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Pacific Statistics Methods Board Meeting

Summary Report and Outcomes

6 November 2020

Virtual meeting hosted by SPC

Noumea, New Caledonia

Prepared by the
Statistics for Development Division (SDD) of the
Pacific Community (SPC)

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List of abbreviations

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics	PSSC	Pacific Statistics Standing Committee
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade	RMI	Republic of the Marshall Islands
HIES	Household Income and Expenditure Survey	SDD	Statistics for Development Division (SPC)
HOPS	Heads of Pacific Planning and Statistics	SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
MICS	Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey	SIAP	Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific
NSO	National Statistics Office	SPC	Pacific Community
PICTs	Pacific Island countries and territories	TYPSS	Ten-Year Pacific Statistics Strategy
PSMB	Pacific Statistics Methods Board	UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund

The Pacific Statistics Methods Board (PSMB) met on 6 November 2020. It was a virtual meeting hosted by SPC, Noumea, and was chaired by Vince Galvin. The meeting was held using Zoom and the meeting documents are accessible here: <https://sdd.spc.int/events/2020/11/6th-PSMB-meeting>. This was the third PSMB meeting for 2020, following an interim meeting on 9 and 11 September, and the first meeting of the year in July (delayed from April due to COVID-19 restrictions).

Participants	<p>Board members:</p> <p>Melanesia – Kemueli Naiqama, Fiji</p> <p>Micronesia – Frederick de Brum, Marshall Islands (substitution for Guam)</p> <p>Polynesia – Viliami Konifelenisi Fifita, Tonga (Deputy Chair)</p> <p>Small NSOs – Ipia Gadabu (PSSC Chair)</p> <p>Australian Bureau of Statistics – Bruce Fraser</p> <p>Statistics New Zealand – Vince Galvin (Chair)</p> <p>UN agencies – James Kaphuka (UNICEF)</p> <p>Observers:</p> <p>Marshall Islands – Scott Keju, Economic Policy, Planning and Statistics Office</p> <p>Pacific Community (SPC) – Epeli Waqavonovono, David Abbott, Michael Sharp, Gloria Mathenge</p> <p>Samoa – Aliimuamua Malaefono Tau</p> <p>Stats NZ – Ofa Ketu'u, Tracey Savage</p> <p>World Bank – Kristen Himelein</p>
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Summary of proceedings

Welcome

1. The Chair welcomed everyone, in particular the participants from Marshall Islands and Samoa, who accepted the invitation extended to all Pacific Island National Statistics Offices to attend the meeting as a step towards increasing communication and engagement between PSMB and NSOs.

Agenda item 1: Proposal for the University of the South Pacific (USP) to establish a Centre of Excellence for Statistics at its Nauru campus

2. Ipia Gadabu, Director of Statistics, Nauru, and Chair of the Pacific Statistics Standing Committee (PSSC) presented the concept for a Centre of Excellence for Statistics to be established by USP and hosted at its Nauru campus. He noted a Centre of Excellence was the second of four key objectives for 2015–2017 previously identified by Pacific Heads of Planning and Statistics (HOPS).
3. The proposed Centre would support:
 - higher education and enrolments in statistics, thus addressing capacity shortfalls in PICTs;
 - innovation/supervision of experiments;
 - reform of statistics education in the region, validated by wide consultation;
 - increased coherence and relevance of regional statistics under TYPSS; and
 - improved reporting of progress against the Pacific SDG indicators.
4. The presentation included:
 - an outline of the curriculum and potential for online delivery of courses;
 - the draft legal/policy framework for the Centre;

- ICT issues; and
 - plans for engagement with users/beneficiaries to determine their needs.
5. Nauru is offering a home for the Centre and has approached USP, which is supportive of the concept and location, depending on the challenges to be addressed. The governance structure for the Centre will require discussion with USP but should reflect the university's current structures.

Discussion

6. PICT NSOs:
- acknowledged the potential benefits of a Centre of Excellence for the Pacific;
 - said there are many existing programmes in place, including USP courses on official statistics. USP's MBA also includes statistics requirements;
 - questioned the rationale for placing the Centre in Nauru, noting that hosting requires support;
 - asked about plans for accreditation of the Centre's courses, noting that PICTs have their own national Qualifications Authorities; and
 - suggested the proposal be discussed at the next HOPS meeting to allow all NSOs to provide input, given that some time has passed since HOPS approved the concept.
7. Ipia Gadabu said official statistics courses in the region are fragmented and do not address the full set of government priorities, such as fisheries and climate change. Most PICT NSOs are unable to look at these priorities because they are too small and lack the required resources. Consequently, there are shortfalls in reporting on Tier 2 and 3 SDG indicators.

There is potential for coordination of statistical collections in the environmental /fishery sectors, and development of better information in areas that drive government policy. In addition to USP, other potential partners for the Centre include the Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific (SIAP), though it is no longer part of PSSC.

8. Michael Sharp, SDD, agreed SIAP could be a logical partner if the Centre is to get off the ground.
9. Kristen Himelein, World Bank, said a Centre of Excellence could potentially be partially funded by the World Bank as part of a second-generation PACSTAT project in a few years' time. The World Bank would look at co-financing with development/bilateral partners, if others were interested.
10. The Chair said there was obvious interest in the concept of the Centre, but also questions about accreditation of the Centre's courses, the proposed location, and the role of the Centre in relation to existing statistical courses. He suggested Nauru could work with others to mature the proposal.

Agenda item 2: PSMB governance

11. This item focused on
- PSMB's report to PSSC, which will meet on 25–26 November 2020;
 - the upcoming HOPS process, including the review of PSMB after three years of operation;
 - PSMB's terms of reference (attached as Annex A of this report);
 - PSMB's decision-making process (e.g. what constitutes a quorum?); and
 - the status of PSMB subcommittees (retire, renew or propose new subcommittees).

Discussion

12. Tracey Savage (Stats NZ) said a PSMB subcommittee has been proposed to provide input to the SPC project on use of administrative data in PICTs (*Utilisation of administrative databases in census programmes of Pacific Island countries*). Under this project, there has been progress on a feasibility study with Tuvalu, including plans to establish an external advisory group. This subcommittee could provide the group.
13. Michael Sharp proposed retiring the HIES subcommittee, which was formed (PSMB meeting, Oct. 2018) to examine the issues raised as part of reviewing the RMI HIES experiment.

14. Ofa Ketu'u (Stats NZ) suggested that PSMB appoint a small subcommittee to review the TORs, and that the review should cover issues raised, such as the decision-making process, quorum and subcommittees.
15. In response to the Chair's request for volunteers for the proposed subcommittee, the following names were put forward: Vince and Ofa (Stats NZ), Ipia (PSSC Chair), Epeli (SDD Director) and Kristen (World Bank).
16. Ipia Gadabu raised questions about PSMB's role in relation to PSSC and TYPPS, including whether its role ends when the current phase of TYPPS ends. He suggested the review of PSMB's TOR should not take place until after the TYPPS review. The future of PSSC and PSMB should depend on the outcome of the TYPPS review, and this should be determined at HOPS.
17. The Chair noted there is no explicit reference to TYPPS in PSMB's TOR. The main context is that PSMB reports to PSSC and its role is reviewed after three years.
18. David Abbott (SDD) said the review of TYPPS has not yet happened, although DFAT aims to complete it before the end of the year. Part of the review will be to look at how the statistics governance structure set up by HOPS has worked, including the roles of PSMB, PSSC, and the Development Partners Group. SDD will let members know when the review will take place.
19. Ofa Ketu'u clarified that PSMB was created as part of the new regional statistics governance framework approved by HOPS in 2017. PSMB was not bound by the life of TYPPS. She agreed that the region's current statistical governance (HOPS, PSSC and PSMB) could be reviewed as part of the TYPPS review. While acknowledging the point made about the sequence of the reviews, she suggested the review of PSMB's TOR should proceed, noting the TYPPS review is yet to take place.
20. In reply to a question on whether PSMB's report to PSSC would be separate from the TOR subcommittee's report, the Chair said the report to PSSC could be distilled from that report. He suggested the TOR committee should be set up as discussed to achieve this input.

Agenda item 3: Next steps in progressing standards for measurement of non-monetary poverty and support for PICT decision-making in relation to SDG 1.2.2

21. Viliami Fifita, Tonga, said the SDGs emphasise multi-dimensional poverty (Indicator 1.2.2: Proportion of men, women and children of all ages living in poverty in all its dimensions according to national definitions). Poverty means different things to different groups of people. The various approaches used to measure non-monetary poverty identify different groups as poor.
22. Tonga used consensual deprivation indicators to produce a deprivation index. The process distinguished four groups: 1. Poor and deprived; 2. Non-poor; 3. Rising from poor; and 4. Falling into poverty, due to job losses, etc.
23. For PICTs, the advantages of the consensual approach (CA) include that it produces poverty measures that have face validity (they make sense to the population); it is adaptable to PICT contexts; it results in low measurement error; and it produces information relevant to policy-making to target deprived people.
24. CA does require investment in collecting and analysing new data that is devised to capture poverty rather than using data from other surveys, e.g. HIES, which were not designed specifically to measure poverty.
25. Free-of-charge technical assistance (TA) is available for PICTs wishing to implement CA for poverty measurement. Tonga's NSO is trying to set up a website that other countries can use to replicate CA methods. There are also papers and simple modules available. Tonga provided some training in 2017, but personnel have since turned over. Some notes on CA are available at: <https://sdd.spc.int/events/2020/11/6th-PSMB-meeting>
26. Tonga can link interested countries with TA without the need for PSMB to be involved. However, it would be useful if PSMB agrees that Tonga can provide assistance.

Discussion

27. Samoa asked if there were some examples of applying the CA method in the Pacific and also comparisons

with current methods for estimating non-monetary poverty.

28. There are reports on the Tonga NSO website, e.g. on disaggregation and small area estimation (which produces better information for policy makers). A paper has been published in a peer-reviewed journal. The NSO worked with the World Bank, which wanted to target households needing support for school fees. Consensual deprivation indicators were used to rank the whole population of Tonga in terms of poor/non poor.
29. The Chair thanked Tonga for the offer of support for other NSOs, and noted (for the benefit of new participants) that CA was presented and discussed at PSMB's inaugural meeting (May 2018).

Agenda item 4: Benefits of harmonisation of welfare statistics – Experience from the WAEMU Project

30. Kristen Himelein described a World Bank project to improve the frequency, timeliness, and quality of harmonised statistics for the West Africa Economic and Money Union (WAEMU). The project was requested by the central bank because of difficulties in getting comparable information from the eight countries originally involved, particularly poverty statistics.
31. The project which ran from 2015 to 2020 included intensive capacity building for NSOs, and harmonisation activities (harmonised questionnaires, cleaning, analysis, etc.). Hundreds of pages of manuals and resource documents were generated, and multiple cross-country and national training sessions were held, including Stata training. From a near zero base for most countries, all countries were able to complete data cleaning and analysis in Stata by the end of the project.
32. The methodologies used by each country were similar but not identical, allowing for variation based on national contexts (with agreed parameters). The use of harmonised methodologies did not mean the countries generated the same poverty lines. However, the slope of the relationship between GDP to poverty incidence strengthened as would be expected (in a negative direction).
33. In the Pacific Island region, the slope is positive, contrary to what would be expected, and there is less comparability between PICTs than there was for the WAEMU countries.
34. In contrast to PICT NSOs, the West African NSOs were large but tended to have less-qualified staff.

Discussion

35. Participants commented on
 - the relationship of GDP per capita to the poverty line, and the relevance of factors such as the high cost of living and high incidence of lifestyle diseases in PICTs;
 - the possibility of harmonising a regional approach to benefits/returns for certain sets of skills;
 - whether implementation of the harmonised methods changed the poverty line for the West African countries involved;
 - reasons why the slope between GDP and poverty incidence for PICTs is contrary to what would be expected; and
 - the significance of local context. While international best practice and institutional development are important, each PICT will have its own priorities for consumption, definition of poverty, etc.
36. Response to comments and questions:
 - Cost of living measurement is important and is taken into account in national poverty lines.
 - Harmonising a regional approach to benefits/returns for certain sets of skills first requires a good basis for measurement of returns to skills, education, etc.
 - The process of harmonisation for WAEMU countries did break trends for poverty rates (some countries did not have a trend). An uptick in poverty incidence was difficult to explain to policymakers but being able to point to a regionally endorsed methodology was important and gave the process credibility. The World Bank committed to providing technical assistance to countries for trend analysis using survey imputation to address this issue.

- The unexpected slope between GDP and poverty for WAEMU countries was due in part to lack of comparability in methods for collecting data and also use of outdated methods in some countries. This also occurs in PICTs. Use of historic methods that deviate from international best practice may explain the distorted slope for PICTs.
- The WAEMU project recognised the importance of local context – West Africa has many different cultures. The focus was on harmonising processes, while allowing culturally/locally appropriate methods to be developed within international best practice and guidelines.
- Documentation is critical, especially for NSOs with thin capacity that rely on TA and consultants. There is a lack of documentation in the Pacific region compared to West Africa.

37. The World Bank would not import the same methods used for the WAEMU project to the Pacific. It would import the process through the IDA project, including updating methodologies and upgrading technology. The project would be adapted to the Pacific context.

Agenda item 5: PACSTAT – Statistical Innovation and Capacity Building in the Pacific Islands Project (standing agenda item)

38. Michael Sharp said PACSTAT expects to submit the first proposals for PSMB-commissioned work to the April 2021 meeting of PSMB.
39. The administrative processes for projects are now in place, including an agreed process for receiving proposals for innovative work and research, and for SPC to put proposals forward.

Agenda item 6: Other business

40. *Nauru census/HIES* – Ipia Gadabu noted for the next agenda, the test of the new HIES methodology in Nauru, as discussed with SDD. Nauru plans to incorporate the HIES questionnaire with its census next year.
41. Michael Sharp said it would be a long-form census with the HIES to run immediately after the census, which would avoid having to ask the same questions. It could be an innovative experiment under the IDA project and could come under the PACSTAT agenda item at the next meeting. The World Bank is open to the idea of an experiment on combining a HIES and census.
42. Kristen Himelein commented that there are details to work out, but in principle this is a good idea for research.
43. *MICS results* – James Kaphuka (UNICEF) said the MICS results for Tonga will be released on 20 November. The results for Samoa and Tuvalu are also likely to be released before the end of the year.
44. *Kiribati and Vanuatu census* – SDD has been providing remote TA for the Kiribati census which starts next week, and for the Vanuatu census which starts shortly. The Kiribati census is slightly underfunded, but field work can proceed.
45. *World Statistics Day 20 October* – Tonga commended Samoa for highlighting World Statistics Day on its website. In Tonga, the day is a national celebration. PSMB could promote the day as a way of publicising Pacific statistics.

Agenda item 7: Next PSMB meeting

46. The Chair said the next PSMB meeting will be held in April 2021. SDD will advise on the dates and agenda closer to the time. At this stage, it is still not possible to plan in-person meetings.

Pacific Statistics Methods Board Meeting (PSMB)

6 November 2020

Meeting Outcomes

1. Proposal for the University of the South Pacific (USP) to establish a Centre of Excellence for Statistics at its Nauru campus

PSMB:

- i. expressed interest in the proposal for a Centre of Excellence for Statistics to be established by USP and hosted at its Nauru campus;
- ii. recognised there were several issues for discussion including the location, accreditation of courses, and the role of the Centre in relation to existing regional statistical courses;
- iii. noted the World Bank could possibly provide partial funding for such a Centre through co-financing with development/bilateral partners through a second-generation PACSTAT project, if others were interested.
- iv. agreed that Nauru will work outside the PSMB meeting to refine the proposal with partners, including USP, NSOs and others.

2. PSMB governance

PSMB:

- i. agreed to establish a subcommittee to review PSMB's terms of reference, including its decision-making process, and further agreed the members of the subcommittee will be Vince Galvin and Ofa Ketu'u (Stats NZ), Ipia Gadabu (PSSC Chair), Epeli Waqavonovono (SDD Director) and Kristen Himelein (World Bank);
- ii. noted that PSMB's report to PSSC will be informed by the subcommittee's review;
- iii. asked to be kept informed of the timing of the TYPPS review;
- iv. agreed to the proposed establishment of a PSMB subcommittee to provide input to the SPC project, *Utilisation of administrative databases in census programmes of Pacific Island countries*, noting that the subcommittee will fulfill the role of the external advisory group planned to support Tuvalu's implementation of the project;
- v. agreed to retire the HIES subcommittee, which was set up to examine issues raised in reviewing the RMI HIES experiment.

3. Next steps in progressing standards for measurement of non-monetary poverty and support for PICT decision-making in relation to SDG 1.2.2

PSMB

- i. acknowledged Tonga's offer of support for PICT NSOs wishing to explore the consensual approach to non-monetary poverty measurement, including linking them with free-of-charge technical assistance;
- ii. encouraged interested PICTs to contact the Tonga NSO directly.

4. Benefits of harmonisation of welfare statistics – Experience from the WAEMU Project

PSMB:

- i. noted with interest the outcomes of a World Bank project to harmonise welfare statistics for the eight countries of the West Africa Economic and Money Union (WAEMU), including improvements in the timeliness and quality of statistics and comparability across countries, and NSO upskilling (e.g. use of Stata) based on intensive capacity building;

- ii. noted that the process of harmonisation took local context into account and allowed culturally and locally appropriate methods to be developed within international best practice and guidelines;
- iii. acknowledged the potential to adapt the harmonisation project to the Pacific region through the IDA project.

5. PACSTAT – *Statistical Innovation and Capacity Building in the Pacific Islands Project* (standing agenda item)

PSMB noted that PACSTAT expects to submit the first proposals for PSMB-commissioned work to the April 2021 meeting of PSMB.

6. Next PSMB meeting

The next PSMB meeting will be held in April 2021. SDD will advise on the dates and agenda closer to the time.

Annex A – PSMB Terms of reference

Inaugural Meeting of THE PACIFIC STATISTICS METHODS BOARD 3–4 MAY 2018

TERMS OF REFERENCE

1. Purpose

The purpose of the Pacific Statistics Methods Board (PSMB) is to ensure that relevant best practice standards are developed and are “fit for purpose” for use in Pacific Island countries and territories (PICTs) for a suite of core censuses and surveys.

2. Roles

- a. Assist in the compilation of production schedules and forward work programmes and utilise these for assessing the need to improve methods, the extent of capability gaps or the need to support production activity. These include:
 - i. Establish the drivers of regular statistical production in terms of methods, system and procedures
 - ii. Identify common needs and opportunities across the region
 - iii. Help broker access to capabilities in other statistical or provider agencies
- b. Assess and approve proposals put forward by providers working in the Pacific on: questionnaire design, sampling methodologies, classifications, collection tools and systems, and quality assurance processes. The type of proposals can include:
 - i. Matters of statistical practice, e.g. timing and scope of historical revisions
 - ii. Changes in standard approaches to statistical methodologies and classifications
 - iii. Implementation approaches, including choices around software
- c. Provide advice and recommended courses of action on issues, e.g.:
 - i. Resolve conflicts between alternative methodological approaches suggested by different development agencies
 - ii. Resolve conflicts between national statistics offices and development agencies on methods, system or procedures
 - iii. How to balance the need for standard approaches with the need to reflect the diversity of requirements of Pacific countries.
 - iv. How to optimise a programme of data acquisition to meet extensive data requirements
 - v. The long-term capability consequences for proposals to change methods
- d. Provide advocacy to enable the particular requirements of the Pacific region to be adequately reflected in international standards. These include:
 - i. Identify where work is needed to develop methodological approaches that reflect the situation of Small Island States
 - ii. Explore opportunities to have these issues worked on within the wider international statistical community
- e. Initially the focus of the Board’s work will be on the following core statistical activities:
 - population and housing censuses,

- household income and expenditure surveys,
 - multi-indicator cluster surveys,
 - demographic and health surveys,
 - disability surveys, and
 - agriculture surveys.
- f. The Board may commission work, such as:
- literature reviews,
 - experiments to test methodologies, and
 - consultative qualitative research.

This work may be commissioned proactively or reactively based on issues raised by constituents.

3. Membership

- a. PSMB membership will include:

Four representatives from among regional statistics development partners, namely: Statistics NZ (Chair), Australian Bureau of Statistics, World Bank and one of the UN Agencies.

A representative (Government Statistician) from each of the four PICT areas, namely; Polynesia (Tonga), Melanesia (Fiji), Micronesia (Guam) and Small Island States (Nauru). In the event that a representative of an area cannot attend a meeting, or cannot continue as a Board member, the Government Statisticians from the area concerned will nominate a Government Statistician to replace.

- b. **Terms:** The term of the PSMB Chair will be for a period of 3 years before the next election. The current Chair can be re-elected if the majority vote in his/her favour. The term of the Deputy Chair will also be 3 years. The deputy chair will be a Government Statistician representative. Following the initial election of a deputy, the position will be rotated amongst the Government Statistician representatives.
- c. **Secretariat:** Secretariat services will be provided by the Pacific Community's Statistics for Development Division (SDD).
- d. **Attendance:** Compulsory for Board members. Should a Board member be unable to attend, a suitable representative must be provided.
- e. **Presenters, observers and invited members:** Board members may nominate people from their respective agencies who have authored and/or co-authored papers in partnership with SDD, to attend board meetings to present the paper and respond to questions. The Board may co-opt a member country's Government Statistician or relevant staff member as, and when required.

4. Procedures

- a. **Meetings:** Meetings will be held twice a year, in April and October. The April meeting will be via teleconference and the October meeting will be face-to-face. The October meeting will be held one day before the Pacific Statistics Standing Committee (PSSC) Meeting.
- b. **Servicing:** The Board will be serviced by SDD, which will submit standards to the board for review and approval.
- c. **Reporting and governance:** The Board will come under the umbrella of PSSC and HOPS (Heads of Pacific Statistics and Planning) and will provide a briefing to PSSC outlining key decisions, progress and achievements. Matters requiring a broader view and/or guidance will be referred to PSSC as they arise.

Timing: The secretariat will distribute the agenda and papers to the Board and invited members one month prior to the meeting date. Papers are to be submitted to the secretariat no later than five weeks prior to the meetings taking place. Key decisions will be released for the Board for approval two weeks after the meeting. Minutes will be made available on SDD's website within one week following Board

approval.

d. **Papers:** The Board will:

- review submitted papers to ensure that all relevant information has been provided,
- make all decisions on submitted papers,
- endorse papers that propose changes to methods in national collections, and
- endorse papers in principle but require further work at its request.

Members wishing to present papers should notify the secretariat of their intention to do so as early as possible in the meeting cycle. The paper must clearly state the purpose for submission and with clear recommendations on decisions requires from the board.

- e. **Retention of papers:** All papers submitted to the Board will be stored and archived by SDD. This will ensure that papers are easily located in the future and that member countries, technical partners, donors and consultants working on these collections have easy access to them.
- f. **Structure and content of papers:** A style guide for Board papers and their submission will be provided by the secretariat and should be followed.
- g. **Urgent issues and/or changes:** New methods requiring immediate clearance and implementation outside Board meetings will be considered through circulation to Board members for comment and a decision, although the aim is to limit the need for urgent changes. Any urgent changes requiring implementation without Board scrutiny should be documented for review at the next available meeting.
- h. **Out-of-session papers:** In some cases, papers may need to be circulated for the record, or for information only. Before submitting a paper out of session, papers must be signed off by the Secretary and Chairman of the Board. This is to ensure that the content has had the appropriate level of scrutiny. Out-of-session papers will be noted on the agenda but will not be presented for discussion.
- i. **Action items:** An action item should be created when further work is required on a presented paper that will need to be reviewed and monitored by the Board as it progresses. The Board will determine if any actions are required following its presentation.
- j. **The Chair and secretariat:** The Chair will endeavour to reach a consensus position on recommendations but otherwise will, depending on the balance of opinion, either signal endorsement with reservations, or rejection.

The secretariat will:

- organise meeting times and venues;
- call for agenda items and accompanying written material;
- circulate the final agenda and accompanying written material;
- manage and follow up on outstanding action items;
- prepare the minutes of the meeting and seek clearance from presenters;
- file approved papers and associated documents electronically in SDD; and
- create and maintain a 'methods' corner on its website, where all documents and standards endorsed by PSMB can be uploaded to inform all member countries, technical partners, and donors of the Board's decisions.

- k. The Chair and secretariat will be jointly responsible for ensuring that the purpose of each item on the agenda is clear and unambiguous.

5. Review of Terms of Reference

The PSMB retains the right to review and amend its Terms of Reference as changes in context and circumstances require.