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**Joint Media Release:**

**New era of partnership for the Melanesian Spearhead Group and Australia**

Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) Secretariat Director General Leonard Louma and Australian High Commissioner to Vanuatu Heidi Bootle have committed to strengthening the Australia-MSG partnership in 2024.

MSG members and Australia share longstanding bonds, including through deep cultural and historical ties, significant development, education and trade linkages, shared values including multiculturalism, democracy, equality and human rights. We also share a commitment to taking strong climate action.

In 2024, the MSG Secretariat will partner with Australia to launch two new projects aligned with its economic, social and cultural agenda for the region:

- i. A **Policy Coordination Unit** within the MSG Secretariat will boost its administrative and project management capacity and resource MSG to have a stronger impact for its members.
- ii. The **Yut4Melanesia** initiative will support youth in Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu to respond to climate change and find solutions to the region's pressing environmental challenges, such as plastic pollution.

***The Director General of the MSG Secretariat, Leonard Louma OBE said,***

*"We welcome the partnership of the Australian Government and are equally excited to launch these two new projects this year.*

*"I note that the Australian Cooperation programs with our MSG Members continues to expand largely in many areas and I appreciate these efforts very much," DG Louma stated.*

*"Furthermore, I am pleased to note that this commitment by Australia will help enhance the capacity of the Secretariat in improving the implementation of our work program."*

***Australian High Commissioner to Vanuatu, Heidi Bootle said,***

*"Australia highly values its partnerships across the Melanesian region, through close relationships with MSG member countries and strong historical and cultural ties, including through our Torres Strait Islander and Australian South Sea Islander communities."*

*“These new, Melanesian-led initiatives elevate our partnership with the MSG Secretariat to another level and will enable the MSG Secretariat to deliver more for its members.”*



*(L-R) Australian High Commissioner to Vanuatu Heidi Bootle and the Director General of the MSG Secretariat, Leonard Louma OBE committed to strengthening the Australia-MSG partnership in 2024.*

In December 2022, Australia’s Minister for Foreign Affairs, Senator Penny Wong, and the then Deputy Director General of the MSG Secretariat, George Hoa’au, signed the Australia-MSG Memorandum of Understanding on Development Cooperation, a long-term partnership towards achieving the MSG 2038 Prosperity Plan.

Australia also partnered with the MSG to host the inaugural and 2<sup>nd</sup> MSG Prime Minister’s Cup football tournament, hosted in Vanuatu (2022) and New Caledonia (2023) respectively, and supported the 2023 Melanesian Arts and Cultural Festival (MACFEST) hosted by the Government of Vanuatu in collaboration with the MSG.

ENDS

**Media Contacts:**

Ria Bhagat  
Second Secretary  
Australian High Commission  
Email: [Ria.Bhagat@dfat.gov.au](mailto:Ria.Bhagat@dfat.gov.au)  
Tel: 22777 (extension 107)  
Mob: 7763763

Ana Tudrau-Tamani  
Media & Communications Officer  
Melanesian Spearhead Group Secretariat  
Email: [a.tamani@msg.int](mailto:a.tamani@msg.int)  
Mob: 7698477