



R E P O R T

ACT Legislative Assembly exchange with the Maneaba ni Maungatabu Kiribati

19 to 24 November 2023

About the partnership

The ACT-Kiribati Partnership is a grew out of a parliamentary initiative.


Set up by the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association's Australia and Pacific regions in 2007, the twin parliament program partners Pacific parliaments with one in Australia. Its aim is to promote cooperation and collaboration. The direct link allows Pacific parliaments to access the established knowledge of Australian parliamentary practice and Australian parliaments to be exposed to new ideas and challenged to innovate.

The Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory and the Maneaba ni Maungatabu Kiribati were twinned together in 2008.

Since then, the partnership that grown from this is into a rich one.

There have been over 26 people-to-people exchanges since 2008, ranging from technical officers to speakers and heads of government. Procedural advice is exchange freely, directly, and regularly between parliaments. The Assembly shares i-Kiribati culture through its display in the Kiribati committee room and is fostering connections with Canberra's local i-Kiribati community.

In the ACT, this partnership has expanded beyond the parliamentary into other areas of cooperation. The newest expansion is a partnership between the ACT and Kiribati Auditors-General and their offices, signed in 2023. Other partnerships are also being explored, including one between the Kiribati and Canberra Institutes of Technology.

More information about the partnership is available on [the Assembly website](#) .

About the delegation

The Legislative Assembly sends a delegation on a parliamentary exchange to Kiribati once a term. This tradition began in 2008 during the Sixth Assembly. The group is apolitical, with members acting in the role of parliamentarians, Canberrans, and Australians.

The Tenth Assembly delegation travelled from 19-24 November 2023 and included:



Mark Parton MLA, Deputy Speaker



Dr Marisa Paterson MLA



Tom Duncan, Clerk of the Assembly, and



Jayden Evett, the Assembly's senior education officer

Acknowledgements

Countless people made this exchange possible.

Our humblest thanks go to our colleagues at the Maneaba ni Maungatabu Kiribati, who planned our in-country program, accompanied us across Tarawa, and honoured our visit so kindly. *Ko rabwa* to Hon Tangariki Reete, Speaker and Eni Tekanene, Clerk of the Maneaba for their continued and close friendship with the ACT Legislative Assembly. A special thank you to Koru Tione Tebakabo, the Maneaba's education officer, who put so much effort and good humour into ensuring the visit was a success.

We also want to thank the team at the Australian High Commission in Kiribati for their warm welcome and support throughout our exchange. Our delegation is grateful to all posted and local staff who joined us and helped in some way, including Tion, Sarah, Brenton, and Anthony. Thank you to Her Excellency Karen Bray, High Commissioner to Kiribati and David Martin, First Secretary, whose hands-on dedication to the Kiribati-Australian relationship we experienced firsthand.

Thank you to the many people who took time and resources to meet with us and honour us with food, drink, garlands, song, dance, and signs of thanks. To those at the Kiribati Institute of Technology, Te Umanibong Museum and Culture Centre, the Ministry of Education, Kiribati Teachers College, Sunrise Primary School, the National Examination Unit, Atoll Food Futures, and Tungaru Youth Action – *kam batin n rabwa!*

Our thanks also to delegation members Tom Duncan and Jayden Evett for coordinating our exchange and preparing both the visit brief and this report.



Mark Parton MLA
Deputy Speaker
Member for Brindabella



Dr Marisa Paterson MLA
Member for Murumbidgee

Program overview

Sunday 19 November

Transit from Canberra, Australia to Nadi, Fiji

Monday 20 November

Transit from Nadi, Fiji to Tarawa, Kiribati

Engagements

- Meeting at the Australian High Commission
-

Tuesday 21 November

Engagements

- Meeting with the Speaker of the Maneaba ni Maungatabu
 - Tour of the Maneaba precincts and observing question time
 - Meeting with and tour of the Kiribati Institute of Technology
 - Visit and guided tour of Te Umanibong Museum and Cultural Centre
-

Wednesday 22 November

Engagements

- Dawn service for the 80th anniversary of the Battle of Tarawa
 - Meeting with the Kiribati Ministry of Education and tours of the Kiribati Teachers College, Sunrise Primary School, and Kiribati Examinations Office
 - Meeting with the Atoll Food Futures program and tour of the Tungaru Youth Agricultural Garden
 - Afternoon tea with members of the Maneaba ni Maungatabu
 - Reception at the Maneaba ni Maungatabu
-

Thursday 23 November

Transit from Tarawa, Kiribati to Nadi, Fiji

Friday 24 November

Transit from Nadi, Fiji to Canberra, Australia

Exchange report

Australia in Kiribati

The parliamentary twinning relationship is one part of Australia’s larger partnership with the Republic of Kiribati.

Australia is Kiribati’s largest country-to-country aid partner. It has invested over \$186 million in the country’s development since 2018, including \$26.1 million for the 2023-24 financial year. The priorities of the Kiribati Government – set out currently in [a 20-year plan to 2036](#) – determine how this money is spent.

A [new memorandum of understanding](#) was signed in February 2023 by both governments to deepen this partnership.

The Australian High Commission

The Australian High Commission in Kiribati represents the Australian government in-country, helps administer aid programs, and provides consular services to visiting Australian citizens. They are a big team, led by [Her Excellency Karen Bray, Australian High Commissioner to Kiribati](#) who was appointed to the role in April 2023.

Commissioner Bray and her team also supported planning the exchange program, lent us one of their cars and driver – Tion – and accompanied the delegation on many site visits, for which we are very grateful.

The delegation met with Commissioner Bray and First Secretary (Political) David Martin in the afternoon of Monday 20 November after arriving in Kiribati. They provided an overview of the two country’s partnership and projects where we’d be seeing Australian aid investments, all over a generous spread of Australian snacks.



The delegation at the Australian High Commission with Commissioner Bray (left) and First Secretary David Martin (right)

Office of the Legislative Assembly © 2023

Te Maneaba ni Maungatabu

The [Maneaba ni Maungatabu](#) is the national parliament of the Republic of Kiribati. It is 45-seat unicameral legislature, electing 44 members from multi-member electorates for four-year terms with a 45th member appointed by the Fijian Government represent the Banaban community on Rabi Island, Fiji. It uses a mix of the Westminster and Washington parliamentary systems, with a directly elected President – who must be a sitting MP – and an elected Speaker – who cannot be a sitting MP.

The delegation visited the Maneaba repeatedly during the exchange.

Call on the Speaker

On Tuesday morning, the delegation made a call on Hon. Tangariki Reete, Speaker of the Maneaba ni Maungatabu, also attended by the Clerk and Deputy Clerk of the Maneaba. The meeting was high-spirited with constructive reflections on the state of the parliament's partnership and discussion of an inbound visit to the ACT from the Maneaba in 2024.

During the meeting, Mr Parton and Dr Paterson presented Speaker Reete with a collection of reference books for the Maneaba library. The library had shared a need for such books during the Ninth Assembly exchange and relevant works were put aside for them as they were deaccessioned from our Assembly Library's collection. The books were gratefully received.

Question time observation

Our visit coincided with one of the Maneaba's three two-week sitting blocs it holds each year. The delegation was honoured with seats on the debating chamber floor to observe question time – the first item of business at 10am on a sitting day.

Proceedings are conducted in the local te Kiribati language and broadcast live on Radio Kiribati, the national broadcaster and one of only 3 local radio stations. On-site translation is sometimes available, though it was not during the delegation's observation.



Mr Parton and Dr Paterson present a collection of reference books for the Maneaba ni Maungatabu library to the Speaker, Hon. Tangariki Reete.

Office of the Legislative Assembly © 2023

During proceedings, the delegation was welcomed and greeted directly in both te Kiribati and English by Speaker Reete and His Excellency Taneti Maamau, President of Kiribati. This is recorded in the Hansard transcript from Tuesday 21 November:

Te Tibiika (Hon Tangariki REETE): Imwain ae I waakina ara titiraki ao I bon riai moa ni kanakoa au katanoata ibukin raonakira inanon te ingabong ae tamaroa aei irouia raora ke ara iruwa aika a roko man ara Twin Parliament are te Australian Capital Territory Legislative Assembly mai Australia.

Ngaia are ti welcome them to our chamber as they will be sitting with us for a few hours and then leave as they have other programs to attend. We welcome you and we hope that you will have the opportunity to observe some of our proceedings while sitting with us today in our chamber.

Ao tao ti anne au katanoata ao the team is led by the Hon. [Deputy] Speaker of the Australian Capital Territory Legislative Assembly ae Hon. Mark Parton ao n reitaki ma te Tia Tei temanna Hon Dr. Marisa Paterson te Member naba n te Legislative Assembly, te Clerk of the ACT Legislative Assembly naba ae Tom Duncan, ao ai Jayden Evett, Education Engagement Officer. Ngaia are kaitau nakoia ngkai a kona n raonira inanon ara bowi n te ingabong aei ao ti nang waaki nakon ara titiraki ao kaekaia .

...

Te Beretitenti (H.E. Taneti MAAMAU): Ko rabwa Madam Speaker ao imwain ae I kaeka am titiraki te Tia Tei temanna ae karineaki mai Makin ao I kan join am warm greetings nakoia ara guest from the Australian Capital Territory Parliament on behalf of the Government the People of Kiribati. May you enjoy your short stay in Kiribati. Thank you.

Parliamentary education information sharing

Parliamentary education is a new function at the Maneaba ni Maungatabu, with Koru Tebakabo the first to take on this role as the Maneaba's education officer. Mr Tebakabo accompanied the delegation from arrival to departure and, throughout the exchange, traded information, resources, and tip with Jayden Evett, the Assembly's senior education officer.

The exchange was a perfect opportunity to build strong ties in a new area of cooperation between our two parliaments, with regular contact between both education teams continuing after the visit.

PHOTOS ON PAGE 7 (all Office of the Legislative Assembly © 2023)

TOP: The ACT flag is flown out the front of the Maneaba ni Maungatabu Kiribati building.

CENTRE: The delegation poses for a photo out the front of the Maneaba building.

BOTTOM: Mr Parton and Dr Paterson take a selfie with Hon. Tangariki Reete (centre), Speaker of the Maneaba ni Maungatabu Kiribati.





Dr Paterson is garlanded by a traditional dancer during the reception at the Maneaba ni Maungatabu in the delegation's honour.

Office of the Legislative Assembly © 2023

Building people-to-people connections

Hospitality is a core part of i-Kiribati culture, which takes great pride in honouring people – especially guests – through garlanding, performance, and food. The delegation was humbled to receive such generous gestures throughout its visit, including from the members and staff of the Maneaba ni Maungatabu itself. We embraced each opportunity to build people-to-people connections with our parliamentary counterparts, from ministers and members to the parliamentary officers.

Two particularly special occasions included being invited to partake in the MPs afternoon tea recess, and the formal dinner in the delegation's honour on the final night of the exchange.

We were humbled by the attendance of President Maamau and First Lady Teiraeng Maamau, Kiribati's first post-independence president Sir Ieremia Tabai, Opposition leader Hon. Tessie Lambourne, Auditor-General Eriati Manaima, members of the diplomatic corps, and members of the Maneaba.

Both Speaker Reete and Mr Parton delivered speeches praising the ACT-Kiribati partnership, gifts were exchanged, and as per tradition, the delegation took the dance floor to participate in a traditional dance celebrating the exchange.

Additional focuses

The exchange program included three other focus areas additional to our main focus on the Maneaba ni Maungatabu: education, food and water security, and the 1943 Battle of Tarawa. These provided the delegation with context to some of the challenges facing i-Kiribati people and where Australian support is supporting local-led efforts to address them.

Education

Education is a powerful driver of development – [the World Bank](#) acknowledges it as one of the strongest tools for reducing poverty and improving health, economic, and social outcomes. In Kiribati, it is instrumental in both fostering local innovation and upskilling labour mobility scheme participants whose work in countries like Australia provides a valuable revenue stream back home.

Ministry of Education visit

The delegation received a comprehensive overview of Kiribati’s education system, from primary school to teaching the teachers. On Wednesday morning, we received a briefing from staff at the Ministry of Education about the challenges to education delivery, which included:

- The duality of a dense urban population on one atoll and sparse village-based populations spread across 3200km of scattered islands
- Limited to no telecommunications infrastructure, often with prohibitive costs for sending and receiving small amounts of data, and
- Ensuring continuity of instruction – that there is always a trained teacher in each village on each island.

We were surprised at the end of our briefing by a visit from students of the Kiribati School and Centre for Children with Disabilities, who performed a medley of Christmas songs (including a mash up of *Joy to the World* and the *Macarena*).



Kiribati Institute of Technology Director, Jason Fello, talks to the delegation about campus upgrades.

Office of the Legislative Assembly © 2023



Mr Parton with a students at Sunrise Primary School and a sign they made that reads 'Thank you Australia' during a site visit,

Office of the Legislative Assembly © 2023

The Kiribati Education Improvement Program (KEIP) has been Australia's largest aid program in-country for the past 10 years. A big part of this is upgrading school buildings to meet burgeoning student populations and endure increasingly extreme weather events. On Tuesday, we visited several sites upgraded as part of KEIP, including the National Examinations Unit and Kiribati Teachers' College.

Sunrise Primary School visit

The delegation also visited Sunrise Primary School, the last primary school of 28 to be upgraded as part of KEIP. The upgrades let the school accommodate its growing student body and allow students to do full schools days (instead of the half days they currently do due to limited classroom space).

Sunrise's students, staff, and parents made our visit very special, garlanding the delegation upon arrival and providing a generous lunch. Classroom windows were also decorated with posters students had drawn thanking Australia for investing in their school's upgrades.

Kiribati Institute of Technology visit

On Tuesday, the delegation visited Kiribati Institute of Technology (KIT), one of the country's largest further education providers. We were hosted by its Director Jason Fello and his team, who briefed us on KIT's work and its link into preparing i-Kiribati workers applying for labour mobility schemes. The delegation was also toured around the KIT campus.

During the visit, KIT leadership raised their interest in setting up a people-to-people relationship and exchange between their students and staff with those at the Canberra Institute of Technology.

Food and water security

Islands' poor soil quality and small land area, their geographic remoteness, and contamination-prone shallow groundwater contribute to notable food and water insecurity in Kiribati. [An estimated 41% of i-Kiribati people](#) [don't have regular, reliable access to nutritionally adequate and safe foods](#), exacerbated by increasing reliance on imported food as [population growth outstrips local agriculture](#) . Many i-Kiribati also lack reliable sources of safe drinking water at home, with [testing in December 2021 by ChildFund](#) showing that 73% of participating households' water was contaminated.

Atoll Food Futures visit

On Wednesday afternoon, the delegation visited the [Atoll Food Futures program](#) office in Temwaiku, where staff welcomed us and shared with us their work. The program champions micro-agriculture and provides i-Kiribati communities the knowledge and tools to revive traditional farming practices on their land. Its work supports building climate-resilient garden nurseries and rainwater collection systems in villages, as well as facilitating person-to-person knowledge sharing on composting and keyhole gardening.

An Australian innovation – foodcubes, raised wicking garden beds designed and made in Melbourne - is an important part of encouraging micro-agriculture with limited fresh water and topsoil. We saw cubes throughout the South Tarawa, including at the Maneaba ni Maungtabu. Each cube can produce up to 25kg of fresh produce annually.

The delegation also visited two gardens participating in the scheme, including one run by [Tungaru Youth Action](#) , Kiribati's first youth-led organisation. We were amazed by the vibrance and high yield of these gardens and the dedication of those who cared for them. At Tungaru Youth Action's garden, we were also treated to a spread of local produce and energised demonstrations by Willie Tabuia – [captured by Mr Parton on TikTok](#) .



The delegation with staff and volunteers at the Atoll Food Futures program office.

Office of the Legislative Assembly © 2023

80th anniversary of the Battle of Tarawa

The November 2024 exchange coincided with the 80th anniversary of the Battle of Tarawa. The delegation was honoured to be included in its official commemoration.

About the battle



Photograph: Hulton Archive/Getty Images

The Battle of Tarawa was a 76-hour beach invasion by US forces to dislodge a heavily fortified Imperial Japanese garrison on the island of Betio. It was the first battle of the Central Pacific campaign and the first with heavy Japanese resistance.

The battle earned a reputation for its devastation. A three-hour naval bombardment flattened every tree on Betio and killed over 40% of the Japanese defenders. Nearly 6,400 people died on both sides, including all except 17 Japanese soldiers and 129 forced Korean labourers. The deaths of i-Kiribati locals are unrecorded.

The battle anniversary was woven into the exchange program. On Monday, the delegation visited the ruins of the Japanese gun emplacement on Betio, as well as the monuments memorialising the almost 5,000 Korean and Japanese killed during the battle. During our visit to Te Umanibong Museum in Bikenibeu on Tuesday, we saw a small display of bullet cartridges, a helmet, and other remnants recovered since 1943.

On Wednesday 22 November, the delegation participated in a dawn service commemorating the 80th anniversary of the battle, held at the US Marines War Memorial in Betio Sports Complex. The service included a colour guard, wreath laying, and speeches from President Taneti Maamau, US Ambassador to Kiribati Marie Lamour, and COL Matthew Brannen of the US Department of Defence's war dead accounting agency.

Particularly touching was the ceremonial repatriation of an unknown Marine's remains, one of some 400 personnel that were buried on Betio in unmarked graves.

Mr Parton and Dr Paterson laid a wreath at the foot of the memorial on behalf of the Legislative Assembly and the people of the Australian Capital Territory.

Others who laid wreaths included President Maamau; COL Brannen; diplomatic representatives of the United States, Australia, Aotearoa New Zealand, and Japan to Kiribati; a group of US Marines veterans; and members of the local community.

PHOTOS ON PAGE 13 (all Office of the Legislative Assembly © 2023)

TOP: Mr Parton and Dr Paterson talk after the service with CMDR Victor Lange (US Navy), Defence Attaché at the United States Embassy in Suva, Fiji.

CENTRE: Mr Parton and Dr Paterson step back after laying a wreath at the US Marines War Memorial.

BOTTOM: Dr Paterson and Tom Duncan, Clerk, talk with COL Matthew Brannen (US Marines), acting Deputy Director for Operations of the US Department of Defence MIA/POW Accounting Agency



Appendix A: Letter to the federal presiding officers regarding the Pacific Parliamentary Partnerships Fund



Legislative Assembly for the
Australian Capital Territory

Hon Milton Dick MP
Speaker
House of Representatives
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Senator the Hon Sue Lines
President
Senate of Australia
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

cc Joy Burch MLA
Speaker
Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory
196 London Circuit
CANBERRA ACT 2601

Dear Speaker/President

Pacific Parliamentary Partnerships Fund

We are writing concerning the future use of the Pacific Parliamentary Partnerships Fund which you jointly administer on behalf of the Australian Region of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA).

By way of background, we have recently returned from a twinning visit to the Legislative Assembly's twinned parliament, namely the Parliament of Kiribati. During the visit we were able to visit the parliament, meet and hold discussions with the Speaker, Deputy Speaker, the President and various other members of the parliament.

These visits are undertaken once an Assembly (ie every four years) and are aimed at strengthening the twinning relationship, establishing contacts, and keeping aware of the issues facing the Kiribati parliament.

During the visit the Australian High Commission assisted with arranging a program of visits to various initiatives of Australian government assistance in Kiribati, including with the Kiribati Institution of Technology and the Sunrise Primary School, Live and Learn garden food cubes. We were very impressed by the very good work being undertaken in these areas, and commend both the High Commission staff and other Australians who are assisting with delivering these important programs.

We understand that the Australian Region of the CPA is considering the future use of the Pacific Parliamentary Partnerships Fund in relation to twinning activities. We would support more funding to the twinning arrangements that would facilitate more training and facilities for the twinned parliaments, either through visits of Australian members and staff to offer training, or by Pacific parliaments being funded to travel to Australia to undertake training/attachments. From our recent visit, in our view such further training opportunities would be welcomed by the twinned parliaments.

Happy to discuss further, and we would be more than happy to provide further information should you require it.

Yours sincerely



Mark Parton MLA
Deputy Speaker
Member for Brindabella



Dr Marisa Paterson MLA
Member for Murrumbidgee

 December 2023

Appendix B: Email from Kate Lundy, CIT Board Chair, about partnering with Kiribati Institute of Technology



Dr Marisa Paterson MLA
Member for Murrumbidgee
ACT Legislative Assembly
paterson@act.gov.au

Dear Dr Paterson,

Thank you for your email of 29 November 2023 to Minister Steel and I as the CIT Board Chair. Your email is seeking a contact regarding the possible development of a relationship between the Canberra Institute of Technology (CIT) and the Kiribati Institute of Technology.

On behalf of the CIT, I am supportive of discussions with the Kiribati Institute of Technology to see how we may be able to collaborate and assist staff and students at their Institute. I am happy for Mr Fello or his replacement to discuss this with the CIT's Executive Director, Education Futures and Students, Ms Jo Andersen. Ms Andersen's contact details are 02 6207 9240 and JosephineM.Andersen@cit.edu.au

Yours sincerely

Regards

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kate Lundy".

Kate Lundy
CIT Board Chair
4 December 2023

Shaping Change
Growing Our Region's Economy
Advancing Canberra's Workforce
Transforming Our Business

GPO Box 826, Canberra, ACT, 2601 Australia
T +(61) 02 6207 3188 | F +(61) 02 6207 3109 | cit.edu.au
ABN 432 737 96 990