



Joint Media Release

Vanuatu and Australia launch new Tafea infrastructure investments

LENAKEL, TANNA (29 February): Two high-impact infrastructure projects in Tafea Province will deliver social and economic benefits for people and businesses on Vanuatu's southern islands, where communities continue recovering and rebuilding from severe weather events including twin cyclones Judy and Kevin.

The Vanuatu and Australian Governments led a groundbreaking ceremony today to launch the Isangel Loop upgrade and Imanaka Bridge construction.

Prime Minister the Honourable Charlot Salwai Tabimasmas and Australian High Commissioner, Her Excellency Heidi Bootle led the ceremony with government and community partners, including Member of Parliament representing their Tanna Constituents, Minister of Agriculture, Livestock Forestry and Fisheries, the Honourable Nako Ianatom Natuman, First Deputy Speaker of Parliament, the Honourable Andrew Solomon Napuat and Government Whip the Honourable Xavier Emmanuel Harry, along with representatives from the Public Works Department within the Ministry of Public Works and Utilities, Tafea Provincial Council, local contractors and the Australian High Commission.



Caption (L to R): First Deputy Speaker of Parliament the Honourable Andrew Solomon Napua, President of the Nikoletan council of Chiefs Peter Marcel, President of Tafea Provincial Government Council Moses Misiman, Minister of Agriculture the Honourable Nako Natuman, Australian High Commissioner HE Ms Heidi Bootle and Prime Minister the Honourable Charlot Salwai Tabimasmas at the groundbreaking ceremony on Tanna.

The Isangel Loop and Imanaka Bridge projects are further additions to the portfolio of infrastructure investments Vanuatu and Australia partner to deliver. These initiatives ensure ongoing access to essential services and more opportunities for the communities they connect.



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“I take this opportunity to acknowledge the continuous support from the Government of Australia for being a helping hand to our development needs and these always contribute to making a difference amongst the lives of our people,” said Prime Minister Salwai.

The Vanuatu Public Works Department (PWD) prioritises projects according to the People’s Plan (National Sustainable Development Plan 2016 – 2030) and the Public Roads Strategy. Objectives include sealing all urban roads and reestablishing connectivity after natural disasters.

“These kinds of infrastructural connections make it easy for evacuation operations during times of disasters and also allows for effective humanitarian response from the government and its partners,” add Prime Minister Salwai.

Once completed, the Isangel Loop road will enable access to provincial government offices, health clinics, and schools. Overseen by PWD, in partnership with Australia, local contractors will seal the 1.7 kilometre stretch of the Isangel Loop with fibre-reinforced concrete: a climate-resilience, long-life and low-maintenance pavement that can withstand severe wind and rain.

“Connectivity means opportunity for Vanuatu’s people. A road is not only a matter of convenience, but an investment in better health, education and economic outcomes – and one Australia is pleased to make in Tafea’s future,” said High Commissioner Bootle.

“Having local contractors carry out the roadworks is an essential element of our partnership with Vanuatu in infrastructure. This not only generates short-term employment opportunities but builds capacity within the local construction industry and ensures the road can be maintained for future generations.”

The Imanaka bridge, once a crucial piece of infrastructure, was severely damaged by Tropical Cyclones Judy and Kevin in 2023.

Vanuatu and Australia announced a partnership to not only rebuild the bridge but replace the original single-lane bridge with a wider bridge that will include a footpath.

This vital crossing will restore connectivity between Lenakel township, the airport, and tourist attractions, boosting economic reactivation on Tanna.

To support project management, High Commissioner Bootle also handed over a Suzuki Jimny to the TAFEA Public Works Directorate. The vehicle will help engineers, supervisors, and site inspectors to manage current and future roadworks across Tanna. Similar to a car provided by Australia for the TORBA Public Works Directorate in 2022 to oversee construction of the Sola road, this vehicle will ensure quick response to community requests and will assist Public Works staff in the field when supervising local contractors across the island.



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Caption: Australian High Commissioner Heidi Bootle handing new vehicle keys to the Acting Director General of the Ministry of Public Works and Utilities Mr Junior Shim George.



Caption: Prime Minister the Honourable Charlot Salwai Tabimasmas delivering speech.



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Caption (L to R): Government Whip the Honourable Xavier Emmanuel Harry, First Deputy Speaker of Parliament the Honourable Andrew Solomon Napua, President of Tafea Provincial Government Council Moses Misiman, Prime Minister the Honourable Charlot Salwai Tabimasmas, Australian High Commissioner HE Ms Heidi Bootle and Minister of Agriculture the Honourable Nako Natuman.



Caption: Australian High Commissioner HE Ms Heidi Bootle and Prime Minister the Honourable Charlot Salwai Tabimasmas led the ceremony with government and community partners



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