Parliaments are essential in a well-functioning democratic system of government. They perform legislative, accountability and representational functions and by electing representatives to parliament citizens are able to influence the decisions that affect their lives.

But in the Pacific many parliaments have struggled to establish themselves as credible and effective institutions. They are commonly criticised for being weak and, in many cases, subordinate to the executive arm of government.

Elected members of parliament often find themselves consumed by a cycle of negotiations to form and re-form government. This process of coalition-making can cause members to overlook the contribution they can make as parliamentarians to public policy and law making.

The Pacific Parliamentary Leadership Dialogue will allow a select group of 12 influential and emerging parliamentarians from across the Pacific to reflect on what it means to be a parliamentarian today and to consider what they as individuals can do to re-vitalize the performance of their parliaments.

The Dialogue is a 4-day program of discussions and briefings designed to challenge participants to distinguish between their roles as politician and as parliamentarian; to reflect on the tensions that exist between being a community advocate, member of a political party, policy maker, legislator and accountability agent; and to consider the critically important contribution that parliament can make to good governance.

During the Dialogue participants will discuss:
- balancing relationships between the parliamentary, executive and judicial branches of government;
- exercising parliamentary power, especially law making, policy review and administrative accountability and financial scrutiny powers; and
- ethics and integrity in parliamentary leadership.

These discussions will be informed by meetings with Australian parliamentarians and parliamentary officials and by observing proceedings of the Australian Parliament and its committees. The program will also involve meetings with members and staff from the Australian Capital Territory Legislative Assembly.

The Dialogue will be guided by a panel of facilitators including Sir Rabbie Namaliu (former PNG Prime Minister and Speaker of the PNG Parliament), Hon Dr Kay Paterson (former Australian Senator and Cabinet Minister); Hon Duncan Kerr (former Australian MP and Minister) and Dr Stephen Sherlock (CDI’s Director).

The Dialogue is an opportunity for parliamentarians from across the Pacific to consider what they can do to foster new ways of thinking about parliamentary leadership, so that Pacific parliaments can assume their place as effective institutions of government. The Dialogue is an opportunity also to encourage participants to mobilise networks for change within their own parliaments.