

National Parliament of Solomon Islands Public Accounts Committee Report, 2024

Introduction

Greetings from the National Parliament of Solomon Islands

I am Heston Rence representing the Secretariat of the two Finance Committees in the National Parliament of Solomon Islands, Namely, The Public Accounts Committee and the Public Expenditure Committee.

Indeed, it's an honor and a great pleasure for me, to present before the Australasian Council of Public Accounts Committee and other Parliamentary delegates our report.

Background

The National Parliament of Solomon Islands is a young parliament of 46 years, which has a unicameral chamber and a voting system of first-past-the-post. We had our last election in 2019 and the next one will be on the 17th of April, we have a four year term, and the offices of the speaker of the parliament, the Prime Minister and the Leader of Opposition are currently on care taker mode till after elections.

History of Finance Committees in the Solomon Islands Legislature

Since 1978, when the Parliament enacted our constitution, there was a Public Expenditure Committee (PEC) and a Public Accounts Committee. Both of the Committees were operational since the independence in 1978.

We have a unique approach to our Public Accounts Committee, back in the past the parliament sees the Committee needs a qualified personal to advice the PAC therefore have included in the standing orders 69 (2) the Auditor General as the secretary to PAC.

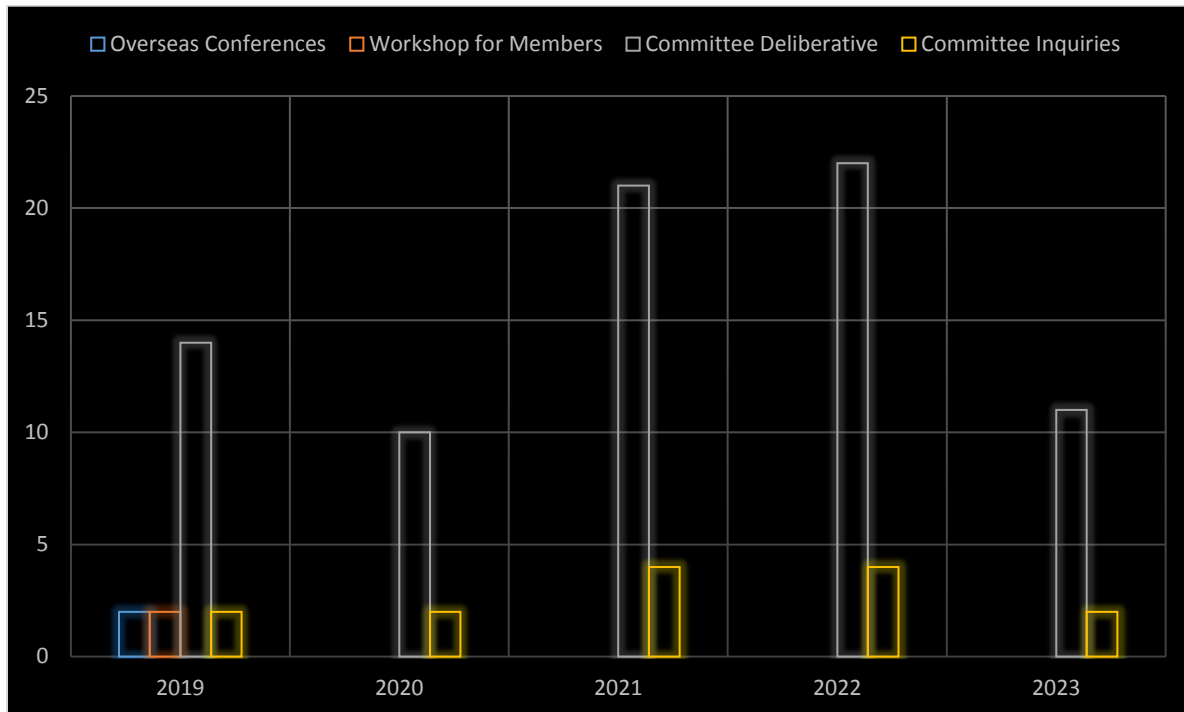
Activities in the 11th Parliament

The 11th parliament was not a really good term for parliament, and globally as well, as there were a lot of factors affecting its operation, the economic down turn, and the covid-19 pandemic, it affected the committee's plans and activities.

Activities Table

Year	Overseas Conferences	Workshop for Members	Committee Deliberative	Committee Inquiries
2019	2	2	14	2
2020			10	2
2021			21	4
2022			22	4
2023			11	2
Total	2	2	78	14

Activities Graph



Discussions:

Pre-Covid, PAC usually attend programs outside of the country compared to during and post-covid periods. Our parliament have huge challenges with finance and some of the overseas trainings/conferences were can't afforded to be attended to.

Members of PAC/PEC do not pick up reports that could have been inquired into over the term depending on their interests. PAC/PEC traditionally wait for the Appropriation Bills/other budget reports to be tabled and inquired into. Our Finance Committees were inactive due to some of the reasons below:

Challenges

1. **Political View** – a lot of our audit reports were tabled but have not been picked up, it's up to a member of parliament to pick it up by a motion or by conducting an Inquiry.
2. **Budget** - Our Committees department lack sufficient budget to operate plans for the finance committees. A committee needs to come up with a work plan, these needs the cooperation of the members.
3. **Standing Order Reviews** – our standing orders needs to be reviewed to accommodate our finance aspirations, we need to have one finance committee. Two committees poses some challenges such as quorum issues.
4. **Parliamentary Autonomy** – some of these issues would need a parliamentary autonomy to carry them out.
5. **Lack of Parliamentary Calendar** – the Parliament does not have a parliamentary Calendar where the legislature can incorporate all its annual events.

Way Forward

1. **Political View** –committee members must take ownership in their job, to take interest in the reports and deal with them.
2. **Budget** – PAC to come up with a work plan to bid for its budget.
3. **Standing Orders Reviews** – having only one Finance Committee would solve the challenges of quorum or non-attendance of MPs.
4. **Parliamentary Autonomy** – a working group should be set up to work closely with the Office of the Prime Minister to forge relationships in these areas.
5. **Lack of Parliamentary Calendar** - A parliamentary calendar paves a way to plan out committee activities.