

29 August, 2014

PRESS RELEASE

PIURN Memorandum of Cooperation launched



A Memorandum of Cooperation (MOC) was signed in Apia, Samoa for the Pacific Islands Universities Research Network (PIURN) on 29 August, 2014.

Present at the launch were Professor Rajesh Chandra, USP's Vice Chancellor & President, Professor John Bythell, USP's Deputy Vice-Chancellor Research and International, Professor Leapai So'o, National University Samoa (NUS) Vice-Chancellor, Desmond Lee Hang, NUS, Dean of the Faculty of Science, Ms. Fadhila Lemeur, PACE-NET Plus Project, Manager, Professor Jean-Francois Marini, PACE-NET PLUS, Project Coordinator and Associate Professor Ioana Chen-Mow of NUS.

USP's Director of Research and co-Director of PIURN Dr Jito Vanualailai said the document spells out clearly how Pacific Universities can work together while maintaining their unique identity, independence and intellectual property.

"The Preamble of the MOC beautifully reflects this and I quote, 'Universities that endorse this Memorandum of Understanding agree to use their combined resources in pursuit of a common goal to strengthen research and research training capability in the Pacific region without compromise to their autonomy or intellectual property rights entitlements.'" Dr. Jito said.

“With this sense of unity, we are excited about the future. Indeed, as we reflect on the MOC today, work is already underway to bring into reality the ideals of the MOC. The first big-scale major PIURN activity will be the 1st PIURN Conference to be held in Noumea, thanks to our colleagues at the University of New Caledonia (UNC), who secured funding from the French Government,” he noted.

“The fund will be used to send our researchers to this conference. Fittingly, the theme of this conference deals with the challenges facing the communities of the Pacific countries, from societal to land issues,” Dr. Jito said.

He said the PIURN Conference will be an annual event that will hopefully someday become a fixed event in the calendars of all universities in the Pacific region.

“While we prepare for the conference, PIURN is also busy working with the Technical Centre for Agriculture and Rural Cooperation (CTA) in enhancing the skills of our researchers. Under the umbrella of PIURN, 4 Pacific Islanders are now in Australia attending a workshop and conference in agriculture. And PIURN and CTA will hold a workshop in food security in November this year for all member universities,” he noted.

In the meantime, PIURN members themselves have agreed to collaborate in three areas affecting the region most:

- Environment & Climate Change;
- Biology & Medicine; and
- Food and Agriculture.

“The future is exciting. Our way forward is captured by our logo - showing our war canoes sailing in our ocean, embraced by PI, the symbol of science. Surely with this logo, which also captures the warrior spirit of our forefathers, we will succeed,” he said.

USP’S Deputy Vice-Chancellor Research and International and Acting Deputy Vice-Chancellor Learning & Teaching and Student Support, Professor John Bythell said a regional network of Pacific Islands Universities was one of the recommendations of the first EU Pace Net project, which was aimed at achieving greater regional integration, communication and cooperation in areas of science and technology.

He said the aims of the network are also strongly supported in USP’s Strategic Plan 2013-18 which aims at greater engagement with the region and our communities across the Pacific.

“In fact we specifically aim to ‘Provide and maintain leadership in Pacific Academic and Research Networks’. So I’m very glad to attend this event, which allows me to tick off a successful achievement of one of my own KPIs! But of course the launch of PIURN is the beginning not the end of a long journey and a lot of effort by many,” he said.

Professor Bythell noted that the establishment of the PIURN was agreed between the 11 founding Universities in Suva in July, 2013.

“PIURN is designed to help coordinate and support collaborative research, foster exchange of ideas, sharing of research policies and procedures and also to address regional policy issues with respect to research priorities,” he noted.

Profesor Bythell acknowledged Dr Vanualailai and his co-director Dr Anne Roualt of UNC for all their efforts in negotiating and drafting the MOC.

He confirmed that there will be invitations for other Universities, notably the University of Guam and Solomon Islands National University to join PIURN as equal members once it is founded.

Professor Bythell added that initiatives such as PIURN and PACE Net Plus, are closely linked and both are aimed at strengthening our interactions and awareness of the issues faced by the peoples of the region, but more importantly agreeing on a way forward and using the collective power to push forward the implementation of approaches to solve these pressing issues.

“There are also other initiatives that we will seek collaborations with such as the Universities Network for Islands Sustainability based at the Okinawa Institute for Science and Technology, Japan and linked to the University of Ryukyus,” he noted.

“Again, the PIURN network will give us the base to enable this and similar international collaborations. I sincerely hope that during SIDS 2014 we can move beyond the awareness raising and move on to developing concrete actions, and that PIURN will be seen as a key part of the mechanisms to drive forward this agenda in the Pacific,” Professor Bythell added.

For further queries please contact Dr. Jito Vanualailai on (679) 3232661, (679) 9989576 or email vanualailai@usp.ac.fj at Research Office, The University of the South Pacific, Suva, Fiji