

**36th AUSTRALIA PAPUA NEW GUINEA BUSINESS FORUM.
BRISBANE, 24 TO 26 MAY 2021.**

REIMAGINING THE FUTURE PAPUA NEW GUINEA.

The 36th Australia Papua New Guinea Business Forum was held in Brisbane and online from 24 to 26 May 2021 with the theme: Reimagining the Future Papua New Guinea. The Forum had been deferred from May 2020 due to Covid-19 restrictions.

The Forum was attended by 153 delegates in person in Brisbane and 69 online delegates in Papua New Guinea and elsewhere, and included 10 Trade Expo Booths in Brisbane and 5 virtual trade expo booths.

The Australian Government Keynote Address was delivered remotely by the Hon Scott Morrison MP, Prime Minister of Australia, emphasising the important history of the relationship between our two countries providing a platform for the contemporary close bilateral relationship. The Prime Minister noted the importance of the business and commercial relationship to the wider bilateral relationship. He acknowledged the work of the Australia Papua New Guinea Business Council.

The 9th Henry Kila Memorial Address was delivered by Dame Meg Taylor DBE, Immediate Past Secretary General of the Pacific Islands Business Forum. Dame Meg emphasised the importance of leadership, governance and anti-corruption measures to ensuring Papua New Guinea can move towards achieving its true potential for the benefit of all its people. She challenged the Councils to proactively advocate stronger ethics in public leadership, and suggested the Councils consider developing a code of ethics for itself and its members.

In his opening remarks the President of the Australia Papua New Guinea Business Council, Mr Mark Baker expressed his appreciation for the sponsors, delegates and trade booth holders who stayed the course of the 12 month deferral of the Forum from 2020 and helped provide the certainty for the Council in arranging this Forum. He noted the current challenges of doing business between Australia and Papua New Guinea but expressed optimism that Papua New Guinea would in the medium to long terms remain a valuable partner for Australian investors and other business. A crucial step in reinvigorating the Papua New Guinea economy and stimulating foreign and domestic investment will be actual approvals and commencement of work on development of at least one of prospective new major resource projects, but preferably more than one. He announced a restructuring of the APNGBC approved by members at the Annual General Meeting on 24 May 2021 which will improve member representation and interface with all stakeholders.

The Forum was addressed by range of experts in economy and investment, agriculture, infrastructure, MSME, PNG-Australia Leadership legacies and looking ahead, private sector support for the COVID Vaccination Alliance of UNICEF Australia, and on PNG's resources industry.

Delegates heard a number of presentations on how Papua New Guinea authorities have managed the Covid-19 pandemic, its impact on business and economy, and plans for vaccination rollout. The important role of the National Co-ordination Centre and the effective role played by its senior management was noted with appreciation. The divide between developed and developing States in managing the pandemic was evident in the responses to the pandemic and in vaccine rollout. Vaccination resistance and supply chain remains a challenge in delivering a cohesive and effective national rollout. There are opportunities for business to support vaccination rollout through the Covax and through the Covid Vaccination Alliance of UNICEF Australia including through logistic and financial support.

There was strong support expressed by presenters of the need to diversify the Papua New Guinea economy to reduce its over-reliance on the resources sector. There are opportunities for considerable growth in

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agriculture and for medium and small enterprises which were highlighted by presentations by business practitioners in these sectors. Growth in these sectors is constrained by a range of impediments including poor infrastructure inhibiting improvements and efficiencies in logistics and various regulatory and fiscal impediments adding to costs. The Investment Promotion Authority spoke to its work in facilitating and managing investment. A presentation on using Papua New Guinea's natural resources for the harvesting of carbon credits while protecting Papua New Guinea's environment and contributing to the management of climate change at a national level created much food for thought in developing future policy.

Delegates were briefed about developments and opportunities in Morobe Province utilising Lae's position as a major port centre and gateway to the Highlands provinces. A briefing was also given on opportunities currently under study for the development of a hydrogen based industry in Gulf Province and thermal energy in New Britain.

The Papua New Guinea Minister for Transport and Infrastructure, Hon William Samb MP, detailed the government's ambitious infrastructure development program. In partnership with Australia and other countries the Papua New Guinea Electrification Partnership creates many project and investment opportunities for Papua New Guinea and Australian companies including in partnership with United States of America businesses. The role of PNG Power Limited in power generation and distribution in this Partnership was explained in some useful detail, as were projects being developed by the Australia Infrastructure Partnership for the Pacific (AIFPP).

The Forum welcomed a briefing on infrastructure projects being developed across Papua New Guinea by a partnership between the Australian Defence Force and the PNG Defence Force including Lombrun Naval Base at Manus Island and in other locations.

The session on PNG Australia Leadership legacies and looking ahead showcased the work of The Lowy Institute for International Policy's in creating a voice for emerging young Papua New Guinean leaders and young Australian leaders provided an opportunity for these impressive young people to speak to this group of business leaders. The session highlighted the challenges of the contrasting environment in each country in which young leaders seek to be heard and to represent greater diversity in public life. It highlighted the importance of developing strong personal relationships between young leaders in both countries for the future.

The resources sector expressed optimism about entering a growth phase in 2022 provided the fiscal, policy and regulatory circumstances are finalised and are conducive to the scale of investment required to bring projects to development. Participants were interested in the data provided in the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative presentation and expressed an interest in developing a deeper understanding of the significant historical and current contribution of the extractive industry to the national economy.

Delegates present in Brisbane welcomed the opportunity to gather together after twelve months or so of gathering restrictions for networking and to hear the presentations.

The Australia Papua New Guinea Business Council and the Business Council of Papua New Guinea expresses their appreciation to all those who participated in the Forum in person and online including speakers, delegates, sponsors and trade booth holders.

In her concluding remarks the President of the Business Council of Papua New Guinea, Ms Nuni Kulu, announced that the 37th Australia Papua New Guinea Business Forum will be held in Papua New Guinea in 2022 at a date taking into account the PNG national elections due in 2022.

BRISBANE
26 May 2021