijians are affiliated to a Christian denomination. The largest Christian denominations are the Methodist Church of Fiji and Rotuma and the Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and the Seventh-day Adventist Church also have notable presence in both countries. Churches in Fiji and Tonga are generally well funded and possess solid infrastructure capable of withstanding strong winds and rainfall. As such, church halls are often designated as evacuation centres. Churches and FBOs are also seen as the gatekeepers of the community and enjoy a high degree of trust and legitimacy. Similar to the Humanitarian Forum Indonesia, platforms such as the Church Agencies Network Disaster Operations (CANDO) exist in the Pacific to facilitate and coordinate FBO engagement in humanitarian affairs.

Private sector

In terms of disaster risk management and response, government agencies and NGOs in Fiji and Tonga have very limited engagement with the private sector. No formal ties and arrangements have been established thus far. Most of the private sector contributions involved ad-hoc funding and participation during disaster response. One explanation for this is that the private sector is less developed in the PIS than elsewhere, and the government remains the main service provider. However, it is important to engage the private sector in multi-stakeholder forums to facilitate engagement in longer-term disaster risk reduction.

Insurance penetration is relatively low in Fiji and Tonga. This is due to the small size of their economies, their limited borrowing capacity and reliance on external aid. Not many insurers and reinsurers operate in the region, and the few that are available are unwilling to extend coverage to natural disasters. There is also a lack of awareness about insurance mechanisms at the community level.

The sharing of perspectives on private sector engagement in disaster management in ASEAN could offer insights into how to activate this relationship

in the Southwest Pacific. Efforts can also be made to share experiences of the Pacific Catastrophe Risk Assessment and Financing Initiative (PCRAFI) and the Southeast Asia Disaster Risk Insurance Facility (SEADRIF).

Future Developments

In Fiji, a new camp, tentatively named Camp Black Rock, is currently under construction in Nadi for use as a regional peacekeeping and HADR training centre for the Southwest Pacific, as well as a warehouse for relief supplies. Australia is financing its construction while New Zealand supports the development of its training syllabus. With a target operational date of December 2020, the facility will have the capacity to train around 300 people. The RFMF also plan to extend the training programmes to police forces in the region in the future. The Changi Regional HADR Coordination Centre (RHCC) in Singapore, which is also run by a military, is a potential partner to the RFMF for exchanging information and experience in HADR covering a region with exposure to natural hazards. More broadly, the ASEAN Community offers numerous entry points to engage with the Southwest Pacific on disaster governance. For example, the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on disaster management (AHA Centre) offers an operational avenue to engage Fiji's emerging regional organisation.

In Tonga, the Tonga Meteorological Service is currently working with the World Bank to establish a multi-hazards early warning system. The designs were scheduled to be finalised by the end of October 2019. Once operational, the system aims to provide more efficient and accurate forecasting of both seismic and climate-related hazards.

Fiji and Tonga are reviewing their respective national disaster management acts. The reviews seek to clarify the roles and responsibilities of various actors, strengthen the disaster risk reduction component of the legislation, and standardise protocols on international assistance. They will also look to incorporate a Pacific version of the 2007 "IDRL Guidelines", a set of internationally endorsed guidelines meant to help governments become better prepared for legal problems commonly encountered in international disaster relief.⁹ The aim is to move away from reactive disaster governance towards more proactive strategies and to ensure that legislative frameworks are able to respond to present and future needs in disaster management.¹⁰

⁹ The long form of "IDRL Guidelines" is "Guidelines for the domestic facilitation and regulation of international disaster relief and initial recovery assistance".

¹⁰ SPC, "Fiji Government reviews National Disaster Management Act and Plan", 2018, <https://www.spc.int/updates/news/2018/05/fiji-government-reviews-national-disaster-management-act-plan>.

Policy Recommendations

The following steps are recommended for potential future cooperation between the Southwest Pacific and ASEAN on disaster governance:

- Develop an inter-regional ASEAN–PIF disaster governance agreement to act as the overarching framework for the shared challenges faced by the two regions.
- Supplement capacity at the national level with technical experts and disaster management specialists through a joint ASEAN–PIF roster.
- Encourage ASEAN to extend access to its disaster management training programmes and joint simulation exercises to the PIS.
- Establish an inter-regional network of ASEAN–PIS countries for sharing of experiences and joint capacity-building.
- Explore partnership between Camp Black Rock in Fiji and RHCC in Singapore on military-to-military HADR activities.
- Expand Singapore’s role as a humanitarian and disaster risk financing hub by drawing on the experiences of PCRAFI and SEADRIF.

About the Authors

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About the Centre for Non-Traditional Security Studies

The Centre for Non-Traditional Security Studies (NTS Centre) conducts research and produces policy-relevant analyses aimed at furthering awareness, and building the capacity to address NTS issues and challenges in the Asia Pacific region and beyond. The centre addresses knowledge gaps, facilitates discussions and analyses, engages policymakers and contributes to building institutional capacity in the following areas: Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief; Food, Health and Energy Security; Climate Change, Resilience and Sustainable Development; and Peace and Human Security. The NTS Centre brings together myriad NTS stakeholders in regular workshops and roundtable discussions, as well as provides a networking platform for NTS research institutions in the Asia Pacific through the NTS-Asia Consortium.

More information on NTS Centre and a complete list of available publications, policy briefs and reports can be found here: <http://www.rsis.edu.sg/research/nts-centre/>.

About the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies

The **S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS)** is a think tank and professional graduate school of international affairs at the Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. An autonomous school, RSIS' mission is to be a leading research and graduate teaching institution in strategic and international affairs in the Asia Pacific. With the core functions of research, graduate education, and networking, it produces cutting- edge research on Asia Pacific Security, Multilateralism and Regionalism, Conflict Studies, Non-Traditional Security, Cybersecurity, Maritime Security, and Terrorism Studies.

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Appendix

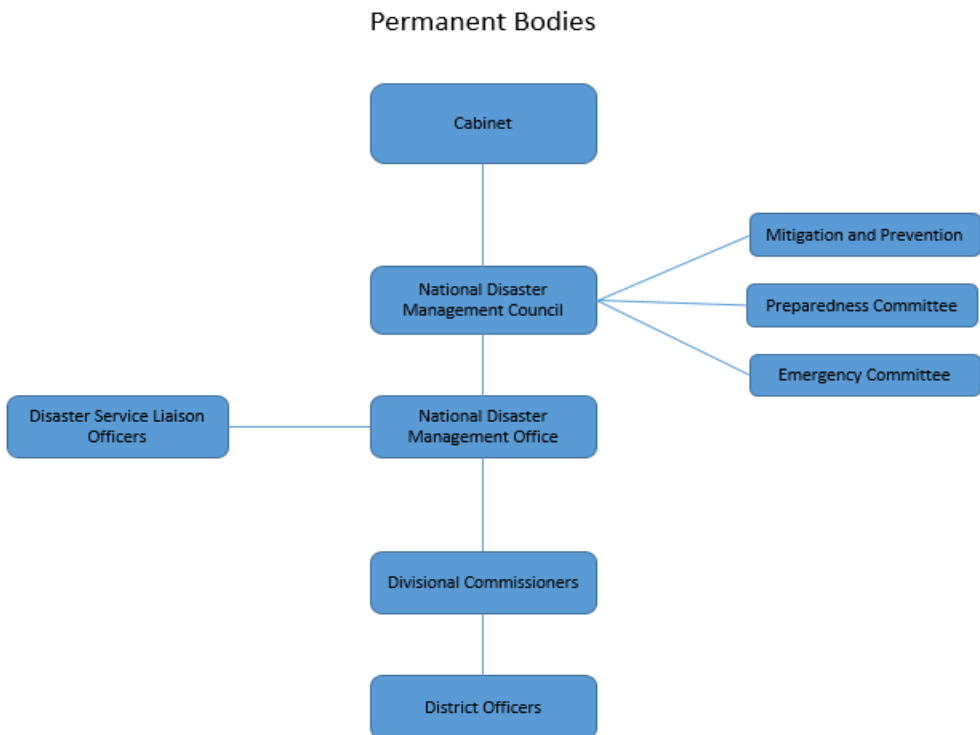
Appendix 1: Factors Determining Vulnerability in Small Island Developing States

Small size	Spatial concentration of productive assets and key installations; limited natural resources.
Insularity and remoteness	Limited access to external goods; delays in information flows; high transportation costs.
Environmental factors	Large coastal zones.
Disaster mitigation capability	Limited hazard forecasting capabilities; limited insurance coverage.
Demographic factors	Small population; population concentrated in coastal zones.
Economic factors	Small economies; dependence on external finance; small domestic markets; highly specialised production.

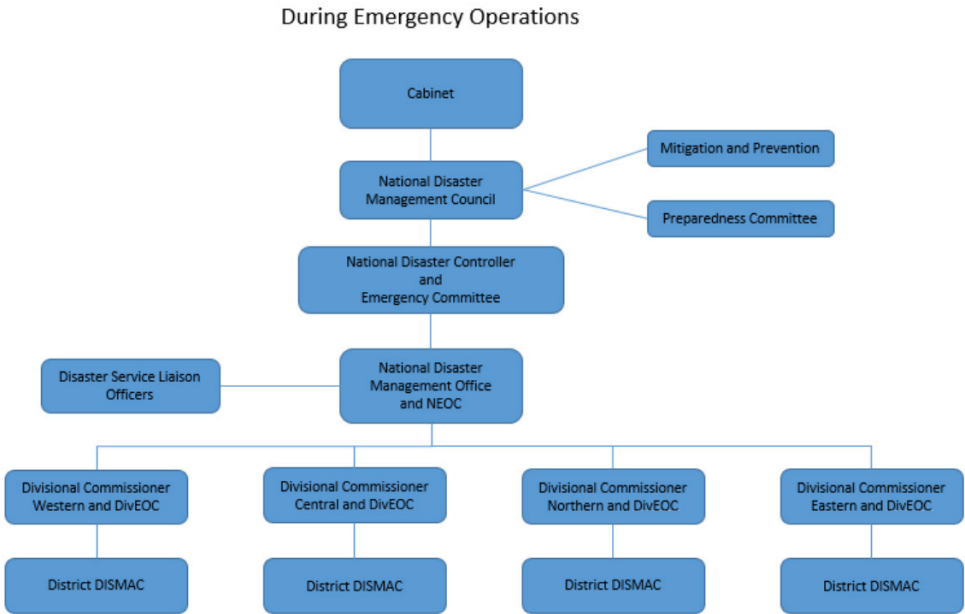
Based on: Mark Pelling and Juha I. Uitto, "Small Island Developing States: Natural Disaster Vulnerability and Global Change" *Global Environmental Change Part B: Environmental Hazards* 3 (2001), No. 2: 49-62 (p. 53).

Appendix 2: Fiji's Disaster Management Structure

(A) Permanent Bodies of the Disaster Management Structure

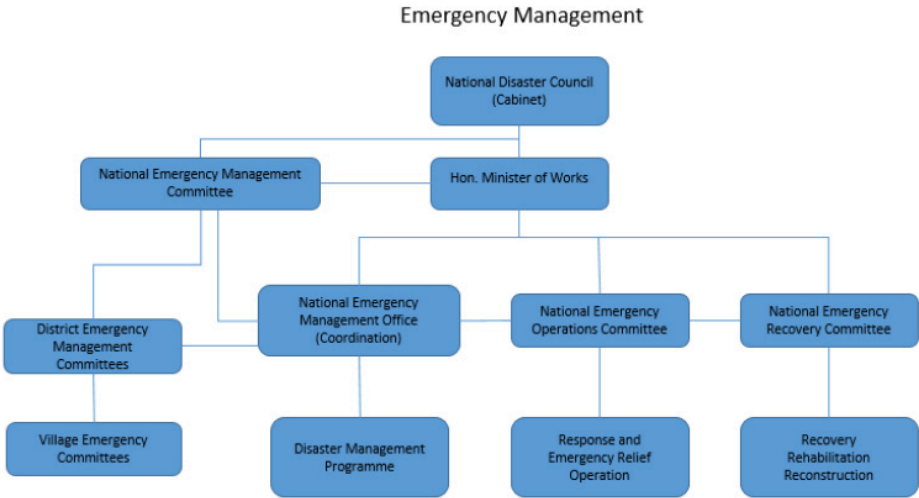


(B) Disaster Management Structure during Emergency Operations



Adapted from: National Disaster Management Council, “Fiji National Disaster Management Plan”, 1995, https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/FJI_%20NDM_Plan_1995.pdf.

Appendix 3: The Structure of Emergency Management in Tonga



Adapted from: National Emergency Management Committee, “Kingdom of Tonga National Emergency Management Plan”, 2009, https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/TONGA_National%20Emergency%20Management%20Plan%202009.pdf.

Appendix 4: Notable Joint Exercises in the Pacific Region

Exercise	Type	Frequency	Last Held	Participating Countries/Organisations in Last Exercise	Area of Focus
Long Reach (Fiji)	Bilateral	Biennial	2017	Australian Defence Force, RFMF, Fiji Police Force, Salvation Army, Various NGOs	HADR — Planning and Preparedness
Long Reach (Tonga)	Bilateral	Biennial	2018	Australian Defence Force, HMAF, NEMO, Cluster Focal Points	HADR — Fostering interoperability of plans
Tava Kula	Multinational	Annual	2018	HMAF, Armed forces from Australia, New Zealand, France and USA, Nevada National Guard ¹¹	HADR and Emergencies
Tropic Twilight	Multinational	Annual	2016	HMAF, Armed forces from Australia, New Zealand, USA, China,	HADR with a specific focus on improving water storage, sanitation, and medical assistance
Pacific Endeavour — Multinational Communications Interoperability Programme (MCIP)	Multinational	Annual	2018	Australia, Bangladesh, Fiji, France, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Maldives, Mongolia, Nepal, Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Tonga, Vietnam, USA	HADR with a specific focus on compatibility and interoperability of communication systems
Kurukuru	Regional	Biennial	2018	Pacific Islands Forum members, Dialogue partners	Maritime surveillance exercise involving Pacific patrol boats together with naval forces from Australia, New Zealand, USA, and France
Pacific Angel	Regional	Annual	2018	US Pacific Command, Pacific Countries	HADR and Civil–military operations

¹¹ The Nevada National Guard (USA) established a formal partnership with the Tongan military in 2014, which includes joint training exercises and exchanges in Tonga and Nevada.



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