

Jurisdiction report: National Parliament of Solomon Islands

50th Presiding Officers and Clerks Conference

Brisbane July 2019

1. SUMMARY:

1.1. Since the 49th Presiding Officers and Clerks Conference (POCC) the National Parliament of Solomon Islands has had an eventful 12 months. This jurisdiction report provides a brief overview of the key highlights and events during that time, the report concludes with a few words of acknowledgement.

2. DISSOLUTION - 10TH PARLIAMENT :

2.1. For the latter part of 2018 Parliament met more frequently than usual, with the government keen to clear its legislative program before the dissolution of the 10th Parliament, this kept the House busy from 18 July to 31st August and 24 September 2018.

2.2. The Budget meeting commenced in late October 2018 – with the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) taking the lead in reviewing the 2019 Budget estimates. The Committee was aided in its scrutiny and analysis of the 2019 Budget papers with technical support the UNDP Pacific Parliamentary Effectiveness Initiative (PPEI) providing research officers from regional parliaments to assist the committee secretariat. This initiative has also proven successful in other pacific parliaments.

2.3. With the House set to dissolve on the December 17th 2018 – The Bills and Legislation Committee had a busy task of scheduling public hearings in-between Parliament sittings. A total of 17 Bills came through the Committee for scrutiny – and for a small island Parliament this was significant not only in terms of the number of Bills but also the pressure put on the Committee and its limited resources.

2.4. Amongst the bills passed by Parliament were the Anti-corruption Bill; the Whistle Blowers Bill; Electoral reform bills as well as 2 Citizenship reform bills.

2.5. With the dissolution date looming and to allow all MPs time speak on the *sine-die* motion, Parliament agreed to sit over the weekend. After all MPs had spoken, the 10th Parliament adjourned *sine-die* at 10pm on Sunday 16th December 2018.

3. NATIONAL GENERAL ELECTIONS:

3.1. On 3rd April 2019 Solomon Islands held its National General Elections, this was the country's first election since the withdrawal of the Australia-led Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Island (RAMSI) in June 2017. Most constituencies recorded voter turnouts of more than 80 percent.

3.2. The Electoral Commission and international observer groups have commended the country for a peaceful election.

- 3.3. The 50 members of the National Parliament were elected in single-member constituencies using first-past-the-post voting. 36 MPs retained their seats including 2 women MPs – (Lanelle Tanangada and Freda Soriacomua), with 14 new MPs making up the balance. Each member serves a four year term.

4. 11TH PARLIAMENT – 1ST MEETING:

- 4.1. The first meeting of the 11th Parliament – was held on Wednesday 15 May 2019. The first sitting day commenced with the administration of Oaths followed by the election of the Speaker and Deputy Speaker.
- 4.2. As mandated by Standing Orders 5 "Every citizen of Solomon Islands over the age of twenty-one and who is otherwise qualified for election as a Member shall be eligible for election as Speaker". Thus the Speaker is not necessarily chosen from among sitting MPs. There were 2 nominations for the Speaker's post – Mr Ajilon J Nasiu and Mr Patteson J Oti. After just the first round of voting Mr Patteson J Oti was announced Speaker of the National Parliament with a majority of 15 votes. A total of 48 votes were cast, with 3 spoilt ballots and 2 MPs absent.
- 4.3. For the Deputy Speakership, only one nomination was received at the closure of nominations and that was for Hon. Stanley Festus Sofu. He was then declared during the first sitting as the Deputy Speaker of Parliament.
- 4.4. The first meeting of the 11th Parliament also saw the announcement of Mr David Kusilifu as the newly appointment Clerk to National Parliament. The Clerk's post was left vacant in late December 2018 when the former Clerk Clezy Rore left to contest in the National General Elections.

5. MP'S INDUCTION:

- 5.1. Following on from the first meeting of Parliament, the National Parliament Office then organised a 3 day induction training program for Members of Parliament. The programme was held from 27th to 29th May 2019 and covered elements that would strengthen the role of Members of Parliament in the oversight and scrutiny of Government. Hon. Viliame Gavoka from the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji and Former NZ Member of Parliament Richard Mark Burton and academic, Joseph Foukona (PhD) attended the induction programme as resource persons sharing their expertise and experiences.
- 5.2. The Induction was made possible through the partnership of the National Parliament of the Solomon Islands and the UNDP Pacific Office in Fiji through two of its parliamentary strengthening programmes namely, the Pacific Parliamentary Effectiveness Initiative (PPEI) funded by the Government of New Zealand and the Strengthening Legislatures in Pacific Island Countries Project (SLIP) funded by the Government of Japan.

6. PARLIAMENTARY REFORMS:

- 6.1. Upon taking up duties as Speaker of Parliament, Mr Patteson Oti made his intentions clear during his brief introductory remarks in Parliament in that during his term he aims to pursue a number of Parliamentary reforms.
- 6.2. Key to the reform agenda is Parliamentary Autonomy, the Speaker has recently revived the autonomy working group – an in house working group tasked to review and implement proposed changes to the current Standing Orders as well as raising the autonomy issue with the Parliamentary House Committee and the Executive.
- 6.3. As part of the reforms and to ensure a progressive modernization of the Standing Orders, the Speaker has proposed that the first tranche of amendments to the Standing Orders be introduced during the August sitting of Parliament.
- 6.4. Another reform initiative is the ‘Parliamentary Chairs Group’ - The Speaker who is the Chair of the Committee Chairs Group will conduct regular reporting meetings with Committee Chairs and report on progress of each committee on a monthly or quarterly basis. The first meeting is scheduled for late July.

7. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

- 7.1. In closing the National Parliament wishes to acknowledge and sincerely thank the previous Speaker of Parliament Mr Ajilon Nasiu and the previous Clerk Mr Clezy Rore for their leadership, service and commitment to the National Parliament.
- 7.2. The National Parliament also wishes to thank the Speaker of the New Zealand House of Representatives, Rt Hon Trevor Mallard and his parliamentary delegation for visiting the Solomon Islands in October 2018. The New Zealand delegation met with the Leader of Opposition and the Leader of the Independents along with the Deputy Speaker and Committee Chairs.