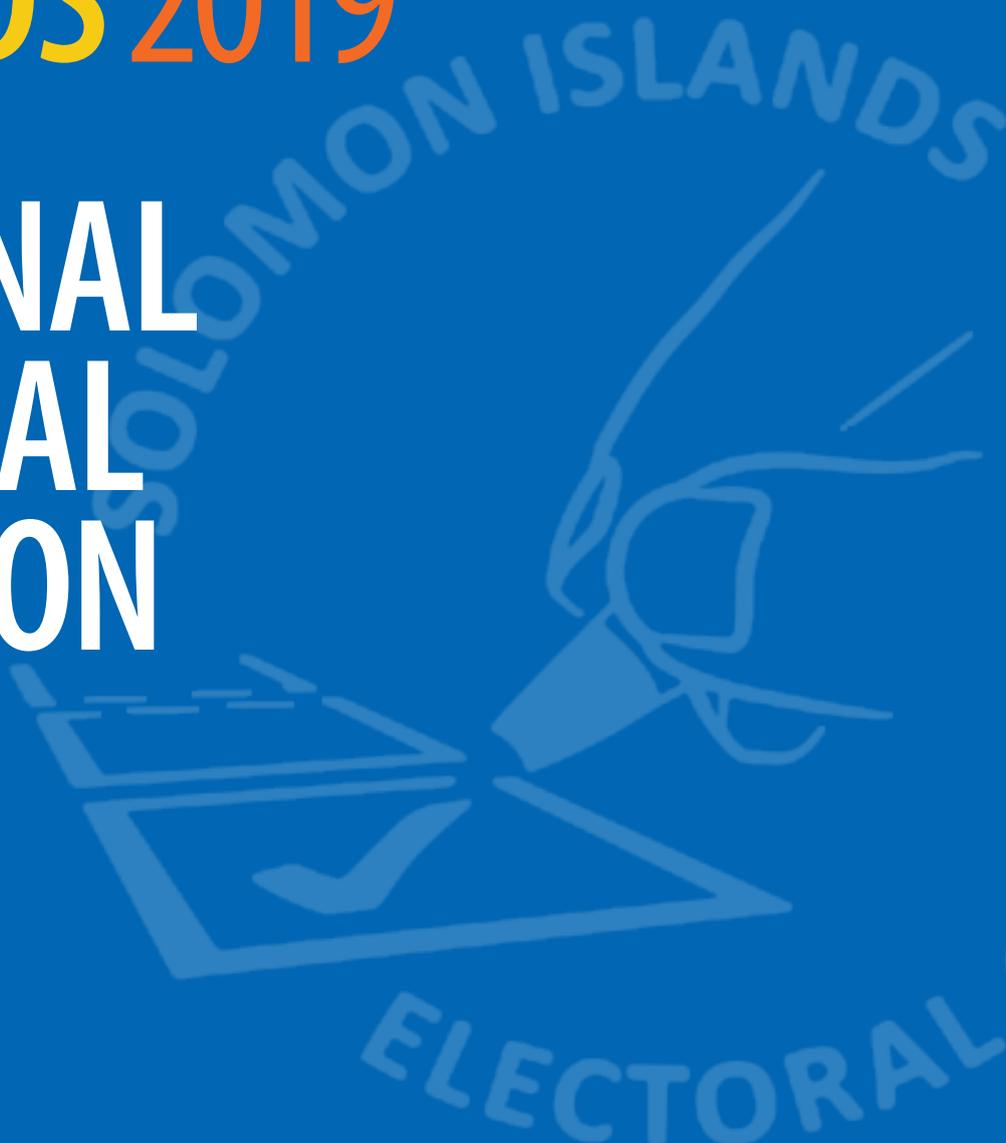
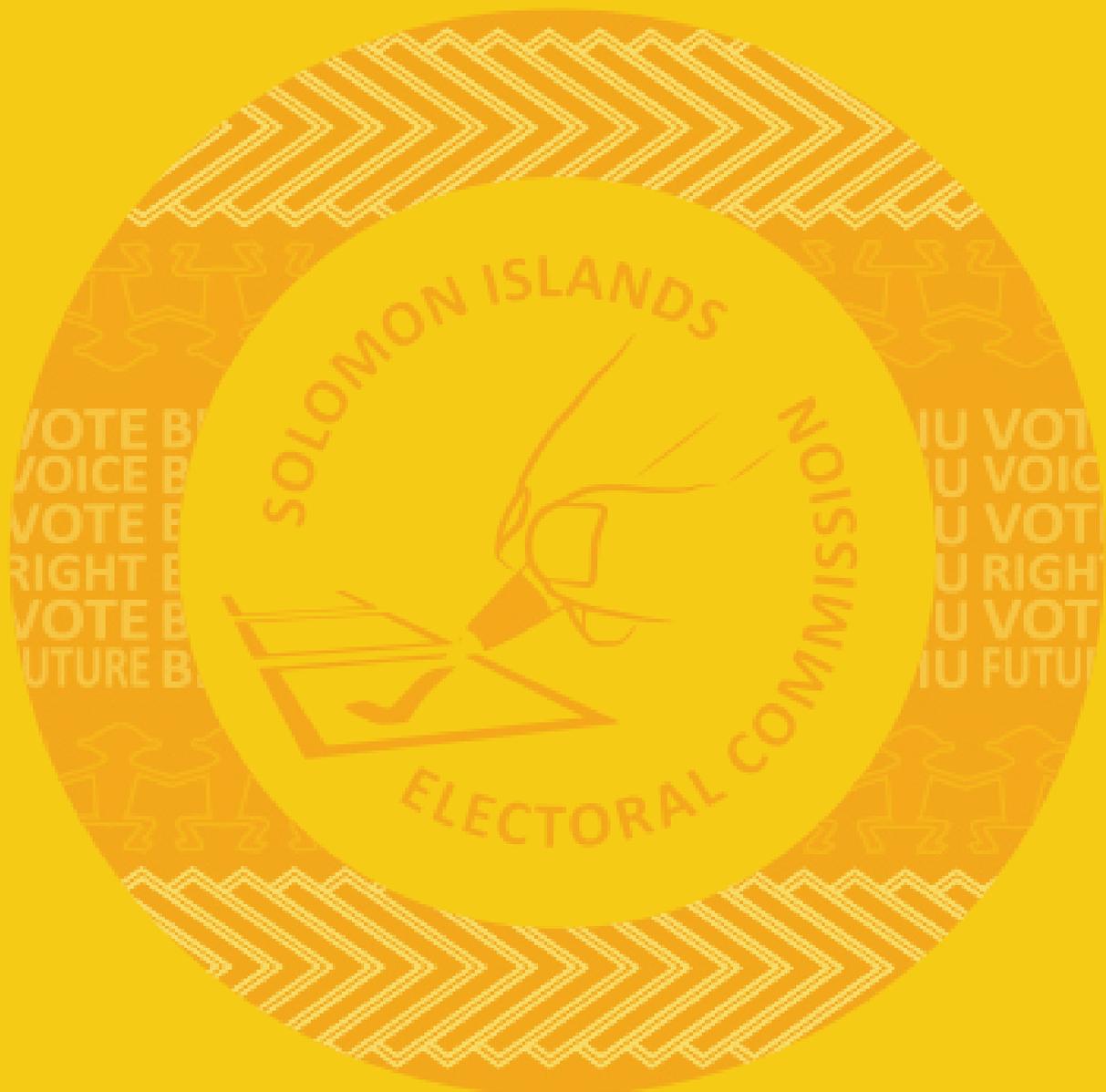


# SOLOMON ISLANDS 2019

# NATIONAL GENERAL ELECTION





The Solomon Islands Electoral Commission acknowledges with gratitude the support provided by the following partners towards the successful conduct of the 2019 National General Elections:

- The Solomon Islands Government;
- The Strengthening the Electoral Cycle in the Solomon Islands Project phase II (SECSIP II) executed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and funded by the Government of Australia, the European Union (EU) and UNDP;
- The Electoral Systems Support Program funded by the Australian Government; and
- The Australian and New Zealand Governments for their Defense Forces' joint logistics support for the security and logistics of the Solomon Islands 2019 National General Election



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# FOREWORD

by the Chair of the Solomon Islands  
Electoral Commission

Managing an election in any country is a huge challenge, and in the context of the Solomon Islands in 2019 it was especially difficult. The main reason for this was that the electoral legislation, which was thoroughly reviewed in 2017 and 2018, was still only a Bill in mid-2018 and had not been passed. In effect the Commission needed to have two election management plans in operation at the same time – one based on the current Act; one based on the proposed 2018 Electoral Act. Although the Electoral Commission had been making preparations for the National General Election based on the changes that were contained in the new Act, it was not possible to implement these until the Bill was passed. The new Electoral Act 2018 was eventually passed by Parliament in September 2018, leaving just a few short months to implement all the necessary changes in readiness for the conduct of the poll on 3 April 2019.

The 2019 General Election was keenly awaited by many Solomon Islanders and on Wednesday 3 April 2019 all eligible voters went to the polls to elect the Members of Parliament to represent them in the 11th Parliament. Out of the 359,523 people who were registered to vote, a total of 310,667 (86.41%) cast their ballots – a very creditable achievement and amongst the best rate of participation in the Pacific region.

I need to state at this point that I was not the Chair of the Electoral Commission when all the preparations were made and the poll and count were conducted, as I was only appointed upon being nominated and appointed as Speaker of Parliament at Parliament's first meeting on 15th May 2019. But looking from outside I have been most impressed with the Solomon Islands Electoral Office's (SIEO) ability to conduct of the 2019 National General Election. The great majority of stakeholders too have also made very positive comments about the quality of the systems and processes that have been followed. There were very few complaints and it was pleasing to note that some have even regarded it as the best election ever.

In my view the Electoral Commission should be extremely proud of its efforts in conducting the 2019 General Election. I consider that even though the Commission's reputation for impartiality, reliability and professionalism has grown substantially, we still need to focus our attention on further improvement. We need to constantly look at ways of offering even better services for voters across the country, especially to those in remote locations. Many of our proposed improvements will be rolled out during the course of 2019, and beyond. Some will have far reaching implications and they need to be carefully thought through and possibly trialled before being implemented.

The years ahead look to be exceptionally busy as well, with decisions on election petitions to be implemented as required once each matter has been heard by the Courts; By-elections conducted as necessary; deferred provisions of the Electoral Act to be put into effect; and systems and processes to be reviewed and improved. It is now more than 7 years since the Biometric Voter Registration system was introduced in the Solomon Islands and if funds permit it would also be very useful to use the period between now and the next General Election to undertake an audit of the hardware and software. It would also be useful to undertake some random sampling of the data itself to ensure the integrity level is still at a very high level.

I am particularly pleased to see the way in which registration and voting data is presented in this Report in the various charts and statistical tables. Its compilation in such detailed form is new for the Electoral Commission and its careful analysis of all the major activities undertaken, and the recommendations arising from it, is an important part of the General Election process itself.

I commend it to those who wish to be better informed about the processes used and outcomes achieved in conducting the 2019 National General Election.



**Hon. Patteson Oti**  
**Chair of the Solomon Islands**  
**Electoral Commission**



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Solomon Islands Parliament consists of 50 members, directly elected from single-member constituencies based on the first-past-the-post electoral system. The Parliamentary term is four years.

This formal Report on the 2019 General Election is the first of its kind for the Solomon Islands Electoral Commission. While its main target audience will be Parliament, it will also be provided to other key stakeholders such as contesting candidates and Political Parties, Government Departments, the media, domestic and international observer groups, civil society organisations and donor organisations.

Although the 2019 General Election is the primary subject of this Report it needs to be remembered that the election is the culmination of many other activities. The General Election does not stand on its own, and much of this significant pre-work commenced some time earlier. For example, a comprehensive review of the electoral legislation began in late 2017 resulting in the passage of a new Electoral Act in September 2018; and preparations started in late 2017 for the nationwide Biometric Voter Registration update which commenced in early September 2018. Without the completion of these vitally important “other” tasks the General Election would not have been held to the expected high standard. All this important pre-work is also covered in this Report, especially the Biometric Voter Registration update.

In terms of the timeline for the General Election, the legislative framework requires that Parliament dissolve itself on the anniversary of 4 years after it meets following the previous General Election. The “dissolution” of the 10th Parliament took place on 18 December 2018, and with it a specific chain of events commenced.

First, in terms of section 74 of the Constitution, the Governor General was required to formally proclaim the date for the next General Election. This had to be a date not later than four months following the date of dissolution – so by 17 April 2019. The electoral legislation then required that a series of notices be prepared by the Commission and by Returning Officers in each constituency, each notice requiring public display and advertising within constituencies.

These notices were largely for the public, intending candidates, and parties, and officially notified the date for the General Election; the period within which candidate nominations needed to be submitted (the opening and closing dates); the last day for the withdrawal of a person’s candidature; the date the draw would be held for the order nominated candidates will appear on the ballot paper; the hours that all polling stations would open and close across the country; the last day for the appointment of counting agents and polling agents; and the last day for campaigning. The Electoral Act 2018 prescribes the specific dates by which each notice needed to be publicly advertised.

Interspersed amongst all the notices mentioned above, the Electoral Commission was continuing its readiness for polling day. During the time of the General Election the Electoral Commission’s staffing numbers increase significantly. The Solomon Islands Electoral Office (SIEO) usually has a small team of just 11 staff on its establishment, so it needs to appoint literally thousands of casual staff to help it run such a major electoral event. In terms of short term contracted personnel there were 10 Election Managers (one for each Province); 50 Returning Officers (one for each constituency); more than 150 Assistant Returning Officers (a minimum of three to provide support to each Returning Officer); more than 3,100 staff allocated to each of the 1,043 polling stations (three to each polling station); and some 200 support staff. Added to this number was some 20 permanent staff and advisers based in the Commission’s office in Honiara, and the four-person Commission itself. This meant a total of more than 3,600 staff were working across the country on polling day. While the number reduces during the counting period, the Commission is a significant employer during a General Election.

The 2019 General Election again used the Biometric Voter Registration (BVR) system – this was procured by the Solomon Islands Government in 2012 - and once again the List of Voters proved its worth in terms of accuracy and integrity. With nearly 360,000 names on the List of Voters it is inevitable that there will be issues from time to time, but the feedback from voters, candidates and parties continued to be

generally positive. During this General Election the very high number of cross border registrations was a major cause for concern. This is not a fault with the BVR system – it is a matter for candidates and the public at large to reduce or eliminate. People being offered inducements to change their registration details from one constituency to another simply to be able to vote for one candidate or another are actually breaking the law because people should only be registering to vote where they are ordinarily resident. More time will need to be spent on this matter and consultations will need to take place with parties and candidates on how it might be prevented in the future.

The great majority of commentary before, during and after polling day (from the media, domestic and international observers, election officials and the public at large) was positive and that polling day itself was “calm and peaceful” across the country. Those same reports provided early feedback that many voters attended the 1,043 polling stations around the country, some queuing well before the polling stations opened at 7am to make sure they could cast their vote. Most reports received by the SIEO were that voters were in a positive mood and well behaved. Feedback on the General Election from domestic and international observer missions was highly complimentary, as was the feedback from political parties, candidates, the media and the public at large.

A small amount of negative feedback came from the media around what they believed to be an unnecessarily lengthy period for the counting of votes. The Chief Electoral Officer responded advising that it was of critical importance the count was conducted by each of the 50 Returning Officers in full accordance with the law and that it was vital all valid votes were counted - and that all invalid votes were not counted. He went on to say that it was better the count took a little longer and be 100% correct rather than being pushed along quickly with a chance of getting it wrong. Most results were declared within 3 days of polling day with just one taking 5 days. These time periods were consistent with other election management bodies in the region, with some taking quite a bit longer to finally declare their results.

A total of 310,667 votes were cast across the country with the final voter turnout averaging 86.41% (the highest Constituency turnout was West Guadalcanal at 95.81% and the lowest, Temotu Pele, at 77.28%). Of the total votes cast 309,765 were valid, and 902 were regarded by Returning Officers as being invalid. Of this figure 765 votes were informal, meaning the voter’s intention was not clear; the voter had marked the ballot paper multiple times; or had not marked the ballot paper at all. The remaining 137 ballot papers contained no official mark. Again these figures are all low compared to most other countries in the region – the total number of invalid votes represented 0.29% of all votes cast.

The Commission was itself full of praise for all electoral officials, noting the successful conduct of the National General Election was a credit to the hard work and commitment of everyone involved. That such a significant constitutional activity was conducted to a very high standard; was completed on time, and was in full compliance with the relevant legislation in the great majority of cases was an excellent achievement.

# THE CONSTITUTION & THE ELECTORAL ACT 2018

A good part of 2017 and the first six months of 2018 was spent developing the Electoral Bill 2018 and the Constitutional Amendment (Electoral Reform) Bill 2018. Following extensive drafting and consultation, including consultative workshops in each of the 9 Provinces and Honiara, the Bills were submitted to Cabinet and Parliament for approval on March 2018.

Parliament's Bills and Legislation Committee sought the SIEO's attendance at its hearings on 15, 16 and 17 May 2018 to respond to issues and concerns and to provide justification for matters they wished to discuss. The Committee made some minor changes to the Bills as submitted but were subsequently enacted by Parliament in August 2018. The Constitutional Amendment (Electoral Reform) Act became operational on the day of assent (7 September) and the Electoral Act became operational by gazette notice on 25 September 2018. The coming into force of the new Electoral Act brought with it a number of new responsibilities for the SIEC, however its enactment was so close to the delivery of the Biometric Voter Registration update and to some extent parts of the General Election too, that some provisions needed to be deferred. These were sections 4, 12, Part 4 Division 5, and 107(2) and it was a Commission decision to defer them - based primarily on the SIEO's difficulty to properly implement those requirements in the very short timeframe, while at the same time focusing on the preparations for the National General Election. These following sections were formally deferred by Gazette notice on 25 September 2018:

- i. Meaning of ordinarily resident (Section 4);
- ii. SIEC to assume responsibility for provincial elections (s.12);



- iii. Conduct pre-registration of citizens who are 17 years old (Part 4, Division 5); and
- iv. Publishing the list of electors who had voted (s.107(2))

▲ Chief Electoral Officer addressing members of the Solomon Islands Association of People with Disabilities during SIEO/SECSIP workshop, Feb. 2019.

## Roles and Responsibilities - the Solomon Islands Electoral Commission (SIEC)

Amendments to section 57 and the creation of s.57A in the Constitution changed the make-up of the Electoral Commission and the role of Chief Electoral Officer. The changes under s.57A have already been implemented and the changes to s.57 will follow as soon as possible in 2019.

For ease of reference the following Table compares the old and amended versions of s.57 of the Constitution:

**S.57**

1. There shall be an Electoral Commission consisting of –
  - a. the Speaker, who shall be Chairman of the Commission; and
  - b. two other members (in this section referred to as “the appointed members”) appointed by the Governor-General, acting in accordance with the advice of the Judicial and Legal Service Commission.
2. A person shall not be qualified to be an appointed member of the Commission if he is a member of, or a candidate for election to, Parliament or the Honiara city council or any provincial assembly.
3. Subject to the provisions of the next following subsection, an appointed member of the Commission shall vacate his office –
  - a. at the expiration of the period specified in the instrument by which he was appointed; or
  - b. if any circumstances arise that, if he were not a member of the Commission, would cause him to be disqualified from appointment as such.
4. The provisions of section 126 of this Constitution shall apply to an appointed member of the Electoral Commission as they apply to a member of the Public Service Commission except that subsection (7) shall apply as if for the words “in accordance with the advice of the Prime Minister” there were substituted the words “in accordance with the advice of the Judicial and Legal Service Commission”.

**S.57 – Electoral Commission**

1. The Electoral Commission is established.
2. The Commission comprises:
  - a. a Chairperson; and
  - b. two other members; and
  - c. the Chief Electoral Officer appointed under section 57A.
3. The Governor-General may, acting on the advice of the Judicial and Legal Service Commission, appoint the members mentioned in subsection (2)(a) and (b) (the “appointed members”).
4. The Chief Electoral Officer:
  - a. may take part in any deliberation of the Commission; but
  - b. must not vote on it.
5. At least one member of the Commission must be a woman.
6. Only the following persons are qualified to be appointed as appointed members of the Commission:
  - a. a former Governor-General;
  - b. a former Speaker;
  - c. a retired judge;
  - d. a former Member of Parliament;
  - e. a current or retired head of any religious organisation or of any civil society organisation; (f) a person who has held a distinguished career in the government or private sector;
  - g. a public officer of the permanent secretary level.
7. The following persons are not qualified to be appointed as appointed members of the Commission:
  - a. a member of or a candidate for election to:
    - i. Parliament; or
    - ii. a Provincial Assembly; or
    - iii. the Honiara City Council; or
  - b. a person who is a member of a political party registered under a law relating to political parties.
8. Subject to subsection (9) an appointed member vacates the office of the member:
  - a. when the member’s period of appointment expires; or
  - b. if any circumstances arise that, if the person were not an appointed member, would cause the person to be disqualified from appointment as a member.
9. An appointed member may be removed from office under section 126 as if the office of appointed member were an office to which that section applies.
10. However, reference to “in accordance with the advice of the Prime Minister” in section 126(7) is modified to read “acting on the advice of the Judicial and Legal Service Commission”, for the purpose of subsection (9) of this section.
11. Any other terms and conditions of appointment of the appointed members are as prescribed.”

**S.57A – Chief Electoral Officer**

1. The position of the Chief Electoral Officer is established as a public office.
2. The Chief Electoral Officer is the administrative head of the office responsible for electoral matters and other prescribed matters.
3. The Governor-General may, acting on the advice of the Judicial and Legal Service Commission, appoint a suitably qualified and experienced person as the Chief Electoral Officer.
4. Other terms and conditions of appointment and other functions, duties and powers of the Chief Electoral Officer are as prescribed.”

Section 58 of the Constitution remains the same, giving the Electoral Commission general responsibility for the registration of electors and the election of Members of Parliament. In effect the Electoral Commission is the policy and decision-making body, while the SIEO is the “delivery” or “implementing” agency.

The Commission is comprised of a Chairperson and 3 other members, one of whom must be a woman. The members of the Electoral Commission during the conduct of the 2018 Biometric Voter Registration update in 2018 and the General Election in 2019 were as follows:

- Hon. Ajilon Nasiu – Chair
- Taeasi Sanga – Deputy Chair
- Jeffrey Deve – Member
- Mose Saitala – Chief Electoral Officer and Member (non-voting)



▲  
The Electoral Commission at the Tally Room, Mendana Hotel – 6 April 2019. Left to right – Mose Saitala, Jeffrey Deve, Taeasi Sanga and Ajilon Nasiu.

The Electoral Commission met on several occasions in 2018 and up to 30 June 2019 to monitor progress, resolve issues of concern, and make policy decisions.

Hon. Pattison Oti automatically took over as Chairperson of the Electoral Commission following his election as the new Speaker of Parliament on 15 May 2019. With the new section 57(6)(b) of the Constitution (as amended by the Constitutional Amendment (Electoral Reform) Act 2018), where the Chairperson of the Commission can no longer be the Speaker of Parliament, there is a need to replace the current Chair. Section 9 of the Constitutional Amendment (Electoral Reform) Act 2018, however, provides that

the Electoral Commission that existed before the commencement of the Act will continue up to the date the new members take their oaths of office. However, with so much still to be done the Chief Electoral Officer has requested to hold off on seeking a new Commission until the first-half of 2020 when the implementation of all SIEC reform programs are expected to have commenced.

### Roles and Responsibilities - the Solomon Islands Electoral Office (SIEO)

The operational arm of the Electoral Commission, known as the SIEO, is headed by the Chief Electoral Officer. It is responsible for all activities relating to the preparation and conduct of the electoral processes. Within the SIEO there are a number of very small business units:

- Corporate Services is responsible for ensuring that effective and efficient administrative support is provided to the SIEC for its day-to-day running. The Principal Administration Officer Corporate Services has overall responsibility for the management and activities of Human Resources, Finance, and General Administrative Services.
- The Operations unit is responsible for developing the SIEC’s operational plan and ensuring its implementation. The Manager Operations has overall responsibility for this unit and as such oversees the strategies and activities of Training, Logistics, Field Operations and Coordination, the BVR Data Centre, and Public Awareness and Media.

During a major event such as the 2019 General Election, the following additional responsibilities fall on the SIEO to establish and manage:

- Provincial Offices - the SIEO does not have a permanent presence in each Province at this point but rather establishes a temporary presence around major electoral events (e.g. Voter Registration and Elections). Although experienced staff are often employed in the field on a casual basis, their availability cannot be taken for granted and remains a concern.

- Election Managers (EM's) provide temporary management support in each of the 9 Provinces, and Honiara, primarily to better coordinate electoral activities with and between RO's at the Provincial level. An EM, who works to the Chief Electoral Officer, heads each Provincial electoral office. EM's are supported by an Accountant who was responsible for financial matters pertaining to a Province.
- Returning Officers (RO's) are engaged by the Commission in each of the 50 Constituencies to manage the implementation of electoral activities. Among many other tasks the RO's are responsible for facilitating the candidate nomination process; identifying suitable and accessible polling stations; recruiting and training of poll-workers, counting of ballot papers at counting centres; the announcement of the winning candidate in the election for the constituency they represent. RO's are assisted by Assistant Returning Officers (ARO's) and poll workers.
- Poll-workers. The SIEO recruited approximately 3,200 poll-workers to manage the 1,043 polling stations. In each polling station there was one Presiding Officer and two Clerks/Assistants.

During a major electoral event such as the 2019 General Election the electoral structure operates as follows:

- Electoral Commission**  
(Chairman and three other members (one of which is the Chief Electoral Officer) appointed by the Governor General]
- Solomon Islands Electoral Office**  
(Managed by the Chief Electoral Officer)
- Electoral Managers**  
(One for each province and one for Honiara City Council)
- Returning Officers**  
(One for each Constituency)
- Assistant Returning Officers**
- Presiding Officers**  
(One in charge of each Polling Station)
- Polling Assistants**  
(Two assisting each Presiding Officer)

### Support from other Ministries etc.

It might also be useful to note under this organisational arrangement heading that the SIEO continues to work closely with other Ministry's, Departments and agencies. By way of example, following a number of meetings with the Police in early 2018 a formal Memorandum of Understanding was put in place between the SIEO and RSIPF to ensure the two organisations coordinated their efforts on safety and security during the election. as another example, a Memorandum of Agreement was entered into with Telekom regarding the SMS text messaging platform and the "288" voter information database for voters to check their registration particulars. These Memoranda worked well and it is the SIEO's intention to continue them for large electoral events in the future.

### Donor Support

Two donor funded support programs have been embedded in the SIEO for some time now. For the duration of the 2018 BVR update and the 2019 General Election the two Programs had the following staffing profiles:

- The Electoral Systems Strengthening Program (ESSP), funded by the Government of Australia, has been providing assistance and support to the SIEC since 2005. In the last two years the focus of the two Advisers has been on management, electoral reform, risk management and mentoring;
- The Strengthening of the Electoral Cycle in the Solomon Islands Project (SECSIP), funded by the Government of Australia, the European Union and UNDP, has been supporting the SIEC since 2013. Phase 1 of SECSIP ran from July 2013 to June 2017, and Phase 2 from July 2017 to June 2020. During the 2018 BVR update and the 2019 General Election the SECSIP team comprised of four international staff, five national staff and seven graduates. The focus in the last few years has been on operations, media and awareness, and gender equity.

Personnel from both programs provided significant support and the Chief Electoral Officer made special mention of his sincere gratitude to donors, and the staff of both teams for their encouragement, support, guidance and input for the many years they have provided their expertise.

# VOTER REGISTRATION

This Part of the Report deals with the registration of eligible Solomon Islands citizens so they can vote in electoral events. Section 55 of the Constitution prescribes the criteria for registration as follows:

## s.55

1. Subject to the provisions of this section, a person shall be entitled to be registered as an elector if, and shall not be so entitled unless -
  - a. he is a citizen of Solomon Islands; and
  - b. he has attained the age of eighteen years.
2. No person shall be entitled to be registered as an elector -
  - a. in more than one constituency; or
  - b. in any constituency in which he is not ordinarily resident.
3. No person shall be entitled to be registered as an elector who -
  - a. is under sentence of death imposed on him by a court in any part of the world, or is under a sentence of imprisonment (by whatever name called) for a term of, or exceeding, six months, other than a sentence in lieu of a fine, but including a suspended sentence, imposed on him by such a court or substituted by competent authority for some other sentence imposed on him by such a court;
  - b. is certified to be insane or otherwise adjudged to be of unsound mind under any law for the time being in force in Solomon Islands; or
  - c. is disqualified from registration as an elector or from voting at elections under any law for the time being in force in Solomon Islands relating to offences connected with elections.
4. For the purposes of paragraph (a) of the preceding subsection two or more terms of imprisonment that are required to be served consecutively shall be regarded as a single term of imprisonment for the aggregate period of those terms.

## Overview of the Biometric Voter Registration (BVR) system

Following an evaluation of voter registration systems in 2012 representatives from the SIEO and the Ministry of Home Affairs visited the Fiji Elections Office in Suva to examine their BVR system in a working environment. The BVR system was provided by Electoral Services International (ESI) from Canada. The travelling team was impressed with the integrity of the process, especially how the system was able to check the names and biometric data of all persons in the database to determine whether there were any possible multiple enrolments. The presentation of the finished List of Voters with clear colour photographs (head and shoulders shot) of all registered persons was also a plus as it gave polling officials an opportunity to make absolutely sure the person in front of them was who they said they were.

Following further discussion with the Solomon Islands Government opted to procure an almost identical BVR system to that used in Fiji for the SIEO to register voters for the 2014 General Election and beyond. This type of BVR system uses a programming language called SQL – this software is commonly used in business to manage data held in a relational database management system. Essentially the database holds the records of every registrant, and on initiating the relevant software it can produce a report of possible multiple registrants based on their “matched” biometric data. Once all new registrations are vetted for accuracy and confirmed on the BVR database, and all multiple registrations are deleted upon the Commission’s decisions, the List of Voters is ready in its final form for use in the next electoral event – whether that be a By-election or General Election. Of course, the database is regularly backed up with copies archived and stored off site.

To use the BVR system a trained operator has a kit containing a laptop loaded with the BVR software, a camera to take a high definition “head and shoulders” shot of the registrant; a thumb print scanner; and a small printer to produce an identity card. Every intending registrant was required to complete a registration form, Form B - Claim for Registration, and signing a declaration that the information they had provided was true and correct.

With ESI's assistance the BVR system was utilised to register voters for the 2014 General Election. From an operational viewpoint it went very well and there was a high degree of confidence in the system from the public, candidates and political parties, and the SIEO itself. A large number of possible multiple registrants were identified in the Provisional List of voters in 2014 and some were referred to the Police to examine. For a variety of reasons these were not pursued.

From 2015 to late 2017 only minor work was carried out on the BVR system, largely because there was insufficient funding to carry out anything of major significance. This minor work included an early examination of all the software, laptops, cameras, thumb print scanners and printers to ensure they were fit for purpose when the update got underway. Where there were issues, repairs were attempted to make sure there were enough complete units to use in the field when the voter registration update got underway in 2018.

### The Biometric Voter Registration update in 2018/19

In early 2018 more detailed preparations got underway for the nationwide BVR update. This was initially scheduled by the SIEO for April or thereabouts but again there were funding issues. It was eventually settled that the BVR update it would start late August/early September.

The List of Voters is the cornerstone of any election – if it is not accurate or even perceived not to be accurate, the public is always likely to have concerns and/or little confidence in its content. Such a lack of confidence can lead to major problems during and after the registration period closes, and on polling day itself. It was therefore vital that the highest degree of care and attention to detail was brought to bear to “get it right” during the registration process. An accurate roll is a must for a well conducted election.

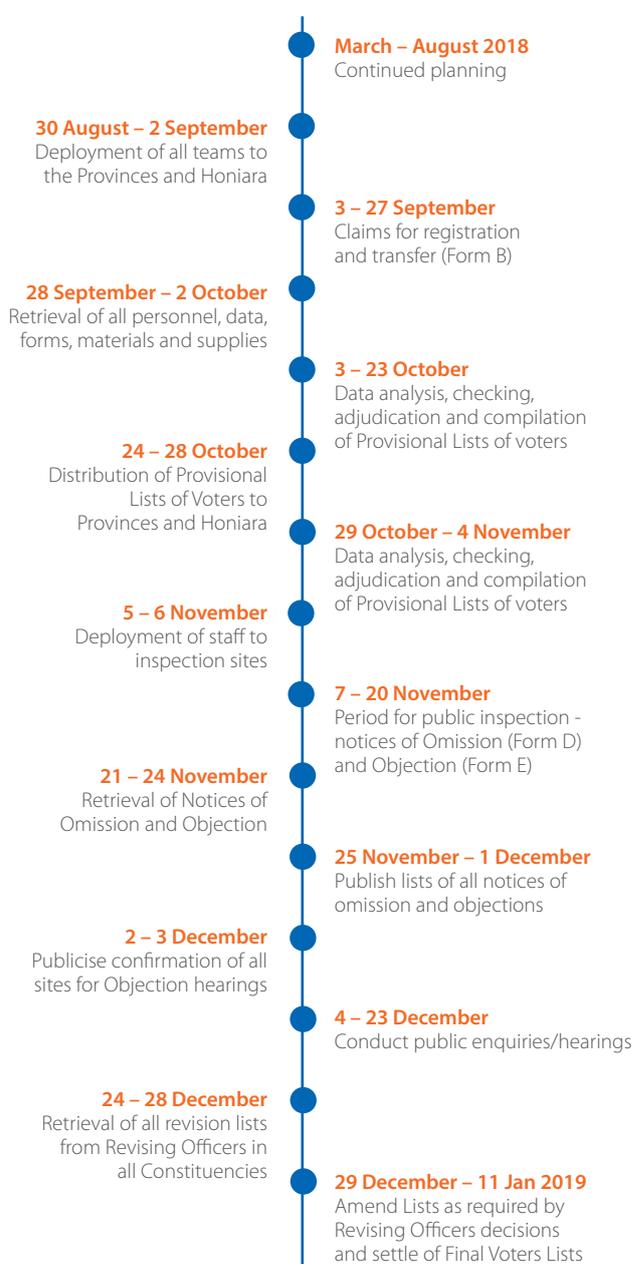
The detailed preparations included more thorough planning; the updating of manuals; the appointment and training of Registration Managers and Registration Officers; the recruitment of some 2,000 Data Entry personnel; the development and agreement on a workable logistics framework; liaising closely with Ministry Tenders Board and the Central Tenders Board on tendering and contracts for vessels to help with transportation of voter registration materials and supplies to Provinces; the development and implementation of a comprehensive public awareness strategy; printing of the provisional list of voters and making it available for the public to check; conducting the voter registration update across the country;

mapping out how the omissions and objections process will work etc; and at the end, producing a final list of voters to use on polling day. Once all the above was complete a draft timeline of the 2018 BVR update was prepared, agreed, and put in place.

### Timeline

As a result of many internal meetings and subsequent discussions with the Electoral Commission, the following Table summarises the key activities and action dates in the agreed timeline for the update of the List of Voters:

#### Timeline



As can be seen from the Table the actual BVR update period in 2018/19 ran from 3 September 2018 to 11 January 2019 - a total of 139 days. This “actual” period does not include all the earlier operational planning, recruitment, training, public awareness, logistics and movement of the various teams to prepare for the first day of registration etc. With the operational planning and delivery period added on, the whole process required some eight months of concentrated effort. While not being as complex as a General Election to manage, a nation-wide voter registration update is none-the-less a highly complex and time bound process requiring a lot of drive and commitment.

### Public Information, Education and Outreach

The SIEO’s key communication goal was to provide relevant information that would encourage all eligible persons to be aware of and participate in the voter registration process during the registration period as necessary. To support that goal the Public Awareness team of just four staff set the following objectives:

- Ensuring all eligible voters who were not already on the voter list, to get onto it
- First time voters get the chance to register and are encouraged to do so
- Inform current registrants that they should update their details if they have changed since the last time they registered – warn eligible persons that the latest registration they apply for will be the one that remains on the database; previous registrations will be superseded
- Encourage everyone to take responsibility to assist clean up the voter list – warn eligible persons that it is an offence to register more than once
- Everyone who has registered understands they should check that their names on the provisional voter list after registering
- Everyone who has registered understands that they will need to report any problems with the provisional list after checking
- Everyone knows what to do during the public inquiry process, especially those objected to

The main messaging about the BVR update was via the media, press and radio, using a mix of direct advertising, weekly radio programs and talk back shows, live interviews and proactive press releases. Various methodologies were used to convey information at the right time to eligible persons. These included “face to face” awareness programs in schools, churches, Civil Society Group meetings, market gatherings etc. In most cases this information was delivered by Registration Officials working in the field.

The SIEO also used comprehensive text messaging, Facebook and its own website to convey relevant information to the public in a timely fashion. In addition, the two major players in the field of communications, Telekom and B-Mobile (who have a reach of some 200,000 and 150,000 subscribers respectively) provided the SIEO with an instant messaging platform to get information out to all their subscribers in a cheap and timely fashion.

### Appointment of Casual Staff

As mentioned earlier in this report the BVR update was a significant undertaking, both from an operational and management perspective. While the majority of the Commission’s 1,100 casual staff are drawn from the pool of previous appointees there is a need to locate and appoint others to replace those who are unable to get release time from their employers or are otherwise not suitable for reappointment. Similarly, many of the middle management and data entry staff are those who worked for the Commission on BVR in 2014. That said there was a need to advertise for around half the staff being engaged to work on the BVR update in 2018. Advertisements were placed in local newspapers, on the radio and in the Commission’s website. Applications were shortlisted within a short period of time after they closed. Given the number involved and the short timeframe the Commission needed to work within it was not possible to undertake interviews for those Data Entry personnel who were new to the process. Most of the Data entry personnel were Honiara based for training purposes.

Once decisions had been made all the suitable casual staff were offered contracts, and once signed each person was required to attend at least one formal training session in Honiara. The pay rates that were fixed for each employee category for the BVR update are set out below:

#### Biometric Voter Registration

NO.	OFFICERS	QTY	PAY RATES
1	Registration Manager	10	\$10,151
2	Registration Officer	51	\$ 9,100
3	Assistant Registration Officer	200	\$ 7,500
4	ARO - clerk	197	\$ 7,500
5	ARO - Data	278	\$ 7,500
6	Revising Officer	50	\$ 9,100
7	Assistant Revising Officer	322	\$ 7,500
8	Data Processing Officer	20	\$ 1,500
9	Accountant	10	\$ 9,100

All rates were fixed, and calculated on the basis of the content, complexity, responsibility and duration of the person's contract.

The very small HR team of just two persons carried out an important role in a tight timeframe and their largely behind the scene efforts assisted the Commission to carry out a high quality BVR update for the Solomon Islands.

### ☒ Training

The SIEO's Training Unit comprises just one staff member so it is not surprising that external support was required to train officials at the management level as well as training for the hundreds of Data Entry personnel employed to work in the 892 registration centres around the country. At the SIEO's request the BVR system provider, ESI, was on hand to help the SIEO to facilitate its many training workshops. The main venue for this training was the St Barnabas Church Annex in Honiara where groups of around 50-60 attended each of the half (to three quarters) of a day sessions. This number of participants was higher than was preferred by the respective trainers, but it was necessary due to the high number of participants that needed to be shown their tasks and given some hands-on time with the hardware and software. It was also necessary to provide time for questions and answers because once the trained staff got out into the field they were largely on their own.

For management level BVR officials, support was also provided to the SIEO trainer by two personnel from the Australian Electoral Commission. This was targeted at training for Registration Managers and Registration Officers, and again was delivered in Honiara. These sessions were highly interactive as the trainers reviewed the Registration Officer's training manuals, spending a lot of time on eligibility for registration; the criteria for ordinarily resident; how the omissions and objections process would work; and how public hearings should be conducted etc.

In a first for participants all Registration Managers, Registration Officers and Accountants were required to make a formal pledge at the end of training to uphold the integrity and honesty of the registration process in carrying out their duties. It was intended that this would emphasise to them the importance of the role they were about to carry out and in turn give confidence to the public at large that they were serious about doing their job properly. This pledge was taken on the Bible and presided over by a Minister of the Church. All participants provided high quality feedback on these training sessions.

### ☒ Logistics

One of the biggest challenges with conducting events on a country wide basis, and one such as the Solomon Islands with many remote land masses, is the ability to get the right staff with the right materials to the right place at the right time. Ensuring that all the staff, equipment and materials were present in all the required villages and towns in accordance with the published itinerary and timetable was exceedingly difficult. But the public had been informed of the dates and times voter registration facilities would be made available in every village/location so the SIEO had to make sure they kept to the programme.

As might be expected there were a few slippages, largely due to weather conditions preventing staff getting from A to B; and a few equipment failures where laptops failed to boot up, cameras did not function properly, and/or printers did not work as expected meaning officials were unable to provide people with a voter ID card after registration. However, these were not common problems and with good communication the SIEO was still pleased with its efforts.

Contracts were negotiated with responsible shipping companies to get the SIEO registration teams from Honiara to their various places of work in all constituencies. This worked well although the same issues keep occurring where vessel owners want to maximise the space by offering passage to the public even when the vessel was contracted by the SIEO. This had happened before and it was hoped it would not re-occur, but it seems even stronger contractual arrangements will be needed in the future.

### ☒ Operations

The Operations Unit is the hub of the SIEO in terms of operational activities and the team of five staff have the overall responsibility for making sure the BVR update is carried out smoothly and effectively.

During the BVR update some 872 voter registration centres were appointed around the country by officials for the public at large to utilise for various voter registration activities. These were set up in convenient locations so the public could access them during the prescribed times to check that their name was still on the List of voters from 2014; check that their details were correct or update them; or object to others who had registered. The voter registration venues used in 2018 were the same as those used for the 2014 BVR update as well as being used as polling stations for previous General Elections. This has been a deliberate action in an effort to get the public used to a common venue for electoral activities.

For the public there were three key phases in the voter registration process. The first was a 25 day period for people to check the 2014 List of Voters – if the person’s registration details were still correct and their place of residence had not changed, there was no further action required. If their registration details were not correct or their name did not appear at all (possibly a new registrant) the person needed to complete a Claim for Registration (Form B).

The second phase enabled the public to check the Provisional List and advise of any omissions, or to file an objection against any person they believe is not entitled to be registered as a voter in that constituency.

The third phase related solely to the objections process, in particular the conduct of public hearings by appointed Revising Officers to examine and make decisions on all the objections lodged.

### Special Out of Constituency Voter Registration Centre

The SIEO again made arrangements for a special out of constituency voter registration centre to be set up in Honiara to make it easier for the many people living and working in in the city to register to vote in the General Election (this was first done in 2014). Despite a great deal of planning and management the public made unprecedented use of this special facility and it took a huge number of claims for new registration and applications for changes to existing records. The total number of claims and applications received topped 54,000.

These exceedingly high volumes caused significant problems for both the public and the staff working there. More and more officials were quickly trained and engaged by the manager in charge of the facility to try to cope with the high volumes, and in particular to try to reduce the waiting times for the public. Despite this in the last few days there were still further problems, and anger, that there were not enough staff and people were unable to register. People blamed the SIEO for insufficient facilities

and following internal discussions with the Electoral Commission a 2 day extension was granted in the hope that any person who had not been able to submit their claim to register as a voter, would be able to do so before the extended registration period closed. As it happens very few registrations were taken during the 2 days extension period and registration closed without any queues on Tuesday 2 October.

It is important to note though that based on our experience from the 2019 General Election, and the fact that SIEO is changing the voter registration phase to a continuous process, every day from today till a month or so before Parliament is dissolved, the SIEO will no longer be implementing out-of-constituency voter registration. All voters will be required to go and register or update their details in the registration centres for their constituencies. There will be plenty of time for voters to do this because the voter registration phase will change to a continuous process ending just before Parliament mandatory dissolution.

### Provisional List of Voters

After the SIEO had processed all registration forms and application to transfer from all registrants in all 50 constituencies, they were able to provide a Provisional List of Voters. This was finalised by the SIEO on 23 October and distributed to each of the 50 Registration Officers in the week that followed. The Provisional Lists were then made available at each of the Voter Registration Centres between 29 October and 4 November for the public to check their accuracy.

*People checking the Provisional List of voters in early November 2018 – Source ANU Observer Team.*



## Objections and Omissions

The period for objections and omissions ran from 7 November to 20 November. Any person wishing to advise the SIEO that their name was missing from the Provisional List (despite them having registered) used Form D; any person wishing to file an objection against someone else appearing on the List of Voters for one of the reasons stated on the form, used Form E. Following the close of the omissions and objections period a total of 666 persons had submitted Form D's to advise that their name was missing from the List of voters; and 14,853 persons had lodged objections against others appearing in the List.

The next step was for all the appointed Revising Officers in the constituencies to consider all the objections filed through a formal hearings process. These were carried out across the country between 4 and 23 December 2018.

Once all the hearings had been completed and the decisions had been made by the respective Revising Officers, each result was actioned strictly in accordance with the Revising Officers decisions by the SIEO. In summary, of the 14,853 objections filed, 11,879 were approved (and the names were duly deleted from the List of Voters), and 2,974 were rejected (the names remained on the List of Voters). All applications regarding omissions from the List were handled by the SIEO based on all the information available

A copy of the final List of voters looked like this:

Solomon Islands Electoral Commission - Provisional list of voters

Province: CHOISEUL - Constituency: EAST CHOISEUL - Polling Station: KOLBE

 Core Thelma Kilbau	 Rosemary Kilbau	 Lela Vira Kilbau	 Lela Vira Kilbau	 Lela Vira Kilbau	 Lela Vira Kilbau	 Lela Vira Kilbau	 Lela Vira Kilbau	 Lela Vira Kilbau
 Rosemary Kilbau	 Lela Vira Kilbau	 Lela Vira Kilbau	 Lela Vira Kilbau	 Lela Vira Kilbau	 Lela Vira Kilbau	 Lela Vira Kilbau	 Lela Vira Kilbau	 Lela Vira Kilbau
 Lela Vira Kilbau	 Lela Vira Kilbau	 Lela Vira Kilbau	 Lela Vira Kilbau	 Lela Vira Kilbau	 Lela Vira Kilbau	 Lela Vira Kilbau	 Lela Vira Kilbau	 Lela Vira Kilbau
 Joseph Kilbau	 Joseph Kilbau	 Joseph Kilbau	 Joseph Kilbau	 Joseph Kilbau	 Joseph Kilbau	 Joseph Kilbau	 Joseph Kilbau	 Joseph Kilbau
 Joseph Kilbau	 Joseph Kilbau	 Joseph Kilbau	 Joseph Kilbau	 Joseph Kilbau	 Joseph Kilbau	 Joseph Kilbau	 Joseph Kilbau	 Joseph Kilbau
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 Joseph Kilbau	 Joseph Kilbau	 Joseph Kilbau	 Joseph Kilbau	 Joseph Kilbau	 Joseph Kilbau	 Joseph Kilbau	 Joseph Kilbau	 Joseph Kilbau
 Joseph Kilbau	 Joseph Kilbau	 Joseph Kilbau	 Joseph Kilbau	 Joseph Kilbau	 Joseph Kilbau	 Joseph Kilbau	 Joseph Kilbau	 Joseph Kilbau

Registration retained. Other registrations for this person objected by the Solomon Islands Electoral Commission.

## Complaints

By comparison to the total number of registrations on the List of Voters the number of complaints or allegations of missing data on the List of Voters were minimal. Some related to missing names and it was interesting to note that upon investigation many were found to have not registered in the first place and were attempting to use the omissions process to get onto the List of Voters outside the registration period. Others related to insufficient voter registration centres making it hard for people to register or participate in the registration process, but it is not easy to satisfy all the people all the time.

## Registration Offences

As noted above, part of the process of preparing the Provisional List for public inspection was to run the duplicate checking software to identify any person whose name appears more than once. There were many multiple registrations in 2014, and despite the Electoral Commission widely publicising the checking process it was clear that people thought they could get away with it.

Unfortunately, a similar large number of multiple registrations were taken in 2018 as well. There was a high level of public awareness before and during the 2018 BVR update that registering more than once was an offence under the Electoral Act. The BVR system is very effective in identifying possible multiple registrants and

where the match was a “high probability” the multiple registrations were removed by the SIEC; where there was a “medium or low probability” each registration was checked in detail before any decision was made. The Commission decided that all proven multiple registrations would again be removed and that this time they would work with RSIPF to further investigate and possibly charge those who registered more than twice. This was requested by the Commission on the basis that some who registered twice might have either forgotten about the first registration, or were simply trying to fix up the error they had made during the cross-border registration that they were encouraged to do by candidates.

Despite the offence provisions being made clear, and many media releases issued on the subject, 106 people tried again to register multiple times. Despite the fact the Electoral Commission provided to the Police details of people who committed the offence of providing misleading information when carrying out multiple registration, there was a technical issue making it difficult to prosecute these offenders. The issue was that the Electoral Act 2018 came into operation only on 25 September 2018 and most of these multiple registrations took place before 25 September.

### Costs associated with BVR Update

The initial budget for the nationwide BVR Update was \$23,874,810 however this proved to be insufficient to cater for the whole operation. This was the first time the SIEO had undertaken an update and it was found that many additional activities, and costs, were necessary to undertake the task properly and in accordance with the relevant legislation.

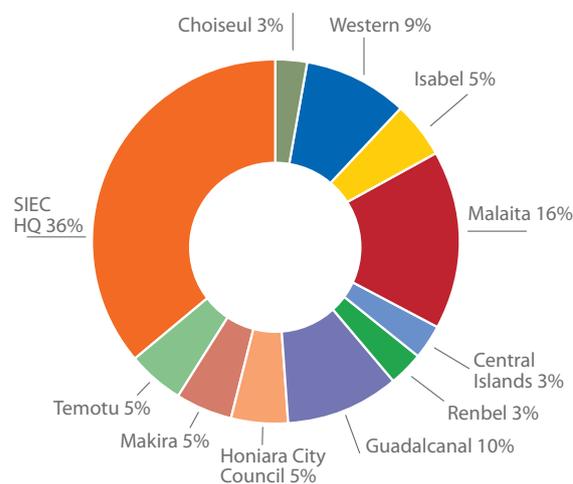
At the mid-point of the BVR update the SIEC sought additional funding of \$12,488,680 through the Supplementary Budget in July 2018 to cater for the shortfall; and due to further additional costs as a result of extending the registration period a further request of \$12,085,008 was sought and approved through a Contingency Warrant. This resulted in a total cost of \$48,448,498 to conduct the 2018/19 BVR update. Voter registration is indeed an expensive process.

It is important to note that the majority of the funding for the BVR update was provided by SIG, although there was support from international development partners – the latter in terms of biometric voter registration equipment, production of voter education materials and support for the implementation of public voter awareness activities. Nearly two thirds of the total SIEO expenditure for the BVR update was used in the Provinces. The following chart illustrates breakdown of expenditure:

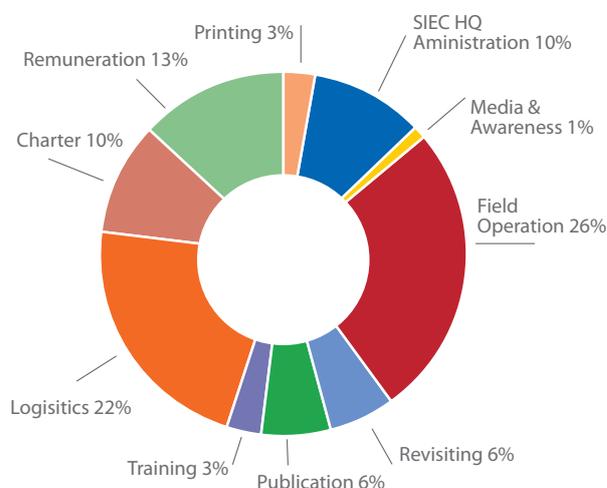
Some 64% of the total expenditure was spent in the Provinces, while 36% was spent at SIEO headquarters for materials, printing, training, various logistical activities etc.

An analysis of the expenditure, by activity heading, is shown below:

### Funding for the BVR Update



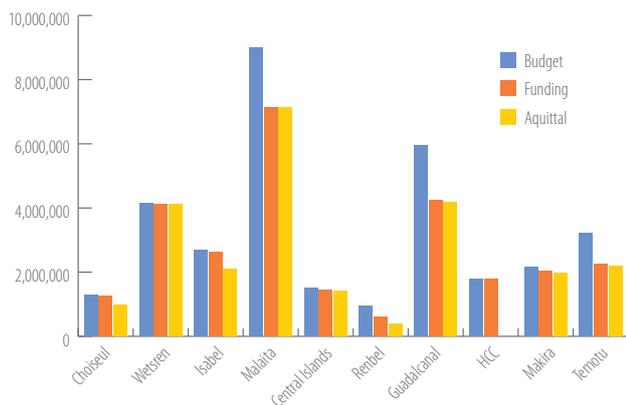
### Activity Expenditure



As can be seen from the above chart, BVR “field operations” had the largest share of the expenditure pie with 26%; followed by logistics with 22%; remuneration 13%; and other costs at 38% - the smallest was Media and Awareness with only 1%. This doesn’t mean that Media and Awareness was not fully funded because donors were supporting some of the costs in this area eg. materials, posters and the engagement of civil society organisations to deliver face to face awareness and education at the grass roots level etc.

As at the end of 2018 the SIEO had acquitted about 95% of all BVR funds sent out to the Provinces. Though challenges were encountered during the acquittal process, it was under control and funds were being acquitted on time. The graph below shows the level of budget, funding and acquittals from each Province. The blue lines represent the budget requests from the Provinces for the BVR operation; red represents the funding issued to each Province by the SIEC; and green represents the acquittals received.

Budget vs Funding vs Acquittal



The graph indicates that not all budget lines were fully funded. This was due to many challenges, some of which were:

- Cash flow problems experienced by SIG
- Unrealistic budgets from Provinces
- Insufficient budgetary allocation for BVR operation due to unexpected high number of registration transfers which required more resources

The acquittal bar shown in green showed that some of the receipts in the Provinces were yet to be justified or very slow in reaching SIEC HQ for verification. In general acquittals were received and retired to MoFT in time before the operational phases of the General Election began.

To ensure the best possible financial management practices in the nine Provinces and Honiara, the SIEO appointed ten Accountants to ensure SIG funds were managed efficiently and effectively, and that correct accounting procedures were followed at all times. All Accountants received relevant training on financial management and SIG processes to equip them to handle public funds allocated for the BVR update, with standard templates being used for reporting purposes to capture every dollar spent. Apart

from the budget over-run I am of the opinion that these measures resulted in the successful financial management of the nationwide BVR update.

There were many financial challenges encountered during the BVR update as represented by the following Table:

### Financial Challenges

CHALLENGES	EFFECT
Delay in funding from MoFT	Each day lost due to funding delay results in adjustment to the timeline affecting therewith the number of contractual days of temporary election officials and service providers
Slow acquittal process from the Provinces	Delay in getting funds from MoFT to the Provinces leading to a delay in BVR activities
Variance in service provider rates	Affected budget allocation for each activity
Unrealistic budget submission from Provinces	Budget cut or not fully funded.

### Risk Management

A Risk Management profile was prepared in April 2018, largely to assess preparedness for the BVR update. The main risks at the time were the lack of adequate and timely finance, the shortage of personnel with detailed technical knowledge about the intricacies of the BVR software, and the concerns around the poor quality of some of the essential BVR hardware used in 2014. With respect to the latter, despite some logistical challenges related to the transport of essential BVR equipment and thanks to the support of international development partners, portable generators, components for BVR kits and batteries made a timely arrival for deployment to the field with the voter registration teams within the established timeline.

With regard to the shortage of finance the Chief Electoral Officer pursued this vigorously with the MoFT and sufficient funding was eventually made available.

At the SIEO's request a software analyst was provided by ESI to work alongside the two staff members with some knowledge of the BVR software to get the system fully prepared for its later use when the BVR update got underway. Finally, it was fortunate that repairs were able to be made to some of the equipment and eventually there were enough laptops, cameras, thumb print scanners and printers available for the 2018 BVR update.

## Periodic vs Continuous Voter Registration

The Solomon Islands currently undertakes its voter registration on a “periodic” basis. This means registration for new people and information updates for existing registrants is carried out when it is needed for a particular event such as a By-election or General Election. Some countries undertake their registration on a “continuous” basis which means a person can register at any time and the List of voters is always up to date.

With the benefit of the experience gained in 2018/19, and after a period of consideration and discussion with stakeholders, the SIEC and SIEO wish to pursue continuous registration from 2020. The intention is that continuous registration would continue until about three months before the dissolution of Parliament so the Final List of voters can be published, showing all registered voters assigned to their polling stations, on or very close to the same day Parliament dissolves. This would be a significant achievement compared to what occurred in 2019 where it took nearly 4 months to have an effective Government in place following the dissolution of Parliament on 18 December 2018. SIEC is now fully committed to complete the voter registration process in good time for the Final List of Electors to be publicised on the day Parliament dissolves.

To set up continuous voter registration and implementing ongoing voter awareness programs throughout the country will however require the permanent establishment of provincial election offices. Costs and operational details are being worked out before SIEC budget bid for 2020 fiscal year is submitted.

## Summary

The measure of “success” in any voter registration process is largely based on rates of participation and complaints. For the BVR update that means all eligible persons had the opportunity to participate in the process - whether that be checking their name appears on the list; that they were able to register (as either a new registrant or an existing registrant wishing to transfer or amend their particulars); that they were able to advise the SIEO of an omission; or that they were able to object to the name of someone else appearing on the list of voters. The SIEO does not have details of those who only checked the list and took no further action, but for all the other actions listed above the number of persons “participating” in the BVR update was very high.

The following Table compares high level outcomes of the voter registration process between 2014 and 2018:

### Outcomes of Voter Registration 2014-2018

	2014	2018
No. of voter registration centres	892	952
No. of registrants on Provisional List of Voters	297,305	371,866
No. of Claims of Omission	2,018	666
Claims of Omission accepted/rejected	1853/165	543/123
No. of Notices of Objection	2,725	14,853
Notices of Objection accepted/rejected	1741/984	11,879/2,974
No. of registrants on Final List of Voters	287,562	359,523
Increase from 2014 to 2019	Not applicable	71,961/25.02%
Gender breakdown – female/male	48.5%/51.5%	48.4%/51.6%
Largest constituency (number of registrants)	13,529 (Cent Honiara)	15,986 (Cent Honiara)
Smallest constituency (number of registrants)	2,512 (Shortlands)	3,142 (Malaita Outer Islands)

Overall the voter registration update went well across the country with the total registered voters increasing from 287,562 in 2014, to 359,523 in 2019 – an increase of 71,961. As is usual with large scale projects the voter registration process was not without problems. As each arose, they were discussed and resolved, on occasions following consultation with the Electoral Commission.

One particular issue that affected a few constituencies was a process that became known as “cross-border” registration. It seems that in most cases this was at the instigation of candidates who presumably wished to bolster their support by getting groups of people (sometimes large groups) to transfer from one constituency to another. This occurred even though the majority of persons involved had no registration entitlement to shift to the new constituency. The SIEO moved quickly to issue media releases etc informing the public at large not to be encouraged by candidates and parties to register in locations other than where they resided, and while this targeted public information campaign was reasonably effective

it resulted in even more transfer applications as the persons concerned sought to transfer themselves back to their correct constituency again. The total number of applications to transfer from one address to another, or one constituency to another, was 54,687. One of the reasons that there were so many cross-border registrations arises mainly because of the SIEO's inability to acquire proof that a registrant-applicant is ordinarily resident in the constituency s/he is trying to register in. The SIEO's difficulty in effectively verifying the 'ordinarily resident' claim stems from several factors:

- i. the BVR process started on 3 September under the old Electoral Act which did not define ordinarily resident (it is defined in the new Electoral Act 2018 which was operationalized on 25 September 2018);
- ii. the absence of any clear or workable (practically verifiable) definition of ordinarily resident makes it impossible for the SIEO to impose a requirement of proof when one applies to register (new or transfer) as a voter in a constituency.

There were also a few allegations of names missing from the Final List of voters. Upon investigation by SIEO officials most occurrences stemmed from the fact that the person concerned had been objected to during the omissions and objections phase – that is the Revising Officer decided after a hearing eventually that the person's name should be deleted from the List. Informing persons who have been objected to is a difficult task, especially when some of those are from other parts of the constituency, or even in other constituencies or remote locations. It was evident that more work is necessary during the next update to ensure people are advised they have been objected to and encouraging them to attend the objection hearing if they are able to.

When time permits further work will be done on the List of Voters to ensure it is in the best possible shape for the next electoral event. Using a BVR process for voter registration is still very new in the Solomon Islands and the SIEO will continue to develop its Information Technology skills and its public awareness initiatives to ensure people better understand the processes involved. This is particularly important around the objection and omission process.

The BVR approach to voter registration, especially the ability of the process to identify and remove people who attempt to register multiple times, is a significant step forward in electoral roll management, and while there is still work to do the Lessons Learned workshops were helpful in identifying ways in which the SIEO can strengthen the integrity of all its voter registration processes.

As is usual with large scale projects the voter registration process was not without problems – as these arose, they were discussed and resolved (as best they could be). For example, there was a great deal of concern about a process that became known as "cross-border" registration, which resulted in very high numbers of applications for transfer from one constituency to another. The SIEO moved quickly to issue media releases etc informing the public at large not to be encouraged by candidates and parties to register in locations other than where they resided, and while this was reasonably effective it resulted in even more transfer applications as they sought to transfer back again.

### Lessons Learned

While the BVR update was largely conducted across the country to a high standard there is always room for improvement. The SIEO conducted three Lessons Learned workshops involving senior election officials from most of the constituencies to consider how the organisation might use strengths and weaknesses for learning purposes. The workshops were held in Gizo (15 and 16 April), Honiara (23 and 24 April) and Auki (26 and 27 April). Election Managers, Registration & Returning Officers, Assistant Registration/Returning Officers from the 9 provinces participated in the lessons/learned workshops conducted in Gizo, Honiara and Auki. The matters raised during these workshops were presented to the SIEO in Honiara on 29 April. The following matters came up as areas that require review and improvement:

- **Ordinarily resident** – across the board the participants expressed their view that the definition of ordinarily resident in its current form enables electoral engineering by prospective political candidates. This was in part due to the ambiguities in the definition and insufficient awareness that the cross-border registration, undertaken under pressure or for a financial incentive, was a punishable offence. It was the view of participants that the ordinarily resident provision needs to be more clearly defined in the legislation, and additional public awareness needs to be done to familiarise the public with the meaning and the legislation;
- **Cross-border voter registration** – participants recognised that in the majority of cases cross-border registration was politically driven and that some voters used a loophole to change the place of registration as a favour to or under pressure from candidates. There was general agreement that a limit needed to be put in place for the number of times a registration can be made across locations during each BVR update;

- **Out-of-constituency registration** – this is perceived as damaging to the List of Voters, as it provides an opportunity for non-eligible registrants to be registered under the radar. While several such practices were addressed during the omissions and objections period, it is probable that a significant number of non-eligible registrants remain on the List of voters;
- **The six months residence requirement**, as defined by the Electoral Act 2018, is seen as a welcome addition to the eligibility criteria and is expected to correct some of the practices relating to cross-border registration. Participants were of the opinion that the residential requirement needs to be strictly imposed as an eligibility criteria;
- **Provisional registration for 17 years old** was seen as being useful because individuals who were not 18 at the time of registration were left out of the List of voters despite them being 18-years-old (or older) on polling day. To address this, participants discussed the possibility of implementing a “voter registration in schools” initiative, which would allow the provisional registration of 17 years old;
- **Voter ID cards**, while useful to verify a voter’s identity on polling day, also caused a lot of confusion. This was particularly the case with registrants who registered several times, and are subsequently in possession of more than one voter ID card. The participants’ view on whether to continue or discontinue the use of voter ID cards was divided. The conclusion, however, was that if ID cards are continued, the Commission should seek to replace current ID cards with new ones, and potentially issue voter ID cards at the later stage, perhaps during the omission and objection period or even on polling day;
- **Public scrutiny of the List of voters** – significant delays in the release of funds affected the schedule of the hearings of objections and some centres unnecessarily rushed the processes. Participants felt that a number of objections filed would have increased had the time for public scrutiny period been longer and without the confusion caused by constant changes with the movement schedule of the hearings. An additional factor affecting the omissions process was a general lack of awareness concerning the public scrutiny process. Quite often, the communities were not aware of the significance of objections;
- **Publication of voter lists** is a necessary part of the process to ensure the confirmation of registration details. The use of technologies, SIEC web-page and SMS system was recognised as a positive initiative. However, the limitations of the network coverage necessitated publishing of voter lists all the way to the village level through community leaders and church leaders. In addition, the names of registrants removed from the List of voters needs to be published at polling stations so potential complainants are informed in advance of their registration status. This would also prevent confusion on polling day;
- Participants supported a **continuous registration process** as a way of giving registrants more time and opportunity to visit communities, markets, schools etc. it was felt registrants would benefit from the increased opportunity to register at any time;
- **Intra-governmental cooperation on data exchange** was also recommended to allow the Ministry of Home Affairs to extend the records of births, deaths and marriages to the SIEO. This would also allow the automation of some of the registration activities, for example, removal of deceased persons’ registration records. Data from the National Statistics Office might also create an opportunity to plan voter registration of 17 and 18 years old Solomon Islanders;
- **The Voter awareness campaign** should start much earlier; well in advance of any voter registration activity and extend as far as possible into all communities, including those in remote areas. The campaign should focus on eligibility criteria, public scrutiny of the process and objections, as well as on the electoral offences related to the abuse of electoral processes.

Work on many of these Lessons learned will form part of the ongoing work of the electoral commission over the next few years between electoral events.

With the completion of the BVR update the Electoral Commission was ready to conduct the General Election.

# GENERAL ELECTION

## Overview of the General Election

At the same time as the BVR update was being conducted in the last quarter of 2018 it was necessary for the SIEO to ready its plans to conduct the General Election in early 2019. Working on two major electoral tasks in parallel was exceedingly difficult but the SIEO's small team once again rose to the challenge.

Conducting a General Election in any country is a challenging task, one which is widely regarded as being the largest and most complicated logistical event that any country undertakes in peace time. It requires careful and detailed planning to ensure the voting public can attend at their designated polling station to vote with the confidence of knowing that if they have registered during the registration period, their name will be on the roll; that they will be issued with a ballot paper upon which the names and photographs of all candidates who have been properly nominated in their Constituency will appear; that they can mark their vote alone, free of influence, and in secret; and that if completed correctly their ballot paper will be counted according to their wishes to determine the winning candidate in their Constituency. In short election officials must ensure that a person's democratic and constitutional right to vote in a free and fair election is preserved.

The SIEC is the sole authority for registration of electors and implementation of Parliamentary elections in Solomon Islands, although the recently enacted Electoral Act 2018, expands the SIEC's mandate to include Provincial and Local Government Elections. Discussions have been held with the Ministry of Provincial Government and Institutional Strengthening, and the Ministry of Home Affairs on this proposed takeover and it is anticipated that the SIEO will take over the

administration of all Provincial and Local Government Elections in the near future.

Ensuring voting facilities were provided in sufficient numbers in every constituency, and that they are both accessible and convenient, is a significant task by any standards. Early organisation was critical to ensure every voter was provided with the best possible level of service on polling day - right across the Solomon Islands.



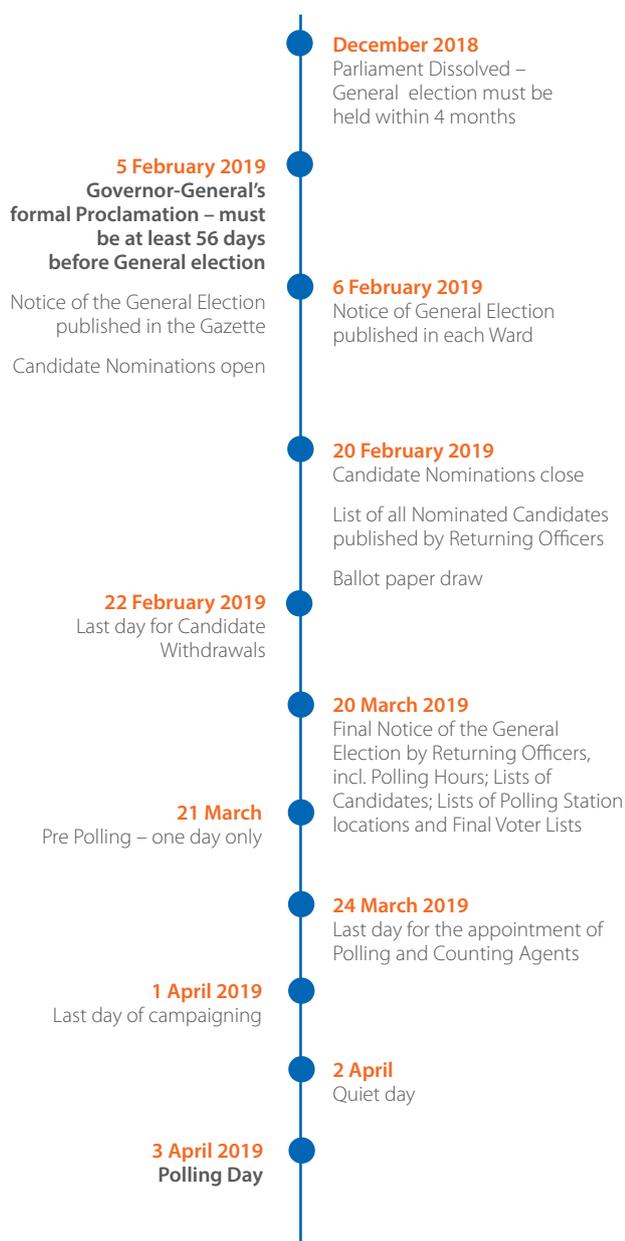
A comprehensive Operations Plan was developed by the SIEO in April 2018 to define what needed to be done and who had responsibility to do it, in an effort to ensure the successful conduct of the 2019 General Election. This document set out all the high-level operational activities, drilling down as necessary to give a sense of the work that was involved, and the timing for its completion.

▲ *Youth checking their names before going to cast their vote.*

As at 31 December 2018 planning for the 2019 NGE was well advanced with the major work areas of Operations, Training, Public Education and Awareness, Logistics, and of course Finance and Personnel, all gathering momentum.

Three timeline scenarios were prepared by the SIEO to assist the Electoral Commission and the Governor-General to decide, at the appropriate time, the date on which the 2019 General Election would be held – these were Wednesday 27 March, Wednesday 3 April and Wednesday 10 April. With Parliament dissolving on 18 December 2018 it was assessed that the Governor-General would need to make his formal Proclamation no later than early February 2019, and he did so on 5 February. The following key dates in the General Election timeline were also set, as follows:

## Timeline



The only major issue that frequently arose during the course of early planning for the SIEO for this key electoral event was the lack of adequate and timely releases of funds by MoFT. Without sufficient funding there was every likelihood that the planning and implementation processes would constantly have to stop, and it rapidly became such an issue that the SIEO sought the Electoral Commission's assistance in trying to resolve the situation. With that assistance the matter was escalated to the highest levels of Government and eventually some interim funding was received.

Processes for the recruitment of all staff were defined by the SIEO Human Resources unit, using advertisements, application forms, interview records and recommendations forms. For recruitment carried out at the provincial level, the SIEO issued guidelines which detailed the process, procedures and timeline for the recruitment of poll-workers and other temporary staff.

## Planning

Based on previous experience, the SIEO knew that conducting a high-quality General Election in early 2019 could only be achieved with efficient and effective preparation, so the task of detailed planning and preparation got underway around June of 2018. It was a significant and lengthy task, commencing with the development of a workable timeline; preparation of budgets and calculation of the required funding; seeking that required funding from Government; procurement of the necessary equipment, materials and supplies (especially those which were required from overseas such as indelible ink). The terms "materials and supplies" in the electoral context also tend to include posters, brochures, pamphlets for public awareness; and manuals, forms and ballot papers.

Other major activities included the development of an effective and timely public information and awareness strategy; the recruitment and training of all casual staff, including Election Managers, Returning Officers, Assistant Returning Officers and other officers; and the development of a logistics plan. The list is almost endless, but all of it was absolutely necessary to ensure the proper conduct of the poll and the timely declaration of results.

## Risk assessment and management

Risk is an ever-present issue in managing large-scale electoral events such as the General Election. In this context risk management is the process of identifying, assessing and controlling threats to the SIEC's and the SIEO's activities. These threats, or risks, could stem from a wide variety of sources, including financial uncertainty, legal liabilities, errors in management decision making,

incorrect procedures, accidents and natural disasters. The SIEO regularly prepared a risk management profile at various key points in the electoral process to ensure it is aware of the risks that might occur and how they might be prevented or mitigated.

As the timeframe for the General Election got ever closer risk management matters became the subject of regular SIEO Management Team meetings, with risks being assessed as they occurred and where possible were resolved as quickly as possible.

A review of the key themes coming through from one risk matrix to another relate to the continual untimely release of funds and the high level of concern that the SIEO might have to stop working on the election until sufficient funds arrive; the significant workload compared to the number of staff working in the SIEO and the risk of activities not getting done on time; and insufficient capacity of the existing SIEO staff. With regard to the untimely release of funds this was a matter discussed frequently with the Ministry of Finance. While keeping the risks in very much in mind the SIEC had no choice but to continue its work. The risks did not go away, but they were managed well enough for the SIEC to deliver a well conducted General Election in 2019.

### Key stakeholders

For the successful implementation of its mandate, the SIEO seeks the cooperation, consultation and assistance of a range of other stakeholders, both national and international. These include the Government of the Solomon Islands, political parties, candidates, Chamber of Commerce & Industries, civil society organisations, international organisations, development partners and most importantly the voters, to ensure that the electoral process is acceptable to all.

### Donor Support

At the request of the Government of the Solomon Islands the United Nations Development Programme managed its Strengthening the Electoral Cycle in the Solomon Islands Project (SECSIP) – co-funded by the Government of Australia and the European Union.

From 2013 SECSIP has provided support across most of the activities of the SIEC within a particular focus on operations, public awareness and information, and gender equity. Similarly, since 2007 the Electoral Systems Strengthening Program (ESSP), also funded by the Government of Australia, has been in place to provide more general support to the SIEO to manage all of its activities, especially in the areas of electoral reform, management performance, risk management and mentoring.

Assistance was also provided during the delivery of these major initiatives by the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC). The AEC personnel were of significant value to the SIEC, particularly in the areas of training, operations and logistics support.

RedR, also funded by the Australian Government, provided significant support to Election Managers in five of the ten provinces, as well as support to the Operations team in the SIEC headquarters. Their activities were primarily aimed at encouraging communication and coordination between the Election Manager and the Returning Officers in the Province, but they tended to cover the entire range of activities such as funding, personnel matters, report writing and general administration.

In all cases the SIEC has expressed its sincere gratitude to donors for the technical and financial support it has provided to the SIEC for many years.

### Counterparts

The Political Parties Commission (PPC) and Office of the Registrar of the PPC are close interlocutors of the SIEC on matters related to the registration of Political Parties. The role of the Office of the Registrar of the PPC is particularly important with respect to candidates representing political parties. The Office of the Registrar of the PPC certifies that the intending candidate is a registered member of the political party and a candidate of the political party for the election. SIEC Commissioner, Mrs. Taeasi Sanga is also a Chairperson of the PPC.

The Royal Solomon Islands Police Force (RSIPF) is responsible for providing security and safety for all aspects of the electoral process. The primary law and order function rests with the RSIPF and includes the responsibility for securing SIEO buildings and sites in which electoral activities are to be carried out. The RSIPF also provides escorts for convoys with sensitive material if necessary, and security around polling stations as required. The SIEO coordinates security arrangements with the RSIPF HQ at the national level and with Provincial Police stations in the provinces. For the BVR update in 2018/19 and the General Election in 2019 there was an agreed Memorandum of Understanding in place between the RSIPF and the SIEO.

The Attorney General acts as the principal legal adviser to the SIEC and his officers were of significant help in providing legislative advice and legal opinions to the SIEC and the SIEO. The AG's Chambers also provided a great deal of advice as and when required.

The Australian Defence Force (ADF) provided significant help to the SIEO in the forms of logistics management. In addition to personnel they also helped in a way no other organisation could – and that was with the provision of helicopters and naval vessels. During the weeks before the General Election, and afterwards as ballot papers needed to get to counting centres, the ADF (supported by New Zealand) had the best possible assets to get materials to and from the necessary destinations, very quickly. Looking back it may not have been possible to get as much done in the last couple of weeks before polling day had it not been for this high quality support.

The Inter-Ministerial Electoral Operations Committee (IMEOC) is intended to provide across-Government cooperation and coordination to assist the SIEC and SIEO to conduct elections. The costs of conducting such significant electoral events are continuing to rise significantly and some of these can potentially be reduced through the cooperation and sharing of resources across Government as well as across provincial lines. The 2019 General Election will be the country's 11th since its first parliamentary elections in 1976 and the Commission is fully committed to looking at more efficient and cost-effective ways of managing these events. The role and functions of IMEOC are as follows:

- Acting as a forum to support the SIEO in the coordination and management of all electoral events
- Assisting to ensure the SIEO receives adequate and timely funding for all electoral events
- Coordinating national government agency responses to the planning and delivery of resources for electoral events
- Initiating and adopting policies which would result in an integrated approach towards assisting the SIEO during electoral events
- Initiating and adopting policies which would encourage cooperation and sharing of resources across government as well as across provincial lines to better facilitate electoral events
- Helping to build networks and partnerships with civil society groups and business entities to support the delivery of credible electoral events
- Providing support for any other assistance which SIEO or the Commission may from time to time seek

## Electoral observers

An essential element of the electoral processes is the requirement for transparency. Not only must the final outcome be credible but key stakeholders must be satisfied that this is the case. In order to enhance this “acceptability” domestic and international observers were invited to observe all aspects of the electoral processes. In order to ensure the transparency of the process the SIEO invited and accredited national and international groups/organisations that wished to deploy electoral observers for the nomination period, the political campaign and for polling, counting and results dissemination. The SIEO provided all accredited national and international groups/organisations with relevant information regarding the electoral process through briefings and information packs, as well as issuing an electoral observer handbook and code of conduct. The SIEC managed the observer accreditation process centrally in Honiara.

The following international and domestic groups (with the actual number of observers deployed in brackets) fielded observers to monitor the 2019 General Election in the Solomon Islands:

### **International:**

- Commonwealth Secretariat (15)
- Melanesian Spearhead Group (8)
- Pacific Islands Forum (4)
- Australian High Commission (31)
- New Zealand High Commission (14)
- British High Commission (5)
- United States Embassy (Port Moresby) and Consulate (Honiara) (12)
- Embassy of Japan (3)
- Australian National University Research Team (97)

### **Domestic:**

- Development Services Exchange (167)

The SIEO formally briefed all observer groups and provided them with relevant information regarding the electoral process, as well as issuing a handbook containing a Code of Conduct for each observer. This stated their rights and responsibilities.

Not all observer reports had been received at the time of writing this Report. When all have been received an analysis will be undertaken of their feedback and recommendations.

## Recruitment of electoral staff

The SIEO recruited a significant number of temporary staff at Provincial and constituency levels. The recruitment was conducted in 3 phases – (a) Election Managers and Returning Officers in early January 2019, about a month before the Governor-General’s Proclamation, in readiness for the first phase of training; (b) Assistant Returning Officers in early February, soon after Proclamation; and (c) poll-workers and counting officials in mid-march, some 2-3 weeks before the General Elections. The SIEO employed a total of more than 3,800 temporary election officers to help conduct the 2019 General Election.

For such a large number of casual employees this was a significant task. For each of the employee categories used during the General Election pay rates needed to be calculated and approved by the Commission with concurrence of the Ministry of Finance and Treasury; detailed job descriptions needed to be drafted for all employee categories, and approved; employment contracts needed to be drafted and approved; and codes of conduct needed to be revised and approved. The small HR team also undertook a lot of liaison with senior officials, primarily Election Managers and Returning Officers on their own and their staff’s individual performance.

The pay rates for each employee category for the General Election were as follows:

### Election Officials

NO.	OFFICERS	QTY	PAY RATES
1	Election Manager	10	\$10,151
2	Returning Officer	50	\$ 9,100
3	Assistant Returning Officer	113	\$ 7,500
4	Presiding Officer	1043	\$ 1,000
5	Polling Assistant	2100	\$ 900
6	Counting Officials	500	\$ 1,500
7	Accountant	10	\$ 9,100

## Gender equity

The SIEO has consistently encouraged the recruitment of women in the elections process and made all reasonable efforts to encourage, promote and facilitate the recruitment of women for all positions. While the intent is there and many lower level polling officials are female, more needs to be done to encourage women to apply for senior positions such as Election Managers, Returning Officers and Assistant Returning Officers.

## NGE sex disaggregated data on employment of casual staff for 2014 and 2019 elections

ITEMS	2014	2019
Provincial (Electoral) Manager	10 (0 women)	10 (0 women)
Provincial Accountants (PA)	10 (20% women)	10 (30% women)
Returning Officer (RO)	50 (8% women)	50 (10% women)
Assistant Returning Officer (ARO)	79 (3.8% women)	150 (32.6% women)
Polling staff (presiding officer and polling assistant)*	Presiding officer: 867 (4% women) Polling assistant: 1,734 (6% women)	Presiding officer: 1,043 (20% women) Polling assistant: 2100 (35% women)

\*Estimated percentages based on data provided by officials working in the provinces

## Political Parties and Candidates

At the time of the Governor-General’s Proclamation on 5 February ‘19 a total of 15 Political Parties were “registered” by the Political Parties Commission, compared to 12 in 2014. They were:

- United Democratic Party (UDP)
- Solomon Islands Kadere Party (SIKP)
- Peoples Alliance Party (PAP)
- Solomon Islands Democratic Party (SIDP)
- Democratic Alliance Party (DAP)
- National Transformation Party Solomon Islands (STPSI)
- Peoples Progressive Party (PPP)
- Solomon Islands Party for Rural Advancement (SIPRA)
- Solomon Islands People First Party (SIPFP)
- New Nation Party (NNP)
- Solomon Islands Pan Melanesian Congress Party (SIPMCP)
- Youth Owned Urban and Rural Party (YOUR)
- Direct Development Party (DDP)
- Solomon Islands United Party
- Green Party Solomon Islands

These parties were therefore able to contest the 2019 General Election should they wish to.

## Candidate nominations

Any registered Solomon Islander who stood as a candidate in the General Election needed to be nominated by 3 eligible persons. Candidates needed to submit their nomination application in person to the relevant Returning Officer or nominated Assistant Returning Officer. In order to provide facilities for nomination, Returning Officers were required to open at least one candidate nomination centre in each of the 50 Constituencies.

In a first for the nomination process the SIEC developed a special application to allow on-the-spot verification of eligibility criteria related to voter registration. Kits, which held a pre-installed candidate nomination “application”, consisted of a cased laptop containing a laptop and camera, along with a portable generator. Added to this were the necessary forms and stationary; a ballot box for the ballot draw; and a printed copy of the relevant list of voters for the constituency. All intending candidates were provided with information about the new nomination process which started a day after the Governor-General’s Proclamation on 5 February 2019. The nomination period ran for 14 consecutive days as required by the legislation. Candidates were able to run as an Independent or a Political Party candidate.

Information provided to Returning Officers during the nomination period was processed through the candidate nomination application and a photograph of the candidate was taken for the ballot paper at that time. Following the end of the 14 day period, candidates were further given 48 hours to withdraw their nomination if s/he wishes to do so while the ROs will use the first 24 hours to verify the information provided by candidates to confirm acceptance of a candidate’s nomination. Then, within 7 days of the closing of candidate nominations, Returning Officers were responsible for organising a ballot paper draw and determine the order in which each nominated candidate would appear on the ballot paper.

Following the end of the withdrawal period a total of 331 candidates had nominated to contest the 2019 General Election, compared to 447 in 2014 and 509 in 2010. Of the 331 candidates, 168 were party affiliated and 163 were standing as Independents. A total of 26 female candidates were nominated. The SIEC received no particular feedback as to why the number of candidates had reduced, but it seems clear that the increase in nomination fees from \$2,000 to \$5,000 may have been a factor.

The SIEO created a candidate handbook with relevant information on the nomination process and made

it available both in hard copy and electronically through the SIEC’s web pages. The SIEO awareness team prepared several press releases and printed media on the nomination process to ensure relevant information was widely distributed.

## Campaigning

For the 2019 General Election the campaign period commenced on 5 February (the day the Governor-General proclaimed the General Election) and closed at midnight on 1 April (24 hours before the General Election polling day).

This is an area that parties and candidates have not always conformed to in the past so a new offence provision was inserted into the Electoral Act 2018. Section 124 states that a person who engages in a campaign activity in relation to an election outside the campaign period for the election commits an offence. The maximum penalty set is 20,000 penalty units or imprisonment for 2 years, or both. It is true that there were a few complaints from the public and other candidates about campaigning outside the period, but in general this requirement appears to have been observed better in 2019.

## Operations

The primary objective of the Operations team was to prepare and manage credible and transparent polling and counting processes in accordance with the relevant electoral legislation. In order to ensure its neutrality and non-partisan nature, the SIEC operates as an independent body, exercising its functions without regard to any influence, direct or indirect, from any source.

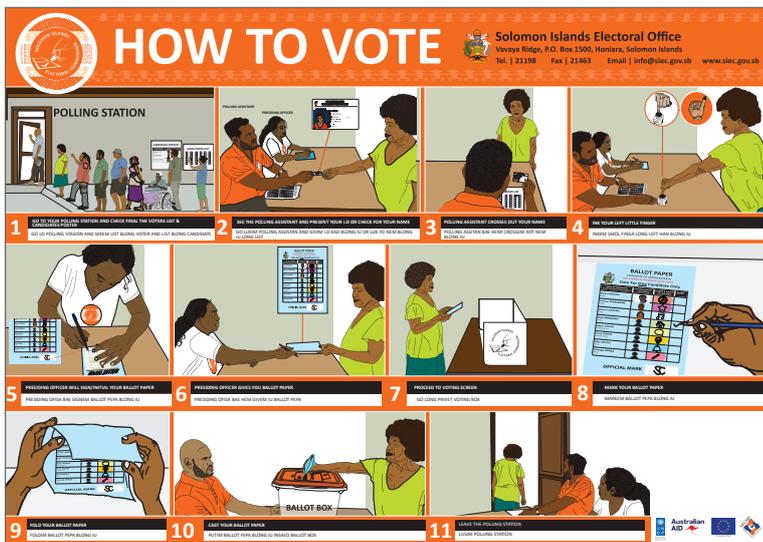
Elections in the Solomon Islands were simultaneously conducted in 50 constituencies, in 1,043 polling stations on polling day. To do so the Operations team acted as the main hub for action and coordination. The operations unit was led by the Manager Operations, and his small operations support team and advisers. In addition to being the nerve centre for the conduct of the General Election the Operations Centre managed the coordination with the RSIPF and the Combined Taskforce Group (led by the Australian Defence Force (ADF).

## Candidate Agents

As prescribed in s.68 of the Electoral Act, each candidate was able to nominate two agents for each Polling Station and 2 agents for their constituency counting centre in which their ballot papers would be counted, to represent them. The candidate agent nomination lists needed to be submitted to the Returning Officer at least 10 days before the Election Day.

## Voter awareness campaign

The Public Awareness and Education team prepared a detailed plan to assist all those involved in the General Election, including all registered voters, the media, intending candidates, political parties, domestic and international observers, and in many ways for all electoral officials. The plan provided an overview of the campaign strategy, and details on the materials that had been prepared including the timing of the various key messages. The most important materials that were produced as a part of the overall strategy were:



*How to vote poster part of the voter education campaign.*

- Civic/voter handbook;
- Voter Awareness Programme (VAP) manual;
- Candidate handbook;
- Observers handbook;
- Frequently Asked Questions: Voter Information booklet;
- How to vote poster;
- Offences and penalties poster;
- A series of factsheets;
- Ballot paper poster; and
- Candidate lists posters (constituency specific).

The key awareness and information messages were delivered through the media (print, radio and TV), the SIEO website, the distribution and display of voter awareness materials, group

discussions with relevant institutions and organisations, as well as through face-to-face meetings with communities in churches, civil society organisations and with the voters themselves.

In previous electoral events the SIEO had found that unauthorised election related information often reached the public domain and in some cases had caused a lot of confusion, particularly for the public at large. The SIEO endeavoured to make sure it was the only source of voter education information and materials, however social media could not be controlled and continued to release information that was not always correct.

Despite changes brought in by the new Electoral Act, the voter awareness and communication strategy used was generally a very successful one. There was a high voter turn-out of 86.41% nationally and very low record of 0.3% invalid votes of the total votes cast. Although such a result could have been achieved due to other reasons, it could also be due to the huge effort put into implementing these awareness programs by the Communication and Awareness team. There was a high level of voter participation and the public at large was hungry for information about the candidates that were standing, and where and when to vote on polling day. It was also clear that there was an enhanced level of knowledge among voters on election procedures, especially on polling day and the process of casting a valid ballot paper.

In maintaining and enhancing coherency with the overall election timeline and field operations, the Communication and Awareness team employed a strategy that has been effectively executed in the past. It was a very organised strategy that was aligned with the election operation timetable. There were three campaign phases, as follows:

- ‘Vote’ Campaign – this campaign commenced two weeks prior to the announcement of the election date through to polling day. It focused on clear messaging that encouraged voters, political parties and candidates to participate in the electoral process and

to educate them on their rights, obligations and the importance of their votes.

- ‘Who is running’ Campaign – focussed on messages on key dates, specifically the opening and closing dates for candidate nominations, candidate campaigning rules and dates, electoral offences and penalties, especially the new ones contained in the Electoral Act 2018. This phase commenced following the announcement of the election date and ran in parallel with the “vote” campaign messages.
- ‘How to vote’ campaign – focused on the voting process itself; the operation of the polling place and how to correctly mark the ballot paper. It ran in parallel with the other messages and included polling day offences and penalties. It also highlighted aspects of vote security and special features of the voting facilities including the new ballot paper design. This phase was rolled out from about three weeks before polling day, until polling day.

Part of the SIEO’s media campaign saw the engagement of civil society to assist in the distribution of messages and material, especially in remote and hard to reach areas. Awareness materials were also used as aids by the Returning Officers in their meetings with local communities in their constituencies. All SIEO voter awareness materials were produced by the media and awareness team in collaboration with the UNDP SECSIP project.

Being fully aware of the need to provide accurate and up to date information on all aspects of the General Election process, the SIEO did its best to ensure that political parties, independent candidates and other stakeholders were kept informed of progress and developments on a regular basis. This was vital in the attempt to build confidence and relationships.

### **Public Information, Education and Voter Awareness, incl. SIEC Website and online tools**

The SIEO’s online presence was one of the most vital information platforms used, and engaged over 10,000 Facebook users prior to and during the election period (February, March and April). It also required a lot of maintenance responding to the many queries and comments. The daily two-way communication continued to interest many online users who decided to resort to this platform for messages (stickers, diagrams, and videos) and to get prompt responses from the key source – the SIEC. The page was updated on a daily basis with messages ranging from civic and information awareness amongst the ongoing posting of key messages to accompany electoral events and activities in the lead up to polling day. The reach for each post during the month of March sky rocketed

from 4000 to 7000 visitors each day. It was also linked to the SIEC website making it easy for website visitors to see fresh updates from the face book on the website. There was a high level of positive feedback about both Facebook and the SIEC’s website.

A new initiative known as polling station locator was set up to assist voters to find if they were registered, and if so where they should attend to vote on polling day. People were able to send text message to Telekom number “288” to make their enquiries, and feedback indicated it was one of the most useful tools when one wants to know or confirmation as to which polling-station he or she should go to cast her/his vote.

SMS Blast Text Messaging and Hotline Call Centre – sending text messages to mobile phones, using both Bemobile and Telekom proved again to be one of the most effective communication tools. This was evident in a number of enquiries and responses received through office hotline in reaction to messages sent through SMS blast text messages. Even though the cost per nationwide blast was very high specials rates were negotiated through a long-term Memorandum of Agreement with Telekom. There were 20 text messages pre-scheduled on specific dates in alignment with key activities within the election timeline that were sent out to both Telekom and BeMobile Mobile Communication Network simultaneously. The estimated reach to Telekom customers was roughly 200,000 users, and 150,000 BeMobile users.

### **Preparation of storage facilities**

Storage facilities based in Honiara were organised to receive electoral materials as part of the preparedness process. The SIEO warehouse in Ranadi was used to receive all procured and printed electoral materials, process and pack them, and prepare them for onward distribution to Provinces. Given the sensitive nature of the materials that were stored at the warehouse, security and access was carefully managed.

In terms of Provincial level storage facilities the SIEO and RSIPF agreed that Provincial Police Stations would be used to store the electoral materials until the distribution to constituencies, and thereafter to polling stations. Even though the materials were being stored in this way they were under the Election Manager’s/Returning Officer’s custody at all times, and accessed only by authorized personnel.

Highly secure storage facilities were not always available in some locations, so from time to time materials had to be stored for short periods of time at the constituency level to facilitate the prompt

distribution of materials to polling stations. These storage facilities were identified by Returning Officers as part of their movement planning. At the polling station level it was necessary to store materials prior to polling day. The guidelines noted the necessary storage requirements where this was necessary.

### Recruitment of poll-workers

Each polling station was manned by 3 poll-workers, a Presiding Officer and 2 Polling Assistants. Based on the 1,043 polling stations the SIEO needed to recruit and contract 1,043 Presiding Officers and roughly 2,100 Polling Assistants. It was also necessary to appoint nearly 100 queue controllers in the larger urban polling stations where large numbers of people had registered to vote.

The recruitment tasks were the responsibility of the small SIEO Human Resources team.\* First, the HR team prepared and issued operational instructions to Returning Officers on the responsibilities for recruitment, and how they should identify and select suitable persons to work in each polling station in the constituency. The process involved advertising, testing, selecting and contracting, with all the required documentation being submitted to the SIEO by the Returning Officers for random audit purposes. Polling staff were generally recruited within the constituency and ideally living close to the polling station in which they will be working. Special attention was given to attempt to recruit staff from the areas where they live and are registered to vote for two reasons – the first was it ensured a good level of local awareness; second it minimised the potential number of poll-workers who might require the use of pre-poll facilities. In order to ensure a good level of education among its polling staff, the SIEO will particularly focussed on recruiting teachers, public servants and university students, as well as those who had undertaken the role in previous General elections or by-elections. The SIEO continues to maintain a policy of promoting employment possibilities for Solomon Islands women in the electoral process, with all Returning Officers being encouraged to recruit as many qualified women as possible.

Poll-workers were paid an agreed lump sum reflecting the job they were appointed to do with 20% of the wages being paid upon the completion of training, and 80% once the Returning Officer had approved their payment for the work done. In the case of Returning Officer payments this was signed off by the relevant Election Manager.

\* Due to the lack of established SIEO human resources staff, in the lead up to the NGE, SECSIP provided a national human resources adviser who was supported by a human resources assistant (SECSIP graduate).

### Training of staff

In order to train all poll-workers on the correct polling procedures, the SIEO utilised the proven technique of cascade training. This is where the SIEO Training team trained Election Managers and Returning Officers on most aspects of the electoral process, so they could in turn train their Assistant Returning Officers and polling and counting staff on parts of the electoral processes they were directly engaged in. Additionally, the Provincial Finance Officers were trained in Honiara, exclusively on financial matters.

The training schedule the SIEO put in place was as follows:

#### Training Schedule

START DATE	PARTICIPANTS	TRAINER	# DAYS
25 Jan 2019	10 Election Managers 10 Accountants 50 Returning Officers	SIEO Trainers	3 days
05 Feb 2019	150 Assistant Returning Officers	Returning Officers	1 day
04 Mar 2019	10 Election Managers 50 Returning Officers	SIEO Trainers	4 days
Various dates in late Mar and early Apr 2019	1,043 Presiding Officers 2,100 Poll-workers 50 Counting teams	Returning Officers	1-2 days

Training kits were procured in advance to enable their utilisation at all stages of training cascade and were deployed together with the polling station kits. The training kits included samples of all materials and forms to ensure a comprehensive and effective training for all participants. In addition to the kits, the Returning Officers were provided with printed voter educational materials.

### Procurement of other materials

The procurement of elections materials was conducted in close cooperation with the Ministerial and/or Central Tenders Board and in line with the Solomon Islands Government (SIG) Procurement rules. Some procurement was undertaken by the UNDP SECSIP project, eg. polling and counting kits, ballot boxes and indelible ink. The voter screens were supplied by the New Zealand Government. Whenever feasible, existing materials from previous elections were re-used. As far as possible, electoral materials were procured from within the Solomon Islands, to support the local economy and save money on costly freight. All materials deliveries were completed

a month before polling day, and the SIEO will put special arrangements in place to facilitate customs clearance where relevant. Materials were delivered to the SIEO warehouse in Honiara.

Upon arrival of the materials at the warehouse, the SIEO warehouse team and the logistics officer checked everything to ensure that the correct quantities were received and that the quality was acceptable. All materials were entered in the relevant inventories, and in case of the materials procured by UNDP's SECSIP team, the ownership was transferred from UNDP to the SIEC in line with the agreement between the two institutions. The SIEO warehouse team and logistics officer then packed the material and labelled the polling station kits.

Electoral materials were categorised as either sensitive or non-sensitive. Sensitive materials were items such as ballot papers, printed forms, indelible ink, stamps, ballot boxes and numbered seals to be used on polling day. Their damage or loss could seriously affect the election operation. Non-sensitive materials were those needed to deliver the election, but which could have been replaced in a short period of time in the event of damage or loss, and would not jeopardise the operation.

Each polling station was assigned one polling station kit including forms, validation stamps, indelible ink, numbered seals and stationery; one ballot box and the correct number of ballot papers; checklist; and polling and accounting forms; queue control tape and other materials.

To ensure a good flow of voters passing through the polling station, any of them with up to 250 voters on their List of voters received two voting screens. Those polling stations with 250 or more voters received three voting screens. The voting screens were made of good quality cardboard and could be mounted on a table to make the voting process as easy as possible for the voter.

Training kits were also supplied for Returning Officers to use to train Presiding Officers. These kits included mock ballot papers and other training materials such as polling procedures, checklists, training guides, and other useful aids. The training kits also included voter information materials such as flipcharts, brochures, leaflets, posters, billboards and sample ballots for the public to see and understand.

Finally, the SIEO assigned each Returning Officer an additional polling kit and spare ballot papers.

## Movement plan & Logistics

Electoral materials were distributed in two cycles - the first being the non-sensitive polling materials, voter information materials and training kits that started some 3 weeks before the elections; the second cycle was the distribution of ballot papers and final voter lists a week before polling day. All materials were initially distributed to Provincial capitals and other key drop off points in Provinces, and were stored at Police Stations storage facilities until they were needed. Non-sensitive polling materials were moved to polling stations together with sensitive materials according to the agreed constituency movement plans.

The SIEO used sea, air and ground transport to move electoral material in a timely, suitable and efficient manner. The distribution of materials to polling stations and the retrieval of these materials before they are counted, is extremely sensitive and complex. Sensitive in the fact that within those materials are ballot papers that need high security on the way out to polling stations, and perhaps even higher security on the way back to counting centres. Logistics planning is critical to the election process and required detailed planning. Given the geography and natural characteristics of Solomon Islands, movement options and their feasibility must be carefully assessed. The SIEO developed its movement plan in close cooperation with the RSIPF, always keeping in mind that the materials must arrive at the correct polling stations in the right quantities, on time, undamaged, and secure. For the purposes of movement planning the SIEO divided the process into national level planning and provincial level planning.

The SIEO prepared a movement planning guideline for use by Election Managers and Returning Officers to ensure materials and supplies were moved as necessary and in a timely manner. The guideline explained what needed to be moved; the various considerations that need to be taken into account in planning all movements; how the movement process is to be carried out; the timelines governing the planning and implementation of movements; and the information that needs to be supplied by each Province to the SIEO. Each Election Manager, with advice and assistance from the SIEO operations team, developed workable movement plans describing in detail the routes, timeframe and resources required to deliver and retrieve all polling materials to and from each and every polling station. As could be expected the SIEO liaised closely with RSIPF on the movement of all materials, ensuring relevant security escorts were in place.

The finalised movement plans enabled the SIEO to precisely identify the resource requirements, ground, air and human, for the implementation of the plan as well as the timeframe which will govern its implementation. The plans also allowed the SIEO to ensure movements conform to its overall plan including procedures and timeframes for distribution, collection, storage and counting of ballots and to facilitate the development of contingencies. The plan, when finished, was shared with RSIPF in order to ensure proper security coordination and planning.

A brief overview of the transport routes for the distribution of materials and supplies for the General Elections are outlined in the box on the right.

### Ballot paper production

Before the List of voters was finalised the SIEO needed to calculate the likely costs of printing the large number of ballot papers for budgeting purposes. Part of the calculations also included the development of ballot paper templates, estimating the ballot paper quantities for each constituency, and formulation of specifications for ballot production. The ballot paper for each constituency was a single page (of varying length depending on the number of candidates who were nominated). Candidates were listed as determined by the ballot paper draw and each had a unique symbol either as representing a registered political party, or as an Independent candidate. Each candidate also had a “head and shoulders” photograph of themselves alongside their name on the name of the ballot paper.

Ballot papers were printed for ordinary voting and bundled in pads of 100; ballot papers for pre-poll voting and tendered ballots were bundled in pads of 25. Only counterfoils had a sequential numbering system for accounting purposes. Ballot pads were individually shrink-wrapped and packed in cardboard boxes by the two appointed printers. Each polling station was subsequently provided with sufficient ballot papers corresponding to the number of voters on the final List of voters for each polling station, rounded up to the next hundred. The SIEO ensured that such “rounding up” allowed for at least 25 extra ballot papers over the number of voters assigned to a polling station in case any ballot papers were spoiled by voters.

Printers for the ballot papers were selected through a competitive procurement process. The ballot paper designs were finalised within five days of the publication of the final list of candidates for each constituency.

## Transport Routes

1. **Route 1** - Makira and Temotu Provinces. The vessel is to remain at the last drop of point (Anuta) until after the elections. The vessel will then retrieve all Temotu ballots to the Counting Centre in Lata and remain docked until the counting is over.
  - a. 22 March 2019, depart Honiara to Kirakira
  - b. 24 March 2019, depart Kirakira to Lata
  - c. 26 March 2019, depart Lata to Duff Islands
  - d. 27 March 2019, depart Duff Islands to Utupua to Vanikoro
  - e. 28 March 2019, depart Vanikoro to Tikopia
  - f. 29 March 2019, depart Tikopia to Anuta
  - g. 31 March 2019, depart Anuta to Lata for docking.
2. **Route 2** – Western, Choiesul and Isabel Provinces. Retrieval of materials is organized separately following the same route.
  - a. 27 March, depart Honiara to Noro;
  - b. 28 March, depart Noro to Gizo to Nila;
  - c. 29 March, depart Nila to Taro;
  - d. 30 March, depart Taro to Buala;
  - e. 31 March, arrive Buala.
3. **Route 3** – Malaita Province. The vessel is to remain at the last drop off point (Pelau) until after the elections. The vessel will then retrieve ballots for Outer Malaita Islands only and transport them back to Honiara for counting. Elections materials for remaining 13 constituencies in Malaita will be retrieved separately on a route from Auki to Honiara.
  - a. 24 March, depart Honiara to Auki;
  - b. 25 March, depart Auki to Sikaiana;
  - c. 27 March, depart Sikaiana to Luaniua;
  - d. 31 March, dock at Luaniua.
4. **Route 4** – Central Province. The vessel will transport staff from Tulagi to Savo and Yandina.
  - a. 31 March, depart Honiara to Tulagi to Savo to Yandina.
5. **Route 5** – Guadalcanal. This route utilizes both sea and land transport
  - a. 31 March – Chartered vessel departs Honiara to East to South Guadalcanal
  - b. 31 March – Trucks and porters to Central Guadalcanal;
  - c. 01 April – OBMs depart Honiara to North Guadalcanal.
6. **Route 6** – Rennell and Bellona. This route utilizes commercial aircraft, OBMs and trucks.
  - a. 31 March – Airlift Honiara to Rennell;
  - b. 01 April – OBMs to Bellona;
  - c. 01 April – Trucks inland Rennell.

The printing of the ballot papers and booklets was expected to take 12 working days – this was exceeded by a few extra days due to one of the selected printers not being up to standard. This ballot paper printing process was monitored and randomly checked by SIEO staff, through regular site visits. At the completion of printing each printer was required to destroy all the printing plates and film that was used in presence of SIEO staff and certify that such was done. The ballot printing order commenced with pre-poll ballots first, followed by the ordinary and tendered ballots.

### Internal Communications

Communication systems play a vital role in any electoral operation. The SIEC and the SIEO must be informed of progress with preparations and with their implementation, as well as getting an early warning when something is becoming a problem or has gone wrong. Effective and prompt communication allows the SIEC and SIEO to confidently inform the various stakeholders of the progress being made. All Election Managers and Returning Officers were tasked with the responsibility of keeping the Commission “informed” and did so to a high standard. The SIEC’s Media team also need to be aware of issues as quickly as possible so they can assist to put the right information in the public domain.

The Operations team also needed to be kept informed of progress via scheduled and unscheduled reporting. This plan will be distributed to all relevant SIEO staff and involved stakeholders prior to the commencement of the elections. Close cooperation and communication was also maintained with the Election Managers, Returning Officers, Assistant Returning Officers, and as far as possible with the Presiding Officers and security agencies throughout the process.

### Deployment of materials

The implementation of the national movement plan required numerous transport assets and security arrangements. The SIEO operations team arranged contracts for vehicles, sea and air assets for the General Election, including significant liaison with the Police security at the central and provincial office level. Overall responsibility for the movement of materials and personnel as well as its tracking was with the SIEO.

Sea transport is the back-bone of transportation in Solomon Islands. The national consolidated movement plan identified enough charter boats to undertake the movement of electoral materials to the already established routes and destinations in Provinces. The

SIEO, in collaboration with relevant governmental offices, published a tender for chartering sufficient vessels for sea transport. At the Provincial level, the SIEO utilised boats powered by OBM’s, and canoes for short distance transportation of staff and materials.

Air support was also critical. The national consolidated movement plan enabled the SIEO to reasonably accurately identify air support requirements and to ensure it was used sparingly and wisely given the high cost and short supply. Air support was intended to be used only where other modes of transport would pose potential risk to timely distribution of materials or staff. The SIEO planned to secure air assets dedicated to the electoral process, in collaboration with relevant governmental offices.

Of course, based on advice from Election Managers and Returning Officers, the SIEO utilised ground transport in Provinces where reasonable roads exist and for many non-coastal villages/areas. The exact requirements were defined following various Provincial planning exercises. For polling stations that were not accessible by vehicles, manpower was engaged for the deployment and retrieval of polling materials.

Due to the sensitive nature of the materials, security arrangements were put in place, with guidelines on required handling and security being issued by the SIEO. Additional security was also put in place for warehouses, especially when sensitive items were being stored in the short term. Police escorts were also for deployment and retrieval.

Unscheduled movements were avoided as far as possible but from time to time it was unavoidable. Again the SIEO issued guidelines on the use and conduct of unplanned movements. Wherever possible movements incorporated a contingency plan to ensure that in case of unforeseen events alternative means of transport were available to ensure materials arrive on time to the correct location. This is where the Australian Defence Force team was particularly useful with its sea and air support.

### Pre-polling

Pre-poll facilities were only available to election officials who were working in a location away from the place they had registered to vote, and Police officers on duty on polling day. This latter category also included Correctional Services officers who assisted the Police and the Electoral Commission with security support. Those seeking to pre-poll were required to

formally apply in writing, and if their names were indeed registered in one of the constituencies they were permitted to pre-poll at a designated centre on the day set down. Pre-polling was held on one day only in terms of the legislation.

Pre-poll centres were set up only in designated locations and generally followed the procedures for ordinary voting. The key procedural differences were (a) completed ballot papers were inserted inside a sealed envelope with the name of the constituency name printed on it, and only then placed inside the special ballot box for pre-poll votes; (b) the voter lists for RSIPF and CSSI were pre-printed, while for the poll-workers, voter details were entered onto a blank voter list form; and (c) sealed envelopes containing ballot papers will be placed into packages by constituency at the end of the day set down for pre-polling and distributed to the relevant Returning Officers to be added at the appropriate time into the counting process.

The total number of pre-poll votes taken was 1,302. It was expected that the number of pre-poll votes would be higher and further work will be done by the SIEO before the next General Election to make sure that more workable procedures are in place.

## Polling

Preparations for polling were carefully thought through by the SIEC as they were the most complex of the entire electoral process. The SIEC was highly conscious of the need to get it right, for all voters, and spent a lot of time making sure every person working for the Commission in one capacity or another, knew their responsibilities well.

As had become convention over the years polling day was a Wednesday and was a designated public holiday. Polling hours were 7am to 5pm – a total of ten hours. The new legislation also made it clear that any person joining the queue before 5pm would be allowed to vote. Any person attempting to join the queue to vote after 5pm was not allowed to vote.

Polling day is the highlight of the electoral process. All the training, procedures, arrangements, public awareness and education, logistics, materials, equipment and staff were ready to go for polling day. All that the SIEC and SIEO asked for was good weather across the country! All voters were assigned to designated polling stations and it was only there that their names appeared on the printed final List of voters. Voters were required to cast their ballots in the village/area they are registered.

Voters were required to cast their ballots in person, and although it was desirable that they present their Voter ID card because it made the process easier to find their names on the final List of voters, it was not mandatory to do so. Any registered person who attended at the right polling station to vote, even without their Voter ID card, was still able to vote. Polling was conducted by secret ballot.

Only properly appointed candidate agents and accredited electoral observers were able to be inside the polling station premises. Police officers were generally outside polling stations but could be inside to vote or if called upon the Presiding Officer to assist with any matter that might require intervention, such as a security matter or allegations of a person trying to vote for someone else for example. In some areas it was necessary that the Police, based on their own security assessment, were inside the polling station throughout polling day. This was determined on case-by-case basis.

The procedures defined by the SIEC essentially provided the rules on how the voting process was to take place, and to ensure accuracy and consistency it was vital they were detailed and clear. In order to ensure this, detailed polling procedure manuals were developed and made available to all relevant staff. A one page check list was also provided so it could be readily used and referred to by Presiding Officers and other polling officials throughout the day. The procedure manuals explained the detail about polling as well as the very important close-of-poll procedures and the use of the various forms and envelopes.

For the purposes of clarity a polling station is a location where voters go to cast their ballot paper on polling day. In order to facilitate efficient and smooth procedures, polling stations in highly populated urban areas will have not more than 600 voters on their List of voters. This number was deemed to be the maximum number of voters a Presiding officer and two support officials could effectively and efficiently manage on polling day. In some locations the polling station needed to have two streams where voters could be processed in two queues – for example those with the last name A-K in one queue, and L-Z in the other queue. In those cases the List of voters was compiled slightly differently to make the officials jobs easier. In less populated and rural areas one polling station was generally able to cater for the volume on the List of voters. The majority of polling stations were placed in the same locations that were used for previous elections (and for the BVR update undertaken in late 2018). With the help of Returning



▲  
*Voters at Lawson Tama stadium, Honiara, in the presence of candidate agents and observers.*

Officers and their Assistants the location of polling stations was based on accessibility, ensuring even in remote and rural areas that people did not have to travel too far to be able to vote.

One of the first tasks Election Managers and Returning Officers needed to undertake following their appointment was to identify suitable polling stations within their constituencies. To assist them in that task the SIEO drafted a consolidated list of identified polling stations reflecting updated demography in the Solomon Islands. Assistant Returning Officers were required to check previously used polling stations to judge their appropriateness, suitability and availability. This provisional list of polling stations was then circulated to the RSIPF for security assessments of the locations.

It was critical that as many as possible of the appointed polling stations were accessible by all voters. In settling the polling stations each Returning Officer wished to use in their constituency, due regard needed to be given to accessibility by those in the community who were elderly, infirm or had a disability of some kind. Unfortunately it was not easy to find convenient buildings with good access, as many of them are built up off the ground to prevent flooding etc., but Returning Officers did their best. On this same subject the SIEC encouraged Presiding

Officers to keep an eye on people waiting to vote and to provide assistance to those who needed it whenever they could.

All finalised polling stations in a constituency were then allocated a unique code, including the Province, constituency, ward and polling station number. The polling station code consisted of an eight-digit number – the first two digits represented the Province code (01-10); the second two digits represented the constituency (01-50); the third two digits represented the Ward within the constituency (01-33); and the last two digits represented the polling station number within the constituency. These codes were later used to create the batches for counting.

In the majority of cases, all the required materials and supplies arrived at the polling stations between one and three days before polling day, with sensitive material being stored by Presiding Officers. In some urban areas close to SIEO warehouse (in and around Honiara and Guadalcanal) sensitive material was delivered early on the morning of polling day. Polling officials across the country were asked to arrive no later than 6am on polling day to commence setting up ready for a 7am start.

There were 1,043 polling stations open on polling day and due to the limited number of Police officers the RSIPF was able to provide, many polling stations did not have a static Police presence. Where necessary, based on the security assessments of the Police and/or the SIEO, special arrangements were made to have Police support available to assist at short notice. No security forces were to be permanently present inside a polling station. Polling was held throughout the country in a single day, starting at 7am and closing at 5pm, with voters being required to cast their ballots in person.

All polling stations have their own List of voters. Polling procedures were simple and straight-forward with the voting process designed to safeguard against impersonation and multiple voting while ensuring strict secrecy of the ballot. The

voter screens in the polling station were arranged in such a way that permitted a voter to mark her/his ballot paper alone and in secret without being seen by another voter or polling official. Instructions were clear that no other person shall, except in accordance with the SIEO procedures, be behind the voting screen while a voter is marking her/his ballot paper. The only exception was where a registered voter was suffering from a physical disability and was unable to mark the ballot paper. In this case the Presiding Officer or a caregiver could accompany the person and mark the ballot paper or assist to mark the ballot paper in accordance with the person's wishes. In these circumstances the matter should be recorded in the Presiding Officer's journal.

Voters arrive at the polling station, and position themselves at the end of the queue, if there is one. When it is their turn, the voter hands their voter ID card (if they have one) over to the polling official who asks for their name and village/location. The polling official finds their name on the List of voters and marked a small square box underneath the person's name on the List to indicate they have voted. The voter then moved to the Presiding Officer who issues the next ballot paper in the pad, endorses their official mark on it and issued it to the voter. The voter's finger was then applied with indelible ink. The Presiding Officer then instructed the voter to go to one of the available voting screens, mark their ballot paper alone and in secret, and place it in the ballot box before leaving the polling station.

If an intending voters name was not found, the polling official was required to ask the voter how the name was spelled and to look at possible options such as whether the voters name may have changed since they registered eg. change of name due to marriage etc. Only after these other checks would a person be advised their name was not on the List and for them to possibly try another polling station.

There was to be no transfer of ballot papers between polling stations. In the highly unlikely event that more registered voters attended a polling station than there was ballot papers available, the Presiding Officer needed to request that reserve ballots be issued by the Returning Officer. This did not occur at any polling station during the 2019 General Election, nor should it, because the number of ballot papers supplied is the total number on the List plus a small contingency of spares in the event voters spoil their ballot paper. Additional materials could be requested by the Presiding Officer if there are insufficient, or they have been destroyed or damaged in transit.

Sensitive material must be accounted for at all times. For this reason, it is crucial that the handover procedures in the chain from SIEO, to Election Manger, to Returning Officer, to Presiding Officer are observed as identified in the administrative instructions.

Candidate agents, domestic and international observers (if any) and media were allowed access to polling stations to observe the process in line with their respective codes of conduct and in accordance with the established procedures. The Presiding Officer had full authority to enforce procedures and codes of conduct in their polling stations.

A Presiding Officer may find it necessary to suspend polling if threatened by riot, violence or any other event which makes polling impossible or endangers the lives of staff and voters. If this occurs the Presiding Officer must inform the Returning Officer immediately, who in turn will inform the Provincial Election Manager. If the reason for suspension no longer applies the polling station should reopen and again be communicated up the line without delay to the SIEO.

A few minutes before 5pm the Presiding Officer should have made arrangements to have a Police Officer or polling official to stand at the end of the queue calling out to the community that the polling station will close shortly. At exactly 5pm only those voters already in the queue were permitted to vote, with any voters arriving after this time being turned away. Polling continued only for those in the queue by 5pm, but it was interesting to note that the great majority of voters attended their polling station in the morning hours. Once the last person had voted the Presiding Officer sealed the slots of the ballot box, allowing the observers and agents present to make a record of the seal numbers.

### **Close of poll and retrieval of materials and supplies**

Upon the closure of the polling station, all used and unused materials and supplies were accounted for and packed in accordance with the instructions contained in the Presiding Officers Manual before being transported to the designated location for counting. In most cases the materials and supplies were collected in a convoy arrangement escorted by the Police and followed the pre-established retrieval route.

All ballot boxes from polling stations and packages of pre-poll votes from pre-poll centres were delivered directly to the Provincial counting centres in readiness for counting. In accordance with the established

retrieval plan, all Returning Officers needed to make sure all the electoral materials were received at their designated counting centre before any counting commenced. In most cases the counting centres were located in Provincial capitals but in one or two instances (Malaita Outer Islands and remote polling stations in Temotu) this was not the case. In urban areas this delivery task was delivered to the Returning Officer on the evening of polling day. Party and candidate agents, as well as observers, were permitted to remain with the ballot boxes, and other materials until they were handed over to returning Officers.

In all cases each Presiding Officer needed to maintain responsibility for all materials at all times until they were handed over to the Returning Officer. Upon arrival and being checked off, the materials needed to remain unopened until the count got underway. In most cases the count commenced the day after polling day.



▲ Counting station in Honiara.

### ✉ Counting of ballots

Each Returning Officer was responsible to form a 6-10 member counting team. The team was generally staffed by the Returning Officer, Assistant Returning Officers and additional counting members to open and sort ballot papers and administrative forms as required.

For the most part training for the counting team was conducted by the RO, approximately two to three days before polling day. The SIEO developed the series of step by step procedures for the count, the main elements of which included a reconciliation of ballot papers supplied and used; batching of ballots from several polling stations; mixing of the ballot papers to ensure anonymity and counting and recording of votes by candidate.

The first stage of the counting process was the reconciliation of ballot papers by polling station. Returning Officers were required to inspect the ballot box for any damage or signs of interference; check that the seal numbers correspond to the "Record of Ballot Box Security Seals" form initially completed by the Presiding Officer. Only then did the Returning Officer proceed to open the ballot box. The ballot papers were first counted face-down and reconciled against the appropriate forms. The Returning Officer then returned the reconciled ballots to the ballot box, sealed it and placed it aside securely, and the same steps were repeated for every ballot box and the package of pre-poll votes.

Once all the ballot papers had been reconciled the counting team followed a batching process which saw pre-determined ballot boxes for a number of polling stations opened at the same time. Counting officials then mixed the ballot papers together forming a batch to ensure anonymity for all voters and proceeded with counting the votes, sorted into candidate piles, and recorded them on batch results form. This process was undertaken in front of agents and observers, and was repeated by the Returning Officer before the numbers for each candidate were recorded on a spreadsheet. This same batching and counting process was followed until all the ballot papers from every polling station in the constituency had been counted. In cases where discrepancies were found the Returning Officer was authorised to conduct another count of the votes following prescribed procedures.

## Returning Officers Declarations

Once the counting of all ballots from all polling stations was completed and the batch results were summarised, the Returning Officer was required to declare the winner of the election by using the phrase: "I hereby declare that [name of the candidate] with the most votes to be elected for the constituency of \_\_\_\_\_."



▲ CEO Saitala announcing results at the Media Centre on 6 April 2019.

## Transfer of results forms to the SIEO and verification of electoral results

Although Returning Officers in each of the 50 constituencies were responsible for the formal declaration of their own election results, in a first for General Elections in the Solomon Islands the SIEO took the initiative to set up a Media Centre at the Mendana Hotel to manage the tallying and verification of all election results before they were formally announced by the Chief Electoral Officer to the public. The Media Centre worked exceedingly well and the SIEC website [www.elections.org.sb](http://www.elections.org.sb) received many enquiries from individuals, political parties and candidates, government organisations and civil society, as well as international enquiries.

The SIEO does not have a permanent field presence and is therefore highly dependent on Provincial Government support for staffing and to some extent, resources. These field offices are in most cases the offices of the Election Manager who, as is the case with the RO's, are predominantly public servants. This in turn quite often affects the Constituency

level as many constituencies do not have government buildings which can be used as an electoral office. The RO's and ARO's are often deployed to the Constituencies at the time of specific electoral phase (eg. the nomination of candidates) and upon completion return to the Provincial Capital.

As is the case with the electoral offices, the SIEO does not have any storage facilities in the Provinces. However, agreement was reached with the RSIPF that the SIEO will be provided with storage facilities at Provincial Police Stations wherever possible. During the times when the Returning Officer needed to store highly sensitive items such as ballot papers, the Returning Officer was allocated separate facilities.

## Contingency Planning

Contingency plans were developed in a number of areas. Extra materials were delivered to Returning Officers to ensure sufficient materials were available and as much as possible was delivered early so the risk of short supply was reduced. All sensitive materials were carefully tracked to ensure there were no irregularities during the elections.

It was exceedingly difficult to come up with effective contingency planning in the Solomon Islands. The SIEO ensured, wherever possible, that alternative means of transportation were available should there be any problems with the chartered boats. In rare cases where it was determined absolutely necessary, the SIEO tried to utilise the fixed and rotary wings assets where available from the Australian/New Zealand Combined Task Force.

In order to keep track of key risks potentially affecting the implementation of electoral activities, the SIEO prepared a Risk Management Matrix. This recorded inherent risks to the process, assessed the probability of that occurring, and likely impact if it did occur.

## Post-election activities

As soon as the final tally of electoral results was completed, announced and Gazetted, the Operations team arranged for Lessons

learned Workshops to be held at convenient locations around the country. The main focus was on how the electoral process could be improved from start to finish. In line with post-election activities in 2014 the SIEC was keen to meet with Election Managers and Returning Officers to discuss processes, procedures and lessons learned. This type of process enabled the SIEO to assess “what went wrong and why” and “what went” leading to subsequent process improvements. Lessons Learned workshops were held in Gizo, Auki and Honiara at the end of April 2019 to formulate a series of recommendations for the future. This type of post-election activity is also very useful to consolidate the capacity of the SIEO and to reconfigure it in a manner that can be sustained over the next four years.

### Final retrieval of electoral materials and disposal of assets

The Operations team and Warehouse Manager are currently working on the disposal of materials and retention of assets for future electoral events. Sensitive materials will be held securely until the 12 month period for settling election petitions period is over. The necessary guidance has been prepared on storing sensitive materials as well as the protocols for accessing them in case of a Court order.

### Offences

Many of the electoral offences were revised in the new Electoral Act 2018, with fines and sentences being increased to better reflect their importance or severity. The 2019 General Election was the first time these became operational and it remains to be seen how these new provisions will work in practice.

For example, the penalty for the offence of election bribery has been increased, aligning it to the penalty for the offence of bribery in the penal code as amended by the Anti- Corruption Act 2018 – this prescribes a penalty of \$150,000 or 15 years imprisonment or both. There are other new offences including campaigning outside the campaign period and a disqualification provision of 5 years from standing as candidate if one is convicted of the offences of election bribery, undue influence or fraudulent voting. Now that such provisions are in place it is vital the SIEO is given the necessary resources to enforce these as necessary following the 2019 General Election, and in the future.

### Election campaign - Expenses and Donations

In terms of sections 69 and 125 of the Electoral Act 2018 every contesting candidate must submit their statement of accounts reflecting the campaign election expenses and the sources of funding within 90 days of the publication of the election result – on 19 April 2019. Any candidate whose campaign expenses exceed \$500,000 commits an offence and the maximum penalty for doing so is 50,000 penalty points.

Out of the 331 candidates who stood in the 2019 General Election, 250 made a timely submission of their statement of accounts, 30 candidates made a late submission and other 5 statements were incomplete. At the time of writing this report, 46 candidates had not submitted their statement of accounts.

# FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES AND FURTHER ELECTORAL REFORM INITIATIVES

## Lessons Learned

In the same way as lessons learned feedback was identified for the Biometric Voter Registration update earlier in this Report, the following information was gleaned from Election Managers and Returning Officers for the 2019 General Election:

### Candidate Nominations

- **The Candidate nomination application** was a useful innovation and it improved the nomination system, although there were frequent, often trivial, mistakes made which could have been avoided with a more focused training programme and practical exercises. Participants noted that the SIEO should plan to provide technical support facilities, at least in provincial electoral offices, given that the remote support from the SIEO office in Honiara was limited. Overall, the list of candidates, their symbols and their photos printed directly from application were useful. The participants also identified a need for more comprehensive training on the use of the application so that errors such as misspellings, in the voter register data were minimized or avoided.
- **Communication** was a challenge, particularly in cases where 2 candidates selected the same candidate symbol in different nomination centres. Merging of data collected in different nomination centres was slow which in the case of Small Malaita led to the confusion. Namely, the Returning Officer could not provide accurate information on a particular candidate when the data, due to the communications difficulties, was not passed on to the Returning Officer until several days later. The SIEO should distribute the satellite phones to constituencies most affected by poor or no networks.
- **Candidate awareness** – more attention should be given to briefing the intending candidates on the eligibility requirements and they should also be supplied with practical information on the candidacy process. As an example, the candidates were often not aware that the photo on the ballot paper was to be taken during the nomination process. Because of that, some of them came poorly dressed and demanded to have a new photo taken after the nomination was completed.
- **Public service and resignation process** – there was confusion as to which institution was authorized to accept the resignation of public servants who intended to run for an elected office. This, in one particular case, led to the re-printing of ballot papers to include the candidate previously excluded due to the confusion.
- **Candidate fitness and education criteria** – participants raised the question if it was possible to institute the criteria on education and general fitness of intending candidates. The CEO explained that an attempt to regulate such matters might possibly be seen as a violation of basic human rights and as such, it is rather left to the voter to judge and decide if the candidate is capable to represent his/her electorate.

### Polling stations

- **Polling station identification** was severely affected by bad weather. In addition, the tight timeframe over the candidate nomination process influenced the ability of some Assistant Returning Officers to conduct the task in a timely fashion. The newly introduced criterion of having a maximum of 600 voters per polling station was a positive way forward. This allowed for increased accessibility to the voters and has led to a smoother polling process, reduced delays and minimised opportunities for overcrowdedness at polling stations. One identified difficulty was a delay in confirmation of the polling stations by the SIEO. Given that the number of established polling stations is not expected to significantly change for the next General Election, confirming the number of any new ones should be faster the next time around, allowing for uninterrupted planning process and the publication of locations earlier in the process.
- **Village/area revision** – participants noted that some of the villages/areas have a disproportionately high number of assigned voters which did not correspond to the actual population. The issue tracks back to the 2014 BVR when the registrants

were often allocated to the village where the polling station was located, rather than to the village where they lived. This needs to be rectified before the 2023 General Election or even By-election.

- **Voting hours** – participant feedback suggested 97-98% of the voters showed up in the morning hours. The queues were minimal because of a large number of polling stations. The voting was therefore, largely completed by 3pm, with a majority of polling stations completing the polling even earlier, by 1 pm. Very few voters showed up to vote after 3pm. Without exception, the participants requested the SIEC to revise the working hours and consider closing the polls by 4pm. This would allow more time for the completion of the forms and the retrieval of the materials in many cases could be done during daylight.
- **Mapping** – In some cases, the polling station maps were not accurate which occasionally made air-drops difficult. The maps will need to be carefully reviewed for accuracy.

### Pre-poll voting

- **Pre-poll voting** - was perceived as a welcome addition to the Solomon Islands electoral process. Despite that, the participants voiced disappointment that the Attorney General's Chambers interpreted the Electoral Act provisions to limit the duration of the pre-poll voting to a single day across the country. The subsequent decision not to extend the pre-poll voting service to the Presiding Officers and Polling Assistants was also disappointing. As the pre-poll categories will be further expanded, the legislation will need to be reviewed.
- **Pre-poll application process** was centralized and this was viewed by the participants as generally positive. The participants felt that the pre-poll application process was unified and that there was a good measure of shared responsibility with the institution nominating the applicants. Due to the number of potential applicants, the participants agreed that de-centralised in-person application process in Provinces would require additional resources, both financial and human.
- **Pre-poll application status** – there were numerous cases of RSIP Officers not having their names listed in the pre-poll lists at the pre-poll voting stations which affected their ability to vote. Almost without exception, these officers were rejected during the verification process as ineligible. Because some may not have applied for pre-poll voting within prescribed period, the participants recommended better channelling of the information next time around, making sure that the officers were informed in advance of their pre-poll status. In addition, it was recommended that the final pre-poll voter lists with all approved pre-poll voters should be made available at least a week in advance and it should be posted at the pre-poll voting stations for public viewing.
- **Pre-poll voting information campaign** – the overall impression among the participants was that pre-poll voters, the public and candidates were inadequately informed of the pre-poll voting process. In several instances, the candidates were complaining that they were not offered an opportunity to field their polling agents to pre-poll voting stations. The observers were present in some provinces but generally the information on the process was lacking. As the pre-poll voting is expected to expand to include other groups of voters, timely awareness campaign will be crucial for the success of the process.
- **Packing of pre-poll ballot papers and onward distribution** – handling and verification of pre-poll ballot papers for the selected few Provinces caused public consternation when the ballot papers were returned to the Provinces inside the ballot box (Western Province). It is therefore strongly recommended, that the pre-poll ballot papers, as initially indicated in the instruction, are handled by the counting officials only.
- **Pre-poll voter flow and handling of ballot papers** – while there were no major issues with the process, it was noted that in a few cases ballot papers were placed in wrong envelopes. In one case, the PO issued several mismatched envelopes. Those ballot papers were rejected during the counting as they went to the wrong counting centres. It is therefore necessary to reiterate the need to verify that the envelopes match the ballot papers. Additionally, self-sealing envelopes should be used in the future to avoid unintentional damage of ballot papers.
- **Batching, verification and counting of pre-poll ballot papers** – There were no major criticisms of processing of pre-poll ballot papers at the counting centres. The only issue faced with that problem was with the Provinces where pre-poll envelopes were verified at SIEO in Honiara as those envelopes were not accompanied by prescribed reconciliation forms.
- **Double voting prevention** – Although Election Managers and Returning Officers were informed during the training in Honiara that the names of the pre-poll voters should be removed from the voter's lists, this was apparently not always the case. The names were marked with an asterisk but

still appeared in the voter's lists. This caused some confusion among the poll-workers. The SIEO should remove those names from the voter's lists as this, apart from leaving space for double-voting, also affects proper recording of the voter turnout.

### *Out of constituency voting*

- ***Out of constituency voting*** – The CEO informed participants that the SIEC is considering conducting out of constituency voting in the future on the condition that the out of constituency registration will be disallowed. The participants recognized that the out of constituency voting can increase the inclusiveness in elections and can make the voting easier for voters living outside of the constituencies they are registered to vote for.

### *Election materials and logistics*

- ***Transportation routes from Honiara*** – Although the time for the electoral materials distribution was sufficient, the delivery route to Isabel, Western Province and Choiseul saw delays and faced constraints and additional expenses as the training in constituencies could not be delayed. Delays in the distribution especially affected Choiseul as the established route does not have enough time allocated for distribution. In order to avoid time constraints and unplanned costs, it is required to review the distribution timings and make the materials available at least a few days earlier than planned before. This is important in lieu of limited transportation alternatives in the Solomon Islands. Should the Australian Defence Force air and sea support not be available in the future, any similar boat failure could cause the elections to be delayed. In addition, the matter of creating a separate route for Western Province and another one for Isabel and Choiseul would result in a more optimal distribution of materials.

### *Use of assets and coordination*

- ***Use of provincial government assets*** was regarded positively by the participants. It was recognized that the Inter Ministerial Election Operations Committee's (IMEOC) role in mobilizing resources was very helpful to the entire process of election organisation. None-the-less it would have been beneficial to have government resources made available earlier in the process, to give more time for proper planning at provincial levels. It must be recognized however that even if all governmental assets were mobilized, they would only cover 40% of transport needs, however to have 40% of transport

needs covers however represents significant savings to the budget.

- ***Government mobilization coordination*** – While the purpose of IMEOC was recognized as a positive initiative, it was noted that creating similar bodies in provinces could be beneficial to coordinate government response in the field. Such provincial coordination bodies should have representatives from all relevant government branches as well as the RSIPF. Their role should be to help coordinate electoral activities. The CEO informed the participants that the government considers adding the provisions to the Electoral Act which would enable the SIEC to mobilise all government assets as needed to help with the election's organization.
- ***Coordination with the RSIPF*** – The participants agreed that the coordination with the RSIPF has significantly improved since the previous elections. In all cases, the EMs and ROs held regular meetings to coordinate their efforts in deployment of RSIPF officers. Despite the high level of coordination and clear understanding that the SIEC would not have any budgetary responsibility over the RSIPF response, there were cases of local police officers requesting additional allowances and payment of accommodation costs. While the Provincial Electoral Officers did not make requests for additional allowances, in Western Province, the ROs covered the costs of meals and accommodation for local RSIPF. There were no such issues with the RSIPF deployed from Honiara. The SIEO will need to look into these payments as the funds are already expended, albeit against the instruction that no expenses toward RSIPF were to be made. Planning of electoral material distribution and retrieval was done in close coordination with the RSIPF and was executed without major problems.
- ***RSIPF presence at the Polling Stations and Counting Centres*** – Despite the limited number of Police Officers that RSIPF could deploy, they still provided permanent presence in all areas which were identified as potentially difficult. On the other hand, the RSIPF deployed significant numbers of police officers to the counting centres, which boosted the confidence of counting officials and in great number of cases their presence prevented heated situations at the counting centres. Additionally, the RSIPF provided escorting support during the delivery and retrieval of election materials to and from the Polling Stations.
- ***RSIPF electoral briefings*** – while the RSIPF was professional and did not interfere in the process, it was evident that the RSIPF deployed from Honiara was generally better prepared and informed

about their role then their colleagues in some of the Provinces. It is therefore recommended to provide stronger support in structuring the briefing package RSIPF receives across the board.

### Training

- **Training structure** – The participants agreed that organising the training into two separate sessions improved the overall quality of the training. Such a training structure proved to be more focused and easier on the participants. The training was designed to cascade down so that EMs and ROs could train AROs who would assist training the poll workers. While the EMs and ROs were able to train AROs, the AROs appeared to have lacked the confidence to deliver independent training to the poll workers. The participants therefore recommended to the SIEO to include the AROs into the first level cascade training. The SIEO should plan for robust training structure. Where possible, the SIEO should engage other relevant institutions to provide enough trainers, e.g., Ministry of Education.



▲  
Elections Media training Supported by SECSIP, with financial assistance by the Australian Government, the EU and UNDP.

- **Training manuals** – The participants noted the value of training manuals however, they also noted that, due to their size, the manuals were impractical as a reference guide on polling day. The poll-workers benefited more from 1-page checklists outlining the relevant parts of the process. In many cases, on their own initiative, the EMs and ROs summarized the manuals and provided those to the poll-workers.

They also focused on providing relevant practical exercises.

- **Cascade training** – as noted, most of the AROs were not confident enough to separately deliver the training sessions to poll-workers. ROs therefore carried out those trainings as well. Some of the ROs delivered the theoretical part of training to entire group, and then split the training participants into smaller groups for practical exercises.

### Polling day

- **Number of voters at Polling Stations** – A smaller number of voters per polling station resulted in an uninterrupted flow of voters. The revision of voter allocation to polling stations within established criteria coupled with a ‘vote early’ campaign resulted in most voters casting their votes in the morning hours. This allowed for timely closure of polling stations, in keeping with the schedule.
- **Location and physical size of polling stations** – The ROs were able to identify sufficient number of adequate hard structures to serve as polling stations. Only in a few isolated cases, the temporary structures had to be created to serve as polling stations. The weather was fortunately cooperating and did not test the durability of temporary structures.
- **Authorized persons inside the polling stations** – There were no issues with candidates attempting to spend more time than needed inside the polling stations, and even though the Candidate Agents were not issued with the badges, no issue was observed or reported with having more than one authorized agent in a polling station. The only time when there was more than one candidate agent inside the Polling Stations or Counting Centres was during the shift changes, when both, the departing and the replacing agents were at the venue together. In general, that practice did not cause any problems.
- **Indelible ink** – Participants noted that the use of indelible ink is a positive practice in preventing multiple voting. However,

in some cases the ink stained the ballot papers when those were handled before the ink dried. The participants discussed when the ink should be applied and reached a consensus that dipping the finger in indelible ink just before the ballot paper is placed inside the ballot box will minimize the risk of staining the ballot papers.

- **Signature or thumb print by voters on Voter Lists** – Participants noted that in a few cases polling officials incorrectly marked the voters who had voted. Ticking the boxes next to the names of those who had voted leaves process open to abuse, and while it was not seen as a major issue during this election, it might become so in the future. The participants agreed that reformatting the voter lists to provide for a space for voters’ thumb print instead of a tick-box prevents potential abuse. The thumb prints captured this way represent forensic evidence if allegations are made that people voted in place of others.
- **Sealing of ballot boxes and recording of serial numbers** – In few cases the ballot boxes were not properly sealed. More often, the top seal number was not properly recorded. In the future, the training should reiterate the importance of both, proper sealing and careful recording of seal numbers. Some ROs were of opinion that the contract payment should be withheld until all materials are checked and verified as received in required condition.
- **Electoral forms** – The participants agreed that there are too many forms to document the process. There was a consensus that forms should be combined to simplify the process, and avoid having to unnecessarily enter identical information multiple times. As the staff rushed to complete the packing process before dark, some forms were left incomplete or not filled in at all.
- **Polling hours** – Some participants noted that with the increased number of polling stations and a majority of voters voting in the morning, polling stations could close at 4pm and poll-workers could have an extra hour of daylight to retrieve materials. Others thought that urban areas would benefit from the later start, while rural areas benefit more from the earlier start of polling so people can get back to farming.
- **General complaints** – The EMs and ROs were not trained enough nor were they provided a written guidance on how to deal with general complaints. This caused the inconsistent handling of complaints received. The SIEC needs to issue guidelines on processing the complaints so they can be handled in a structured and consistent manner.

## Counting and declaration of election results

- **Centralized counting and counting venues** – Participants positively viewed the initiative to centralise the counting process. Despite more complex logistics in retrieving the ballot boxes to central counting centres, centralized counting and counting venues allowed for better oversight of the process; it reduced security burden on RSIPF; and improved communication with the EMs and the SIEO, making it possible to transmit the results to the SIEO faster. Each Province was able to identify suitable number of counting centres.
- **Setting up of counting centres** – The participants agreed that the counting process can be further improved. It was also recommended to the SIEO to provide detailed guidelines for setting up the counting centres. A consideration should be given to the appointment of a small Counting Centre Management team to fulfil the role of managing the flow of visitors to the counting centres; provide uniformed briefings to the counting agents and observers; and ensure dissemination of relevant service information on the process to those present inside the counting centres. This would enable the counting teams to concentrate on their task at hand.
- **Batching, verification of ballot papers and counting** – Removal of the serial number from the ballot paper and the voter ID number from the counterfoil served to protect the secrecy of vote, and the batching process reinforced the efforts to protect it as well. The batching however made counting process more complex causing initial delays. The counting speed picked up later on as the routine was established but it would be useful in the future to provide practical exercises of batching and counting during training.
- **Audit** – One area that requires guidelines from the SIEO is “internal audit” in cases where the discrepancies are determined. Often, those were found to be administrative errors. However, in order to properly assess and rectify such errors, a proper guidance needs to be established. Polling Station codification was useful as it allowed easier tracking of Polling Stations.
- **Use of Forms EF031-EF034 and their timely submission** – several mistakes were discovered in the results forms received by SIEO in Honiara. The participants noted that this could have been avoided with a proper training on the use of the forms. The results management system was introduced very late in the process and was never covered in the training. Considering that the staff

were operating from a written instruction only, and despite delays in the final verification and submission to the Governor-General and the Clerk to Parliament, the process went relatively well.

- **Declaration of results** – It was explained that while the ROs were responsible for declaring the winner of an election, the process did not end there. The SIEC was tasked to verify electoral results and announce them publicly. The verified result forms were then submitted to the Governor General for approval and were published in the Official Gazette. Only then, the negotiations for the formation of the Government could commence. Therefore, the ROs engagement in the timely correction of errors/discrepancies is crucial.

### Human Resources Management

- **Recruitment process** – There was a general feeling that the recruitment process was relatively flexible which meant that, at times, the RO's had liberty to decide on a recruitment process. The lack of a competitive recruitment process in some cases opened the RO's to criticism.
- **Recruitment of essential field staff** – Late timing of recruitment on all levels resulted in a very tight timeframe for the implementation of activities and often led to rushed training, especially for the poll-workers.
- **Selection criteria for Revising Officers** – The Revising Officers (RVOs) were effectively exercising the role of a Judge. At times, some of the RVOs were under significant pressure by the public and had a difficulty in executing their tasks in an unbiased manner. In many instances this was attributed to the lack of legal training.
- **Gender balance in recruitment** – in several constituencies where more attention was given to the recruitment of female officers, the process benefited from better organization.
- **Code of Conduct** – the introduction of an oath ceremony at the conclusion of training was perceived as a useful practice reinforcing the message of accountability. This ceremony should be extended to the poll-workers as well.
- **Monitoring of performance** – As there had been no prescribed mechanism for monitoring the staff performance, previously underperforming staff apparently applied and were rehired to work on this election. Therefore, the recommendation is to develop staff performance monitoring tools.

### Financial Management

- The SIEO Head of Finance gave the financial overview of the BVR and the 2019 NGE and explained the budgeting process and MoFT procedures. While \$40m was budgeted, the expenditure mounted to \$48m.
- Overall, participants acknowledged that the budget was sufficient however the release of funds was in almost all cases delayed which affected the election timings. The retirement of finances represents the biggest issue for ROs and AROs as many of them are not acquitted according to the financial procedures. Furthermore, poor practices and poor culture of using invoices by vendors in the field made the accounting process unnecessarily complicated. The SIEO should therefore introduce internal invoice booklets which could be used for local payments. This would improve the situation caused by the lack of invoices from vendors.
- **Budgeting process** – The SIEO Head of Finance explained to the participants that the budgeting process precedes the start of the operation by 6-10 months. As the changes in the Electoral Act led to the operational changes, the approved budget had to be repeatedly recalculated. He stressed that the unspent funds need to be returned to the MoFT.
- **Withdrawal of funds** – was an issue as the bank branches operate with limited liquidity. The EMs had no option but to withdraw funds in smaller amounts of SBD 50K over a period of several days.

The SIEO is conscious of the fact that lessons learned workshops have only been held internally, and that to date there have been no feedback sessions with stakeholders, political parties and candidates, the media etc. It is hoped such lessons learned workshops will be held with these election participants during the latter half of 2019.

### Finance

The SIEC was granted a separate "expenditure head" in the 2019 recurrent budget for the first time since its establishment under the Constitution. Previously the Electoral Commission was part of Ministry of Home Affairs as a subdivision within that Ministry. The 2019 year will be a challenging one in terms of financial management because the office will conduct the NGE under its new expenditure head.

There are six key objective areas that the SIEO Finance Unit needs to achieve in this upcoming election. They are:

- Compliance with the Financial Management Act and other procedures
- Budget systems are developed that achieve full funding of SIEC activities and proper allocation of funds
- Effective Cash flow management systems
- A procurement process that ensures value for money in the purchase of goods and services
- Asset management procedures and practices that safeguard SIECs and SIG assets
- Financial management reporting that provides appropriate information on all financial matters

It is estimated that about 64% of the total budget will again be allocated and spent in the Provinces for various activities in the NGE timeline. The cost will be funded by the Solomon Islands Government however it is anticipated that there will again be assistance from donor partners with the supply of election materials such as polling kits, voting screens, selected areas in awareness programs and logistics.

### Electoral complaints

Political parties, candidates or persons seeking to be nominated as a candidate are entitled to seek the review of a decision, action or inaction of an electoral officer. General complaints must be lodged within 2 days from the decision, action or inaction, and contain alleged facts and name/contact details of the complainant. The SIEC is responsible for registering the complaint and provide a chance for a fair hearing. Complaints should be decided within 24 hours after receiving it on matters related to candidate nomination, or 3 days for a complaint related to any other matter. The Electoral Act also provides for the lodging of complaints in connection with incidents during voting and counting.

### Election petitions

There are 3 categories of petitions to the Court:

- **Election petition** – where an elector or a candidate submits a petition arguing that the winning MP was not validly elected. The election petition must be filed within 30 days after the proclamation of a winning candidate was made. A petitioner must be from the constituency the petition is referring to;

- **Status petition** – where the right of a person to be an MP is questioned. This type of petition can be filed either by an elector or by the Attorney General; and
- **Vacancy petition** – where the ruling on whether the seat of an MP has become vacant. This type of petition can be filed by an MP or the Attorney General.

A total of \_\_\_ election petitions were filed in the High Court in Honiara before the period closed. As at the time of writing this report \_\_\_ had been heard

### Summary

The number of registered voters increased significantly between the 2014 and 2019 General Elections, in fact by 71,956. While in some locations it was not necessary to increase the number of polling stations because there was sufficient space within the existing polling facility, in many other locations additional polling stations were necessary. Across the country the number of polling stations increased by 175, from 87 in 2014 to 1,043 in 2019. Such an increase has a knock-on effect, not just for staffing costs, but in the provision of materials and supplies, logistics etc.

One way of presenting the General Election in the Solomon Islands, the following Table sets out some key comparative statistics between the 2014 and 2019 events.

Outcomes of Voter Registration 2014-2019

	2014	2019
No. of election officials	2,700	3,400
No. of polling stations	867	1,042
No. of registered parties	12	15
No. of candidates	447	331
No. of female candidates	26	26
No. of male candidates	421	307
No. of Independent candidates	246	163
No. of political party candidates	201	168
No. on the list of voters	287,567	359,523
Voter turnout	258,599	310,667
Voter turnout %	89.93%	86.41%

## Electoral Boundaries

While not a function of the Electoral Commission it is none-the-less noted that the electoral boundaries have not changed for many years in the Solomon Islands, with the last review by the Boundaries Commission, in 2009, not being accepted by Parliament. As a result of not having electoral boundary changes for many years now, the wide disparities between the constituencies across the country are becoming increasingly evident. In terms of population size the smallest is Malaita Outer Islands with 2,769 registered voters; the largest is Central Honiara with 15,986 registered voters.

## Summary and challenges and priorities for the future

The SIEO continues to operate out of cramped and sub-standard accommodation – there is need to get more space well before any additional personnel are recruited. This is a critical situation now that the SIEO has had to vacate the building occupied by the Leader of the Independent's Office.

Although there is urgency for the SIEO to take over responsibility for Provincial Assembly and Local Government elections in the Solomon Islands, this can only be achieved if and when adequate funding and personnel are provided by SIG. The SIEO simply cannot add this significant additional activity to its current responsibilities without extra resources. Discussions will need to be held with MPGIS officials to determine how such a transfer of functions might work in practice, and when.

A new Electoral Commission needs to be appointed in terms of the Amendment to s.57 of the Constitution – as provided by the new Constitution (Amendment) (Electoral Reform) Act. This requires the appointment of a new Chair, the re-appointment of the two current Commissioners, and the confirmation of the CEO as a continuing Commissioner. The right time for this change is likely to be late 2019 after a lot of the other challenges are completed or resolved.

On the matter of electoral reform, the recently passed Electoral Act will require some minor amendments as a result of experience gained conducting the BVR Update and the NGE. One of those amendments will be to look at ways in which the SIEO can offer better pre-poll services for other classes of voters besides electoral officials and Police Officers on duty, as well

as the possibility of providing remote and out of constituency voting. There is also continuing interest in the possibility of a new electoral system for the Solomon Islands. If the DCGA Government wishes this to be pursued it will require extensive effort on the part of the SIEO to ensure any system is workable and that the public is kept fully aware of the process if it should be approved.

With regard to the List of Voters we need to review and improve our procedures to ensure we continue to provide high quality electoral roll information for electoral events as required, and in mid/late 2019 consider how the SIEO might commence the pre-registration of 17 years old.

Finance continues to be a problem and it is doubtful that the SIEO will be provided with sufficient funding for the NGE in early 2019. This is being vigorously pursued and will be closely monitored.

There is also a need to evaluate the feedback provided from the Lessons Learned workshops held recently in Gizo, Auki and Honiara, in an effort to identify and seek improvements in the future.

The major challenge in 2019 was of course the NGE. This was a significant undertaking requiring huge resources, and unlike many other activities there was just one chance to get it right. Until it was completed, with all results declared by Returning Officers, lessons learned workshops held, all ballot papers and materials are in safe storage in readiness for any Election Petitions which may be lodged, it continued to be the SIEO's primary focus.

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There is also a need to thoroughly evaluate the feedback provided from the Lessons Learned workshops held recently in Gizo, Auki and Honiara, in an effort to identify and seek improvements in the future.

Finance continues to be a problem and as the work program is developed post the 2019 General Election it will be critical the SIEO is provided with sufficient funding to enable it to move forward to ensure electoral events in the Solomon Islands continue to be conducted to the best possible standard

