



THE BAHAMAS



1 INTRODUCTION

The Commonwealth of the Bahamas consists of a chain of several hundred islands of which only around 20 are inhabited. The islands in general, with the exception of New Providence and Grand Bahama, are often referred to as the 'Out Islands' or the 'Family Islands'. They lie in the Atlantic Ocean 50 miles to the east and south-east of Florida, USA. The population is 305,655 and the total area is 13,940 sq km of which 10,070 sq km is mainland area.

The Bahamas is a constitutional monarchy. HM Queen Elizabeth II is the head of state represented by an appointed governor-general, and the prime minister is the head of government. Parliament is bicameral with a 16-member (appointed) Senate and a wholly elected 40-member House of Assembly. Both houses have five-year terms. Elections for the single-member constituencies are held by popular vote using a first-past-the-post system. There is universal suffrage at age 18.

All 16 Senate members are appointed by the governor-general: nine are appointed with

the advice of the prime minister, four are appointed with the advice of the leader of the opposition and three are appointed with the advice of the prime minister after consultation with the leader of the opposition.¹

The governor-general appoints the cabinet on the recommendation of the prime minister. Nassau, the capital, is administered directly by central government. There are 31 local government districts being 13 second-schedule districts and 19 third-schedule districts. Local government expenditure contributes about 0.64% to GDP.

2 POLITICAL AND ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE OF THE BAHAMAS

2.1 Position of local government in the state

The most recent general election in the Bahamas took place in May 2007 when the Free National Movement (FNM) won 41 seats (49.85%), PLP won 39 seats (46.96%).

Local government policy is formulated and administered through the Ministry of Local Government and Consumer Affairs within the Local Government Act of 1996. The minister

may create new local government areas from time to time based on demography.

3 LEGAL BASIS FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT

3.1 Constitutional provisions

The constitution of the Bahamas is silent on the subject of local government.

3.2 Main legislative texts

The key Act on local government in the Bahamas is the Local Government Act 1996.

The minister responsible for local government is known as the Minister for Family Island Affairs.

4 LOCAL GOVERNMENT ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE

4.1 Main divisions

There are two types of local council in the Bahamas – second-schedule district councils and third-schedule district councils. There are 13 second-schedule district councils and 19 third-schedule district councils.

The two differ in the way in which the councillors are elected, the functions for which they are responsible, and in that second-schedule districts are comprised of town areas governed in part by town committees.

4.2 Distribution of local governments and population

The average population of a local government district is 2,983. However, the range is vast. The smallest second-schedule district is Cat Island, which has a population of 1,548, and the largest is Central Abaco with a population of 6,014. In the third-schedule districts the range is even greater: the smallest is Ragged Island with just 72 residents, and the largest is the City of Freeport with a population of 31,478. 90% of the population live in urban areas.

Table 1. Size and range of councils

	Second-schedule district	Third-schedule district
Largest	6,014	31,478
Smallest	1,548	72

The 13 second-schedule districts are: North Abaco, Central Abaco, South Abaco, North Andros, Central Andros, South Andros, Cat Island, Central Eleuthera, South Eleuthera, Exuma, East Grand Bahama, West Grand Bahama, and Long Island. These are further sub-divided into town areas.

The 19 third-schedule districts are: Grand Cay, Hope Town, Moore's Island, Berry Islands, Mangrove Cay, Bimini and Cat Cay, Acklins, Crooked Island and Long Cay, Harbour Island, North Eleuthera, Spanish Wells, Black Point, Ragged Island, City of Freeport, Inagua, Mayaguana, San Salvador, Rum Cay, and Green Turtle Cay. These are all unitary authorities. The second and third schedules together make up the first schedule.

5 DEMOCRATIC AND POLITICAL STRUCTURES IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Councillors of third-schedule district councils and members of schedule-two town committees are elected. Elections are held every three years on a first-past-the-post system. Third-schedule district councils have between five and nine elected councillors.

Second-schedule districts are comprised of between seven and nine members, the chairpersons of the town committees in their district, and other such committee members as may be required who are elected or appointed to the council.

For both types of district councils the chief councillors and their deputies are elected from amongst themselves. They serve for the lifetime of the council and the minister determines their stipend. Second-schedule district councils' statutory boards also elect chairpersons and their deputies from amongst themselves.

District councils and town committees are required to hold at least one monthly meeting that is open to the public. They may also hold occasional meetings closed to the public.

Currently there are two serving female councillors and a significant number of other elected female local government practitioners.

5.1 Second-schedule districts

Second-schedule districts have the following statutory boards and committees:

- Road Traffic Licensing Authority
- Port and Harbour Authority
- Hotel Licensing Board
- Liquor and Shop Licensing
- Town Planning Committee.

Third-schedule district councils carry out all of the functions of a council, a town committee and the statutory (regulatory and licensing)

boards appointed by second-schedule district councils. However there is one exception among the third-schedule districts: the City of Freeport Council, which has the option to appoint the various statutory boards aforementioned. Both second- and third-schedule district councils themselves carry out the building control function.

5.2 Town committees

The town committees are sub-structures of the second-schedule district councils, but are corporate bodies themselves.

5.3 Local government and staffing

The local government administrator is an appointed official, who is inextricably intertwined with both local and central government. This official is the principal link between the two levels of government, serving as the chief representative of the central government in the district and carrying out multiple functions including magisterial duties. The administrator is the executive secretary and financial officer for all local government bodies, financial officer for all central government agencies in the district and coordinator of all governmental official functions in the district. Notably, some administrators are responsible for two to three districts.

5.4 Scrutiny

Both second- and third-schedule district councils must submit financial reports to the ministry responsible for local government as well as to the Ministry of Finance.

6 DISTRIBUTION OF SERVICE DELIVERY COMPETENCE

Councils, town committees and statutory boards provide services at the local level. Notably, councils and town committees have discretionary powers to decide on the award and duration of contracts and the appointment of boards and committees.

7 FINANCE

7.1 Revenue

While revenue is collected in the local government districts by the administrator for deposit into the central government's Consolidated Fund Account, no local government body is empowered under the present Act to engage in revenue-generating schemes. Funding for all of their expenditure is provided by the central government via transfer payments.

7.2 Revenue-sharing

The Local Government Act 1996 provides rebate percentages relative to revenue generated in

the district based on the traditional taxes and fees of the central government.

8 ORGANISATIONS OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The Bahamas Association of Local Government Authorities (BALGA) and the Association of Local Government Administrators (ALGA) are voluntary organisations. Their aim is to foster the growth and development of local government and to exchange views, opinions and experiences. Neither association is recognised by law or by the constitution and both are funded by membership contributions and affiliated to international organisations via regional bodies.

9 INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS

Intergovernmental relations in the Bahamas are conducted formally through the island administrator.

10 E-GOVERNMENT

The government of the Bahamas is in the process of implementing an e-government strategy, which will involve the local government system. The ministry responsible for local government has placed the relevant legislation and guidance on the web.

In 2005 there were 93,000 internet users in the Bahamas, 30.6% of the population.²

11 ENVISAGED REFORMS

In 2006, the government of the Bahamas began public consultation and discussion on the idea of local government for New Providence, where some 60% of the population reside.

12 SUMMARY

Elected local government was formally established in 1996. So far there have been four local government elections. Although local government is 100% funded by central government, it has maintained its autonomy and has had a significant positive impact on local communities through service delivery and local development.

References

- 1 www.epicproject.org
- 2 CIA World Factbook 2007.

Service	Delivering authority				Remarks
	Central	Second-schedule district councils	Town committees	Third-schedule district councils	
GENERAL ADMINISTRATION					
Police	●				
Fire protection	●	●			
Civil protection	●	●			
Criminal justice	●				
Civil justice	●				
Civil status register					
Statistical office					
Electoral register	●				
EDUCATION					
Pre-school		●			
Primary	●				
Secondary	●				
Vocational and technical	●	●			
Higher education	●				
Adult education	●	●			
SOCIAL WELFARE					
Kindergarten and nursery		●			
Family welfare services	●				
Welfare homes	●				
Social security	●				
PUBLIC HEALTH					
Primary care	●	●			
Hospitals	●	●			
Health protection	●				
HOUSING AND TOWN PLANNING					
Housing	●			●	
Town planning	●	●	●	●	
Regional planning	●	●			
TRANSPORT					
Roads	●	●	●	●	
Transport	●	●			
Urban roads	●		●	●	
Urban rail					
Ports	●	●	●	●	
Airports	●	●		●	
Other					
ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC SANITATION					
Water and sanitation	●		●	●	
Refuse collection and disposal	●		●	●	
Cemeteries and crematoria	●		●	●	
Slaughterhouses	●				
Environmental protection	●	●			
Consumer protection	●	●			
CULTURE, LEISURE AND SPORTS					
Theatre and concerts	●	●			
Museums and libraries	●	●			
Parks and open spaces	●		●	●	
Sports and leisure	●		●	●	
Religious facilities	●	●			
UTILITIES					
Gas services	●	●			
District heating					
Water supply	●	●	●	●	
Electricity	●	●		●	
ECONOMIC					
Agriculture, forests and fisheries	●				
Economic promotion	●				
Trade and industry	●	●		●	
Tourism	●	●		●	