



PNG: ROAD TO INDEPENDENCE

1 x 1 HR

At low tide you can wade a few kilometres from the northern tip of Australia to Papua New Guinea.

For six decades Australia administered Papua and New Guinea. From 1914 when an expeditionary force seized German New Guinea in the first battle, and first casualties ever, by a newly minted sovereign Australia. To September 16, 1975 when Gough Whitlam, in the presence of then Prince Charles, handed combined PNG its independence.

More Australians died in the New Guinea campaign than any other combat theatre of WW2. Our High Commission in Port Moresby today has more staff than in the Washington DC embassy. That reflects not only our ongoing economic and social synergies with our doorstep nation of 12 million, but PNG's standing as the most critical geo-political zone of the entire Pacific 'battleground' of influence between Australia- USA and China.

Australia and PNG are inextricably bound in history and the future.

While the ABC has been the world's pre-eminent chronicler and broadcaster about and from PNG for 92 years, the Australian media generally has been myopic in its coverage of our largest, closest neighbour.

Our landmark documentary for the national broadcaster will contribute significantly to the national narratives of both countries. For the Australian audience and for those in PNG and internationally it will inform and educate – and reveal.

The documentary will have three central pillars: (1) an insight into the most culturally diverse nation of the planet with 840 living languages out of the total 7000 worldwide (2) the path to 1975 Independence from the first elections of the House of Assembly in 1964 and (3) the first 50 years of nationhood, its challenges, successes and future.

Narrative Structure

The film will begin at midnight September 16 1975, the birth of Papua New Guinea, and the end of a long day of celebrations across the country capped off with fireworks. Witnesses and commentators will articulate the moment's hope, great significance and the big challenges the new nation faced in maintaining peace and unity, growing its wealth, preserving its treasure house of cultures and creating new opportunities for its citizens into the 21st century. They will also point to a remarkable journey from colony to country, one marked by a unique relationship between the peoples of PNG and the colonising power, Australia. The film cuts back to the early 1960s when Michael Somare, the man who is now PNG's Prime Minister, was among young radicals, inspired by liberation movements and militias in former colonies all over the world, calls for freedom and self-government, the end of Australia's unjust dominion over its nearest neighbour.

The main thread of the story will run through those 15 years that lead to independence. Through Papua New Guineans' advocacy, debate and conflict; Australian resistance to but also enthusiasm

for a free Papua New Guinea. The politics of both countries, the mining and farming interests, the dreams, conflicts and the risks (Australian PM John Gorton once packed a pistol while speaking to what he thought could be a hostile PNG crowd) ...

Out of the independence narrative the film will reach back into fascinating pre-colonial, pre-contact times and the creation of one of the richest arrays of cultures and languages on Earth. The story will chart the arrival of Europeans, their impact and fights amongst themselves, Papua New Guineans' resilience in the face of huge change and the cataclysm (for colony and coloniser) of Japan's invasion of PNG during World War 2.

The film will also explore, through the prism of the country's journey to independence, the nation PNG has become. Beginning with thoughtfully shot present day sequences that reflect a modern economy, the ghosts of the colonial period and the continued strength of ancient ways of life, the film will reveal the country's great challenges and achievements and its shifting, vital relationship with Australia.

Voices and Story Telling Devices

We have assembled a cast of interviewees who were central to the birth of a nation and its development and those integral to today's political, intellectual, business and social fabric. Some of those overlap.

We will illustrate their reflections by filming breathtaking images of ancient cultural ceremonies and dances handed down through thousands of years, spectacular islands and coastal idyll and mountains, mists and waterfalls of the rugged and legendary highlands regions. We'll infuse the ancient with modern images of the developed metropolises of Port Moresby and Lae and high-tech developments.

We will draw on the unique ABC archives, and also other archival footage we've identified that has never been broadcast. These include crucial footage and interviews of the 'Young Turks' who led the charge to independence and governed as prime ministers, foreign and finance ministers, ambassadors and other roles.

We can tell the story of the "Father of the Nation" the Grand Chief Sir Michael Somare both through archive and his distinguished daughter Dulciana Somare who has agreed to full cooperation and access to family archives, Somare Haus and tomb in Wewak now a pilgrimage destination.

We will interview the other most influential person in PNG history, two-term prime minister Sir Julius Chan, part of the independence push and captured in footage in the welcome for Prince Charles, Gough Whitlam, Sir John Kerr and other dignitaries on Independence Day. *Chan is 85 and frail and needs to be interviewed asap.

We've identified the existence at the NFSA of colour film raws shot in a multi-camera coverage in 1975 for a documentary on independence filmed around the country on the day by Australian director Dennis O'Rourke's team of eight cinematographers.

We'll get an historical perspective the Australian who organised the 1975 independence events, was cabinet secretary for three years to Chief Minister Somare pre-independence then Somare's principal advisor for his first two years as prime minister. Mark Lynch has agreed to share his unique insights which include memories of the exclusive party of 25 people who gathered for dinner on the

night before independence. Guests included Prince Charles, the Whitlams, the Kerrs, Pacific leaders and of course the Somares and Guises. At exactly midnight they watched together as fireworks signified that Michael Somare and John Guise had become the first prime minister and first governor-general of a brand-new nation.

One very young lawyer who took part in nation building with Somare was Meg Taylor and we'll hear from her. Now a Dame, Taylor was raised in Goroka, the daughter of a famous Australian pioneer who "opened up" the highlands in the 1930s and his PNG wife. She became one of the first Pacific women lawyers and helped set up her nation's legal and infrastructure systems. She was Ambassador to the USA, Mexico and Canada (1989-94) Secretary-General of the Pacific Islands Forum (2014-2021) and is still active in PNG affairs. Dame Meg is the epitome of the PNG-Australia bond.

Other potential interviewees are listed in the attached document and include former prime minister Pias Wingti who served two terms (1985-1988 and 1992-1994). Interestingly, in context with today's geo-politics, in his first foreign interview as PM with yours truly in 1985, Wingti told me he would look to China as a partner and benefactor.

Another crucial interview would be with Brisbane-based Sir John Kaputin, a man central to independence movement via the 'radical' Mataungan Association. He features as a young firebrand in an historic Four Corners 1969 report when John Gorton visited Rabaul. Kaputin served as Foreign Minister and Minister of Finance (bringing in national superannuation) and became Secretary-General of the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of states. Kaputin was also a star sprinter who competed in the 1962 Empire Games and Commonwealth Games and is inducted into the PNG Sporting Hall of Fame.

We feel it's important to include young voices in our film and have listed for potential interviews a range of people from current minister Kessy Sawang to prominent and dynamic young women and men who are opinion leaders and achievers.

We believe King Charles might be open to an interview given his multiple trips to PNG, professed fondness for the country and other Royal visits by his mother the Queen and sister Princess Anne over the decades.

To reiterate, a goal and mandate of this film is not only to capture the story of a nation but how PNG's history and birth is forever linked to Australia's own national narrative.

The words of inaugural Governor-General Sir John Guise in his Independence Day speech are testament to, and symbolic of, the story and the ongoing relationship.

"We are lowering the (Australian) flag – not tearing it down,"