

Pacific regionalism... it's tricky

By Tess Newton Cain and Matthew Dornan

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It does not come as a surprise to learn that the summit to discuss Pacific regional architecture that was due to be held in Sydney in March has now been [postponed](#) – [apparently 'indefinitely'](#). The short lead-in time between its [announcement](#) in October and the proposed time slot was always going to be a significant hurdle for DFAT. Their ability to persuade leaders from the region to attend was further hampered by the government reshuffle that saw Brett Mason replaced as Parliamentary Secretary by Steven Ciobo, whose [Pacific experience is limited](#).

Whilst there were some who viewed this Australia/Fiji sponsored initiative [positively](#), it would appear that the more widely held perception in the region was that this summit was neither necessary nor appropriate – an argument we [articulated](#) when the summit was first announced.

The next best opportunity to discuss issues pertaining to regional architecture will be at the Pacific Islands Forum leaders' meeting to be held in Port Moresby in July. However, this is not as straightforward as it sounds. As things currently stand, Fiji has declined to rejoin the Pacific Islands Forum so there is no guarantee (or indication) that Prime Minister Bainimarama will attend that meeting. The Fiji government moved quickly to prepare a position paper outlining its proposals for refashioning PIF membership and has been busy canvassing support from others, including Tuvalu and [Tonga](#). But the anticipated forum for this discussion was a summit in Sydney with Fiji as co-sponsor not a Forum Leaders' meeting in Port Moresby with Peter O'Neill in the host's chair.

It all goes to show: Pacific regionalism is tricky, even for big players like Australia and Fiji.

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