

PISUKI Chairman's Report May 2015

Greetings to everyone with us here today – with a special welcome to all those who have joined us from the formal launch of the charity Communities Fiji Britain, to which PISUKI was happy to give space during today's events here at New Zealand House. We offer a particular welcome to HE Solo Mara, High Commissioner for Fiji, who has kindly agreed to be our AGM speaker.

This year, both in the Society and for the Pacific at large, we have seen many positive and pleasurable events, set against the impact of sadder happenings.

For us, the highly enjoyable Family Picnic of last June, held, with the KTA, in the grounds of the Walsh's home in Monmouthshire, set the positive tone for the year.

In July's Edwin Smith Lecture, Michael Scott was able to give us valuable insights into the interaction of local traditions in the SW Solomon Islands and contemporary politics – in a well-attended event at the Palace of Westminster.

Film showings were also well-attended. This February, Kristian Brodie allowed us to show his film *Next Goal Wins* – an informative and feel-good film concerning the efforts of the struggling American Samoa soccer team and their new coach in the run-up to World Cup qualifier matches. Olivier Pollet's film *Canning Paradise*, shown in November, while similarly well-received, gave a powerful reminder of the continuing development issues in the region, with its presentation of the impacts of fisheries and fish canning in Papua New Guinea.

In the course of the year, we have tried to maintain and develop links with other groups and organisations.

In September, Chris Luxton and Roy Smith were able to attend the PACE-NET Plus conference in Bremen – in particular, attending a workshop on non-communicable diseases. The Pacific Europe Network for Science Technology and Innovation, funded by the European Union, promotes bi-regional co-operation.

Chris also attended the Melanesian, Micronesian, Polynesian Festival in Hanover, last August and has continued to represent us on the Council of Commonwealth Societies – playing an important part in finding Pacific flag-bearers for the Commonwealth Day Observance in March. She was also very active in identifying possible Pacific Islands Candidates for the Queen's Young Leaders Programme, which was launched last July, and aims to discover, celebrate and support young people from Commonwealth nations who have transformed their lives and the lives of those about them.

We have also had good links with the Chevening Scholars programme. I was delighted to meet the Pacific Chevening Scholars (including 3 from Fiji, 3 from Papua New Guinea, and one from New Zealand) at their induction day. Chris has been in touch through Facebook, and we have been pleased that some of the Scholars have been able to join us at events during the year.

One of the positives for the region was the successful conduct of the Fijian elections in September, which has seen the expanded re-engagement of Fiji with the Commonwealth and the United Kingdom. It was a pleasure to attend, on behalf of PISUKI, the 44th Fiji Day Celebration in Stoke on Trent in October, the London reception for the Prime Minister of Fiji in November, and a meeting with Fijian parliamentary delegation at the Commonwealth parliamentary Association in January. We look forward to hearing more from HE the High Commissioner about the post-election challenges and opportunities in Fiji.

Of course, in July and August last year the Commonwealth Games in Glasgow, quite literally, brought Pacific Islands' strengths to the fore, with the various successes in weightlifting, including the gold for David Katoatau of Kiribati. Our friend from the KTA performed twice at the Games.

Returning to our own activities, the Christmas party, held at St. Philips, Earls Court on December 18th provided a very enjoyable evening, through which £350 was gathered. This, via the Melanesian Mission, was donated to support the replenishing of school libraries in Solomon Islands.

However, the Christmas event was also a time when we recalled one of our losses of this year, with a song performed in remembrance of Agnes Akineti Henson Derby. A member of our council, Agnes will be remembered for her enthusiasm and energy, with her keenness to promote appreciation of her own country of Kiribati and the other Island Pacific nations. A number of members of the Society and from various Island communities were at Agnes's funeral in November, and at the commemorative gathering in Great Missenden, which provided a celebration of her life and Pacific interests.

We also note, with sadness, the loss of a long-standing member, Patrick Barrett, and the recent death of our former Council colleague, Michael Peart.

Probably the most devastating events for the region in the last year, came with hurricanes of March - Cyclone Pam most powerfully striking Vanuatu, with the winds and storm surges also seriously affecting Tuvalu and Kiribati; and super typhoon Maysak also sweeping across sections of Yap. The Council had made contributions on behalf of our Society to relief and reconstruction in Vanuatu (£100 through the NGO, MapAction, £100 through the British Friends of Vanuatu), in Tuvalu (through UNICEF UK), and in Kiribati (£100 through the KTA/"Five Boys Clothing" Palm Appeal).

An event reflecting on Cyclone Pam and its aftermath is planned for 30th June 2015, at St Philips Church, Earls Court Rd. The meeting will be addressed by Liz Hughes, the CEO of MapAction.

As the centenary commemoration of World War I continues, I was pleased to be able to represent the Society (through the good will of the New Zealand High Commission and Dept. of Culture Media and Sport) at the special ANZAC Day remembrance of the Gallipoli campaign – both at the Cenotaph and at the Westminster Abbey service, where other members of the council were present. These

were moving events, and sombre reminders of the losses of Gallipoli – which resulted in the fuller recruitment of Islanders into the First World War. They also act as a reminder of the military links which we see today.

In conclusion, thanks go to all the members of the Council, including John Wilson for his steady oversight of our accounts, our Secretary Rex Davis, David Evans for keeping track of membership matters, Ben Burt for ensuring *The Outrigger's* appearance and, above all, to Chris Luxton, who as Vice Chairman performs a multitude of administrative and communicative tasks, so giving the Chairman an easier time than he deserves.

Thanks also to Tom Hughes, who, despite his retirement from the Council, has continued to play important roles in the life of the society, including the making arrangements for this meeting.

Finally, we are grateful to Avira and Nick Harding for agreeing to be our new Area Representatives in the SW, continuing the strong tradition established in that region.

Christian Clerk