

Reviews of American Sāmoa, Hawai‘i, Niue, Tokelau, Tonga, and Tuvalu are not included in this issue.

COOK ISLANDS

The period under review was dominated by an unprecedented call for general elections, parliamentary conflicts, and budget approval constraints that at times tested the interpretation of the powers of the head of state. Ongoing out-migration of Cook Islanders, environmental problems, and continuing inflation slipped under the radar as politicians pushed for major salary increases and most Cook Islanders struggled from paycheck to paycheck. The popular American television series *Survivor*, and some sporting successes, provided some respite, but an unpredictable tourist industry, technical personnel limitations, and occasional invasive diseases and insects reminded Cook Islanders to be constantly vigilant.

July 2006 began with continuing concern by many observers about the leak of the Queen’s Honours list from the office of Prime Minister Jim Marurai, which he dismissed as “unimportant” (CIN, 5 July, 4). Perhaps of more concern to Marurai were political undercurrents aimed toward replacing him and the Speaker of the House (CIN, 6 July 2006, 1). Meanwhile, one of the laws finalized by the Cook Islands Parliament was a Marriage Amendment Bill outlawing marriages between homosexuals. The law was

clearly designed to counter the provisions of New Zealand’s civil union legislation (CIN, 19 July 2006, 1).

Government also committed itself to a variety of programs including the development of geotourism through an agreement signed by Tourism Minister Wilkie Rasmussen and Sarah Laskin, vice president of public and business development for National Geographic. The agreement obligated the island country to adhere to fourteen geotourism principles designed to sustain and enhance the geographic character of a given place, including the environment, culture, aesthetics, and the well-being of its people. In return, National Geographic promised to produce maps and brochures “which identify the unique features of the Cook Islands” (CIN, 2 Aug, 2006, 1). The Cook Islands becomes only the fourth country to accede to the charter.

In July Teina Bishop, member for Arutanga (Aitutaki), resigned from his cabinet post realigning himself with the opposition Cook Islands Party (CIP). Not long after, Kiriau Turepu (CIP) won the snap election for the Matavera (Rarotonga) constituency, potentially changing the balance of power in Parliament and creating a footing for a change of government (CIN, 20 July 2006, 1). The political battle intensified when opposition CIP members met in Parliament without Democratic Party (Demo) government members. After swearing in the

newly elected Kiriau Turepu, they voted the Demo government out. The event was broadcast live on national radio, attracting accusations of a coup attempt bordering on sedition and treason. The extraordinary chain of events became even more confusing when Queen's Representative Sir Frederick Goodwin called for a general election. This essentially negated the by-election just won by Turepu and preempted the later attempt by CIP parliamentarians to use a vote of no confidence to force a change of government (*CIN*, 25 July 2006). The high court was drawn into the drama amid accusations of political maneuvering on both sides of the aisle. Meanwhile, caretaker Prime Minister Jim Marurai tried to reassure the general population that there was no cause for alarm (*CIN*, 25 July 2006, 1). The election was set for 26 September 2006.

Sir Geoffrey Arama Henry announced his retirement from the Cook Islands Party leadership effective 31 August 2006, and as member of Parliament representing the Takuvaine (Rarotonga) constituency. Mark Brown replaced Henry as CIP candidate for Takuvaine, and Tom Marsters, the member of Parliament for Murienua (Rarotonga), was eventually elected to lead the Cook Islands Party in Parliament (*CIN*, 13 Dec 2006, 1). The party now faces multiple challenges: new leadership, a seemingly overzealous head of state, possible court challenges, and a pending general election.

As candidates filed their nominations for the elections, Wilkie Rasmussen switched his allegiance to the Democratic Party. He had originally won his seat by nine votes over Demo

candidate Tepure Tapaitau (*CIN*, 10 Aug 2006, 1). Apparently catching the campaign committee off guard, the Cook Islands Party failed to nominate a substitute candidate, so Rasmussen entered the election unopposed. The election was hotly contested for 23 of the 24 seats. After some recounts—and allegations of bribery involving bread, fish, pearls, and an excavator—the Democratic Party won a majority of seats and formed a government (*CIN*, 14 Oct 2006, 1; *CIN*, 27 Oct 2006, 1).

During this intense election period, the caretaker government faced budgetary limitations, and the queen's representative issued an unprecedented decree authorizing bridging expenditure from 20 November to twelve sitting days after the first meeting of the newly elected Parliament (*CIN*, 18 Nov 2006, 1). In the subsequent debate over the intervention, New Zealand constitutional expert Dr Alex Frame warned that the claim of "necessity" cited by the head of state was difficult to justify (*CIN*, 18 Dec 2006, 1). A second legal opinion by Dr William Hodges, a member of the Auckland University law faculty, supported Frame's remarks but added that the queen's representative "does have reserve powers 'to sustain and not to destroy' peace, order and good government as provided by the constitution" (*CIN*, 21 Dec 2006, 13).

The national police provided one focus for the newly constituted Demo government when an eagerly awaited review identified poor leadership, financial mismanagement, and lack of public confidence as key issues facing the force (*CIN*, 5 Dec 2006, 1). In April, the cabinet appointed Patrick

Tasker, a New Zealand inspector, as the new commissioner of police. The new commissioner will be expected to manage necessary changes while sustaining police operations (*CIN*, 28 April 2007, 1). In another change, local Shola Ivaiti was named to replace Kevin Carr as financial secretary (*CIN*, 23 Feb 2007, 1). Earlier, former Solicitor General Janet Maki became the country's first woman ombudsman, beginning her new job 15 November 2006 (*CIN*, 1 Nov 2006, 1). Her stated goal was to provide a public service that ensures government accountability (*CIN*, 3 Nov 2006, 3).

The issue of fisheries poaching emerged in December, when long-liner FV *Tim Tam* was captured by a police squad fishing ninety nautical miles south-southwest of Penrhyn Island. The *Tim Tam* had a Korean captain and a crew made up of a Samoan, Fijian, Chinese, and three Taiwanese sailors (*CIN*, 6 Dec 2006, 1). About seventeen tons of mostly albacore tuna on board were sold off cheaply to the general public in Rarotonga (*CIN*, 14 Dec 2006, 1). Skipper Yeong Bae Han was convicted and fined the minimum NZ\$100,000, a far cry from the legal maximum of NZ\$1 million (*CIN*, 16 Dec 2006, 1). In May 2007, a Taiwanese long-lining vessel FV *Yin Chen No 1* was caught fishing illegally and Captain Man Liu Tsai was convicted in the high court. Noting that the vessel had made multiple excursions into the Cook Islands exclusive economic zone, the court ordered a fine of NZ\$200,000 plus NZ\$50,000 in costs (*CIN*, 24 May 2007, 1).

Another focus for controversy was the Ports Authority Board, whose chairman Don Beer Jr was sacked by

Cook Islands Investments Corporation (CIIC) board chairman Julian Dashwood over plans to tour Auckland ports in February 2007. The decision to terminate Beer may have also been influenced by a December 2006 audit that claimed improper payments of over NZ\$30,000 for consultancy work (*CIN*, Feb 2007, 1). Dashwood himself was later terminated after the change of government. "Maybe it's because I was trying to weed out corruption. I guess my standards are higher than theirs," declared Dashwood (*CIN*, 22 Feb 2007, 1). The Chamber of Commerce weighed in on the controversy by expressing concern at the "apparent political interference shown by the sacking of Dashwood" (*CIN*, 23 Feb 2007, 1). Local businessman Sam "Gumby" Crocombe replaced Beer as the new chairman of the Ports Authority Board, while Tapi Taio replaced Dashwood as CIIC chairman (*CIN*, 9 March 2007, 1).

In April 2007, the Chinese-funded National Police Headquarters in Avarua was finally opened with a ceremony led by Queen's Representative Sir Frederick Goodwin and the Chinese Ambassador Zhang Yuan-yuan (*CIN*, 2 April 2007, 5). The government revealed a Chinese-funded NZ\$7.5 million road-upgrading project for the 5.5-kilometer stretch of back road from Nikao to Takuvaine, to be completed in time for the 2009 South Pacific Mini Games (*CIN*, 14 March 2007, 1). China also agreed to fund a new sports stadium for the Cook Islands with NZ\$4 million in aid, plus a further NZ\$2 million in concessional loans (*CIN*, 20 March 2007, 1).

In January, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Immigration Wilkie Ras-

mussen noted an increase in foreigners illegally working in the country. He warned that it was a serious issue and, after meeting with communities of Samoans, Fijians, Kiribati, and others, some twenty foreigners were given forty days to leave the country (CIN, 5 Jan 2007, 1; CIN, 25 May 2007, 1).

As of December 2006, the Cook Islands total population including visitors was 19,569 (9,932 men and 9,637 women), an increase of 8.6 percent compared to the last census in 2001. Large population declines were noted for the Northern group, especially Manihiki Island, from 515 in 2001, to 351 in 2006 (CIN, 13 April 2007, 1).

The budget estimate for the 2006–2007 financial year tabled in Parliament by Minister of Finance Dr Terepai Maoate totaled NZ\$106.9 million (CIN, 14 Dec 2006, 1). The 2007–2008 budget policy estimates the government's net worth at NZ\$133.6 million in the new financial year, noting that aid to the Cook Islands is expected to total NZ\$28.7 million. This represents a drop of NZ\$8.6 million, partially explained by the removal of a one-off Australian payment of NZ\$4.5 million for the upgrade of the patrol boat *Te Kukupa* in the 2006 budget (CIN, 3 April 2007, 1). New Zealand retained its designation as the highest donor to the Cook Islands with NZ\$10.3 million in aid. Government debt is expected to be NZ\$54.8 million by June 2007. The budget statement anticipated that proceeds from the pearl industry would increase by 10 percent (from NZ\$2.1 million in 2006), while the fishing industry would continue exporting an estimated NZ\$9.9 million worth of fish a year (CIN, 3 April 2007, 1).

In March 2007, Parliament changed a law empowering the cabinet to give members a pay raise without being bound by the independent Remuneration Tribunal (CIN, 8 March 2007, 1). Proposed adjustments would increase the prime minister's salary from NZ\$75,000 to NZ\$105,000, with members of Parliament going from NZ\$35,000 to NZ\$50,000 per year (CIN, 12 April 2007, 1). The increases are apparently exclusive of many additional allowances. A group for political change challenged the government to justify the change, and the Chamber of Commerce's Teresa Manarangi-Trott described the raises as extremely disturbing (CIN, 10 March 2007, 1; CIN, 20 March 2007, 1).

Tourism remained the largest industry in the Cook Islands. Spotlighting that market, Air New Zealand's short-haul group general manager Norm Thompson and Air Rarotonga's managing director Ewan Smith signed a new code-share agreement to provide joint schedules between Aitutaki and Rarotonga beginning in May 2007 (CIN, 5 April 2007, 1). Air Tahiti began its first Tahiti-Rarotonga connecting flight under a code-shared service with Air Rarotonga (CIN, 3 April 2007, 1). The joint venture offers a twice-a-week service (CIN, 4 April 2007, 1). Cruise ship tourism continued during the year, and the 119,000-ton, 750-cabin *Sapphire Princess*, carrying 2,670 passengers, became the largest cruise ship yet to visit Rarotonga (CIN, 30 April 2007, 1).

During this review period, the government launched the country's fifteen-year sustainable development plan titled "Living the Cook Islands Vision—A 2020 Challenge"

(Te Kaveinga Nui—Pathway for Sustainable Development in the Cook Islands). In a public meeting, hotel entrepreneur and economist Tata Crocombe called it a plan to nowhere, pointing out that it failed to incorporate some of the country's biggest problems such as depopulation, human resource development, aid dependence—and politicians. Moreover he observed that the government was too big (*CIN*, 25 Jan 2007, 1). Cabinet Minister Wilkie Rasmussen defended the government by pointing out that the issues mentioned by Crocombe were not new, labeling his comments as “purely ideals and theories of convenience” (*CIN*, 26 Jan 2007, 4).

During the year, Tata Crocombe's sweetheart deal in purchasing the government-owned Rarotongan Hotel reemerged in the news. Tata Crocombe had been recruited by Sir Geoffrey Henry's government to broker the sale of state assets, but ended up purchasing the hotel himself for NZ\$3.25 million with no money down, and a grace period of ten years to pay back the money with no interest charges. The media noted that the ten-year period was ending in September 2007 (*CIN*, 18 Jan 2007, 1). Crocombe was also linked to a proposed Black Rock tourist development scheme incorporating the current golf course, Black Rock preschool, and Harley Street in Rarotonga (*CIN*, 25 Nov 2006, 1).

Throughout the year under review, religion maintained a powerful influence on politics. The Religious Advisor Council (RAC), representing the Cook Islands Christian Church, Catholic, Seventh-Day Adventist, Latter-day Saints, Assembly of God and

Apostolic Church denominations, was regularly called on to offer invocations and benedictions at government functions and events. In July 2006, the council issued a call for a national day to pray and fast for the political “circus” occurring in the Cook Islands. The RAC chairman, Pastor Tutai Pere, declared that the tiny nation needed “deliverance from further political bondage of disunity, instability and uncertainty” (*CIN*, 6 July 2006, 1). In another public display of political pressure, Ngatangiaa Cook Islands Christian Church Pastor Iana Aitau asked police to enforce a ban preventing people from swimming or surfing on Sundays. The police responded that they could only ask people but in effect could not enforce such a rule (*CIN*, 11 July 2006, 1).

In 2007 Cook Islanders appeared in third place on a list of the world's fattest countries. Nauru topped the list with the greatest percentage of overweight adults (94.5 percent) followed by Federated States of Micronesia, Cook Islands, Niue, Tonga, Samoa, Palau, and Kiribati. The United States follows in ninth place (74.1 percent). Conducted by the United Nations World Health Western Pacific Regional office and the London-based International Obesity Task Force, researchers looked at the adult population over age fifteen. Obesity rates highlighted imbalances between levels of physical activity, and significant changes in diet (*CIN*, 21 Feb 2007, 1).

The review period also saw a sharp rise in dengue fever cases (*CIN*, 14 Feb 2007, 1). The Cook Islands Ministry of Health finally responded with plans for a mosquito-spraying blitz (*CIN*, 15 Feb 2007, 1). Although the use of

Reslin in the spray and its potentially toxic effects received some heavy criticism from the public, spraying continued anyway (*CIN*, 18 April 2007, 1). A total of 1,394 cases of dengue have been recorded since May 2006, with most (1,296) having occurred in Rarotonga. Some nineteen tourists were affected.

Educational initiatives were also in the news during the year. Thirty-five students enrolled in the University of the South Pacific's new Master of Business Administration program, most being heads of departments paying their own way (*CIN*, 16 Feb 2007, 1). The USP center also received a NZ\$300,000 upgrade (*CIN*, 25 June 2007, 1). On the downside, the Cook Islands government withdrew its support for the South Pacific School of Medicine set up in Rarotonga on 16 March 2004. It was to be a two-year course costing foreign students US\$39,000 (NZ\$56,000). The government removed its backing after discovering that the founder, controversial American Dr Larry Sands, had been convicted of mail fraud, and disciplined for prescribing wrong medicines (*CIN*, 21 March 2007, 1).

By July of 2006, the popular television series *American Survivor* had begun filming its "reality game" on Aitutaki. Filming in Cook Islands was completed by 4 August, and Tourism Authority chief executive Chris Wong revealed that the production had injected an estimated NZ\$3 million into the Cook Islands economy (*CIN*, 5 August 2006, 1). Exposure of the Cook Islands to over 16 million people in the United States alone was expected to increase visitors to the country. Wong stated, "Our hope

is that outside entertainment value that reality TV shows provide, viewers will find the natural attractions of the country highly appealing and consider the Cook Islands as an option for an island vacation" (*CIN*, 20 Jan 2007, 7).

Another attraction in the Cook Islands during the year was the traditional canoe-building project, Te Mire Tarai Vaka (*CIN*, 18 July 2006, 1). However the most challenging sporting event was the third Vaka Eiva, a canoe race around the island of Rarotonga involving thirty-five teams of canoe paddlers from New Zealand, Australia, Hawai'i, Fiji, Niue, Tahiti, and Cook Islands (*CIN*, 17 Nov 2006, 1-17).

The year under review was also marked by drug and criminal activities. Cocaine bound for Rarotonga and valued at NZ\$5.6 million was seized in Auckland. Hidden in the linings of two suitcases, the cocaine is believed to have come from São Paulo, South America. It is uncertain whether Rarotonga was the final destination or a transit point to the Australian market (*CIN*, 29 Nov 2006, 1). An unprovoked stabbing of an unarmed youth brought the realities of big city violence to Rarotonga, with Cook Islands police declaring their determination to stamp it out (*CIN*, 21 Dec 2006, 1). The Religious Advisory Council reacted to the stabbing by calling for the formation of a youth action team dubbed "Youth for Life—Mapu Kia Ora" (*CIN*, 22 Dec 2006, 1).

Cook Islanders continued to take a deep interest in environmental issues. As active participants in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Kyoto Protocol since 1992, the Cook Islands

joined other island countries in a plea for a reduction of greenhouse gas emissions to larger countries that contribute most to global warming. Island nations have been described as “the conscience” on climate change (*CIN*, 21 Dec 2006, 5). The Cook Islands is already being impacted by climatic changes, particularly with regard to its tourism and pearl industries (*CIN*, 16 April 2007, 3).

As part of the government’s plan to reduce dependency on fossil oil, a wind energy farm project was proposed at Kiikii on the island of Rarotonga (*CIN*, 24 Jan 2007, 1). Preliminary testing for persistent organic pollutants (POPS) in Rarotonga lagoons indicated concentrations of chlorinated pesticide (DDT and methoxychlor), polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAH) and phthalates (DEHP) above the detection limit. Environmentalist Imogen Ingram pointed out that the government needed to take positive action to remedy the environmental challenge because it was a signatory to the Stockholm Convention that agreed to a total eradication of POPS (*CIN*, 15 Nov 2006, 7).

Another problem that emerged during the year took the form of the glassy-winged “sharpshooter” bug. Discovered in Rarotonga, and suspected to have arrived on plants smuggled in from Tahiti, the insect feeds on more than three hundred host plants including trees, crops, and plants such as hibiscus, gardenia, and papaya. It is also known to transmit Pierce’s disease, which affects grapevines (*CIN*, 4 April 2007, 1, 7). In more positive environmental news, the year marked the return of the kura or lorikeet

bird, which was once plentiful on the island of Atiu. Before it became almost extinct, its feathers were used for the cloaks and headdresses of high chiefs. In a joint effort in April, naturalists and Atiuans brought in twenty-seven birds from Rimatara Island in French Polynesia (*CIN*, 28 April 2007, 1).

As part of its Unit Titles Bill initiative the Tepaki group purchased the twelve-unit Castaway property for NZ\$2.3 million, adding to their recent purchases of Manea Beach for NZ\$1.8 million, and Lagoon Lodges for NZ\$4 million, with expected settlements for the Aquarius and the Manuia Beach properties (*CIN*, 2 May 2007, 1). The Tepaki group also maintains a keen interest in building a high-rise apartment block on the Cook Islands High Commission office location in New Zealand. The New Zealand High Court had ruled against Tepaki’s so-called “diplomatic project,” which planned to turn the Cook Islands High Commission chancery in Wellington into a high-rise office and apartment complex. Originally approved by the Cook Islands government, the deal was canceled when certain conditions were not met and when the government changed (*CIN*, 18 Oct 2006, 1).

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References

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FRENCH POLYNESIA

Political instability continued in French Polynesia during the year under review. The barely two-year-