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Embassy of Australia

Washington



**NEW ZEALAND
EMBASSY**

22 February 2024

The Honourable Mike Johnson
Speaker of the House
US House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honourable Charles Schumer
Senate Majority Leader
US Senate
Washington, DC 20515

The Honourable Hakeem Jeffries
House Minority Leader
US House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honourable Mitch McConnell
Senate Minority Leader
US Senate
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Johnson, Minority Leader Jeffries, Majority Leader Schumer, and Minority Leader McConnell:

The Ambassadors of Australia and New Zealand strongly encourage the inclusion of the Compact of Free Association (COFA) Amendments Act of 2023 (H.J.Res.96/S.J.Res.48) in the next available legislative vehicle. The COFA funding is vital to safeguarding our mutual interests in the Pacific.

Australia and New Zealand welcome the United States' long-standing commitment to the Pacific. The Compacts of Free Association have been a key pillar of the United States' engagement in the region for over 40 years. The Compacts are mutually supportive of our two countries' enduring partnerships with and significant assistance to other Pacific Island nations.

The Freely Associated States, the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI), the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), and the Republic of Palau have emphasized the importance they place on their Compacts with the United States. The COFA agreements have long been an important piece of architecture in the Pacific and of strategic importance to the United States and likeminded partners. Successive United States administrations have also acknowledged the importance of the agreements for securing defence access in the western Pacific.

The timely passage of the COFA Amendments Act, which we understand enjoys strong, bipartisan support in both chambers, is imperative to uphold our mutual interests in a vital region for our three countries. Failure to pass

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the Act would have severe consequences. This includes heightened geopolitical and economic vulnerability of the three US-aligned Freely Associated States in the Pacific as well as impacting the United States' reputation in the region. It will also have a broader strategic impact throughout the Indo-Pacific.

Without the economic assistance provided by the United States under these agreements, or if such assistance continues to be delayed, the Freely Associated States will face even greater economic, fiscal and strategic uncertainty, and face significant pressure to look for sources of funding that they believe are more reliable.

The COFAs stand as the United States' flagship initiative in the region, crucial for maintaining US presence and influence in the Pacific Islands. As your closest friends in the Pacific, we are committed to seeing the United States remains engaged and active in this critically important region.

Yours sincerely



HE The Hon Dr Kevin Rudd AC



HE The Hon Mr Bede Corry

Cc: Representative Steve Scalise, Majority Leader of the House of Representatives

Senator Dick Durbin, Senate Majority Whip

Senator John Thune, Senate Minority Whip

Representative Tom Emmer, House Majority Whip

Representative Katherine Clark, House Minority Whip

Senate Committee on Appropriations

House Committee on Appropriations

Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources

House Committee on Natural Resources

Senate Committee on Foreign Relations

House Committee on Foreign Affairs

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~~Senate Committee on Armed Services~~

House Committee on Armed Services

~~Senate Committee on Rules~~

House Committee on Rules

Senate Select Committee on Intelligence

House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence

House Select Committee on Strategic Competition between the United States and the Chinese Communist Party