China Probes Naoero's Seabed—Last Week in the Pacific

Summary of PRC Activity

China concentrated its activity this week on seabed resources and institutions inside US partner states. In Naoero, the submersible *Jiaolong* hosted the president and carried AI systems that could adapt to submarine and sonar uses. Naoero sponsors a seabed contract area that overlaps a pending US permit application. In Kiribati, Chinese fishing ventures appear to supply more than a tenth of government revenue. In Fiji, the RFMF China Alumni Association gives Beijing a formal network inside a partner military. New ambassadors arrived in Fiji and Kiribati, while health training in the Solomon Islands and student awards in Naoero extend Chinese soft power.

Ambassador's Corner

On 27 October, Ambassador Lyu Jin presented Naoero's first Chinese Ambassador Awards alongside Education Minister Asterio Appi.

Students received cash in red envelopes. The embassy paid AUD 37,200 (about US$25,700) to 198 students across five schools, from AUD 100 per primary-school student to AUD 600 for the top performers at Naoero Secondary. It also handed the Department of Education a second batch of 30 computers, following an earlier 30 computers and 600 schoolbags.

Days later, the embassy held a second presentation in its facilities for students who missed the first ceremony.

This Week's Big Themes:

Deep Sea Engagement in Naoero

On 26 October, the research vessel *Shenhai Yihao* (Deep Sea No. 1), carrying the crewed submersible *Jiaolong*, docked at Aiwo on the second leg of China's Ocean 100 expedition. The ship's crew and Ambassador Lyu Jin led President David Adeang, Speaker Marcus Stephen, and Chief Justice Jay Udit on a tour and showed them samples "collected from the waters around Naoero." More than 150 dei-Naoero attended a public open day. The embassy said attendees showed "appreciation for Chinese technology" and highlighted *Jiaolong*'s first female pilot to the young women in the crowd.

**The PRC Pacific Embassies Monitor provides systematic, open-source tracking of Beijing's public diplomatic activities across the nine Pacific Island Countries hosting Chinese missions. The monitor captures official embassy social media and website posts, supplemented by local sources, to offer a weekly structured intelligence report that bridges critical information gaps on regional engagement*

Naoeroan media, not the embassy, shared parts of the speech in which Lyu highlighted the expedition's purpose and China's aims for deep-sea cooperation. He said the expedition would give "Naoero a clearer picture of its marine resources" to help the country "better manage, protect, and sustainably develop its marine resources, diversify its economy, and support long term growth."

Xinhua reported that Lyu urged cooperation in "marine spatial planning, marine ecological monitoring, marine industry development, and marine talent training" and that the two sides met to define next steps. The Ambassador and the ship's chief scientist presented President Adeang with a model of the submersible. Adeang is Naoero's leading advocate for seabed mining in the Clarion–Clipperton Zone, where the country sponsors NORI's exploration contract, so the gift suited a known interest.



Ambassador Lyu presents President Adeang with a *Jiaolong* model. (Source: PRC Embassy in Naoero Facebook)

Jiaolong arrived with AI upgrades that carry potential military uses. As the *Shenhai Yihao* reached Naoero, *Xinhua* reported that the submersible had tested two new AI-powered systems on trial dives in the Philippine Basin. The first technology is a fault-diagnosis and decision-support system that helps identify mechanical problems. The *South China Morning Post's* (SCMP) reported that this system could have military applications in nuclear-powered submarines. The second system is an AI imagery-analysis program that identifies objects on the seabed. It can reconstruct the submersible's diving trajectory, analyze marine species, and generate reports on seabed ecosystems. *SCMP* reported that a system of this kind could be adapted to acoustic data to support military sonar. The vessel that offered Naoero a clearer picture of its marine resources had tested systems that *SCMP* says could serve submarine and sonar programs.

Supporting Events

- **Naoero:** *Shenhai Yihao* Visits; President Adeang Tours
- **Naoero:** Public Open Day Aboard *Shenhai Yihao*
- **Naoero:** Xinhua: *Shenhai Yihao* Visits Naoero (Chinese)

Kiribati Engages China on Ocean Resources

From 14 to 23 October, a delegation led by Kiribati Minister for Fisheries and Ocean Resources (MFOR) Ribanataake Tiwau held 10 meetings across Shanghai, Zhoushan, and Beijing. Four of these events were board meetings for Kiribati-China joint ventures—Kiribati Fish Limited, Kiribati Island Fish Limited, Kiribati Tuna Fishing Company Limited, Kiribati Blue Pacific. A fifth meeting involved China National Fisheries Company (CNFC). MFOR reported about US$2.6 million in dividends from the joint ventures to the Kiribati government and said the ventures buy more than US$28 million in fishing days each year. Together, the two figures equal more than 10 percent of the government's 2024 revenue.

On 20 October, Tiwau signed a tripartite joint venture framework agreement with CNFC and a Fiji-based partner. The general manager of China National Agriculture Development Group, the state-owned enterprise that operates CNFC, said that the cooperation "covers purse-seine and longline fishing operations, as well as seafood processing and exports."



Minister Tiwau receives a gift at China Minmetals. (Source: Kiribati Ministry of Fisheries and Ocean Resources Facebook)

The delegation met the Vice President from China MinMetals Corporation, the Director General of the China Deep Ocean Affairs Administration, and the General Manager of the China Mechanical and Engineering Company (CMEC). The Ministry did not describe these meetings, but the other events and the readout offer clues to their purpose. The CNFC agreement emphasizes building Kiribati's domestic processing industry, which may explain the CMEC meeting. The readout reported agreed next steps in development areas that include deep-sea minerals and thanked, among others, the chairman of Marawa, the Kiribati state-owned company that holds an International Seabed Authority contract in the Clarion–Clipperton Zone. Together, these references make it likely that the Minmetals and deep ocean administration meetings concerned seabed minerals.

At the end of the trip, Tiwau and his delegation hosted a banquet in Beijing for i-Kiribati students studying in China. After returning, he was among the first officials to receive Ambassador Yao Fei.

Supporting Events

- **Kiribati:** Tiwau Delegation Holds JV Board Meetings in China
- **Kiribati:** CNADC Signs Tripartite Fisheries JV Framework
- **Kiribati:** Yao Fei Meets Minister Tiwau

Military Ties

On 29 October, the Republic of Fiji Military Forces (RFMF) China Alumni Association signed its constitution at a ceremony Defense Attaché Zhang Yu attended

Building Health Capacity

At the Solomon Islands Ministry of Health's request, the China Medical Team in Honiara assigned a breast surgery specialist to the National Referral Hospital (NRH).

New Ambassadors in Suva and Tarawa

After a year without an ambassador, China sent Ambassador Chen Haiping to Fiji.

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