The road to the 2014 FIFA World Cup Brazil™ and the Women's Olympic Football Tournament London 2012 have been altered for the top men's and women's teams respectively within Oceania.

OFC originally planned to use the football tournaments at the Pacific Games in New Caledonia this August/September as part of the qualification process, as had been the case in Samoa four years earlier.

But uncertainty around the participation of Guam, a member of the Asian Football Confederation (AFC), in the respective football tournaments has left the OFC Executive Committee with no other option but to scale back its involvement.

The men's tournament at the XIV Pacific Games 2011 will therefore no longer act as the first stage of qualifying for the 2014 FIFA World Cup™ while the women's event will likewise not be part of the 2012 Olympic Games qualification process.

OFC General Secretary Tai Nicholas admits it is disappointing to not be able to use the Pacific Games as a qualifying stage but says OFC had no other choice.

"FIFA have been very clear that they cannot approve a FIFA qualifying event where non-OFC members are participating," Nicholas says.

"But the Pacific Games will remain a premier event for the Pacific Island nations. Eleven men's teams and ten women's teams are still going to the Games and will use the matches as preparation for the upcoming FIFA qualifying events."

Nicholas says the confederation has had to look at alternative options for the World Cup qualification process and a new four-stage format has been decided upon and approved by FIFA.

The first stage will see the four lowest-ranked OFC member associations (based on the FIFA/Coca-Cola ranking and other sporting reasons) take part in a tournament based on a league system from 21-26 November 2011.

The countries involved will be American Samoa, Cook Islands, Samoa and Tonga, and the top finisher will advance to the second stage, joining the remaining seven OFC teams that received a bye in the first stage.

Stage two will see the revival of the OFC Nations Cup where eight countries - namely Fiji, New Caledonia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Tahiti, Vanuatu and the winner of stage one - will take part in a tournament based on a league system with semi-finals and a final.

The tournament is scheduled for 1-12 June 2012 and the winner of the final will go on to represent OFC in the 2013 FIFA Confederations Cup.

The four highest-placed teams from the second stage will then contest stage three - a round-robin, home-and-away play-off series.

The matches are foreseen to take place between 7 September 2012 and 26 March 2013 in FIFA windows.

The winner of the third stage will advance to the inter-continental play-off for a place at the 2014 FIFA World Cup Brazil™.

Whether the OFC representative will face an Asian, Central American or South American opponent will become known after the 2014 FIFA World Cup Brazil™ Preliminary Draw on 30 July.

Nicholas is pleased with the format of the new qualification process and says it will provide plenty of excitement for the region’s football followers.

“The withdrawal from the Pacific Games has given us the opportunity to review the qualification pathway and we believe we have developed several events that will cater to the needs of our members and fans across the Pacific,” he says.

An alternative option for women's Olympic qualifying has also been found. New Zealand will be seeded to the second stage while the eight other OFC member associations who are International Olympic Committee (IOC) members – American Samoa, Cook Islands, Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu - will play a tournament based on a league system with semi-finals and a final.

The winner of the preliminary stage final will then play New Zealand in a one-off match hosted by the preliminary winner. As was the case for the 2008 Olympics, the winner of this match will qualify for the Women's Olympic Football Tournament London 2012.