



Department of Pacific Affairs In Briefs: A Snapshot

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Introduction

Recently, the Department of Pacific Affairs (DPA) conducted a survey of our readership to evaluate the relevance, quality and impact of our In Briefs.¹ In Briefs are the DPA's flagship publication series, aimed at enhancing understanding of the Pacific, building research capacity and amplifying voices from the region. The survey sought to systematically capture data about how our publications are being received and used by readers as well as readers' topic preferences. This data was intended to complement quantitative download metrics and periodic feedback from individual readers.

Based on the survey responses, this In Brief reflects on the impact and value of our series and provides insights into its reach and how this is changing over time, and the topics highlighted by our survey respondents in the region. We begin by discussing the role, intention and format of the series. We then discuss the survey we conducted to gauge our readership's engagement. Finally, we consider who is writing DPA In Briefs. Moving forward, our intention is to conduct regular readership attitude surveys to gauge changes over time. This will enable appropriate adjustments to our editorial approach.

DPA In Briefs

DPA publications are integral to our engagement with the region. They also play a vital role in strengthening Pacific research culture and connecting Pacific research to the rest of the policy and academic worlds.

Through our In Brief series, the DPA seeks to address topics of interest to a wide audience of academics, policymakers, practitioners and others interested in governance, state and society in the contemporary Pacific. In Briefs range across disciplines including, but not limited to, political science, anthropology, human geography, law, gender studies, development studies and international relations, with a central focus of advancing Pacific studies. By definition, In Briefs are intended to be concise summaries of research or other developments on issues relevant to the contemporary Pacific. They are also presented in a style and language accessible to a generalist audience. In Briefs differ from blogs in that they are peer reviewed by researchers or practitioners from around the region with relevant expertise and experience.

We publish In Briefs both online and in print. These are distributed to a very broad range of readers. In addition to an electronic mailing list with approximately 1,200 addresses, we also provide printed copies to around 180 recipients across the region, including embassies, universities and other educational institutions, government organisations, NGOs, media outlets and others. We are committed to providing printed copies to reach readership communities in isolated areas or areas where internet access is limited.

All our papers are open access; that is, they are free to download and distributed free of charge in printed format. They are hosted online at The Australian National University's [Open Research Repository](#).

The survey — our readership

The survey probed readers on how they use our publications; the topics covered; the quality, relevance and accessibility of our In Briefs; and their preferred format. In total, we received 47 responses. The small number of responses is an obvious limitation to our study, but we hope to increase response rates in future iterations of the survey.

Most of those surveyed (70.2%) receive the publications as individuals, while 29.8% receive them through their organisation. This may be an artefact of how the survey was conducted; it was sent to our electronic mailing list, which contains mostly individual rather than organisational addresses. Our printed copies are sent almost exclusively to organisations.

The survey asked how readers currently find information about Pacific-related themes. Most (68.1%) receive such information through mainstream media (newspapers, radio), with 57.4% receiving information through social media (e.g. Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, X, etc.). A smaller proportion (42.6%) receive such information via their workplace or educational institution, with a smaller minority (12.8%) receiving it through their local library.

Most of those surveyed (95.7%) read the In Briefs themselves, with 44.7% distributing them to others. 61.7% use them for their research, 17% use them in their teaching, 78.7% use them to keep up to date with issues relating to the region and 53.2% recommend them to others to read (Figure 1).

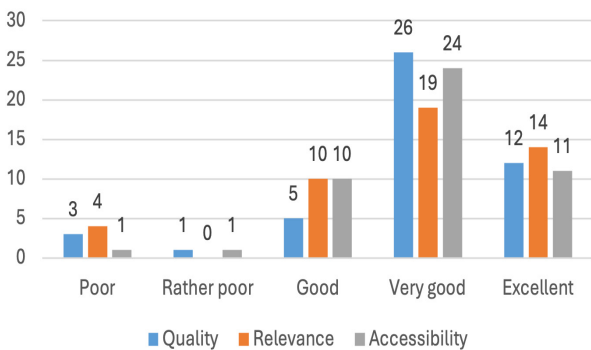
Figure 1: How do you use our publications (n=47)?



For the majority of respondents (72.3%), the topics covered in the In Briefs are often of interest. For 25.5%, the topics are sometimes of interest, and for 2.2% the topics are rarely of interest. For the latter two groups, we asked what topics they would like to see covered more often. Topics mentioned included climate; the environment and natural resources; security, governance and geopolitics; and developmental challenges.

When asked to rate the quality, relevance and accessibility of our In Briefs on a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 is poor and 5 is excellent, the majority rated them in category 4, with category 5 the second most chosen (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Quality, relevance and accessibility



The majority of those surveyed (87.2%) prefer to receive the publications electronically through an emailed quarterly newsletter — this is again probably an artefact of the way the survey was conducted, as discussed. The majority (68.9%) would like to receive In Briefs as they are currently provided, in PDF format. A minority (12.8%) would like them to be readable online in html format, and 14.9% had no preference.

The top five countries where our readers are located are Australia, the US, Papua New Guinea, New Zealand and China, in that order.

Our authorship

The possibility of publishing with the DPA is open to all authors, not solely those affiliated with the DPA. Our editorial policy is to improve the inclusiveness of our authorship, particularly in terms of gender and authors from the Pacific.

During the Pacific Research Partnership (PRP) Phase II (July 2022–mid-October 2025), 53% of the 193 authors of all DPA publications have been women, and 44% have had Pacific Island heritage. This contrasts with 47% women and 32% Pacific Island-heritage of the 447 authors in the PRP Phase I (October 2017–June 2022). These rises demonstrate the increasing participation of Pacific Islanders and women in analysing matters of significance in the region. Our efforts to improve inclusivity are evidently paying off, as demonstrated by this increase in targeted groups during the PRP Phase II, and these efforts will be continued as we move forward.

The future

While based on a relatively small sample, the survey provides a useful snapshot of our readership and their views. We are grateful to those who participated in the survey. We shall take their views on board and will endeavour to cover those topics requested by respondents. In this spirit, we welcome submissions relating to these themes of climate; the environment and natural resources; security, governance and geopolitics; and developmental challenges. In Briefs are central to research in and about the Pacific, and we will continue to prioritise publishing Pacific voices addressing topics of current interest to researchers, policymakers and other stakeholders in the region.

Endnote

- 1. The DPA’s publications are supported by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade under the Pacific Research Partnership Phase II.

DPA In Briefs catalogue Information on how to submit



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