

8th Regional Meeting of the Pacific Heads of Agriculture and Forestry Services
Partner Statement from the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR)
Thursday, 9 March

As a member of the Pacific family, Australia is committed to working with all in the Pacific to achieve our shared aspirations and address our shared challenges. We're committed to collaborating with the Pacific to tackle the climate crisis, strengthen our economies post-pandemic, and achieve our shared interests in a peaceful and secure region.

Australia supports a strong and unified Pacific family and the vital role of Pacific-led regional events like the Pacific Week of Agriculture and Forestry, empowering Pacific nations to drive conversation and guide partners on regional priorities.

Our Australian delegation is attending the Pacific Week of Agriculture and Forestry to listen, support discussions, and explore how we can contribute to Pacific-led initiatives to transform food systems for a more resilient and sustainable Pacific future.

The Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR) and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade proudly support the Pacific Week of Agriculture and Forestry. This event has brought Pacific leaders together to draw global attention to agriculture and forestry in the region and set the strategic direction for regional collaboration.

This week provided a valuable platform for ACIAR to talanoa with our Pacific family and to be guided by Pacific voices on how Australia can assist in planning and coordinating research and strengthening the research partnerships needed to contribute to building the resilience and sustainability of agrifood systems in the region.

ACIAR has been part of the Pacific family since 1982, connecting Australian and international scientists and researchers with their Pacific counterparts to improve food security and reduce poverty for more than 40 years. We are currently investing AUD\$18.6million in 52 agricultural research-for-development projects across 8 countries in the Pacific throughout 2022-23.

The research that ACIAR funds in the Pacific is diverse. From strengthening regional biosecurity; making rural livelihoods more resistant to the impacts climate change; improving gender equity through the empowerment of women and girls; enhancing human health by prioritising nutrition in agrifood systems; and to exploring opportunities to develop agribusiness and unlock economic opportunities for smallholder farmers.

This week, ACIAR hosted a dialogue with its Pacific research partners on the next phase of our research partnerships in agriculture and forestry, marking the first in-person meeting with our Pacific partners in four years due to COVID-19 disruption.

We also worked closely with our Australian Government partners and the Pacific Community (SPC) to host a talanoa on Pacific food systems pathways that focused discussions on the initiatives needed to underpin the broader changes required in Pacific food systems.

ACIAR also funded the Fiji Institute of Agricultural Science (FIAS) to host a Regional Research Symposium on Agriculture and Forestry that helped identify how science and innovation can bolster food security and further economic development.

In all of these events and dialogues, it was fantastic to see ACIAR Alumni in Fiji and from across the Pacific playing key roles in these discussions that will determine future research priorities for the region. ACIAR is investing substantially in developing scientific and policy capabilities within our Pacific partner countries through our capacity building program. To date, ACIAR has supported 191 Pacific islanders to gain post-graduate qualifications in Australian and Pacific institutions to further their careers and the research capacity of their home country. Throughout Pacific Week of Agriculture and Forestry, ACIAR engaged with its Pacific

Alumni to hear their thoughts and insights on how we further strengthen research networks and contribute to future capacity building efforts in the region.

On behalf of ACIAR, I'd like to thank the Government of Fiji for hosting this important event that will be pivotal in deepening and strengthening the research partnerships needed to ensure a peaceful and prosperous Pacific region.