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40th AUS-PNG BUSINESS FORUM & TRADE EXPO

OPENING REMARKS

SUSIL'S NELSON KONGOI

President of BCPNG

ACCOLATES

Hon. John Rosso, Acting Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea

Ms. Charlotte Blundell, First Assistant Secretary-Pacific Economic and Infrastructure Division,
Office of the Pacific, The Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

Mr. Vaughn Mills, President of Australia Papua New Guinea Business Council

Ministers of State and Members of Parliament

Members of our Business Council's

Delegates

Ladies and Gentleman

We are delighted Honorable Pat Conroy federal Minister for Pacific Island Affairs and Defense Industry will join us later today.

It is an absolute privilege to welcome you all to the 40th Australia Papua New Guinea Business Forum & Trade Expo. Apart from the annual bilateral meetings since 1975, this forum is the longest continued engagement of promoting Australia PNG relations. This event carries special significance as Papua New Guinea celebrates 50 years of nationhood alongside four decades of enduring business dialogue between our two nations.

It presents an important opportunity to reflect on our collective journey, acknowledge our achievements, and chart a forward-looking agenda focused on strengthening partnerships, trade, and investment for the years ahead.

INTRODUCTION

In order for the Kumul to display elegance, vitality and strength, like all birds, the strength of its wings must prevail. This basic observation is central in the mythology of several regions to describe the necessity of partnership. Where the absence of collaboration, teamwork, bung will not make the family strong: husband and wife; clans and the tribe will be divided. Therefore, the wings must rise, function and operate in unison to display the majestic Kumul. The vibrancy of PNG Australia business relationship depicts this and has immensely contributed to the prosperity of Australia and Papua New Guinea.

2025 THEME

By blending development aspirations, people, culture, training and business models, we are able to control the pace of disruption so as to continue our co-existence of traditional values and embracing technology such as artificial intelligence. The next two days will shine a spotlight on these key themes shaping our partnership and the future of our economies.

We continue to unlock opportunities in agribusiness, regional trade, advancing digital transformation and innovation, promoting climate-resilient strategies, and supporting major initiatives like the PNG NRL Franchise. Through these conversations, we aim to capture the energy, enterprise, and creativity of wantoks that are driving these tremendous opportunities.

With over 30 exhibitions and an anticipated 800 visitors across two days, the stage is set for a productive and memorable event. I extend my sincere appreciation to all our speakers, exhibitors, and guests joining us from Papua New Guinea, Australia, and beyond. I wish you a successful Forum filled with meaningful dialogue, valuable connections, and lasting partnerships.

KEY MESSAGE

I would like to cover three critical themes that will define our relations for the next 10 years.

These are;

1. **The 100 000 (tbc) strong PNG Diaspora;**
2. Security in an increasingly volatile region; and,
3. Enhancing socio-economic growth through Rugby League and Sports in general

The 100 000 strong PNG Diaspora

I had the privilege of engaging with the PNG community at the Gold Coast last year on how best they may actively contribute in a trade and investment relations. It was gratifying to hear their voices speak confidently on shaping tourism, logistics, agriculture, resource projects, and in creative and innovative sectors. Whether it was thousands of tradies, SME tour operators or cyber security experts, these PNG Aussies are fully invested for a better Papua New Guinea. Yesterday, their voices were heard again, at the first Coral Sea Dialogue, an engagement exclusively to promote the PNG Diaspora as a vital bilateral builder. It's truly exciting that government representatives are keen to facilitate removing barriers for their participation. There was also constructive conversations on how best to apply local led partnerships in the Australian Aid Program. And specifically relating to my 8-5 job at IBBM, smart low hanging fruit opportunities are present in accessing suppliers and workforce in this important community. Indeed, the future looks bright if we are able to bring our wantoks for the next 40-year journey where the possibility of technology will have no barriers.

Security in an increasingly volatile region

We produced the *Business Protection Report* earlier this year to inform Government on urgent protection measures. Key findings included heightened survival crimes, cybersecurity threats, and weak enforcement coverage across the country. There is also an increase in transnational crimes where black economy industries are growing in sophistication and resources. The report calls for an urgent, coordinated strategy centered on strong public-private partnerships to stabilize the business environment. Priority actions include expanding enforcement resources, strengthening the National Cyber Security Center, implementing targeted youth employment programs, safeguarding critical infrastructure, and establishing a Copyright and Cultural Rights Commission to protect PNG's intellectual property. This forum must actively participate in bilateral security and defense conversations as malicious cyber-attacks and transnational crime actors undermine the markets performance and therefore the market must be protected if it is to prosper.

Enhancing socio-economic growth through Rugby League and Sports in general

The PNG NRL project is not just a sporting novelty but a strategic, transformative program with deep social, cultural, and economic significance. The initiative comprises two key components: the "shiny bit," which includes events, games, tourism, and international exposure;

and the “back end,” focused on infrastructure, development pathways, and long-term sustainability. A major highlight is the \$300 million investment in development pathways, seen as critical for the program’s viability beyond its initial 10-year funding. It also presents an opportunity to enhance public services, such as transport, immigration, and city infrastructure—addressing gaps like the lack of reliable transport after 7pm in Port Moresby.

Perhaps the most important part of the NRL initiative, will inspire other sporting codes to initiate similar partnerships with other Australian Sporting Competitions. Ultimately, these sorts of projects call for collaborative stakeholder alignment to effectively plan and implement sustainable sports development comprising of business methods, technology, science and new jobs, making it a powerful vehicle to drive lasting socio-economic impact across the country.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The Business Council of PNG remains committed to working hand-in-hand with the Australia PNG Business Council and all stakeholders to ensure that we continue on the path of sustainable development.

So I reiterate, like the majestic Kumul, the wings of PNG-Australia business relations must rise and prevail together.

Thank you.