

Political Reviews

*Micronesia in Review: Issues and Events, 1 July 2015
to 30 June 2016*

MICHAEL LUJAN BEVACQUA, LANDISANG L KOTARO,
MONICA C LABRIOLA, CLEMENT YOW MULALAP

*Polynesia in Review: Issues and Events, 1 July 2015
to 30 June 2016*

PETER CLEGG, LORENZ GONSCHOR, MARGARET MUTU,
CHRISTINA NEWPORT, STEVEN RATUVA,
FORREST WADE YOUNG

PITCAIRN

The islands of Pitcairn, Henderson, Ducie, and Oeno (commonly known as Pitcairn) make up a single territory, the last remaining United Kingdom Overseas Territory (UKOT) in the Pacific Ocean. Pitcairn, the only inhabited island of the group, had a total resident population of thirty-nine—a historically low figure—at the start of 2016. The entire population lives in the lone settlement, Adamstown. The only way of accessing the island is by sea, but because of the difficult terrain, ships must moor offshore, with longboats operating between the ships and Bounty Bay. Due to its isolation, its small and aging population, and the high level of subsidy that is given by the UK government, there are concerns over the future viability of the settlement. Therefore, during the period under review there was significant focus on strengthening its repopulation strategy, improving the island's infrastructure, encouraging more tourist arrivals, and working closely with the European Union (EU) on several projects. However, much of the good work was undermined by reignited concerns over child safety and the decision of the United Kingdom to withdraw from the European Union. All of these issues, which are closely interlinked, are considered in this review.

A fundamental challenge for Pitcairn is its very small and declining population, which is also aging. Fewer than thirty people are economically active, and a majority of these are over fifty years old. Most starkly for the future, the number of residents in the twenty-to-thirty age group is in the

low single figures. Once young people move abroad—usually to New Zealand—to advance their education, they rarely return. In addition, with only a handful of women being of child-bearing age, the birthrate is not high enough to sustain population levels (UK Department for International Development 2015). So apart from a rising number of births, there are two other options for increasing the population: the return of former residents and their families, and new immigrants coming to the island. In order to help facilitate these, the Pitcairn Island Council (PIC) in 2013 agreed to a repopulation plan to stabilize the population at around fifty.

In the face of the extremely limited initial interest on the part of diasporic Islanders and new immigrants in settling in Pitcairn, the PIC undertook a review, which was completed in November 2015. A key part of this was a redesigned and more user-friendly website, including a new promotional film, which was intended to allow those interested in migrating to Pitcairn to begin the application process more easily and in a more informed way (*Pitcairn Miscellany* 2015a; PIC 2015c). In addition, new procedures were approved for immigrants applying for council land. After the changes were made, a small number of applications were received, although none had resulted in any new arrivals by the end of the period under review.

The reasons for the lack of success can be seen in a survey of the Pitcairn diaspora (Solomon and Burnett 2014). It found that the vast majority of those living elsewhere are reluctant to return because of concerns over child safety

and a belief that “on-island social norms do not conform to acceptable international norms” (Solomon and Burnett 2014, 41). These concerns apply to other potential immigrants too. They relate back to the late 1990s when serious allegations of systematic sexual abuse of children were made against a large proportion of the adult male population. Ultimately eight men were convicted, including a recently serving mayor. Significant efforts have been made, including during the period under review, to strengthen child safeguarding. For example, the “Child Matters” training, a child-protection studies program provided by a New Zealand company, was rolled out (PIC 2015a).

However, much of the good work around child safety was undermined when in March 2016 former Mayor Michael Warren was found guilty of downloading scores of hardcore child-abuse images and films (Marks 2016). In response, a further initiative was taken in May 2016 when the PIC agreed to work with the Internet Watch Foundation in a scheme funded by the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO). The foundation will provide a reporting portal for child-abuse imagery (PIC 2016b). Notwithstanding, there remain concerns over the safety of children in Pitcairn, and thus the UK government retains a travel advisory for the island, stating that any visits or settlements involving children under sixteen years of age must be authorized by the Pitcairn Island Office in New Zealand (UK Government Website 2016).

In tandem with the (so far unsuccessful) attempts to attract new settlers, the PIC also recognizes that the

economy of Pitcairn must offer more opportunities for potential immigrants and investors. For many years Pitcairn was able to pay its own way; the sale of stamps and later the registration fees from the “.pn” Internet domain name were significant revenue earners. Recently, however, income from these sources has fallen, while expenditures have increased considerably, particularly in regard to shipping, telecommunications, and medical services (in part because of the aging population). Further, funding is required for the provision of part-time public-sector employment. The result is that domestic revenue represents only 5 percent of the Pitcairn government’s finances. To make up the shortfall, the UK government has provided budgetary aid to the island since 2004. For the 2015–2016 fiscal year, this totaled £2.91 million (US\$4.34 million) (UK Department for International Development 2015).

In order to create a wider pool of job opportunities and to reduce reliance on budgetary aid from London, a number of initiatives are ongoing. Perhaps the most significant is the building of a jetty at Tedside, on the northwestern side of the island, and the upgrading of the road linking Tedside to Adamstown. It is hoped that once the jetty is completed, tenders will be able to more easily transport cruise ship passengers to the island, and so the number of cruise ship visitors will increase (at present about 800 to 1,000 passengers set foot on the island each year). This in turn should have a benefit for on-island tourist industries, such as guesthouses and sales of crafts and curios. However, progress on the jetty

and road projects during the year was slow because of poor weather and sea conditions (*Pitcairn Miscellany* 2015b, 2016b).

A related initiative was the approval by the PIC in October 2015 of the 2015–2019 Sustainable Tourism Development Master Plan (PIC 2015b). The objective of the plan is to “capitalise on the Pitcairn Islands unique points of difference, its *Bounty* heritage, its endemic flora and fauna, its endemic birds, its pristine marine environment, its prehistoric history, and its natural beauty” (Government of Pitcairn Islands 2016). More particularly, the intention is to increase revenues from tourism, including higher landing fees, and to boost employment opportunities in the sector.

Another development that may enhance Pitcairn’s economy was the March 2015 announcement of the UK government’s intention to create the largest continuous marine reserve in the world, covering 834,000 square kilometers. The seas around Pitcairn are believed to be home to more than 1,200 species of fish, marine mammals, and birds, some of which are unique to the region. The area also supports the world’s deepest and best-developed coral reef. A report produced for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office by the Pew Charitable Trusts, PIC, and National Geographic Society suggests that the reserve could build a sustainable economic future for Pitcairn’s resident population, based on increased tourism and permit fees and other maintenance grants. The report also claims that “creating work and jobs in conservation tourism could play a key role in helping encourage young adults within the

community to remain on the islands and attracting new residents” (Blue Ventures 2013, 11).

In the latter half of 2015, the UK government, in tandem with several nongovernmental organizations, discussed how tracking and surveillance in the reserve would be undertaken (PIC 2015c). Then, in March 2016, the first details were revealed (BBC News 2016). An ocean drone had begun work the previous month identifying illegal fishing in the reserve. The data that are collected will be sent back to a satellite watch room based in the Harwell Science and Innovation Campus in Oxfordshire. Any unauthorized trawlers will then be prosecuted. Funding is being provided by the UK government, the Swiss Bertarelli Foundation, and the Pew Charitable Trusts. The wider work around how the reserve could contribute to Pitcairn’s economy was much less advanced, however.

Although the UK government provides financial support to cover much of Pitcairn’s budget, the European Union is also an important source of assistance. For example, the Tedside harbor project is funded by Brussels under the Ninth European Development Fund (EDF). Several other initiatives were either completed or planned during the year. In July 2015, the Pacific Territories Initiative for Regional Management of the Environment (INTEGRE) project to prevent erosion at St Paul’s Point (on the far eastern tip of the island) and Ailihau (on the southern coast) was concluded, with assistance from several workers from French Polynesia (*Pitcairn Miscellany* 2015c). Much of the steep areas were protected with

mats before plants were added. In the first evaluation undertaken, the work at St Paul's had brought some success, but at Ailihau the results were more mixed (*Pitcairn Miscellany* 2015c). A further INTEGRÉ-sponsored initiative took place in the following spring, when a team of experts visited Pitcairn, providing advice on soil fertility, fisheries, and waste management (*Pitcairn Miscellany* 2016a).

In addition, a public meeting was held on 14 December 2015 to discuss future funding proposals to be supported by the European Union. At the meeting, upcoming projects under the Tenth EDF were discussed, primarily focused around upgrading infrastructure to enhance the tourist experience (*Pitcairn Miscellany* 2015d). Included in the EDF-10 proposal is a purpose-built vessel, designed to deliver passengers from ship to shore and back; the surfacing of several key roads; the installation of new road signs; and the construction of a new community center, museum, and general store. These projects are considered key to promoting the tourism sector and the economy of Pitcairn more generally.

To confirm the importance of the Pitcairn–European Union link, representatives from Pitcairn attended the Overseas Countries and Territories (OCT)–EU Forum in Brussels between 23 and 26 February. This is a meeting that is held annually involving the twenty-four OCTs, their metropolitan powers (United Kingdom, Denmark, France, and the Netherlands), and the European Commission. A range of issues was discussed, including climate change, sustainable energy, the implementation of EDF-11 programming, and the promotion of research,

education, and innovation. In addition, several summits were held on the margins of the main gathering, including trilateral meetings with the European Union, the member states, and the Overseas Territories, and regional trilaterals with the European Union, French Polynesia, New Caledonia, Wallis and Futuna, and Pitcairn in attendance.

However, these meetings took place in the shadow of the impending vote in the United Kingdom on whether the country should “Remain” or “Leave” the European Union. Due to the important level of support that Pitcairn and other United Kingdom Overseas Territories receive from Brussels, there was concern over what might happen if the UK voted to leave the EU. As a consequence, the Political Council of the United Kingdom Overseas Territories Association (UKOTA), at its annual meeting in November 2015, mandated the association to commission a report on the relationship between the UKOTS and the EU. The overall aim of the report was not to force the UKOTS onto the campaign agenda (thus Gibraltar, whose government was in favor of the UK remaining in the EU and whose population was eligible to vote, was excluded from the report), but to demonstrate the value of the EU to the UKOTS.

Part I of the report, which considered the benefits to the UKOTS of EU support, concluded that the relationship is very positive to the UKOTS in terms of economic and environmental cooperation, development assistance, and policy dialogue. Further, they now have a “stronger and more independent voice” in the EU, which

has enhanced policy outcomes (Clegg 2016, 17).

On 23 June 2016, the UK voted to leave the EU, with 52 percent supporting that choice and 48 percent voting to remain. The result was unexpected, and as a consequence the UK government does not yet have a clear plan in place to negotiate the country's withdrawal, nor is there a clear sense of how any future relationship between the UK and the EU might be organized. The outcome will likely also have a significant impact on Pitcairn and the other UKOTs. Pitcairn's relationship with the EU is dependent on the UK (via part IV of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union), and when the UK leaves, Pitcairn's support from Brussels will most likely end unless some special arrangement is worked out that provides Pitcairn with continued access to the European Development Fund.

So for Pitcairn—which is already struggling to survive and sees EU funding as crucial for its future sustainability and development—the process of “Brexit” is extremely concerning. Only time will tell how the undertaking of UK withdrawal from the EU will conclude, but in the short run Pitcairn must secure the EU funding that it has been promised. As long as the UK remains an EU member and does not renege on its funding commitments, Pitcairn will benefit from EU support. Therefore, the disbursement of funds—under both EDF-10 and EDF-11 and the regional funding envelope—should be agreed on as soon as possible, and once committed the monies should be secured so that the planned projects can proceed. Even if these projects run beyond 2020,

they will most likely be completed. Thus it is vital for Pitcairn, with the support and commitment of the UK, to conclude the necessary financing negotiations in the near future.

A final issue to consider is the political system and its subtext in Pitcairn, in particular the role of women. The Pitcairn Island Council consists of a mayor, deputy mayor, and five councillors. In addition, there are three nonvoting, ex-officio members: the governor, the deputy governor, and the administrator. In practice, only the administrator will normally attend PIC meetings. The administrator reports directly to the governor, and the governor may direct the administrator to take certain actions. The mayor, who acts as chairman, is elected by popular vote for a three-year term, while the other members are elected for two-year terms. There are no political parties. In order to vote, persons must be eighteen years of age or older and have been resident on Pitcairn for between one and three years. The qualification period is determined by the particular status of the individual. Anyone able to vote may also stand for election, so long as he or she has not been sentenced to imprisonment for three months or more in the previous five years.

This last provision has been particularly important for the representation of women in the political process. Historically, the PIC was dominated by men, but since the child sex-abuse cases, women have taken a greater role, and it was no different in the PIC elections held on 9 November 2015. Voters cast their ballots for a deputy mayor and five PIC members, with women filling five of the six posi-

tions, including Deputy Mayor Brenda Christian (*Pitcairn Miscellany* 2015a). It is very difficult to definitely prove that the greater role for women on the PIC has influenced the nature of public policy, but there are indications to suggest that efforts to improve child safeguarding have been strengthened. Furthermore, other changes are being enacted, including the agreement that the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) should be extended to Pitcairn (PIC 2016a; see also Lee, this issue). So because of the particular circumstances that have surrounded Pitcairn over the last decade and a half, the role of women in local politics has become more important. Even though in most cases there has been continuity in the political agenda around the major issue of securing the long-term viability of Pitcairn, there has been some greater focus and commitment with regard to enhancing the rights of women and trying to strengthen child-safeguarding measures. It should also be noted there has been a strong push by the UK government to make progress on these issues.

The past year in Pitcairn has been a case of one of two steps forward and one—or even possibly two—steps back. On the positive side, there is a clear recognition that, unless something is done to attract new settlers and to develop the economy, the long history of Pitcairn with a permanent resident population may well end. Thus, significant efforts were made to reenergize the repopulation strategy and enhance key aspects of the economy, particularly the island's infrastructure. Little tangible differ-

ence was seen in either the size of the population or the functioning of the economy, but at least the foundation stones are being laid for a potentially brighter future. However, much of this good work was undermined by two developments. The first was the March 2016 conviction of former Mayor Michael Warren for downloading hardcore child-abuse images and films. This was a very unfortunate reminder of Pitcairn's recent dark past. The second was the June 2016 decision of the UK to leave the EU. In the medium term, this may well result in the ending of a vital source of funding, putting at risk Pitcairn's future plans for economic development. There is no certainty that the UK government will cover the shortfall. So despite all the initiatives and projects that were pushed through by the PIC during the year under review, it has ended on a pessimistic note.

PETER CLEGG

References

- BBC News. 2016. Drone to Police Massive UK Marine Reserve. 11 March. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-35783564> [accessed 16 July 2016]
- Blue Ventures. 2013. The Potential Tourism Impact of Creating the World's Largest Marine Reserve in the Pitcairn Islands. A report prepared by the Pew Charitable Trusts, the National Geographic Society, and the Pitcairn Island Council for submission to the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office, May. <http://www.pewtrusts.org/~media/legacy/uploadedfiles/peg/publications/report/potentialtourismimpactofpitcairnmarinereservepdf.pdf> [accessed 24 Aug 2016]
- Clegg, Peter. 2016. The United Kingdom

- Overseas Territories and the European Union: Benefits and Prospects. Part I: EU Benefits to the United Kingdom Overseas Territories. A report produced for UKOTA, June. <http://ukota.org/manage/wp-content/uploads/UKOTA-Final-Report-on-Benefits-of-EU-to-UKOTs.pdf> [accessed 15 July 2016]
- Government of Pitcairn Islands. 2016. Pitcairn Islands Strategic Development Plan, 2014–2018. <http://www.government.pn/policies/SDP%202014-2018%20-%20Amended%2011-05-2016.pdf> [accessed 2 July 2016]
- Marks, Kathy. 2016. Pitcairn in “Last Chance Saloon” after Child Abuse Images Case. *The Guardian*, 11 March. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/mar/11/pitcairn-child-abuse-images-mayor> [12 March 2016]
- PIC, Pitcairn Island Council. 2015a. Minutes of Meeting held in The Square–Public Hall. 24 Sept. <http://www.government.pn/minutes/Approved%20Council%20Minutes%2024th%20Sept%202015.pdf> [accessed 13 July 2016]
- . 2015b. Minutes of Meeting held in The Square–Public Hall. 21 Oct. <http://www.government.pn/minutes/Approved%20Council%20Minutes%20Oct%2021st%202015.pdf> [accessed 13 July 2016]
- . 2015c. Minutes of Meeting held in The Square–Public Hall. 18 Nov. <http://www.government.pn/minutes/Approved%20Public%20Meeting%20Notes%20Nov%2018th%202015.pdf> [accessed 13 July 2016]
- . 2015d. Minutes of Meeting held in The Square–Public Hall. 16 Dec. <http://www.government.pn/minutes/Approved%20Council%20Meeting%20Minutes%20Dec%2016th%202015.pdf> [accessed 13 July 2016]
- . 2016a. Minutes of Meeting held in The Square–Public Hall. 27 April. <http://www.government.pn/minutes/Approved%20Council%20Meeting%20Minutes%20April%2027th%202016.pdf> [accessed 13 July 2016]
- . 2016b. Minutes of Meeting held in The Square–Public Hall. 11 May. <http://www.government.pn/minutes/Approved%20Council%20Meeting%20Minutes%20May%2011th%202016.pdf> [accessed 13 July 2016]
- Pitcairn Miscellany*. 2015a. 2015/2016 Government of Pitcairn. *The Pitcairn Miscellany* 58 (11 [Nov]): 2.
- . 2015b. Alternative Harbour Project. *The Pitcairn Miscellany* 58 (10 [Oct]): 11.
- . 2015c. Conservation Works. *The Pitcairn Miscellany* 58 (10 [Oct]): 4.
- . 2015d. EDF-10 Workshop. *The Pitcairn Miscellany* 58 (12 [Dec]): 2.
- . 2015e. Integre Project. *The Pitcairn Miscellany* 58 (8 [Aug]): 4.
- . 2016a. Dirt, Fins and Rubbish. *The Pitcairn Miscellany* 59 (5 [May]): 9.
- . 2016b. The Landing at Water Valley. *The Pitcairn Miscellany* 59 (2 [Feb]): 3.
- Solomon, Rob, and Kirsty Burnett. 2014. Pitcairn Island Economic Review: Final Report. January. <http://www.government.pn/Pitcairn%20Islands%20Economic%20Report%20-%20Final%20Report.pdf> [accessed 14 July 2016]
- UK Department for International Development. 2015. Pitcairn Aid Budget 2015/16: Business Case and Summary, 204259. April. Available at <https://devtracker.dfid.gov.uk/projects/GB-1-204259/documents> [accessed 9 July 2016]
- UK Government Website. 2016. Foreign Travel Advice: Pitcairn. 9 Aug. <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/pitcairn-island> [accessed 24 Aug 2016]