

The local government system in

# Solomon Islands



## Key facts

**POPULATION (Census 2009):** 515,870  
**AREA:** 28,896 sq km  
**CAPITAL:** Honiara  
**CURRENCY:** Solomon Islands dollar (SBD)  
**LOCAL GOVERNMENT CONTRIBUTION TO GDP:** 0.27%  
**HEAD OF STATE:** HM Queen Elizabeth II  
**GOVERNOR-GENERAL:** Sir Frank Kubui  
**HEAD OF GOVERNMENT:**  
 Prime Minister Danny Philip  
**FORM OF GOVERNMENT:** constitutional monarchy  
 and parliamentary democracy  
**PARLIAMENTARY SYSTEM:** unicameral  
**STATE STRUCTURE:** unitary  
**LANGUAGES:** English (official)  
**NATIONAL ELECTIONS: last:** Aug 2010;  
**turnout:** - **next:** 2014  
**LOCAL ELECTIONS: last:** Dec 2010; **turnout:** -  
**next:** 2014

### SUMMARY

The Solomon Islands is a constitutional monarchy with three tiers of government; national, provincial and local. The constitution specifically mentions sub-national government whilst the main legislative texts for local government include the Local Government Act 1996, Provincial Government Act 1997 and the Honiara City Act 1999. The Minister for Home Affairs has responsibility for all other local government including Honiara city whilst the Minister for Provincial Government has responsibility for the provinces. Honiara City Council is currently the only established local government and is empowered to raise local revenue through property rates, business tax and through fees for services or licences.

### 1. CENTRAL GOVERNMENT

The Solomon Islands is a constitutional monarchy with a unicameral parliament. The head of state is HM Queen Elizabeth II, represented by a governor-general recommended by parliament. The governor-general holds office for a term of five years. The national parliament comprises 50 members elected for a four-year term under a

first-past-the-post system in single-member constituencies. The head of government is the prime minister who appoints a cabinet of 23 from the members of parliament. Sub-national government is made up of nine provincial assemblies and Honiara City Council. The number of members in each provincial assembly varies according to population. All members are elected for a four-year term under the first-past-the-post system and each assembly is headed by a premier indirectly elected by the members.

### 2. LEGAL BASIS FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT

#### 2.1 Constitutional provisions:

The constitution specifically mentions sub-national government and makes provision for the city of Honiara and the provinces.

#### 2.2 Main legislative texts:

The specific Acts governing local government are:

- Local Government Act 1996 (Cap. 117) allows the minister to establish local councils, and local councils to establish area committees
- Provincial Government Act 1997 establishes

provincial assemblies and allows provincial assemblies to establish area councils

- Honiara City Act 1999 establishes the Honiara City Council.

### 3. STRUCTURE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

#### 3.1 Local government within the state:

The Solomon Islands currently has three tiers of government; national, provincial and local. The Local Government Act 1996 (Cap. 117) (LGA) allows the Minister for Home Affairs to establish local government councils and provides for councils' powers and functions; however, there are no councils established under this Act. Honiara City Council is currently the only local government body in the Solomon Islands, and was established under the separate Honiara City Act 1999. Provincial assemblies are established under the Provincial Government Act 1997 (Cap. 118) (PGA) which provides for their powers and functions, which are both political and administrative in nature.

#### 3.2 Ministerial oversight:

The Minister for Home Affairs administers the LGA and also the Honiara City Act 1999 (HCA) which

**Table 1.** Distribution of councils and population (Census 2009)

Region	Number of councils	Population (Census 2009)*	% rural
Honiara City	1	64,602	0
Central Province	0	26,051	100
Choiseul Province	0	26,379	100
Guadalcanal Province (excluding Honiara)	0	93,613	100
Isabel Province	0	26,158	100
Makira and Ulawa Province	0	40,419	99
Malaita Province	0	137,596	95
Rennell and Bellona Province	0	3,041	100
Temotu Province	0	21,362	99
Western Province	0	76,649	96
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>515,870*</b>	<b>85.5**</b>

\*provisional \*\* estimated Source: Solomon Islands National Statistics Office, please note many localities were not included in the census.

establishes Honiara City Council. The HCA gives the minister various functions relating to oversight of the council, including:

- Appointing four out of the 20 council members
- Assenting to council ordinances
- Dissolving the council if it is not fulfilling its functions
- Transferring certain functions under national legislation to the council
- Appointing standing committee members on the mayor's advice
- Approving certain borrowing, lending and investment activities.

The Minister for Provincial Government administers the PGA. With the exception of appointing members, the minister's functions, in relation to provincial governments, are loosely comparable to those performed by the Minister for Home Affairs in relation to Honiara City Council (see above).

### 3.3 Council types:

Honiara City Council is currently the only established local government.

The HCA requires Honiara City Council to establish a minimum of seven standing committees. The Act further states that the executive powers of those committees are limited to those delegated in writing from the mayor, albeit they cannot include powers to borrow money, set a rate or tax, make ordinances or execute a contract. There are currently ten standing committees mirroring the operational divisions of the council, but their powers are limited to researching and making recommendations to council. The Act also gives the council powers to form ad-hoc committees for special purposes.

Sub-national government consists of:

- Nine provincial governments (provincial assemblies), established under the PGA
- Honiara City Council, established under the HCA
- Local councils (including town councils), which may be established by the Minister for Home Affairs under the LGA (none are currently established). The previous local government body for Honiara, Honiara Town Council, was established under the LGA (and dissolved when the HCA came into force).
- Area councils, which may be constituted by provincial assemblies under the PGA (none are currently constituted) and area committees, which may be appointed by local councils under the LGA (none are currently appointed).

For approximately ten years prior to 2008, Honiara City Council struggled to fulfil many of its functions due to ethnic tensions, civil disturbances and poor community support for the council. This resulted in low staff morale, poor revenue collection, equipment maintenance etc, and the inability of the council to function. Recently the community has reacknowledged the purpose, function and capacity of the council, and is now starting to seek alliances with, and demand services of, the council.

## 4. ELECTIONS

### 4.1 Recent local elections:

Honiara City Council members were elected in December 2010.

### 4.2 Voting system:

Honiara City Council members are elected for a four-year term under the first-past-the-post system. The council is headed by a mayor indirectly elected by the councillors.

### 4.3 Elected representatives:

Honiara City Council has 20 councillors, as follows:

- 12 elected councillors (each representing a ward)
- four members appointed by the minister
- the three members of parliament who represent Honiara City
- the premier of Guadalcanal province (the island on which Honiara sits).

The 12 elected councillors are elected through a ward voting system on a first-past-the-post basis for a four-year term. The mayor is elected by and from the full 20 councillors. The mayor may be removed by resolution passed by an absolute majority of council members, but not within 18 months from appointment.

Each of the 12 council wards has a ward advisory committee of local citizens to represent sub-ward areas, advise the elected councillor on local issues and make recommendations on community/individual applications for ward development grant monies allocated by the council to all wards.

### 4.4 Women's representation:

The minister has appointed one woman councillor, who was nominated by the Solomon Islands Council for Women.

## 5. SYSTEMS FOR COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

### 5.1 Legal requirement:

There is no specific legislation governing community consultation.

### 5.2 Implementation:

Community engagement in the local decision-making process is mostly through ward committees, which are intended to provide two-way feedback via the ward councillor, in practice these committees meet rarely. Discussion with student groups has taken place and various women's groups have sought and been granted extra space in the central market to promote products and ideas.

### 5.3 E-government:

There is no e-government strategy in place.

## 6. ORGANISED LOCAL GOVERNMENT

### 6.1 National local government association:

There is no association of local government in the Solomon Islands. At the federal level however the premiers and CEOs of the nine provinces hold an annual premiers' conference to discuss mutual sub-national issues and interaction with central government. They include the lord mayor and CEO of Honiara City Council as participating members.

**Table 2.** Aggregate revenue and expenditure for local government (2009)

Revenue (in local currency)	2009	Expenditure (in local currency)	
<b>Government transfer (total)</b>		<b>Admin and operational (total)</b>	
Conditional		Salaries total	\$2,197,184
Unconditional	\$1,256,959	Elected representatives	\$1,566,398
Other (please specify)		Staff allowances	\$1,168,064
		Facilities total	
		of which maintenance R & M	\$1,487,023
<b>Local tax (total)</b>		Operational Costs	\$5,838,359
council tax		<b>Service delivery</b>	
Property tax	\$2,969,475		
Business tax (Basic Rate)	\$2,352,836	Other (specify & breakdown)	
Other tax (please specify)			
<b>Charges for services (total)</b>		<b>Service delivery (total)</b>	
Utility charges 1		Utilities	
(specify & breakdown)		(specify & breakdown)	
Market Services	\$2,527,850		
Utility charges 2	-	Possibly inc. water, gas, electricity etc	
Land & Planning	\$532,568		
Utility charges 3		Infrastructure (specify & breakdown)	
		Buildings	\$242,868
		Plant & Equipment	£67,264
		Vehicles	£178,500
Business Licensing	\$2,630,776	Possible inc. roads, sewage	
Please indicate		Other Services (specify & breakdown)	
Other charges/sales (specify & breakdown)			
Miscellaneous/other	\$656,719	Miscellaneous/other	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$12,927,183</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$12,745,642</b>

The above table is exclusive of donor support and conditional government grants for Education and Health which are separate authorities under the responsibility of the Council

This was in recognition that the capital city has a pivotal role as the gateway to the Solomon Islands with a larger population than most provinces and a population drawn from across the provinces.

## 7. INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS

The HCA allows the Minister for Home Affairs to appoint four out of Honiara's 20 council members. The three members of parliament who represent Honiara City, and the premier of Guadalcanal province are also ex-officio council members. In theory, these arrangements allow for involvement of national and provincial government representatives in council decision-making. Members' attendance at council meetings has been sporadic.

The council is often asked for its views on national policy and legislative initiatives. Recent capacity-building efforts have enabled it to respond to these requests and promote local government interests through engagement with other agencies. While there are no formal mechanisms for liaison with the Ministry of Home Affairs, the council endeavours to keep the ministry informed of key policy developments. Formal interaction also occurs where ministerial approval is required for proposed council activities.

## 8. MONITORING SYSTEMS

Honiara City Council accounts are required audits of annually by the Auditor General, tabled before full council and forwarded to the Minister of Home Affairs for parliamentary scrutiny. Other bodies empowered by legislation to provide independent scrutiny include the ombudsman, the Ministry of Home Affairs and the Leadership Code Commission. The council also has an internal code of conduct for staff and elected members.

## 9. FINANCE, STAFFING AND RESOURCES

### 9.1 Locally raised revenue:

The PGA allows provincial assemblies to impose taxes in the form of property rates and to otherwise raise revenue through basic rates (head tax) and fees for services or licences. The HCA allows Honiara City Council to impose tax in the form of property rates and basic rates. It allows the council to impose business tax, gaming/casino tax, vehicle tax and liquor tax; however these powers have not been tested in court. The HCA also allows the council to raise revenue through fees for services or licences as specified in council ordinances.

The LGA allows local councils to raise revenue through property rates, basic rates and special rates, and through licences, permits, dues,

charges or fees specified in council by-laws. The LGA also enumerates other revenue bases (eg rent, grants from consolidated revenue, interest on investments) which could also be available to provincial assemblies and the council.

### 9.2 Transfers:

The sum of specific purpose grants and the unconditional main service grant to Honiara City Council total around one-third of all revenue. Transfers should be paid to Honiara City Council on a monthly basis but are usually paid on a quarterly basis from the central government. The amount expected to be received in 2011 is approximately US\$1.7m. Provincial governments receive transfers on a monthly basis and amounts vary from province to province. A review is currently taking place to re-evaluate the formula used for distribution.

### 9.3 Local authority staff:

The Honiara City Council CEO (the city clerk) is responsible for staffing decisions and has the power to recruit and dismiss. The council employs staff directly, but others can be seconded from national government agencies from time to time, mostly to senior specialist positions. The city clerk is delegated power to



discipline officers. The HCA allows councils to establish an employment board to advise on conditions of employment of directly appointed council staff. The typical staffing structure is a chief executive officer supported by divisional heads based on core operational functions of the council: executive administration and human resources, corporate services, finance, health, education, law enforcement, planning and building, markets, youth, sport and women's development, and works.

The city council pays the allowances of its elected representatives and salaries of its direct officers. Seconded staff to the city council are paid by central government. In provincial governments the elected representatives and seconded staff are paid for by central government and direct staff are paid for by the provincial government. The mayor is a full-time salaried position with salary and other entitlements determined by the parliamentary (entitlements) committee. The 11 remaining elected councillors meet when required and receive allowances and entitlements determined by the Minister of Home Affairs.

#### **10. DISTRIBUTION OF SERVICE DELIVERY RESPONSIBILITY**

Honiara City Council is responsible for the delivery of a wide and diverse range of services in the nation's capital as specified in its Act. The city council has sole responsibility for trade, businesses licences and waste management, whilst it shares responsibility with the provincial and central governments for the regulation and conservation of the environment, public roads maintenance, drainage, education and medical services. The HCA also provides that additional functions under specified national legislation may be transferred to the council. Further functions are conferred directly by other national legislation.

#### **References and useful websites**

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4. Ministry for Provincial Government  
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7. Local Government Act 1996  
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