REVIEW
PACIFIC PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSIONERS CONFERENCE

Introduction

Participants of the 12th Pacific Public Service Commissioner's Conference (PPSCC), held in Niue in 2015, discussed the value of the conference and recommendedthat a review be conducted on the benefits of the conference, conference protocols and terms of reference, and conference funding[1]. At the request of the 2015 PPSCC attendees**,** the Australian Public Service Commission (APSC), on behalf of the PPSCC Terms of Reference Working Group, undertook this review.

The Terms of Reference (TOR) for the review are at Appendix A. TheTOR specifies thatthe mandate, structure and operation of the PPSCC would be examined, and an implementation strategy set out to enable the PPSCC to undertake necessary changes to support the conference's ongoing function as a mechanism for improving public sector management across the Pacific.

The review was facilitated by an on-line survey of three questions (Appendix B), distributed to 22 people representing several Pacific Island Countries (PIC's) selected by the PPSCC Terms of Reference Working Group. The survey was open for three weeks and reminders were sent to encourage responses. Thirteen (13) responses were received from representatives of eight Pacific Island jurisdictions.

Consistent with previous communications, the review confirmed that the "Conference [is] of significant value to [PPSCC participants] for networking and sharing of knowledge purposes"[2].A majority of survey participants indicated they would value future conferences if they served as a means for providing strategic direction across the Pacific. The theme for future conferences that generated most support (46%) was ethics and integrity in the public service. Participants suggested several other purposes for the conference includingExecutive Development programs, research, and production of feasibility studies for policy initiatives. Overall, survey participants expressed mixed views with respect to the direction and future themes of the conference.

To achieve consensus onfuture themes andrealise changes to the purpose of the conference, support from members and authorising stakeholders and decisions on a range of matters including resourcing,will be required. These are matters outside the APSC's purview. Mindful of this, the APSC has not formulated an implementation plan as per the Terms of Reference for this review.

Drawing on the survey and other feedback received, as well as previous communiques, this paper outlines key issues to be considered by thePacific Public Service Commissioners' to determine a future direction for the Conference. It posits these issues as questions to guide Commissioners' in their deliberations and decision-making during the 13thPPSCC in Palau.

[1]Communique from the 12th Public Service Commissioner's Conference, p.2 Item 8.
[2]Communique from the 12th Public Service Commissioner's Conference, p.2 Item 8.

Current Arrangements

The Pacific Public Service Commissioners' Conference is a cross jurisdictional forum for Public Service Commissioners from Pacific Islands jurisdictions to come together and deliberate on contemporary public sector issues[3].These regional meetings were initially facilitated by Australia in the 2004/05 financial year to: promotea stronger regional framework of Commissioners; facilitate a forum for the exchange of information and experience on public sector reform in the Pacific, and increase access to knowledge and experience from Australia and New Zealand[4]. This, in essence, was the original purpose of the PPSCC.

Expanding on the purpose, 'The objective was to establish a self-managed, self-initiated Pacific regional Commissioners' Conference held at regular intervals which Pacific Public Service Commissioners agreed to be of value to them in undertaking their responsibilities. The aim was for the conferences to provide an avenue that would enable Pacific Commissioners to identify and develop co-operative and mutually supportive initiatives which contributed to and underpinned the process of public sector reform within their public administrations. The outcomes of the conferences were expected to be the development of a much stronger network of Pacific Commissioners, and for Commissioners to determine relevant, workable approaches to addressing the specific public sector reform challenges faced by their nations'[5].

To support the PPSCC, detailed protocols clearly define functional and operational roles and responsibilities. The protocols articulate decision-making processes on issues such as conference theme, annual initiatives/projects, reporting and the design and operation of the Secretariat, and other governance-related rules to ensure the smooth conduct of PPSCC's. The protocols also provide the Secretariat with guidance to effectively organise the PPSCC's and assist the Secretariat to comply with financial management / audit requirements as set down by member countries.

What's worked well?[6]

Networking, Knowledge Sharing and Secretariat Arrangements

Survey participants expressedthe view that working with other public sector officials has been a strong focus of past PPSCC's and the conferences have helped to build networks across the Pacific by encouraging and enabling strong people-to-people links. Sixty nine percent (69%) of survey participants thought there was value in the networking opportunities, and this was, overall, considered the most valuable aspect of past conferences.

[3]From http://www.samoappscc.gov.ws/About-PPSCC

[4]From http://www.samoappscc.gov.ws/About-PPSCC

[5]From http://www.samoappscc.gov.ws/About-PPSCC

[6]Respondents were instructed to select only three aspects of the PPSCC they valued most in the pastand would value in the future. For example, 69% of respondents valued networking through the PPSCC in the past while in the future only around 30% of respondents would still highly value networking. This does not imply that the other 39% no longer value networking; rather they ***more highly value*** other aspects and opportunities the conference presents.

The PPSCC has previously reviewed and revised the utility and membership of the networks in which it participates, to ensure they remain relevant and effective. The ongoing focus on enhancing the networks and links with other groups in the region has built deep relationships. Networks built among the Commissioners, as well as those built through related networks such as the Pacific Human Resource Managers Network, interact and have helped to promulgate public sector management practises across the Pacific region.

The Pacific hosts a number of regional organisations that have an interest in the proceedings of the PPSCC, or how they could leverage the work of the Conference to their benefit. The PPSCC has previously agreed to explore how it might formalise working relationships with other relevant regional bodies to enhance its profile and, through better coordination, strengthen the region's public sector management practices. Significant progress has been made in this, with members of the PICPA, the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) and the Commonwealth Secretariat invited to previous conferences as observers.

Fifty four percent (54%) of participants appreciated the opportunity the Conference has provided to promote greater consistency of standards for public sector management across the Pacific.
The protocols have enabled existing and new members to access important information and, indirectly, built capability in governance. For example, as the Chair of the Conference is rotated, each year a new Commissioner must learn about the role and responsibilities. The protocols outline this information and have enabled a smooth transition between Conference host countries.

Where to Next?

Commissioners want the PPSCC to be used more strategically across the region by capitalising on economies of scale when countries have common priorities and needs in public sector management. The spirit of this objective is in line with politicians and citizens who expect Governments to use public funds wisely, efficiently and effectively to create public value. Strategies mostlikely to be seen by politicians and citizens as creating public value are:

- Substantively valuable (produce things of value)
- Legitimate and politically sustainable (able to attract both authority and money), and
- Operationally and administratively feasible[7].

Drawing on the criteria above, in the APSC's view, the following would be seen as creating public value and therefore more likely to facilitate ongoing successful Pacific Public Service Commissioners' Conferences:

1. Consensus on apurpose that will deliver tangible value for PICs
2. Astrong authorising/enabling environmentwith a robustmandate for the conference purpose from member country Governments'/Ministers', and
3. Resources to support the Conference's purpose, in particular, funding and Secretariat support.

A short reflection and questions on each of these topics are provided below in order to encourage and guide discussion during the 13th Conference in Palau, August 2016.

[7]Moore, in Petris, S. (2010) Occasional paper no. 7, pp. 2 -3.The nature of strategy in the public sector.ANZSOG.

1. Purpose

The breadth and depth of the PPSCCpurpose will shape the impact that Pacific Commissioners' have, or can create, in the region.

At the 2012 PPSCC the President of the Timor Leste Civil Service Commission (CSC) attributed his ability to establish the CSC to the knowledge he gained and the networks he developed through attending the conferences as an observer[8]. This attribution demonstrates that the current purpose, including sharing expertise and networking, has had, and can continue to have, an impact in the region.

Survey participants suggested that they would:

- Place significant value on the PPSCC if it served as a means for providing strategic direction (69%) across the Pacific
- Continue to value the conference as a vehicle for setting set standards for public sector management (54%), and
- Like the conference to provide tools for public sector management (38%).

At the 2012 Conference, Commissioners' reiterated their resolveto strengthen the strategic direction and continuum approach to good governance, and maintain a focus on emerging issues[9].Future agendas were to be aligned with a new vision and mission agreed at the conference, and would emphasise whole-of-region outcomes[10]. Future conferences were also to be focused on sharing research, lessons learned and best practices (case studies) on regional and global Human Resource Management (HRM) issues, and ensuring basic institutional infrastructure is evident across the region through a regional scorecard along the lines of the Pacific Public Sector Workforce Mapping Report developed by PICPA[11]. These views, along with current survey responses, suggest Pacific Commissioners' have long sought greater impact in the regionthan has been achieved through sharing expertise and networking alone.

Sharpening the PPSCC's strategic and regional focus through a stronger purpose focusing on emerging issues and collaboration towards clear whole-of-region outcomes could garner political supportand a stronger mandate for the conference, and generate greater public value for participating countries. Consensus on, for example, regional standards, and collaboration in the development of shared systems, processes and tools in public administration could complement a strategic role for the Conference in the region.

At the 2012 Conference, Commissioners' considered the conference as a mechanism for providing tools for public sector management in the context of the PPSCC's suitability as a broader network or a community of practice similar to a regional HR Practitioner group. They resolved to maintain the PPSCC as a Commissioners' meeting. Survey participants' reiterated their interest in the conference as a mechanism for providing tools for public sector management.

[8] 2012 PPSCC Significant Outcomes, APSC report.
[9] Communique, 10th PPSCC, October 2012, p.3, and 2012 PPSCC Significant Outcomes, APSC report.
[10] Communique, 10th PPSCC, October 2012, p.3
[11] Unsolicited email to Jane Ryan, APSC, dated 9 October 2015, from Cook Islands representative, also representing the views of PNG, Samoa (Commissioner and PSC ACEO) Dr G Hassall, and an unnamed PIF representative.

Reiterating and broadening the role of the Secretariat is another means by which the PPSCC's impact in the region could be enhanced. Anecdotal feedback suggests the Secretariat was a highly effective means of coordination that has supported seamless delivery of the annual Conference.

Discussion Points on Conference Purpose

Commissioners' could consider the extent of the impact the collective seeks to have in the region, and address the following questions:

- Given the current purpose, are we achieving the results, the outcomes and the impact we seek?
- Is the PPSCC more suited to an HR Practitioner Conference than a Commissioners' conference?
- Would an HR community of practice be sufficiently senior to drive change?

If not,

- What do we want to do?
- Whom do we want to be doing it for?
- What value are we bringing?
- How do we want to do it?
    - What do we have to keep, build on or remove [in relation to systems, structures, processes, mindsets and mental models and behaviours] in order to get to where we really want to be?

Consensus on these four questions could be reflected in a revised statement of purpose.

2. Authorising environment

PICs have unique political, legislative, economic and cultural contexts. The challenge for Pacific Public Service Commissioners is to craft a way forward for the PPSCC that navigates these differing contexts yet resonates with stakeholders to win support from those who influence or authorise participation within each of their jurisdictions.

Discussion Points on Authorising Environment

The purpose, current or revised, could be discussed and tested against the following questions:

- Are the current products/outcomes of the conference of substantive value to citizens?
- Are politicians prepared to defend these outcomes to citizens?
- Are politicians willing to pay for these products/outcomes?

3. Resources

The level of resourcing needed for future conferences will depend on the purpose upon which Commissioners' agree.

If Commissioners' want to expand the conference purpose and support it with, for example, dedicated resources such as a Secretariat, funding for the PPSCC into the future will require new and innovative approaches.

A 2012 review of the PPSCC funding model identified that "the medium to long-term goal is for member countries to fully fund, recognising this cost as an investment, but noting it will depend on budgetary constraints"[12]. If member countries are willing and able to fully fund their own costs and hosting is rotated, with countries able to opt out if circumstances make it difficult for that country to host[13] , it may be possible to maintain the status quo.

Attendees of the 2012 PPSCC held in the Republic of the Marshall Islands, agreed that a full time secretariat position would be funded, the person employed by PICPA, as the regional organisation assisting Pacific countries with implementing changes to their public sectors' workforce planning, management and development systems[14]. The role of the secretariat is primarily focused around organisation of the annual PPSCC, as well as out of session teleconferences and meetings to progress agreed priorities.

Consideration could be given to the secretariat's structure and function to realise efficiencies or to reflect changes in workload if, for example, a decision was taken to host the PPSCC biennially. Capitalising on the Pacific Islands Forum's (PIF) networks and resources, members have previously discussed moving the secretariat to PIF, with the PIF-Governance Division serving as Secretariat[15], although this idea is untested.

Discussion Points on Resourcing

Commissioners' could address the following questions as a means to explore fundingoptions:

- Are jurisdictions willing and able to fund their delegates and, from time to time, host the conference?
- What will influence Governments' to fund the conference?
- What is the likely appetite of donors for supporting the Conference, and what would be needed to influence donors to part or fully fund the Conference? Is this achievable?
- Could a more sustainable and equitable funding model for PIC funding be developed?
- What resource support (expertise, funds) would be required to develop this model, and is this expertise available within any of the PIC's?
- Would the conference be more sustainable if held every second year and what impact would this have on the value and outcomes of the conference?
- Are current operational and administrative arrangements satisfactory to support the smooth planning and delivery of future PPSCCs?

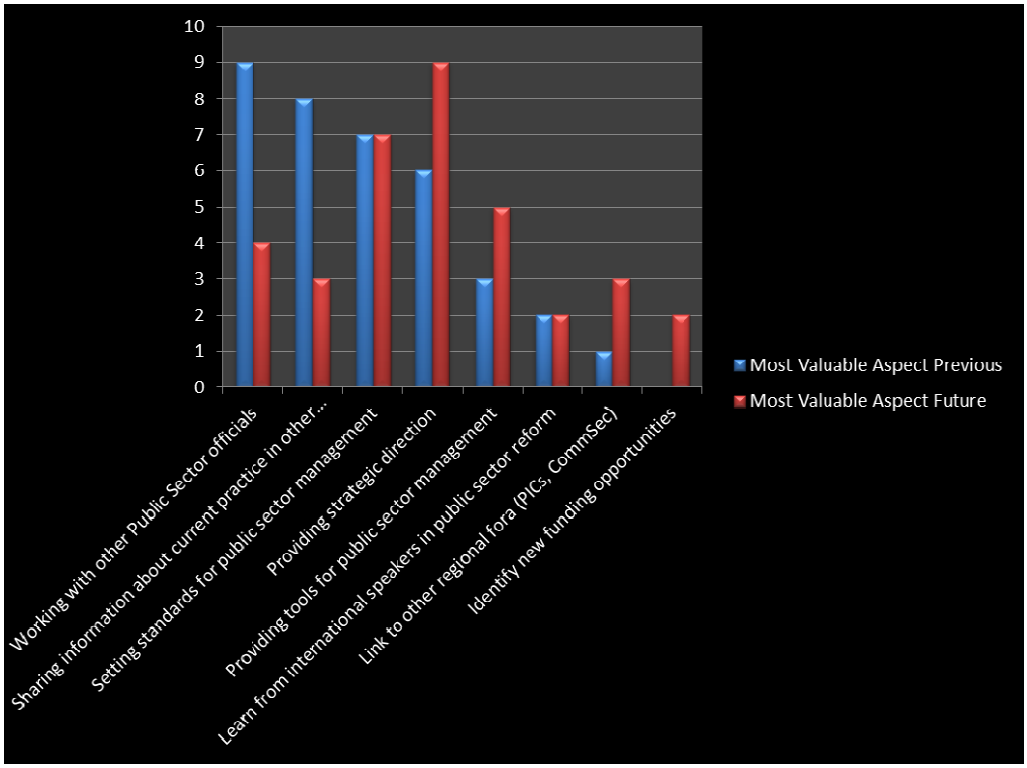
[12]Communique, 10th PPSCC, October 2012, Agreed Conference Future Directions, P.3.
[13]Communique, 10th PPSCC, October 2012. P. 3.
[14]Conference Resolutions, 10th PPSCC October 2012.
[15]Email to Jane Ryan, APSC, dated 9 October 2015, from Cook Islands representative, also representing the views of PNG, Samoa (Commissioner and PSC ACEO) Dr G Hassall, and an unnamed PIF representative.

Survey Findings: Future Conference Themes

The survey generated a number of ideas about topics of interest that could be explored at future conferences if the PPSCC continues in its current form. Thematic areas of interest to Commissioners[16] are:

- Public service ethics and integrity (46%)
- Leadership development (38%)
- Performance management (38%) and, to a lesser extent,
- Human resource management systems and strategic planning (31% each).

Diagram 1: Number of Participants Valuing Aspects of Past and Future PPSCC's.



To a lesser extent, workforce planning, public sector sustainability and managing change effectively are also of interest, and one person is interested in each of regional solutions, the ageing population and succession planning. Climate change, recruitment and induction, and business continuity were not considered priority topics, although one respondent commented that climate change, the ageing workforce and succession planning, with concurrent losses of corporate knowledge, are concerns.

Others themes of interest, added as comments by survey participants, included:

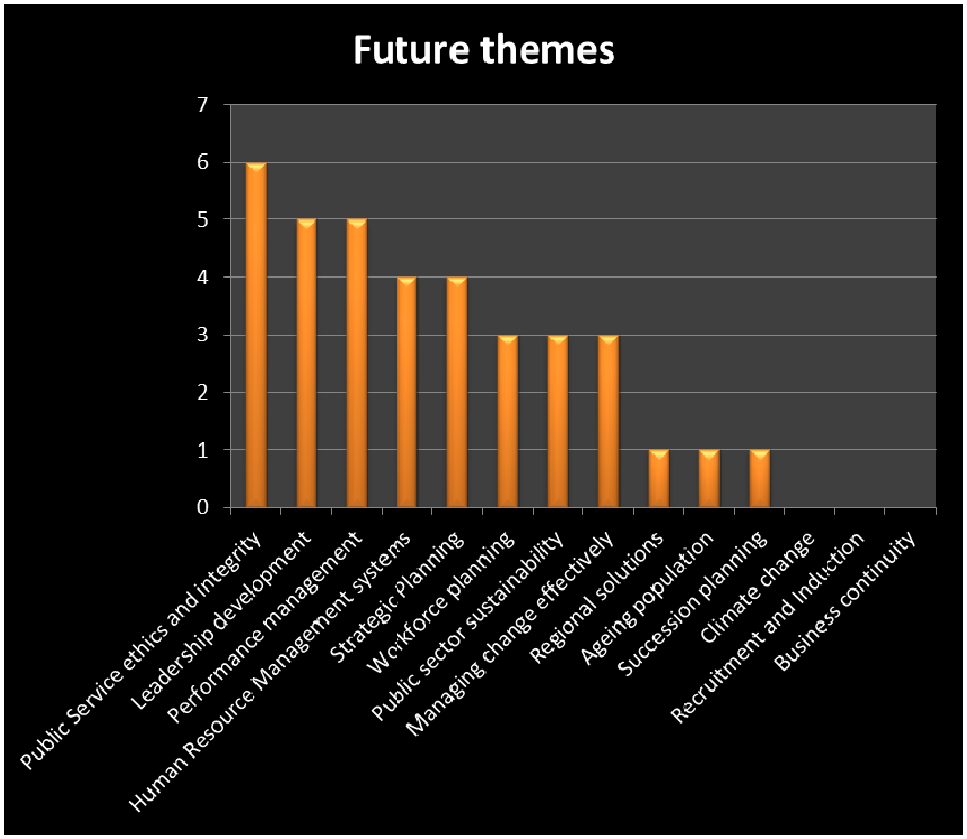
- Regional position on modernising strategies to combat corruption in all forms (to be addressed at every PPSCC)

[16] See Diagram 2.

- Executive development programs for senior positions within Government, targetting people management, managing finances, disciplined leadership, strategic direction, managing political allies etc. – capabilities to the executive level.
- Research program/feasibility studies for policy initiatives
- Reform within public services' in these modern days of change – types of reform, what areas to reform, functional review
- Setting strategic direction
- Contractual arrangements within public services' for results-oriented [sic].
- Service targets included in performance appraisal for executive levels, what should be in their performance agreements?
- Inputs into work program of PICPA
- Pursuing collaborative effort in scarce skills management
- Performance management
- Recruitment and induction.

Each year, tools on these various themes could be added to a shared database or website.

Diagram 2: Priorities for themes of future Pacific Public Service Commissioners Conferences



Appendix A

Terms of Reference for the review of the Pacific Public Service Commissioner's Conference

The Australian Public Service Commission will provide support to the Pacific Public Service Commissioner's Conference (PPSCC) terms of reference working group in undertaking a strategic review of the PPSCC.

Background

- Pacific Public Service Commissioners have requested a strategic review of the PPSCC conference be completed. The review will examine the**mandate, structure and operation of the PPSCC**and will set out an **implementation strategy** that enables the PPSCC to undertake any necessary change.
- This Review is timely as the PPSCC will need to seek funding for future work. Funding proposals will need to be submitted in 2016.
- The APSC will undertake the strategic review.
- Member countries of the Terms of Reference Working Group including Tonga, Nauru, Cook Islands, Fiji and PNG will be involved throughout the process, as well as consultation with the broader membership of the PPSCC. Other relevant stakeholders will be consulted as required. Further detail on stakeholder engagement and the proposed methodological approach to the review is set out below.

Proposed Approach

Task	Timeframe	Relevance
Desktop analysis of current terms of reference, PPSCC protocols and other relevant materials	24 October	Understanding the current mandate and operational and authorising context for the PPSCC. Setting out an implementation strategy for consideration by the TOR Working Group.
Facilitate discussions with TOR Working Group	26 October	Consult relevant stakeholders and agree on key findings and implementation strategy.
Facilitate discussions with broader PPSCC membership and stakeholders including representatives and PICPA through Skype or alternate communication platforms	2 November	Garner support from key stakeholders for implementation strategy and delegate any relevant responsibilities.
Coordinate progress update and distribute to members	Quarterly in 2016, beginning in January.	Monitor progress of implementation strategy

Appendix B

Survey Methodology

A brief survey was distributed online to 22 people representing Fiji, Cook Islands, Vanuatu, Papua New Guinea, West Samoa, Tuvalu, Tonga, Federated States of Micronesia, Kiribati, Palau, Nauru, Solomon Islands, Timor Leste and Republic of the Marshall Islands. The survey was open for three weeks and reminders were sent to encourage responses. With 13 responses, the response rate was 59%.

Survey

What have been the three most valuable aspects of previous Pacific Public Service Commissioners' Conferences?

- ☐ Networking with other public sector officials
- ☐ Providing strategic direction
- ☐ Providing tools for public sector management
- ☐ Setting standards for public sector management
- ☐ Link other regional forums or bodies (PIFS, CommSec, etc.)
- ☐ Sharing information about current practice in other countries
- ☐ Learn from international speakers in public sector reform
- ☐ Identify new funding opportunities

What are the three most valuable aspects of future Pacific Public Service Commissioners' Conferences?

- ☐ Networking with other public sector officials
- ☐ Providing strategic direction
- ☐ Providing tools for public sector management
- ☐ Setting standards for public sector management
- ☐ Link other regional forums or bodies (PIFS, CommSec, etc.)
- ☐ Sharing information about current practice in other countries
- ☐ Learn from international speakers in public sector reform
- ☐ Identify new funding opportunities

What themes should be the focus of future Pacific Public Service Commissioners' Conferences?
Please select up to three.

- ☐ Climate change
- ☐ Ageing population
- ☐ Public sector sustainability
- ☐ Performance management
- ☐ Public service ethics and integrity
- ☐ Regional solutions
- ☐ Leadership development
- ☐ Workforce planning
- ☐ Recruitment and induction
- ☐ Succession planning
- ☐ Human resource management systems
- ☐ Strategic planning
- ☐ Business continuity
- ☐ Managing change effectively

Are there any other themes which should be covered in future conferences?

Appendix C

Mandate

From http://www.samoappscc.gov.ws/About-PPSCC

What is the Public Service Commissioners' Conference?

The Pacific Public Service Commissioners' Conference is a cross jurisdictional forum for Public Service Commissioners from Pacific Islands jurisdictions to come together and deliberate on contemporary public sector issues. It also involves identifying key issues and improves public administration across these Pacific Islands jurisdictions and the region.

How it came into existence?

The Australian Public Service Commission was funded by AusAID to support two Pacific regional meetings for Commissioners in the 2004/05 financial year. The regional meetings were designed to promote a stronger regional framework of Commissioners, a forum for the exchange of information and experience on public sector reform in the Pacific, and increased access to knowledge and experience from Australia and New Zealand. The objective was to establish a self-managed, self-initiated Pacific regional Commissioners' Conference held at regular intervals which Pacific Public Service Commissioners agreed to be of value to them in undertaking their responsibilities. The aim was for the conferences to provide an avenue that would enable Pacific Commissioners to identify and develop co-operative and mutually supportive initiatives which contributed to and underpinned the process of public sector reform within their public administrations. The outcomes of the conferences were expected to be the development of a much stronger network of Pacific Commissioners, and for Commissioners to determine relevant, workable approaches to addressing the specific public sector reform challenges faced by their nations. The inaugural meeting of Pacific Commissioners was held in Fiji in March 2004. Attending Commissioners strongly agreed on the value of the conference which allowed very frank discussion of Pacific Nation public service issues. They suggested an annual meeting of Pacific Commissioners, with the Pacific Commissioners firmly setting the agenda, and with Australia and New Zealand Commissions ensuring external, practical expertise.