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PRIME MINISTER

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TRADE COMMISSION FOR THE SOUTH PACIFIC

The South Pacific Forum has welcomed an Australian Government offer to finance the establishment in Australia of a Trade Commission for the South Pacific under Australia's aid programme.

The offer was made at the South Pacific Forum in Niue this week.

Australia will fund and help set up a South Pacific Trade Commission, possibly located in Sydney. The Trade Commission will identify products from the island countries of the South Pacific Forum which can be successfully exported to Australia, and will provide commercial information and practical expertise to aid the islands' marketing efforts.

It will also help Australian companies make contact with island governments and private companies in connection with other Australian trade and industry-oriented development programmes designed to help the islands.

Australia has suggested that the Trade Commission be run under the auspices of the South Pacific Bureau for Economic Cooperation (SPEC) and is prepared to make up to \$150,000 available on an annual basis for an initial five-year period to meet the Commission's expenses. The Forum has requested the Director of SPEC to enter into consultations with Australia on practical arrangements.

The proposal reflects Australia's concern that the islands should not be handicapped in using existing market opportunities in Australia because of lack of representation or practical experience and expertise.

The offer to fund a Trade Commission has been made in an effort to overcome these problems.

The ability to market competitively is one of the main factors affecting the islands' development prospects. Some 97 percent of island products imported in Australia currently enter on a duty free basis.