

2015 Australia and Pacific Regional Conference

Darwin, Australia

24-26 November 2015



Report by Hon Robin Chapple MLC

Delegate for the Western Australian Branch

Introduction

I would like to express my thanks to the Parliament of Western Australia for giving Jan Norberger MLA and myself the opportunity to attend the 33rd Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) Australia and Pacific Regional Conference that took place in Darwin, Australia, from 24 to 26 November 2015.

Delegates

There were 45 delegates at the CPA Australia and Pacific Regional Conference – 26 from Australia and the others from Samoa, Cook Islands, Nauru, New Zealand, Kiribati, Niue, Bouganville, Tuvalu, Tonga and an observer from Lok Sabha, India.

Table 1 – Delegates of the CPA Australia and Pacific Regional Conference 2015

Name	Country/State
AAULI, Leuatea	Samoa
ANDERSON, Rt Rev Dr Greg	Northern Territory
BEER, James Vini	Cook Islands
BOURKE, Dr Chris	Australian Capital Territory
CAIN, Ann-Marie	Nauru
CHAPPLE, Robin	Western Australia
CRISP, Julie	Northern Territory
CUSACK, Catherine	New South Wales
DAVIS, Jan	South Australia
DUNCAN, Tom	Australian Capital Territory
FINIMORE, Stephen	Queensland
FURNER, Mark	Queensland
HENARE, Peeni	New Zealand
HORNERY, Sonia	New South Wales
IUTA, Taomati	Kiribati
KEY, Stephanie	South Australia
LAAULI, Leuatea	Samoa
LAZARO, Tekii	Cook Islands
McCARTHY, Gerry	Northern Territory
McLEOD, Sue	Tasmania
NAUNTA, Airata	Kiribati
NICHOLLS, Tim	Queensland
NORBERGER, Jan	Western Australia
PARMAR, Dr Parmjeet	New Zealand
PEDERICK, Adrian	South Australia
PIHIGIA, Togiavalu	Niue
PULETAMA, Tofua	Niue
PURICK, Kezia	Northern Territory
ROPATI, Fepuleai	Samoa
SAWAIKER, Narendra Keshav	Lok Sabha, India
SCOTTY, Ludwig	Nauru

SEMOSO, Fancesca	Bougainville
SHELTON, Mark	Tasmania
SMYTH, Brendan	Australian Capital Territory
TAKEUTA, Kirara	Kiribati
TALAITI, Talaititama	Niue
TATHAM, Michael	Northern Territory
TAUSI, Otinielu	Tuvalu
TAYLOR, Adriana	Tasmania
TU'IVAKANO, Lord	Tonga
VIKILANI, Dr Sione	Tonga
WAGNER, Drew	Northern Territory
WOOD, Gerry	Northern Territory
WORTLEY, Russell	South Australia
YOGARATNAM, Jeswynn	Northern Territory

Presentations Overview

In total, 19 delegates presented at the CPA Conference where the overall theme was 'vulnerability' in all its forms, from economic, parliamentary and reputational, as well as a range of issues, including Indigenous representation, personal and family safety, the mineral sector, and the challenges of a small state.

The formal reception took place on Monday, 23rd November where the Hon Kezia Purick, MLA the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory provided the welcoming address, as well as the closing remarks on the final day.

The early part of day one, Tuesday 24th November, was taken up by the formalities of the election of the Conference Chair, election of Deputy Chair and the appointment of Secretary and Deputy Secretary.

Day 1 – Tuesday 24 November

Session 1: Vulnerability of Parliament

The Vulnerability of Parliament – Catherine Cusack, MLC (New South Wales)

- Discussed the forces blocking women in modern Parliaments, which are the same forces threatening the effectiveness of Parliaments themselves.
- Provided an overview of the role of Commonwealth Parliamentary Women.
- Concluded with a bucket list of ideas to modernize, strengthen and enhance the independence of Parliament.

Recent Experience in the Northern Territory – The Hon Kezia Purick, MLA (Northern Territory)

- Provided a presentation, including media clips of an incident that occurred in Parliament that dealt with the Government's use of Standing Orders, Motions and the removal of the Speaker of the House.

- This demonstrated the resilience of Parliament as an institution over ‘the bizarre actions of an angry government’.

Distance, Diversity and Disadvantage – Gerry McCarthy, MLA (Northern Territory)

- Represents the Seat of Barkly, the largest seat in the Northern Territory and how the constituency ‘reflects vast distances from the capital, diversity in cultures and disadvantage both socially and economically’.
- Argued that Parliament is the instrument to address this disadvantage.
- Provided an example of the impact of distance on Indigenous Health through the Tennant Creek Renal Unit, where the gap in life expectancy between Indigenous and Non-Indigenous was between 10 and 12 years.

Session 2: Vulnerability of People

The dimensions of human vulnerability – The Right Reverend Dr Greg Anderson, Anglican Bishop, Diocese of the Northern Territory

- Addressed the issues of family violence.
- Looked at factors of ‘personhood’.
- Discussed people as: relational, cultural, emotional and spiritual.
- Looked at good practice to enable humans to do well: enable society to hear and connect to the story of the individual; and good media practice.

Indigenous Representation – Dr Chris Bourke MLC (Australian Capital Territory)

- Aim was to ‘show how recent diversity management literature can be applied to the goal of increasing the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parliamentarians’.

Strategies for Personal and Family Safety in South Australia – Hon Steph Key ML and Mr Adrian Pederick MP (South Australia)

- Provided information on the initiatives South Australia have undertaken to counteract violence in communities.
- Provided information about a Parliamentary inquiry into domestic and family violence by the Social Development Committee.

Day 2 – Wednesday 25 November

Session 2: Vulnerability of People (continued)

Policy utility of the concept of human security when dealing with vulnerability of irregular maritime arrivals – Jeswynn Yogaratnam, Lecturer in Law, Charles Darwin University

- Demonstrated the shift in paradigm from ‘human security’ to ‘border security’ when policy and law makers discuss dealing with ‘unlawful non-citizens who intend to seek asylum in Australia,’ in particular ‘unauthorised maritime arrivals (UMAs).

- Argued that policy makers can reframe the approach to UMAs if they consider the vulnerability of UMAs by using the United Nations Development Programme's concept of human security.

Population and Political Representation in the Niue Legislative Assembly – Hon Togiavalu Pihigia (Niue)

- Provided information on Niue's parliament, population and distribution, and its vulnerabilities, including population decline.

Vulnerability of People (Jesswyn Yogaratnam, Catherine Cusack, Francesca Semoso, Jan Norberger)

- Panel discussion

Session 3: Economic Vulnerability

Addressing the challenges in a small State – Mark Shelton, MLA (Tasmania)

- Discussion of the risks to Tasmania as a small state and what the government has undertaken to make the economy more resilient, including developments in irrigation for drought proofing; defending the freight equalization scheme for fair access to markets; protecting the image of Tasmania as a clean, pest free, high quality producer.

The Minerals Sector at a Glance – What does it mean to the economy? – Drew Wagner, NT Minerals Council

- Overview of the Minerals Council of Australia.

Economic Vulnerability of a City State – Brendon Smyth, MLC (Australian Capital Territory)

- Presentation of global megatrends or how the world will change over the next 20 years, options on how to benefit from the changes, and constraints to achieve benefits.

Economic Vulnerability – Peeni Henare, MP (New Zealand)

- Presented a paper on the potential vulnerability of regional tourism.

Day 3 – Thursday 26 November

Session 4: Reputational Vulnerability

Reputational Risk – Lord Tu'ivakano (Tonga)

- Argues good governance is the key to minimize risk to damaging Parliament's reputations.

Impacts of False Reporting by Foreign Media – Hon Ludwig Scotty, ML (Nauru)

- Discussed the events and reporting in the media that led to the decision by New Zealand to cut aid for Nauru's judicial system.

***In life and politics, it's about taking risks* – Gerry Wood, MLA (Northern Territory)**

- Talked about the diversity of his electorate and how he managed to remain an Independent and the humor he brought to his electorate.

***Reputational Vulnerability* – Julie Crisp, Auditor General (Northern Territory)**

- Discussed reputational vulnerability as interconnected roles between perspectives of a parliamentarian, in the public sector, and an independent officer.

***The 27 Day Parliamentarian* – Hon James Beer, MP (Cook Islands)**

- Discuss frustrations in role of the Democratic Party and the Opposition and how to turn frustrations into success.

Presentations Personal Highlights

Gerry McCarthy MLA (NT), in a presentation entitled, *Distance, Diversity & Disadvantage*, talked about his very large bush electorate based on Tennant Creek and the real issues with delivering government services in remote Australia, issues that I am all too familiar with in the Mining and Pastoral Region of Western Australia.

There are 22,000 kilometers of unsealed roads in the Northern Territory that are vulnerable; following a severe wet season \$98M of road repairs was required. His electorate, Barkly, is also a trial site for the NDIS and it's ability to perform in remote areas. We have a similar issue with trials of the Welfare Card or what Aboriginal people call 'the white card'.

Other issues he talked about were Indigenous incarceration, domestic violence, renal care, out of home care for children, and alcohol abuse. He was concerned about the lack of political voice for Aboriginal communities, as am I since the current government's mandatory sentencing laws and the Royalties for Regions program is failing Aboriginal people and remote communities.

Other highlights included the presentation by Hon Ludwig Scotty, ML (Nauru) entitled, *Impacts of False Reporting by Foreign Media*, which provided an opportunity to call in question media reporting about the Nauru camps and the impact on the community.

Also, it was very interesting to see how the decline in population on the Cook Islands impacted democracy, government and the work of Members of Parliament, since some members only represented 10 people. The strange phenomenon occurs during elections where expats go back to their village on the Cook Islands and participate in the election and then leave again. This means Parliamentarians represent such a small community and are heavily involved in the delivery of social services not provided through a central agency.

Conclusion

The 33rd CPA Australia and Pacific Regional Conference that took place in Darwin, Australia, from 24 to 26 November 2015 provided an opportunity to explore the themes of vulnerability in the region and how legislators can best address this.

Delegates heard from colleagues on a range of issues, including: the economy; parliamentary procedure; public engagement; political structures; refugees; climate change; and trans-national crime and law enforcement.

I found the conference to be an important forum for regional dialogue to effect positive democratic change and I take with me the knowledge that there are many people trying to bring about positive change.

I would like to provide a special acknowledgment to our hosts in the Northern Territory Parliament, and thanks to the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Western Australian Branch for the opportunity to attend.