

T152/70

OPS

Subject:
Foreign Policy July 80,
Mtg of the South Pacific
Forum in Tarawa



10 DOWNING STREET

PRIME MINISTER'S
PERSONAL MESSAGE
SERIAL No. T152/80

THE PRIME MINISTER

30 July 1980

Dear Prime Minister,

Thank you for your message of 18 July. It was very helpful and timely to have your views on the South Pacific Forum meeting - and we were also grateful for the briefing that your officials gave to Mr. Rose in Tarawa, which enabled him to report on the meeting more fully than would otherwise have been the case.

I will not go into the New Hebrides situation in this letter. Your concern is understood and appreciated. I know you will welcome the fact that we have been able to stick to the date of 30 July for independence and the re-occupation of Santo Island by British and French troops on 24 July. But there are still matters to be resolved in the interest of a peaceful future for the people of the islands. I have asked Peter Blaker, the Minister of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, who as you know will be representing the British Government at the independence celebrations, to come back via Canberra and to make himself available there to brief you, or any of your colleagues should you so wish.

Peter Blaker would also be interested to hear the Australian Government's views on the broader aspects of our joint interests in the Pacific region, which you outline in your letter. As you say, Australia and the UK share considerable interests in the stability and progress of this important area. I was interested

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to note your suggestion at the South Pacific Forum in Tarawa that the 1982 regional Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting might take place somewhere in the Pacific: and I know that you have specifically championed Pacific interests in the Commonwealth and other fora. We have also watched with interest the discussions on possible wider cooperation between Pacific countries themselves, in which Australia and you personally have taken an important part.

You mentioned in your letter the American proposal to store nuclear waste on the island of Palmyra. The acceptability of this particular proposal is a matter for the United States and South Pacific Governments. But we recognise that there could be non-proliferation advantages in having spent fuel from certain countries which we do not wish to see develop national reprocessing facilities stored under multinational arrangements. In general I agree that it would not be in western interests to allow nuclear questions in the Pacific to become contentious and to spoil our good relations with the Pacific countries.

Britain's role in the Pacific is of course less direct than your own, and our priorities, like yours, have to reflect our perceptions of our geographical and strategic position. Our aid programme to the area this year amounts to £27 million. We are members of the South Pacific Commission and have a wide spread of diplomatic representation in the area. These are evidence of our continuing interest in the region.

Yours sincerely,

MT

The Right Honourable Malcolm Fraser, CH, MP.