

Pacific Ombudsman Alliance ~ Network News

Fostering government integrity and good administration in the Pacific

Issue 29 – December 2012

SPECIAL EDITION – WELLINGTON, NEW ZEALAND

In a busy week in Wellington, POA members participated in the POA members' meeting, POA Working Groups and Sub-Committees, attended the International Ombudsman Institute (IOI) conference, and took part in pre-conference workshops and training.

Wellington was chosen as the venue for the fourth POA members meeting to coincide with the IOI conference, hosted by the President of the IOI and Board member of POA, Chief Ombudsman of New Zealand Dame Beverley Wakem.



ANNUAL MEMBERS MEETING

The fourth annual POA members' meeting was held on Saturday 10th November. Sixteen members representing fourteen organisations from twelve Pacific countries attended the meeting – including both foundation members, and recent appointments who were participating in POA for the first time.

The first order of business was to report on completed activities, such as recent placements in the Republic of the Marshall Islands and the Solomon Islands Leadership Code Commission. The Secretariat also presented a budget statement, including a list of all activities and their costs since the start of 2010. This allowed members to see exactly where the funds had been spent, and the relative cost of each type of activity.

After morning tea each member made a country report, focussing on developments since the last meeting and current challenges. Despite the limited time, this was a very interesting session where members could share their achievements and constraints.

Some issues were shared by a few of the members, for example:

- offices being given additional functions without any additional resourcing
- difficulties in attracting and retaining qualified staff
- delays in appointment processes for statutory positions.



Dame Beverley Wakem, Chief Ombudsman, New Zealand, Alain Molgos, Acting Ombudsman Vanuatu and Emmanuel Kouhota, Chairman Leadership Code Commission, Solomon Islands, during Mr Molgos' country report

POA is currently in the final year of its four-year AusAID-funded "consolidation phase". Therefore this meeting took the opportunity to look back on the past four years and assess whether the objectives set in 2009 had been achieved.

The members were firstly asked - should POA continue at all? The unanimous reply was yes. Each member said that over the years POA had been able to offer material and specific assistance that had led to an improvement in their work, and the organisation should continue.

The meeting broke into small groups to talk about specific issues; the objectives in the charter, the consolidation phase goals, and the proposed goals for the next establishment phase.

During the reporting back of each group, and subsequent discussion, it became clear that the basic objectives and aims of POA were still sound, although several refinements, additions and clarifications were agreed by the group. Many of the goals had been achieved, and many were on-going and should be carried forward into the next phase. Some goals were considered to be no longer relevant.



Mr Sateki 'Ahiu, Acting Commissioner for Public Relations, Tonga and staff member Mr Pilimiso Tamo'ua, speaking on the benefits of POA activity

Three observers were also present at the members' meeting. They were Jean Gordon and Graham Walter – independent consultants hired by AusAID to evaluate the effectiveness of AusAID's funding to POA during this phase. The third observer was Sarah Toh, AusAID program officer.

Mr Walter gave a brief presentation to the group about the evaluation process, and members had individual meetings with the evaluation team during the two days following the meeting. POA welcomes the evaluation process and looks forward to any suggestions that could improve its effectiveness and further help its members.

NEW BOARD ELECTED

In accordance with the Charter, elections were held for a new Board of POA at the members' meeting. Immediately after the meeting, the Board met briefly and elected a Chair and Deputy Chair.

The new Board is:

- Bruce Barbour
- Gillian Itsimaera
- Justin Kamupala
- Colin Neave (Chair)
- Junior Patrick
- Phoebe Sangetari
- Beverley Wakem.

As required by the charter, the Board includes representatives of the Smaller Island States (Ms Itsimaera and Mr Kamupala).

LEADERSHIP SUB-COMMITTEE

Three members of POA – the Papua New Guinea Ombudsman Commission (PNGOC), the Vanuatu Ombudsman and the Leadership Code Commission of the Solomon Islands – have additional responsibilities to monitor and enforce their countries' leadership codes. The representatives of these offices form a sub-committee to mutually support these leadership roles, which can be different to traditional ombudsman work in both theory and practice.

In earlier LSC discussions, there had been three overarching themes:

- legislative reform
- awareness campaigns
- resourcing (in particular, staffing).

The LSC decided that the POA Secretariat should investigate the feasibility of running ongoing, small scale media campaigns (through radio, television or newspapers). There may be economies of scale in having a single set of resources that could be used by all members.

The PNGOC agreed to support the Vanuatu Ombudsman in carrying out inductions for new MPs, through sharing of information and materials from its public awareness and induction programs.

All LSC members agreed that staffing was an issue, particularly recruiting and retaining legal staff. The group shared solutions that had been adopted by the various offices, including secondments, using expatriate workers, and interns.



The members took a trip around Wellington Harbour to Days Bay. In front is Emmanuel Kouhota, Chairman Leadership Code Commission, Solomon Islands, surveying the Wellington beaches.

SHARPENING THEIR TEETH

On 8 – 9 November POA members attended a two-day workshop “Sharpening Your Teeth” run by Ontario Ombudsman André Marin. The workshop had a practical focus on advanced investigation techniques. Participants used a mock case scenario to assess and then plan an investigation.



Mr Sateki 'Ahio, Commissioner for Public Relations, Tonga and Maiava Iulai Toma, Ombudsman, Samoa, walk from the hotel to the training venue around Wellington's waterfront

Other course topics include interviewing witnesses, writing and publicizing reports, and using new technologies and social media. Many of the POA participants found the non-traditional methods of publicising their offices could be useful in the future.

FORMAL DINNER

To wrap up the POA proceedings, a celebration dinner was held at the Museum Hotel on Monday 12th November. The outgoing Acting Chair, Bruce Barbour, and the incoming Chair, Colin Neave, both spoke briefly to welcome participants, bring together the threads of several days' discussions and emphasise the importance of personal relationships in the network of international ombudsmen and allied institutions.



Arlene Brock, National Ombudsman of Bermuda, at the POA dinner

We were also delighted to host Arlene Brock, who was appointed as the first National Ombudsman for Bermuda in 2005. Ms Brock has actively promoted links between Ombudsmen in the Caribbean. At the dinner, Ms Brock spoke of the similar problems faced by Caribbean and Pacific

Ombudsmen, and the possibility of sharing resources and solutions.



At the dinner (l-r) Ms Phoebe Sangetari, Acting Chief Ombudsman, Papua New Guinea, Ms Sina Hutton, POA Secretariat, Ms Jeannine Daniel, Assistant Ombudsman, Cook Islands

PACIFIC-CARIBBEAN LINKS

Ms Brock set up a meeting of Caribbean and Pacific organisations during a lunch break in the IOI conference. Participants were able to meet each other and briefly share the challenges of being an Ombudsman, or similar, in a small community. Difficulties of resourcing, and the lack of confidentiality, were common themes.

Possible solutions to these problems were also discussed. The group agreed that they would stay in touch through the IOI and POA.

Individual offices also agreed to further communicate in relation to similar specialist roles. For example the Ombudsmen of Papua New Guinea and St Maartens discovered they were both also guardians of their country's constitution and had additional responsibilities in working to resolve constitutional questions.



POA members during their meeting on 10th November 2012, Museum Hotel

Seated (l-r) Bruce Barbour (New South Wales) Beverley Wakem (New Zealand) Phoebe Sangetari (PNG) Joe Poraiwai (Solomon Islands) Junior Patrick (Republic of the Marshall Islands)

Standing (l-r) Sina Hutton (POA Secretariat) Jeannine Daniel (Cook Islands) Sateki 'Aho (Tonga) Emmanuel Kouhota (Solomon Islands) Pilimisolo Tamo'ua (Tonga) Colin Neave (Commonwealth of Australia) James Maneforu (Solomon Islands) Maiava Iulai Toma (Samoa), Tautongo Kaiteie (Kiribati) Lynley Ducker (POA Secretariat) Poni Kapaga (Niue) Carolyn Langley (POA Secretariat) Gillian Itsimaera (Nauru) Alain Molgos (Vanuatu)

SMALLER ISLAND STATES

WORKING GROUP

The SISWG, a sub-committee of POA, met on Sunday 11th November to discuss issues common to smaller island states. After the meeting of the SISWG in May, it was decided that membership of this group should also be open to the two smaller island states with Ombudsman, Tonga and the Cook Islands. The SISWG therefore includes representatives from Nauru, Kiribati, Niue, Cook Islands, Tonga and the Pacific Island Forum Secretariat.

The meeting on the 11th discussed how to implement the Terms of Reference agreed by the group in May and endorsed by the POA Board in June. All members agreed that it was important to have a forum where the smaller countries could talk about their challenges. In particular, the group noted that the larger meeting did not always provide enough space to talk through specific problems.

A highlight of the SISWG was hearing about the Cook Islands Ombudsman education and outreach program. Ms Daniel agreed to provide the relevant materials, which can be used as a basis for a number of the SISWG members to develop their own education and outreach plans.

IOI CONFERENCE

The International Ombudsman Institute (IOI) is a global organisation for the cooperation of more than 150 Ombudsman institutions. The IOI was established in 1978 and operates through regional chapters in Africa, Asia, Australasia & Pacific, Europe, the Caribbean and Latin America, and North America.

Although POA is not formally affiliated with the IOI, a number of PAO members are also IOI members, and participated in the IOI general assembly and subsequent conference. The theme of the conference was "Speaking Truth to Power". Many of the speakers shared their experiences in positioning their office as a voice for integrity in situations where they faced direct political and legal opposition.

Another theme of the conference was the impact of budget cuts as a result of the global financial crisis. All ombudsman offices are having to do more with less. Many speakers gave their innovative solutions for maximising their impact with less money and less staff. The conference agreed that an ombudsman becomes particularly important in times of austerity - when government services to the public are reducing in both quality and quantity.



At the Speaker's reception - Dame Beverley Wakem and the Speaker, Dr Smith

On Tuesday 13th November the Speaker of the New Zealand House of Representatives, Dr the Rt Hon Lockwood Smith hosted a reception for the IOI participants at the Grand Hall, Parliament Buildings.

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

Previous issues of *Pacific Ombudsman Alliance Network News* are stored electronically and are available at www.pacificombudsman.org.

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

Best wishes to all our friends and colleagues
for a Happy Christmas
and a safe and prosperous 2013