



Agenda item 24: Visa Waiver

Recommendations

The PIDC Regular Annual Meeting is invited to:

1. **note** the different visa waiver arrangements in the Pacific;
 2. **note** the increasing risks of visa waiver arrangements; and
 3. **encourage** members to adopt best practises in the management of visa waiver programmes.
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Purpose

1. To discuss visa waiver arrangements in the Pacific and the potential risks it poses to national and regional security.

Background

2. Pacific Island states generally introduce visa waiver programmes to enable tourists and business travellers from particular countries to travel without a visa, subject to certain conditions. Visa waiver schemes rely on relationships of trust between the countries to ensure that visitors return home.
3. The unilaterally lifting or substantial easing of visitor visa requirements for tourists from countries out of the region (i.e. without the need for reciprocity) is normally driven with the view to facilitate tourism to the countries and generate revenue.

Risks

4. The management of visitor movement requires a delicate balance between facilitation and control as, while governments seek to streamline and speed up the issuance of visas for bona fide arriving persons, there is a need to introduce control mechanisms to prevent abuse.
5. More recently, the fear of terrorism has led many governments to tighten their visa requirements. A further reason why some countries continue to maintain strict visa regulations is their concern over potential cultural, social and environmental impact of large numbers of tourist.

Financial Implications

6. There are no financial implications identified for activities discussed under this agenda item although Members may propose specific activities as a result of discussions.

Conclusion

7. The Marshall Islands, Solomon Islands and PNG will share their respective experiences in how they manage visa waiver programmes and how they plan to sustain these into the future. The Pacific is well known for its generous visa on arrival arrangements. Whether these arrangements are sustainable or whether Pacific Island states need to consider developing a stronger capacity to screen impending arrivals is a sovereign issue that has to be managed nationally. Members will consequently have the opportunity to discuss best practises and approaches that can be adopted to manage visa waiver programmes.

8. Members will note that there are a number of activities discussed in the Annual Work Plan for 2017/18 that discuss enhancing information sharing and strengthening Pacific Islands profiling to reduce identified risks.