



PASAI

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Pacific Auditors Working Together

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SAI Western Australia safeguarding independence to ensure public interest

The Auditor General of Western Australia, Caroline Spencer, has expressed concerns with yet-to-be-enacted legislative amendments on her office’s independence.

Parliament passed the Auditor General Amendment Act 2022 (Amendment Act) just over a year ago, but it has not yet been proclaimed.

The Office of the Auditor General (OAG) has since published, in its [Annual Report 2022-23](#), issues it has identified with the Amendment Act, including provisions that are inconsistent with the existing statutory independence of the Auditor General.



The amendments were stated to enhance integrity, transparency and accountability across government by explicitly providing access to all relevant information, including documents subject to public interest immunity and legal professional privilege. However, it also introduced provisions regarding access processes and the reporting powers of the Auditor General. For example, it would place new constraints on who the OAG can report to and who sees the OAG's draft reports before they are published.

Aspects of the amendments are contrary to the overarching independence provisions of the current legislation that state that the Auditor General is not subject to direction from anyone in relation to what to audit and report, and could impact the effectiveness of the Auditor General role.

The Auditor General felt particularly duty bound to publicly raise these issues in the OAG's annual report as the amendments will affect the OAG's ability to report directly to Parliament on matters that she and future auditors general consider to be in the public interest.

"It is critical that our State continues to have strong public audit legislation and that whoever is the Auditor General retains the unambiguous statutorily enshrined independence necessary to fulfil their duties to the Parliament and the people of Western Australia," she said.

The OAG continues to engage with government and stakeholders to address its concerns with the Amendment Act, respectfully requesting that the legislation not be proclaimed given the issues identified, but rather that it be carefully reviewed by the Joint Audit Committee of the Parliament.

Having attended the 24th Congress of PASAI in March this year and been accepted as a new member, the Auditor General appreciates her peers in the region have experienced similar challenges. She takes some comfort knowing she is part of an international community of auditors who understand the need to safeguard independence of government audit offices for the benefit of the communities they serve.

Message from the Chief Executive

We have come to that time of the year when we pause and reflect on the achievements, challenges, mistakes, missed opportunities and celebrations of the year. Taking stock of this year, reflecting, learning, reorganising, rethinking, and strategising will strengthen the steps moving forward.

We continue to work with SAIs and partners to build the capacity of SAIs to strengthen accountability, transparency and integrity in the Pacific region. Thank you to all our members, the SAI heads, development partners and colleagues for your continuous support of our work.

We wish you joy and peace this Christmas. May 2024 bring better opportunities and achievements!

SAI Nauru reaping benefits from recent assistance

New Strategic Plan

Earlier this year PASAI arranged for a consultant, Dr Potoae Roberts-Aiafi, to assist the Nauru Department of Audit with the review and update of its Strategic Plan 2019–2023. This involved bringing various stakeholders together, including representatives from government departments and the private sector, for a stakeholder consultation session on 22 May 2023.

Incorporating feedback from the session, Dr Roberts-Aiafi worked alongside the Auditor-General, Manoharan Nair, and other SAI staff to produce the SAI's Strategic Plan 2024–28 and corresponding Operational Plan.



Attendees of the stakeholder consultation session that Dr Potoae Roberts-Aiafi facilitated on the SAI's Strategic Plan

New tool to follow-up audit recommendations

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) employee, Wezzie Lukhere, arrived in Nauru on 2 September 2023 to assist the SAI instal an audit recommendations follow-up tool.

Mr Lukhere also conducted a workshop on various topics including IT audit. A Citizen Audit Report from the Auditor's Report 2019 was also drafted and an Action Plan was drawn up at the end of the workshop.



Wezzie Lukhere and Auditor-General, Manoharan Nair (sixth and fifth from right), surrounded by SAI staff

Quality Assurance and advocacy

PASAI Director – Practice Development, Sinaroseta Palamo-Iosefo, also visited the SAI in September, partly to conduct a QA review of the 2019 FSG audit.

She also had meetings with various officials, including the Deputy Speaker and Chair of the Public Accounts Committee, Hon Lionel Aingimea; Chief Secretary, Ipia Gadabu; Australian Deputy High Commissioner, Alexandra Langley; and the Secretary of the Nauru Island Association of Non-Government Organisations (NIANGO), Julie Olsson.

After explaining the importance of SAI independence in facilitating public sector accountability, Ms Palamo-Iosefo obtained support for an Audit Bill drafted to increase the SAI's independence.

The staff conveyed their appreciation to PASAI and the UNDP for the continued support in SAI development and advocacy.

Mr Nair singled out the individuals who provided assistance, saying, "We will do our best to live by their guidance to achieve the ultimate goal to serve our country.

"That is how we express our gratitude."

SAI New Caledonia opens its doors to the public

To mark Heritage Days this year, the Chamber of Accounts of New Caledonia (the Chamber) opened its doors to visitors on 15 and 16 September. This gave them the chance to discover the history of the heritage-listed building and learn about the work of the Chamber.

The Chamber has existed since 1998 and in 2012 was relocated to the former hotel of the colony's military commander, built by the penal colony in 1876. History students from the University of New Caledonia had organised a guided tour and presented the characteristics of the building. The President of the Office and a team of judges, auditors, secretariat-general and registry staff were all on hand to explain their jobs and the Chamber's mission. Special activities were planned for children and refreshments offered to all to facilitate further discussion.

The first day, a Friday, was dedicated to local high school students. About 80 of them visited and asked questions about the Chamber's reports and about career paths leading to working at the office. Some professional vocations may even have emerged among a few of the students ...



Chamber President, Florence Bonnafoux, speaks to high school students in her office

The following day, the Chamber opened its office to the general public. About 60 members of the public passed through. As well as the historical visit, they were particularly interested in understanding the Chamber's working methods and its selection of subjects. Some of the reports that had received recent coverage in the local press were presented in greater detail by the magistrates present.



Visitors listening to a presentation about the Chamber's mission and workflow

The Chamber used the occasion to invite, for the first time, any member of the public aged 15 or older to suggest audit and investigation topics. The visitors were very keen and expressed some interesting ideas which will probably find their way to the dedicated portal recently opened on the Chamber's website. This has the potential to enrich the Chamber's work programme with new ideas.

The feedback on the event has been very positive and staff at the Chamber hope to repeat the experience next year.

SAI Yap's fraud week media blitz

The Office of the Public Auditor (OPA) for the Micronesian State of Yap squeezed a lot of value out of this year's International Fraud Awareness Week, which was between 12 and 18 November.

The OPA is one of many audit offices in the Pacific Island region whose mandate specifically requires it to detect and investigate claims of fraud perpetrated by those employed by or doing business with the government.

In the lead up to International Fraud Awareness Week, the OPA arranged for the Governor, Charles S Chieng, to sign a [proclamation](#) that, among many things:

- recognised the week,
- acknowledged how fraud affects Yapese citizens and businesses,
- encouraged employee tip-offs, and
- expressed the importance of fraud prevention, detection and reporting.

The OPA sent a mass email to the government offices about International Fraud Awareness Week with the Governor's signed proclamation attached.

Capitalising on its good relationship with the local media, the OPA then had a recording of the Governor reading the proclamation broadcast via radio throughout the week.

Investigative Auditor, Marie Laamar, was also interviewed on the popular Island Chat radio programme, allowing her to further boost awareness about fraud and share the work of the OPA's Compliance Investigation Division more generally.

During the interview, Ms Laamar explained, "Complaints come into YAP OPA through our telephone hotline, the OPA website and even from individuals walking into our office to report a suspected activity.

"We also initiate investigations based on audit findings. This is when the Audit Division finds something suspicious during their audit."

With more than 1,400 followers on Facebook, the OPA has a social media audience that deserves to be the envy of many public sector agencies in much more populous nations. As another indication of how seriously the OPA considers the issue, it published no fewer than four times about fraud during this week.

Ms Laamar expressed her satisfaction with the week's activities, saying, "I'm confident that with the support of the Governor, we were able to educate many people across Yap about what they can do if they think public funds are being wasted through fraud or other kinds of misuse."

The [OPA International Fraud Awareness Week](#) interview and proclamation are available to listen to online.

Enthusiasm for twinning partnerships at SAI New Zealand-hosted ACAG meeting

Sarah Markley, Director International Engagement at the Office of the Auditor-General New Zealand and Deputy Secretary-General of PASAI, contributed the following article.

The Office of the Auditor-General (OAG) of New Zealand hosted the six-monthly meeting of the Australasian Council of Auditors-General (ACAG) on 9 and 10 November, in Wellington. The members of ACAG include the SAIs of Australia, Fiji, Papua New Guinea and New Zealand, and the state and territorial audit offices of Australia.

The ACAG business meeting provides a valued opportunity for auditors general to learn from each other by sharing issues, challenges and key developments.

It was a privilege to host our Australasian colleagues. We were also very pleased to invite PASAI's Chief Executive and our twinning partners, SAIs Cook Islands and Samoa, to join us for this occasion.



ACAG business meeting participants

As the host of the meeting, we took the opportunity to place two issues on the meeting agenda that we deemed to be important for ACAG members to consider. The first was the work our office is doing to address our strategic intention Enhancing our impact in te ao Māori (the Māori worldview). And the second item was actions needed to fully activate the potential of twinning partnerships in PASAI's next strategic period.

Enhancing our impact in te ao Māori

Our Establishment Director, Māori Capability and Engagement, Mat Mullany, and our Assistant Auditor-General, Sector Performance, Leanne McAviney, presented to our ACAG guests. They spoke about what has been done to continue to build trust and confidence among Māori in our role and to support our work to have increased relevance to, and impact for, Māori. We discussed the work that has been done to set up a rōpū Māori (an advisory group to support our work with Māori) to develop learning pathways in te reo Māori (language), tikanga (culture) and understanding of the Treaty of Waitangi. There was also useful discussion around work being done in other ACAG offices.

Twinning partnerships

I was very pleased to be able to lead a discussion about relevant aspects of the development of PASAI's new strategy 2024–2034. We focused on the opportunities highlighted in PASAI's independent evaluation for the greater use of the skills and experience within PASAI's developed SAI members through twinning and other peer-to-peer relationships.

This part of the meeting provided an excellent opportunity to have ACAG members and our PASAI member guests work through the challenges to making twinning function well. Work is continuing to shape the twinning programme for the future. The good news is there is strong enthusiasm to build on the success of the past and to strengthen these relationships as a complementary part of PASAI's support for capacity development across the region.





New Territorial Auditor confirmed for American Samoa

Californian auditing veteran, Mike Edmonds, was confirmed as the Territorial Auditor for American Samoa in October this year.

Mr Edmonds has nearly 40 years of governmental auditing experience, having worked for the California State Auditor, several private consulting firms and in executive level positions with several local governments around California. He has written articles for professional auditing journals and presented topics at numerous professional conferences.

Mr Edmonds is an active member of the Institute of Internal Auditors and the Association of Local Government Auditors (ALGA). In May 2022, he was one of four government auditors who received ALGA's Lifetime Achievement Award, an award given only to auditors who have made lasting and worthwhile contributions to local government auditing through their extraordinary service to ALGA.

During his appointment, Mr Edmonds will perform his duties from the office in Pago Pago, American Samoa for some of the time, and work remotely for the rest of the time from his home in California.

Last month, PASAI programme director, Sinaroseta Palamo-Iosefo, visited the Territorial Audit Office and met Mr Edmonds in person.



Territorial Auditor, Mike Edmonds

Mr Edmonds remarked, "It was a pleasure to meet Sina and learn about the capability development support PASAI offers its members.

"With many relatively new staff here, I look forward to making the most of opportunities that emphasise audit quality and operational sustainability of the office itself."

Mr Edmonds graduated from Fresno State University with a degree in Political Science and is a Certified Internal Auditor.

Upcoming events / training

4-7 December	PASAI in-country visit (FSM Pohnpei)
5-14 December	HR Champions workshop 3 (Guam)
6-12 December	PASAI in-country visit (FSM Yap)
7 December	SAI NZ: Anti-corruption initiatives webinar
14 December	Leadership Programme Community of Practice session 7
15 December	Emerging Leaders Community of Practice session 7
23 December-7 January	PASAI Secretariat office shutdown period
29 January	Auckland Anniversary Day (New Zealand public holiday)
6 February	Waitangi Day (New Zealand public holiday)
12-16 February	PASAI in-country visit (Papua New Guinea)
19-23 February	PASAI in-country visit (Cook Islands)
1 March	37th Governing Board meeting (online)
11-15 March	Tier 3 training
11-22 March	PASAI in-country visit (Marshall Islands)
29 March	Good Friday (New Zealand public holiday)

Dates may change. Find updated information on the the [Events calendar](#).



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