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RESEARCH AND INFORMATION SUPPORT FOR THE LEGISLATURE

Paper delivered at the Conference

by

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INTRODUCTION

In this paper I aim to cover the research and information services provided for by the Legal and Advisory Services of the Papua New Guinea National Parliament. How these services support the Members of the Parliament in their search for information through the existing setup, problems associated with the service and future prospects of the Service.

PAPUA NEW GUINEA PARLIAMENT

The Papua New Guinea Legislature which I will refer to as the National Parliament or Parliament, currently consists of 109 Members, of whom the literacy rate would stand as average. English is the official language but commonly spoken is the native vernacular Pidgin. Each Member is provided with a fully furnished office (desk, chairs, telephone) and has electoral support staff. For the 109 Members, the Parliament has 173 support staff. These staff service the Parliament under the Parliamentary Service Act of 1975 and is headed by the Clerk of Parliament. The Parliament is organized in five Divisions:

- a. **Parliamentary:** provides procedural advice and assistance to Members, Committees and Parliament.
- b. **Legal & Advisory:** provides legal advice and research and information services
- c. **Finance & Administration:** deals with salaries, allowances, accommodation for Members and staff
- d. **Reporting:** responsible for translations and transcripts
- e. **Building & Maintenance:** runs services such as office accommodation, security, communications.

All these Divisions are involved in different ways ⁱⁿ to transmitting information to and from Parliament. Parliament sits about 16 weeks every year. That works out to about 4 Sessions at 4 weeks duration.

The National Parliament being the supreme law-making body of Papua New Guinea wholly need the support of an active healthy research and information service. Research and information is an indispensable function of any Parliament. Much of Parliaments functions is dependent on information provided by professionals either in the public or private sectors. To this end, much research is undertaken before any conclusive information is relayed to the Parliament through individual Ministers and/or Members. Thus the Legal and Advisory Services of the Papua New Guinea National Parliament has been solely established to cater for and support this service.

The Legal and Advisory Services comprises the Legal, Research and Library and is under the directorship of the Parliamentary Counsel. This Division, although shortstaffed is manned by a small but very capable and competent staff, who provide services to Members and their research staff, party workers, Committees, the Parliamentary Service and to a lesser degree Government Departments and Institutions within and outside of Papua New Guinea. Members are always given priority. However the Legal and Research operations are curtailed by the Parliamentary Services Act - in that they can only provide information to private Members and not Ministers. (Attachment I - Legal and Advisory - current staff list).

INFORMATION RESOURCES

Members information support is sought through:

1. Internal operations

- a. **Legal and Research Services.** A wide range of services is provided: legal advice, legislative drafting, research and report and speech writing. Research may range from simple queries which can be answered immediately to complex questions which require analysis and may take days, weeks to complete. As well they provide a variety of briefing and background papers on subjects which are of interest to Parliament, Members and Parliamentary delegations. (Attachment II - listing of types of assistance provided for by the Research).
- b. **Library:** This is the main back-up and support service the Legal and Research turn to for information, as well as Members, etc. The Library is not required to provide research services due to the nature of the setup of our Division, although we handle whatever request that comes through us if not of a complex nature. The Library in its limitations is relied upon to collect and maintain a well selected stock of materials and derive systems to extract this information that will satisfy that need. Materials that will assist the Member in gaining or adding to knowledge that will enable him to take an intelligent and active part in formulating, discussing and improving policy and legislation. To achieve this the Library has:
 1. **Collection Building.** Through subscriptions and donations the Division select items of interest and relevance to the Parliament not only confined to National interests but comparable sources of references. Our main interest lie in the fields of politics, law, economics, with special interest in parliamentary and constitutional matters. Items currently consist of reading materials only such as books, journals, newspapers, serial titles, reports and pamphlets. From time to time the collection is weeded for updatedness or extended as circumstances change. Whilst we have a good basic collection, we infact could do more through extending our services to include audio/audiovisual material. We are however unable to do this because our funds are limited.
 2. **Current Awareness.** Our newspaper clipping service provides for perpetual information service. We have also expanded this to include Journals. Whilst the newspaper and some journals are clipped, most of the Journal articles are on card index.
 3. **Hansard Index.** Library's index dates back to 1980 and this lends support to quick access to the Hansard contents. Hansard is constantly in use.

4. **Networking.** Our links with other libraries/organizations both national and international, allows for inter-library loans, exchange of materials and request for materials, all under the guise of information support for the Parliament. I will elaborate on this as seen as an external source of information.
5. **Borrowing and Lending.** Except for books marked 'reference only' a Member is entitled to borrow 4 books at any one time for a 4 week period. Special permission is sought for other materials.
6. **Photocopy and Faxing.** Provided free of charge for members for all parliamentary business.
7. **Acquisitions List.** Circulated prior to each Parliamentary Session to inform Members of new Material acquired and ready for borrowing.

2. External resources

Our services must have access to almost any kind of information through not necessarily held in our collection. We have to rationalize due to funding, space and selectiveness, thus co-operation with other libraries/organizations is important. This is where our networking system is very useful.

Our support from the National Library is overwhelming, we perceive them as our parent library for advice and assistance. Within the National Library is a Government Advisory Unit especially setup for this purpose. We are privileged to have access to specialize services that are normally not accorded to the ordinary library user.

We have links with the various Government Departments in order to acquire information that may be missing from our own official publications collection. It is an obligation on both sides to supply the other, although obtaining them can be a difficulty.

We have established exchange schemes with Independent Bodies to supplement our information needs. Our parliamentary publications are used as a basis for this exchange both nationally and internationally. We are also on the mailing list of Foreign Embassies, whom we have asked to deposit publications that may be of use to Members.

We enjoy the privilege we receive from being a member of APLA. Through our faxing system we are able to receive information that is required which we do not have in our collection. Donations are always pouring in. Acquisitions Lists, Periodical Abstracts and special reports are always a great source of help.

PROBLEMS

As outlined, our information support is there but one problem we have yet to overcome is to attract the Members interest to these services. Language may be a barrier but we have staff present who are qualified to handle this.

Staff shortage is an ongoing problem. We cope well enough, but with the current ratio of Member to staff we fit into a very tight schedule. There are other tasks that could be performed to enhance our services.

Funding to an extent is a bother, but not as critical as yet. Our funds are generated from the general vote, and as such have no set budget allocation. Spending on library material is flexible but when it comes to staff or very much needed equipment the brakes are applied.

FUTURE

More can be achieved if the staff requirements are increased in the overall Division. A Library Committee would be an advantage as we would have proper representation in Parliament with a body to address our problems. Not only the above mentioned problems, they are major, but other minor problems that are faced during our day to day business. If the Parliament was made a legal depository this would supplement a full range of Papua New Guinea publications. Finally modernizing the Division in line with technology would boost our services.

In regards to APLAP, it is only recently that Papua New Guinea is fostering and establishing ties with the Asian region. One has to look at the foreign aid and the number of Asian diplomatic missions Papua New Guinea has within and outside in the last couple of years to prove this growing relationship. In the same way that we maintain our links with APLA we hope to have the same with APLAP. Co-operation is what is required for information support and this was forged in Korea in 1990.

Attachment I - Legal and Advisory - Staff List 1992

Parliamentary Counsel

- Pokwari Kale (LLM)

Assistant Parliamentary Counsel

- Jairus Tago (LLB)

Publications Officer (Legal)

- David Tojiembo

Secretary

- J. Igo Kwarara
(Certificate in Stenography)

Principal Research Officer

- Apelis Maniot (B.Ec.)

Deputy Research Officer

- Tom Manjin (LLB)

Secretary

- Kila Araga

Parliamentary Librarian

- Lily Tiki
(B.App.Sc.(Librarianship))

A/Deputy Parliamentary Librarian

- Eare Vanua
(Certificate in Librarianship)

Library Assistants

- Boio Solien
- Lekei Fletcher

Attachment II - Type of Assistance provided for by Research

The Parliamentary Service Act (Section 8) establishes the office of the Principal Research Officer who shall supervise and control the work of the Research and Information Service for the benefit of members and Committees of the Parliament.

The Research and Information Service of the PNG Parliament has to date provided assistance to members and Committees of the Parliament in the following areas:

1. Preparation of Notices of Motions, Questions for written or verbal answers from respective ministers, petitions and matters of public importance.
2. Assist members to have prior knowledge of and or general understanding of businesses before the House prior to debate, through the preparation of briefs, statistical data, etc.
3. Prepare private information papers for members as well as carrying out feasibility study into projects at members request, either in their own electorates or elsewhere.
4. Compilation of background information, fact sheets etc., on subjects relating to the function and role of the Parliament as an institution which may be of interest to members.
5. Researching providing detailed background information for private member's bills before they are drafted by the office of the Parliamentary Counsel.
6. Compilation of briefs, background and research information for Parliamentary delegations attending various conferences held in the country and abroad, viz., Conferences of - Presiding Officers of Provincial Governments in PNG, Conferences of Inter-Parliamentary Union, Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, Commonwealth Speaker's Conference and meeting of Society of Clerks-at-the-Table and Parliamentary delegation going abroad on good-will missions.

The Research and Information support Service for the Legislature, as can be seen from the above is an important component of the Parliamentary Service.