



**Australian Security in the 21st Century
Seminar Series**

**PAPUA NEW GUINEA
What Can Australia Do (Successfully)?**

Delivered by

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Australian Security In The 21st Century Seminar Series**

***PAPUA NEW GUINEA
What Can Australia Do (Successfully)?***

By Sean Dorney

About 24 years ago, I was detained by the police and charged with leaving the scene of an accident. Now, given the way so much analysis of Papua New Guinea in Australia these days is shrouded in pessimism and gloom, I could try to spin you a line that this happened at the Cairns airport on my arrival back in Australia after being deported from PNG – and that the “accident scene” I had so rapidly left was our former colony. It would be a fairly laboured joke, I concede, but there is no denying that if you have read much about the country produced recently, the description of Papua New Guinea as “the scene of a disastrous, never-ending accident” might seem fairly apt. I do not necessarily agree.

In fact, the “leaving the scene of an accident” charge I’m referring to happened about three years before my expulsion. That, incidentally, was almost exactly 21 years ago (on September the 21st 1984). But back in late 1981, I was racing to a news conference called by the then Finance Minister, John Kaputin, who is now a senior world bureaucrat based in Brussels as Secretary General of the African, Caribbean and Pacific group of countries, the ACP. However, then, he was preparing a budget and he was engaged in an almighty wrangle with PNG’s Transport Minister of the day, the late Iambakey Okuk.

Okuk was Deputy Prime Minister and determined that PNG should cash in on – and this might surprise some – on its then excellent standing as a responsibly managed developing country and borrow heavily so that he, Okuk, could build roads and airstrips all over the country to help his National Party win the 1982 elections.

As I say, I was tearing through Port Moresby on my way to the Kaputin news conference when I came to the intersection outside military headquarters, Murray Barracks. I was turning left off the Sir Hubert Murray Highway and the vehicle in front of me stopped for some non-existent traffic coming in from the right. I could see there was nothing coming from that direction, stepped on the accelerator and crunched into the back of this other vehicle, which had a government numberplate. I was running late for the news conference and, after slowing down to check that nobody seemed to be injured – the two Papua New Guinean occupants got out to survey the relatively minor damage – I took off for Waigani and the news conference.

One of the problems with being the ABC Correspondent in Port Moresby is that people know who you are. And so it was that a day or two later the police called and I was formally charged with leaving the scene of an accident. It was my intention to throw myself upon the mercy of the court and plead extenuating circumstances. But I never needed to. After being remanded by the Ela Beach Magistrates Court twice, I got off scott free because the police failed to turn up for my third appearance and I joined the long list of criminals who have outlasted PNG's poor under-strength and over-whelmed police prosecutions office.

The point I am trying to make is that many of PNG's problems are not new although the Australian Government with its new whole-of-government approach to PNG is displaying an uncanny ability to discover them all again, and again, and again. A haphazard and slack application of the law, uneasy, acrimonious government coalitions, a dysfunctional political system that constantly challenges rational economic planning (and Australians who expect immunity from prosecution) – this is all familiar stuff in PNG. We need to understand that politics in Papua New Guinea is very different from politics in Australia, that PNG is a very different place and that our excellently manicured solutions are often laughably inappropriate. What works here most often does NOT work there. Just to give you an off-beat example we once recovered an ABC car stolen from our Administrative Officer, Margaret Wilson, not by going to the police but by approaching some Southern Highlanders who promised to get it back for a carton of beer and a cowboy suit – a cowboy suit being riding boots, jeans, a shirt and an akubra. The whole thing went a bit awry. The Southern Highlanders knew the Kerema gang who had taken the car but while those two were drinking the beer, a third group, a gang from Goilala in the Central Province, stole the car off them both. They did retrieve our ABC vehicle but by then it was damaged and, as our Southern Highlands contact who was shamed enough to forego the cowboy suit, told Margaret, "Ah, Missis Margaret, we Southern Highlanders are OK and so are the Keremas, the guys who held you up. But you just can't trust those Goilalas!" Margaret Wilson had had a gun pointed at her when the car was taken but, after all this, the Kerema gang leader who had threatened to shoot her was forever friendly, even occasionally asking for a lift.

Professor Donald Denoon in his recently published book on Australia's decolonisation of PNG, called *A Trial Separation*, came up with a line that, if I had known it when the Menzies Research Centre approached me, would have made an excellent title for this address. Summing up the approach of the Social Change Advisory Committee that the Australian Territories Minister, CEB Barnes, set up in the 1960s, he wrote: "Western behaviour was the goal, indigenous values the obstacle and paternal administration the solution." Have we really come that far, though, since then in divining answers for the multitude of problems we see in PNG? Reading some of the literature relating to how we have gone about devising our aid program it seems to me "Western [market] behaviour remains the goal, indigenous values are still the obstacle and paternal [ordered] administration is the solution." I might just throw in another obstacle there which as colonial administrators we never had - democracy. And we do seem to forget about it in our aid policy – that the PNG political leaders who so exasperate us have to win elections in an unforgiving environment and that PNG Governments have lasted, on average, 2.5 years.

When I asked my wife, Pauline, who is from Manus, what I should say in this address on the Australia/PNG relationship and what Australia should do she said ... well, she said a number of things. One was that she totally agreed with a comment Sir Michael Somare had made when I interviewed him for the *Paradise Imperfect* TV documentary the ABC let me make in 2000 to mark PNG's first quarter century of independence. That comment was, "We Papua New Guineans have an attitude problem." That attitude problem was that Papua New Guineans had little respect for anything that was not directly theirs or which did not belong to their group or clan. Nobody

felt responsible for the protection, preservation or upkeep of anything belonging to any other group and certainly not for anything belonging to the State. I'll get back that analysis in a few minutes because it is a very pertinent point that helps explain why PNG is so difficult to govern. But, first, I want to stress that the reality too, I believe, is that we Australians also have an attitude problem when it comes to PNG. We are unbelievably arrogant. We also have delusions about how we think we are regarded.

The indigenous people of the Pacific, deep down, don't think we belong in this part of the world. We are the super-power in the Pacific, true. But up there in PNG and out there in the Pacific we are regarded as late-comers. Many Papua New Guineans do not see Australia as a wise, father-like figure generously helping out its wayward child, PNG, with top-ups to the allowance and firm-handed offers of guidance on how a troubled adolescent nation can survive in a sophisticated world. No matter how much that self image might seep into our own imaginings of the relationship it is not shared by the other side. The late Sir Anthony Siaguru, who was for six years Deputy Secretary General of the Commonwealth, once used the comparison of distant relatives: a city-wise Australia trying to guide its country-bumpkin cousin, PNG, in the ways of urban living with neither really appreciating or understanding what the other is going through. But I would suggest a less benign analogy. I would contend that, from the PNG side, some view us as more like the offspring of a raskol gang that forcefully moved into the house next door, banished the original owners, their distant cousins, the Aborigines, from the home, forcing them to live in poverty in a ragged tent in the backyard but that, having done all that, we now have the gall to lecture the long-time

residents of the street, like the Papua New Guineans, about appropriate behaviour.

During the Sandline affair in 1997 *The National* newspaper in Port Moresby ran an editorial criticising the Australian media for ignoring the Pacific region. "Part of the Australian media blindness," the paper argued, "stems from that country's apparently endemic identity crisis. Who are these Australians?" the PNG paper asked. "Are they a lost tribe that has strayed from its ethnic and cultural roots in distant Britain and Europe?" It has been said to me, "You call yourself an Australian – the real Australians are the Aborigines!" There is also suspicion in PNG that Australia and Australians have a design on dispossessing Papua New Guineans of their land. Many of you might find that laughable, even ridiculous. But the suspicion is given fuel by economists who are regularly lamenting the lack of utilisation of customary owned land in PNG and demanding that it all be converted to individual title. You may recall that a World Bank inspired land mobilisation scheme led to riots in Port Moresby a few years ago and the shooting dead of several students. So remember - no matter what we think we are doing in PNG, our motives are always being questioned.

Now, how do we view PNG? Alan Morris and Rob Stewart, commissioned to write an analytical report for the coming Aid White Paper, say this:

"Papua New Guinea faces enormous development challenges. The country continues to confront difficult economic circumstances, there is widespread breakdown in service

delivery and the economic and social impact of the emerging HIV/AIDS crisis will intensify in the next three to five years. PNG has the worst social indicators in the Pacific, and its human development indicators remain poor relative to its per capita income. ... In US\$ terms per capita income in 2003, at US\$510, was substantially less than it was in 1975 (US\$560)."

Hugh White, in his major report on how Australia might help PNG made this prediction about what we might see in 20 years time if things go badly:

"It could become a country of ten or more million people which may have disintegrated into a series of even less viable mini-states; with terrible rates of HIV infection, a stagnating domestic economy, incapable of attracting investment on any but the most rapacious terms, dominated by organised crime, in which the authority of central government has collapsed and the delivery of essential services has stopped altogether, and human security of the population has nosedived, producing widespread misery."

Professor Donald Denoon in *A Trial Separation*, sums it up well:

"In the minds of some influential Australians, Papua New Guinea has become a political tragedy, an economic disaster and a strategic nightmare."

As I stated earlier, I am not so dreadfully pessimistic although there is no denying PNG has huge problems. But pessimism about PNG has been orthodox thinking in Australia ever since we began our hasty decolonisation. Back in 1972, E.K. Fisk and Maree Tait wrote in an AIIA publication: "Is there in fact any reasonable hope for success ... or is failure inevitable? Can chaos in PNG really be averted in any case?"

Back in the mid 1970s, when I was first in PNG working for the then newly created National Broadcasting Commission, there was a huge expectation, especially in the Australian media, of almost immediate failure. As Donald Denoon writes in his book things went surprisingly well. He concludes, and I would have to agree, that the "transfer of powers from Canberra to Waigani was an outstanding bureaucratic feat at both ends." One of the problems with the Papua New Guinea/Australia relationship now is that because there was no sudden collapse, because the Kina actually became stronger than the Australian dollar for 15 years and because there was no coup or any real likelihood of one, Australia, and the Australian media, rapidly lost interest. Here was, as I think Hank Nelson has argued, perhaps the most significant thing we had ever done as a nation – creating another one – but because it seemed to work we turned away. Now, 30 years later, when things may appear to have reached the state we were fearing they would plummet to as early as 1976, a few of us are wringing our hands wondering what we can do. Rather, what we can do successfully.

However, let me question one pillar of the accepted wisdom: that the PNG economy is a disaster and that, as the World Bank says, and AusAID agrees, per capita income in PNG has declined since

Independence. As mentioned, the World Bank figures state that at independence in 1975 income per head was US\$560 compared with US\$510 now (or rather in 2003). Tim Curtain, a Canberra based economist who worked in PNG for many, many years provides a compelling argument as to why that US\$510 figure is just plain wrong. He questions the figures at several levels but for a start, says that if you accept the Kina GDP figure and the dubious population estimate then "any Papua New Guinean with only the official average income in 2003 of K2393 would have been able to exchange that for US\$674 at his/her bank with a minimum of fuss." That is significantly better than the World Bank's US\$510 figure and quite a bit better than 1975's US\$560. But Curtain also queries the accepted population data which is all based on the 2000 PNG census. He argues that a simple comparison of the 2000 census with the 1980 census (which many regard as more reliable) reveals enormous discrepancies. He writes:

"The population given by the 1980 census must have been an underestimate if the 2000 census was sound, since the latter shows many more persons alive aged 20-29 than were alive aged 0-9 in 1980, and likewise there were more aged 35-39 in 2000 than had been alive aged 15-19 in 1980."

Remember, this is a country with no immigration so you should expect those age group blocks, 20 years on, to be significantly lower than in 1980 given PNG's health indicators. "Alternatively," Curtain says, "the 1980 census was sound, and the 2000 census provides a seriously exaggerated estimate of the population." Now the reason for that would not surprise anybody who knows anything about PNG. In 1995 there were changes to the *Organic Law on Provincial*

Government which “introduced a population basis for grants to the provinces, creating an incentive for inflating population growth”. So Curtin has done a few recalculations of the economic and population data and concludes:

“Many commentators have ... asserted that Papua New Guinea’s growth performance has been poor and getting worse, with national income growing at less than population growth. In fact since independence in 1975 national income has grown at over 3.5 per cent per annum, i.e. well above population growth. Thus national income per head has increased from A\$374 per head in 1974/5 to A\$1035 in 2003. That means Papua New Guinea’s growth of GDP per head over this period has been faster than Australia’s 2.4 per cent per annum.”

Surprised? I was. But dismissive. Certainly not. One thing I can confidently say is that PNG is a statistician’s nightmare. I can give you examples from our extended family. My son is getting married at the end of this month and we have been trying to arrange for several of his PNG relatives to come down from Manus. Two of them are his first cousins, the sons of Pauline’s older brother. Same father, same mother but their names are Alex N’drehaya and Aloise Tiwain. Although when we first ordered the tickets we gave the names as Alex Cheyaha and Aloise Wain. It’s the same amongst Pauline’s brothers and sisters. To see their names written down you would never guess they were related. Even more confusing for the bureaucrats, Pauline has two birthdays. On our marriage certificate it is the December 21st and on her passport it’s March 9th. If you want an explanation ask a question

later. But the point Tim Curtain makes is that you can't rely on official statistics in PNG and that must frustrate the hell out of the AusAID planners. Anyone from the Australian Federal Police who was in Port Moresby during the brief but aborted Enhanced Cooperation deployment could tell you how when they started fixing up the crime statistics it was used against them to "prove" that crime in the city had allegedly got worse while they were there. I have attended the last two annual Australia/PNG Business Forums in Cairns and the quite positive vibes intirgued me. On the economic front there is actually a bit of good news about and if the gas pipeline goes ahead it will generate more. Of course it helps to have a decent Treasurer like Bart Philemon.

Back to Pauline's point about the attitude problem that she believes lies at the heart of PNG's service delivery dilemma. She certainly thinks her family is a victim of some of that in relation to my son Xavier's wedding. Pauline's sister put in all the necessary papers for their passports in July. She had to send them down to Port Moresby by personal courier because of concerns about the unreliability of the mail. But, after almost three months wait, she has now been told the documents have all been lost. You would think that it is every citizen's right to apply for and get a passport. That is apparently not what some of those who work in the Immigration section of PNG's Foreign Affairs Department think. To quote a furious wife, she believes there is a mind-set of, and this is a Pidgin word, "Pilim!" – "Feel it!" or "Take that!". "Who do you think you are wanting to travel overseas?"

A lot of the attitude problem has to do with the extraordinarily fractured nature of the Papua New Guinea state which, as you

probalby know, is made up of some 850 plus language groups. That is what makes national identity in PNG such an elusive concept. I was going on earlier about how we are regarded with suspicion. But so is almost every group outside your own in PNG. In some places, traditionally the automatic assumption was that those outside your group, being natural enemies, will be lying and trying to trick you. It is not a great basis on which to establish mutual trust and national cooperation. One of my all-time favourite stories about PNG was told by Vic Botts, the North American mining engineer who started up the Porgera Gold Mine in the Enga Province in the late 1980s. Vic told the Port Moresby Press Club when he was leaving PNG the following tale about how he only came to realise how difficult it was going to be negotiating with the landowners when he had dinner with a Catholic priest who had been a missionary in the Porgera Valley for 20 years. "Vic, let me tell you about these Porgerans," Botts told us quoting what the priest said to him. "It took me six months to convert any of them. Then, I told them the story about the last supper. And, God knows, Vic, it took me another six months to convince them that Judas was the bad guy!"

Actually, it never surprises me that fundamentalist Christian preachers have such sway in PNG. Given the absolute patchwork of languages it must be very tempting to put a local interpretation on, for example, Genesis Chapter 11 about the Tower of Babel. "And the LORD said, 'Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language; and this is only the beginning of what they will do; and nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. Come, let us go down and confuse their language that they may not understand one another's speech.' ..."

One product of this incredible diversity of indigenous languages is the very localised nature of politics. We Australians introduced Papua New Guineans to the ballot box quite late, in 1964 only 11 years before independence, although nobody in the then Administration had any idea how quickly our rule would come to an end. And what system did we introduce? The one we knew – individual member electorates. Papua New Guineans are extraordinarily adaptive people so they refined this system to their own ends to produce something very different from what we intended. One crucial difference is that while we thought we were bequeathing a system of representative government – Members of Parliament being representatives of their people – what it has turned into, put bluntly, is an alternative method of becoming a chief, a leader of your people. And, until the recent changes re-introducing optional preferential voting, you could get to be a leader, a new-age chief, with as little as six per cent of the vote. Those recent changes and the attempt to tighten up party loyalty in Parliament have finally created a situation where Sir Michael Somare might be able to stay in power from one election to the next – a full five year term from 2002 to 2007. That has never happened since Independence and will be quite an achievement. But there are still mighty flaws in the whole system.

It is instructive to spend a little time thinking about how successful our aid policy to PNG has been. For the first 15 years of PNG's Independence most of our aid was handed over as cash. Then, we decided, despite much opposition from PNG, to convert all of our A\$300 million aid package to "project" and "program" aid. I recall attending a two-day forum in Brisbane in 1993 at which this switch

was explained to 400 hungry-eyed Australian consultants and representatives of various NGOs all with ideas on how to get in on the action. A year or two prior to this, Australian aid officials had set up 'joint' committees covering the agreed sectors into which Australian money would be channelled – health, education, infrastructure, renewable resources, law and order, and the private sector. The chairmen of these Sectoral Working Groups presented their reports on what was planned in their area or expertise. It was stunning just how much basic policy on fundamental issues, such as the future of education and health in PNG, had been appropriated by these committees. Admittedly they did have PNG representation but given the shortage of skills in the PNG bureaucracy and the multiple demands on talented manpower it was inevitable the Australian 'experts' dominated, working under the imperatives of deadlines set by the Australian aid authorities.

Sir Julius Chan, who was Finance Minister at the time, told me during the forum that it was "a very cumbersome, very tedious, very unnecessary load of work". Australia's then Development Cooperation Minister, Gordon Bilney, put the alternative argument. He asked whether the untied aid arrangement agreed to at independence out of "respect" for PNG's sovereignty might have been the wrong decision. "Would it have been better," Bilney said, "[for Australia] to have remained engaged in some way? Would it have been better to use Australia's more developed technical and human resources to work together with Papua New Guinea to develop their country? Would that have ensured more rapid and more equitable development?" Chan's answer was a flat no. "We are concerned," Sir Julius told the forum, "that the decreasing real value of support could lead to be of less and

less tangible benefit if it is frittered away on too many programs and projects which have excessive bureaucratic and administrative costs." He was particularly concerned about the rake-off to consultants. The then Secretary of the PNG Prime Minister's Department, Brown Bai, after hearing the presentations by the Australian chairmen, expressed surprise at the amount of work the teams had done planning PNG's future. "I am supposed to be the PNG Government's chief adviser," he said, "but I know nothing about this."

Bai was not complaining about the quality of the work done. He said he had found some of the presentations "excellent". "But I want to ask you," he said from the floor during a question and answer session, "with all this 20 years, 30 years, ten years planning that you are now proposing under these programs, how would that accommodate any changes that would arise coming out of new policy initiatives of the government of the day?" The feeble answer was that Papua New Guineans had been involved as committee members. In *The Sandline Affair* in 1998 I wrote about this debate and the problems the implementation of the rapid changeover from cash to project and program aid was causing. "With increasing numbers of Australian officials and consultants delving into all these areas of PNG Government responsibility," I said, "the range of points of irritation has grown exponentially. There is a terrible temptation facing Australians who work on these aid projects to push the Papua New Guineans aside and take over the problem to effect a quicker result. But it is self-defeating."

Now, seven years since I wrote that, has this change in approach worked? That depends upon your interpretation of "works". It has

worked in providing a good income for a lot of Australian consultants, AusAID now employs a lot more people and it has been great for the Australian management companies that have won the AusAID contracts but it has not achieved the lofty expectations I heard outlined over those two days in Brisbane in 1993. In fact, reading the doom and gloom assessments of PNG's current social indicators it would be, you would think, a bit of a stretch to claim much success at all. But wait! In a 2003 report on "The Contribution of Australian Aid to PNG's Development" we are told that "key achievements" of the programmed aid included: a doubling of the number of children attending school from 510,000 in 1992 to one million in 2002; a reduction in infant mortality by more than one third; an increase in life expectancy from 49 to 59; and that key roads and airports had stayed operational. Oh, so these are Australia's achievements not Papua New Guinea's. And all the negatives we keep hearing about? They must be PNG's fault.

What did not surprise me in reading the Morris/Stewart report for the coming Aid White Paper was the conclusion that "the breadth of the aid program, with its reach into nearly all sectors of activity, has undermined rather than underpinned improvements in some respects." They suggest that to be effective and sustainable our aid program must "complement and support the work of the PNG Government in meeting its responsibilities, not ... supplant it." In his book, Donald Denoon makes the same point saying "project aid has undermined local control and damaged the morale of officers managing programs and services" and adds that by the end of the 1990s "AusAID treated local public servants as a lost cause and allowed them to be partly eclipsed by Australian consultants and NGOs". Revealingly Morris and

Stewart write that: "Analysis of PNG's own funding ... indicates that government funding for key sectors such as infrastructure, health and education was higher when PNG was receiving budget support than in recent times." But the killer line for me in this analytical report prepared for AusAID was that the three billion dollars or so we have now devoted to program aid to PNG actually resulted in a transfer of knowledge to AusAID. "Over recent years" Morris and Stewart say "the program's quality has benefited from devolution and stronger analytical capacity in AusAID, resulting in substantial knowledge gains." Wow! That's value for the Australian taxpayers' dollar.

And now that we have this whole-of-government approach to tackling problems in the Pacific it is not only the consultants who are getting the good dollars. Australian officials from all sorts of Departments are being given excellent packages to work in PNG or the Solomons. But how well briefed are they in what actually works there rather than what works here in Canberra. This is probably excellent training and good for the future but in the meantime are their PNG counterparts backing away and saying, "You fix it!"? I must admit when I first heard about the proposed Enhanced Cooperation Program, the ECP, following hard on the heels of the initial successes of RAMSI, the Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands, I was apprehensive. In my mind's eye, I could see some excited policy maker from Prime Ministers' and Cabinet running through the corridors waving above his head one of Nick Warner's early reports from Honiara and shouting, "We've found it! We've found it! We've found the Melanesian-dilemma-fix formula." I was sceptical because I knew that the way a desperate Solomon Islands Parliament had embraced the RAMSI concept would never, ever be replicated in the Parliament in Port Moresby. In the

Solomons, despite a few murmurs of disquiet, it was a unanimous vote to approve the intervention. Remember the Solomons did not ask their former colonial masters, the British, to intervene. The person who convinced me the ECP might have a chance of working, however, was a Papua New Guinean, the immensely capable and deep-thinking Internal Affairs Minister, Bire Kimosopa. But the odds were stacked against it and him especially considering that his Prime Minister was reluctant to claim any ownership of the ECP whatsoever.

I have no doubt the Australian cops on the beat in Port Moresby did make a difference. It is probably a great pity they are not still there. I can understand the arguments as to why Australia wanted immunity for them but I am not convinced the deployment was impossible without it. Any expectation that the PNG Parliament would vote through changes to its constitution to exempt Australian police from following the laws they were there to enforce was pure fantasy. One thing that did worry me was whether we had enough of the sort of people needed. I understand the Australian Federal Police budget has jumped ten fold in about five years. Surely that alone raises questions about how many hardened, experienced policemen and policewomen are available given the AFP's commitments elsewhere like in Solomon Islands. One of the realities the ECP also came up against was outright opposition within the Royal Papua New Guinea Constabulary from those whose positions and power were threatened. The mobile squads were having their most powerful weapons taken from them and I understand a senior officer who allegedly had interests in a brothel was more than happy to see the AFP leave. I was the In-Country Manager of an aid project in the early 1990s when the ABC was trying to help out PNG's NBC and I know well how those who feel threatened,

especially the corrupt and the incompetent, can quickly undo good work.

PNG desperately needs more police. At Independence in 1975 it had about 4400. Now with twice the population and crime further out of control it has about 4800. How many police does Australia have? 50,000 or so I believe. That's a ratio of more than ten to one when the populations are four to one. As somebody said to me recently, "It's PNG that needs the 50,000 police considering how much more difficult a place it is to combat crime than Australia." Police are included in the public service numbers in PNG so maybe it is time we stopped bleating on about the allegedly bloated public service in PNG and encouraged them to rapidly expand their police force and help boost police pay and conditions. Bire Kimosopa is trying to improve things along those lines.

What other things can we do? I had a quick browse yesterday through some AusAID fact sheets on the Aid Program and it seems there are very few things we are not somehow involved in. What the Morris/Stewart analytical report calls for is more focus. They say the aid program "has certainly failed to generate the kind of progress expected, but a more balanced conclusion," they feel, "may be that expectations have been overly simplistic and unrealistic." They recommend that "the aid program needs to force itself further away from the mindset that it must take responsibility for everything that goes on in PNG. ... Arguably," they say, "the program ... has been too ambitious, too broad and has sought to progress too many objectives ...". I would agree. After all, our aid represents some 17% of the PNG Budget. There are things PNG has responsibility for and its priorities are certainly not always in accord with ours.

Let me wind up by suggesting a few things that I think would help PNG. The first is a major reform of the political system. Sir Anthony Siaguru wrote 15 years ago that in “the most unlikely event of Australia ever seeking to interfere in our internal affairs by making her aid conditional on a cleaning-up act, then I certainly hope her focus would be on the area of constitutional reform. For without doubt, it is here, at the centre, that the roots of our worst troubles are to be traced and their remedies ... found. And, believe me, while our officials might bear their teeth, and leaders might snarl for the benefit of public consumption, Canberra might be astonished by the support she might receive from ordinary Papua New Guineans in helping the country achieve the overthrow of a political system which has become monstrous in its concentration on numbers games at the expense of considered policy and the health of the community.”

I am not suggesting we refuse to give any aid unless there is a change to the political system. But perhaps we can admit that what we gave them back in 1964 was a “stupid white-man’s idea” and that we are happy to help fund a major convention for Papua New Guineans to devise a system better suited to Melanesia. I have read academic suggestions of what is called an atomised system where representation is broken down to language groups. I don’t think that would work in PNG because who wants 850 politicians? Also while some language groups number in the tens of thousands others are but a few hundred. What might be worth considering is getting away from single member electorates and adopting a party list system where the whole province or an entire region votes for those lists. There are many systems they could be examine but the advantages of getting

away from single member seats include strengthening political parties upon which the Westminster so relies and breaking the hold of the wantok system where an MP is beholden to and looks after one fraction of the electorate with slush funds plundered from the State. Also, the gender problem in the PNG Parliament could be solved by stipulating a compulsory male-female or female-male sequence on the party lists. If Melanesian women made up half the PNG Parliament it would be a radically different place. Other alternatives could be ditching the Westminster model and going for a system where every Member is part of the Government and all MPs are on committees and have a say in policy.

Let me also endorse an idea Hugh White proposed. The cause of national unity in PNG would be given an extraordinary boost if we could get a PNG based team into the Australian National Rugby League competition. It took the North Queensland Cowboys eleven years to reach their first Grand Final but what a surge of pride that injected into North Queensland! It might seem a bit of a pipe dream but if the PNG to Australia gas pipeline becomes a reality then there is a natural sponsor. In the interim, we should be encouraging the present NRL clubs to send scouts to PNG to unearth the talent that exists there. Bob Bennett, Wayne Bennett's brother, is the PNG Kumuls coach and he would be a first point of contact. The gas pipeline itself of course is extraordinarily important for PNG and the Australian and Queensland Governments must actively recognise that.

A couple of other ideas: a bit of concerted support for converting the government vehicle fleet to running on coconut oil. In Vanuatu they now run all government vehicles on bio-fuel. It is called Island

Fuel there. It is 15 cents cheaper than diesel and according to the mechanic most heavily involved they get 10% more kilometres to the litre out of Island Fuel than diesel. Finally, an idea I have shamelessly pinched from Tim Curtain. Australia should encourage the World Bank to switch its opposition to logging in PNG into support for regulated and managed forestry plantations. He has made suggestions on what needs to be done and argues that landowner issues are not insoluble pointing to the Oil Palm developments in West New Britain. Curtain says that while PNG is at war with the World Bank over logging, "Sweden, unimpeded by the World Bank, has been logging at rates of up to 70 million cubic metres a year for the last decade, 35 times more than PNG with its much larger forested area." Also, he says, New Zealand is earning three times as much as PNG from its logging.

I'll conclude with another anecdote which I think sums up a bit of the glory and the frustration I've experienced trying to help PNG. When I captained the national rugby league side, the Kumuls, in 1976 we ran out onto the field before a packed stadium in Port Moresby. Pauline's father was there and, unbeknown to us, he had brought a tomahawk. The Kumuls were playing a representative side from country New South Wales and when, at one stage, I was gang tackled and left briefly concussed, my brother-in-law had to restrain my father-in-law from fetching the tomahawk out of his bag. Shortly after that, still dazed, I threw a stupid cutout pass which cutout all of our players and was intercepted by one of their backline who scored. As we gathered behind the tryline and I was apologising to the team, feeling sore, sorry and useless, a voice from the crowd cried out, "He's just looking after his wantoks!" So, even when you are on PNG's side

and playing your guts out it is not always appreciated. However, I did redeem myself and score a try and we won. It is possible, therefore, despite setbacks, for we Australians to register victories in Papua New Guinea. But you have to be prepared to admit your mistakes and it's best done when you are playing with them as part of their team.

Thank You.