



Parliament Fact Sheet



No. [4]

OFFICERS OF THE HOUSE

Some members of Parliament and officials have specific formal duties in the house of the National Parliament. They are known as Officers of the House. Their titles and functions are set out below.

THE SPEAKER

Section 64 of the Constitution makes provision for the election of a Speaker, from amongst persons qualified for election as a Member of Parliament and a Deputy Speaker, from amongst the Members, on the first day of sitting of the Parliament after a general election. These positions are crucial to the workings of Parliament as no business, except the election of the Speaker, can be conducted at any time when the Office of the Speaker is vacant.

The Speaker controls and supervises the meetings of the House and rules on points of procedure. The Speaker's role is of great significance in a Parliamentary democracy and it has a colourful past.

Current Solomon Islands context

The Speaker of Solomon Islands National Parliament's main visible function is to chair the meetings of the house and to rule on procedure. The Speaker manages the business of the Chamber and ensures that Members are conducting themselves in a parliamentary fashion. The Speaker's position is crucial to the workings of the Parliament.

The election of the Speaker is done in accordance with the Constitution. Voting is done by secret ballot and Members are provided with a list of candidates prior to the vote. Candidates are eliminated by sequential ballots unless a candidate achieves an absolute majority in the

first ballot. The Speaker remains in office for the term of the Parliament.

In addition to presiding over the House, the Standing Orders (procedural rules) of the House confer upon the Speaker a number of functions to be carried out on behalf of the House. Included are issuing of summons for a witness to appear or for the production of documents to be presented before a committee and also considering matters of privilege raised by Members.



The Speaker, Rt Hon. Sir Peter Kenilorea, and the Clerk, Taeasi Sanga, in the Parliament chamber.

DEPUTY SPEAKER

Section 64 of the Constitution also makes provision for the election of a Deputy Speaker. The Deputy Speaker must be from among the Members of Parliament. The Deputy Speaker, in the absence of the Speaker, can perform any of

the duties and exercise any of the authorities bestowed upon the Speaker in relation to Parliamentary Proceedings.



CLERK OF THE HOUSE

The Clerk of the Parliament House is a permanent non-political officer who remains in office regardless of which party (or parties) controls the House. The Clerk provides the Secretariat support to the House and its committees. During Parliamentary sittings the Clerk is seated directly in front of the Speaker, taking notes of the proceedings and advising members as required. When the House meets after a general election, the clerk, under a commission from the Governor General, administers the oaths of allegiance of Members. The Clerk also presides over the election of the Speaker.

It is the duty of the Clerk to keep the Minutes of Proceedings of the Parliament and the Committees for the Speaker's signature and for distribution to Members at the commencement of the next sitting. It is also the duty of the Clerk to keep the Order Book up to date showing all the business for which notice has been given.

For each sitting, the Clerk, on advice of the Secretary to Cabinet, is responsible for preparation of:

- an Order Paper which shows the business for that sitting and

- a Notice Paper which shows all motions, questions and reports for which notice has been given.

As prescribed in the Standing Orders, the Clerk is responsible for the safe keeping of all votes, bills, records and documents laid before the Parliament. These must be maintained in a transparent system for easy inspection by Members at all times and other persons approved by the Speaker.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS

The Sergeant-at-Arm's role is the ceremonial function of carrying the mace while leading the Speaker in and out of the debating chamber. The Sergeant-at-Arms main responsibility is ensuring rules of conduct in the confines of the debating chamber are followed while the House is sitting. The Sergeant-at-Arms would also ensure those summonses are served if at any time the Speaker were to issue a summons.

The Mace carried by the Sergeant-at-Arms symbolises the Speaker's authority. The Sergeant carries it into the debating chamber ahead of the Speaker and on any other ceremonial occasions such as delivering a formal address to the Governor General.

FURTHER READING

The Solomon Islands Independence Order 1978

Acknowledgement

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