6. France’s engagement in the region from the 1990s: France, its collectivities, the European Union and the region

As memories of the aberrations of the 1980s receded, and as France fine-tuned its approaches in New Caledonia and French Polynesia while mounting its regional diplomatic offensive in the 1990s, it became a more familiar and accepted regional participant into the 2000s, albeit as an outside player. It built its image as a regional partner, particularly as a partner of the major regional power, Australia. While the French State continued to invest heavily both financially and politically in managing aspirations in its Pacific entities for more autonomy, it encouraged greater contact by all three with the region, within limits.

France develops its regional links

Diplomatic representation

France continued to deepen and broaden its own links with the region, particularly Australia. The foreign affairs ministry maintains resident diplomatic representation in the largest Pacific countries, Australia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Fiji and, for historical reasons, in Vanuatu; and continues to have a Paris-based ambassador for the South Pacific, supported by a diplomat based in Noumea. The interior ministry sends high level representatives to each of its collectivities, known as high commissioners and delegates of the French Republic in Noumea and Papeete, and known as prefects in Wallis and Futuna. In April 2009, announcing a global reorganisation of priorities in its foreign representation, which was based on a 2008 white paper, Paris indicated that its embassy in Canberra would carry the highest diplomatic responsibility in the region (‘mission élargie’, i.e., with the broadest range of responsibilities); that Wellington and Port Vila would be secondary missions (‘missions prioritaires’, with a secondary set of responsibilities) and Suva and Port Moresby would be considered as posts with a simple diplomatic presence (Flash d’Océanie 30 March 2009). The mission at Suva covers Fiji, Tonga, Kiribati, Tuvalu and Nauru.

Since the 1980s France has conducted annual meetings of its Pacific-based high-level officials, including its regional ambassadors and ambassador to the South Pacific, its high commissioners and prefect from its three entities, and Paris-
based Overseas France ministry or secretariat officials. In 2008, for the first time, it invited Australian Parliamentary Secretary for the Pacific, Duncan Kerr, to participate in one of these meetings in Noumea.

### Oceanic Summits

France has been a dialogue partner with the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) from 1989, participating in post-Forum summit meetings with island leaders each year. These contacts at the highest level were boosted when President Jacques Chirac launched an initiative for regular consultations with regional leaders, called France–Oceanic Summits, the first of which was held in Papeete in 2003. France hosted a second summit in Paris in 2006, and a third in Noumea in 2009. At these summits, France has expressed support for the Pacific region, reinforced its desire to see its own collectivities participate more in the life of the region, and pledged co-operation principally in environment, climate change and fisheries surveillance, and through its South Pacific Fund (see South Pacific Fund below). Each successive summit has represented a demonstrable effort to address issues of significance to the island states, in the context of objectives defined in the PIF and other organisations, and to integrate European Union (EU) activity as well. The third summit in Noumea, however, which was the first to be held during the presidency of Nicolas Sarkozy, lost momentum when he decided not to attend, relegating French representation to his foreign minister, Bernard Kouchner, with concomitant lower level representation by Pacific leaders (only the presidents of Micronesia, Marshall Islands, and the prime ministers of Samoa, the Cook Islands, and Niue attended themselves, all other delegations were headed by ministers, MFA spokesman, 28 July 2009, website of French Embassy Fiji accessed 24 February 2010). No summit was held in the French presidential election year of 2012.

In its second and third meetings, France sought to engage Australia. But there were mixed messages from France and Flosse at the first meeting. Australia was absent from the 2003 Papeete summit, owing to an apparent diplomatic hiccup. Then, French Polynesian President Gaston Flosse, long disaffected with Australia, omitted to invite the Australian Government. When Paris-based French officials belatedly extended an invitation, just weeks before the event, the Australian prime minister and foreign minister were unable to attend, and France did not accept the Australian proposal to send a special envoy, maintaining at the time that it was a senior leaders meeting. (Interestingly, at the same time Australia had extended an invitation to France to participate in a regional counterterrorism ministerial summit in Indonesia and yet accepted a designated ambassadorial level representative when French ministers were unavailable.) At the same summit, Chirac, in his opening statement, pointedly contrasted France’s, and the EU’s, global leadership on climate change with
6. France’s engagement in the region from the 1990s

those ‘neighbours’ in the Pacific (Australia, the United States) who had not then ratified the Kyoto Protocol (Chirac 2003 and see Mrgudovic 2008, 318–20). Nonetheless, the Australian Government has been supportive of France strengthening its links with regional leaders in such meetings. Foreign Minister Alexander Downer participated in the second Oceanic summit in June 2006 in Paris, and Parliamentary Secretary for the Pacific, Duncan Kerr, in June 2009 in Noumea.

Co-operation within the United Nations

At the same time as it was initiating its Oceanic Summits, France was reviewing its approach to the United Nations Decolonisation Committee, or Committee of 24. As noted in Chapter 2, it had removed its Pacific colonies from the UN Decolonisation list of non-self-governing territories in 1947, arguing that its entities were self-governing, and declining to transmit reports to the UN as the Charter required (Art. 73(e)).

France did not alter its approach when the UN Decolonisation Committee was established in 1960. The committee prepares working papers on non-self-governing territories on the basis of reports by the respective administering authorities. UN General Assembly (UNGA) Resolution 1541(XV) of that year set out the principles that should guide members as to whether or not an obligation exists to transmit information called for under Article 73e of the charter. It refers to non-self-governing territories as ‘those in a dynamic state of evolution and progress towards a full measure of self-government’. France bitterly opposed New Caledonia’s re-inscription on the UN List of Non-Self-Governing Territories, after intense lobbying by the Pacific island countries, in 1986. Even after it had concluded the Matignon Accords in 1988, France declined to transmit reports on New Caledonia to the UN.

But from January 2004, without any public fanfare and for the first time, France, as administering authority, began to submit (confidential) annual reports on the situation in New Caledonia to the committee, (Personal communication from Committee Secretariat 2008). Against the background of the history of France’s noncompliance with the committee, this was an extraordinary step, undoubtedly reflecting France’s renewed confidence in its position, and a belief that the international community would endorse its unfolding plan for New Caledonia. Several of the current 29 members of the committee come from the region: Papua New Guinea, Fiji, East Timor and Indonesia are all on the committee. Moreover, in the post-Cold War world, committee members Indonesia (with an eye to its troubles in West Papua and Aceh), Papua New Guinea (concerned about Bougainville), Russia and China amongst others, for domestic reasons, are disposed to resist active decolonisation moves that might
bolster separatist claims. France calculates that its Noumea Accord framework for an outcome in New Caledonia will receive widespread support in the very committee that regional Pacific and Kanak independentist leaders used, by re-inscription, to further their claims.

In the same spirit, in October 2009, the New Caledonian government, with France’s blessing, sent a delegation to make a presentation to the UN Decolonisation Committee for the first time. The delegation was led by pro-France leader Philipe Gomès and included representatives of the collegial government, including Front de Libération Nationale Kanak et Socialiste (Kanak Socialist National Liberation Front, FLNKS). Gomès referred to his government’s participation as providing a more balanced input to the committee, which, until 2004, had received petitions and presentations from non-government sources in New Caledonia, mainly the FLNKS.

France and the delegation extended an invitation for the Decolonisation Committee to hold its regular Pacific regional seminar in Noumea in May 2010. The committee agreed, and duly held its seminar in the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) headquarters in Noumea, 17–18 May. The regional impact of France’s efforts to court the committee was undercut by France’s treatment of Kanak customary leaders and visiting French Polynesian Speaker and intermittent President Oscar Temaru, all of whom protested outside the building at their non-inclusion. French authorities sent them on their way (Nouvelles Calédoniennes 21 May 2010, Flash d’Océanie 17 May 2010), although they were given an opportunity to meet committee representatives at a dinner hosted by Kanak customary leaders.

There are signs that France is picking and choosing those elements of the decolonisation process that it will support. The suggestion by at least one member of the Decolonisation Committee, that a quid pro quo for holding the committee’s seminar in Noumea should be requiring a UN investigatory mission there, was not implemented. France has never accepted a visit by such a UN mission to New Caledonia, despite the record of co-operation by other administering authorities (for example, New Zealand has accepted five visiting UN missions to Tokelau since the 1970s, UN Paper A/AC.109/2006/20), and despite strong exhortations by the committee that administering authorities do so (see UN Paper A/AC.109/2009/L.6). The ministerial PIF missions to New Caledonia have sent their reports to the UN committee (PIF Communiqué 1991, paragraph 34), although there has not been a visiting PIF mission since 2004 (see Pacific Islands Forum watching brief, below).
There have been occasional moves to overhaul the core wording of the annual UNGA Resolution on the Question of New Caledonia, which has been a thorn in the side of France each year from 1986. A general review of the text would provide an opportunity for France to modify its longstanding critical references.

Implicit in France’s taking on its UN responsibilities as administering authority, is an acknowledgement that New Caledonia is a non-self-governing territory, the future of which would therefore be bound by UN decolonisation principles. These principles provide a pointer to the possible future status of New Caledonia. The principles are laid out in two linked UNGA resolutions (1541 and 1514). UNGA Resolution 1541 of December 1960 provides for three options by which a territory ‘can be said to have reached a full measure of self-government: (a) Emergence as a sovereign independent State; (b) Free association with an independent State; or (c) Integration with an independent State’ (Annex). The principles include a commitment to an outcome based on ‘the free and voluntary choice by the peoples concerned’ (Principle VII (a)). In the case of the integration option, the outcome is to be based on ‘equal status and rights of citizenship between the peoples of the erstwhile territory and the independent territory to which it is to become integrated’ (Principle VIII), begging questions about the special citizenship rights France provided under the Noumea Accord (i.e., the restricted electorate for the final referendum on New Caledonia’s future status).

In the recurring UNGA Resolutions on the Question of New Caledonia, the UNGA has invited ‘all the parties involved to continue promoting a framework for the peaceful progress of the Territory towards an act of self-determination in which all options are open and which would safeguard the rights of all sectors of the population, according to the spirit and letter of the Noumea Accord’ (UNGA A/Res/66/87 operative clause 13).

France’s taking on its administering authority responsibilities also reasonably means that France should comply with injunctions such as that in UNGA Resolution 35/118, which in its Annex calls for member states to ‘adopt the necessary measures to discourage or prevent the systematic influx of outside immigrants and settlers into Territories under colonial domination, which disrupts the demographic composition of those Territories and may constitute a major obstacle to the genuine exercise of the right to self-determination and independence by the people of those Territories’ (UNGA 35/118 Plan of Action for the Full Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples, 11December 1980). UNGA resolutions on New Caledonia have variously referred to the problem of immigration, noting ‘the concerns expressed by representatives of the indigenous people regarding incessant migratory inflows’ (A/RES/66/87, 12 January 2012, operative para 7).
Separately, France has been steadfast in ignoring calls by Temaru (referred to in Chapter 5) for re-inscription of French Polynesia with the Decolonisation Committee.

France no doubt calculates that its objective to retain its Pacific entities will be enhanced by complying with some UN decolonisation procedures. But UN mechanisms, with the history of non-compliance by France, remain a vehicle for any dissenting pro-independence voices in the French Pacific entities, particularly New Caledonia, to make themselves heard, should their aspirations not be met. The relatively new UN instrument protecting indigenous people’s rights (such as the 2007 Declaration on Indigenous Rights, see Chapter 8), provides a further avenue of redress for disaffected Kanak peoples in implementing the Noumea Accord and its aftermath. An example has been the 2011 visit to New Caledonia by the Special Rapporteur for the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, James Anaya, and his report which identified areas of concern relating to Kanak rights in the implementation of the Accord so far.

### Aid to region

France contributes aid to the region through its participation in the SPC and the South Pacific Regional Environment Program (SPREP), and support for Forum activities. France contributes to emergency disaster management and fisheries surveillance through a trilateral FRANZ (France Australia New Zealand) arrangement (see below), and defence training and exercises engaging regional countries and its armed forces in New Caledonia and French Polynesia. Its main aid delivery arm, the Agence Française de Développement (French Development Agency, AFD), has only one bilateral aid program in the region, for Vanuatu, which it operates from Noumea after closing its Vanuatu office in 2002. France is a major contributor to the European Development Fund (EDF) activities in the region and participates in the Asian Development Bank (ADB). And its ambassador to the South Pacific administers a small South Pacific Fund.

### Inconsistent statistics

Statistics about French contributions through these various mechanisms are opaque and inconsistent. Depending on sources, there is clearly some overlap in stated expenditures, creating a confused picture (for example, overlaps in reported French bilateral aid and EU aid, see below; also some program assistance, as distinct from core budget support, to SPC comes from the South Pacific Fund; and some emergency assistance under the FRANZ arrangements is included in expenditure by the New Caledonian army (FANC, Forces Armées de la Nouvelle-Calédonie)).
The French Ministry of Foreign Affairs shows variable and not necessarily comparable figures over time. Whereas figures were available in past years, by 2012 the ministry’s website gave only the broadest aid figures, and did not break expenditure down by countries. It indicated that of EUR9.751 billion (approximately $A12.5 billion, converted May 2012) total aid in 2010, 60 per cent was directed at Africa, 20 per cent to Mediterranean countries, 10 per cent to countries in crisis, and the remaining 10 per cent to ‘emerging countries’ (website <http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/enjeux-internationaux/aide-au-developpement> accessed 7 May 2012). South Pacific island countries can be assumed to be within the latter, modest amount.

Earlier access to the website was more productive as an indicator of French aid to the Pacific region, and for this reason figures to 2009 are used. But figures are variable and unclear. An item on the website dated June 2006 (accessed 27 February 2010), entitled ‘France and the Pacific Region’, showed that in 2006, France’s total bilateral aid budget to the region was around EUR15 million per year, and specified a further EUR12.8 million that year through EU channels, a total of EUR27.8 million (approximately $A40 million, converted 19 May 2010). An item on the same ministry website, dated October 2009, showed France’s bilateral aid disbursement to the Pacific totalled EUR103 million ($A146 million) in 2008 and EUR98 million ($A140 million) in 2007, and was not clear whether that included funds through the EU. These figures are a leap from the EUR27.8 million in 2006, but may include French contributions through the EU (French foreign affairs website <http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/pays-zones-geo_833/oceanie_14692/index.html> accessed 14 May 2009 and 25 February 2010 and superseded by May 2010; and bilateral aid section accessed 25 February and 19 May 2010).

If these figures do include contributions by way of the EU, then the situation is further muddied by the caveats to EU aid (see EU representation and aid to the region, below) such as the pattern of underspending allocations; and the occasional lumping together of EU funding to the independent Pacific countries along with EU overseas collectivities (such as the French Pacific ones there) (see for example EU website overview on EU and the Pacific, <http://www.europa.com>).  

France also sometimes includes in its aid figures expenditure in its own entities. A figure provided by the French Government to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in 2006 and cited by OECD as gross French bilateral aid to ‘Océanie’ or the Pacific (undefined), amounted to $US110 million ($A128 million, converted 19 May 2010), but this included some items to its own three collectivities (OECD 2008a, Tables B.3 and B.4, 86 and 87). Some
other analyses (see for example Mrugudovic 2008, 326 footnote 1012; Hughes 2003, 20) also include in aid figures France’s financial support for its own three Pacific entities.

This practice is distorting, since this amount is very large, totaling over $A4.6 billion in 2008 alone (EUR2.65 billion for the three Pacific entities, communication from Senate Finance Commission 2008; in 2007 the figure was $A4.2 billion comprising $A1.8 billion or CFP121.5 billion to New Caledonia, ISEE TEC 2008, 960; $A2.4 billion or CFP159.1 billion to French Polynesia in 2006 from French High Commission press release 7 August 2007; and $A8.3 million or CFP562 million to Wallis and Futuna in 2006, IEOM website, all figures converted 28 May 2009). While there is no doubt that much of this expenditure in the French collectivities benefits economic development there, and therefore the region, since it is expenditure on sovereign soil of a developed country, it is difficult to describe this as development assistance to the region.

Table 6.1 Indicative figures on France’s assistance to the region

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>In millions of Euro ($A)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2006&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aid to region&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>27.8 ($A40)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Of which, bilateral&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>15.0 ($A21)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Of which, through EU (just under 20% EDF)</td>
<td>12.8 ($A19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some indicative programs funded (not complete):</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Pacific Fund</td>
<td>2.4 ($A3.4) average p.a. 2007–2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPC&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>3.0 ($A4.2) average p.a. 1999–2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plus French share/EU</td>
<td>1.0 ($A1.4) average p.a. 2002–2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activities through FRANZ (emergency aid, logistic support)&lt;sup&gt;d&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>1.0 ($A1.4)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources:


b. French Ministry of Foreign Affairs website accessed 26 February 2010; may include allocations through EU programs

c. SPC Annual Reports and Financial Statements, France and EU support to SPC 1993 to 2009

d. Estimate from FANC

---

1 With the effects of the Euro crisis, figures available to time of writing show that although France had increased its disbursements in 2010 to CFP147 billion for New Caledonia, CFP179 billion for French Polynesia, and CFP12.4 billion for Wallis and Futuna (ISEE, BIEP, and IEOM websites accessed 22 November 2012), the total translated to a combined lower total in Australian dollars, at $A3.5 billion (converted 22 November 2012), owing to a far weaker Euro. To facilitate comparison with latest regional statistics available (2009, 2010), the figure of $A4.6 billion, converted in 2009, is used.
While there are apparent discrepancies, the conclusion to be made is that France, on its own account and through contributions to the EU effort, spent EUR27.8 million in 2006, EUR98 million in 2007 and EUR103 million in 2008, on aid to the Pacific region, over and above its expenditure in its own Pacific collectivities (Table 6.1). France’s 2006 expenditure of EUR27.8 million in the Pacific included assistance in governance (against drug trafficking and money laundering), sustainable development and climate change (through SPREP and SPC projects including on coral reefs), health (including a joint Australian project on AIDS through the SPC, and a New Zealand project on public health monitoring), education (university co-operation and professional and technical training), broadcasting (co-operation with Radio France Outre-Mer and other French broadcasters), infrastructure (modernisation of secondary airports and renovation of Vanuatu’s hospital) and natural disaster assistance (including implementation of the FRANZ arrangement). France has been a member of the ADB from 1970 with 2.322 per cent of shares (fewer than Australia’s 5.773 per cent but much more than New Zealand’s 1.532 per cent). It is described as a non-regional member. The ADB supported projects in the South Pacific through loans and financing to a value of $A684 million in 2007 (ADB 2008, 16).

Considering it is a country resident in the region, France’s aid to the region is relatively modest, given the contributions of other Pacific region donors and given its own contributions to other regions.


As a point of comparison, the OECD Official Development Assistance (ODA) figures are useful. ODA only includes specially defined assistance (essentially official government aid with the main aim of economic development of developing countries and containing a certain percentage of grant aid, see OECD 2008b). The OECD ODA statistics used by Australia’s Ausaid in its 2009 publication, Tracking Development and Governance in the Pacific, showed that France provided $US16.7 million ($A19.4 million, converted 19 May 2010) or 1.4 per cent of total ODA contributed to PIF countries in 2007, with the EU contributing $US71.2 million ($A83 million) or 6.1 per cent (and France contributes around 19 per cent of EU funding to the Pacific). In the same comparison, Australia provided $US649.3 million ($A757 million) or 55.7 per cent of ODA, and New Zealand $US120.9 million ($A141 million) or 10.4 per cent. France was also outshone by the United States (14.7 per cent) and Japan (six per cent) (Ausaid 2009, 42).
Compared to its own expenditure in other regions, France’s aid to its immediate neighbours in the Pacific region seems meager. The French Foreign Ministry site’s table of global disbursements (Table 6.2) showed that the 2008 and 2007 figures for the Pacific represented just two per cent of total French bilateral aid disbursements, well behind Africa (which received 53 per cent in 2008), the Middle East (12 per cent), Asia (only three per cent) and South America (three per cent). In 2005, the tiny state of Mauritania alone received EUR36 million ($A64 million), more than the entire Pacific region at the time (French bilateral aid, French Foreign Ministry website <http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/pays-zones-geo_833/oceanie_14692/index.html> accessed 14 May 2009). These figures suggest that, despite its sovereign presence, France does not see the Pacific as its own immediate region, with special aid contribution responsibilities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>In millions of Euro</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>295</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Africa</td>
<td>436</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-Sahara Africa</td>
<td>1886</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South America</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle East</td>
<td>531</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central and southern Asia</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Far East</td>
<td>372</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacific</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-zone assistance</td>
<td>550</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total bilateral assistance</td>
<td>4435</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Moreover, the relative disproportion of France’s expenditure in its own entities relative to the rest of the region underlines the paucity of its aid to the region. France contributed $A1.8 billion or CFP121.5 billion to New Caledonia alone in 2007 (not including its metropolitan based expenditure such as payment of military personnel see ISEE 2008, 96), more than the GDPs of each of the Forum island members except Papua New Guinea, Guam and Fiji. Its total contribution to its three territories in 2008 ($A4.6 billion, converted 28 May 2009) was worth more than any individual Forum member’s GDP except Papua New Guinea and Guam (SPC statistics translated into CFP, Table, ISEE TEC 2008 p. 12). France’s

South Pacific Fund

At the same time that France talks of improved political dialogue and hosts its Oceanic Summits, its assistance to the region through its own South Pacific Fund is declining. The fund is the same one originally established by Flosse when he was minister for the South Pacific (see Chapter 3). It has fluctuated in value, from close to EUR3 million per year in the 1990s, but has declined in recent years, from EUR2.7 million in 2007, to EUR2.5 million in 2008 and EUR2 million in 2009 (see Flash d’Océanie 13 March 2009, 14 November 2008 and 2 April 2008). Moreover, the focus in the last few years has shifted from Flosse’s idea of supporting local Pacific island projects, to funding projects primarily and overtly to assist the French Pacific entities’ involvement in the region (see the list of priority areas under the program, article ‘Le Fonds Pacifique’, website of the French Embassy in Papua New Guinea, <http://www.ambafrance-pg.org/article.php3?id_article=427> accessed 8 March 2010). This means that the fund serves France’s regional objectives, more than the priorities of the independent Pacific island countries themselves.

France and the Secretariat of the Pacific Community

From 1947, France has hosted the headquarters of the SPC in Noumea, including throughout the regional difficulties of the 1980s. Originally housed in the former US military headquarters from World War II, the French State facilitated the construction of an impressive new headquarters at a valuable nearby beachfront site, completed in 1995. It provided 75 million francs ($A20 million), the largest single component, towards construction costs (Journal Officiel du Sénat, response to question 10070, 15 October 1998). The main conference room, designed by a Fijian architect, takes the form of an upturned boat with oceanic details such as a reflective pool mirroring the ocean against its internal walls, and finishes of ropework over the glossy wooden panels. The organisation has operated in both French and English since its inception, a significant symbolic achievement for France given the cost and limited capacity of most of the members to draw on the French translations. Despite France’s modest ongoing financial contributions to the SPC, French nationals have held prominent positions in the organisation. New Caledonia’s Jacques lékawé was appointed secretary-general in 1992, but passed away before assuming office. The office of deputy director-general to the
SPC has recently been occupied by French nationals (the former cultural attaché to the French embassy in Sydney, Yves Corbel, served as deputy from 1997 to 2006; and his successor, Richard Mann, is a French national).

Since it is the largest international conference facility in Noumea, the French State and New Caledonia have benefitted from their investment. The SPC has been amenable to the conference facility being used for a range of domestic political meetings, including a New Caledonian land issues conference in 2001, and a satellite video hook-up between the New Caledonian Government and the then Overseas France Minister, Brigitte Girardin, in 2003.

Mrgudovic (2008, 139) argues that the SPC had been a strong force for the integration of France and its entities into the Pacific. If so, this is more because of the institutional presence of the SPC in Noumea and the political effect of Pacific island experts and officials travelling to Noumea regularly, than because of French engagement in the work, and funding, of the SPC. The technical focus of the SPC has set it apart from political differences over the years, and is a testimony to the maturity of the Pacific island countries, supported by large regional donors, Australia, New Zealand, France, to a lesser degree the United States and, in the past, the United Kingdom.

France’s contribution to the SPC has averaged just over EUR3 million in each of the last 10 years although, according to one senior SPC official, the amounts expended in any year fluctuate owing to the nature of program assistance (SPC 2009). For example, SPC figures show that it contributed $US7.1 million in 2007, about half of what Australia and New Zealand respectively contributed (Australia: $US14.7 million, New Zealand: $US14.5 million) (SPC 2007). But in 2010, France had increased its contribution to $US3.7 million (SPC 2010). France also contributed to the region through its contributions to the EU, which also, by their nature (going to programs rather than the core budget), are variable and averaged close to EUR5 million per year from 2005 to 2007, SPC 2007).

France, Australia, New Zealand and regional defence and other links

While France’s 2008 defence white paper said very little about the Pacific per se (see Ministère de la Défense 2008; Fisher 2008c), it did highlight the importance of regional partnerships, specifically mentioning Australia in this context. The paper sought to focus France’s domestic priorities on better intelligence and technology, while rationalising and reducing overall numbers of personnel and bases. In this context, the paper announced that Noumea would host the pre-eminent French defence presence in the region, with personnel in French
Polynesia to be reduced by half between 2011 and 2015 to 1100. New Caledonia’s defence personnel would be reduced slightly from 3000, but its police and civil security personnel would increase. France had already built a consolidated headquarters that brought together all arms of the defence presence at a new $A13 million structure in Noumea.

Co-operative defence relations between France and Australia, often with New Zealand, have grown. The tripartite FRANZ arrangement, based on an exchange of letters in 1992, provides for disaster relief coordination engaging aid and defence elements from all three countries. There have been numerous examples of FRANZ co-operation to assist regional countries after natural catastrophes (for example, the Solomon Islands in 2007 following a tsunami). Aid officials from each FRANZ country meet regularly for planning purposes. In recent years the Arrangement has been extended to cover maritime fisheries surveillance, which was formalised in a joint declaration signed in Canberra in March 2006. Overflights by French military aircraft provide feedback to Pacific island countries on illegal fishing identified in vast areas contiguous with its territory. It is a complementary mechanism to similar activity by Australia and New Zealand in other areas of the South Pacific, with regular day-to-day engagement by France with regional countries providing useful, economically valuable regional intelligence.

FRANZ countries, along with the United States, participate in annual quadrilateral discussions on maritime security, including fisheries and Pacific traffic issues. France has participated from 1998 through its military forces based in French Polynesia and New Caledonia. The French force contribution to FRANZ is estimated to be worth around EUR1 million per year ($A1.75 million, converted 7 July 2009, Personal communication, senior French military official, 2009).

Australian and French defence co-operation in the Pacific operates within the context of close bilateral defence relations, outlined in the 2006 Defence Co-operation Agreement, which came into force in July 2009. Co-operation includes regular political/military consultations from 2001, defence supply compatibility programs, and commercial Australian defence contracts involving French companies, particularly EADS. France is the world’s fourth-largest defence materiel exporter, and Australia is one of its biggest customers (see Maclellan 2009b, 13). In September 2008, after meeting the new Australian Labor Minister for Defence, Joel Fitzgibbon, the French Defence Minister Hervé Morin announced that New Caledonia would be available to give military logistical support to Australia in a Mutual Logistical Support Arrangement (Joint press conference Australian and French defence ministers 17 September 2008). This arrangement formalised the kind of military support the French had provided from New Caledonia on various occasions. For example, New
Caledonia provided an evacuation point for injured Australian personnel when an Australian military Blackhawk helicopter crashed on an Australian vessel, HMAS *Kanimbla*, during an evacuation operation offshore from Fiji during the 2006 Fiji coup, and served as a staging point for Australian ships preparing for the eventuality of consular evacuations from Fiji (see Fisher 2008c).

An important bilateral gesture to Australia and New Zealand respectively is made every year by France in its commemorations of Anzac Day in New Caledonia. The event is commemorated over three days in three different locations. On the first day, usually Anzac Day itself, a ceremony is held in the centre of Noumea, in the presence of the High Commissioner, New Caledonian President and other dignitaries, and war veterans. On the second day, officials travel en masse to participate in similar ceremonies at the Commonwealth cemetery at Bourail; and, on the third day, to a hilltop overlooking the Plaine des Gaiacs in the north, the site where US Seabees had laid an airstrip, now overgrown, to Australian design early in World War II. These pilgrimages engage the local communities as much as the French representatives, and mark their great affection and respect for the ANZACS who fell in metropolitan France and in the region during the two world wars.

France participates in regular military exercises with Australia and New Zealand from its base in New Caledonia, many of which include other Pacific island countries. These include the annual Equator naval exercise off the coast of Queensland; the biennial Southern Cross exercises in New Caledonia, and Australian regional exercises including Pitch Black and Kakadu (DFAT Country brief on France accessed 28 October 2008; French Embassy in Australia website, <http://www.ambafrance-au.org>, accessed 11 November 2008). Many training exercises routinely involve Tonga, Vanuatu and Papua New Guinea often alongside French, Australian and New Zealand troops. French senior military officials visit Papua New Guinea regularly.

Ship visits and visits by respective senior military leaders cross frequently between New Caledonia and Australia and have increased in number in recent years (for example from around four per year to more than eight from 2001 to 2005). This form of co-operation draws France in to the normal defence activity of the region, enhancing interoperability, and facilitating close co-operation in times of need. The official French approach has been positive, with local French forces who undertake joint exercises on French soil communicating in English. This is an important symbolic effort that illustrates the willingness of the French defence forces to adapt to the region.

Beyond formal agreements and exercises, France has taken great care to support Australian regional defence objectives. France was the first regional country to respond when Australia called for participants in the UN-backed International
France's engagement in the region from the 1990s

Force for East Timor in 1999, arriving there even before New Zealand. This is a significant reminder of the potential strategic benefits for Australia and the region deriving from France’s physical presence in the Pacific. France let Australia know that it would be interested in participating in the Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands (RAMSI), deployed in July 2003, although it did not in the end participate given regional sensitivities (see Regional reactions to French efforts, below). And, as indicated above, France provided important logistical support for Australian activity at the time of the 2006 Fiji coup.

Mixed reaction in New Caledonia

Whereas these formal defence links are a positive indication of Australian–French co-operation, local feeling in New Caledonia is mixed. Roch Wamytan has commented on the incompatibility of France’s recent restructuring of its Pacific bases and building a new headquarters in New Caledonia with New Caledonia’s decolonisation process (Maclellan 2009b, 13). An FLNKS leader has commented privately that it was disappointing for the first sign of the then new Australian Labor, under Kevin Rudd, government’s interest in New Caledonia was the military pact (status of forces arrangements).

Reforms flowing from France’s 2008 defence white paper will lead to New Caledonia becoming a major French defence logistical base from 2011, literally on the eve of the final five-year stage (2013–2018) of the Noumea Accord. Reflecting Kanak sensitivities, in a submission to the UN Decolonisation Committee in November 2008, FLNKS leader Wamytan noted the French decision to regroup its military forces to New Caledonia violated the obligation of administering authorities not to use non-self-governing territories for military bases or installations (see UNGA 2008 A/C.4/63/SR.5).

French–Australian scientific co-operation

The French Pacific collectivities, particularly New Caledonia, also provide a venue for French–Australian scientific and cultural co-operation.

France and Australia have signed a number of bilateral scientific agreements. These include the Scientific and Technological Agreement, October 1988; the Scientific and Technological Marine Agreement, May 1991; the Industrial Research Program Agreement, May 1991; the French Australian Science and Technology program (FEAST), November 2003; and a scholarship program benefitting Australian students in France (Fisher 2004).
Co-operation also flows from France’s presence in New Caledonia. There is significant contact between Australian research institutions and the many French research institutions based in New Caledonia. Australian scientific co-operation is handled by Australian tertiary institutions individually, not the government, as is the case with France. It is therefore difficult to identify the full range of co-operation. As an indicator, in 2004, the New Caledonia-based Institut de Recherche pour le Développement (Institute for Development Research, IRD), co-operated with more than 10 Australian institutions in a number of scientific areas. These included the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) on oceanography, biology and entomology; Geoscience Australia on geology and coastal modeling; Australian Nuclear Science and Technology Organisation (ANSTO) on radio-chemical applications to the marine environment; the Queensland Museum on marine natural substances in Vanuatu; the Sydney Botanical Gardens on algae; the Sydney and Victorian museums on crustaceans; the universities of Canberra and Queensland on climatology; James Cook University and ANSTO on metals in soils; and, Monash University on botany (Personal communications Colin 2004).

In the area of educational exchanges, since the Noumea Accord was signed, Australia has provided about $A1 million per annum to fund scholarships to enable students from all three French Pacific collectivities to study in Australia. The take-up has been excellent. Despite ongoing problems with the recognition of Australian qualifications in the French entities, New Caledonia has made an effort by allowing case-by-case consideration of Australian-qualified applicants to its civil service. As the mining sector grows, companies are less likely to be concerned about where training occurred and employment prospects for Australian-trained New Caledonians will increase. There is little or no exchange in the other direction. Indeed, from 2008, New Caledonia began to send many young people to train in francophone Canada, suggesting that it would prefer French language institutions rather than the regional Anglophone ones (see Partir pour mieux revenir, Nouvelles Calédoniennes 7 August 2008).

France and Australia co-funded a house of residence for Vanuatu students at the University of New Caledonia in Noumea in 2001.

**Trilateral development co-operation**

Other forms of regional co-operation with Australia and New Zealand have included a tripartite declaration on the surveillance and combating of illegal fisheries (April 2006), the Pacific Regional Endeavour for an Appropriate Response to Epidemics (PREPARE) program with New Zealand and the World Health Organisation (WHO) on treatment of epidemics, the prevention of
sexually transmissible diseases and HIV/AIDS, the Santo 2006 project on marine and land-based biodiversity in Vanuatu, and the Coral Reef Initiative for the South Pacific Program (CRISP) from 2002 (see Gazsi 2009).

Regional participation by the three French collectivities

Regional institutions

Statutory provisions reserve responsibility for foreign affairs to the French State, but enable both New Caledonia and French Polynesia to establish regional relationships in their own right. The Noumea Accord, Article 3.2.1, provides essentially for New Caledonia to be a member, or associate, in international bodies including specifically Pacific regional organisations, the UN, UNESCO, International Telecommunications Union (ITU) and a broad ‘et cetera’; to have representatives in the Pacific zone and EU organisations, and to negotiate agreements with these countries in areas of its responsibility, which are defined at 3.1.1 to cover external trade, rights of foreigners to work, some specified air services, and maritime services. The February 2004 Organic Law for French Polynesia provides for it to have its own representation in any State (although the Constitutional Council has specified that this is not full diplomatic representation); for the president to negotiate administrative arrangements with any Pacific state or territory to advance its social and economic development; and to sign co-operation agreements in any area within French Polynesia’s responsibility (Articles 15 to 17). With the agreement of the Republic’s authorities, French Polynesia can be a member, associate or observer of international organisations, or its president can be associated with work undertaken by regional Pacific organisations in the areas of its responsibility (article 42). The Law defines French Polynesia as having all responsibilities other than those (régalien, or sovereign) functions of the French State which are specified (and include foreign policy, defence, entry of foreigners (not their access to work), and air services within the Republic (see Faberon and Ziller 2007, 323–25).

All three French Pacific entities have participated in the SPC since 1983, although they functioned for many years as part of the French delegation and have not been active in their own right.

Membership of the PIF has been more problematic, since the organisation is political in nature and was created as a vehicle of opposition to French policies in the Pacific. The Forum allowed only entities on the way to self-government to become observers. With the signature of the Noumea Accord, New Caledonia
was seen as having qualified and became an observer in 1999, and French Polynesia in 2004 after changes to its Organic Law. But, in acknowledgement of significant efforts by France to develop relations, including by the Chirac government hosting a meeting of the France Oceania Summit for Pacific leaders in Papeete in 2003 and in Paris in June 2006, the PIF welcomed both in a new category of associate member in 2006, when Wallis and Futuna became an observer. Since then, New Caledonia’s President Gomès has indicated that he wants full membership status for New Caledonia (see Flash d’Océanie 19 January 2010, and Regional reaction, below).

All three French entities are members of the Pacific Islands Telecommunications Association and the Pacific Power Association (PPA) and the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Program (SPREP). New Caledonia and French Polynesia are members of the South Pacific Tourism Organisation (SPTO), known as South-Pacific Travel; the Pacific Islands Development Program (PIDP); and associate members of the Secretariat of the Pacific Applied Geoscience and Technology Division (SOPAC). French Polynesia is an observer at the Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA). (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade website, at South Pacific regional organisations, <http://www.dfat.gov.au> accessed 9 March 2010).

Table 6.3 Participation of French Pacific collectivities in Pacific regional organisations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organisation</th>
<th>New Caledonia</th>
<th>French Polynesia</th>
<th>Wallis &amp; Futuna</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SPC (Secretariat for the Pacific Community)</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PIF (Pacific Islands Forum)</td>
<td>A/M</td>
<td>A/M</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOPAC (Secretariat of the Pacific Applied Geoscience and Technology Division)</td>
<td>A/M</td>
<td>A/M</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FFA (Forum Fisheries Agency)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PECC (Pacific Economic Co-operation Council)</td>
<td>A/M*</td>
<td>A/M*</td>
<td>A/M*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPTO (South Pacific Tourism Organisation)</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PIDP (Pacific Islands Development Program)</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPREP (Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Program)</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PPA (Pacific Power Association)</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OCO (Oceanic Customs Organisation (non-CROP, Council of Regional Organisations of Pacific))</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: M Member, A/M Associate Member, O Observer, A/M* combined Associate Member with France

Source: ISEE TEC 2008 p. 13
Thus, as Table 6.3 shows, the French collectivities are represented, in some way, on seven of the 10 inter-governmental members of the Council of Regional Organisations of the Pacific (CROP), i.e., in the SPC, SPREP, SOPAC, PIDP, SPTO, FFA, and the PPA. There are only three CROP bodies in which the French Pacific collectivities are not represented: the University of the South Pacific, the Fiji School of Medicine, and the South Pacific Board for Education Assessment. The Universities of New Caledonia and of French Polynesia (which split apart from the united French University of the Pacific in 1999) are not members of CROP. The universities operate in the French language, which limits the potential for co-operation. Still, there would be a good argument for closer collaboration between France, its regional universities and CROP’s education members.

France and its collectivities together participate as an associate member of the tripartite (government, business, academic) Pacific Economic Co-operation Council (PECC) through the Paris-based France Pacific Territories National Committee for Pacific Economic Co-operation. The collectivities are members of the Oceanic Customs Organisation, which was headquartered in Noumea in 1999, but which subsequently moved to Suva.

Much of the promising breadth of participation by the French collectivities is limited by the cultural divide between their senior officials and those of the regional groupings. The Noumea Accord specifically states that training will be provided to prepare the collectivities for foreign affairs activities (Noumea Accord 3.2.1). Whereas France has been active in overtly campaigning for full participation of its collectivities in the PIF, and allowing for their participation in their own right in Forum activities and those of other regional organisations, it has been less energetic in ensuring that local officials are equipped to participate fully in this Anglophone organisation. Senior New Caledonian leaders have privately expressed their expectation that the Forum, made up of the poorest island states that happen to be English-speaking, should fund parallel French language interpretation services, an unrealistic hope given the dominance of Anglophone countries and the cost of translation services. Lacking an adequately resourced local secretariat for external affairs, New Caledonian leaders and officials are also not conversant with key Forum and CROP issues.

For their own part, the collectivities have displayed a mixed attitude to regional participation. The government of Pierre Frogier (2000–2004) was distinctly unenthusiastic, senior leaders complaining privately about the fact that proceedings were conducted in English about issues on which they had not been fully briefed, either from their local viewpoints or certainly in the regional context. Chapter 5 noted the limited development of an external affairs unit in New Caledonia.
French President Sarkozy underlined his wish that France’s overseas entities integrate more closely in their regions, and he exhorted the French territories to be economically open to the countries surrounding them (Sarkozy 2009 and 2010a). To assist the French Pacific collectivities to participate effectively and genuinely in their own right, training in English and regional affairs, perhaps through exchanges, will be essential. A greater effort needs to be made by France, and regional donor countries, Australia and New Zealand, in this area.

**Melanesian Spearhead Group**

As seen in Chapter 2, the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) was formed to show solidarity with New Caledonia’s Kanaks and press for their independence. Since the signature of the Matignon/Noumea Accords, the grouping altered focus to economic co-operation, but maintains an interest in the New Caledonian decolonisation issue, along with support for the autonomist aspirations of West Papuans. The MSG is now made up of the independent governments of Papua New Guinea, Fiji, Vanuatu and Solomon Islands, and the FLNKS. New Caledonia as an entity is not a member. The MSG put in place a Free Trade Agreement in 1993, and established a Free Trade Zone in 2006, with limited effectiveness.

France has shown some flexibility towards the MSG. Perhaps with a concerned eye on China’s funding of a new secretariat building for the body in Vila, which was inaugurated in 2007, the French State allowed Noumea to host an MSG meeting in 2001, and French High Commissioner Yves Dassonville met MSG representatives in late 2008 to discuss technical issues (address to Colloquium on Melanesian Integration, de Deckker and Faberon 2008, 10).

In October 2009 Gomès, then President of the New Caledonian Government, told the UN Committee on Decolonisation in New York that his government wanted New Caledonia to become a full member of the MSG (see Flash D’Océanie 19 January 2010). Although such participation would possibly strengthen the effectiveness of the MSG as an economic subgrouping, the idea was not welcomed by some of New Caledonia’s Kanak leaders. FLNKS spokesman Victor Tutugoro commented that the idea of the MSG, formed as part of the Kanak fight for liberation, was that a fully independent New Caledonia would eventually become a member in its own right. He also noted that New Caledonia, or Kanaky, was not yet fully emancipated (Nouvelles Calédoniennes, 19 February 2010). His comments came after a debate at the annual FLNKS congress at which Palika (Parti de Libération Kanak/Kanak Liberation Party) generally supported developing regional links for New Caledonia, while the more ascendant Union Calédonienne (Caledonian Union, UC), defended the traditional objectives of the FLNKS within the MSG. In June 2010, an MSG delegation visited New
Caledonia in order to assess Noumea Accord implementation, and expressed continuing concern at the slow rate of implementation of Accord commitments (May 2011, 6 and see Regional reaction, below).

‘Franconésie’ unity

France has encouraged its three Pacific entities to consult and work together in recent years. France’s intention for the three collectivities to work together has been referred to as a kind of ‘Franconesia’, designed to ‘reinvigorate a French regional role’ (Rumley et al. 2006, 244).

From 2003, the three have taken turns to chair meetings on the allocation of the South Pacific Fund. In 2009, they agreed to meet and work together on a regular basis. In February 2010, the heads of the assemblies of the entities signed a partnership agreement under which they agreed to consult and formulate common approaches to French State policy announcements. While this grouping is embryonic, when set against long-term objectives of the French entities of fuller participation in the PIF and other regional groups, it can be seen, potentially at least, as operating as a subgroup of interests within regional bodies.

Trade engagements

New Caledonia has used its capability to negotiate, and even sign (on behalf of the French State), bilateral agreements in the region in areas of its responsibility (Noumea Accord Articles 3.1.1 and 3.2.1). The first country to sign an agreement with New Caledonia was Australia (Trade and Economic Relations Arrangement in March 2002); followed by Vanuatu (in co-operative agreements in 2002 and 2006). The Australian Arrangement provided for regular bilateral talks between economic officials. In practice these have been infrequent. By mid 2009 only two had been held, the first in Canberra in September 2002, the second in Noumea in November 2005. There has been other high-level contact, with visits by senior New Caledonian leaders (2010 and 2012), and visits to New Caledonia by the Australian Parliamentary Secretary for Pacific Island Affairs Richard Marles in 2010, and again in April 2012, accompanied by Australia’s Governor-General.

Bilateral economic links between the collectivities and the region are few. The big two, Australia and New Zealand, are unsurprisingly more important for the collectivities than the collectivities are for them. New Caledonia, the most economically significant of the three collectivities, ranks as Australia’s 51st trading partner, with two-way trade equal to .1 per cent of Australia’s total. It is, however, Australia’s fourth-largest trade destination in the South Pacific. Australia’s exports there (mainly coal, and civil engineering equipment and parts)
amounted to $A379 million in 2010–2011, and this is trending upward. Imports largely consisted of nickel ore, and were worth $A174 million. Australia was New Caledonia’s fourth-largest export destination in 2010 (after France, Japan, and Korea), taking just nine per cent of New Caledonia’s exports. Australia was New Caledonia’s fourth-largest source of imports that year, after France, China and Singapore (from where New Caledonia imports its petroleum), providing 9.7 per cent of its imports. French Polynesia’s links with Australia are even slimmer, with Australian exports there worth approximately $A50 million in 2010–2011 (mainly processed and other food) and Australian imports valued at close to $A4 million (pearls and measuring instruments). Australia was French Polynesia’s ninth-largest export destination and seventh-largest import source in 2010 (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Fact Sheet, New Caledonia, French Polynesia <http://www.dfat.gov.au> accessed 27 May 2012).


Economic links with the Pacific islands are even more limited and tend to be focused on Melanesia. In 2010, New Caledonia imported some products from Fiji (worth CFP368 million or $A3.9 million, converted 7 May 2012) and Vanuatu (CFP314 million or $A3.3 million) (ISEE website accessed 7 May 2012) but no longer exported to Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands, as it had in 2007 (ISEE TEC 2008). Further growth in economic links is affected by the French collectivities’ restrictive trade barriers and reliance on the French and European markets, apart from the relatively limited range of imports from other island economies.

It is therefore unsurprising that there is much to be done to engage the French collectivities in regional economic activity. Although the French entities have been invited to participate in regional free trade programs — the PACER (Pacific Agreement on Closer Economic Relations) and the PICTA (Pacific Island Countries Trade Agreement) — they have responded cautiously. There is a strong awareness of the differences between the well-off, heavily subsidised economies of the French collectivities and the majority of Pacific island states, and of the corresponding economic responsibilities that a regional economic agreement would impose on the better-off economies. The French collectivities have made much of the need to protect local business in order to develop economic activity. So, while New Caledonia is studying the two agreements, and has officially indicated its willingness to enter into negotiations for its eventual
participation, it is unlikely to move quickly to do so (for an indication of the protectionist approach in New Caledonia, see a contribution by the then head of its regional co-operation and external relations unit, Laurent Sémavoine, in de Deckker and Faberon 2008, 241).

France, the European Union and the region

Beyond France’s specific bilateral and regional engagement, and that of its collectivities in the Pacific, France has led the way for greater EU activity in the region. It has done this in two ways, first, by leading European support for the overseas territories of EU members, including those of France in the Pacific; and second, by pioneering the ACP (African–Caribbean–Pacific) program whereby Europe assists developing countries in Africa and the Pacific, with France providing a significant contribution to funding for this EU development cooperation, including in the Pacific.

Because many aspects of EU handling of the French overseas collectivities highlight specific regional concerns and departures from overall EU practice, and because their treatment under EU provisions differs to those that the EU applies to the island Pacific countries, the dispositions of EU treatment of the French Pacific collectivities and the Pacific island states will be considered (a fuller analysis is in Fisher 2012c).

EU and the French Pacific collectivities as European overseas countries and territories (OCT)

From the beginning of the creation of the EU, with its origin in the European Economic Community (EEC), France led the way for some form of association with European members’ overseas possessions. This meant that the French Pacific entities have represented a slice of Europe in the Pacific from the late 1950s.²

Overseas countries and territories

The first European treaty, the 1949 Statute of the Council of Europe, did not refer specifically to overseas territories of member states. The 1951 Treaty of Paris on coal and steel made only cursory mention of extra-European territories of member states, guaranteeing that any preferential measures in those territories

² For ease of reading, EU is used to refer to the various iterations of the European Community.
would be extended to other member states (Article 79). The 1952 Paris Treaty on a European Defence Community made oblique mentions of Algeria and Saint-Pierre et Miquelon.

But, from the 1957 Treaty of Rome, provision has been made for ‘overseas countries and territories’ (OCT) to be associated with the EU, which at the time essentially meant the French overseas possessions, Belgian and Italian African territories and Dutch territories in the Americas. And French influence was the decisive factor ensuring that these provisions were included (see European Commission 1998, 11; Faberon and Ziller 2007, 249; Jorda in Tesoka and Ziller 2008, 343). The OCT arrangements have remained broadly unchanged since then. The provisions stop short of seeing the OCTs as legally part of Europe. They aimed at advancing economic and social development of the OCT and the establishment of close economic relations between them and the whole community (Article 131). The French OCTs include New Caledonia, French Polynesia, and Wallis and Futuna, the French Southern and Antarctic Territories, Mayotte, and Saint-Pierre et Miquelon.

The treaty included the creation of the EDF, from which the French overseas possessions have derived considerable financial benefits. France has consistently contributed around 20 per cent of the fund, a larger amount than other European countries with overseas possessions. For the 10th EDF (2008–2013), France will become the second largest contributor (19.55 per cent) after Germany, but in advance of Britain, Netherlands and Denmark (Tesoka and Ziller 2008, 347).

Africa–Caribbean–Pacific

With the decolonisation of many overseas European, including some French, possessions in the 1960s and 1970s, the EU developed links with the newly independent African states and Madagascar in the 1963 Yaoundé Convention; and preferential trading measures with the countries of the new ACP under the 1975 Lomé Convention. The ACP arrangements were agreed at regular intervals, most recently in the Cotonou Agreement of June 2000, and are applicable for 10 years. Parallel arrangements for the OCTs include periodic renewal, initially by an agreement of application, then by decisions of association taken by the European Council.

Preferential treatment of OCTs relative to ACPs

Under these agreements, the preferential access to European members markets was the same for ACPs and OCTs until 1991, when the OCTs were accorded free and unlimited access to the European market, while the ACPs had to comply with rules of origin and transborder requirements.
Further benefits were accorded to the OCTs in 1997, following the establishment of the EU in 1993, in an annex to the Treaty of Amsterdam. No EU customs duties or other charges were payable by OCTs. The arrangements are not reciprocal, and OCTs can make their own customs legislation, for example to protect sensitive sectors of their economies. By this time, overseas territories of other European members had been added to the OCTs (those of the United Kingdom in 1973, Denmark in 1986). But the special nature of the French OCTs was accentuated here by two further protocols to the Treaty of Amsterdam, one called the ‘Protocol on France’ preserving the privilege of issuing currency in its overseas entities, the other a declaration reserving the right of each member state to act separately from other member states in the interest of an OCT (European Commission 1998, 30).

Both French Polynesia and New Caledonia have provisions in their respective Organic Laws for their governments’ executives to be involved in relations and negotiations with the EU, and for consultation with their assemblies on proposed acts of the EU (Articles 30 and 89 of the 1999 Organic Law for New Caledonia, and Articles 41 and 135 of the 2004 Organic Law for French Polynesia). In practice, the collectivities themselves have not been directly engaged with the EU, without the presence of a representative of France, although French Polynesia has had a representative in Brussels from 1994.

In the Pacific, the French Pacific entities as OCTs have thus held a privileged position over other Pacific island states, who are ACPs, in relation to their treatment by Europe.

French Pacific entities: Implications for citizenship

The way in which EU provisions apply to the populations in the OCTs is variable, and still being worked out. Recent reforms are moving in the direction of treating them increasingly as normal EU members, thus bringing them increasingly into the EU family and in doing so giving the EU a stake in French sovereignty in the Pacific (see Fisher 2012c). But the French OCTs retain particular privileges relating to citizenship, which impact on local sensitivities there.

Because of their French citizenship, and its ‘indivisibility’ or supposed non-discriminatory application to all citizens (Faberon and Ziller 2007, 253, and Gohin 2002, point 4), inhabitants of the French Pacific entities who are French can vote for special overseas seats in European elections and are entitled to European passports (European Commission 1998, 15); they enjoy non-reciprocal rights of mobility and settlement in EU member countries; and they can protect sensitive sectors of their economies from EU imports and can issue their own currency. It is ironic that these benefits derive from the ‘indivisibility’ of French citizenship, given the unique status of New Caledonian citizenship, the restricted
electorate and protective local employment conditions provided under the Noumea Accord, which seem incompatible with the notion of indivisibility and equality of all French citizens (Gohin 2002, points 32 and 33). The arrangement is yet another example of the creativity of the French State in supporting their collectivities even against the background of monolithic Europe.

**Voting rights**

In view of the controversies surrounding New Caledonian citizenship issues, and to some extent French Polynesian employment-protection citizenship issues, the association of the French Pacific collectivities with the EU, and its generally reciprocal arrangements, not surprisingly touch sensitive nerves (see Chapter 4).

Jean-Yves Faberon and Jacques Ziller note that the EC treaty applied fully to all EU citizens, and therefore to all French citizens wherever they resided, in metropolitan France, in its overseas departments, in its overseas collectivities enumerated in Article 74 of the French Constitution, or in New Caledonia, despite its sui generis status (2007, 240). All French citizens, including all those French citizens in the French Pacific collectivities, have the right to vote in EU elections. They are the only member state nationals living outside the EU who may do so (Muller 1999, 43; Commission Européenne 1998, 15). Three special Députés (members of Parliament) positions were created specifically to represent the French overseas collectivities.

But, for the locals in the three Pacific collectivities, this right to vote is seen as a mixed blessing, reflected in the low voter turnouts (around 20 per cent, compared to around 70 per cent turnout in other elections, see for example Table 4.7) and general lack of appreciation of the benefits, or potential benefits, of European membership. In French Polynesia, most parties boycotted or did not actively become engaged in European elections in July 1989 because of concerns about French Polynesia’s status and the potential for immigration inflows from Europe. France was dismissive of these concerns, referring to controls held by the French State since 1932 over entry and residence, supplemented by French Polynesia’s 1984 statute which provided for consultation with the territory on immigration and the control of expatriate residents. But local leaders at the time warned that the EU vote risked fuelling independentist sentiment and Flosse suggested that the EU identity could erode local culture and identity (Muller 1999, 44). It is possible that the changed status of the OCTs relative to the ACPs from 1991, according more privileges to the OCTs from their association with the EU, may well have resulted from an effort to allay such sensitivities.

In New Caledonia, the pro-independence Palika has traditionally opposed participation in EU elections on the basis that it would imply integration into a
system that condoned colonialism in Kanaky (Chappell 1998, 443). As Chapter 4 described, after the Noumea Accord was signed, France secured special non-reciprocal rights by which EU members resident in New Caledonia could not vote in congressional or provincial elections. They remained able to vote in municipal elections, however, which aroused particular concern amongst the pro-independence groups.

These efforts by France failed to reduce the sense of concern and isolation in its entities: in the June 2004 EU parliamentary elections, voter turnout was a low 25.43 per cent in New Caledonia, and 39.85 per cent in French Polynesia. In May 2005 Palika, a leading constituent of FLNKS, called for a boycott of the French vote on the EU constitution (Maclellan 2005b, 413). This was consistent with its anti-EU election stance noted above, and occurred when Palika was challenging the pro-France group’s interpretation of the restricted electorate for provincial elections in New Caledonia.

A further effort was made to encourage more active participation in EU elections. Until 2009, the three French overseas positions in the EU parliament were contested on a basis of one electorate and list of candidates on a proportional basis. This meant that candidates from the more populous Réunion invariably won all three seats. Again, at the instigation of France, for the 2009 election, this procedure was changed, with the creation of three electorates, enabling the election of one representative from each of the Caribbean, Indian Ocean and Pacific collectivities. During the lead-up to the election, newspapers reported extensively on the substantial funding the OCT received from Europe, to remind the voter of the benefits of EU association. But this effort too failed. Voter turnout in New Caledonia and French Polynesia was even lower than in 2004 (21.82 per cent in New Caledonia in 2009, and in French Polynesia, 22.59 per cent) (see also Muller 2010, 6). These turnouts are low when compared with the local turnout for local elections (above 70 per cent in New Caledonia in 2009 and French Polynesia in 2004) and also compared to overall turnout for France in EU parliamentary elections (46.76 per cent in 1999, 42.76 per cent in 2004, and 40.63 per cent in 2009).

**Non-reciprocal rights of travel and settlement**

Again, by virtue of their French citizenship, the French Pacific originating populations are able to settle in each of the other 26 EU member states on the same terms as residents of other EU member states. In so far as the reciprocal right is concerned, the 1957 treaty provided for regulation of this right by agreements requiring the unanimity of the members of individual states, which have never been adopted (Faberon and Ziller 2007, 254–55; European Commission 1998, 27). Therefore the OCTs benefit from the non-reciprocity of the right to travel and settle in other EU states.
In 1985, some countries of the EU, including France, agreed to create the Schengen area of free movement of peoples, abolishing border checks at internal borders. By 2008, most EU countries participated. At France's request, the French OCTs are not part of the Schengen group and, unlike Schengen member countries, they maintain their own police border controls (see Faberon and Ziller 2007, 256).

The special employment protection provisions of New Caledonia and French Polynesia are also permitted. Thus, the French OCT can take protective measures on employment, so long as incoming workers from EU members are treated no differently to those from third countries (European Commission 1998, 27, Faberon and Ziller 2007, 267). Interestingly, in theory this would provide a means for local French collectivities to treat incoming French citizens, as EU citizens, seeking employment, just as rigorously as those from third countries, although so far the local governments have not taken up this option. Senior French officials acknowledged in personal communication in early 2009 that local political parties in New Caledonia were pressing for greater controls on French immigrants. The sensitivity of the immigration issue means that all applications by foreigners for employment visas are individually seen and decided upon in the executive (or cabinet) of New Caledonia. This is bureaucratically demanding. The criteria for endorsement are opaque. Faberon and Ziller (2007, 267) have noted that, while statistics are difficult to come by, judicial experience indicates that the EU provisions have resulted in a greater influx of EU workers into the French OCTs, particularly French Polynesia.

**Economic benefits**

The French OCTs are given full access to the internal market of the EU, which is a meaningful privilege given that virtually all of the OCT’s economic activity is geared towards the European community (European Commission 1998, 30). Moreover, the French OCTs can make their own customs legislation protecting sensitive sectors of their economies, and issue their own currency (which has been a controversial issue, see Chapter 4). In these respects, it is worth noting that the four French overseas départements, Guadeloupe, Guyana, Martinique and Réunion, are not OCTs as they are considered an integral part of the EU by virtue of their status as departments of France. As such, they cannot make their own customs legislation, must apply European customs arrangements to imports and are given support from the Structural Fund rather than the EDF (European Commission 1998, 18).

While the French Pacific collectivities enjoy, and exercise, their right to make their own protective customs legislation even against European imports, the reality is that their economies are dependent on France and on Europe, particularly given the habits and tastes of the inhabitants and this, together with
strong vested local interests, acts as a brake on the exercise of this privilege. As a result, duties and import taxes are more likely to be directed against regional imports, for example from Australia, New Zealand, and the neighbouring Pacific states, than against European imports. The net result is that the economies of the French Pacific collectivities remain inexorably linked to France and Europe, which impedes their integration within their own region, even given the dramatically higher costs such as those associated with freight.

Thus, in 2011, exports from New Caledonia, the largest economy of the French Pacific entities, went principally to the EU (of which over half went to France), and then to Japan, Australia and Taiwan, while imports came primarily from the EU (of which half came from France), followed by Singapore, Australia, Japan, New Zealand and the United States. Its trade with the regional Pacific island countries was so negligible that it did not warrant a line report in official statistics (ISEE website accessed 16 February 2012). Australia holds only 10 per cent of market share in New Caledonia (after France, China and Singapore) and in 2010–2011, Australian exports there totalled only $A348 million, and imports $A174 million (Country Brief, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade website accessed 16 February 2012).

The ambiguities of OCT status for the fledgling participation of the French Pacific entities within their own region have led to some misunderstandings. In the early 2000s, senior New Caledonian leaders would argue publicly that New Caledonia would provide a door for Pacific economies (including the large Australian and New Zealand economies) to European markets. In practice, this is not the case, as the EU maintains local content rules and rules of origin which preclude processing of essentially foreign imports in an OCT, for example, New Caledonia, for subsequent preferential entry to its markets.

Development benefits

The French Pacific collectivities as OCTs benefit from aid flows and projects under the EDF. These benefits are not as favourable to them as the Structural Fund available to EU member states. The EDF applies not only to OCTs but also to ACPs. Because New Caledonia and French Polynesia are large and enjoy a higher standard of living than many other OCTs and ACPs, and because they fall outside some of the specific recent EDF programs, they do not receive as much as others. This has become a motivation for France to make the OCTs eligible for other EU programs (Personal communication by senior French officials 2012). They nonetheless have had access to considerable support.

Under the current 10th EDF (2008–2013), projected expenditure in New Caledonia is EUR19.81 million; French Polynesia EUR19.79 million; and Wallis and Futuna EUR16.5 million (Europa website accessed 8 November 2011). But,
problems arising from time-consuming bureaucratic processes, the isolation and distance from Brussels of the French OCTs (despite the presence of a resident EU representative in Noumea and Suva), means that the often impressive notional allocations are rarely fully spent (this problem is one shared by the ACP Pacific countries, see EU aid to the region, below). Thus, although the 9th EDF (2000–2007) allocated support to New Caledonia totalling EUR21.5 million, to cover a number of projects including a new aquarium, roadworks and professional training, this figure included as much as EUR7.8 million that was unspent from the previous period (see ISEE website, accessed 25 November 2008). Wallis and Futuna, defined as a least-developed OCT, was allocated EUR16.7 million in the 9th EDF, of which EUR5.2 million was carried over from the previous period.

The OCTs also benefit, as do the ACP countries, from the EU’s STABEX and SYSMIN systems for supporting agricultural exports and financing mining products respectively. They also have access to the European Investment Bank. Given the level of economic development, however, French Polynesia and New Caledonia do not generally qualify over other OCTs, although New Caledonia has received some training and mining rehabilitation funding from SYSMIN.

With French support, the OCTs are increasingly being granted access to other mainstream EU programs funded by the EU budget (i.e., outside the EDF funding arrangement) such as education, training, competitiveness and innovation framework and cultural and audiovisual programs (see Custos in Kochenov 2011, 110).

**Currency: The Euro**

France would like its three Pacific collectivities to adopt the Euro instead of the special French Pacific franc that is currently in circulation, but has indicated that it will introduce the Euro only if all three collectivities agree to do so. Wallis and Futuna has indicated it will fall in with such a decision taken by the other two collectivities; French Polynesia voted in 2006 to introduce the Euro. Chapter 4 refers to the reasons why New Caledonia has so far been disinclined to accept the Euro as its currency, essentially seeing such a move as stepping back from the Noumea Accord’s stipulation that currency would be dealt with as one of the final sovereign matters to be voted on between 2014 and 2018.

**Political benefits**

Importantly too, the OCTs have the right of petition before the European parliament mediator, introducing a new area of influence over what happens in their (OCTs) territory (European Commission 1998, 30). It is notable that New Caledonian pro-French interests had recourse to the European Court of Human Rights over the restricted electorate issue, with that court judging in favour of
local interests given the special sensitivities of the New Caledonian situation (see Chapter 4). Thus, the political association with Europe provides a potential check to French administration practices and a new pressure point to which the French Pacific collectivities can have recourse, not only on local issues but also on issues of interest to the wider Pacific region.

Review of EU–OCT relationship

The EU is reconsidering its approach to the OCTs, and France has been instrumental in driving change. A 2008 green paper was followed by a 2009 European Commission Communication and a joint EU/OCT position paper in February 2011, the latter being an outcome of a meeting hosted by France in Noumea.

The 2008 green paper set the pace, noting that the emphasis to date on development co-operation, and the relatively high expenditure on the OCTs relative to the ACPs was outmoded (the average per capita level of EU financial assistance to the OCTs was approximately six times higher than the average per capita level of its assistance to the ACP states). The paper notes that the approach had been formed when most OCTs had been African colonies, and is no longer consistent with the contemporary realities of the OCTs. Aspects under consideration, and taken up by the subsequent communication and joint position paper, include whether or not the development co-operation approach was the most relevant, given the relatively high standards of living in the OCTs; whether and how the OCTs could play a key role as strategic outposts for the EU; whether better means could be found for their integration into their geographic regions; and how they could better engage in environmental protection of their unique biodiversity. The green paper also raises the special role and influence of other countries in respect of the OCTs, in the case of the Pacific, the role of the United States, Japan, China, Australia and New Zealand was raised (European Commission 2008, 13). The directions of these changes, notably the view of the EU’s OCTs as strategic outposts, and the trend towards their integration in their own region, are clearly inspired by French policy approaches to its own OCTs, enunciated by the French President and other leaders in recent years (see Chapter 7).

EU representation and aid to the region

The OCTs themselves form an important part of the EU’s presence in the Pacific region, and are seen as such by the EU. The 2008 green paper on the OCTs states that ‘Indeed, while the OCTs do not form an integral part of the EU, they are a part of or at least closely related to an EU Member State, which means that they cannot be uncoupled from the EU and, in a sense, are “part of its ultimate frontiers”’ (European Commission 2008, 7). But apart from the EU’s engagement
with France’s three OCTs in the Pacific (and Britain’s minuscule Pitcairn Island), the EU is formally represented in the region, contributes to some regional organisations and has been involved in assisting the independent Pacific countries through the ACP relationship. France has been a major contributor to this process, and to funding.

The EU has residential diplomatic representation in Australia and New Zealand, a regional delegation office in Fiji and a delegation office in Papua New Guinea, technical offices in East Timor, Samoa and Kiribati, and offices in Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. It also has an office for the French OCTs in Noumea. The European Investment Bank has an office in Sydney. The EU participates in dialogue discussions that are held immediately after PIF summit meetings.

The EU launched a new strategy for the Pacific in 2006 (European Commission 2006). It noted that its support for regional governments dated from the 1975 Lomé Convention, revised in 2000 as the Cotonou Agreement, and totalled EUR1.8 billion to 2006. It described itself as the second-largest aid contributor to the region, but included in its calculations the separate aid contributions by some of its members (France, United Kingdom and Portugal) (European Commission 2006, 25 and 26). Its assistance focused on governance and regionalism, and sustainable development of natural resources and climate change, elements that corresponded to the Forum priorities of economic growth of sustainable development, good governance and security. The strategy noted France’s regional and military presence in its three OCTs, along with the desirability of promoting integration of these entities (as well as Pitcairn Island) into the region (European Commission 2006, 4 and 5).

The 10th EDF 2008–2013 allocated to Pacific programs an overall envelope of EUR293 million ($A441 million, converted 2 March 2010, or just under $A90 million per year) with a possible 25 per cent increase if countries demonstrate clear commitments to good governance (European Commission 2007, Preface, 7). There are regional and bilateral (i.e., EU/individual Pacific island states) programs. The regional program allocates EUR105 million over the five-year period ($A157 million, converted 9 March 2010), within the broad objectives of the Forum’s Pacific Plan, which is focused on sustainable energy and preservation and exploitation of natural resources. Of this amount EUR45 million ($A67.4 million) has been earmarked for regional economic integration, EUR40 million ($A60 million) for sustainable management of natural resources and the environment and climate change, and EUR10 million ($A15 million) for non-state actors and the Forum (EU website <http://www.http://ec.europa.eu/development/geographical/regionscountries/eupacific_en.cfm> accessed 6 April 2009).
Until 2009, little of this funding had been channelled through the SPC. The EU
does not contribute to the core budget of the SPC, but it does provide funding
for programs, and therefore the annual amounts fluctuate widely depending
on the timing and pace of expenditure in the programs that it supports. It
averaged contributions of just under EUR5 million ($A7.4 million) per annum in
the five years to 2007 (SPC 2009). In 2007, the EU contributed EUR1.8 million
($US2.8 million or $A3.1 million), or 5.16 per cent of SPC income (SPC 2007
contributed $US7.1 million in that year, or 12.97 per cent of total income. Since
France contributes just under 20 per cent of EU EDF funds, it can be assumed it
contributed an estimated EUR1 m. ($A1.5 million) per year to the SPC, via the
EU contribution, in the five years to 2007.

By 2010, the situation had reversed, with Europe contributing 11.17 per cent of
total SPC income, or $US9.4 million, and France 4.4 per cent or $US3.7 million
(SPC Annual Report 2010 Part II, 46–47). This suggests a French policy objective
of channeling more of its support through the EU prism than in the past. By
2011, the SPC itself was claiming that the EU was expected to become the second
largest contributor to SPC programs after Australia, having allocated 23 per cent
of the SPC’s projected funding for 2011 (SPC Annual Report 2010 Part 1, 9).

As for the OCTs, EU funding to independent Pacific island governments is
limited by the capacity of the bureaucratic processes in Brussels to deliver, in a
timely way, appropriately tailored projects to remote micro states. The capacity
for these small states to provide the necessary documentation required by EU
procedures is also an issue, as is the propensity for the Europeans to prefer
region-wide programs, which are often unsuited to the diverse needs of the
Pacific states. Together, these factors account for the past underspending of
generous European allocations. There was a 36 per cent underspend for the
6th EDF 1985–1990 and 49 per cent for the 7th 1990–1995, which led to an
emphasis in the 9th EDF 2000–2007 on redressing this situation (Mrgudovic
2008, 332). By 2011, the EU website claimed that, for the first time, the 10th
EDF (2008–2013) began with the resources from past EDFs already committed to
programs (Aid Funding, Developing Efficiency, entry dated 31 December 2010,
Europa website accessed 22 November 2011). As noted, however, an estimated
20 per cent of these funds are committed to implementing programs that are
hangovers from the previous EDF.

Other EU links

Trade between the region and the EU is minuscule. Both-ways trade was worth
just over EUR1 billion in 2008, of which EU exports comprised just under
EUR700 million. The EU’s main exports to the Pacific region are machinery and
transport equipment (about 60 per cent of its exports in 2008). It imports consist mainly of palm oil (49 per cent of its imports in 2008) and sugar (14 per cent) (Europa website accessed 6 December 2011). Although the EU takes 10 per cent of Pacific ACP exports, over 90 per cent of these come from Papua New Guinea and Fiji (European Commission 2006, 24). The importance of the EU to Fiji is reflected in its taking half of Fiji’s major commodity, sugar, at guaranteed prices, until the phase-out of the program in 2010, although this preferential treatment has been suspended on occasion to sanction Fiji’s undemocratic practices (most recently, on 18 May 2009, the EU cancelled $A31 million aid to Fiji’s sugar industry in response to the establishment of its military dictatorship). It has signed fishery agreements with the Solomons, Kiribati and the Federated States of Micronesia, covering fishing licenses for Spanish and French fishing vessels. The EU has acceded to the Western Central Pacific Fisheries Convention.

From September 2004 the EU has been negotiating Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs), to replace the preferential Cotonou arrangements. Although Australia and New Zealand have not insisted on prior consultation, as provided for in the PACER, negotiations have been slow and have extended well beyond the original deadline of 2008. No doubt this reflects the limited interest for Europe in the Pacific island states as sources of trade or investment. By 2011 Pacific EPAs had only been signed between the EU and Papua New Guinea and Fiji (both in 2009) granting them duty- and quota-free exports to the EU from 1 January 2008. In the interim, the other Pacific island countries benefit from the EU’s generalised system of preferences, which does not have a major impact given their weak trade links with Europe.

**Regional reactions to French efforts**

As with its efforts to improve its image in the region in the 1980s, the reaction in the region to French overtures in recent years has been mixed.

On the one hand, regional leaders have responded to France positively. They have participated in the France Oceanic Summits. Many (Papua New Guinea, Tonga, Vanuatu, Fiji) participate in defence exercises and exchanges with France, and welcome French naval visits. Just as some Melanesians were uneasy with the Rudd government’s conclusion of a defence agreement with France over the use of French defence facilities (see Co-operation with the United Nations), however, so are some island leaders cautious about engaging France in regional defence activity. When Australian Foreign Minister Alexander Downer was
putting together RAMSI, in 2003, in response to a request to Prime Minister John Howard from the Solomon Islands Prime Minister Sir Allan Kemakeza, he had in mind French participation. In the event, regional island leaders, sounded out informally in the corridors of a meeting hosted by the Australian Government in Sydney to plan the mission, were not responsive to the idea of French participation, and the idea was dropped.³

The same hesitation was evident at the time Australia was encouraging Indonesia to develop a long-term democratic solution in East Timor. Indonesian President B. J. Habibie strongly rejected Howard’s proposal to apply a Matignon Accords-type solution to East Timor. Then Australian Ambassador to Indonesia John McCarthy reported at the time ‘that he (Habibie) found the choice of a colonial example unpalatable’ (McPhail 2007, 116 and 117). Alison McPhail attributed the rejection to ‘the bitter legacy of Dutch colonisation of Indonesia which made any suggestion that Indonesia was acting as a neo-colonial power highly offensive to the President’.

The MSG, despite holding one of its meetings in Noumea, has stopped well short of full endorsement of France and its presence in the region. An example of its reticence towards France is its support for Vanuatu’s claim to the Matthew and Hunter Island group, drawing on traditional Melanesian links and history, in the face of France’s continued assertion of its own claim by virtue of its New Caledonian presence (see Chapter 4). Gomès, New Caledonia’s pro-France President, has flagged his wish for full membership of the MSG by the government of New Caledonia, as a replacement for the FLNKS (Flash d’Océanie 19 January 2010). This would mean that the collegial, albeit pro-France dominated, government, would replace and therefore significantly weaken, the voice of the Melanesian grouping which first mobilised the MSG. The idea has been met with a studied silence from the MSG. Instead, the MSG sent a visiting mission to New Caledonia in June 2010, which in its private report expressed some criticism of progress in the implementation of the Noumea Accord so far (Personal communication by senior Pacific island country official, 2010 and May 2011 p. 6). While the MSG has been preoccupied with economic issues in recent years, it has not forgotten its core concerns about New Caledonia’s status.

Pacific Islands Forum stance: A watching brief on New Caledonia

A certain reserve about France is also evident within the PIF, particularly in responding to the French entities’ desire for full membership in 2010.

³ Downer mentioned the idea to the French Ambassador, at a lunch he was hosting for European ambassadors. Preliminary indications were that the French would have responded positively (Personal comments Downer 2003 and 2009).
Forum membership is confined to ‘independent and self-governing states’ (PIF website accessed 27 September 2010). Nonetheless, the Forum made special provisions to accommodate the three French entities. At the time, in 1999, the Forum specifically defined observers as ‘A Pacific island territory on a clear path to achieving self-government or independence’ (Pacific Islands Forum Koror, Palau, Communiqué 1999), yet it created a special category of associate member (not defined and subject to leaders’ discretion, Article 1, Agreement Establishing the Pacific Islands Forum (revised), 27 October 2005) for French Polynesia and New Caledonia. The Forum has so far held the line at these forms of association, with Wallis and Futuna as observer, while retaining a separate mechanism for engagement of France in the post-Forum summit dialogues.

This creation of a special category for New Caledonia and French Polynesia was ambiguous. On the one hand, Forum action suggests that the two collectivities had transcended the category of observer in some way. The granting of observer status to Wallis and Futuna seemingly overlooked the fact that that entity was not on a path to self-determination or independence (although other observers include entities as various as Tokelau, the Commonwealth, and the ADB, with East Timor as a special observer). Meanwhile applications to be observers by the US dependencies, American Samoa and Guam, have simply remained under consideration.

On the other hand, assigning a special unique category to these two French entities is not inconsistent with ongoing monitoring of the as yet unfolding process of self-determination. The evolution of New Caledonia’s status has remained on the Forum agenda since the PIF welcomed the Noumea Accord in 1998, but its support for the Accord was not unqualified. The Forum at the time specifically recognised New Caledonia’s right to self-determination (which it has reiterated in subsequent Communiqués). The 1998 Pohn Pei Forum communiqué expressed support for continuing contact between the Forum and all communities in New Caledonia, and established a mechanism for monitoring implementation of the Accord. ‘Leaders agreed to a continuing future monitoring role for the Forum Ministerial Committee on New Caledonia during the period of the Noumea Accord, particularly with respect to the referenda that will be conducted pursuant to the Accords’ (my emphasis) (1998 Pohn Pei Forum Communiqué). As noted above, when it admitted New Caledonia as an observer to the PIF in 1999, the Forum took care to define observer explicitly as a territory on a clear path to achieving self-government or independence. At the same time, Forum leaders agreed ‘to continue to bring to the attention of the UN the question of New Caledonia’s political future’ and called on members to consider making available training awards for the Kanak people (1999 Koror, Palau, Forum Communiqué).

The Forum sent a ministerial committee to visit New Caledonia in 1999, 2001 and 2004. The 2002 Fiji Communiqué noted that the report of the committee
France’s engagement in the region from the 1990s

(2001), welcomed the establishment of institutions under the Noumea Accord, and encouraged all communities to support and implement the Accord, and supported self-determination in New Caledonia. Once again, ‘The Forum also agreed to continue to bring to the attention of the UN the question of New Caledonia’s political future’, and agreed to support more Kanak training through a Kanak training fund. Forum leaders encouraged greater integration and participation of New Caledonia in the Forum region and endorsed the continuing monitoring role of the ministerial committee.

The Forum also acts as a conduit for what is effectively a subgroup, the MSG. Wamytan, the MSG representative at the time, secured the inclusion in the 2001 Nauru Forum Communiqué of a reference to Noumea’s hosting of a summit meeting of the MSG in July that year. In an attachment to the 2003 Auckland Communiqué, the MSG leaders, ‘noted with concern the lack of implementation of certain provisions of the Noumea Accord, in particular the electoral process and issues relating to New Caledonia’s referendum process’. They noted the planned visit by the Forum Ministerial Committee the following year, and urged it to focus on these two issues.

In 2005, after the 2004 Forum Ministerial Committee’s visit to New Caledonia, the Madang Forum Communique welcomed the high degree of political will from all stakeholders in the implementation of the Noumea Accord. But it also endorsed the committee’s ‘continuing role in monitoring the affairs of the territory’ and in encouraging closer regional engagement (Madang Forum Communiqué 2005). A Forum visit has not taken place since 2004.

The MSG sent its own visiting mission to Noumea in 2010, a mission that was critical of some aspects of implementation of the Accord (see Melanesian Spearhead Group, above).

More recently, Forum leaders have made clear their ongoing concern about resolving the status of New Caledonia. At the same time as he was seeking New Caledonia’s full membership of the MSG in late 2009 and early 2010, Gomès also pressed for its full membership of the PIF (Flash d’Océanie 19 January 2010). In response, at their August 2010 summit, Forum leaders, specifically referring to New Caledonia’s wish for full membership, noted that the Noumea Accord ‘self-determination’ process itself would resolve the question of New Caledonia’s international standing, and pointedly referred to further engagement, including by a visiting Forum mission, which as noted, had not taken place since 2004. The Forum ‘welcomed the continuing interest of French Polynesia and Wallis and Futuna to deepen their engagement with the Forum’ (Pacific Islands Forum Communiqué 5 August 2010). The 2011 and 2012 Forum Communiqués made no mention of New Caledonia’s interest in full membership, notwithstanding the French State having expressed its support publicly only a few weeks before the
2011 Forum. Minister for Overseas France, Marie-Luce Penchard had supported the formal request by New Caledonian President Harold Martin at a meeting of ambassadors to countries adjoining the French Overseas collectivities (Flash D’Océanie 8 September 2011).

For its part, Australia has distinguished itself from Pacific island members of the Forum by supporting the full membership of New Caledonia in the Forum (Rudd–Juppé press statement 11 September 2011 and DFAT Media Release 13 October 2010). But for the Forum, the real test of French intentions, and the long-term status of the French entities, will be the post-Noumea Accord outcome in New Caledonia.

Pacific Islands Forum advocates self-determination in French Polynesia

As the date of the last French nuclear test recedes, the 2004 election of pro-independence leader Temaru as president of French Polynesia, and perceived French efforts to frustrate his leadership since, keep alive a regional focus on developments in that collectivity. Temaru has shown a willingness to exploit his longstanding personal links with Forum leaders to maintain pressure on the French State (see Chapter 5).

The PIF has underlined the importance of self-determination in its consideration of French Polynesia. French Polynesia’s admission as an observer had to await its constitutional review, and only occurred in 2004 once statutory change had been put in place (see the 2003 Auckland Forum Communiqué, in which leaders noted constitutional developments in French Polynesia and agreed to pursue a visit there the following year). After Temaru’s election in May 2004, and the ensuing uncertainty and then outright frustration at the result, the Forum’s response was careful. The August 2004 Forum Communiqué expressed leaders’ welcome to French Polynesia as an observer ‘in its own right’, and their support for French Polynesia’s right to self-determination; and pointedly encouraged it and France to seek ‘an agreed approach on how to realise French Polynesia’s right to self-determination’. Moreover, leaders asked the chair to convey their views to French Polynesia and France, and called for the secretary-general to report on ‘developments in respect of French Polynesia’s progress towards self-determination’. In 2005, the Forum noted the secretariat’s report on French Polynesia, again in the context of the entity’s ‘progress to self-determination’ (Madang Communiqué 2005), i.e., at no time did the Forum judge that French Polynesia had attained self-determination.

At the 2006 Forum summit, Temaru raised the issue of re-inscription of French Polynesia on the UN’s list of non-self governing territories, to which the French
responded by publicly saying French Polynesia already had the potential for self-determination (see Chapter 5). It was at this summit that the Forum gave associate status to French Polynesia (along with New Caledonia). Temaru once again called for Forum support for re-inscription of French Polynesia at the 2007 Forum summit, also calling for a ‘Tahiti Nui’ Accord, along the lines of the Noumea Accord of New Caledonia. Doubtless because of the constantly alternating leadership between pro-France groups and the pro-independence Temaru, the 2007, 2008 and 2009 Forum Communiqués make no mention of French Polynesia’s political issues. The 2010 Communiqué welcomed French Polynesia’s continuing interest in deepening its engagement with the Forum, after referring to New Caledonia’s self-determination process under the Noumea Accord. Once again, in 2011, the Forum leaders ‘recalled their 2004 decision to support the principle of French Polynesia’s right to self-determination. They reiterated their encouragement to French Polynesia and France to seek an agreed approach on how to realise French Polynesia’s right to self-determination’ (Auckland Communiqué 2011). The 2012 Communiqué repeated this language, noting that the election of a new French government ‘opened fresh opportunities for a positive dialogue between French Polynesia and France on how best to realise French Polynesia’s right to self-determination’ (Rarotonga Communiqué 2012).

Australia was silent on the issue until very recently, when it enunciated a public position, again, like that on New Caledonia’s membership of the Forum which was slightly different to that of Forum members. Marles made a rare comment on the question of French Polynesian independence on 17 April 2012, interestingly on the eve of French presidential elections. Responding to a call by Temaru for Australia’s support for French Polynesia’s independence, Marles referred to Australian support for the Forum’s position that French Polynesia had a right to self-determination. But he said Australia ‘very much’ supported France’s role in the South Pacific and would ‘follow France’s lead about how the process should play out best in French Polynesia’. He said that French Polynesia was not ready for self-determination yet (Marles 2012).

The PIF’s approach to the French collectivities is therefore ambiguous, and indications are that its hesitations arise from the inconclusive state of self-determination in the French entities, and discomfort with what it sees as France’s continued colonial presence. Just as Forum leaders were not swayed by the simple Flosse-led public relations program of the 1980s, but awaited concrete policy change (cessation of nuclear tests in 1996 and the conclusion of the Noumea Accord in 1998) before they responded to French overtures, so they are waiting for resolution of the long-term status of the French entities before welcoming them as full-fledged equals in relevant regional political bodies (PIF, MSG) (argued in Fisher 2010b). The Forums treatment of the French entities, separately to the dialogue arrangement with France, suggests that the Forum
would not want to see a situation develop where the French Pacific entities’ participation becomes a guise for French participation. The Forum is kept informed about the statutory evolution in French Polynesia, and has recognised, by keeping Wallis and Futuna at a different observer level, that the latter is in a category of its own.

This suggests that the PIF, the MSG, and the UN Decolonisation Committee, while relatively dormant in recent years on the French collectivities, maintain ongoing monitoring processes which could be activated if necessary to defend particular collectivity interests and focus international attention on any issues.

**France ‘in’ or ‘of’ the Pacific: Ongoing ambiguity**

A strand of debate amongst academics, related to France’s desire as a global power to be present in the Pacific, has been that of whether France is simply ‘in’ the Pacific, or whether it is also, or should be, ‘of’ the Pacific (a debate more fully explored in Fisher 2012a). The distinction is not merely semantic, but goes to the heart of how France wants to be seen in the region, and in the world. While there is little doubt that, by virtue of its sovereign collectivities, France is ‘in’ the region, academic discussion has focused on whether it, or even its collectivities, can or should be more ‘of’ or ‘from’ (the French ‘de’ means both) the region.

Jean-Marie Tjibaou gave France the benefit of the doubt. He told Jacques Lafleur, pro-France leader, in a televised panel discussion in 1983 that a big difference between Lafleur’s people and the Kanaks was that ‘We are from here and nowhere else, you are from here but also from somewhere else’ (TV 5 Panel Discussion 1983; Fraser 1990b; Cordonnier 1995a, 25). He appears to concede that the pro-France Caldoches were indeed from or ‘of’ the Pacific.

The question came under discussion at the height of regional opposition to France’s nuclear testing in French Polynesia, a time when France’s assertion of its presence in the South Pacific became a shrill. Régis Debray, speaking as Secretary-General of France’s High Council for the Pacific in 1987, demanded that France’s right ‘as a member of the Pacific family, on an equal footing [to other Pacific states], be recognised’ (Chesneaux 1987a, 1). At the same time, Hervé Coutau-Bégarie, while noting that France’s Pacific entities returned little revenue to the motherland, underlined that a principal benefit was that they ‘allowed France to be present in the Pacific’ (1987, 286).
While Jean Chesneaux acknowledges the undisputed sovereignty of France in the Pacific, its rights over extensive Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ) there and its permanent presence in its collectivities, he noted that this seemed inconsistent with its commitment to nuclear deterrence, which was at odds with Pacific policies of a nuclear free Pacific. While nuclear testing ensured France’s status as a nuclear power, he notes that it did not make it a Pacific nuclear power (Chesneaux 1987b,131). He ascribes to France a motivation that was first and foremost political, not economic, given the enormous expense of exploiting the nickel resource, and the relatively small percentages of trade with Australia and the region (French commercial interests were worth less than three per cent in Australia and one per cent of New Zealand markets in 1983). He refers to the irony of France’s global nuclear strategy, with its objectives defined thousands of kilometers away, being based on a technical presence in the Pacific, in ‘splendid isolation’. He questions the reigning ideas France adduced about the Pacific: that the Pacific was the centre of the world, the technological Pacific myth (nodules, space centres, aquaculture all in foreign or multinational hands), the Pacific as a theatre of Soviet–US confrontation, French–Anglo rivalry, and peaceful island communities subject to the covetous greed of Australia and New Zealand; all of which, according to Chesneaux, were incoherent myths of the mid 1980s (1987b, 208–13). He suggests that this idea of the Pacific did not reflect the reality, a reality France did not want to confront at the time.

While depicting France as an outsider in the region, Chesneaux notes that it was nonetheless a longstanding outsider and, as such, had an ongoing role in the region particularly in the provision of aid (1987a, 17). Indeed, because France is ‘in’ but not ‘of’ the Pacific, one could say that France needed to do more than others to provide development assistance. (And, as noted, its record so far has been modest.)

Even after the Matignon Accords were in place, and before the resumption of nuclear testing in the Pacific, regional analysts were drawing the distinction of France being ‘in’ as opposed to ‘of’ the Pacific.

In his brief but comprehensive paper on France and the South Pacific island countries, Stephen Bates clearly sees France as an outsider. As in the past, he believes France’s approach would primarily be dictated by its national interests, and its interests within Europe. Crucial decisions about the South Pacific would continue to be made on the other side of the globe. He warns about this, noting that ‘in any conflict between its national security interests in Europe and regional interest in the South Pacific, the former will inevitably take precedence’ (1990, 137). Because of this, France could do and say things that seemed incomprehensible to people in the Pacific. Bates uses the example
France in the South Pacific: Power and Politics

of France during the vexed 1980s, telling the Pacific island states to stay out of its internal affairs over New Caledonia and French Polynesia, and yet seeing no inconsistency in sending agents to New Zealand to attack a ship in its harbour.

Myriam Dornoy-Vurobaravu begins her 1994 volume *Perceptions of France in the South Pacific* with the observation that France was ‘essentially a European power and partner with expertise, not a Pacific country’ (1994, 1). She proceeds to illustrate this by examples of Gallicisms, including citing the French Minister for Co-operation in 1975 saying that France must be present everywhere in the world, ‘where her thinkers’ genius has given her a place without any relation to her demography or resources’; President Valéry Giscard d’Estaing saying ‘France is what is best’; President François Mitterrand referring to ‘this indefinable genius’ of France; and, Charles de Gaulle: ‘our action aims at linking objectives, which, because they are French, answer the needs of all men’. Régis Debray is once again cited as applying this kind of thinking to the Pacific, saying in 1986 ‘To demilitarise the Pacific would deprive it of Francophonie’ (Dornoy-Vurobaravu 1994, 1–3). Dornoy-Vurobaravu described Australia as considering itself as a Pacific country, and considering France as an external power (15).

Isabelle Cordonnier took the debate further, writing in 1995 that, while the French collectivities themselves were seen by Pacific island states as part of the region, the métropole was not. Taking the cue from Tjibaou’s words to Lafleur in 1983, she notes that in South Pacific eyes, you are an insider if you come from there and nowhere else, and that by dint of geography at least, Australia and New Zealand were from the Pacific and, therefore, ‘legitimate’ Pacific countries (Cordonnier 1995a, 25). Cordonnier sees such differences as explaining some of the critical ambiguities in French policy, for example, how it could support nuclear testing in the region as an instrument of France’s grandeur and status as a middle global power, in the face of negative perceptions in the region based on fear that testing would provoke a spiral of terror in case of nuclear war (1995a, 20).

The old Gallic–Anglo Saxon distinction often made by France was seen as a factor forever condemning it to being an outsider. In 1998, Nic Maclellan wrote of France’s tendency to attribute opposition to it and its policies, variously to Australian and New Zealand’s own imperialist ambitions, or even to a ‘conspiracy’ of customary law of the Pacific islands and the Biblical morality of the London missionaries (Maclellan and Chesneaux 1998). French Admiral Antoine Sanguinetti in 1985 wrote that France’s Pacific presence was motivated simply by remaining in the region after the British had left (Sanguinetti 1985, 32). Today it is common for French officials and longstanding French settlers in New Caledonia to dismiss the rest of the Pacific as ‘Anglo-Saxon’.

Maclellan sees this kind of defensiveness by France as ignoring the sense of regionalism, of belonging to the South Pacific, that made the settler states in
Australia and New Zealand part of the region, as much as France remained ‘an outsider’ (Maclellan and Chesneaux 1998, 194). In 2005, he commented that the ‘sense of belonging — of looking to the skies, seeing the Southern Cross, and feeling at home — underlies much of the regional opposition to France’s nuclear policy’, noting this emotion against ‘outsiders’ from Paris rang just as true in Australia and New Zealand as Pacific countries, as in the islands (Maclellan 2005e, 365). Himself a longstanding opponent to nuclear testing in the Pacific, Maclellan describes regional opposition to nuclear testing as not so much due to quantitative measures of distance but to a qualitative political and cultural unity that had developed in the region. The formation of the PIF showed that this unity was largely cemented as a response to the dissonant French approach. Maclellan sees it as impossible for France, after nuclear testing, to be anything other than an outsider: ‘After Moruroa, France can intervene in Pacific affairs, can make a valuable contribution. But it cannot be part of the region — it can only participate from outside the region, as others do … France can no longer pretend to be a power of the Pacific, but must act as a power in the Pacific’ (my italics; 1998, 240). In 2005 he wrote that the nuclear issue was not closed, with continuing issues such as dumping of waste; passage of waste ships; uranium mining; testing of missile defence satellite systems threatening the multilateralism of space; and, issues over the long-term effects of past nuclear testing, where French positions were at odds with those of the Pacific (2005e, 365).

Another Australian analyst, Graeme Dobell, when writing in 2007 of China’s activities in the region, lumped France along with China and Japan as external powers or outside players who acted as though they wanted a stake in the region (2007, 9). One prominent Australian think tank in 2009 made tentative plans to convene a regional conference on outside powers in the Pacific, specified as France, China and Japan. The perception is, therefore, strong.

Nathalie Mrgudovic, in her major 2008 work on France in the Pacific, notes that while France claimed to have been ‘of’ the Pacific until the end of the 1980s, France has since pursued a more nuanced approach of claiming simply to be ‘in’ the Pacific (2008, 37), while working for the integration of its entities ‘in their region’ (her italics, 240). She notes the view of the Pacific islands states that France was not ‘of’ the region (360) and also that, in the context of the RAMSI force, France was an ‘extra-regional’ power (314).

Former Prime Minister Michel Rocard writes in his preface to Mrgudovic’s work that France had moved from the detested colonising power that detonated bombs in the Pacific to a status more like a ‘big sister’ to the region, rejecting arbitrary dominations, accompanying ‘its former territories’ in their progress towards autonomy much to the ‘relief’ of the bigger powers Australia and New Zealand (13–14). He similarly exaggerates the reaction of regional states, saying that the PIF, which was explicitly created to shun France in the region, had
become one ‘of the firmest defenders and even seekers of our presence’ (15). This idea of being a big sister to the region continues a certain ambiguity about its role: France wanting to project itself as one of the family, but ever conscious of its larger power status.

Perceptions that France is not ‘of’ the region are not immutable. It is within the power of France, if it so chooses, to change the perception that it is an outsider to the region. For example, in 2008, Maclellan analysed one of the ongoing issues, compensation over the health of those affected by nuclear testing, in terms very damaging to France (pointing out that France, while professing to be compensating for damages, had written legislation which excluded large numbers of potential beneficiaries, see Maclellan 2008a). But in April 2009, France announced compensation measures for those whose health had been affected by its testing in the Pacific, potentially covering 150,000 former workers, and on favourable terms which removed the onus on the worker to prove cause. Chapter 8 examines areas where France might address aspects of its regional involvement.

When viewed against the current and continuing motivation of France to retain its Pacific collectivities, i.e., being able to claim to be a sovereign indigenous power in affairs affecting the Atlantic, Caribbean, Pacific and Indian Oceans, and indeed as the only such European power, representing ‘tropical Europe’ (Aldrich and Connell 1989, 164 and see Chapter 7), it is important for France to continue to work to alter the widely shared perception amongst non-French and French analysts alike, that it is an outsider in the region, so that it truly can project itself partly as a Pacific power. France appears to be addressing this issue by repeatedly claiming that it wants its collectivities to engage more in the region, perhaps seeing its collectivities as proxies for its own interests (a prospect hardly likely to be welcomed by neighbouring Pacific island states), but, as discussed earlier, without giving them the wherewithal to participate effectively in their own right in the region. In this area as in many others, however, it may be that France prefers a certain ambiguity in its position.

Conclusion

In the 1990s and early 2000s, France has directed considerable diplomatic energy towards improving its standing in the Pacific. It has done this first, by developing its own range of regional and relevant international links, conducting regular summit meetings between French and Pacific island leaders; becoming, selectively, engaged in the UN Decolonisation Committee; holding regular annual meetings of its senior regional representatives; and, expanding defence co-operation links. France has increasingly drawn senior Australians into this
network of activity, or hitched itself onto existing Australian and New Zealand initiatives (such as fisheries surveillance and coral reef protection), boosting the impact at very little cost. Thus, for example, Defence Minister Hervé Morin, visiting the region in 2008, is cited by *Flash d’Océanie* on 15 September 2008, as saying ‘the two main Pacific powers are Australia and France’.

Second, France has said it wants its own Pacific collectivities to participate in the region, in both the SPC and the PIF, and some other CROP organisations, albeit without providing them the training, regular networking and travel, and resources they need to do so effectively. It is encouraging them to work more closely together.

Third, France has funded regional activities, although at an extremely modest level, primarily through the SPC, the PIF and its small, and decreasing, South Pacific Fund.

Finally, France has been a major player in developing EU links with the region, seeking, as Karis Muller describes it, to ‘Europeanise’ its geopolitical ambitions in the Pacific (Muller 2010, 13). Once again, the results have been mixed (and analysed more fully in Fisher 2012c). Its own collectivities have an ambiguous view of their unique EU connection, largely stemming from their geographic isolation and local preoccupations and sensitivities, thereby leaving to France the shaping of EU activity in the region. In this context, some of the privileges that France has won for the collectivities, within the EU, have been perceived as dubious: their ability to vote in the European parliament is seen as irrelevant, and carrying risky reciprocal consequences in terms of voting rights on their territory; freedom of movement, albeit not completely reciprocal, is seen as risking influxes of Europeans competing with locals for jobs, thereby heightening immigration concerns; economic EU access privileges have limited value given the hold of French custom and capture of the market; pressure to introduce the Euro is seen as a backward step by pro-independence groups, particularly in New Caledonia; and, access to EU development co-operation is limited by the very prosperity the French collectivities enjoy. Dealing with all of this locks the French collectivities into the European system, crowding out the effect of tentative forays into integration within the Pacific region, whatever France’s rhetoric promoting regional ‘insertion’. One benefit from the local perspective is the recourse the French collectivities have, through the EU association, to EU mediation and political pressure agencies such as the EU parliament and the Human Rights Court. As the successful EU Human Rights Court decision on the restricted electorate for New Caledonia has shown, these instruments are potentially useful for the collectivities in pursuing grievances against the French State.
The EU’s direct engagement with Pacific island countries has also been mixed. While funding pledges sound impressive, effective implementation on the ground does not have a good record, and has been geared through bilateral and other initiatives, rather than the regional organisations such as the SPC (though Fisher 2012c, 22 notes a shift in 2010). EU attempts at replacing ACP aid arrangements with economic partnerships have similarly foundered on their inconsistency with other regional ventures and arrangements, such as PACER and PICTA, which are intrinsically not attractive to France or the French entities. Whether these activities are the result of well intentioned but misdirected largesse, or efforts to secure Pacific island co-operation away from existing regional activity, is not clear (and this question is addressed in Fisher 2012c).

The broader response by Pacific island state leaders to France’s efforts has not been one of unalloyed enthusiasm. The UN Decolonisation Committee, PIF and MSG — all of whom have overlapping Pacific island memberships — maintain a watching brief on the implementation of the Noumea Accord in New Caledonia. While the PIF has so far stopped short of formally calling for re-inscription of French Polynesia in the UN Decolonisation Committee, its summits have underlined the importance of France and local leaders agreeing to work out self-determination measures, and have provided an opportunity for French Polynesian President Temaru to vent his frustrations about his quashed leadership, and to renew his calls for re-inscription of French Polynesia in the UN decolonisation system.

Just as regional leaders waited for significant policy change (ceasing nuclear testing and negotiation of the Noumea Accord in New Caledonia) from the colonial French power before accepting the French Pacific entities as guests into their Forum, so they are likely to await the outcome of a post-Noumea Accord future in New Caledonia, and democratic handling of instability in French Polynesia, before truly welcoming the French entities as equal partners within their own political organisations. From the regional perspective, as much as for France and its three Pacific entities, New Caledonia has become the pre-eminent French Pacific collectivity, and outcomes in French Polynesia will depend increasingly on solutions in New Caledonia.

The next chapter will examine France’s changing motivations guiding its policies, before turning to security risks that may present to the region, along with identifying areas of further regional engagement and possible alternative outcomes in New Caledonia.