

# Pacific Ombudsman Alliance ~ Network News

Fostering government integrity and good administration in the Pacific

Issue 31 – June 2013

## COMPLAINT HANDLING IN KIRIBATI

The Pacific Ombudsman Alliance (POA) is currently supporting a short-term placement in the Kiribati Public Service Office, to provide technical advice and training in complaint handling. The four-week placement is being carried out by senior investigations officer Helen Ford of the New South Wales Ombudsman's office.

As a part of her placement, Ms Ford is examining how complaints are currently handled by the Public Service Office and in other government agencies, delivering training, and supporting the development of a suite of tools to guide agencies in their complaint handling.

The Public Service Office is a non-legislative complaint handling mechanism for complaints about government. It receives about ten complaints a week, and deals directly with agencies in resolving disputes. More complicated and contentious matters are referred to the Secretary to the Cabinet as head of the public service.

Other avenues of complaint include to the President, Members of Parliament, directly to ministries, the Public Service Commission (largely appeals against employment decisions) and the courts.



*Helen Ford (left), Deputy Secretary and staff of the Public Service Office participating in complaint handling training*

## COOK ISLANDS AND VANUATU OMBUDSMEN VISIT AUSTRALIA



*L-R Kalkot Mataskelekele, Colin Neave and Tearoa John Tini*

The Cook Islands Ombudsman, Tearoa John Tini, and Vanuatu Ombudsman, Kalkot Mataskelekele carried out a one-week tour in Australia in late May. The Ombudsmen were hosted by the Commonwealth and New South Wales Ombudsman offices in Australia.

The Ombudsmen held a series of meetings with the Commonwealth and New South Wales Ombudsmen to share experiences and strategies for leading an Ombudsman's office effectively. The Ombudsmen also held meetings with operational and corporate staff to look at a range of common issues – including strategies for successfully engaging with government agencies and overcoming challenges to implementing organisational change.

The Ombudsmen also took the opportunity whilst in Sydney and Canberra to visit other institutions in the Australian integrity landscape – including the Independent Commission Against Corruption (NSW), the Office of the Information Commissioner and the Australian Commission for Law Enforcement Integrity.

Both the Cook Islands Ombudsman and Vanuatu Ombudsman were appointed in November last year.

## SAMOAN OMBUDSMAN GETS HUMAN RIGHTS FUNCTION

In March 2013, the Government of Samoa introduced the *Ombudsman Bill 2013* to give the Komesina o Sulufaiga (Office of the Ombudsman of Samoa) the additional role of Human Rights Commission. On 30 May 2013 the Bill was passed without amendment by the Samoan Parliament with full cross party support.

In addition to its traditional Ombudsman functions, the office will also need to take on a more proactive role in effectively discharging its human rights functions, including:

- Conducting investigations and inquiries into systemic human rights issues and challenges;
- Increasing human rights awareness, including through education;
- Analysing draft and existing laws for their compatibility with Samoa's human rights obligations and assisting the courts in an amicus curiae role; and
- Collaborating and coordinating with other State institutions and agencies and with civil society.



*Ombudsman Maiava Iulai Toma (Source: Samoa Observer)*

The passage of the Bill is a great result for Samoa, and the result of the tireless work of the Ombudsman, Maiava Iulai Toma, his staff, Australian Youth Ambassador for Development

Ash Bowe, and the Samoan Attorney General the Hon Aumua Ming C. Leung Wai MP. The office will assume its extended mandate from July 2013.

## AUDITOR-GENERAL HARD AT WORK PROMOTING TRANSPARENCY IN RMI



The Office of the Auditor General (OAG) of the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI) recently helped to celebrate the Nation's 34<sup>th</sup> Constitution Day, promoting transparency and accountability in government.

The OAG took the opportunity to provide education to the public on the role of the office and promote its fraud hotline and complaint handling service. The hotline, available 7 days a week, gives the public an avenue to complain about instances of fraud, waste and abuse of public resources.

The Auditor-General, Junior Patrick, and his staff are currently hosting Mr Simon Bonney, a senior investigations officer with the Commonwealth Ombudsman's office, on a short-term placement for the POA. Mr Bonney is assisting the OAG to revise its investigation processes and prosecution protocols.

He is also working with the OAG to clarify some of the complexities in the legislative framework governing the OAG's powers and responsibilities. Mr Bonney is also helping the office develop effective case management protocols between the OAG and external agencies.

## COMMONWEALTH OMBUDSMAN VISITS THE SOLOMON ISLANDS

The Commonwealth Ombudsman Colin Neave and Solomon Islands Ombudsman Joe Poraiwai

have reaffirmed the importance of the relationship between the two offices' during a visit to Honiara hosted by the Office of the Solomon Islands Ombudsman (OOSI) on 12 and 13 June.



*Ombudsman Neave and Ombudsman Poraiwai addressing the media at a press conference*

The Commonwealth Ombudsman delegation carried out a full program of meetings over the two days. Ombudsman Poraiwai and his staff gave the delegation an orientation of the work of the office and provided an update on the status of new ICT and case management systems.

The delegation also held meetings with the Chairman of the Leadership Code Commission, Emmanuel Kouhota, and the Auditor-General, Edward Ronia. Together with the Ombudsman's office, and supported by the Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands (RAMSI), the three integrity agencies work together to promote good governance and transparency through public outreach and coordination.



*The delegation with OOSI staff and Gregory Parkhurst (back right)*

The visit coincided with the four-week placement of Gregory Parkhurst, Senior Investigations Officer with the Commonwealth Ombudsman's

office. Mr Parkhurst is working with the OOSI staff to further develop the offices' case management capability and provide on-the-job mentoring and advice.

This is Mr Parkhurst's second placement in the Solomon Islands. In October 2012, he undertook a four-week placement with the Leadership Code Commission, supporting legislative reform and investigations processes.

## OMBUDSMAN INDUCTION AND LEGISLATIVE REFORM IN TONGA

The Tongan Office of the Commissioner for Public Relations (TOCPR) has had a busy year so far. In March/April, the Acting Commissioner, Mr Sateki 'Ahio, undertook a three-week study tour with the Office of the Ombudsman of New Zealand.

Mr 'Ahio was given a broad introduction into the role of an Ombudsman's office – including strategies for effectively managing relationships with Government agencies and with Parliament and maintaining appropriate independence.

These topics were particularly timely for the Acting Commissioner as the TOCPR are progressing legislative reforms to bolster the independence of the office and clarify some of the offices' powers under existing legislation. The TOCPR is also looking change the offices' name to the Office of the Ombudsman.

At the same time, the TOCPR is concerned about a simultaneous attempt to create a Good Governance Commission to oversight the TOCPR and other integrity agencies. The Good Governance Commission Bill was tabled with the Parliament's Standing Committee on Legislation in late March.

Commonwealth Ombudsman, Colin Neave, as Chair of the Board of POA, wrote to the Prime Minister of Tonga, Lord Tu'ivakano, in April. In his letter, Ombudsman Neave highlighted the need for Ombudsman offices' to be independent and impartial in order to be credible and effective.

The TOCPR expects that following the Committee on Legislation's consideration, the

bills will be tabled in Parliament in August-September 2013.

## CHIEF OMBUDSMAN APPOINTED TO THE PAPUA NEW GUINEA OMBUDSMAN COMMISSION

Papua New Guinea's Prime Minister, Peter O'Neill has announced the appointment of Mr Rigo Lua to the position of Chief Ombudsman of the Ombudsman Commission of PNG. The announcement was made by the Prime Minister at a press conference on 20 June. Mr Lua, comes to the role with a wealth of experience, as a lawyer by profession and as the former Chairman of the Public Services Commission. The Post-Courier online published this [report](#).

The Pacific Ombudsman Alliance welcomes Mr Lua and looks forward to a continued leadership role for the PNG Ombudsman Commission in the Alliance. POA would also like to acknowledge the dedication and achievements of Ombudsman Phoebe Sangetari during her time as Acting Chief Ombudsman.

## NEW ZEALAND OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE WELCOMES PROFESSOR RON PATERSON

The Office of the Ombudsman of New Zealand has welcomed its new Ombudsman, Professor Ron Paterson. Prof. Paterson was sworn in on 4 June. Before starting with the Ombudsman's office, he was a Professor of Law at the University of Auckland and New Zealand Health and Disability Commissioner from 2000-2010.



Professor Ron Paterson (Source: Office of the New Zealand Ombudsman)

## IN THE NEWS

### **10 May 2013 – New report released by Samoan Ombudsman**

The Samoan Ombudsman, Maiava Iulai Toma, has released a damning report criticising the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment for its handling of a land dispute. The report was discussed in a [detailed article](#) and [editorial](#) in the Samoa Observer.

### **12 June 2013 – Solomon Islands MPs charged by Leadership Code Commission**

The Solomon Islands Leadership Code Commission (LCC) has charged 36 Members of Parliament and 17 Permanent Secretaries with misconduct charges. LCC Chairman Emmanuel Kouhota said with vast improvements to their Register of Interests Monitoring System, it was easy to detect leaders who breach the leadership code. The Solomon Star published this [report](#).

## UPCOMING EVENTS

The Pacific Regional Branch International Council on Archives (PARBICA) will hold its fifteenth biennial conference from 12 – 16 August 2013 in Honiara, Solomon Islands. For more information and a copy of the programme visit <http://www.parbica.org/conf15.htm>.

## CONTACT US

Articles and submissions are welcome. To submit items for publication, or any other communication, please write to us at:

*Pacific Ombudsman Alliance Secretariat*  
*Commonwealth Ombudsman*  
GPO Box 442  
Canberra ACT 2601  
AUSTRALIA  
or Email: [pacific@ombudsman.gov.au](mailto:pacific@ombudsman.gov.au)

Previous issues of *Pacific Ombudsman Alliance Network News* are stored electronically and are available at [www.pacificombudsman.org](http://www.pacificombudsman.org).

*Pacific Ombudsman Alliance Network News* is supported by AusAID and NZAID funding.

