

SPEECH

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LAND ADMINISTRATION WORKSHOP
KNOWLEDGE SHARING FOR THE FUTURE

Canberra

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Thank you Tony (Burns)

Ladies and gentlemen:

I would like to acknowledge that we are meeting today on the land of the Ngunnawal people and I would like to acknowledge their stewardship of this land since time immemorial.

As the local Member for Canberra, I am pleased to welcome you all here today, particularly those of you who have come from interstate. You may have been expecting to see my colleague the Parliamentary Secretary for International Development Assistance, Bob McMullan. Sadly he is not able to be present as he is representing the Australian Government at the funeral in Samoa of Greg Urwin, Secretary General of the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat.

I'm sure many of you would know Greg and would know the very significant contribution he made to developing and strengthening the relations between the countries and peoples of the Pacific – a region of fundamental importance to Australia. The death of Greg Urwin is a great loss not only to his family and friends but also to the Pacific.

I congratulate Land Equity for organising today's discussions. Land administration is an enormously important issue, not only for the island countries of the South Pacific but for most of the developing world.

Collectively in this room there are many decades of experience in land matters in many countries, including implementing AusAID projects across the Asia Pacific, so your contributions to the ongoing debate over land administration will be greatly valued.

A couple of months ago the publication *Making Land Work* was launched by Bob McMullan at a Pacific regional land policy conference in Vanuatu which was organised by AusAID.

Many of you will have seen the publication. It is in two volumes. For those who haven't - there are copies here so please take one.

It was produced by AusAID with input and participation from more than 80 land experts and practitioners from the Pacific, Australia and New Zealand.

Making Land Work looks at the issues related to land policy reform and provides case studies of both innovative approaches and difficult problems in land tenure and land administration in the region.

It's an excellent resource and a good example of knowledge sharing for the future.

Already, the University of the South Pacific and Unitech in PNG have asked AusAID if the publications could be made available as texts for students.

This is consistent with the feedback that AusAID has been getting from many respected sources in the region.

These publications will inform AusAID's approach to the Pacific Land Program.

Therefore, I would like to highlight some of the important messages coming out of these publications.

The first message is that land policy reform in the Pacific must recognise the continuing relevance of customary forms of tenure.

This message seems pretty obvious now although it was not so obvious only three or four years ago when there was a vigorous debate over land reform in the Pacific.

The debate, which can be broadly characterised as being between individualised tenure and communal forms of tenure, is an argument that I think is now largely over.

I have been told that a number of you here today played an important part in swinging that debate in favour of traditional tenures.

Another important message in *Making Land Work* is that the need for land policy reform is being driven by forces beyond the control of governments and nations.

They include:

- the rise of the cash economy;
- rapid population growth in most parts of the Pacific;
- more mobile populations;
- rapid urbanisation;
- new technologies.

These forces change values and aspirations and, in particular, there is a weakening of customary authority in many areas and a greater diversity of views within customary groups.

What this means, and this is something that comes out strongly in *Making Land Work*, is that first and foremost, land policy is a subset of social and economic policy.

This is an important message.

Another important message in *Making Land Work* is that land policy reform must be driven by Pacific governments and communities themselves, and not by donors.

The fact that so many Pacific island ministers and senior officials attended the *Making Land Work* conference in Vanuatu shows how seriously they take the issue.

There is one more comment I would like to make and that is – whatever the nature of land policy reform – it must include women.

What happens to land and how it is used affects women just as much as men.

Leaving women out of the debate increases the danger that they will be even more disadvantaged than they are already in many instances.

And we know from experience that, if you want social and economic advancement, women have to be given equal opportunity to participate fully in community life and in the economy.

When women have access to land and rights to land, it paves the way for broader improvements in their social and economic status.

You see the same intergenerational benefits that you see when a woman receives education and health care.

Her life prospects and those of her children and grandchildren generally increase and cycles of poverty are broken.

Ladies and gentlemen:

Land administration is a big topic and you have a full day of discussions ahead of you.

But the more you share your experiences and contribute to the greater debate, the better we will all get at dealing with the complex issues that emerge.