

REPORT – 35th CPA Australia and Pacific Conference

I am pleased to provide a report to the CPA on my visit to the 35th CPA Australia and Pacific Conference held from 28th to 30th November 2016 at Rarotonga, one of the 15 islands that form the nation.

The Members in attendance were;

Barry House, President of the Legislative Council.

Terry Waldron, Member for Wagin.

Kim Hames, Member for Dawesville.

Nigel Pratt, Clerk of the Legislative Council.

Anne Day, Executive assistant to the clerk of the Legislative Assembly.

Lauren Misiti, Committee clerk with the Legislative Council.

**The theme of the conference was
Leadership Excellence for the Common Good;
Share, Exchange, Act.**

The first session was the election of the chair.

Elected Hon Niki Rattle, Speaker, Parliament of Cook Islands
Deputy Chair Hon Barry House, Speaker, WA Parliament

Session 1

Need to Know

Presented by Neil Angus, Parliament of Victoria.

Improving research and development in Parliaments.

Provided details of the library system in Victoria including resources available. Went through details of resources and clearly much greater than in Western Australia.

Varying questions, most interest around e petitions with presenter against but Queensland, Tasmania and ACT have used them for about ten years and say they work well.

Barry House made the point that there has been a review in WA but no action had yet been taken.

Session 2

The Right to Access

Presenter 1 : Ms Clare Curran, Labor, New Zealand

Theme of presentation was lack of transparency and accountability of government. Clearly presented by someone in opposition. I think all members in opposition will agree with her view, while those in government nod their heads wisely and do nothing, understanding that those strident views will rapidly change if they are in government.

The catch cries of opposition is that the information is needed to provide proper scrutiny of government decisions. However, in my experience, it is the media and opposition who seek to gain information that would provide opportunities to embarrass the sitting government so that they can take their place or sell news. Invariably, in government, the same behaviour by government continues, and the cries from opposition are unchanged.

Presenter 2 : Hon Leaupepe Taimaiono Tolrafoa, Speaker of Parliament of Samoa

Read speech describing his role as Speaker and the operations of the Samoan Parliament and made remarks about public access to information of the Parliament and the Committees.

Session 3

Better information Management

Presenter : Mrs Pua Hunter, director of ICT, Office of the Prime Minister, Cook Islands

Talked about the progress of the Cook Islands from a totally uncoordinated individual management of IT systems and how they are now moving to a coordinated system with overarching

management significantly reducing the cost and improving efficiency, accountability and storage of data.

Reiterated the need for security of data.

Session 4

Better Information Dissemination

Presenter : Ms Sonia Hornery, MP, Parliament of New South Wales

Talked about navigation, labelling and research with move from books to cloud.

Listed options for Member of Parliament.

1. General business notice of motions
2. 90 second statements
3. Private members statements five mins
4. Questions on notice
5. Petitions
6. Speeches on bills

Conference Day 2

Session 5

Effective Oversight 1

Presenter 1. Tangata Vainerere, Executive Director, Pacific Legislatures for Population and Governance.

Presenter 2. Mrs Catherine Evans, Deputy Solicitor General, Crown Law, Cook Islands

Set benchmarks for indicators for good governance of the Pacific Islands.

Both speakers went through indicators to explain rules for governance in the Islands. All seem very similar to ours, although they have many deficiencies due to lack of resources in providing adequate support for members of parliament.

Session 6

Effective Oversight 2

Presenter 1: Dr Kim Hames

My presentation focussed on the Western Australian Committee system comparing Select Committees and Standing Committees. I discussed the strengths and weaknesses of each system using my previous experience on multiple committees as an example.

Presenter 2: Hon Mark Brown, Minister for Finance, Cook Islands

The Minister discussed the current arrangements for committees on the Cook Islands, highlighting the difficulties caused by financial constraints, isolation and a lack of members who were not Ministers.

Session 7

Effective Representation, building capacity to fulfil constituency responsibilities

Presenter 1: Mrs Joan Rylah, MP, Parliament of Tasmania
Talked about challenge of managing a smaller constituency. A key component is to manage expectations.

Tasmania's system is the reverse of normal, that is, a single elected upper house representative and multiple lower house reps via the Hare-Clark system.

Presenter 2: Hon Tuck Waldron, MLA, Parliament of Western Australia

Connecting with constituents on an ongoing basis.

Emphasised the need to go to all sections of the community.

Very important to build relationships with Ministers and Government staff if you want to achieve things for your electorate.

Reiterated the Importance of meeting local people.

Noted that we forget that we are important to the local community.

The most important thing is to turn up to the tough meetings.

Session 8

The Public and Legislation

Mechanisms to encourage wider consultation

Speaker 1. Lord Tu'l'afitu, Deputy Speaker, Parliament of Tonga
Key element is to act for the common good.

Speaker 2. Mark Mcardie, MP, Parliament of Queensland
In 27 years we have moved from brick sized mobile phones to modern style.

The way in which media coverage has changed is similar.
Discussed changes to committee process during that time and improvements in assessment of legislation by committees and opportunities for community engagement. However, it tends to be the same organisations (single issue organisations ie right to life) that put submissions to multiple committees on multiple occasions. The general public seldom have or take the time or have the training to make a submission.

Conference Day 3

Session 9

Ethical Governance, Accountability, transparency and responsibility in parliaments.

Presenter 1. Mr Tom Duncan Clerk ACT

Listed a series of critical requirements for accountability, including such things as Codes of conduct. ACT also have a motion each year which is moved whereby members agree to meet the requirements of the code.

Declaration of interest.

Register of lobbyists.

Discussed executive accountability such as question time. Will have 51 questions every day, one full day for opposition bills, plus list of other accountability requirements, mostly we already have. Half of committees chaired by opposition, but still not with opposition majority as number has been reduced to four.

Committees can self-refer any matter for investigation. Having an even number of members has caused problems as decisions can be split two all, with no clear mechanism for resolution.

Ten indications listed for healthy parliament such as average time for passage of legislation. On all things we do well in WA with only a commissioner for standards being missing. In many ways this role is currently being undertaken by the Public Sector Commissioner in WA.

Presenter 2. Mr Tangata

Two pillars of ethical governance are accountability and transparency, with foundation being responsibility. The aim is to give people a voice in management by government.

Transparency... being honest and open.

Hallmark... actions and results are virtuous enough to bear public scrutiny.

Accountability....being answerable to stakeholders, those being the voters not those with self-interest.

Session 10

Progressive reform, transforming rules of procedure and parliamentary process.

Speaker 1. Hon Thomas George, MP, Parliament of NSW

Role of parliament is to legislate, represent and to scrutinise.

Speaker 2. Representatives of Fiji, Nauru and Niue. Parliaments shared their experiences on improving parliamentary procedures and processes.

Session 11

Women in leadership, looking beyond the numbers.

Panellists;

1. Hon Niki Rattle, Speaker, Parliament of the Cook Islands
2. Ms Annabel Digance, Parliament of South Australia
3. Ms Charlene Malele, Clerk Parliament of Samoa
4. Elizabeth Lee ACT

Speaker 1. Hon Niki Rattle

Only four women in Parliament for Islands in 51 years.

The Speaker, who is not a member of Parliament, thinks there should be a 50/50 compulsory representation in Parliament.

Interestingly, the four members of Parliament who were female didn't agree and thought it should be merit based.

Speaker 2. Ms Charlene Malele

Ms Malele said that a constitutional amendment in Samoa required ten percent to be women was enacted this year.

Previously half the members of parliament had been members for more than 20 years. The amendment was barely required as four women (one short) were elected in their own right.

Speaker 3. Ms Annabel Digance

Ms Digance said that South Australia was the first state in the late 1894 to allow women to vote and be members of Parliament. It said it then took 65 years to get a woman into parliament. Now there are still only about 25% of members who are female.

Now Labor have a quota system that says at least 40% of members, male and female, must be women.

However, gender targets without enforcement is not successful.

Speaker 4. Ms Elizabeth Lee

Ms Lee has been a member of the ACT parliament for three weeks. They now have the first female dominated parliament.

Labor and Liberal had the same numbers of females despite only Labor having a quota.

Session 12

Youth Parliament- young people and youth perspectives in Parliament

Speaker 1. Mr Tuaine Manavaroa, grandson of former member of Parliament.

In Tonga youth regarded as being under thirty in age

Great disassociation with Parliament. No interest in Parliament whatsoever, only following things like sport.

General view is that members of parliament are only there for self-interest.

Speaker 2. Ms Leanne Clare, Assistant Clerk, Parliament of Queensland.

Their Parliament has a special program for young people up to the age of 25.

In 2015/16 9602 primary, 1125 secondary students and 1206 tertiary students toured Parliament House and participate in a forum for debate.

They use an iPad mini to keep information up to date, and is much more appreciated than previous tours based more on the architecture of the building.

Their educators also do a regional tour twice a year and again students are given opportunities for role playing and debate.

Speaker 3. Michael Pettersson, 25yo, from ACT.

Talked about why it is so difficult for young people to get into parliament.

Much harder as they may not have family backing, may not have a partner, almost certainly not financially secure and there are few role models.

The largest problems are structural. With single member constituencies, parties are looking for someone who will not attract negatives, ie better if married, with a job and children. So winning preselection is very difficult.

Speaker 4. Hon Barry House, President of Parliament of Western Australia

Talked about the origin of Welcome to Country practises in WA as having originated in the late 1970's as a result of a dance group from the Cook Islands insisting on having aboriginal people welcome them to the land before performing.

Tabled a document and summarised what the Western Australian Parliament does to engage youth.

Final Session

Adoption of Conference Outcomes

Recommendations

To be provided as a flash drive.

The conclusion of the conference included a formal function under a marquee on the Wednesday evening, held in the grounds of Parliament, which included an excellent performance by the band and traditional dancers, and included a buffet presentation of traditional Islander food.

Speakers on behalf of the Islands and the guests recognised the value of the conference, the warm welcome and excellent care provided by the hosts, and the success of the outcomes of the conference.

Hon Barry House was especially thanked by the Chair Niki Rattle, who thanked Western Australia for their role in Twinning with the Cook Islands CPA, and Barry for his key role in that arrangement.

It was of great interest to the Members that a photograph was discovered on the walls of the Parliament of the 15th CPA conference, which included the Hon Barry House in 1991.

I thank the members of the CPA and the Western Australian support members for their excellent company, and those who elected me to represent the Parliament of Western Australia at what is likely to be my last official Parliamentary function.

Dr Kim Hames MLA
Member for Dawesville