

Australian assistance to Samoa and Tonga

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*Senator the Hon John Faulkner
Minister for Defence*

The Minister for Foreign Affairs, Stephen Smith, and the Minister for Defence, Senator John Faulkner, today announced further Australian support to Samoa and Tonga following the tsunami that devastated both communities on 30 September.

The Royal Australian Navy's heavy landing ship HMAS Tobruk will depart Sydney today, loaded with a range of goods, equipment and relief aid destined for the two countries.

"The Melbourne Metropolitan Fire Brigade has donated a fire truck to Samoa to replace one destroyed during the tsunami," Mr Smith said.

"A large consignment of heavy machinery and donated goods from the Australian community – including the Samoan and Tongan communities in Australia, non government organisations and several businesses – will also be delivered to both Samoa and Tonga."

"Tobruk will carry earth movers, generators, cement mixers and other heavy machinery, provided by the Australian Government, to be used in Tonga to clear debris and rebuild over the next 12-18 months."

Total Australian assistance to Samoa and Tonga now stands at \$13 million.

This includes \$3 million for emergency relief and recovery activities (\$2 million to Samoa and \$1 million to Tonga) announced in the days immediately following the tsunami.

It also includes Australia's contribution of \$5 million of reconstruction assistance for Samoa announced on 11 October with New Zealand Foreign Minister, Murray McCully, and matched by New Zealand.

The further \$5 million announced today will be provided to Samoa for additional recovery and reconstruction activities, including:

- \$2.5 million to help re-establish infrastructure and ensure affected communities have access to essential services such as power, water, health and education. Australia will also provide support to help businesses re-establish quickly, and improve disaster monitoring and warning systems;

- \$1.5 million for recovery and relief operations, including \$500,000 to Australian Non Government Organisations; and
- \$1 million to assist the Government of Samoa's own reconstruction planning and coordination.

Senator Faulkner said, "HMAS Tobruk will enable access to the remote island of Niuatoputapu in Tonga, where the delivery of the earthmoving equipment will allow reconstruction efforts to begin earlier and at a faster pace than would otherwise be possible."

"This assistance mission will provide tangible support to the people of Samoa and Tonga rebuilding their lives in the weeks after the tsunami," Senator Faulkner said.

"Along with the ongoing work in Padang, this mission by HMAS Tobruk is another good example of how the ADF and AusAID continue to play an important role in supporting our Pacific neighbours to respond to humanitarian crises."

Tobruk will make a port call to Townsville later this week to embark loading craft to assist accessing the remote islands.

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