

Pacific Ombudsman Alliance ~ Network News

Fostering government integrity and good administration in the Pacific

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TONGAN STAKEHOLDERS MEETING

On Wednesday 7 September 2011, the Pacific Ombudsman Alliance (POA) held a workshop in the conference room of the Puataukanave Hotel for government officials and nobles of the Kingdom of Tonga. Among the participants were the Hon. Samiu Vaipulu (Acting Prime Minister), the Hon. William Clive Edwards (Minister for Justice) the Hon. Isleli Pulu (Minister for Trade And Commerce), the Hon. Fe'ao Vakata (Minister for Employment), the Hon. Viliami Latu (Minister for Tourism), Lord Tu'i'afitu (Deputy Chairperson of Legislative Assembly), Lord Vaea (Minister for Agriculture and Food, Forestry and Fisheries), Lord Tu'ilakepa (Nobles Representative of Vava'u) Mr Busby Kautoke (Chief Secretary and Secretary to Cabinet), and Mr Folau Lokotui (Acting Secretary Of Justice And Chief Magistrate).

Prior to the visit, there had been debate in Tonga about the establishment of an Anti-Corruption Commission and where the Commission should sit within Tonga's accountability framework. The Government had also considered restructuring and strengthening the Commission for Public Relations.



Left, POA Board member Mr Justin Kamupala and right, the Hon. Clive Edwards, Minister of Justice, Tonga

The workshop provided an opportunity for attendees to learn more about the role of ombudsmen and how they assist government to manage public expectations of service delivery and ensure the service model is structured to effect a better quality of service delivery. Delegates also learned of the relationship between an Ombudsman's office and an Anti-Corruption Commission, and how the offices can be structured to complement each other without creating a situation in which one office becomes subordinate to the other.

REPUBLIC OF THE MARSHALL ISLANDS

On 18 October 2011, the POA Secretariat visited the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI) to re-establish contact with our Marshallese colleagues and scope opportunities for future POA engagement in the RMI.

During their visit, the Secretariat met with the Public Service Commission; Chair of the Public Accounts Committee; Chief Secretary; High Court Associate Judge, Justice James Plasman; and Women United Together Marshall Islands.



Representatives from Women United Together meeting with POA Secretariat members Ms Carolyn Langley and Mr Kai Sinor

Stakeholders demonstrated a keen interest in the notion of an ombudsman, and recognised the contributions that a complaint-handling institution could make to accountability, transparency and good governance in the RMI. Stakeholders agreed that while the RMI was not yet ready for an ombudsman institution, the POA could provide support to strengthen pre-existing accountability institutions such as the Auditor General's Office.

This was the first contact with the RMI since a delegation from the Pacific Ombudsman Network visited the RMI from 7 to 11 March 2008. During the 2008 visit, the delegation noted that while there was no single service to receive and investigate administrative complaints in the RMI, there was a variety of existing complaint mechanisms. For instance, individuals may raise service delivery issues through departmental secretaries or ministers; the Public Service Commission has jurisdiction to receive complaints regarding the behaviour of public servants; and the Attorney-General may conduct investigations into alleged violations of law where there is an overarching public interest in conducting the investigation.

The delegation also noted that while there was an Auditor General, the performance of the office had been affected by the occupant's ill health. With the appointment of a new Auditor General however, the Auditor-General's Office had begun increasing its role within the RMI accountability framework.



Ms Carolyn Langley with Mr Junior Patrick

The new Auditor General, Mr Junior Patrick, is making a significant effort to restructure and strengthen his office. For example, there is a strong relationship between the Public Accounts Committee, Public Service Commission and Auditor General's Office.

The Secretariat also learned of Mr Patrick's fraud abuse hotline; an anonymous telephone service for citizens to report fraud, waste or abuse of public resources. Mr Patrick told the Secretariat that citizens had been very responsive to the hotline, preferring to provide information anonymously.

OCPNG LEADERSHIP FORUM

On 3 October 2011, the Ombudsman Commission of Papua New Guinea (OCPNG?) held its Leadership Summit. POA sponsored five international delegates to attend the Summit: Fredrick Fa'abasua and James Maneforu from the Solomon Islands Ombudsman; Alwyn Danitofea from the Solomon Islands Leadership Code Commission; and Alain Molgos and Velma Karabani from the Vanuatu Ombudsman's office.



At the forum were, left, Mr Vergil Narakobi, Counsel, and right, Mr Mathew Damaru, Director Leadership, PNG Ombudsman Commission

The Summit brought together PNG leaders to inform them of their responsibilities and obligations under the Leadership Code. This was the first time that non-elected leaders, for example senior public servants, had been the focus of the PNG Ombudsman Commission's education and outreach activities.

APSACC

The Western Australian Corruption and Crime Commission, Queensland Crime and Misconduct Commission and New South Wales Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) held the Australian Public Sector Anti-Corruption Conference (APSACC) in Fremantle, Western Australia, on 16-17 November 2011.

At the June 2011 members meeting, POA agreed to fund delegates to travel to Perth to attend the APSACC conference. The conference gave an opportunity for POA delegates to understand contemporary trends, strategies and future directions in preventing corruption, and to share experiences and learn from the collective successes and challenges of corruption prevention practitioners.



Mr Bill Kokkaris, Senior Project Officer, ICAC, talks about public education

The day before the conference, a one-day workshop was held for the POA delegates. This workshop allowed the delegates to talk about issues specifically relating to ombudsmen who have responsibility for anti-corruption work. It also gave the delegates an opportunity to talk about theoretical models of anti-corruption and different ways that organisations could work together to prevent corruption.

Speakers from the Office of the Commonwealth Ombudsman, West Australian Ombudsman, ICAC and CMC gave presentations at the workshop. The delegates delivered country reports on the role of

their organisation in the anti-corruption architecture of their country.



POA delegates at the Tradewinds Hotel rooftop

The following were delegates at the conference:

- Ms Taare Aukitino, Senior Assistant Secretary, Kiribati
- Maiava Iulai Toma, Ombudsman, Samoa
- Mr Billy Kerepiniano, Principal Investigation Officer, Solomon Islands Ombudsman
- Mrs Judith Waleanisia, Principal Investigation Officer, Solomon Islands Ombudsman
- Mr Emmanuel Kouhota, Chairman, Leadership Code Commission, Solomon Islands
- Mr Mathew Damaru, Director Papua New Guinea Ombudsman Commission
- Ms Gillian Itsimaera, Senior Examiner of Accounts, Nauru
- Mr Pilimisolo Tamo'ua, Officer in Charge, Tonga
- Mr Alain Molgos, Director, Vanuatu Ombudsman
- Mr Richard Pagen, Leadership, Papua New Guinea Ombudsman Commission.

We were also honoured to include in the workshop the Chief Ombudsman of the Republic of Indonesia, Bapak Danang Girindrawardana, and Ombudsman Bapak Petrus Beda Peduli. These two Indonesian officers were hosted with the support of the Commonwealth Ombudsman's AusAID-funded program with the Ombudsmen of the Republic of Indonesia.

OCPNG PLACEMENT OFFICERS

The Commonwealth Ombudsman has hosted two two-month placements from the Ombudsman Commission of Papua New Guinea.



L – r Mr Ephraim Manhi, former Commonwealth Ombudsman Mr Allan Asher and Mr Allan Barilae

Mr Allan Barilae, Regional Manager, Lae Regional Office, spent time with a variety of work areas in various geographical locations. Mr Barilae looked at different ways of assessing first approaches to the office and managing complaint workflows within a regional office.

Mr Ephraim Manhi, Team Leader, Complaints and Administrative Investigations Division, worked for two months with the Commonwealth Ombudsman’s Immigration Complaints team. Mr Manhi’s focus was on workflow processes—including the Resolve complaints management database—and identifying systemic issues and reducing case backlogs.



Mr Ephraim Manhi with Commonwealth Ombudsman Immigration Complaints colleague Ms Erin O’Connell

BOARD MEETING

On 27 September 2011, the POA Board met at Puataukanave Hotel, Vava’u, Tonga. The meeting was held to coincide with the Tongan stakeholders meeting).

The Board noted past activities and approved future activities in accordance with the current budget. POA is currently running almost exactly to budget, which is evidence of good planning and management.

The Board also:

- endorsed an additional four-month placement for the officer currently in the Samoan Ombudsman’s office, noting the need to assist the Samoan Ombudsman in identifying and embracing strategic goals.
- endorsed a draft diagnostic template aimed at assessing the capacity and needs of POA members.
- noted that the first activity of the Leadership Sub-Committee would be to attend the October 2011 OCPNG Leadership Forum in Port Moresby.



(L – r) Mr Michael Woodhead, Adviser Samoa; Board members Mr Bruce Barbour, Mr Justin Kamupala and Mr Allan Asher

CHANGES TO THE BOARD

POA members have appointed the Acting Commonwealth Ombudsman, Ms Alison Larkins, to the Board of POA. This arose after x, when the Commonwealth Ombudsman, Mr Allan Asher, resigned from his position. As a result, Mr Chronox

Manek, Chief Ombudsman of Papua New Guinea, is currently Acting Chair of the POA Board.

Although the Acting Commonwealth Ombudsman, Ms Alison Larkins, became a member of POA by virtue of her new acting appointment, she was not automatically entitled to assume a position on the Board. However IN November the Acting Chair nominated Ms Larkins to the Board, and the members voted by email to put Ms Larkins onto the Board.

COMMONWEALTH SECRETARIAT

SEMINAR ON INTEGRITY IN PUBLIC

LIFE

On 17-18 November 2011, the Commonwealth Secretariat held its second regional seminar to discuss codes of conduct for public officials and to draft guidelines for dealing with conflicts of interest. The seminar, held in Auckland, New Zealand, was attended by two POA members; the New Zealand Chief Ombudsman Beverley Wakem and Cook Islands Ombudsman Janet Maki.

Ms Wakem and Ms Maki contributed to the seminar with their own experiences as ombudsmen in dealing with integrity in public life. Ms Wakem advised the attendees of POA's establishment of a Leadership Sub-Committee to develop targeted activities for those members with responsibilities for enforcing codes of conduct.

More information is available on the Commonwealth Secretariat's website at www.thecommonwealth.org.

CONTACT US

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

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