

Address by HE Mr Bruce Davis
Australian High Commissioner to Papua New Guinea
28 September 2017

The Papua New Guinea – Australia Partnership for Improved
Decentralisation and Service Delivery

I am delighted to be here today to mark an important point in the evolution of Papua New Guinea's approach to delivering services to its people.

As everyone in this room will know, this nation is founded on the promise of a decentralised system of government that provides for and empowers its citizens as enshrined in the Constitution.

So I'm very pleased to be standing here in the national parliament to reaffirm Australia's long-standing partnership with Papua New Guinea in this endeavour.

The Partnership we have signed today will support Papua New Guinea's priority of improving service delivery, economic opportunities and community development, by empowering provinces and districts.

Papua New Guinea's provinces and districts are the engine room of the nation's future growth. And as Australia's relationship with Papua New Guinea matures into an economic partnership, it is

only fitting that we work together on empowering those responsible for keeping this engine running.

Australia has a proud history of supporting Papua New Guinea's efforts to build the systems of government necessary to deliver services to its citizens.

We have worked with Papua New Guinea on some its most significant decentralisation policies, including the reforms to intergovernmental financing. A key reform that sustains Papua New Guinea's current service delivery machinery today.

Australia was also the key partner in the Papua New Guinea Government's Provincial Performance Improvement Initiative – an incentive based program to strengthen subnational governance

So we know that where there is strong national leadership, development partners can play a useful role in supporting decentralisation reforms to improve service delivery.

I take this opportunity to commend the Papua New Guinea Government's emphasis on partnership in taking forward its decentralisation reforms.

Robust, transparent and accountable partnerships with provincial and local level governments, will be critical to implementing the changes needed to improve services and stimulate economic activity.

But in a modern economy, government cannot do everything. And so it is also welcome that these partnerships will provide a vehicle for private sector, civil society, multi-lateral and bilateral partners to engage in these important reforms.

We have worked with Papua New Guinea to develop a Partnership Arrangement that closely reflects the Government's priorities for decentralisation.

The Partnership Arrangement we have signed today explicitly acknowledges the importance of jointly investing in supporting reform to Papua New Guinea's system of decentralised government - to deliver services effectively, promote growth and achieve development outcomes.

It has been some time since a Partnership on decentralisation has been agreed at this level – that we have one today bodes well for the success of our continued collaboration in this area.

Working closely with the various Ministries, we have jointly agreed that the *Partnership Arrangement for Improved Decentralisation and Service Delivery* will focus on *three priorities*.

Our *first priority* will be to work together to identify and support local solutions for local challenges - to strengthen frontline service delivery on the ground where it counts.

We will support partnerships between government, communities, citizens, the private sector and churches to develop ‘best fit’ solutions to respond to local service delivery and development challenges.

We are already progressing plans to partner with Oil Search Foundation, to test new ways of improving health service delivery in Hela Province and the Greater Southern Highlands region of Papua New Guinea.

Working with Papua New Guinea, we will also develop a new program of support for work at the service delivery frontline.

Co-contribution will be a core element of this support. Where provinces and districts are willing to take the initiative in applying their own resources to improve service delivery and increase economic opportunities, Australia will work with them to identify how we can add value.

The existing Pacific Leadership and Governance Precinct will also support our collaboration on decentralisation, through a greater focus on developing provincial and district leaders of the future.

The *second* priority area will be to work with provinces, districts and other partners to empower citizens and communities to engage with their Government and contribute to development outcomes.

Australia has already agreed to support the Government of Papua New Guinea, in conjunction with the World Bank, to deliver the Rural Service Delivery Project (RSDP).

RSDP will improve communities' access to basic infrastructure and services and build sub-national capacity, using a community-led development approach.

Australia's contribution will support an increase in the number of grants made under the program, strengthen the engagement of women in community decision-making and support monitoring and evaluation activities.

Our existing support to Papua New Guinea's churches will continue. And we will explore with Papua New Guinea what more can be done in the provinces and districts to improve community development outcomes.

This is expected to include initiatives with a focus on promoting the full inclusion and participation of women, youth and people with disabilities and supporting the role of volunteers.

The *third priority* will be to provide support to ensure Papua New Guinea's policies for decentralised service delivery are well developed and well understood.

In this area we will work together to create the enabling environment at the national and local levels for a whole-of-government approach to implementing decentralisation policies.

We will support the Government of Papua New Guinea's commitment to measuring performance and progress by working together to strengthen the availability, use and dissemination of data and information on the development status of provinces and districts.

The launching of the Ward Record Books is an important step in that direction as Papua New Guinea continues to build credible and reliable sources of information for policy and program development.

In conclusion, our support across the three priority areas will be attuned to the diversity of Papua New Guinea's sub-national governments and local communities and recognise that no 'one-size fits all'.

We will look to work in partnership with government, private sector, communities and fellow development partners.

Particularly, we will seek opportunities to work with Papua New Guinean partners across sectors and at different levels.

This will allow us to maximise the impact of Australia's sectoral investments in health, education, infrastructure and law and order.

I see this partnership for decentralisation as a new element of the broader, evolving economic partnership between our countries, founded on shared history, shared future and people to people links.