

PAC: NZ consulate planned for Brisbane

AUCKLAND, April 17 AAP - New Zealand will open a consulate in Brisbane this year and beef up its diplomatic presence in Melbourne as part of an overhaul of its foreign affairs department.

New Zealand Foreign Minister Winston Peters yesterday said he had secured a five-year funding plan for his department of \$NZ621 million (\$A524 million).

The money would fund about 100 overseas diplomats and 100 domestic staff in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

"New posts will open this year in Stockholm and Brisbane, with a diplomatic presence added to the trade work of the Consulate-General in Melbourne," a statement from Peters' office said.

"Posts in Asia will get extra staff and resources to work more effectively with regional groupings such as ASEAN and the East Asia Summit."

A spokesman for the minister said the move was a recognition that Australia was New Zealand's largest trading partner.

"You have got to do more than have an office in Canberra and in Sydney if you want to take full advantage of that and try to boost the levels even higher," he said.

He said New Zealand also needed more diplomats to hasten negotiations for free trade deals, and to see the Doha trade talks successfully concluded.

Posts in the Pacific would be strengthened in recognition that the region was no longer the peaceful place it used to be, he said.

"Some of the (Pacific) posts we had that were relatively small because the relationship was relatively straightforward are now under strain because things aren't so easy anymore," he said.

As part of the deal the ministry would get \$NZ523 million (\$A441 million) in new operational funds over the next five years and a capital injection of \$NZ98 million (\$A83 million).

The ministry's current annual operating budget is about \$NZ278 million (\$A234 million), according to reports.