

National Parliament of Solomon Islands

Public Accounts Committee

# Committee Report

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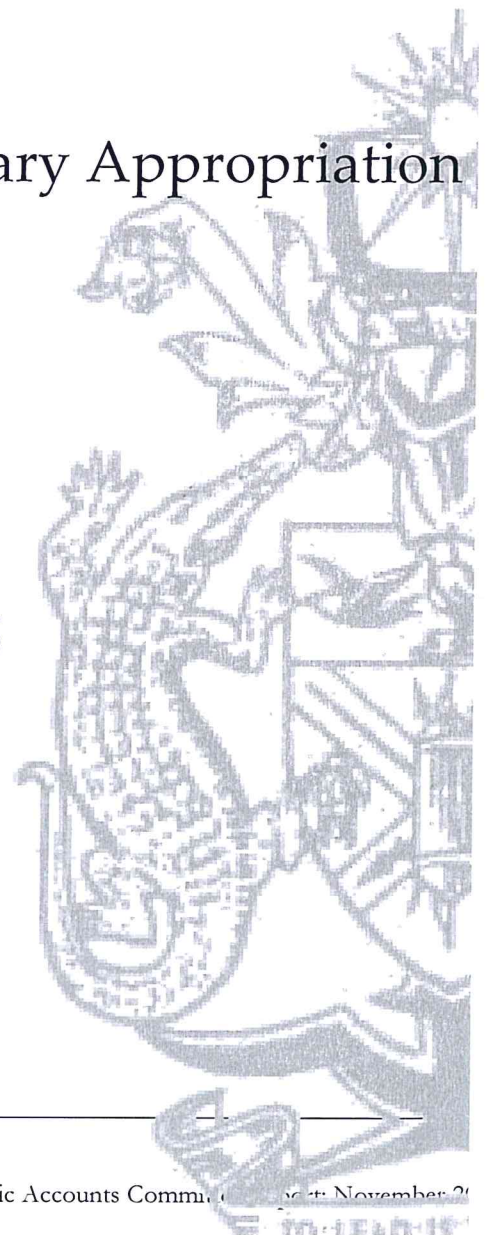
Report on the 2015 Supplementary Appropriation  
Bill 2015



NP-Paper No. 20/2015

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National Parliament Office



## COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

The current members of the **Public Accounts Committee** (10<sup>th</sup> Parliament) are:

**Hon. Rick Houenipwela, MP (Chairman)**

**Hon. Jeremiah Manele, MP**

**Hon. Steve Abana, MP**

**Hon. Matthew C. Wale, MP**

**Hon. Connelly Sandakabatu, MP**

**Hon. Derrick Manu'ari, MP**

**Hon. Nestor Giro, MP**

**Secretary:** Mr. Robert Cohen, Acting Auditor General

### **Secretariat**

Mrs Jasmine Waleafea

Ms Vanessa Rodie

Ms Salome Pilumate

Mr. Marson Lilopeza

### **Contacts**

Public Accounts Committee  
National Parliament of Solomon Islands  
P O Box G19  
**HONIARA**

Website: [www.parliament.gov.sb](http://www.parliament.gov.sb)

Telephone: (677) 24323

Facsimile: (677) 24272

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## COMMITTEE FUNCTIONS

The Committee is established under *Standing Order 69*; an Order made pursuant to the *Constitution*<sup>1</sup> and has the functions, together with the necessary powers to discharge such, to:

- (a) examine the accounts prescribed by Section 77 of the Public Financial Management Act 2013, together with the report of the Auditor General thereon, and to report the results of such examination to Parliament;
- (b) establish the causes of any excesses over authorised expenditure and to make recommendations to Parliament on any appropriate measures to cater for such excesses of expenditure;
- (c) examine such other accounts laid before Parliament as the Committee may think fit, together with any auditor's report thereon and to report the results of such examination to Parliament;
- (d) summon any public officer to give information on any explanation, or to produce any records or documents which the Committee may require in the performance of its duties;
- (e) consider in detail the Draft Estimates prepared by the Government in support of the Annual Appropriation Bill;
- (f) summon and examine the Accounting Officers and Technical staff of Ministries and Departments and require the production of background information and explanation in relation to Draft Estimates;
- (g) report to Parliament in such a way that the report may inform Members prior to the Parliamentary debate thereon of the background to the Draft Estimates draw attention to those matters which the Committee feels should be the subject for such Parliamentary debate; and
- (h) make such recommendations as the Committee sees fit and subsequently receive comments and reports on such recommendations from the Government.

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<sup>1</sup> Section 62, *Constitution of Solomon Islands* 1978.

# CHAIR'S FOREWORD

## REPORT OF THE PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE

Mr. Speaker,

Pursuant to Standing Orders No. 69 (1) [e] and [g] of the National Parliament of Solomon Islands, it is an honour and pleasure for me Sir, to present the Report of the Public Accounts Committee of the Inquiry into the 2015 Supplementary Appropriation Bill 2015 for laying before Parliament.



Honourable Rick Houenipwela, MP

Chairman

Public Accounts Committee

November 9<sup>th</sup>, 2015

Some of these funds are derived from savings from existing appropriations as follows:

### Variations in Appropriations

	MINISTRY	ESTIMATE	SUPPLEMENT- ARY ESTIMATE	REVISED ESTIMATE	MAIN ITEMS
274	MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND EXTERNAL TRADE	44,282,973	-1,000,000	43,282,973	Funds taken from Conferences vote
283	MINISTRY OF POLICE, NATIONAL SECURITY AND CORRECTIONAL SERVICES	226,430,864	-4,203,290	222,227,574	Funds taken from numerous votes [see pp20-21 of Bill]
481	OFFICE OF THE PRIME MINISTER AND CABINET	10,825,865	-6,626,000	4,199,865	Funds taken from numerous votes [see pp21 of Bill]
488	MINISTRY OF COMMERCE, INDUSTRIES, EMPLOYMENT AND IMMIGRATION	12,130,000	-100,000	12,030,000	Funds taken from Conferences and Transport votes
496	NATIONAL JUDICIARY	3,000,000	-416,848	2,583,152	Funds taken from Capex vote
	<b>TOTAL OFFSETTING SAVINGS</b>	<b>296,669,702</b>	<b>-12,346,138</b>	<b>284,323,564</b>	

## 2.2 Issues of concern to Committee

### MINISTRY OF FINANCE AND TREASURY

#### Misuse of Contingency Warrants

The Committee expressed once again its concern over the continued use of Contingency Warrants to expend unappropriated monies when the purposes for those expenditures were foreseeable or not urgent. The Committee was of the view that such practices lent themselves to political expediency.

The Committee's concerns were heightened in the light of assurances by the Ministry of Finance during previous hearings that the new arrangements under the new *Public Financial Management Act 2013* would lead to improved budgeting practices – but that this appeared not to be the case.

The Committee highlighted instances of poor planning such as the additional expenditure of \$2.8 million for the Melanesian Spearhead Group Leadership Summit, \$11.6 million in ex gratia payments to border patrol officers during the Bougainville crisis and \$3.7 million for attendance at the Pacific Games held in PNG – all of which the Government was aware several years in advance. The Ministry advised that the full amount was bid in the 2015 Budget but the bid was cut by MOFT with a view that the additional funds be obtained through the Supplementary Budget.

The Committee is greatly concerned to learn that MOFT is using the budgetary process as a cash management tool rather than a transparent means of predicting the full cost of administering the Government's annual programs, with the Contingent Warrants only to be used for unforeseeable events requiring Government responses. Such practices undermine the integrity of the annual appropriation mechanism and promotes poor planning practices by encouraging supplementary bids.

### **Recommendations**

The Committee recommends that

- MOFT Budget Unit cease using the current budgetary practice of treating budgets as a cash management tool and commence fully appropriating the cost of the Government's annual program in its budgets
- training of ministries in proper budget planning be initiated by the Ministry of Finance & Treasury rather than passively accepting poorly developed bids by ministries; and
- Permanent Secretaries' performance assessments include a review of the quality of their budget bids in terms of balancing historical expenditure patterns against upcoming activities.

### **Treatment of income tax refunds**

The Committee noted that the original appropriation \$2.3 million in the 2015 Budget was increased by a further \$27.3 million in the Supplementary Appropriation Bill. The Commissioner of Inland Revenue explained that previous practices of crediting tax payers rather than paying refunds obscured actual tax collections. The new practice will improve transparency over the actual amounts of revenue collected.

### **Bauxite excise duty collection**

The Committee expressed concerns that the collection of excise duty on bauxite exports could not be determined until the ore had been processed and valued. The Ministry advised that the amounts of revenue were too small to impact on the budget, and that more discussion with industry was required to determine the most efficient way of valuing and collecting such duty.

## **MINISTRY OF POLICE, NATIONAL SECURITY AND CORRECTIONAL SERVICES**

### **Responsiveness to emergency calls**

The Committee queried whether the RSIPF was monitoring its responsiveness to emergency calls in Honiara as well as in the provinces. The Commissioner of Police advised that this was an issue being addressed by the RSIPF in a number of ways:

- improving crime prevention through the identification of the causes for crime such as alcohol abuse and unemployment; and RSIPF was working with community leaders to address these problems
- upgrading recording technology to better capture more details about emergency calls
- installing GPS tracking devices to vehicles to better determine availability to respond to calls as well as better protect the safety of officers
- continuing to provide training to police officers including establishing service standards; and
- developing a prioritisation framework to best police 5,400 villages with 1,200 police officers so that the most urgent calls are addressed before other calls.

### **Mobility of the RSIPF**

The Committee queried whether the police had the capability of responding to calls as the public perceives that there is a problem with availability of vehicles. The Commissioner of Police advised that:

- there were adequate vehicles at present but there was a need to improve the mix of vehicles including by way of bicycles and motorbikes
- the RSIPF was looking at ways to improve maintenance of the fleet including by way of outsourcing some of the work to reputable providers; and
- there was currently a rollout of nine new half cabin cruisers to better attend to calls in the provinces.



### **Adequacy of Ministry budget**

The Ministry and RSIPF have expressed concerns over the level of funding provided under its budgets and has commissioned through RAMSI a report which analyses the real costs of policing and compares that to regional jurisdictions. The Commission of Police advised that the report is being used as a basis for its 2016 Budget Bid and was currently being reviewed by Cabinet. The Committee has requested a copy of this report.

### **RAMSI drawdown**

The Committee queried the current status of the RAMSI drawdown and was reassured by the Commissioner of Police that it was on track – the last major exercise being the rearmament of the RSIPF. Currently armed support is provided to the RSIPF through the PPF.

Community consultations are being conducted on the rearmament of police, a new armoury has almost been completed, specific units of the RSIPF are being trained in arms use, and new arms suitable for police work are being purchased.

Other RAMSI support such as the use of helicopters will no longer be available but development partners will be putting in place ongoing support through their respective bilateral assistance arrangements to the Solomon Islands once the last of RAMSI contingents leave.

### **Outstanding weapons amnesty compensation claims**

The Committee queried whether all claims for compensation for weapons surrendered under the RAMSI amnesty had now been paid. The Committee was informed that there was still one final list of claimants which had received Cabinet approval and is included in the 2016 Budget bids.

### **Solomon Islands - PNG border protection**

The Committee expressed its concerns about continuing community fear of armed incursions over the border from PNG and queried what steps were being taken to improve border security.

The Ministry advised that two police stations had been built at strategic locations, and a review was currently underway to assess what other steps ought to be taken. In addition, the RSIPF has been cooperating with the Bougainville police as well as conducting regular joint patrols with other agencies every 6 weeks; and they have been successful in intercepting weapons. The Government conducts joint meetings with the RPNGPF to monitor border issues.

## MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS AND AVIATION

### **Fire safety**

The Committee noted that the Supplementary Appropriation Bill included an amount for repairing a fire truck and wondered why these expenses were not included in the 2015 Budget.

The Ministry advised that the administration of the airports had been allowed to decline over several years and his recent appointment to the ministry was intended to redress the loss of administrative and program performance. Furthermore, many basic services had been allowed to lapse and most of the 2015 funding had already been expended.

The Ministry informed Committee that only one of the three fire trucks was operational, and the requested funds were needed to get a second truck operational. The third truck would be repaired under the 2016 Budget. Once the airport had three operational trucks, the Ministry would be able to serve the wider community as far as Ranadi in support of the RSIPF fire service.

Asked about whether any fire fighting capability would be rolled out to the provincial airfields, the Ministry advised that this was not possible and focus remained on the international airports which are required to meet international safety standards.

### **Henderson airport facilities**

The Committee commented on the very poor facilities at Henderson International Terminal which did not accord well with the Government's drive to attract tourists as a new growth industry.

The Ministry advised that there were a number of initiatives being planned to improve water supply, toilet facilities and air conditioning – and in the longer term, separate the arrival and departure lounges by taking over the upper floor currently occupied by the Ministry and the lower level areas currently used by immigration and customs officials. Such improvements will require a separate building to house departmental staff before they could occur.

The Ministry also advised that there were plans to improve the pedestrian corridor between the international and domestic terminals for transiting passengers as well as improving facilities at the domestic terminal.

### **Provincial airport construction**

The Committee queried the status of sealing gravel airstrips such as Taro and was informed by the Ministry that it had taken on responsibilities which were not its core activities. As a result, there were a number of incomplete projects which required finalisation. The Ministry advised that all projects will now be undertaken by Ministry of Infrastructure Development (MID) which has the technical expertise to manage such activities.

For instance, the Maanaoba gravel airstrip had cost \$60 million to date - \$20 million more than the sealed international airstrip at Munda which had employed an international engineering firm to build – and was still unable to be opened, and for which the Ministry was still receiving claims for payment. The Ministry advised that it had not properly negotiated for the land which has resulted in ongoing compensation claims. It was clear to the Committee that the Ministry does not have the administrative or procedural capacity to manage this process and it is urgent that the appropriate line ministries become involved in bringing the project to a successful close.

Another example cited was the project to install Non Directional Beacons at Henderson and Kirakira but which is currently at a standstill even though the equipment has been purchased and imported. To complicate matters further, the Ministry does not yet have costings information for the beacons installation and so has missed the deadline for bids in the 2016 Budget – resulting in the need to bid for funds in the 2016 Supplementary or 2017 Budget.

Funds were provided in the 2015 Budget to seal the air strips at Taro, Seghe and Lata but because of the late timing of the budget, and the decision to transfer responsibility for contracting and managing of civil engineering projects to MID, the projects will be undertaken through MID's National Transport Fund in 2016.

#### **Recommendations**

The Committee recommends that the Ministry take urgent action to regain control over the Maanaoba Airstrip project by

- reviewing the current state of construction against original plans, agreements and contracts with the assistance of international experts
- suspending any contracts that may be still ongoing until the review has been completed so that a decision can be made whether to continue or terminate those contracts; and

- formulating a plan to regularize any outstanding land disputes and complete any outstanding infrastructure construction.

### **Air Services Agreements**

The Committee queried how the recent dispute settlement agreement with Fiji Airways resulted in Solomon Airlines being no better off than they were before the dispute. The Ministry advised that it had not proactively managed the negotiations of such agreements resulting in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs taking the lead whose officers did not have the technical knowledge to appreciate aspects that needed to be taken into account.

For instance, Solomon Airlines is required to set up offices in Fiji and Papua New Guinea to ticket passengers and is taxed on those operations; whereas Fiji Airlines and Air Niugini are exempted from tax when operating in Solomon Islands.

The Ministry advised that the current agreement was up for review recently but because the working group was inactive, it has rolled over until February 2016. The Ministry is preparing to take a greater role in the next review with a view to achieving a fairer outcome for Solomon Airlines.

### **Recommendation**

The Committee recommends that the Ministry:

- give notice of termination of the current agreement with both Fiji and PNG;
- take more proactive lead in future negotiations, work closely with Solomon Airlines and other stakeholder ministries when preparing its negotiating strategy to ensure it understands all aspects that need to be considered during negotiations;
- ensure that any new agreement is based on fair reciprocity between the three parties.

### **Undersea Cable Project**

The Committee queried the current status of the undersea cable intended to improve telecommunications data connections. The Ministry advised that there were two alternative projects being considered by Government – one to connect directly to Sydney and the other to connect to the PNG – Vanuatu cable which also connects to Sydney.

The Ministry has recommended to Government the first option which, although more expensive, had the advantage of being totally under the control of Solomon Islands whereas the alternative proposal meant that Solomon Islands had to share control with PNG and Vanuatu thereby making it a riskier proposition. The Ministry advised that one of the Sydney tenders has priced its bid based on second-hand cabling previously used between Philippines and Guam which is in as-new condition. The recommendations are currently before Cabinet. The Committee was unclear as to why the government felt that the PNG-Vanuatu cable was a sovereignty risk and request further clarification from the government.

## **OFFICE OF THE PRIME MINISTER AND CABINET**

### **MSG Secretariat- Port Vila Grant**

The Committee queried whether the grant of \$2 million to the Secretariat was only for this year or was the Office going to bid for the similar amount in 2016 Budget. The Office advised that it is voluntary one-off payment and that there is no intention to provide additional budget in 2016 for further grants.

### **Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report**

The Committee queried whether someone had now been recruited and engaged to fully implement the recommendations as previously advised to Committee at its last hearing. The Office confirmed that it was delayed, but they managed to complete their selection process and a recommendation is before the Ministry of Public Service for a national consultant to be appointed – the Office is confident to have him appointed before the end of the year.

#### **Recommendation**

The Committee recommends that the Government make the implementation of the Report a top priority in the current Parliament so that the people of Solomon Islands can complete its unfinished business and move forward with renewed commitment towards a peaceful and prosperous future as one.

### **RAMSI Committee**

The Committee again raised a question on the establishment of the committee as to whether it would be headed by a politician, and, if so, who would be heading that committee. The Office was not

aware of such a proposal and advised that a representative of the Prime Minister was a member of the committee.

### **MP's and MPA's overseas costs**

The Committee questioned the need for further funding in the Supplementary Budget and an explanation for the large delegations, especially those accompanying the Prime Minister. The Office advised that the funding was a general travel code which covers other Ministers or representative from the State separate from their respective Ministry travel allocations. The additional funds were also required to cover the delegation attending the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting to be held later this year. In addition, the Office advised that MPs travel for medical attention under the health entitlement abroad arrangements was also covered under this line item as there is no specific provision for it under the Budget.

The Committee also questioned that, where spouses accompanied the head of delegation during the official trips, who was responsible for the additional expenses. The Office advised that this is covered under the government entitlements but could not provide the actual costs at the hearing.

### **Additional Office Equipment**

The Committee questioned the purpose for additional equipment to be funded with the \$300,000 and was advised that the funds were required for furniture, computers etc. to be used by the political appointees to carry out their work.

### **Unretired Imprests**

The committee requested an update on the status of unretired imprests received by political appointees. The Office confirmed that there were almost \$2 million in unretired imprests and that they have been issued reminders to them as well as all staff to comply with the latest instructions issued by MOFT.

### **RAMSI drawdown**

The committee was concerned over gaps in future support that have been identified as RAMSI withdraws from Solomon Islands. One of these was the funding of the Provincial Governance Strengthening Project provided to the provincial governments. The Committee queried how much of these gaps the Government was ready to take up and how many of those programs the Government was looking to donors to help fund.

The Office explained that the withdrawal process was a large program involving all core ministries and that the program has been going on for a couple of years now. The processes are moving to the core areas of peace keeping and law and order and its focus on strengthening the national security and police capabilities has resulted in the police recently achieving a standard of UN peace keeping level.

### **Political Appointees**

The Committee questioned the recruitment of political appointees and their deployment to the provinces. The Office was unable to advise current status but there have been visits to Malaita-Suava Bay. The Office also confirmed that there were a total of 39 contracts and one has removed.

The committee requested advice on arrangements for performance reviews of appointees and whether they would be undertaken by an independent professional organization to ensure an objective assessment. The Office advised that the appraisals had commenced in June and were being done by a committee within the Office and the process will be similar to the public service appraisal process.

### **Federal Constitution**

The Committee queried the Prime Minister's undertaking that he would bring the final draft of the Federal Constitution to this November Parliament Sitting. The Office advised that a draft had been completed and the final consultations had been carried out, but that it was not possible to submit it to Parliament on its last sitting until the Prime Minister had had an opportunity to see whether it is appropriate for the nation and when it will come to Parliament.

### **Recommendation**

The Committee recommends that the Government present to Parliament the Draft Constitution in the next Sitting of Parliament to enable the Honourable Members sufficient time to consider and adopt the new Constitution during the life of the Tenth Parliament.

### **Grants to Malaita Province**

The Committee questioned the purpose for providing \$1 million funds for a Malaita Conference and was advised by the Office that it took seriously the initiative by the Malaita Provincial Government to

bring leaders together to discuss current issues affecting development of the province. The Office assured the Committee that it would scrutinize the use of the money, which will be paid in instalments, and each instalment would depend on the retirement of the previous one.

The committee also questioned the nature of funding towards Suava Bay stability restoration and was advised that this was an arrangement to facilitate the settlement of disputes affecting Suava Bay development, with the funds being distributed through three constituencies to neighbouring parties who were impacted by families made homeless during the tension.

## **MINISTRY OF INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT**

### **MPs' motor vehicles**

The Committee queried the Ministry on its request need to purchase further vehicles this year and was advised that when the new government was formed, all previous vehicles were purchased by outgoing members based on the Prime Minister's approval. The funding included the cost of hiring vehicles to give to Ministers as these expenses were not budgeted for in the 2015 Budget. The Ministry needed to continue to hire vehicles as there was insufficient funding to purchase all the vehicles required under such arrangements.

### **Shipping Grants**

The Committee questioned the Ministry as to whether there was a shipping grant policy in place to guide the disbursement of the funds to the individuals, MPs or private companies receiving the grants. The Ministry advised that a draft policy was drafted and approved by Cabinet and that it consisted of three categories [purchase, build or subsidy], but the policy does not allocate a fixed percentage for each category and grants are based on merit of individual proposals. Under the policy, grant payments will be made directly to the supplier. The Committee requested a copy of the policy.

The Committee also requested clarification as to when the shipping grant policy was to commence and whether it would apply to grants dispensed in 2016.



### **Ministry technical capacity**

The Committee expressed its concerns that given the shortness of time to implement the 2015 Budget, the Ministry did not have the capacity in terms of qualified staff to be able to manage such a large development budget.

The Ministry agreed that although it had 186 positions in its establishment, 32 were vacant and unable to be filled due to a lack of qualified applicants for such positions. The Ministry has made a submission to the Ministry of Public Service to address the issue. The lack of qualified staff has a number of impacts including the inability to operate the new quality assurance laboratory that has been built in Lunga, or full oversight of construction projects in the provinces such as the building of wharves, ramps and lighthouses.

#### **Recommendation**

The Committee recommends that the Ministry explore alternative means for developing a sufficiently large cadre of technical professionals, including by way of internationally sourced workers, to manage the large number of infrastructure projects currently funded under the 2015 Budget and anticipated in the 2016 Budget. Such a plan should encompass high priority projects not under direct MID management such as the hospitals projects under care of the Ministry of Health and Medical Services.

### **Road transportation program**

The Committee questioned the Ministry on its future transportation assistance plans for land transport as against the current emphasis on new sea transport infrastructure and road maintenance of existing roads. The Ministry confirmed that it was looking at such a program.

The Committee also queried the Ministry on how logging roads could be registered as public roads. The Ministry advised that the processes included people keeping the road maintained by using it while steps are taken to acquire the land by the Ministry of Lands so that it can be classified as a public road and become eligible for Government maintenance. Under a new Road Use Bill which will be submitted to Parliament next year there is a provision to provide for roads constructed by logging companies to be included in the Government's maintenance program where they are made available to the public. Although conversion of logging roads is a valid way of developing a road network, it does not fulfil all road transportation needs and new ones will still need to be built.

The Committee queried the current status of a road project in Kirakira where the contractor who was supposed to do the work had failed to complete. The Ministry advised that the contractor was issued with a notice which he accepted; and after the Attorney General gave clearance to terminate the contract the Ministry awarded the contract to another contractor.

The Committee noted that three road awards were still outstanding and queried what were the hold ups. The Ministry advised that one site was currently occupied by squatters, another was still to mobilize whilst the third contract needed to deal with timber bridges.

### **Airstrips**

The Committee noted the airstrips currently listed with the Ministry and noted their importance to the tourism sector in Isabel and other parts of Solomon Islands. Although the work was listed for this year it was most likely not going to occur until next year. The Committee pointed out an error in the works program which referred to an airstrip in Sasammugga which does not exist. The Ministry confirmed the correct location was in fact Taro.

### **Rapid Employment Program**

The Committee was concerned that the sustainability of this program could be in jeopardy once the current World Bank funding finishes. The Ministry advised that discussions were being held and are ongoing with the Government, including the possibility of extending the program to the provinces to try to discourage the current urban drift towards Honiara where people are coming to look for paid employment and creating uncontrolled squatters settlements.

## **MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT, CLIMATE CHANGE, DISASTER MANAGEMENT & METEOROLOGY**

### **Disaster Relief**

#### *Cyclones Pam and Raquel*

The Committee was of the view that disaster relief funding in the Supplementary Budget was intended for those who missed out in the last disaster relief and the Committee sought confirmation from the Ministry to verify this. The Ministry commented that early this year there were two disasters affecting the country - Tropical Cyclone Pam for which the Ministry submitted a funding request of \$9,532,621 which was approved by Cabinet, and an additional \$1 million for support to Vanuatu.

However, the MOFT only provided \$4 million for Cyclone Pam and the \$1 million to support Vanuatu.

The other was Cyclone Raquel for which the Ministry submitted a funding request for \$14 188 414 to provide relief supply to those provinces affected by the cyclone from which the Ministry only received \$5.4 million. A separate funding request from the Prime Minister's Office for \$3.3 million was endorsed by Cabinet and that was fully paid to the 33 constituencies who were most affected and in urgent need. The Ministry holds all the payment vouchers and other record documents.

The committee questioned whether the \$5.4 million was adequate enough to carry out the work of the Ministry and queried the basis for the reduction in its bids. The Ministry advised that MOFT did not have enough funds at the time and the rest of the money was expected to be received upon submission of further requests based upon the initial Cabinet approval. Part of those subsequent requests will include one for \$1 million to be paid to the remaining 10 constituencies affected by Cyclone Raquel.

#### *Budgeting for unforeseeable disasters*

The Committee questioned how the Ministry budgets for disasters because it is not possible to foresee how much will be required in any one year. The Ministry advised that it submits a bid under the disaster relief allocation for up to \$5 million but the Government only allocates between \$500 000 to \$1 million so that when disaster strikes the Ministry relies on Contingency Warrants to request the actual funding required.

#### *NDMO responsiveness to disasters*

The Committee was concerned that the Ministry was often not able to reach or assist on a timely manner during disasters. The Ministry advised that it was handicapped by an inadequate staffing level but a Natural Disaster Risk Management Plan was in place where other line ministries as well as NGOs also play a vital role. Once disaster strikes they assist in undertaking impact and needs assessments as well as delivery of relief supplies and assistance. Support is also provided in other ways such as being given access to credit by the airlines and the shops in the villages during a disaster.

The committee was also concerned to learn that some officers in Auki refused to provide their assessment reports to the MPs until they were paid their allowances. The Ministry advised that

Government employees were entitled to allowances according to General Orders; but that, due to not enough funds being provided to the Ministry, some of the officers doing the assessments had to be recalled resulting in some areas not having assessment reports from those officers.

The Committee was most concerned to learn of such breakdowns and queried how this is not to be repeated in future disasters. The Ministry agreed that the current arrangements presented difficulties for the NDMO but it had no choice but to rely on the Natural Disaster Risk Management Plan arrangements to cope as best as it can until such time as the Government agrees to increase its annual appropriation for disaster funds in successive budgets.

#### *Direct disaster funding to constituencies*

The Committee was very concerned about the decision to channel disaster funds directly to the constituencies as it could lead to politicization of essential assistance and leave people vulnerable and expressed the view that the NDMO should be strengthened to be able to deal in real time with unfolding emergencies.

#### *Impact of climate change*

The Committee was concerned the impact of the sea level rise was having in some areas due to climate change and asked when funding would be provided to deal with it. The Ministry advised that a national assessment was currently underway. An assessment for Choiseul had been completed and currently assessments were being undertaken in Makira and Malaita.

The Ministry confirmed that the effects of cyclone seasons and El Nino would require funding and that its budget bid submission for 2016 is again \$5 million based on historical information. The Ministry also will rely on aid partners to help while waiting for the funding.

### **Recommendations**

The Committee recommends that the Government increase funding of the NDMO to ensure that:

- it has sufficient staff to undertake disaster impact assessments more quickly when disasters strike
- provide for an emergency response team that can coordinate and provide rapid emergency supplies without the need of using direct constituency support payments, and
- complete the rising sea level impacts study as a matter of urgency.

### **Mataniko River cleaning project**

The committee queried whether the project to clean Mataniko River was still ongoing. The Ministry advised that it was continuing in partnership with SPREP, the local communities and the Honiara City Council. Floaters were in place to collect the rubbish which was subsequently identified. This type of assessment will help the Ministry to understand the contributing factors and better conduct awareness campaigns to nearby communities.

### **April Flood Disaster**

The Committee was very concerned to note that riverbank dwellers were relocated away from flood-prone areas and an ordinance was issued by the Honiara City Council prohibiting any new buildings in these areas; but it seems that people are returning and rebuilding in those zones. The Committee queried whether the Ministry was aware of this and whether it had any responsibility for preventing the movement back.

The Ministry advised that its responsibilities were limited to providing information and warnings to those communities of the risks of resettling in flood-prone areas.

#### **Recommendations**

The Committee recommends that the:

- Ministry of Environment, Climate Change, Disaster Management and Meteorology take a more proactive role in educating riverbank dwellers on the dangers of rebuilding in flood zones
- Honiara City Council more directly enforce its Ordinance prohibiting the building of houses in designated flood zones; and
- Ministry of Finance and related line ministries make it clear that dwellers who return to prohibited flood zones will not be eligible for relocation support or compensation should they be impacted by future floods

## **MINISTRY OF HEALTH AND MEDICAL SERVICES**

### **Cuban trained doctors**

The Committee raised again its concerns regarding the Cuban trained doctors and asked what the Ministry's plans were on further training them as they are only qualified to provide basic public health. The Ministry confirmed that the doctors will be trained locally on clinical medicine through a

bridging course for 6 months to reorient them back to SI system which will involve Fiji School of medicine (FSM). The World Health Organisation (WHO) is supporting the bridging courses and the Ministry is about to sign an agreement with the Australian Government to fund extra supervision at the Kilufi and Gizo hospitals which will employ the doctors.

### **Relocation of National Referral Hospital (NRH)**

The committee expressed concerns on the relocation of NRH in terms of whether the location decision has been finalised and who is taking the leading role on this project. The Ministry advised that it had identified two possible locations – one at Gilbert Camp and the other at New Zealand Camp. A final decision has yet to be made. The Ministry will take the lead in the project supported by a relocation committee which is made up of members from MID, Ministry of Lands and Housing and Ministry of Finance and Treasury.

### **Management of National Referral Hospital**

The Committee expressed concerns over the capacity and management of issues within the current facilities and buildings. The Ministry explained that NRH has its executive which manages the primary and secondary roles. There is a review being conducted by Guadalcanal Provincial Government (GPG) and Honiara City Council (HCC) to identify what services could be provided by these authorities so that patients do not need to go to NRH. It is envisaged that GPG and HCC will provide primary care while the NRH will handle secondary care under future arrangements.

### **Medical testing equipment**

The Committee reiterated its concerns raised in past budget hearings over the issue of lack of testing equipment for NRH and the provincial health facilities. The 2015 Budget allocated \$7.7 million for testing equipment but the Ministry at the time of the budget hearing suggested that it required \$100 million to fully equip the hospitals; however the Committee noted that there are no additional funds in the Supplementary Budget for testing equipment.

The Ministry confirmed that the current Equipment Committee came up with a list of equipment to be procured in anticipation of the new hospital. The tendering went out late but this was done internationally as the procurement funds came from performance-linked aid from the Australian Government which is only disbursed when certain targets are met by the Ministry each year. The equipment list is split between central facilities and provincial centres.

### **Recommendation**

The Committee recommends that the Ministry ensure that arrangements for fully equipping hospitals and medical facilities with testing equipment as designed to expedite delivery as a top priority to ensure the safety and well being of our citizens are better protected.

### **Consultancy fees**

The Committee queried the makeup of consultancy fees in the Supplementary Budget and the Ministry advised the bulk of these funds were for project officers' salaries and per diem allowances for projects such as the Non communicable Disease Survey Project being funded by WHO.

### **Project delays**

The Committee expressed its concern over project delays resulting in deferrals into 2016 such as the Kirakira hospital for instance. The committee noted that the Ministry development budget implementation up to September 2015 was only about 22%, and with only two months remaining before the national accounts are closed, the Committee asked how the Ministry intended to complete the 2015 budget implementation. The Ministry advised that the reasons for the delay were only having one adviser on infrastructure projects and a number of technical staffs being suspended but not yet dismissed thereby preventing the Ministry from recruiting replacement staff. However, the Ministry has assigned top priority for new hospital projects; and has a policy to develop effective national health coverage which includes the posting of doctors and identifying key areas for district hospitals.

### **PPP funding of Kilufi Hospital**

The Committee queried the status of the funding for the Kilufi Hospital that was supposed to have been funded under a PPP arrangement with the Nazar Group of companies. The Ministry was not clear on the current status of the arrangements and had been requested to assist in costing the civil works but did not have the technical staff to assist as yet.

## **MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT**

### **Teachers 'salaries and housing and travel allowances**

The Committee queried the need for additional funding for the teacher's salaries, housing allowances and travel allowances which should have been included in the 2015 Budget. The Ministry explained that it is chronically underfunded each year because the full cost of teaching staff has too great an

impact in the annual budget and is always reduced as a consequence; which results in the Ministry requiring an additional amount each year. For instance, in 2015 the provision for teachers travel is \$6.5 million but the expected amount is \$14 million, so the Supplementary Budget is to cater for the shortfall.

The Committee also expressed concerns over the issue where the past practise was for the Education Authorities (EAs) to meet half of the teachers travel while the Ministry paid for the other half but now the Ministry paid the full amount. The Ministry explained the Government agreed to pay for the full amount as a one off payment in 2015 but then devolve that responsibility on a pro rata bases back to the EAs over the next 3 years; and that policies and support training have been developed to support this arrangement.

The Committee was concerned whether the EAs would have the money to fund the teachers' travel if this responsibility is devolved back to them. The Ministry explained that whether that is managed by the Government through additional grants or managed by the Ministry by re-prioritising EAs' spending of existing grants was something that was being designed at the moment. The intention as it stands now is that over the next 3 years responsibility will devolve back to the EAs in stages - with 30% of the responsibility passed back to the EAs in 2016, 60% in 2017 and 100% in 2018.

### **Recommendation**

The Committee reiterates its recommendation that the Government discontinue its current 'false economy' tactic of reducing funding of teachers' entitlements in its annual budgets as a cash management tool and then subsequently providing them in supplementary budgets. The full amount of fixed costs of teaching services should be transparent and included in the annual budget cycle.

### **Other matters**

The committee expressed concerns over the size of the \$46 million in the Supplementary Budget and asked if there is any outstanding issue raised by teachers that needed addressing by Government. The Ministry advised that apart from teachers' allowances, the Ministry was

- drafting an Education Bill which will clarify the responsibilities of EAs and teachers allowances
- revising the Teaching Service Handbook which will provide operating procedures and policies; and
- restructuring Ministry arrangements which will help address issues within EAs.



The committee expressed concerns over a lack of provision for teachers' housing allowances and the Ministry explained that teachers have no housing allowances to date.

## **MINISTRY OF COMMERCE, INDUSTRY, LABOUR AND IMMIGRATION**

A written submission was received from the Ministry which explained that its bids in the Supplementary Budget were necessitated by reductions in its original bids under the 2015 Budget which resulted in underfunding of operational expenses comprising:

- printing of various forms for work permits (\$200,000) and immigration cards (\$200,000)
- staff annual leave fares (\$50,000); and
- vocational apprenticeship exams and sponsored annual leave fares for 1,582 students around the country (\$250,000).

An amount of \$200,000 was requested for functions held as a result of a changeover of Minister and the farewelling of the Registrar of Companies and Chairman of Trade Dispute Panel who were taking up new appointments.

## **NATIONAL PARLIAMENT OFFICE, NATIONAL JUDICIARY AND MINISTRY OF JUSTICE AND LEGAL AFFAIRS**

Written submissions were also received from the National Parliament Office, National Judiciary and Ministry of Justice and Legal Affairs in which the contents of their respective appropriations in the Supplementary Budget were reiterated without any issues being identified.

### 3.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

The wishes to recommend the following to the Government on issues gathered from the 2015 Supplementary Appropriation Bill 2015:

1. On the issue of misuse of Contingency Warrants, the Committee recommends that the Ministry of Finance and Treasury:
  - a. Budget Unit cease using the current budgetary practice of treating budgets as a cash management tool and commence fully appropriating the cost of the Government's annual program in its budgets;
  - b. Initiate training of ministries in proper budget planning rather than passively accepting poorly developed bids by ministries; and
  - c. Ensure Permanent Secretaries' performance assessments include a review of the quality of their budget bids in terms of balancing historical expenditure patterns against upcoming activities.
  
2. The Committee recommends that the Ministry of Communications and Aviation take urgent action to regain control over the Maanaoba gravel airstrip project by:
  - a. reviewing the current state of construction against original plans, agreements and contracts with the assistance of international experts
  - b. suspending any contracts that may be still ongoing until the review has been completed so that a decision can be made whether to continue or terminate those contracts; and
  - c. formulating a plan to regularize any outstanding land disputes and complete any outstanding infrastructure construction.
  
3. In relation to the Air Service Agreements, the Committee also recommends that the Ministry of Communications and Aviation:
  - a. give notice of termination of the current agreement with both Fiji and PNG;
  - b. take more proactive lead in future air service agreements negotiations, work closely with Solomon Airlines and other stakeholder ministries when preparing its negotiating strategy to ensure it understands all aspects that need to be considered during negotiations; and
  - c. ensure that any new agreement is based on fair reciprocity between the three parties.

4. The Committee recommends that the Government make the implementation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report a top priority in the current Parliament so that the people of Solomon Islands can complete its unfinished business and move forward with renewed commitment towards a peaceful and prosperous future as one.
5. The Committee recommends that the Government present to Parliament the Draft Federal Constitution in the next Sitting of Parliament to enable the Honourable Members sufficient time to consider and adopt the new Constitution during the life of the Tenth Parliament.
6. The Committee recommends that the Ministry of Infrastructure Development explore alternative means for developing a sufficiently large cadre of technical professionals, including by way of internationally sourced workers, to manage the large number of infrastructure projects (such as the hospitals projects) currently funded under the 2015 Budget and anticipated in the 2016 Budget.
7. The Committee recommends that the Government increase funding of the NDMO to ensure that:
  - a. it has sufficient staff to undertake disaster impact assessments more quickly when disasters strike;
  - b. provide for an emergency response team that can coordinate and provide rapid emergency supplies without the need of using direct constituency support payments; and
  - c. complete the rising sea level impacts study as a matter of urgency.
8. The Committee recommends that the:
  - a. Ministry of Environment, Climate Change, Disaster Management and Meteorology take a more proactive role in educating riverbank dwellers on the dangers of rebuilding in flood zones;
  - b. Honiara City Council more directly enforce its Ordinance prohibiting the building of houses in designated flood zones; and
  - c. Ministry of Finance and related line ministries make it clear that dwellers who return to prohibited flood zones will not be eligible for relocation support or compensation should they be impacted by future floods
9. The Committee recommends that the Ministry of Health and Medical Services ensure that arrangements for fully equipping hospitals and medical facilities with testing equipment as

designed to expedite delivery as a top priority to ensure the safety and well being of our citizens are better protected.

10. The Committee recommends that the Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development (Government) to include the full amount of fixed costs of teaching services in the annual budget cycle and discontinue its current 'false economy' tactic of reducing funding of teachers' entitlements in its annual budgets and then subsequently providing them in supplementary budgets.

## 4.0 APPENDIX

### Minutes of Proceedings



NATIONAL PARLIAMENT OF SOLOMON ISLANDS

P.O. Box G19,  
Honiara.  
Tel: 28520/23424.  
Fax: 24272

### PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE

#### Minutes of Proceedings Committee Hearing into the 2015 Appropriation Bill 2015

Day 1/Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup> November 2015, CR II, Parliament House 1:30 pm

#### 1. Members Present

Hon. Rick Houenipwela, Chairman  
Hon. Jeremiah Manele, MP  
Hon. Steve Abana  
Hon. Matthew Wale, MP  
Hon. Nestor Giro, MP  
Hon. Derrick Manu'ari, MP  
Hon. Connelly Sandakabatu, MP

Secretary: Mr. Robert Cohen- Auditor General (Acting)

#### Secretariat

Mr Marson Lilopeza, Director Committee Secretariat  
Mrs Jasmine Waleafea, Committee Secretariat  
Miss Salome Pilumate, Admin Committee Secretariat  
Mr Davidson Kukuti, Hansard Reporter  
Mr Whitmon Taebiru, Hansard Reporter  
Mr Moffett Maenao, ICT Officer  
Mr Stephen Hachi, Media Officer

#### 2. Welcome and Opening Remarks

The Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee Hon. Rick Houenipwela made his opening remarks. The Chair informed the witnesses of the Parliamentary privileges.

#### 3. Inquiry into the Supplementary 2015 Appropriation Bill 2015

The Hearing proper commenced and the following witnesses from the Ministry of Finance and Treasury were admitted:

#### Hearing 1 Witnesses

- i. Mr. Harry Kuma ( Permanent Secretary)
- ii. Mr. Paula U (Accountant General)
- iii. Mr. Aylten Jamieson (Commissioner, Inland Revenue)
- iv. Mr. Bebeno Mulesae ( Financial Controller)
- v. Mr. Norman Hiropuhi (Director Budget)

- vi. Mr. Peter Oiuru (Senior Budget Officer)
- vii. Mr. Umata Riimana (Senior Budget Officer)
- viii. Mr. Brendon Nerdal ( Budget Advisor)

The witnesses made their presentations before the committee.  
The committee questioned the witnesses based on the evidences presented.  
The examination concluded.

*Hearing suspends at 2:51 pm*

The Hearing proper resumed at 3:00 pm and the following witnesses from the Ministry of Police, National Security and Correctional Services were admitted:

**Hearing 2 Witnesses**

- i. Mr. Stephen Maesiola, Undersecretary
- ii. Steven Oto, Financial Controller
- iii. Mr. Frank Prendergast, Police Commissioner
- iv. Mrs Juanita Matangi, Deputy Police Commissioner
- v. Alice Saeni, AG
- vi. Michael Healy – Advisor PPF
- vii. Toni Bere, PPF

The witnesses made their presentations before the committee.  
The committee questioned the witnesses based on the evidences presented.  
The examination concluded.

*Hearing suspends at 3:53 pm*

The Hearing proper continued at 4:05 pm and the following witnesses from the Ministry of Communication and Civil Aviation were admitted:

**Hearing 3 Witnesses**

- i. Mr. Moses Virivolomo, Permanent Secretary
- ii. Mr Chris, Chief Accountant

The witnesses made their presentations before the committee.  
The committee questioned the witnesses based on the evidences presented.  
The examination concluded.

**4. Adjournment:**

The committee adjourned hearing at 5:06 pm

**5. Documents Tabled**

- a. MPNSCS ( Submission #1)

**Day 2/Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> November 2015, CR II, Parliament House 9:07 am**

**1. Members Present**

Hon. Rick Houenipwela, Chairman  
Hon. Jeremiah Manele, MP  
Hon. Steve Abana

Hon. Matthew Wale, MP  
 Hon. Nestor Giro, MP  
 Hon. Derrick Manu'ari, MP  
 Hon. Connelly Sandakabatu, MP

**Secretary:** Ms Wendy Ngodoro, Office of the Auditor General

**Secretariat**

Mrs Jasmine Waleafea, Committee Secretariat  
 Miss Vanessa Rodie, Committee Secretariat  
 Miss Salome Pilumate, Admin Committee Secretariat  
 Mrs Arol Kimi, Hansard Reporter  
 Mr Moffett Maenao, ICT Officer

**2. Welcome and Opening Remarks**

The Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee Hon. Rick Houenipwela made his opening remarks. The Chair informed the witnesses of the Parliamentary privileges.

**3. Inquiry into the Supplementary 2015 Appropriation Bill 2015**

The Hearing proper commenced and the following witnesses from the Office of the Prime Minister and Cabinet were admitted:

Hearing 4 Witnesses

- i. Mr. Joseph Waleanisia, Secretary to Prime Minister
- ii. Mr. Pellion Buare, Finance Controller
- iii. Mr. Andrew Muaki, Special Secretary to Prime Minister

The witnesses made their presentations before the committee.  
 The committee questioned the witnesses based on the evidences presented.  
 The examination concluded.

*Hearing suspends at 10:15 am*

The Hearing proper resumed at 10:33 am and the following witnesses from the Ministry of Infrastructure Development were admitted:

Hearing 5 Witnesses

- i. Mr. Henry Murrey, Permanent Secretary
- ii. Mr. Jimmy Nuake, Undersecretary Technical
- iii. Mr. Leslie Nate, DME
- iv. Mr. Mark Kamoia, Human Resources Manager
- v. Mr. Jerold Musi, Finance Controller (Acting)
- vi. Mr. Brain Aonua, Dep. Director SIMSA
- vii. Mr. Patteson Fakavai, Director ABMSD

The witnesses made their presentations before the committee.  
 The committee questioned the witnesses based on the evidences presented.  
 The examination concluded.

*Hearing suspends at 11:46 am*

The Hearing proper continued at 12: 07 pm and the following witnesses from the Ministry of Environment, Climate Change and Disaster Management were admitted:

**Hearing 6 Witnesses**

- i. Mr. Chanel Iroi, Undersecretary Technical
- ii. Mr. Bobby Ramo, Financial Controller

The witnesses made their presentations before the committee.  
The committee questioned the witnesses based on the evidences presented.  
The examination concluded.

**4. Adjournment:**

The committee adjourned hearing at 1:07 pm

**5. Documents Tabled**

None

**Day 3 /Friday 6<sup>th</sup> November 2015, CR II, Parliament House 9:06 am**

**1. Members Present**

Hon. Rick Houenipwela, Chairman  
Hon. Jeremiah Manele, MP  
Hon. Steve Abana, MP  
Hon. Matthew Wale, MP  
Hon. Connelly Sandakabatu, MP  
Hon. Nestor Giro, MP  
Hon. Derrick Manu'ari, MP

**Secretary:** Ms Gerbera Maqiti, Office of the Auditor General

**Secretariat**

Mrs Jasmine Waleafea, Committee Secretariat  
Miss Salome Pilumate, Admin Committee Secretariat  
Mr Fredrick Iro, Hansard Reporter  
Mr Moffett Maena, ICT Officer

**2. Welcome and Opening Remarks**

The Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee Hon. Rick Houenipwela made his opening remarks.  
The Chair informed the witnesses of the Parliamentary privileges.

**3. Inquiry into the Supplementary 2015 Appropriation Bill 2015**

The Hearing proper commenced and the following witnesses from the Ministry of Health and Medical Services were admitted:

**Hearing 7 Witnesses**

- i. Dr. Tenneth Dalipanda, Permanent Secretary
- ii. Mr. Arnold Muveni, Undersecretary Admin and Finance
- iii. Ms Yvonne Lipa, Financial Controller (Acting)

The witnesses made their presentations before the committee.  
The committee questioned the witnesses based on the evidences presented.



The examination concluded.

*Hearing suspends at 10:02 am*

The Hearing proper resumed at 10:20am and the following witnesses from the Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development were admitted:

**Hearing 8 Witnesses**

- i. Mr. James Bosamata, Undersecretary
- ii. Mr. Tahisihaka Andrew, Financial Controller
- iii. Mr. Ron Stalenberg, Technical Advisor
- iv. Mr. Dagnal Dereveke, USC
- v. Mr. Cypriano Nuake, National Director Teacher Workforce

The witnesses made their presentations before the committee.

The committee questioned the witnesses based on the evidences presented.

The examination concluded.

**4. Adjournment:**

The committee adjourned hearing at 10:43 am

**5. Documents Tabled**

None

## List of Submissions

No	Author
1.	MPNSCS – Solomon Islands/Papua New Guinea Border Crisis Active duty Deployment Officers still employed by SIG
2.	MJLA – Solomon Islands Extra Ordinary Gazette no. 110 (legal Notice No. 72)
3.	MJLA – Long Service Benefit Claim for Justice Mwanasalua
4.	MJLA – National Judiciary 2015 Supplementary Budget Brief to PAC
5.	MID – The Ministry of Infrastructure Development 2015 Supplementary Budget Brief to PAC
6.	MCILI – The Ministry of Commerce, Industry , Labour and Immigration 2015 Supplementary Brief to PAC
7.	MCILI – The Ministry of Commerce, Industry , Labour and Immigration’s application for a supplementary provision: Outstanding 2014 bill for Fairy Land Restaurant
8.	MCILI - The Ministry of Commerce, Industry , Labour and Immigration’s application for a supplementary provision: Outstanding bill for printing of Work Permit Forms
9.	MCILI - The Ministry of Commerce, Industry , Labour and Immigration’s application for a supplementary provision: Outstanding bill for purchasing Official files and printing of Embarkation and Disembarkation cards
10.	MCILI - The Ministry of Commerce, Industry , Labour and Immigration’s application for a supplementary provision: Annual leave fare for Labour division Staffs
11.	MCILI - The Ministry of Commerce, Industry , Labour and Immigration’s application for a supplementary provision: 2015 Annual leave fares for SINU sponsored apprentices
12.	NPSI – The National Parliament Office 2015 Supplementary Budget Brief to PAC
13.	MJLA – The Ministry of Justice and Legal Affairs 2015 Supplementary 2015 Budget Brief to PAC
14.	MEHRD - The Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development 2015 Supplementary 2015 Budget Brief to PAC