



# MEDIA RELEASE

**The Hon Peter Garrett MP**

*Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts*

PG /60

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## **PNG AND AUSTRALIA AGREE ACTION ON KOKODA**

**MADANG, PNG:** On behalf of the Australian Government, I have today signed an historic Joint Understanding with the Government of Papua New Guinea on the Kokoda Track and Owen Stanley Ranges.

Through that agreement, Australia and PNG have agreed to preserve the historic values of the Kokoda Track, maintain the integrity of the Track and the special qualities of the trekking experience, which has become an important rite of passage for many Australians.

The Kokoda Track has a special place in Australian history and is a powerful symbol of the bond forged in wartime between our two countries.

The Australian Government is committed to following through with real resources and real action to assist the Government and people of PNG in their efforts to protect the Kokoda Track and Owen Stanley Ranges.

This Joint Understanding recognises the history, as well as the rich natural heritage and environmental values of the site, with the PNG Government and the Australian Government agreeing to work cooperatively to care for the Track and surrounding Owen Stanley Ranges, while improving the livelihoods of local landowners and communities.

The Owen Stanley Ranges, through which the Kokoda Track passes, is one of the most biologically important areas in the Asia Pacific. The Kokoda Track is also Papua New Guinea's most significant land-based tourism attraction, drawing over 5,000 trekkers to the 96 kilometre track last year.

Through this Joint Understanding, the Governments of Papua New Guinea and Australia have agreed to immediately commence implementation of our shared vision including:

- Sustainable development for the communities along the Kokoda Track corridor through improved economic opportunities and provision of basic services, including water, sanitation, health, education and transport.
- Preservation of the historic values of the Kokoda Track, and maintenance of the integrity of the Track and of the special qualities of the trekking experience.
- Protection of the water catchment in the Owen Stanley Ranges for future power and water supply for Port Moresby.
- Maximising the potential forest carbon benefits.
- International recognition of the very special cultural and biodiversity values of the Owen Stanley Ranges.

The Australian Government has committed \$14.9 million to assist the PNG Government in its efforts to improve the livelihoods of local communities along the Track and to establish effective management arrangements so that the Track is protected and delivers increasing benefits to local people. Those funds will also be used to conduct a feasibility study into a World Heritage nomination.

Additionally, the Department of Veterans' Affairs will administer \$1 million of funding to develop educational materials to increase awareness of the special importance of the Track.

This is an important agreement which symbolises the strengthening relationship between Australia and PNG.

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