

Call for Independent Researchers

Commissioned by the Pacific Islands Climate Action Network (PICAN) and Climate Action Network Australia (CANA).

Background and Rationale

Pacific Island leaders, institutions, and communities have demonstrated significant leadership in responding to the climate crisis, both domestically and through regional and global diplomacy. Pacific advocacy has played a central role in advancing major international initiatives, including the United Nations General Assembly resolution requesting an International Court of Justice (ICJ) Advisory Opinion on climate change and the development of the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent.

Yet this leadership is situated alongside a glaring injustice. Whilst Pacific Island Countries and Territories (PICTs) contribute the least to global emissions, they disproportionately bear some of the most severe impacts of the climate crisis. Rising sea levels, intensifying storms, and ocean warming increasingly threaten their territorial integrity, economic stability, and cultural survival. Sitting at the apex of the Pacific regional architecture, Pacific Islands Forum Leaders have repeatedly affirmed that climate change constitutes not only an existential crisis for the Pacific, but an escalating and paramount security threat as well.

At the same time, climate ambition, resilience, and financing are increasingly intertwined with the strategic interests of external powers. In a context of intensified geopolitical competition, climate finance, adaptation, and resilience funding are often linked—explicitly or implicitly—to broader foreign policy priorities, defense cooperation arrangements, and strategic access agreements.

Recent bilateral arrangements illustrate this dynamic. Agreements such as the Australia–Tuvalu Falepili Union and the United States–Papua New Guinea Defense Cooperation Agreement combine elements of climate and development support with expanded security cooperation frameworks. These developments highlight the complex balancing act Pacific governments face as they navigate urgent climate survival needs while safeguarding sovereignty, regional solidarity, and geopolitical autonomy.

In response, PICAN is commissioning an independent baseline research report and living monitoring tool that tracks these conditionalities. The research will contribute to a stronger evidence base on how climate ambitions and resilience financing may be shaped by external strategic agendas, while also examining how Pacific leaders and institutions exercise agency in navigating these dynamics.

Research Scope

The central research question guiding this work is:

To what extent are climate targets and resilience funding in the Pacific shaped by the security architectures and foreign policy agendas of external powers, as opposed to being determined primarily by domestic policy priorities and human survival needs?

The research should examine how climate assistance and resilience funding intersect with external strategic interests and assess the implications for Pacific sovereignty, climate ambition, and regional governance.

Key areas of analysis include:

- Mechanisms through which external foreign policy and defense strategies intersect with climate assistance and resilience financing
- Bilateral and multilateral arrangements—including defense cooperation agreements, climate finance mechanisms, and development assistance frameworks—and their potential conditionalities
- Strategic responses and agency of Pacific Island governments and regional institutions
- Links between these dynamics and emerging international legal frameworks, including principles highlighted by the ICJ Advisory Opinion process

The research should employ a mixed-methods approach, which may include policy and treaty analysis, review of climate finance arrangements, geopolitical mapping of donor engagement, and key informant interviews with policymakers, diplomats, negotiators, researchers, and civil society actors.

Researchers are expected to apply Pacific-informed analytical frameworks and adhere to ethical research practices appropriate to the regional context.

Research Team and Deliverables

PICAN invites proposals from individual researchers or small research teams (maximum three principal investigators) with demonstrated expertise in relevant areas such as:

- Pacific geopolitics and security dynamics
- Climate finance and development assistance
- International diplomacy and multilateral climate governance
- International law and emerging climate jurisprudence
- Pacific regional governance and institutions
- Human security and sovereignty in the Pacific

Individual applicants should fall within at least one of the following categories:

1. From the Pacific Islands with specialisation in or knowledge of the subject areas
2. From or based in Australia with specialisation in or knowledge of the subject areas

For team applications, teams should ideally reflect a diverse composition that brings together Pacific-based and/or Australia-based researchers with expertise in regional strategic dynamics.

Applicants should demonstrate an established research record, strong analytical and writing skills, and the ability to conduct ethical research in Pacific contexts. A PhD in a relevant field is preferred, though equivalent professional expertise may also be considered.

The selected researcher(s) will produce:

1. Research design and outline
2. Draft analytical report (mid-June 2026)
3. Final report incorporating feedback (first week of July 2026)

The final output will be a substantive analytical report suitable for policy engagement and public dissemination.

Researchers will work collaboratively with the PICAN Secretariat and other commissioned researchers, while maintaining independence in research and analysis.

Application Process

Interested researchers should submit an Expression of Interest (EOI) including:

- 1. Cover Letter**
 - Explanation of how the applicant meets the selection criteria
 - Description of relevant expertise and experience
 - For team submissions, explanation of team composition and complementary expertise
- 2. Research Intent**
 - Proposed analytical approach
 - Preliminary research design
- 3. Proposed Timeline**
 - Demonstrating how deliverables will be completed within the specified timeframe

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OWNER: PICAN



4. Budget

- Presented in Australian Dollars (AUD)
- Including researcher fees and all anticipated research expenses

5. Curriculum Vitae

- For all team members, including qualifications, research record, publications, and relevant professional engagements

6. References

- Contact details for three professional referees (names, titles, affiliation, email address, and telephone number)

Selection and Contracting

Applications will be reviewed by PICAN, and shortlisted candidates may be invited for interviews.

Budgets must be submitted in AUD. Should payments require currency conversion for the successful applicant(s), payments will be made according to the currency conversion rate on the date of payment, where applicable.

PICAN will not withhold taxes, and contractors are responsible for their own tax and insurance obligations.

Applicants must include a Conflict of Interest declaration confirming independence from government actors or institutions that may present a conflict with the research objectives.

Selected researchers will be required to sign confidentiality agreements and a Non-Disclosure Agreement (NDA).

Submission Deadline: Sunday, 22 March 2026, 11:59pm FJT

Applications and inquiries should be submitted to: Secretariat@pican.org