

2026 COMMITTEE REPORT

BOUGAINVILLE MATTERS

BI-PARTISAN PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE
ON **BOUGAINVILLE MATTERS**

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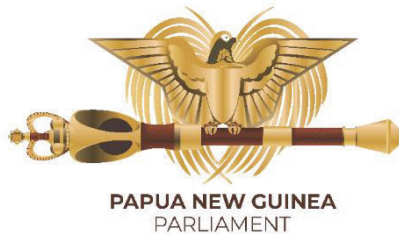


PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE ON BOUGAINVILLE MATTERS

Report on Nationwide Public Consultations on the Bougainville Referendum

2026

This publication is a joint product of the National Parliament of Papua New Guinea and UNDP Strengthening PNG's Parliament Project, supported by the Government of Australia through DFAT. The views expressed herein do not necessarily reflect those of the United Nations, including UNDP, or any of its Member States.



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BI-PARTISAN PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE ON BOUGAINVILLE MATTERS

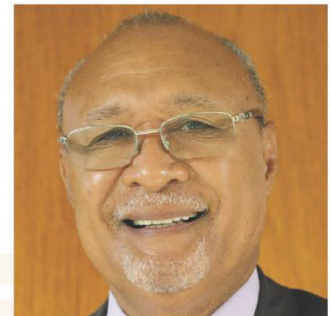
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1. FOREWORD BY THE CHAIRMAN

I am pleased to present to the National Parliament the Committee's Report on the nationwide consultations conducted regarding the Bougainville Referendum.

The question of Bougainville's future political status is one of the most significant constitutional and political matters currently before Papua New Guinea. Following the referendum held in 2019, in which a large majority of voters in Bougainville expressed a preference for independence, the focus of the post-referendum process has been to bring the matter before the National Parliament in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution of Papua New Guinea and the Bougainville Peace Agreement (BPA). Under these arrangements, the National Parliament has the authority to consider and determine the outcome of the referendum through established constitutional processes.

The Bipartisan Parliamentary Committee on Bougainville Matters was established by the National Parliament to support parliamentary engagement on matters concerning Bougainville, particularly during the post-referendum phase. The Committee serves as an institutional mechanism for facilitating dialogue, supporting clarity on constitutional processes, and maintaining transparency and accountability in relations between the Government of Papua New Guinea and the Autonomous Bougainville Government (ABG).

As part of its work, the Committee conducted consultations in selected provincial centres across all four regions of the country, as well as in the Autonomous Region of Bougainville. These consultations provided an opportunity for citizens, community leaders, civil society organisations, churches, and other stakeholders to express their views and perspectives on the referendum and its implications.

The Committee is confident that the perspectives gathered through these consultations will assist the National Parliament in its deliberations when the referendum results are formally brought before it. The consultations have contributed to a broader understanding of the issues involved and have highlighted the importance of informed, responsible, and peaceful decision-making.

I thank my fellow Committee members for their dedication throughout the consultation process and acknowledge the staff of the National Parliament for their valuable secretariat and logistical support. The Committee also expresses its appreciation to the UNDP Strengthening PNG's Parliament Project, supported by the Government of Australia through DFAT, for its technical and logistical assistance in facilitating the consultations and preparing this report.

I commend this report to the National Parliament for its consideration.

HON. DR. ALLAN MARAT, MP

Committee Chairman &
Member for Rabaul

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Bipartisan Parliamentary Committee on Bougainville Matters conducted nationwide public consultations in late 2025 as part of the post-referendum process established under the Bougainville Peace Agreement (BPA) and the Constitution of Papua New Guinea. The consultations were intended to inform the National Parliament's consideration of the 2019 Bougainville Referendum and to gather public views on possible pathways forward, including both the implementation of the referendum outcome and the management of alternative scenarios.

Consultations were held in five locations representing all major regions of the country: Goroka (Highlands), Lae (Momase), Kokopo (New Guinea Islands), Port Moresby (Southern), and Buka and Arawa (Autonomous Region of Bougainville). Participants included a broad cross-section of society, such as community leaders, church representatives, women and youth groups, civil society organisations, academics, legal practitioners, former and current public officials, and members of the general public. The diversity of participants ensured that the consultations captured a wide range of perspectives, experiences, and concerns.

In addition to oral evidence presented during the nationwide consultations, the Committee received a significant number of written submissions from individuals, community groups, civil society organisations, and political leaders. Taken together, the oral and written evidence reinforced the central importance of the referendum outcome in the public discourse, while also highlighting differing views on constitutional process, parliamentary responsibility, readiness, and transition management. The submissions and consultations consistently emphasised the need for peace, clarity, and responsible decision-making, and reflected strong expectations that Parliament's consideration of the referendum outcome be conducted in a transparent, inclusive, and orderly manner.

Across all regions, participants demonstrated a strong awareness of Bougainville's historical experience, including colonial administration, the development of the Panguna mine, the conflict of the late 1980s and 1990s, and the peace process that culminated in the BPA. The referendum was widely recognised as a significant democratic milestone arising directly from that peace process. At the same time, participants expressed differing interpretations of the legal and political implications of the referendum result and of the role and discretion of the National Parliament under the Constitution.

A large proportion of participants, particularly in Bougainville but also in other regions, emphasised the importance of respecting the expressed will of Bougainvillean voters. Others placed greater emphasis on constitutional procedure, national cohesion, and the practical requirements associated with any change in political status. These differing

emphases did not necessarily reflect outright opposition between groups, but rather different starting points for assessing risk, responsibility, and timing.

Despite these differences, several common themes emerged consistently throughout the consultations. These included the central importance of maintaining peace and avoiding a return to conflict; the need for transparent, well-communicated parliamentary processes; recognition that any outcome would require careful planning and sequencing; and the value of continued dialogue and reconciliation between Bougainville and the rest of Papua New Guinea.

The consultations also highlighted that public expectations are shaped not only by the referendum outcome itself, but by experiences during the post-referendum period, including the pace of consultations, the transfer of powers, and the clarity of communication between governments. Many participants expressed concern about prolonged uncertainty and emphasised the importance of Parliament providing clear direction once a decision is made.

This report does not advance recommendations or advocate for a particular outcome. Its purpose is to provide the National Parliament with a comprehensive, neutral account of the views expressed during the consultations, to support informed, responsible, and peaceful decision-making on matters arising from the Bougainville Referendum.



3. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Bougainville's modern history has been shaped by successive periods of external administration and local responses to political and economic developments. In 1886, the island was separated from the Solomon Islands under colonial arrangements between Britain and Germany. The northern part of Bougainville came under German administration, while southern areas were later influenced by British authority. Following the First World War, administrative responsibility was transferred to Australia, and Bougainville was integrated into what later became the independent state of Papua New Guinea (PNG).

In the years leading up to Papua New Guinea's independence, political mobilization in Bougainville intensified. During the 1960s and 1970s, demands for greater self-rule and formal recognition of Bougainville's distinct identity gained momentum. These efforts included a petition to the Secretary-General of the United Nations seeking for Bougainville to remain a Trust Territory and not be incorporated into the newly forming Independent State of Papua New Guinea, as well as the proclamation of a Unilateral Declaration of Independence on 1 September 1975—sixteen days before Papua New Guinea attained independence. The development of mineral resources, particularly the Panguna copper mine, further contributed to these dynamics. While the mine generated significant revenue for PNG, it also raised local concerns over land use, environmental impacts, participation in decision-making, and benefit-sharing.

By the 1980s, these grievances deepened. The Bougainville Revolutionary Army (BRA) was formed and undertook actions against mining infrastructure, highlighting unresolved disputes over compensation and governance. Over time, these disputes expanded into broader questions about autonomy and control of resources.

The situation escalated into a prolonged conflict from the late 1980s to the late 1990s. The conflict involved Bougainvillean groups, including the BRA and the Bougainville Resistance Force, as well as PNG's security forces. The decade-long confrontation resulted in significant loss of life, widespread displacement of communities, and severe disruption of essential services. It also led to Bougainville's second Unilateral Declaration of Independence in June 1990.

The effects of this period remain part of Bougainville's collective memory.

Despite the challenges, local actors contributed significantly to peacebuilding and bringing an end to the conflict. Women, churches, and traditional leaders were active in reconciliation efforts, mediation, and maintaining community life. These community-led initiatives provided a foundation for subsequent formal negotiations.

Peace efforts advanced during the mid-1990s through a series of negotiations supported by regional and international partners. The Burnham Dialogues in 1997, hosted in New Zealand, brought together representatives of Bougainvillean groups and the Government

of Papua New Guinea (PNG). These talks emphasised confidence-building and inclusivity, resulting in the Burnham Declaration and the Burnham Truce, which created the initial framework for ceasefire arrangements.

The Lincoln Agreement of 1998 further consolidated commitments by establishing a permanent ceasefire, provisions for the phased withdrawal of PNG forces, mechanisms for arms disposal, and amnesty arrangements. It also created the Truce Monitoring Group and later the Peace Monitoring Group, both with regional participation, to oversee compliance and implementation.

On 30 August 2001, the Bougainville Peace Agreement (BPA) was signed between the Government of Papua New Guinea and Bougainvillean representatives. The BPA set out three interlinked pillars:

1. **Autonomy** – The establishment of the Autonomous Bougainville Government (ABG) with its own constitution, legislature, and executive. Certain functions, including defence, foreign affairs, and currency, remained with the national government. The Agreement also envisaged Bougainville working towards financial self-reliance through local revenue-raising powers.
2. **Weapons Disposal** – A phased process for disarmament, monitored by the United Nations Observer Mission on Bougainville, accompanied by the gradual withdrawal of PNG security personnel.
3. **Referendum** – Provision for a referendum, to be held 10–15 years after the establishment of the ABG, to enable Bougainvilleans to express their preference on the region’s political future. The Agreement made clear that a separate independent Bougainville will be one of the choices in the referendum and that the result would be subject to ratification by the PNG National Parliament.

The BPA served as both a political settlement and a framework for peacebuilding. It emphasised reconciliation, partnership, and inclusivity, while seeking to balance Bougainville’s aspirations with PNG’s constitutional framework.

Key milestones in the implementation of the BPA included:

- 2001–2005: Implementation of weapons disposal provisions, monitored and certified by the United Nations Observer Mission on Bougainville.
- 2004: Adoption of the Bougainville Constitution.
- 2005: Establishment of the Autonomous Bougainville Government (ABG) following the first elections held under the new constitution.

- 2005–2019: Progressive transfer of functions and powers to the ABG, consolidating autonomy arrangements and preparing the ground for the referendum.

As provided for in the BPA, the referendum was held between 23 November and 7 December 2019. Voters were presented with two options: “greater autonomy” or “independence.” The referendum achieved high participation, with an 87% voter turnout, and 97.7% of votes cast in favour of independence. Domestic and international observers assessed the conduct of the referendum as peaceful, credible, and well administered.

The result marked an important milestone in Bougainville’s governance arrangements. In line with the BPA and the PNG Constitution, the outcome was not self-executing and requires consideration and ratification by the PNG National Parliament.

Following the referendum, the Government of Papua New Guinea and the Autonomous Bougainville Government (ABG) engaged in a series of structured consultations and agreements to guide the next steps under the Bougainville Peace Agreement (BPA) and the PNG Constitution.

- January–May 2021: Initial consultations produced several important understandings. The Joint Communiqué and the Sharp Agreement addressed the accelerated transfer of powers and functions to the ABG, while the Kokopo Consultations outlined Bougainville’s political aspirations and established channels for continued dialogue between the parties.
- July 2021 – Wabag Roadmap: The Joint Post-Referendum Roadmap, adopted in Wabag, provided a shared timeline for decision-making. It specified that the process should conclude within an agreed period between 2025 and 2027, offering a clear timeframe for Progressing towards independence, political settlement or political resolution.
- December 2021 – Era Kone Covenant: Signed at APEC Haus in Port Moresby, the Era Kone Covenant reaffirmed the constitutional role of the National Parliament of Papua New Guinea in the decision-making process. It committed both governments to prepare a joint report to brief the Eleventh Parliament and reaffirmed the timeline set out in the Wabag Roadmap, including the implementation of arrangements for Implementation of arrangements for Independence/political settlement.
- 2024–2025 – Moderated Consultations: In September 2024, Sir Jerry Mateparae, former Governor-General of New Zealand, was appointed as independent Moderator to facilitate continued dialogue. His mandate was to assist the parties in addressing outstanding issues and preparing consolidated consultation reports. Joint consultations were held in Port

Moresby and Burnham, providing opportunities for both governments to present their views, clarify areas of convergence, and map the way forward.

- June 2025 – Melanesian Agreement: At the third Joint Moderated Consultation, held at Burnham Military Camp in New Zealand, the Melanesian Agreement was endorsed. The Agreement reaffirmed joint commitments under the Bougainville Peace Agreement (BPA) and the PNG Constitution, confirmed that the matter would be brought before the National Parliament, and underscored the importance of the role of parliamentary committees, broad public awareness, and the consideration of a Melanesian framework with agreed timelines for future arrangements. In addition, the Melanesian Agreement also captured the parties’:
 - commitment to maintaining a close, peaceful, and enduring relationship;
 - agreement to accept the decision of the National Parliament and commit to further consultations;
 - commitment to institutional strengthening and institutional building of the Bougainville administration;
 - recognition that the context of Bougainville is unique in Papua New Guinea.

All of which are positive for continued peaceful engagement.



4. DOMINANT CROSS-CUTTING THEMES

Across all consultation sites and regions, several themes emerged repeatedly and consistently, cutting across local contexts and individual perspectives. While the emphasis and framing of these themes varied depending on location and background, together they form the core substance of the national conversation observed during the consultations.

The Meaning and Weight of the Referendum Result

Across consultations and written submissions, the 2019 Bougainville Referendum was widely described as a defining democratic event arising directly from the Bougainville Peace Agreement and the broader peace process. Many participants, particularly from Bougainville, characterised the result as a clear and decisive expression of the people's will, carrying significant political, moral, and historical weight.

At the same time, other participants and submitters emphasised that the referendum was conducted within a constitutional framework that explicitly provides for consultation and parliamentary consideration. From this perspective, the referendum was viewed as authoritative but not self-executing, requiring Parliament to determine how the outcome should be given effect, particularly where constitutional amendments or enabling legislation may be required.

While these perspectives differed in emphasis, there was broad recognition that the referendum outcome is central to Parliament's deliberations. Several contributions sought to reconcile these views by suggesting that Parliament's role lies not in revisiting the choice expressed by voters, but in determining an appropriate, lawful, and responsible pathway for implementation.

These differing interpretations were not always presented as mutually exclusive. In several consultations, speakers attempted to reconcile them by suggesting that Parliament's role is to give effect to the referendum outcome through orderly and responsible processes, rather than to reopen the question of preference itself.

Peace as a Paramount Consideration

Peace was consistently identified as a paramount concern, regardless of participants' views on independence, timing, or process. Speakers across regions frequently invoked the experience of the Bougainville conflict as a reminder of the costs of political breakdown and violence. References to loss of life, displacement, and long-term trauma were common, underscoring the depth of feeling associated with this issue.

Participants stressed that any parliamentary decision—whether to ratify or not—must be managed in a way that preserves peace and avoids actions that could be perceived as

dismissive or provocative. Several speakers cautioned that uncertainty, poor communication, or abrupt decisions could undermine trust and increase the risk of tension.

At the same time, peace was not discussed solely in negative terms, as the absence of conflict. Many participants framed peace as an active condition that requires dialogue, reconciliation, and ongoing engagement between Bougainville and the rest of Papua New Guinea. From this perspective, peace was seen as something to be continuously maintained rather than assumed.

Reconciliation and Acknowledgement of the Past

Closely linked to concerns about peace was the theme of reconciliation. Participants frequently spoke about the need to address unresolved grievances stemming from the conflict period. This included reconciliation between Bougainville and the national government, between Bougainvilleans and other Papua New Guineans, and within Bougainville itself.

Some speakers argued that meaningful reconciliation requires formal acknowledgement of past suffering and responsibility. Others emphasised practical reconciliation through development, service delivery, and inclusive governance. While views differed on the form reconciliation should take, there was broad agreement that unresolved historical wounds continue to influence current attitudes and expectations.

Several participants suggested that reconciliation should not be treated as a discrete event, but as a long-term process that should accompany political and institutional



change. In this sense, reconciliation was viewed as both a moral and practical requirement for sustainable peace.

Readiness, Capacity, and Statehood Concerns

The question of Bougainville's readiness for independence emerged as one of the most debated themes. Participants raised a wide range of considerations related to governance capacity, institutional maturity, economic viability, and service delivery. Courts, public administration systems, education and health services, infrastructure, and revenue generation were among the areas most frequently mentioned.

Some participants expressed concern that Bougainville currently faces significant capacity constraints and that premature independence could create risks of institutional failure or instability. These speakers often framed their concerns in pragmatic terms, emphasising the responsibility of leaders to ensure that any transition does not harm ordinary citizens.

Other participants challenged this framing, arguing that capacity should be understood as something that develops over time and through experience. They noted that many states have achieved independence while facing significant challenges and that Bougainville's capacity has been shaped, in part, by the pace and extent of power transfers under the autonomy arrangements. From this perspective, continued dependency was seen as a potential barrier to capacity development.

These differing views often converged around the idea of a managed transition, during which capacity-building could occur alongside the gradual assumption of additional responsibilities.

Transition Timing and Sequencing

Related to questions of readiness were discussions about transition timing and sequencing. Participants expressed a wide range of views on how long a transition period should last if the referendum result were to be ratified. Suggestions ranged from relatively short timeframes to longer, phased approaches extending over a decade or more.

Rather than focusing solely on specific dates, many speakers emphasised the importance of sequencing key steps, such as the transfer of powers, establishment of institutions, and development of economic systems. Milestones were often discussed as preferable to fixed deadlines, allowing progress to be assessed and adjustments made as needed.

Participants also discussed the importance of clarity regarding transition arrangements. Uncertainty about timelines and responsibilities was frequently cited as a source of anxiety, reinforcing calls for transparent planning and communication.



Constitutional Process and Parliamentary Responsibility

Another dominant theme concerned the role of the National Parliament and the constitutional processes governing the post-referendum phase. Participants demonstrated varying levels of familiarity with the specific constitutional provisions and agreements that apply to Bougainville, but many expressed strong and often deeply held views about Parliament's responsibilities and discretion in this process.

A significant number of participants emphasised that Parliament has a duty to give serious weight to democratic expressions of will and to act in a manner consistent with both

the letter and the spirit of the Bougainville Peace Agreement. From this perspective, Parliament's role was often framed as one of stewardship and good faith implementation, with an expectation that the referendum outcome should meaningfully inform the direction and substance of parliamentary decision-making. Some participants suggested that failure to do so could undermine confidence in constitutional processes, weaken public trust in national institutions, and raise questions about the reliability of negotiated political settlements.

At the same time, other participants stressed Parliament's responsibility to consider the national interest, constitutional integrity, and the long-term political, economic, and administrative implications of any decision. These views emphasised that Parliament must balance the referendum outcome with broader considerations, including state viability, intergovernmental arrangements, fiscal sustainability, and the management of complex transitions. From this standpoint, Parliament's deliberative role was seen as an essential safeguard, ensuring that decisions are made with due regard to stability, precedent, and national cohesion, rather than solely in response to political or emotional pressures.

Procedural issues featured prominently across consultations. Participants raised questions about voting thresholds, parliamentary decision-making mechanisms, and

the legal interpretation of consultation versus ratification or consent. In particular, differing understandings of Parliament's constitutional mandate contributed to uncertainty about how the final decision would be framed, justified, and communicated. These discussions highlighted the importance participants place on clarity, consistency, and adherence to agreed procedures, especially given the sensitivity and historical significance of the issue.

Overall, the consultations suggested that clear, transparent, and well-communicated parliamentary processes will be critical to maintaining public confidence. Participants frequently indicated that how Parliament reaches its decision—through adherence to agreed processes, clear reasoning, and respectful engagement with all stakeholders—may be as important as the decision itself. In this context, several implied outcomes were identified by participants, including the need for a clearly articulated pathway following Parliament's decision, mechanisms for managing expectations during any transition period, and measures to reinforce constitutional legitimacy and peaceful relations between Bougainville and the rest of Papua New Guinea.

National Implications and Precedent

Participants in several regions raised questions about the broader implications of Bougainville's political future for Papua New Guinea as a whole. Some expressed concern that a decision to endorse Bougainville's independence could be perceived as setting a precedent for other provinces, potentially influencing debates about autonomy, decentralisation, or secession elsewhere in the country. From this perspective, participants highlighted the importance of Parliament clearly articulating the rationale for its decision, particularly how it relates to constitutional principles and national unity.

Other participants countered that Bougainville's case is exceptional and should be understood within its specific historical and legal context. They emphasised Bougainville's experience of armed conflict, the negotiated peace process, and the detailed constitutional arrangements established under the Bougainville Peace Agreement. From this viewpoint, Bougainville was not seen as a template for other regions, but rather as a distinct case arising from unique circumstances that are unlikely to be replicated elsewhere.

These discussions frequently expanded into broader reflections on decentralisation, equity, and the distribution of power and resources across the country. Participants in several regions used the Bougainville issue as a reference point for expressing long-standing concerns about uneven development, perceived marginalisation, and the effectiveness of existing decentralisation arrangements. While not all participants directly linked these issues to independence, many suggested that the Bougainville process has brought renewed attention to questions about how authority, responsibilities, and resources are shared between the national government and subnational governments.

In this context, some participants noted that Parliament’s decision on Bougainville may have indirect implications for future debates on decentralisation, including expectations around greater fiscal autonomy, improved service delivery, and more equitable resource distribution. Others cautioned that unmet expectations in these areas could increase pressure on national institutions, particularly if communities interpret the Bougainville process as highlighting broader structural imbalances.

Overall, while participants did not present a unified view on national implications or precedent, the consultations indicated that Bougainville’s political future is widely seen as connected to broader questions of governance, equity, and national cohesion. These considerations form an important backdrop to Parliament’s deliberations, underscoring the need for decisions that are clearly reasoned, constitutionally grounded, and attentive to their wider implications for Papua New Guinea as a whole.



Communication, Trust, and Expectations

Finally, many participants highlighted the importance of communication and trust throughout the post-referendum process. Concerns were raised about misinformation, misunderstandings, and gaps in public awareness regarding the status of negotiations and decision-making.

Speakers frequently emphasised that clear, consistent, and honest communication from leaders is essential to managing expectations and maintaining public confidence. Trust, once lost, was described as difficult to rebuild, reinforcing calls for transparency and engagement at every stage.

Taken together, these cross-cutting themes illustrate the complexity of the issues before Parliament. They demonstrate that public perspectives are shaped not only by preferences regarding independence, but also by concerns about peace, governance, process, and the future relationship between Bougainville and Papua New Guinea.



5. REGIONAL PERSPECTIVES AND KEY ARGUMENTS

While the consultations revealed strong national-level themes, each region brought forward distinct emphases shaped by local history, political experience, and proximity to Bougainville. The following section summarises the principal perspectives and arguments articulated in each consultation location, without implying uniformity of views within any region.

New Guinea Islands Region (Kokopo)

Discussions in Kokopo were characterised by a strong sense of regional solidarity with Bougainville, informed by shared historical experiences and cultural ties within the New Guinea Islands. Participants frequently framed Bougainville's situation within broader conversations about decentralisation, autonomy, and the distribution of power and resources across Papua New Guinea.

Many speakers in Kokopo expressed support for recognising the referendum outcome, emphasising that Bougainville's case arises from a specific historical and constitutional context linked to the Bougainville Peace Agreement. Participants often distinguished Bougainville's experience from that of other provinces by reference to the conflict, the peace process, and the explicit constitutional provisions governing the referendum.

At the same time, Kokopo participants placed notable emphasis on process and preparedness. Discussions frequently returned to questions of how independence, if pursued, should be implemented in a way that safeguards stability and livelihoods. Several speakers stressed the importance of a transition period during which Bougainville could strengthen institutions, infrastructure, and economic systems, with continued cooperation from the national government.

Reconciliation featured prominently in Kokopo discussions. Participants referred to the need for healing not only between Bougainville and the national government, but also among communities affected by conflict-related displacement and disruption. Reconciliation was often framed as a prerequisite for any lasting political settlement.

Highlands Region (Goroka)

The Goroka consultation reflected perspectives shaped by distance from Bougainville and a strong emphasis on national unity and constitutional responsibility. Participants frequently framed Bougainville's future within the broader context of Papua New Guinea's nationhood, governance challenges, and history of regional diversity.

Speakers in Goroka generally acknowledged the significance of the referendum and its origins in the Bougainville Peace Agreement. However, discussions often focused on the role of the National Parliament as the ultimate decision-making authority under the

Constitution. Participants emphasised that Members of Parliament must weigh the referendum outcome alongside considerations of national interest, long-term stability, and constitutional integrity.

Concerns about precedent were raised more frequently in Goroka than in some other regions. Participants discussed the possibility that Bougainville's independence could encourage similar demands elsewhere, particularly in resource-rich provinces. These concerns were often balanced by recognition that Bougainville's circumstances are unique, though views differed on how this uniqueness should be interpreted in practice.

There was also strong emphasis on peaceful decision-making. Speakers stressed that regardless of outcome, the process must avoid provoking conflict or resentment. Several participants called for clear public education and communication to ensure that communities understand the reasons behind parliamentary decisions.

Momase Region (Lae)

The Lae consultation was marked by detailed and often technically informed discussions of constitutional, legal, and governance issues. Participants included individuals with legal, academic, and civil society backgrounds, and contributions frequently referenced specific provisions of the Constitution and the Bougainville Peace Agreement.

Many speakers in Lae emphasised accountability and the rule of law, arguing that the handling of the referendum outcome would serve as a test of Papua New Guinea's commitment to democratic principles. Participants discussed the importance of ensuring that parliamentary procedures are transparent, credible, and consistent with constitutional requirements.

Historical responsibility was also a recurring theme. Speakers referred to the role of the Panguna mine in national development and to the impacts of the conflict on Bougainvillean communities. These references were often used to frame arguments about moral obligation, though participants differed on how such obligations should translate into concrete political action.

Discussions in Lae also focused on transition design. Participants explored the merits of phased approaches, institutional sequencing, and capacity-building, stressing that independence, if pursued, should be accompanied by careful planning to avoid governance gaps or economic disruption.

Autonomous Region of Bougainville (Buka and Arawa)



Consultations in the Autonomous Region of Bougainville, including Buka and Arawa, reflected perspectives grounded in direct experience of the conflict, the peace process, and the operation of autonomous governance. Discussions were often highly focused on the referendum outcome and its implications, and expectations regarding the future were articulated with clarity and intensity.

Many participants in both locations described the referendum as having settled the question of Bougainville's political aspiration. From this

perspective, parliamentary consideration was frequently characterised as a procedural step within the constitutional framework rather than a substantive reconsideration of Bougainville's status. These views were commonly accompanied by references to the sacrifices made during the conflict, the loss of life, and the length and complexity of the peace process.

Alongside these expectations, participants engaged in detailed discussions about the practical requirements for the future. Topics included the transfer of remaining powers and functions, the strengthening of public institutions, economic planning, land and resource governance, and internal reconciliation among Bougainvillean communities. Several speakers in Arawa in particular emphasised the need to address unresolved internal divisions and to ensure that governance arrangements are inclusive and responsive across different regions and groups within Bougainville.

Timing and sequencing were also discussed in depth. While some participants stressed the urgency of providing clarity and momentum following the referendum, others supported longer or phased transition periods to allow for consolidation, capacity-building, and confidence-building, provided that the overall direction and process were clearly articulated. Across both consultations, there was strong emphasis on the importance of clear communication and cooperative engagement between Bougainville

and the National Government to support stability and public confidence during any transition.

Southern Region (Port Moresby)

The Port Moresby consultation reflected perspectives shaped by proximity to national decision-making and a strong awareness of constitutional, legal, and political responsibility. Discussions were largely framed around the authority of the National Parliament under the Constitution and the Bougainville Peace Agreement, with frequent emphasis on Parliament's role as the final arbiter of the referendum outcome. Participants consistently acknowledged the historical roots of the Bougainville conflict, including colonial-era grievances, the Panguna mine, and human rights abuses during the crisis, and many argued that these factors help explain the overwhelming referendum result and impose a moral responsibility on the state.

At the same time, Southern Region participants placed strong emphasis on process, legality, and risk management. Much of the discussion focused on the meaning of ratification, the non-binding nature of the referendum, and the procedural requirements that would follow a parliamentary decision, including constitutional amendments, enabling legislation, and the use of sessional orders. Several speakers stressed that, if Parliament were to ratify the result, independence would need to be managed through a carefully phased transition, with continued cooperation, capacity-building, and financial support from the national government rather than an abrupt separation.

If Parliament were to decide against ratification, participants repeatedly underlined the need for peaceful management of the outcome, in line with the spirit of the Bougainville Peace Agreement and subsequent Melanesian Agreement. Speakers warned that a rejection would require clear justification, sustained dialogue, and tangible measures—such as strengthened autonomy arrangements, accelerated transfer of powers, and increased development support—to maintain trust and stability. Across differing viewpoints, there was broad consensus in Port Moresby that whatever decision Parliament makes, it must be handled transparently, lawfully, and without recourse to violence, recognising both Bougainville's long historical journey and Papua New Guinea's responsibility to preserve peace and national cohesion.

Written Submissions

In addition to oral evidence provided during the nationwide consultations, the Committee received a substantial number of written submissions from individuals, community representatives, civil society organisations, and political leaders, primarily from Bougainville but also from other parts of Papua New Guinea. The submissions varied in length, focus, and level of technical detail, and collectively provided a complementary perspective to the issues raised during the hearings.



A significant proportion of submissions emphasised the referendum as a decisive expression of the will of the people of Bougainville. Many submitters described the outcome as the culmination of a long historical process shaped by conflict, reconciliation, and negotiated political settlement. From this perspective, parliamentary consideration was often framed as a step to give effect to the result rather than to revisit the underlying question of Bougainville’s political aspiration.

Other submissions placed stronger emphasis on constitutional process and the role of Parliament as the final decision-making authority under the Bougainville Peace Agreement and the Constitution. These contributions highlighted the importance of ensuring that any outcome is implemented through lawful, orderly, and transparent procedures, particularly where constitutional amendments or enabling legislation may be required.

Across the submissions, peace and stability emerged as central concerns. Many contributors referred to the experience of the conflict and expressed apprehension that prolonged uncertainty, perceived delay, or lack of clarity could undermine trust and social cohesion. At the same time, several submissions cautioned against abrupt or poorly planned change, emphasising the need for careful sequencing, capacity-building, and sustained cooperation between Bougainville and the National Government.

Issues of readiness and transition featured prominently. Submitters discussed institutional capacity, economic sustainability, governance arrangements, and service delivery, with differing views on how these factors should influence timing and sequencing. While some argued that outstanding capacity challenges should be addressed prior to significant political change, others maintained that capacity development is an ongoing process that should proceed alongside a managed transition.

A number of submissions also addressed reconciliation and internal cohesion within Bougainville, noting the importance of inclusive governance, respect for diverse community perspectives, and continued efforts to address unresolved grievances. Several contributors further situated Bougainville's experience within a broader national context, raising questions about decentralisation, autonomy, and governance reform across Papua New Guinea.

Overall, the written submissions reinforced many of the themes raised during the consultations while also providing additional depth and reflection. They underscored the importance of clear process, transparent communication, and responsible leadership in managing expectations and supporting peaceful and orderly decision-making on matters arising from the Bougainville Referendum.



6. KEY CONSIDERATIONS FOR POLICYMAKERS

The nationwide consultations highlighted a set of interrelated considerations that warrant careful attention by policymakers as the National Parliament deliberates on matters arising from the Bougainville Referendum. These considerations do not prescribe outcomes but rather identify factors that participants across regions regarded as critical to responsible, legitimate, and peaceful decision-making.

Preserving peace and stability as an overriding priority

Across all regions, participants consistently stressed that the foremost consideration must be the preservation of peace. The Bougainville conflict remains a lived memory for many, and the peace achieved through the Bougainville Peace Agreement was widely regarded as fragile and hard-won. Policymakers are therefore urged to assess not only the legal correctness of decisions, but also their potential social and political effects. Participants repeatedly cautioned that abrupt decisions, prolonged uncertainty, or poorly communicated outcomes could undermine trust and increase the risk of tension. Participants also frequently indicated that how Parliament reaches its decision—through adherence to agreed processes, clear reasoning, and respectful engagement with all stakeholders—may be as important as the decision itself.

Peace was widely understood as requiring active management through dialogue, reassurance, and inclusive processes, regardless of the decision taken.

Upholding constitutional process and parliamentary legitimacy

Participants demonstrated strong expectations that Parliament will act in accordance with the Constitution and the Bougainville Peace Agreement, and that its procedures will be transparent, consistent, and clearly explained. Many emphasised that the legitimacy of Parliament's eventual decision will depend not only on the substance of that decision, but also on the fairness and clarity of the process by which it is reached. Issues such as voting thresholds, the use of sessional orders, and the passage of enabling legislation were frequently cited as matters requiring careful handling to avoid perceptions of arbitrariness or political expediency.

Managing Expectations through Clarity, Communication, and Sequencing

Evidence from consultations and written submissions indicates that public confidence is closely linked to clarity around parliamentary procedure, sequencing, and communication. Public expectations have been shaped not only by the referendum result itself, but also by the post-referendum dialogue and the pace of subsequent developments. In this context, participants consistently emphasised the importance of clear and timely communication regarding parliamentary processes, decisions, and next steps.

Contributors highlighted the need to avoid ambiguity about timelines, roles, and responsibilities, noting that uncertainty can undermine trust and stability. Where change is envisaged, many participants favoured sequenced and phased approaches linked to agreed milestones rather than fixed dates, allowing space for capacity-building, adjustment, and confidence-building over time. Clear articulation of process and intent was widely seen as essential to managing expectations and supporting orderly decision-making and implementation.

Addressing readiness, capacity, and long-term relationships

Questions of institutional readiness and capacity featured prominently in discussions across regions. Participants expressed differing views on Bougainville's current level of preparedness for independence, but there was broad agreement that capacity development is a shared responsibility arising from the autonomy arrangements and the Peace Agreement. Policymakers were urged to consider how governance, service delivery, fiscal arrangements, and economic sustainability would be supported during any transition. Importantly, many participants emphasised that the future relationship between Bougainville and Papua New Guinea—whether within a single state or between two political entities—should be cooperative, respectful, and durable, rather than defined solely by separation.



7. CONCLUSIONS

The nationwide public consultations and written submissions revealed a high level of public engagement with, and understanding of, the issues arising from the Bougainville Referendum. While participants and submitters expressed a wide range of perspectives on independence, timing, and process, there was a notable degree of convergence around core principles: the imperative of maintaining peace, the importance of constitutional and transparent decision-making, the need for careful planning and sequencing, and the value of continued dialogue between Bougainville and the rest of Papua New Guinea.

The evidence underscored that the referendum result carries deep historical, political, and emotional significance, particularly for Bougainvilleans, while also engaging broader national considerations of unity, governance, and constitutional responsibility. These perspectives were not presented as mutually exclusive, but rather as reflecting different emphases in assessing risk, obligation, and the national interest.

Participants and submitters consistently cautioned against approaches that could be perceived as dismissive, opaque, or unilateral. Instead, there was strong support for decisions that are clearly explained, grounded in law, and accompanied by practical measures to manage their consequences. The importance of reconciliation—between Bougainville and the National Government, among Bougainvilleans themselves, and within the wider national community—was repeatedly highlighted as a continuing task that extends beyond any single parliamentary decision.

This report does not recommend a particular outcome. Its purpose is to present Parliament with a structured and faithful account of the views expressed during the consultations and through written submissions. In doing so, it reflects a shared public expectation that decisions on Bougainville's political future will be made with care, responsibility, and respect for both democratic expression and constitutional order, and with an unwavering commitment to sustaining peace in Papua New Guinea.