

Pacific Ombudsman Alliance ~ Network News

Fostering government integrity and good administration in the Pacific

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MARSHALL ISLANDS

In October 2011 the POA Secretariat visited Majuro in the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI) to scope opportunities for the POA to provide support to strengthen accountability institutions in the RMI.

The visit highlighted the important work being undertaken by the Auditor General, Mr Junior Patrick and his staff. In the months preceding the Secretariat's visit, the Auditor General had launched a fraud abuse hotline. The Auditor-General's hotline triggered an overwhelming public response, with citizens reporting much more fraud than had been anticipated.

The Auditor-General agreed that support from an officer with experience in front-line complaint handling could be of benefit to the office and an out of session proposal to POA Board for a placement to the RMI was made in May 2012.

The placement officer, Mr Simon Bonney from the office of the Commonwealth Ombudsman, arrived in Majuro in July 2012. Mr Bonney has provided assistance to improve complaint handling processes and to develop an investigations manual. More information about the Auditor-General is on his new website www.rmioag.com.

SOLOMON ISLANDS OMBUDSMAN

The Commonwealth Ombudsman is currently running a short program with the Ombudsman of the Solomon Islands with funding from the Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands (RAMSI). The first activity in this program was a scoping mission to review, investigate and recommend opportunities for strengthening investigations, supporting training needs, and for long-term engagement with OOSI.

In the longer term, this program aims to put in place a longer-term institutional partnership between the two offices. This partnership would

also involve other Australian Ombudsman as partners, and work in co-ordination with POA.



L-r John Harper, Ombudsman Joe Poraiwai, Andrew Brown

The scoping mission had the following delegates:

- John Harper, Director ICT, Commonwealth Ombudsman
- Lynley Ducker, Director International, Commonwealth Ombudsman
- Carolyn Langley, International Program Manager, Commonwealth Ombudsman
- Andrew Brown, Deputy Ombudsman, Queensland Ombudsman.

There were two main aims of the scoping mission. Firstly, to assess the current challenges facing OOSI, and which areas may be useful for future support activities. Secondly, to look at the existing ICT systems, and options for a database complaint management system.

To assess the current challenges the Ombudsman's office undertook an organisational assessment using the tool that had been developed by the Secretariat and trialed in Samoa and Vanuatu. The staff of the Ombudsman's office took part and shared their views and analysis of the current strengths and challenges of their office.



Andrew Brown and Carolyn Langley outside Isaac Qoloni House, Honiara

The other important part of this first activity was an assessment of existing ICT systems and giving options for future improvement. John Harper was able to learn about the current systems from the OOSI IT specialist staff. John also spoke to whole-of-government ICT providers. In consultation with the OOSI IT staff, John is developing a range of possible ICT improvements that could be introduced over the next few years as part of the longer-term partnership.

BOARD MEETING

The POA Secretariat convened a board meeting via teleconference on 14 June 2012, chaired by Alison Larkins, the Acting Commonwealth Ombudsman.

The board reviewed activities conducted since the last board meeting in September 2011. Activities reviewed include the Organisational Assessment studies, the Smaller Island States working group, Mr Michael Woodhead's placement to Samoa, POA member attendance at the Australian Public Sector Anti-Corruption Conference and the Marshall Islands scoping visit.

The board also reviewed proposals for new activities. Proposals agreed to by the board and due for implementation in 2012 include: a visit for the Hawaiian Ombudsman to Palau to support north – north Ombudsmen linkages, a legal officer

placement to the Solomon Islands Leadership Code Commission, a placement to the Kiribati Public Service Office (to support the Public Service Office's complaint handling systems), attendance for six officers at the National Investigations Symposium and assistance with outreach in Tonga.

ORGANISATIONAL ASSESSMENT TRIAL – SAMOA

The POA Secretariat visited Samoa to conduct a study of the Samoan Ombudsman's Office. The study was carried out using the POA Organisational Assessment Tool and was facilitated by Mr Rodney Lee Walsh and Mr Kai Sinora.

The study afforded an opportunity for the POA to learn more about how the Samoan Ombudsman operates – its investigation processes, organisational policies and overall office dynamics.

The study highlighted that despite the challenge of providing a demand-driven accountability mechanism in a tight fiscal environment, the Ombudsman and staff remain committed to providing responsive complaint handling.

The Ombudsman and Assistant Ombudsman each share a strategic vision for improving public awareness of the Ombudsman's Office. A public awareness strategy developed by the office began with a bi-lingual television advertisement and will also include activities that focus specifically on Samoa's younger generation.

At the time of the visit, the office learned that an officer had been selected to work as an Australian Youth Ambassador for Development (AYAD). The AYAD will be assisting the office to manage the transition to a combined Ombudsman / National Human Rights Institute. This news was timely; although the office was sad to see the departure of Mr Michael Woodhead, news of a new arrival provided more optimism for what lay ahead for the office.

The outreach strategy, coupled with the addition of a human rights function will increase the office's workload – not only in relation to the

volume of complaints received, but also in relation to reporting. Resource intensive human rights investigations and advocacy will need to be balanced against impartial complaint handling. At times this may require the Ombudsman and staff to fulfil and manage two distinct roles – one of independence and one of advocacy.

The study highlighted that the Ombudsman and staff were keenly aware of the challenges associated with moving from a traditional Ombudsman's office, to an office with a concurrent human rights function (and United Nations reporting obligations). The POA will continue to support the office during this transition period and wish the new AYAD officer the best of luck in his new role.

SMALL ISLAND STATES MEETING

In the POA Charter there is specific provision for a "Non-Ombudsman Small Island State Working Group". This was in recognition of a possible weakness in POA's structure, identified by the Pacific Island Forum Secretariat (PIFS), that in an ombudsman-based alliance the non-ombudsman representatives would be less visible and gradually become excluded from the group.

The first meeting of this group was held in Nadi, Fiji, on 30 – 31 May 2012, and was made possible through additional funding provided by NZAid.

The first meeting was attended by:

- Mr Justin Kamupala, Head of Department of Justice, Lands and Survey, Niue
- Mrs Gillian Itsimaera, Senior Examiner of Accounts, Department of Audit, Nauru
- Mrs Tautongo Kaiteie, Assistant Secretary, Public Service Office, Kiribati
- Mr Fakavae Taomia, Smaller Island States Program Officer, PIFS
- Dr Henry Ivarature, Governance Adviser, PIFS
- Lynley Ducker and Kai Sinor, POA Secretariat.

Representatives from RMI and FSM were invited but were unable to attend.

The group agreed that there was value in talking about issues that are unique to smaller island states. The input of PIFS was also very helpful,

particularly in showing how the SIS are able to access regional mechanisms and co-ordinate within the umbrella of the Pacific Plan.

During the meeting, each country gave an overview on how complaints about government departments were currently managed within their country. Although the mechanisms differed, the challenges of running an effective complaint system were similar in each case.



L-r Fakavae Taomia, Justin Kamupala, Henry Ivarature, Gillian Itsimaera, Lynley Ducker, Kai Sinor, Tautongo Kaiteie

Common themes of problems faced by SIS were identified by the group as follows:

- The challenge of resource and capacity constraints
- Avoiding the perception of bias in a small population
- The cultural barriers to making complaints
- The immediacy of politics, and the ease of political intervention in administrative actions
- Entrenched cultures in government departments and an absence of commitment to continuous improvement
- Public and political resistance to the punitive model of anti-corruption institutions
- The value of independent, outside, experts to raise public awareness and act as a catalyst for change.



Delegates enjoy lunch at the Nadi Novotel

The group developed Terms of Reference for the Working Group, which were endorsed by the Board at its meeting in June 2012. The group also agreed to invite the Ombudsman SIS (Palau and the Cook Islands) to be part of the Working Group. The next meeting will be held immediately before the POA members' meeting in November 2012.

NEW COMMONWEALTH OMBUDSMAN

Mr Colin Neave AM started in his new role as the Australian Commonwealth Ombudsman on 17 September 2012.

In recent years, Mr Neave was President of the Administrative Review Council, Vice-Chair of the Australian Press Council, Chairperson of the Legal Services Board of Victoria and Chairman of the Commonwealth Consumer Affairs Advisory Council. He was appointed a Member of the Order of Australia in June 2005 for service to public administration and to the banking and finance industry, particularly through dispute resolution.

Previously, Mr Neave has served as the Chief Ombudsman of the Financial Ombudsman Service and as the Australian Banking Industry Ombudsman. He has held senior management positions in the public sectors of several Australian jurisdictions including as Deputy Secretary of the Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department, Managing Director of the Legal Aid Commission of NSW, Secretary of the Victorian Attorney-General's Department and Director-General of the South Australian Department of Public and

Consumer Affairs.

The POA would like to welcome Mr Neave to his new role and wishes him much success.

VANUATU OMBUDSMAN

We report with great sadness the passing of the Vanuatu Ombudsman, Pasa Tosusu, unexpectedly in June. Ombudsman Tosusu was a friend and colleague of many in the Pacific Ombudsman Alliance, and a leader and supporter of good governance in Vanuatu. Our deepest sympathies are with his family, and staff in the Ombudsman's office in Vanuatu.



Ombudsman Pasa Tosusu in his office in March 2012

ANNUAL MEMBERS' MEETING

Save the date – the POA annual members' meeting will be held alongside the International Ombudsman Institute's (IOI) conference in Wellington, New Zealand.

The IOI conference is to be held from 12 to 16 November 2012. For more information, and to register, visit <http://www.confer.co.nz/wcioi/>.

PNG PLACEMENT OFFICERS

Under the twinning program between the Commonwealth Ombudsman and the Ombudsman Commission of Papua New Guinea, three placement officers are in Australia this month.

Mr Bill Kapen, Regional Manager, is working with the regional Adelaide office of the Commonwealth Ombudsman. Mr Samuel Moang, Senior Investigator is spending time with Defence and Operational sections in Canberra. Mr Simon Kwalimu, Senior Assessor, is spending two weeks with both the Commonwealth and Victorian Ombudsman's offices, including participating in their Investigation Skills Workshop.



Matt Lemm, Investigation Officer, Commonwealth Ombudsman and Samuel Moang, Senior Investigator, OCPNG, in Canberra

PNG – RECRUITMENT HELP

The Ombudsman Commission of Papua New Guinea (OCPNG) is looking for two experienced officers to work in OCPNG's Complaints and Administrative Investigations Division (CAID) and Leadership Division. The Commission is highly respected within PNG as an independent and impartial body capable of dealing with issues of corruption and malpractice. This has led to new roles and increased workloads. Unfortunately however, increases to workloads have not been

commensurate with increases to staff and other resources. In recent years, this has led to reduced output from the administrative investigations and leadership code investigations areas, both in terms of the number of cases completed and the number of public reports produced.

Officers in these positions will be assisting officers to address this reduced output by:

- Providing mentoring and training to improving the capacity of investigators to deal with complaints and investigations more efficiently and effectively
- Improving management systems to allow for earlier identification of issues, better control of available resources and greater focus on how available resources can be maximised to generate outcomes
- Improving relationships with other government agencies to increase cooperation on common goals, transfer work to more appropriate agencies and reduce resistance to the work of the Commission.

Interested officers should contact the OCPNG Human Resources Director, Dickson Morehari, Dickson.morehari@ombudsman.gov.pg

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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