A BRIEF REPORT

on the

2008 ASPG CONFERENCE & the QUEENSLAND PARLIAMENT ATTACHMENT

SUBMITTED

by

Simon Ila

a/Deputy Clerk of Parliament

National Parliament of PNG
The 2008 ASPG Annual Conference
and the Queensland Parliament Attachment
in Brisbane

Introduction

This report expresses some of my views on the 2008 Australian Study of Parliament Group (ASPG) Conference which was held in Brisbane from 10th -12th July 2008. The conference was followed by a gainful Queensland Parliament Attachment Program from 13th - 21st July 2008. Both programs brought about an improved awareness of the way various parliaments and members/staff work.

Acknowledgements

CDI must be commended for facilitating and meeting the costs of the ASPG Annual Conference and the Queensland Parliament Attachment which I attended while in Brisbane. Our deepest appreciation to CDI and Mr Quinton Clements, both have been great partners in fulfilling the training needs of PNG Parliament, since making contact in 2006. The close association and the generous contributions from CDI has been remarkable in the successful running of the 2007 induction for PNG parliamentarians, induction for PNG parliamentary committee chairmen and staff, and the professional training development for PNG Parliamentary Service and the Provincial Assembly staff (2007 & 2008).

Mention is also made of our appreciation to Hon. Mike Reynolds MP Speaker of the Queensland Parliament, Mr Neil Laurie the Clerk of Queensland Parliament, Mr Michael Reis Deputy Clerk of Parliament and the many helpful staff (too many to name) all of whom made my stay in Brisbane memorable one.

ASPG Annual Conference (2008)

The conference covered a broad range of areas which were found not only to be informative but I thought the information could become useful when deciding how to improve support functions of our own Parliamentary Services. Most sessions revealed our own weaknesses and areas we needed improvements in terms of technical skills and capacity.

The conference provided interesting comparisons and observations which can only be picked up at such conferences where regional interests and issues get to be discussed and articulated. While the principles on the application of procedures and practice are the same, methods of applications vary from one parliament to the next. The more developed Australian (Federal & State) and New Zealand parliaments were at the forefront because of their more. The extent of practices and procedures applied are just enormous giving these parliaments a global competitive advantage. But the good news was PNG is free to choose from a range of these practices and procedures which could be tailored to suit our own environment somewhere down the line.

ASPG Conference Sessions

The conference as was advertised brought together past and present members from Australian, New Zealand and Pacific parliaments. While for new comers (like me) the experience can be daunting the positive effects are overwhelming for senior parliamentary officers as well as first time parliamentarians.

The sessions were enlightening and it does take you to the classroom environment knowing that academics do have a particular interest in parliaments whose political observations do not always marry with the views of the more seasoned politicians on sensitive issues as there are quite strong
views (PNG) politicians are there to “make a fast buck” and not necessarily help the people. And these “views” are based on very poor social development indicators for a Pacific population and I stand to be corrected on this.

On the media and the parliament it is fair game but as a parliamentary officer I feel parliamentarians are hard done by when politicians are misrepresented on the way the media twists facts in published stories. In the case of PNG there are number of privilege matters concerning publishing houses which the parliament is not able to get to the bottom off because inadequate resources.

I thought the highlight of the conference was the debate challenge where the points were well orchestrated by constructive arguments between the “ayes” and “noes” on the topic. This required excellent public speaking skills and the ability to articulate arguments.

Queensland Parliament Work Attachment

The work attachment component consisted mainly of one on one discussions with the heads of the various Divisions namely the Legislative/Information Services and the Corporate/House Services. I was particularly impressed by the heads of the Legislative and Information Services Division where I spent most time and was engaged in some insightful discussions.

And I thought Community Engagement was the stand out experience but this doesn’t mean I didn’t appreciate and value the others, they were just as resourceful and impressive. I guess Community Engagement stood out because that’s where I spent most time and had the honor of meeting Ms Roylene Mills’s family when invited home for dinner. This was a great individual experience and only the second opportunity of its kind since 2000 when I started travelling back and forth between PNG and Australia. And of course the rest of the staff Ms Sarah McCallan, Mr Graeme Kinnear, and Mr Brett Nutley were fantastic to be with.

Conclusion

The conference and the attachment programs were enormous value. The conference provided an excellent opportunity for me to feel and see on display the high level of presentations as well as lively discussions covering the various themes of the ASPG conference, and this could have resulted I believe from many hours put into those individual efforts. The attachment on the other hand provided extremely useful insights on management standards such as work commitments, culture of maintaining high standards, work ethics, integrity and accountability.