

Media Release

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KOKODA TRACK SAFETY BOOST

The Australian Government has committed \$1.8 million to fast-track a range of safety projects along the Kokoda Track.

Australian Heritage Minister, Peter Garrett, and Papua New Guinean Minister for Tourism, Culture and the Arts, Charles Abel, said this initial funding was the first part of a broader program of joint initiatives between the two governments.

The initial \$1.8m will be used to undertake safety enhancements at airstrips – including Kokoda, improvements to communications along the Track and maintenance work on the Owers Corner Road.

Specific safety measures made possible by this funding are:

- Risk assessments and safety audits by PNG Civil Aviation Authority and CASA at Kokoda, Manari, Kagi, Melei, Efogi and Naduri airstrips.
- Installing safety equipment, including windsocks, cones and markers and provision of maintenance equipment at the six airstrips.
- Building sheds, including installing weighing scales, at airstrips.
- Providing regular maintenance works – mowing, clearing drains and repairing potholes – at all six airstrips.
- Carrying out urgent repairs to Owers Corner Road, including grading, gravelling and installing new drainage.
- Upgrading Sogeri Bridge Road
- Constructing footbridges at key points along the Track in consultation with communities and the trekking industry.
- Investigating if another radio channel for emergencies is feasible.
- Installing a second radio channel for emergencies and providing training and additional radio equipment along the Track.
- Implementing a rolling replacement program to provide and maintain additional radios in villages near the track
- Enabling initial work to identify areas where there are explosives on the Track and how to best address this issue.

A second tranche of measures is currently being developed by governments, communities and stakeholders to identify further, major works needed to improve roads, airstrips and communications. These will be informed by the results of technical studies.

Minister Garrett said this investment builds on work already being done to address safety issues.

“The recent tragic plane crash has reinforced the need to continue this work to address infrastructure and safety issues along the Track identified by local communities, government and the trekking industry.

“This assistance will help the Papua New Guinea Government to continue to deliver services to local communities and ensure a safer trekking experience on the Kokoda Track.”

Minister Garrett said that with every facet of the Australian Government’s Kokoda Initiative, it is vitally important to move in partnership with the people and Government of Papua New Guinea.

“We will build on the strong relationships we have with communities, the Kokoda Track Authority (KTA) and the trekking industry to ensure improvements in safety are there for the long term.

“This is an iconic, historically significant place for Australians – the number of people walking the Track has increased significantly over the past several years and the Kokoda Track is now Papua New Guinea’s major visitor attraction,” Mr Garrett said.

The funding for the second tranche of measures will be jointly provided by the two governments.

Mr Abel said transport infrastructure such as the Owers Corner Road and the Kokoda airstrip are important to Papua New Guinea and we have committed to providing the majority of funding for these upgrades, with some assistance from the Australian Government.

“These safety measures are complemented by a raft of initiatives already being delivered by PNG’s Tourism Promotion Authority (TPA) and the KTA.

“The KTA, with the advice and support of the Central and Oro Provincial Governments, TPA and PNG’s Civil Aviation Authority, will continue to drive this program and build on successes gained so far,” Mr Abel said.

Mr Abel said the investigation into the 11 August plane crash is a separate process that may result in specific safety recommendations that also need to be addressed by the Papua New Guinea Government, with assistance from Australia.

Actions to improve safety infrastructure announced today builds upon the \$14.9m already committed by the Australian Government under its existing Kokoda Initiative to assist Papua New Guinea with the protection of the Kokoda Track and the Owen Stanley Ranges and improve the livelihoods of the local communities.

Footage of comments by Minister Abel is available at:
<http://www.environment.gov.au/heritage/kokoda/>