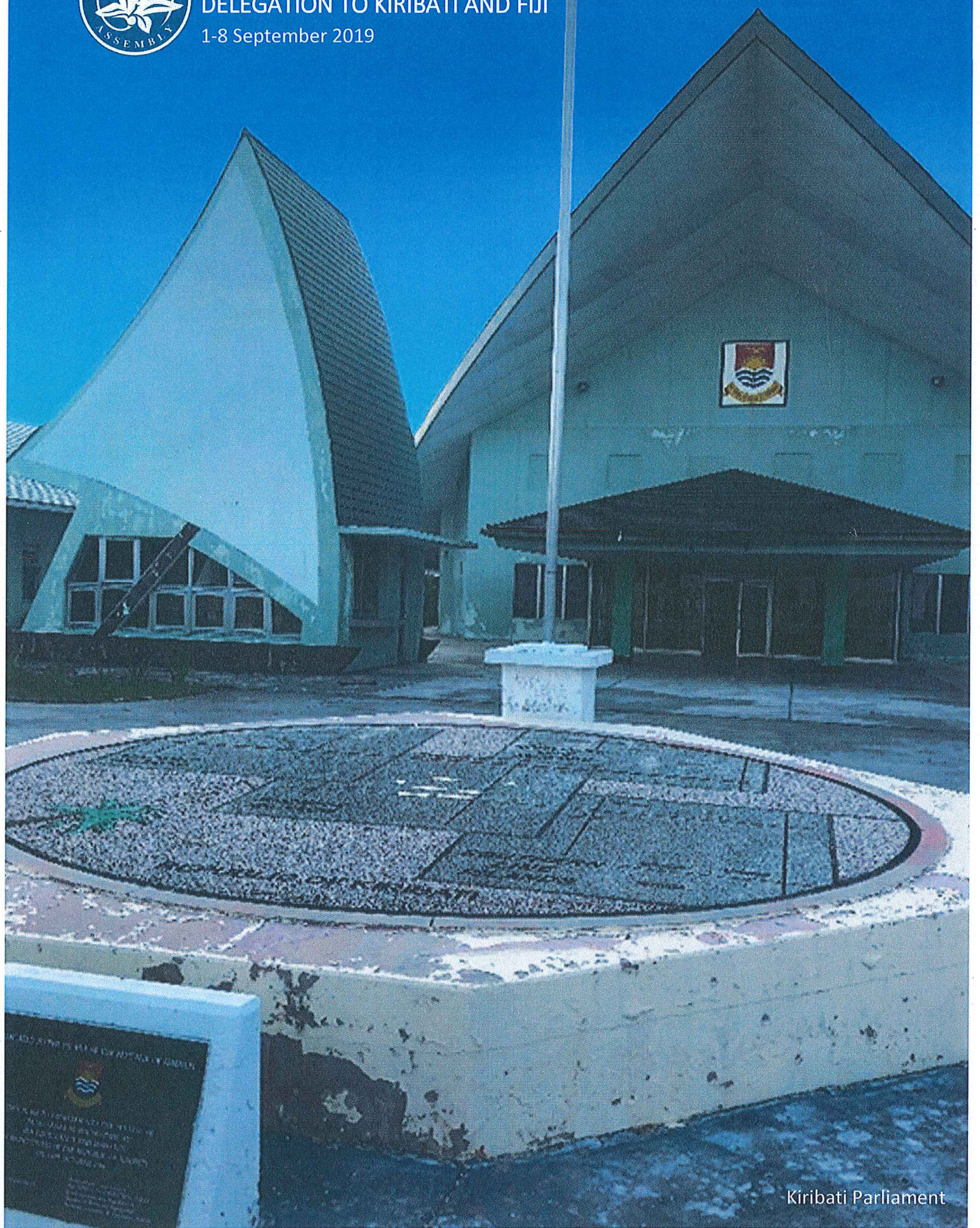




ACT LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY SPEAKER'S  
DELEGATION TO KIRIBATI AND FIJI  
1-8 September 2019

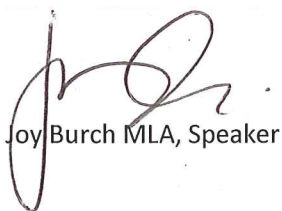




## INTRODUCTION

On 1 September 2019, the Speaker, Ms Joy Burch MLA, Mrs Elizabeth Kikkert MLA and Ms Julia Agostino, Deputy Speaker and Serjeant-at-Arms for the Legislative Assembly of the Australian Capital Territory, left Canberra and travelled to Kiribati as part of Parliamentary twinning arrangements. The delegation spent several days in Kiribati, before travelling to Fiji to visit the Fijian Parliament to meet with the Fijian Speaker and to observe proceedings.

This report outlines the activities the delegation undertook during its visit to Kiribati and Fiji.



Joy Burch MLA, Speaker



Elizabeth Kikkert MLA

26 November 2019

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## KIRIBATI

**Monday, 2 September 2019**

### *Meeting with the Kiribati Speaker*

The delegation arrived in Tarawa on the afternoon of Monday, 2 September 2019 and was greeted at the airport by several members of staff from the Kiribati Parliament, including the Deputy Clerk, Ms Kakiata Tikataake. After checking in to the Utirerei Motel in Ambo, the delegation was driven the short distance to the Kiribati Parliament to pay a courtesy call on the Speaker of Kiribati, the Honourable Tebuai Uaai, Speaker of Maneaba ni Maungatabu (the Kiribati Parliament), in the Speaker's office. The delegation was warmly welcomed by the Speaker, before he was required in the chamber.

### *Kiribati Institute of Technology*

In the afternoon, the delegation visited the Kiribati Institute of Technology (KIT) at Betio. The KIT is a vocational education and training institute that offers a range of courses, including plumbing, mechanics and construction. English language is taught to all students. Whilst there, the delegation took a tour of the facilities with Mr Jason Fello, the Organisational Services Advisor, and observed students as they trained.

It was heartening to see numerous female students training in some of these typically male dominated vocations, including auto mechanics and electro technology. Conversely, the welcome dance performance was provided by male students – because the female students were undertaking their exams at the time.

The facilities at the KIT appear modern and well equipped, and teachers include both Kiribati locals and international staff. The Kiribati facility is supported by the Australian Government and has partnerships with other organisations, including the Maritime Training Centre.

### *Welcome reception at Parliament*

On the evening of Monday, 2 September 2019, the Speaker of the Kiribati Parliament hosted a welcome function in honour of the delegation. In attendance was the Beretitenti, or President of Kiribati, His Excellency Taneti Mamau, and his wife, First Lady Teriaeng Mamau. In addition to Members of Parliament and staff, guests included the High Commissioner of Australia to Kiribati, Mr Bruce Cowled and his wife Evelyn, the UNDP Resident Representative, Mr Levan Bouadze, and representatives from the New Zealand High Commission.

The evening commenced with an opening prayer, followed by traditional garlanding and welcome remarks by both Speakers, during which the strong and valuable relationship that exists between our two parliaments was warmly acknowledged. The work that has been done to date to strengthen ties and build capacity through assistance with things such as a recent review of the Kiribati standing orders, was drawn to the attention of all present.

A highlight of the evening was the excellent dancing display that was provided by one of Kiribati's best youth cultural dancing groups. Our hosts explained how the inspiration for the dance movements were drawn from nature, particularly the birds in Kiribati. As is the tradition in Kiribati, all guests of honour were invited to dance after the main dance performance, and did so enthusiastically!



**Tuesday, 3 September 2019**

*Kiribati School and Centre for Children with Special Needs*

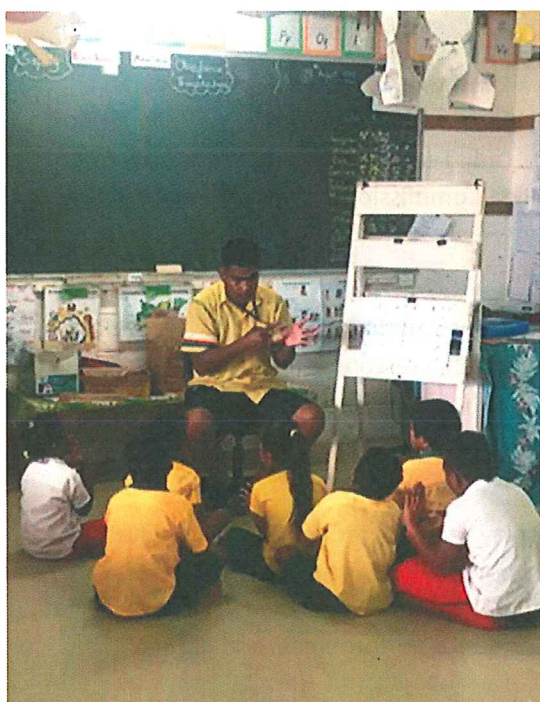
The delegation visited the Kiribati School and Centre for Children with Special needs in Birkenbeu. This is the only school in Kiribati that provides services to children with disabilities. The goals of the school include empowering students, inclusive education such as mainstreaming of students, and helping to create pathways to tertiary studies and ultimately, employment.

The delegation heard that there are currently around 200 children at the school with a range of disabilities, including physical and learning disabilities. It was clear that the teachers, support staff and volunteers are deeply committed to the work they undertake with the children in this facility and there was an overwhelming sense that the children were well cared for and loved by those providing the care.

Music is a very important element of the education at the school, as the delegation saw upon arrival when it was treated to a 'guard of honour' of children and teachers singing. In the school's maneaba (meeting place), the children and teachers sang both the Australian and Kiribati national anthems, as well as three other songs, and performed using traditional musical instruments.

Education offered at the school includes kindergarten and primary school courses such as reading and arithmetic, as well as IT in partnership with the KIT (the school has a computer lab courtesy of the ANZ Bank), gardening, carpentry and music. The school also receives visits from organisations that provide information sessions on things such as recycling.

The school is located in buildings that were formerly part of a hospital. There are class rooms that are set up for children with different abilities. For example, in one classroom we observed hearing impaired children being taught to read; in another room, we observed sight impaired children learning braille. This particular room was air conditioned and our hosts explained that this is because of the specialised equipment used for teaching braille which needs to be kept cool.



A number of organisations have provided funding to the school over the years, and facilities are clearly marked with the name of the donor. The Australian High Commission in Kiribati has provided annual core funding since 2008, and on 24 January 2019, a new three year funding commitment was signed.

The delegation is very thankful for the time and effort that the Principal, Ms Tinana Kane, teachers, support staff, volunteers and students put in to the visit, from the musical welcome on arrival, to the tour around the school during lesson time.

### *Marine Training Centre*

The delegation visited the Marine Training Centre in Betio, Tarawa. The Centre is a division of the Ministry of Employment and Human Resources of the Government of Kiribati. Deputy Captain Superintendent Etekieru Iotua led the delegation on a tour of the facilities and explained the centre's approach to training.

The centre has been in operation for over 50 years, and provides training for different jobs on board ships, including jobs on deck, the engine room and in catering. Competition for the limited places is high, as the centre offers an excellent standard of education and training and trainees are almost certainly guaranteed work at the end of their course.

During their courses, trainees live at the centre, with meals and laundry provided, and they receive a small sum of money. Conditions are strict to reflect life on a ship that may be at sea for many months, and trainees remain on site for most weekends each year. This helps trainees to get used to being away from home for long periods of time and is considered a key to the success of those who go on to life on the ships, because of the importance of family and home life in Kiribati culture which usually draws people home.



The delegation observed a variety of training, including deck training and steering training (via simulation) and met with trainees who were about to finish their training in hospitality.



### *Question Time*

The delegation was transported to the parliament to observe Question Time, which commences in the morning and lasts for two hours. The honour of seats on the floor of the chamber, close to the Speaker's chair, was afforded to the delegation. We were able to observe the Clerks at the Table working during this period, including keeping time and ringing a warning bell when a member's time for responding was almost finished.

Parliamentary proceedings are generally not conducted in English, and we had some translation provided to us by the parliamentary staff accompanying us. Questions to Government are asked with notice, and appear on the Order Paper each day. They appear in both Gilbertese and English, and a response is also provided on the paper. The Order Paper and Questions are published on the Kiribati Maneaba ni Maungatabu website. Interestingly, we noted that the oral responses from Government members often appeared to be more fulsome than what appeared on the Order Paper.

It was interesting for the delegation to see points of order being taken during proceedings during the course of our visits to the Kiribati Parliament. Points of order appeared to be debated with the relevant members, and could take considerable time. It also appeared to us that new evidence was presented during one point of order.

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### *Meeting with the female Members of Parliament*

It was important for our all-female delegation to meet with the three female members of the Kiribati Parliament. While these impressive women were extremely busy with the sitting week, they honoured us with their time over a brief lunch at the Utirerei motel. During this time, we were able to speak frankly about some of the challenges they face as female parliamentarians and even discussed procedural matters such as using the adjournment debate to raise important community issues.

The three members who attended were the Hon. Shiu Fung Jong, South Tarawa, the Hon. Tangariki Reete, Besio, and the Hon. Teima Onorio, Arorae. Each story for how the women became members is vastly different, with the Hon Shiu Fung Jong the most recent elected and the Hon Teima Onorio having been in parliament continuously since 2007.

### *Kiribati Women and Children Support Centre*

This centre was established in 2017 and opened in early 2018. It is funded by the Australian aid program's 'Pacific Women shaping Pacific Development' initiative with support from the Kiribati Family Health Association. Its main goal is to support women and children who are affected by violence.

The delegation met with Support Centre Coordinator Ms Teretia Tokam, who has a legal background and received an Australia Awards Scholarship to undertake additional training at the Australian National University. It was clear from discussion that the centre has a significant workload, but it is having a positive effect on the lives of women and children able to access its services.



Ms Tokam described the work of the centre, including the support services that it provides to women and children who are escaping violence. She indicated that the centre has worked with local authorities to ensure that a number of offenders have been successfully prosecuted in the previous 12 months. She shared some of the challenges faced by the centre, including a lack of sanitary products for women, too few refuges for women and children in need of emergency accommodation, and difficulties in changing local police attitudes to women reporting family violence. She also explained that because Kiribati is small, it can be very difficult for women to take refuge from violence in complete privacy and confidentiality.

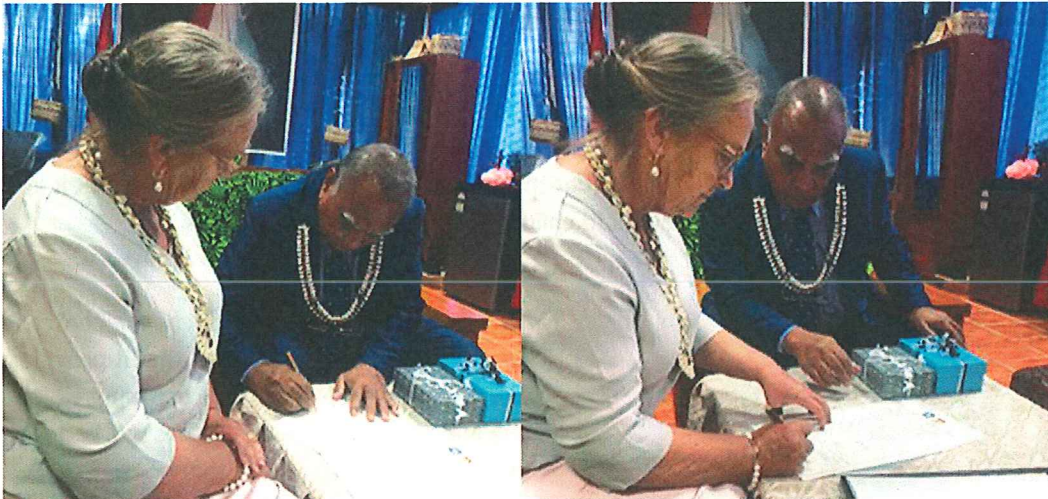


### *Kiribati Fish Ltd*

The delegation met briefly with Mr Umendra Prasad, the Chief Operating Officer of Kiribati Fish Ltd. The company is a joint venture with the Kiribati Government, Shanghai Deep Sea Fishery and Golden Ocean Fish Ltd. The company was established in 2010 and its objective is to invest and develop Kiribati's fishing resources, and to create economic growth and employment for I-Kiribati. Mr Prasad explained that the core business is tuna fishing and processing of fish products for export. The delegation was unable to tour the processing plant due to cleaning and maintenance taking place at the time, but derived a sense of the scale and importance of the enterprise to the Kiribati economy.

### *Parliamentary Partnership Agreement*

During this visit, the delegation met with the Speaker and signed a parliamentary partnership agreement between the parliaments of Kiribati and the Australian Capital Territory. The Kiribati Speaker was presented with a gift from the ACT Legislative Assembly and a framed copy of the motion of the ACT Legislative Assembly of 6 June 2019. This was a memorable occasion and helped to further cement our already strong parliamentary relationship.



Afterwards, the Speaker oversaw the planting of coconut trees on the parliamentary grounds by all members of the delegation and the UNDP representative. We appreciate this honour.

The delegation takes this opportunity to express its sincere gratitude to the Kiribati Speaker, the Hon. Tebuai Uaai for his warm hospitality and the time taken from his busy sitting schedule to make the delegation feel so welcome.

### *Australian High Commission*

The Australian High Commissioner to Kiribati, Mr Bruce Cowled, and his wife Evelyn, hosted the delegation for dinner at their official residence. An excellent meal was prepared by Mrs Cowled and was much appreciated by all. Discussion with Mrs and Mr Cowled and their other guests was insightful and provided us with an excellent opportunity to learn more local culture and history. Importantly, Mrs Cowled shared some culinary secrets with us, including the key to making a pavlova that works every time!

The delegation expresses its thanks for the generous hospitality of Mr and Mrs Cowled.



**Wednesday, 4 September 2019**

*Immaculate Heart College*



Wednesday got off to an early start, with the delegation leaving from the Parliamentary jetty at around 7am to travel by boat to North Tarawa. North Tarawa is at the far end of the atoll, and is home to the Immaculate Heart College, an independent secondary school run by the Catholic Church.

After a boat ride that lasted approximately one hour, the delegation was warmly greeted at the school by the Principal and Deputy Principal, and proceeded through a 'guard of honour' of students, to the front of the school's maneaba, where the national anthems of Australia and Kiribati were sung by the students. With over 400 well-tuned voices ringing through the palms, it was a moving experience.

The delegation was presented with traditional shell necklaces, garlands and garments, and a program of welcome and entertainment commenced. Both singing and dancing took place and speeches were given. After some fresh, cool coconut water and morning tea, the presentation continued, before the delegation was given a tour of the facilities.

Key roles are filled by volunteers, including the deputy principal and the school nurse. The deputy principal explained that tuition fees, though considered large for most families, did not cover work required to maintain facilities, or even basic educational supplies such as desks.



The source of power at the school is solar panels, although these only provide around four hours of power each evening. This means that it is difficult to preserve fresh food. Another challenge is the recent king tides which saw students work together to strengthen the sea walls around the school.

After the tour, the delegation returned to Kiribati by boat, this time arriving at the main wharves due to the tides which had gone out while we had been in North Tarawa.



### *Last visit to the Kiribati Parliament*

In the afternoon, the delegation was invited to visit Parliament one last time to take afternoon tea with members and observe proceedings. As there was an important motion being debated, we were able to speak to just a few members before we entered the chamber to observe proceedings.

## **FIJI**

### **Thursday, 5 September 2019**

On Thursday 5 September 2019, the delegation bid farewell to Kiribati and flew first to Nadi, and then Suva in Fiji.

### **Friday, 6 September 2019**

The final day of the delegation was spent in Suva, Fiji, for the purpose of visiting the parliament and meeting representatives from the Australian High Commission.

Ms Anna Dorney, Deputy High commissioner to Fiji, and Mr Peter Raab, First Secretary, Governance, met us in the morning and provided an interesting briefing on issues in Fiji. Both Ms Dorney and Mr Raab were extremely knowledgeable and answered a great many questions about Fiji generally, and its parliament.

The delegation was accompanied by Ms Dorney and Mr Raab to the Parliament for a meeting with the Speaker, the Honourable Ratu Epeli Nailatikau. Mr Speaker received the delegation warmly and discussion took place over morning tea, before he was required in the chamber.

We were honoured to be acknowledged by the Speaker in the chamber and to watch proceedings about a privileges matter, before we had to leave.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The delegation takes this opportunity to thank all those who assisted us to make this delegation an interesting, enjoyable and very worthwhile experience, including the staff at the Kiribati Parliament who made arrangements and drove us between appointments.

We also thank all those at each place we visited who welcomed us so warmly and took time out of their busy schedules to talk to us about their respective organisations. We appreciate the very generous hospitality we received.

We especially wish to thank Ms Kakiata Tikataake, Deputy Clerk of the Kiribati Parliament, and Ms Marinao I.Tiarie, Senior Librarian, who worked tirelessly to ensure that the delegation program was relevant, engaging and ran smoothly each day.





