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## Critics savage foreign aid budget cut

By AAP | 9:43pm Apr 2, 2019



Australia's foreign aid budget will drop again despite record spending on Pacific nations.

The total amount of overseas aid will drop from \$4.16 billion in 2018/19 to \$4.04 billion in the upcoming financial year, even as \$1.4 billion is spent in the Pacific.

"The government's Pacific 'step-up' has come from the existing aid envelope resulting in a 'step-down' in other parts of the world," Australian Council for International Development boss Marc Purcell said on Tuesday night.

The budget says by 2022/23, the foreign aid budget will be 11.8 per cent lower in real terms than it will be in this year's budget.

"For years now the coalition has told us that aid would be restored 'once we returned to surplus,'" anti-poverty campaigner Tim Costello said.

"Well surplus is here, yet the poor have been forgotten."

Oxfam Australia chief executive Helen Szoke said it was an "extremely disappointing" budget.

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"We've seen a continuation of cuts to Australian aid, and aid funds are being diverted from Asia to fund the 'Pacific step-up' and the poorly designed new Pacific infrastructure facility," Dr Szoke said.

The budget papers say the coalition is still committed to spending \$4 billion a year on foreign aid, with indexation to restart in 2022/23.

"Effectively this is a cut because of the failure to grow the aid budget in-line with inflation," Mr Purcell said.

"We aren't holding our breath for the government to restore indexation in 2022/23 after a trail of broken pledges."

Foreign Affairs Minister Marise Payne said the coalition government is deepening relationships with partners and allies, especially with its aid program in the Pacific.

Prime Minister Scott Morrison visited Vanuatu and Fiji in January to sell his Pacific step up program, which includes new economic and security partnerships.

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