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**RESOURCES AND INFORMATION
SHARING OF LEGISLATION**

BY

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RESOURCES AND INFORMATION SHARING

Paper delivered at the Conference

by

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Fiji Parliament

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The Parliament of Fiji

The Parliament of Fiji came into being when Fiji gained its political independence in October 1970. The Dominion of Fiji then was also a member of the Commonwealth. But Fiji was declared a Republic in October 1987 following a military coup. A new Constitution was finally promulgated by presidential decree in July 1990. It now has a presidential system of government and the Parliament comprise the President, the House of Representatives and the Senate.

Fiji has a bicameral Parliament with members of the lower House, called House of Representative (70 members) who are popularly elected to five year terms and members of the Upper House (34 members) called Senate, who are appointed to 2/4 year terms by the President of the Republic.

The Secretariat, under the Department of Legislature is ostensibly accountable to the Parliament. It is headed by the Secretary General to Parliament.

There are presently 43 staff positions organized into three units namely -

- (a) Administration
 - Subsection Accounts
- (b) Hansard
- (c) Library

These units are involved in different ways to transmitting information to and from Parliament. The Parliament sits for about 16 weeks every year. English is the official language however, Fijian or Hindustani may be spoken.

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The Parliament of Fiji does not have a research unit. But there are administration cum research officers who are employed in the political party offices at Parliament. These research officers rely heavily on the Library to carry out researches etc. so as to provide information to members when required. There are Select Committees in both Houses and special ad-hoc Committees that are established for specific tasks. These Committees do not have staff of their own. Secretarial support is provided by the Secretary General assisted by the Secretary of the respective Houses (i.e. Senate or House of Representatives).

Parliamentary Library

History Background

Following independence from Great Britain in 1970 the first meeting of Parliament took place and four years later the Parliamentary Library began operation. The necessity of having a library as an essential part of the parliamentary services was not given the vital support it needed initially thus the quality of the earlier collections indicated the dependency on willing donors who at most times would donate material not directly applicable to the needs of the Fiji Parliament.

Staffing was a major problem and this I believe was due to the fact that librarianship was a relatively new concept and the only library 'run' by government was a public one - Western Regional Library. In an endeavour to improve upon the library services for Parliament, Parliament sought the assistance of two VSO (Volunteer Service Overseas). New ideas about cataloguing and organizing collections only confused the local library assistant which lead to stagnating development of the library. As a result of these experiences help was given by Commonwealth Library of Australia, which by the way is still continuing.

In 1992, the library collection was moved to its present location. Weeding was high on the agenda as the reference material was outdated and replacement copies of Hansard, Parliamentary papers, etc. had to be carried out. This in itself was a major drawback in the development process of the Parliamentary Library.

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Information Resources

Internal:

Collection

The library in its limitation 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 active part in formulating, discussing and improving policy and legislation.

Subject coverage is not all embracing but its strength is in the wider field of the Social Sciences. Recently through donation (and a few purchases) there has been an increase in the number and subject range of serial publications - bulletins, reports, periodicals and similar publications of indefinite duration.

Through subscription and donations the library select items of interest and relevance to the Parliament and these are catalogued and classified under the Dewey System.

External:

We are privileged to have access to specialized services that are normally not accorded to the ordinary library user and our main sources are the University of the South Pacific Library and the National Archives.

There is a Library co-operative network system but we have had to rationalize this due to selectiveness, space and sometimes funding.

We are on the mailing list of Foreign Embassies and exchange schemes with Independent Bodies are in place. Liaisons with other Parliamentary Libraries in the region has been a great advantage. Donations from foreign embassies are still a great source of useful material.

Services

The concept of a Legislative Reference Service as the focal avenue of a Parliamentary Library through which information is channelled to members of parliament is sound. But such a specialist section can only be achieved where the staff is large enough to allocate persons to implement it. At the present time reference (and research) services are done by staff who have other tasks in addition.

While service to members is of paramount importance, the library is often called upon to assist agencies of government, research workers and the public.

With the growth of the modern newspaper, it has become a major source of public information, criticism or praise. Members of Parliament are better informed today through the opinions expressed by newspapers than their colleagues some fifty years ago. To provide topical subject information of a political nature, a Newspaper Clippings File is kept. Each day the two main daily newspapers are scanned by the Library staff for subjects of interest.

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These are clipped, mounted on backing sheets and arranged under appropriate subject headings in vertical filing cabinets. It frequently happens that members wishing to survey clippings on a particular subject, say the sugar industry, find other ideas relevant to their speech preparations.

Copying facilities are available free of charge to members if the copying required is connected with their electorate or parliamentary duty.

Hansard is constantly used and having Hansard indexes has made this service a more efficient and effective one.

Acquisition lists are circulated to inform members of new material acquired and this is carried out before each Parliamentary Session.

Problems

1. The present methods of cataloguing, indexing and conducting reference research will have to continue until we can purchase computers - automation.
2. Staff shortage is an on-going problem and work routine eliminates the possibility of enhancing the service offered.
3. A problem that we have yet to overcome (I hope to receive some recommended solutions when I leave Bangkok!) is to attract the members interest to services.
- 4) Space is now a problem as materials are stored in their original format.

Future

- With the rapid technological developments taking place in the field of communications it is now evident that libraries must try to keep up with the changes. As for the Fiji Parliamentary Library current methods of cataloguing and indexing will have to change. This is to facilitate the individual requirements of members and you will agree that the ultimate criterion of any parliamentary library will be, of course, the quality of its work done to meet the unusual needs of parliamentarians. This confirms that belief, that the library must remain responsive to the individual's needs from the Members' point of view, and perhaps warn him/her if it is considered that a proposal or a development was counter to Members' views.
- Continued liaison and co-operation with sister parliaments should be encouraged for information support. Creation of as many outside contacts as possible will be pursued.
- Library Officers should be encouraged to participate in conferences, seminars or meetings on subjects of concern to the library's function as a provider of current information.
- The pursuit of full formal qualifications (especially here in the South Pacific) would be desirable and the advantages of subject competence should be a goal for the future.

"Attachment A"

(13)

PARLIAMENT ORGANISATION STAFF STRUCTURE
AS AT 1.1.93

