



AUSTRALIA | POLITICS

'We are family' Pacific church leaders tell Morrison

KYLIE BEACH

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Fifteen Pacific church leaders joined more than 200 Australian Christians in parliament today to talk with Australia's political leaders about what it means to be a part of the 'Pacific family'.

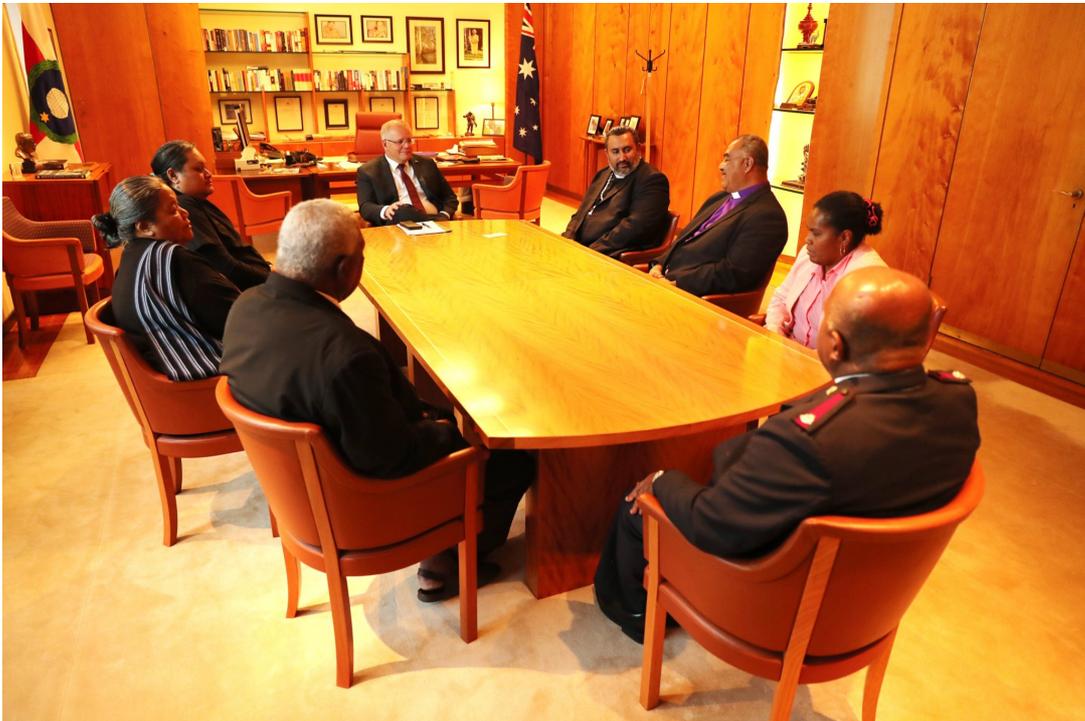
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The group was officially welcomed by Prime Minister Scott Morrison during the launch of 'Friends of the Pacific', a new parliamentary group co-chaired by MPs Dave Sharma and Pat Conroy, who is Shadow Minister for International Development and the Pacific.

Hosted by Tim Costello, the cohort is in the nation's capital for Micah Australia's annual 'Voices for Justice' event. During the visit, they will have nearly 100 face-to-face meetings with the nation's politicians, including senior ministers, discussing the kind of aid they are hoping for through the government's Pacific Step-Up program.

"We are here to say – 'Let's do the Pacific Step-Up in a smart and inclusive manner, that puts people and relationships at the centre,'" Costello said.

"We know how you do this. It's by coming together and actively listening to the issues our Pacific brothers and sisters say need addressing most – like work on gender equality, development partnerships and climate change. That's why we are here and what we are doing in parliament with our delegation."



Prime Minister Scott Morrison meets with Friends of our Pacific Family on December 2, 2019. Picture: Adam Taylor

Rev James Bhagwan, General Secretary of the Pacific Conference of Churches, said the Pacific leaders want to encourage conversations about how Australia can best love its Pacific neighbours.

“Our journey with our Australian Christian brothers and sisters is an example of the kind of partnership the Pacific is looking for from Australia.

“The truth is we don’t want a ‘hand out’, or even a ‘hand up’. What we want is genuine consultative partnership. It is this kind of partnership that we know has two-way benefits in leading to the deeper connection and flourishing of Australian and Pacific societies and their people.

“We’re grateful for the opportunity to meet with Australia’s decision-makers and to discuss what it means to be a part of the ‘Pacific family’.”

The delegation is here on the back of news there will be an upcoming aid review, which has been welcomed by Micah.

The 200 delegates will be calling on the government to ensure the new aid policy empowers local communities in the Pacific to lead their own inclusive and sustainable development as well as recognising the needs of the most vulnerable, though often resilient, members of the Pacific family – women and children.

Delegates will also highlight the impact of climate change in the Pacific and the need to ensure the Pacific Step Up is not at the cost of 'stepping down' efforts elsewhere in the world.

“At a time when our region needs Australia more than ever, we have cut aid to the lowest level ever in history,” said Costello.

“We believe that as a blessed nation we have a moral obligation to ensure Australian aid is generous and is supporting the world’s most poor vulnerable and oppressed, beyond just their ‘strategic’ value.

“In the geopolitical competition for the Pacific, we must ensure poverty reduction is not lost. We must retain our focus on improving the lives of our Pacific friends and neighbours.”

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