

Business Beat

Welcome to the Chamber's Newsletter!

Increased population demands we invest for growth

"This population if engaged in meaningful employment has the opportunity to contribute to a population dividend and participate in economic development." [More on Page 10.](#)



Corruption needs to be urgently addressed



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RSIPF provide updates for SICCI members



SICCI with Japanese Ambassador to SI



Welcome

This is the official Newsletter of the Solomon Islands Chamber of Commerce & Industry (SICCI), published and distributed to members and stakeholders after every two months.

It contains updates on all Chamber activities, news, members' feature, interviews, upcoming events and department updates from the Secretariat.

This publication is produced by the SICCI Media & Communications Department.

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Natalina Hong
SICCI CEO

Dear Members, Stakeholders, Affiliates and Friends of SICCI

On behalf of the SICCI Secretariate I would like to thank each and everyone of you for your kind support and trust throughout the year. As an organization representing a diverse and significant growth sector of Solomon Islands we have endured an unprecedented year with dignity and courage.

This is due to each members resilience, our sponsorships relentless support, our board's consistency and selfless time, our stakeholder's growing trust in us and our mentor's guidance and wealth of knowledge. All of these factors enabled us to end the year with mixed anticipation of next year.

Despite the uncertainty, we must carry on stronger next year as SICCI is fully committed to our existing partnerships and agreements as well as to maintain raising the quality of services for our members.

I started my role on mid-September this year in confidence

due to the hard work and foundation that previous leadership and staff has built. I want to thank all of you for your support and for accepting me into this leadership role. Each word of encouragement and advice is precious and continues to guide the private sector's voice to be effectively heard and that the business community is not isolated but integrated into the road for recovery ahead.

Next year there will be some familiar activities in the first quarter to look forward to- Back to Business event, for the first time ever a digital delivery of the Institute of Directorship (NZ) and the Annual General Meeting in mid-March.

The SICCI Secretariate office at Hyundai Mall will be closed on Tuesday 22 December 2020 and opens again on Monday 4 January 2021. We look forward to working with you all again next year.

Wish you all a safe and blessed Christmas and a Happy New Year 2021.

Dear Members,

*Merry
Christmas
& Happy New Year*

*"Wishing you an enjoyable and
safe festive season!"*

- SICCI Secretariat



Corruption needs to be urgently addressed

“Good Governance and Integrity are fundamental principles for future success”: SICCI Chairman

Friday 13 November, Honiara – SICCI recognises that corruption is a difficult and long-term challenge, but it is also an urgent one that needs to be addressed.

Board Chairman, Mr Jay Bartlett, made the statement at the opening of a two-day Business Integrity Workshop on Thursday 12 October hosted by the UN Pacific Regional Anti-Corruption (UN-PRAC) Project and UNDP in partnership with SICCI.

Mr Bartlett highlighted that what should be of concern for Solomon Islands is the fact that corruption does not allow the local economy to create jobs for the country's growing population

“Finding employment opportunities for young people is a major challenge for the country, with approximately 10,000 young people entering the labour market each year, far surpassing the number of jobs and opportunities available,” he said.

Corruption is also one of the disincentives for foreign investment.

“Investors who seek a fair, competitive business environment will avoid investing in countries where there is a high level of corruption.

“While investing in emerging markets remains a popular investment area, investors are naturally hesitant to put their money at risk in countries known to have high corruption levels,” Mr Bartlett said.

Studies show a direct link between the level of corruption in a country and measurements of the competitiveness of its business environment.

Mr Bartlett said: “Today if we are to be brutally honest with ourselves, our entire society is affected as a result of the inefficient allocation of resources, the presence of a shadow economy, and low-quality education and healthcare.

“Corruption has made our society worse off and has lowered the living standard of most of our populations.”

According to the latest World Bank annual ratings, Solomon Islands is ranked 136 among 190 economies in the ease of doing business.



SICCI Chairman, Jay Bartlett delivering his remarks at the Business Integrity Workshop. Photo: SICCI Media.

This Ease of doing business index ranks countries against each other based on how the regulatory environment is conducive to business operation and stronger protections of property rights. Economies with a high rank (1 to 20) have simpler and more friendly regulations for businesses. The rank of Solomon Islands deteriorated to 136 in 2019 from 115 in 2018.

Consultations with SICCI members, as part of a Private Sector Scan report commissioned in 2017, identified a broad range of issues impacting upon the private sector and its capacity to support development in the Solomon Islands.

A large majority of SICCI members consulted identified corruption as one of the biggest issues impacting upon business in Solomon Islands.

One member highlighted that corruption was the single biggest competitive cost impacting upon their ability to run a profitable business.

Studies have also shown that countries that have a high level of corruption are unable to function efficiently or prosper at an economic level, causing suffering for society as a whole.

Mr Bartlett said corruption can lead to an

uneven distribution of wealth as there is a lack of a level playing field between companies that have established illegal connections with Government officials.

“In a corrupt economy, resources are inefficiently allocated and companies that otherwise would not be qualified to win Government contracts are often awarded projects as a result of bribery or kickbacks.

“The quality of infrastructure, education and healthcare also deteriorates under a corrupt economy, leading to an overall lower standard of living for the country's citizens,” the SICCI Chair said.

SICCI represents the voice of business and plays a key role in harmonizing, advocating and elevating issues of key concern to the private sector.

“As organisation that is funded through memberships fees and Donor funds, integrity and high levels of Governance has always been front and centre of our leadership and team culture. Our members are our shareholders and the onus is on us to manage the funds they have invested in us,” he said.

For Solomon Islands as a country, Good Governance and Integrity are fundamental principles for future success.

Short notice for public holiday irks businesses

Friday 20 November, Honiara – SICCI on behalf of its members has expressed disappointment over the lack of consultation and the short notice given in regards to the public holiday on Wednesday 18 November, 2020.

This puts further constraints on business operations at a time when businesses are already facing difficulties due to the global pandemic and downturn of the country's economy.

SICCI raises these concerns on behalf of its member businesses after Government through the Ministry of Home Affairs, without adequate notice, declared a public holiday to observe the by-elections in Central Honiara and North East Guadalcanal constituencies.

SICCI has submitted a formal letter to the Minister of Home Affairs and the Chief Electoral Officer registering these concerns on the short notice given and how businesses have been affected.

"To help foster business confidence in such difficult times we suggest that a review be considered in the future for business operations during elections because public holidays are costly for businesses," SICCI Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Ms Natalina Hong, said.

"From the feedback we received related



to the public holiday, two main concerns are financial implications and human resources impacts as companies had a very short time to action changes and consider their cost of operations," she said.

She added: "There are already nine designated public holidays in the Solomon Islands calendar year apart from the annual Second Appointed days, which are also public holidays for each of the nine provinces. That makes around eighteen public holidays in a year.

"Companies value the Schedule of National and Provincial Public Holidays list circulated by the Ministry of Home

Affairs at the start of every year, and plan according to it.

In her letter to the Minister and Chief Electoral Officer, SICCI CEO, Ms Hong reiterated the fact that currently businesses are going through a difficult economic situation due to the global pandemic.

"A review in the future to take into account business costs associated with additional public holidays during the year by the Government will be useful given the context of the global Pandemic," Ms Hong said.

RSIPF provide updates business community

The Police Commissioner and his team at the RSIPF attended a Business Luncheon hosted by SICCI on 17 November, 2020 to inform member businesses about Police operations during this time of COVID-19, the by-elections in Central Honiara and North East Guadalcanal and Crime Prevention in communities in and around Honiara City.

Security is an important factor for business confidence, and SICCI appreciate the time taken to assure the business community about the good work the Police have been doing in keeping citizens safe.

This was an outcome from discussions during our recent SICCI/RSIPF Executive Group meeting catered for under the signed MoU between the two parties.



RSIPF informed SICCI members about Police COVID-19 operations and crime prevention during the Business Luncheon.

SICCI discussed investment opportunities with Chinese Chamber of Commerce

Wednesday 2 December, Honiara – SICCI believes that there are many new growth sectors in Solomon Islands and with the right investment can generate positive economic growth and social development for the country.

Board Chairman, Jay Bartlett made these remarks during a video conference on Monday 16th November between SICCI Board members, Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and counterparts from the Chinese Chamber of International Commerce.

Some key trade and investment sectors were highlighted including infrastructure, agriculture, agribusiness, tourism, mining and fisheries.

The video conference was made possible following a courtesy visit in October SICCI made to the Ambassador of the Peoples Republic of China (PRC) to Solomon Islands, His Excellency (H.E) Li Ming as part of the two business Chambers' effort to play a leading role in this new and developing business relationship between the two countries.

As a Chamber, SICCI believes there is scope for further meaningful

engagement and welcomes the opportunity to do so.

"We are interested in seeing that there is a partnership approach to investment, we want to see trade and investment inflows but not to the detriment of our local businesses and jobs," Mr Bartlett said.

"We believe that investment can be done in a manner that is win win for both parties.

"We want to encourage local participation, Joint Ventures and local job creation.

"With a large unemployment rate and fast population growth we have an uncompromising position on ensuring local content is a large consideration in delivery and investment across our nation," he added.

Mr Bartlett reiterates PRC has been an important trading partner for many decades, but the long existing trade is one that has based on a single export commodity, round logs.

"Now that we have this bilateral relationship between our two countries, we can explore some other sectors that will be beneficial for our economies," he

said.

SICCI looks forward to working closely with the Chinese Chamber of International Commerce, and its members and Chinese business partners to further strengthen the business and economic relationship between the two countries.

SICCI has a broad and diverse membership base covering almost every sector – from Construction, Manufacturing, Tourism, Agribusiness, Fisheries ICT, Exporters and Importers. And its membership base also covers a range of business sizes from Small and Medium to the country's largest employers.

SICCI also wishes to reiterate its stand that it is important that we maintain meaningful engagement and communication with all our development partners.

Especially during this time when the impacts of COVID-19 are posing both a health and economic crisis, collaboration is the way to go in balancing risks and opportunities for our country. And this is the basis of the SICCI's engagement going forward.

SICCI meets with Japanese Ambassador

Tuesday 1 December, Honiara – SICCI expressed its appreciation to the Government and the people of Japan for their continuous support to infrastructure development in the Solomon Islands.

Members of the SICCI Board and Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Ms Natalina Hong paid a courtesy call to the Japanese Ambassador to Solomon Islands, H.E Morimoto Yasuhiro on Friday 27 November where discussions focused exploring private sector partnership.

This is part of the Chamber's efforts to reach out and maintain meaningful engagement and communication with all our development partners.

SICCI, as the peak body representing private sector in the country, were also updated on Phase II of the



(From left to right) SICCI Board Member Qila Tuhanuku, an official at the Japanese Embassy, SICCI Chair Jay Bartlett, Japanese Ambassador, H.E Morimoto Yasuhiro and SICCI Board Member Daniel Tucker.

Kukum Highway Project will include the rehabilitation of the road from the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources to Lungga Bridge (4 lanes, 5km) and from Lungga Bridge to the

Honiara International Airport (2 lanes, 2km including Lungga Bridge).

SICCI Board Chairman, Mr Jay Bartlett

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said this is the sort of infrastructure development Solomon Islands needs to support economic growth.

"Roads are the arteries through which the economy pulses. By linking producers to markets, workers to jobs, students to school, and the sick to hospitals, roads are vital to any development agenda," Mr Bartlett said.

It is understood that Phase II of the Kukum Highway Project is expected to be completed before the hosting of the 2023 Pacific Games which is expected to improve efficiency in mobility and provide a much-needed facelift for the capital, Honiara.

SICCI during the courtesy call highlighted the importance of engaging for local content in these big infrastructure projects which in turn provides needed employment for the

country's growing youth population.

CEO, Ms Hong said infrastructure along with the country's complex tax system, corruption and land are key impediments to growth and if addressed would help the private sector make a stronger contribution to inclusive economic growth in the Solomon Islands.

SICCI also expressed its willingness to establish partnerships on a business level with businesses and organisations in Japan.

Ambassador, H.E Morimoto welcomed the courtesy visit and discussions with SICCI as an opportunity to learn more about the private sector in the country and how the Japanese Embassy and SICCI can work together in developing mutual interests for the betterment of

Solomon Islands.

SICCI also commends Japan for their quiet but strong commitment to assisting development in Solomon Islands through initiatives such as the Grant Assistance for Grassroots Human Security Projects which has gone a long way in enhancing the wellbeing of Solomon Islanders at the grassroots or rural level.

This project reflects Japan's commitment to contribute to improvements in various fields including education, health, social welfare, vocational training, as well as other sectors.

The SICCI CEO on behalf of members businesses thanked the Government of Japan for its continuous support to Solomon Islands.



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COVID-19 challenges on the workplace



HR Practitioners call for Gov't guidelines to manage their workforce

Soltuna Limited, based in Noro Western Province provides employment for 2000 Solomon Islanders from all provinces around the country. *Photo: FFA Media.*

Monday 9 November, Honiara – The impact of coronavirus (COVID-19) on our health system and fragile economy is an unfolding story that continues to cause uncertainties.

One of the biggest visible impacts of COVID-19 has been on businesses, organisations, and government's nature of their workplaces and in managing the workforce.

As Solomon Islands continues to register active cases of the virus due to the repatriation flights Government has approved recently, the uncertainties of a lockdown if there is community transmission continues to startle employers.

Employers need some sort of guidance in complying with restriction if there's a lockdown while striving to keep operations going and taking care of the workforce's welfare.

The immediate concern for businesses and organisations is what to do with their workforce once a lengthy lockdown is imposed, and judging from the unpredictability and spread of COVID-19 worldwide, local HR Practitioners insists that as part of the

country's preparedness efforts measures needs to be in place now, rather than later.

Realising this need, in October 2020, the Solomon Islands Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SICCI) collaborated with the local Human Resource (HR) Practitioners Network in facilitating a workshop with a focus on developing an Employer Guide on managing the workplace during COVID-19.

This will be a basic guide suitable for businesses and organisations in Solomon Islands.

It is understood that most businesses have their own standard operation and business continuity plans, this guideline is to ensure preparedness to dealing with employees.

"This was acknowledged as a platform for collaboration between government departments, private sector and HR practitioners to share experiences and challenges affecting their workplaces and to find a local solution to managing workforce during and after this pandemic," Chair of the HR Practitioners Network, Ms Nancy Palmer, said.

The workshop attracted a lot of interest

from SICCI members as well as senior HR Practitioners from some of the biggest companies in Solomon Islands including the country's leading State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs).

Ms Palmer said this was the first avenue for businesses and organisations to come together to discuss issues affecting them during this pandemic.

"From the discussions it was evident that HR practitioners need clear government policies or guidelines on key labour and HR related issues such as repatriation, allowances and many more," she said.

HR Practitioners also agreed that frontliners should also be more inclusive of other essential groups including managers and workers who are required to be on site or at their work station during a lockdown.

"A contingency plan is needed which includes a nation-wide matrix that communicates the level of risk the country is on which helps in the management of people and resources," Ms Palmer said.

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"There is a need for HR advisory services, mentoring and counselling services to address associated mental health issue," she added.

Soltuna Limited based in Noro Western Province provides employment for 2000 Solomon Islanders from all provinces around the country, and for their Human Resources Manager, Ms Bela Simiha, the dilemma is how to remunerate workers when operation shuts down due to a lockdown.

"The Government through its Labour Division has to come out and make some kind of statement as to what companies can legally do and what we cannot do," she said.

For most companies, organisations or even the public service, employees are only entitled to three to four weeks annual leave.

"In the case where community transmission of COVID-19 has occurred and we go into lockdown of more than four weeks, how are we going to pay the employees?" Ms Simiha asked, during an interview with SICCI Media.

"Apart from the annual leave there is sick leave but the question remains if it's legal to do this while workers cannot go to work due to a lockdown.

"That is why we need to have some guidelines and directives from Government because it is also unacceptable to tell workers to go on leave without pay," she said.

Every year Soltuna undertakes an expensive exercise in meeting all costs of sending their employees to their respective home provinces for the festive season. But that too is in doubt for this year.

"The main concern for our employees is whether they will still get paid once there is a total shut down in an event of a lockdown," Ms Simiha said.

"If we do have a lengthy lockdown and they (employees) have to remain in Noro for the festive season then who is going to be responsible for them once their money runs out.

"We acknowledge Government's assurance of containing the virus in the quarantine stations, however, what has been highlighted are possible scenarios and that is why Soltuna along with other companies need some guidelines to work with," she added.

For Soltuna being situated close to the western border poses another risk.

Government has declared the Western border with Papua New Guinea as an Emergency Zone under the current State of Public Emergency due to the risk of importing the virus from Bougainville, which shares the western border with Solomon Islands.

Ms Simiha said they have put in place measures as part of their preparedness plan.

"We have trained our workforce on preventive measures and on healthy living while also checking their temperatures before they come in for work," she said.

South Pacific Oil (SPO) Limited too is facing uncertainties in terms of their workforce as there is no HR policy in place at the moment to cater for COVID-19 related leaves.

Human Resource Manager, Ms Muriel Dakamae said the question they are asking is what to fall back on once employees have exhausted both their sick leave and their annual leave.

"And then absenteeism comes in which is something that affects man power and will put pressure over time which will be another cost. Those are the kinds of things that is a challenge for SPO as an organization.

"A lockdown is also an issue as currently we assume that there is no community transmission. We hope the virus is contained but if worse comes to worse, then SPO also supports essential services and businesses, as such, we will be needing our responsible officer on site," Ms Dakamae said.

During a Labour Advisory Board meeting on 26th March 2020 prior to the 36-hours simulated lockdown in April, the Commissioner of Labour advised that workers and employers agree on what works for them.

There is agreement that the types of leave that can be accessed should start with annual leave, and then any other leave accumulated and as stated in contracts. With sick leave, we see that other jurisdictions are advising that sick leave should only be used where worker is not fit for work due to illness or injury affecting them.

There has not been any further advise since in regards to a lengthier lockdown.

Ask Naomi



EVENTS & TRAININGS?

SICCI offers a professional events management service using a wide network of businesses. We bring you popular SICCI events such as the Business Breakfasts, Business After 5 and our renowned annual Business Excellence Awards.

Members can benefit from accessing our trainings on certain business topics such as leadership, planning, productivity, management and marketing.

SERVICES TO MEMBERS?

Service to our members and stakeholders is our priority as a private sector organization. The strength of SICCI lies in its membership, not only in its numbers, but more so in what the numbers represent - a wealth of private entrepreneurial expertise in business.

Have a question about the Chamber?

Send Naomi a message: services@solomonchamber.com.sb

Increased population demands we invest for growth



Wednesday 2 December, Honiara – The Solomon Islands Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SICCI) believes that the country's increasing population demands that Solomon Islands as a country must invest for economic growth.

SICCI, as peak body representing private sector in the Solomon Islands, made this statement following the launch of the 2019 Census Report recently which revealed Solomon Islands' population at approximately 721,455.

This is an increase of 169,930 people (30.8%) since the last census in 2009. This increase represents an average annual growth rate of 2.7% for the period 2009-2019, or an increase of 17,000 per year.

"This population if engaged in meaningful employment has the opportunity to contribute to a population dividend and participate in economic development," SICCI Board Chairman, Mr. Jay Bartlett, said.

Having said this, SICCI is particularly

"This population if engaged in meaningful employment has the opportunity to contribute to a population dividend and participate in economic development."

SICCI Chairman, Jay Bartlett

concerned with the fact that a growing population has forward and backward linkage with other economic dynamics particularly unemployment.

"Now more than ever, economic growth is a necessity, however, with the current state of our economy due to the global pandemic, it will not sufficiently provide for our population's demands in health, education and infrastructure.

"Our population demographics demands that we must invest for growth," Mr. Bartlett reiterated.

SICCI also believes the private

sector has the potential to enhance economic growth and help address unemployment in Solomon Islands.

To harness the driving force of the private sector, SICCI Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Ms. Natalina Hong said Government needs to initiate bold reforms that could create a more enabling business environment and innovative private sector to facilitate more inclusive and sustainable growth in the long run.

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"Jobs are scarce for many reasons - inadequate policy making, poor infrastructure, and limited access to finance that narrows employment opportunities. For young people, the mismatch between education, skills and the needs of the labor market is a major hurdle.

"When it comes to possible long-term solutions for unemployment, the private sector, which contributes significantly in providing jobs in Solomon Islands already has the advantage to offer further opportunities in formal skill employment for the fast-growing young population," Ms. Hong said.

Alpheia Hou Tufah, People Manager at Pasifiki HR, a member of SICCI, recognises that with regards to unemployment it is something that increases every year and it is an issue that the Government should seriously address through its policies and plans.

"The private sector can provide employment opportunities but it needs the support of Government to provide more job opportunities.

"A simple example would be if Government can give tax incentives to private businesses, they can create more job opportunities with the money they save from tax and continue to grow the business which contributes positively to the economy.

"Therefore, in my opinion the Private Sector needs the Government to work together to address the issue of unemployment and the private sector cannot address this issue alone," Mrs. Tufah said.

To achieve growth which in turn will ease the country's high unemployment rate, there are many new growth sectors that SICCI believe with the right investment can generate positive economic growth and social development for our country.

Chairman, Mr. Bartlett emphasised that there is a large pipeline of infrastructure projects that are planned for investment in the Solomon Islands in the next decade.

He said agriculture has the potential to become Solomon Islands' most important sector.

"With a large growing domestic population, a rising middle class and urbanisation in many of Asia's

economies there is large opportunity for growth in commodities demand and prices. Solomon Islands is well placed to develop on the back of trade and export to many of these large economies such as China with agricultural products," he said.

In terms of tourism, Solomon Islands is one of the least visited countries in the world with only around 26 thousand visitors a year, however, its natural beauty and rich cultural heritage should leave this sector high up on the development agenda for Government.

Solomon Islands has existing natural minerals such as Gold, Bauxite and Nickel.

"We also have a large Exclusive Economic Zone with an abundance of Tuna stocks. Fisheries and Mining are also two key sectors that have the scope for further foreign investment," SICCI Chair, Mr. Bartlett, said.

However, to develop these potential sectors, they will require foreign investment and Solomon Islands need the fundamental building blocks to be in place as a pre-requisite for investment.

Investments in Tourism, Agriculture, Mining or Infrastructure development will first and foremost require access to land in a manner that is transparent and streamlined.

Tourism, Agriculture and Mining developments will most likely occur outside of Urban Centers which sit outside of formal structures of land ownership. Unlocking land and partnering with our traditional landowners is fundamental to creating sustainable economic growth that will accelerate investment & capital these strategic sectors.

Rather than simply exporting our raw natural resources, Solomon Islands must look for opportunities to add value to these resources within the country as a means of creating additional economic activities - jobs and growth.

In a study commissioned by the SICCI in 2017 called the Private Sector Scan to help identify and understand the key constraints to business; Land, infrastructure and corruption were identified as some of the key issues continuing affecting private sector growth.

SICCI believes that institutionalizing the process is an innovative way to progress this complex, sensitive but fundamental issue.

BOARD SPOTLIGHT



Name: Bob Pollard
Title: Managing Director
Company: KPSI & Pasifiki HR

Bob is the Founder and Managing Director of Pasifiki HR and Kokonut Pacific Solomon Islands (KPSI) Limited, two companies with more than 40 employees. He is also a Board Member of Solomon Airlines and a founding member of Transparency Solomon Islands (TSI) and a member of SSEC Campus Church and Panatina Valley community.

Vision for the Chamber

"An organisation that serves its members by working with Government and stakeholders to improve the business enabling environment, targeting a few agreed priorities at a time. Together we are stronger, supporting each other and growing business and livelihoods."

Businesses concern over proposed facebook suspension

Tuesday 17 November, Honiara – Struggling businesses have expressed concerns over Government's proposal to temporarily ban the world's biggest social networking site 'facebook' in Solomon Islands.

The Solomon Islands Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SICCI), as the peak body representing private sector in Solomon Islands, is particularly concerned with the negative impacts this decision will have on our small micro businesses, entrepreneurs and those in the informal sector who depend on social media, especially facebook for marketing and advertising.

"It is the Government's prerogative to make such a decision, but as a Chamber we believe that there are other pressing issues that requires our collective focus," SICCI Board Chairman, Jay Bartlett, said.

Members of the business community have shared their concerns with SICCI while others opposed the decision to temporarily ban facebook.

Paula ter Brake, Managing Director of Tower Insurance Pacific said facebook is the most widely used social media platform in the Pacific Islands and is an important communication tool relied upon by individuals, businesses and communities.

"Tower uses facebook to engage with customers and their communities regarding a variety of matters, most importantly those relating to the preparation for and response to severe weather events.

"The most engagement Tower has on Facebook is relating to claims processing following major events, as such, Tower strongly opposes any proposal to ban facebook usage in the Solomon Islands," Brake said.

70% of SICCI's membership is made up of Small Medium Enterprises (SMEs), one of them is SAMEDIA Limited and Director, Ms Gloria Hong said for small businesses interacting with consumers on social media is an important marketing strategy.

Solomon Islands Cabinet Passes Ban on Facebook



"Using social media helps us to build brand awareness, increase our customer base, and connect with customers.

"In my view, banning facebook is a threat to businesses, especially the small businesses who cannot afford to run advertisements on radio, newspapers and on TV," Ms Hong said.

Tongs Corporation have invested a lot of time and effort to launch and grow their facebook presence as a mode of communication with their customers.

Their Sales and Marketing Manager, John Wopereis said facebook has been an effective tool in building relationships with the wider community to grow product knowledge and showcase the inspiring stories of builders, contractors and homeowners.

"In terms of our planning for 2021 onwards, it's important for us to be clear on what to expect as we have outlined facebook as a key marketing tool and have content lined up ready to go. We need to know what's happening so we can be clear on where to invest our time and effort," Mr Wopereis said.

Like the COVID-19 global pandemic, the Tourism will again be the sector most affect by the proposed plan to ban facebook.

Sunset Lodge based on the island of Savo

relies heavily on social media to attract customers.

Owner Bernard Kemakeza has taken up every opportunity presented by Government and SICCI to improve his business' online presence and sees this move as a setback.

"Coming into 2020 we did not anticipate the global pandemic impacting the Tourism industry the way we're experiencing at the moment.

"For small operators such as ourselves we are struggling to pay our workers, to pay tax to Government, help our nearby communities and we look forward to when things get back to normal.

"The training we have received from Government through the responsible ministry has helped us market our products which eventually helped us during this pandemic. I would call on Government to reconsider its decision to ban facebook and consider its citizens who are only trying to keep their business afloat," Mr Kemakeza said.

The high cost of advertising is a common concern for businesses and facebook provides a more affordable option.

Mr Anthony Fargas, Managing Director

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facebook Suspension

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of Coral Sea Resort and Casino said advertising in the traditional media is not viable in a depressed economic landscape on a regular basis.

"There is a high uptake of facebook with Solomon Islanders and freedom of expression and information should be encouraged in any democracy or competitive landscape.

"It allows businesses to connect directly with suppliers and customers, as well as allowing individuals to keep in close contact domestically and internationally

with family and friends," he said.

At some point in the future, Solomon Islands will be re-opening its borders and Tourism Solomons has around 34,000 followers / likes on facebook.

Mr Fargas asked: "How will the Solomon Islands be marketed with previous international guests and new international guests if we cannot tap into direct communication channels with them?"

He said guests will be considering where to travel during the pandemic, as at post-pandemic many people will be wanting to travel somewhere that is safe and close.

"Solomon Islands is well placed to take advantage of this – but any positive affect of this will be diminished with the removal of basic communication right – such as Facebook," he said.

Countries that have banned social media (Facebook) include China, North Korea, Iran and Syria.

Banning facebook will only bring about negative press on the world stage and is not the solution for the country's social media issues which will keep the country out of touch with technological evolution.

Young Entrepreneurs call on Cabinet to reconsider facebook suspension

Monday 30 November, Honiara – The Young Entrepreneurs Council Solomon Islands (YECSI) has called on Cabinet to reconsider its stance on the proposed temporary suspension on Facebook and highlight the need for Cabinet to conduct robust dialogue with stakeholders before making a decision to that effect.

YECSI supports the development and empowerment of both aspiring and current young business owners as a means to alleviate high youth unemployment rate in the country.

With more than 50 present members engaged in diverse industries from barbers, music, agriculture, tourism to professional services; the majority heavily rely on Facebook as a marketing, advertising and information channel to sustain their businesses.

YECSI members are seriously concerned about the further detrimental impacts the ban would have on their businesses. For Julian Maetoloa, Director and owner of Empire Barber, Facebook is the main platform to communicate with his customers. "Empire uses Facebook for marketing and advertising the products and services we provide. Shutting it down will have a huge impact on our business," said Maetoloa.

Neweye, another small business operating in the agriculture sector, expressed its concern stating that banning Facebook should not be the option for Cabinet at the first place

because of the negative effect it would have on small businesses.

"This banning of Facebook, in my view, will surely and drastically cut down the channel process in reaching my markets," said Moses Michael, owner of Neweye.

While COVID-19 impacts are already causing suffering to many young businesses in the country with declining sales and unwanted downscaling, young entrepreneurs are now incredibly anxious about the sustainability of their businesses if their trusted marketplace is removed from their business equation to survive.

YECSI Chairlady, Millicent Barty, shares huge concerns of the "new normal" the organisation has been promoting and exercising since the start of the year as initiatives to help members adapt to impacts of COVID-19.

"We [YECSI] have invested a lot of our resources and we've been working extremely hard on providing our members trainings to help them adapt and be better prepared for the immediate future," she states.

"The promotion of digital marketing trainings have been the centre of how we've envisaged the "new normal" for young SI businesses as an asset to survive this pandemic, and now, we're being denied the most effective marketplace [Facebook] and business tool accessible to us which raises huge uncertainties and dismisses how we and the rest of the world popularly perceive this new normal."

YECSI in partnership with Strongim Bisnis launched its 'Ennovation Blo lumi' program in July to harness technological advancements and innovation to promote entrepreneurship under the theme "Innovating for Uncertainties [COVID-19 inspired]".

As one of the participants of the program, Tulagi Tours, is a classic example of a local tourist operator, based in Tulagi, that has been substantially affected by the pandemic and has had to diversify and innovate on social media with new domestic tour packages.

Managing Director of Tulagi Tours, Richard Sapia, asserted the current proposal will badly affect their business as a tour operator that has been struggling already to survive amidst the pandemic. "Facebook is an important tool to keep my business going in such hard times, I am of the view that cabinet must please reconsider," said Sapia.

"We would barely maintain our sales and growth if Facebook is banned or even suspended for a certain period of time", MNEM Investment said in a statement to YECSI.

MNEM Investment is an agri-business and emphasizes the importance of Facebook when it comes to doing business especially because it's a fast, affordable and easy way of selling its products.



John Ta'amora
Advocacy Officer

Greetings from the Advocacy Desk.

As the year draws near to its closing and businesses are planning for the year 2021, we want to update you on key Advocacy events and meetings that have taken place year.

The Building Construction Working Group (BCWG)

The Building Construction Working Group started their formal meetings as a committee in June and to date a total of 12 meetings have been taken place the latest being on Thursday 10 December 2020. The next meeting will take place in January 2021.

The BCWG had seen in their seven months the progress of the work on the Infrastructure Management Bill (IMB) and the National Building Code of Solomon Islands (NBCSI).

Through the BCWG Advocacy work, DFAT gave funding and technical assistance to the Ministry of Infrastructure (MID) to progress the Bill and the Code through the Solomon Islands Infrastructure Management Bill Assistance (SIIMBA).

Consultations have taken place in the Western, Choiseul and Malaita Provinces by a team consisting of representatives from SIG (MID and Ministry of Lands) and SIIMBA.

These key documents are expected to be submitted in the next parliament sitting in early 2021.



A roundtable was hosted by SICCI in September with the Ministry of Commerce, Industries, Labour and Immigration (MCILI) and the Honiara City Council (HCC).

Consultation on the draft Infrastructure Management Bill (IMB)

Under the BCWG, SICCI hosted a consultation on the Infrastructure Management Bill (IMB) for its members with the Ministry of Infrastructure Development (MID).

A total of 20 participants have taken part including local engineers, prominent SOEs, and engineering consultants.

The members were able to give sufficient feedback to MID on the Bill. An important aspect of the Bill to the Building Construction Working Group (BCWG) is the legislation that covers the National Building Code of Solomon Islands (NBCSI).

Royal Solomon Islands Police (RSIPF)-SICCI Executive Meetings

SICCI had four successful quarterly meetings this year with the RSIPF. From these meetings the following issues have been discussed:

- The role of RSIPF in relation to COVID 19
- RSIPF Crimes Prevention Strategy
- Social Enterprise Model for Young Entrepreneurs in Burns Creek

- Traffic issues and the role of the Road Transport Board (RTB)
- Concerns of Business on increasing burglary and break ins into business properties
- The facilitation of exemption passes for businesses during any planned lockdown; and

SIG-Private Sector Advisory Group meetings

This year the Advisory Group had a total of 3 meetings. The MOU between SIG and SICCI which was signed in 2017 lapsed in 2019. Therefore, a review was conducted and a renewed MOU was signed this year by the Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare and SICCI Chairman Mr. Jeremy Bartlett on 15 July 2020. The meetings continued after the signing and the following issues have been discussed:

- COVID 19 Impacts on the Economy and Businesses
- Ministerial updates from the Solomon Islands Government and Private Sector updates
- Essential services to be included during a lockdown
- Exemption passes for businesses to operate during a lockdown

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SICCI had four successful quarterly meetings this year with the RSIPF.

- Communication between SICCI and the SIG Oversight Committee
- The critical roles of SICCI Industry Working Groups
- The importance of inclusion of the Private Sector in the National budget Process
- Goods confiscation and price control in the retail sector; and
- The Economic Stimulus Package updates.

Information Session on Medium Term Development Plans (MTDPs) with MNPDC

In October, the SICCI Membership had a chance to listen to updates from MNPDC about MTDP. The presentation highlighted the importance of the Medium Term Development Plan (MTDP), the National Development Strategy (NDS), NDS structure and planning process, its objectives, current challenges and the way forward. The electronic copy of the presentation can be obtained from the SICCI office upon request.

Information session with the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force (RSIPF)

In September this year, SICCI members

had the chance to hear updates from the RSIPF on three important topics:

- RSIPF Border Patrol and duties in relation to COVID 19
- RSIPF Security details in terms of the November By Elections; and
- RSIPF Crimes Prevention Strategy.

Roundtable Meeting for the Retail Sector

Businesses in the Retail sector have had issues with authorities on goods confiscation and price regulations in the retail sector. Therefore a roundtable was hosted by SICCI in September with the Ministry of Commerce, Industries, Labour and Immigration (MCILI) and the Honiara City Council (HCC) to clarify these matters. A sufficient feedback was given to SIG representatives by SICCI members and further updates were given in exchange to businesses for their information by MCILI and HCC.

The Manufacturing Industry Working Group (MIWG)

The Manufacturing Working Group (MIWG) was established in March this year by the SICCI Board and became operational in June.

From this group, one roundtable on

Policies and Standards was hosted in September with SIG officials from the Prime Minister's Office, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Commerce, the Labour Department, and the Price Control/ Consumer Affairs Department. Updates on key challenges and issues faced by the Manufacturing Industry were presented during the meeting.

An outcome of the roundtable is to establish a Manufacturing Sector Taskforce that comprises of key SIG Ministries and the private sector to address issues faced in relation to policies and standards in the Manufacturing sector. The core of the MIWG continue to be Infrastructure Development, Policies and Standards and Compliance.

Tax Administration Bill (TAB)

In July this year, the Bills and Legislation Committee (B&L) was calling for submissions on the Tax Administration bill. However, it was withdrawn to further cater for COVID 19 impacts on the economy.

In early 2019, SICCI hosted an Experts working Group to give feedback on the draft TAB. A submission comprising recommendations for the TAB was developed by SICCI and submitted to the Economic Reform Unit (ERU).



Ronnie Golopitu
Export Industry Development Officer

COCONUT PRODUCTS EXPORT UPDATES

COPRA EXPORTS QUANTITY (MT):

NOVEMBER 2020 = 3,847.405 MT

- Increase by 83% compared to last year (Nov 2019 = 2,105.180 MT)
- 80% drop compared to the annual average for the last 10 years. (Av. Annual exports = 18,861 MT)
- Average Export Price per MT = US\$463/MT equivalent to SBD\$3692.00/M
- Total Value of Copra Exports = SBD\$12.8M
- Production (Sept) – 8,993.481 MT
- 2 Copra Exporters

CNO EXPORTS QTY (MT): OCTOBER 2020 = 4,273.120 MT

- Increase by 24% compared to last year (Oct 2019 = 3,440 MT)
- Average Export Price per MT = US\$936/MT equivalent to SBD\$7,458/MT
- Total Value of CNO Exports = SBD\$33.3M
- Production – 4,572.050 MT
- 2 Exporters

CNC EXPORTS QTY (MT): OCTOBER 2020 = 2,238.4 MT

- Increase by 17% compared to last year (Oct 2019 = 1,916.46 MT)
- Average Export Price per MT = US\$170/MT equivalent to SBD\$1,355/MT
- Total Value of CNC Exports = SBD\$3.1M
- Production – 2,353.960 MT
- 1 Exporter

VCO EXPORT QTY (MT): OCTOBER 2020 = 78.691 MT

- Increase by 28% compared to last year (Oct 2019 = 61.156 MT)
- Average Export Price per MT = US\$3000/MT equivalent to SBD\$23,904/MT
- Total Value of VCO Exports = SBD\$2M
- Production – 87.449 MT
- 1 Exporters

Total Coconut Products Export Valued at about SB\$51.2M

Frequency of Export shipment 2020:

- Copra – 4 shipments (Apr, Jul, Sep, Nov)
- CNO/CNC – Monthly
- VCO - 4 shipments (Mar, May, Jul, Sep)

Destinations:

- Copra – Philippines & Bangladesh
- CNO – EU & New Zealand
- CNC – Australia, New Caledonia, New Zealand
- VCO – Australia, Belgium, New Zealand

Copra Domestic Production (Sept): Central (34%), Western (21%), Guadalcanal (17%), Choiseul (14%), Malaita (6%), Makira (5%), Isabel (2%), Temotu (1%).

CEMA continue to carry out Quality Assurance tasks ensuring that only good quality coconut products that meets the quality standards are to be exported. These includes sampling at the exporters shed, quality analysis at the CEMA Cocoa Laboratory, then issuing of Inspection Certificates for exports.

Update on the Cocoa Export Returns

Cocoa Exports Quantity (MT): by September 2020 = 3,171.699MT

- Increase by 7.8% compared to last year (September 2019 = 1405.001MT)
- Average Export price per MT=1518

pound/MT which is equivalent to SBD15,521.00/MT

- Total Value Exports=SBD45,681,466.00
- 6.7MT to Boutique Markets, valued at \$33,181.00

Currently there are 16 active Cocoa Exporters including Chan Wings and David Kebu Family Cocoa Association (DKFCA) who are exporting to Both Bulk and Boutique Markets.

Cocoa exports are currently on going. There are not many disruptions.

- From January to April 2020, there was an average of 2 export shipment per month.
- From May to September 2020, there was an average of 2 export shipment per month.

Export Destinations: Malaysia is the main destination followed by Indonesia for Bulk market and New Zealand and Australia for Boutique Markets.

Cocoa Domestic Production: Guadalcanal is the leading cocoa producer by 59.71% followed by Malaita (21.14%) and Makira (17.58%).

CEMA continues to carry out quality Assurance tasks ensuring that only good quality Cocoa Beans that meets the quality standards are to be exported. These includes sampling at the exporters shed, quality analysis at the CEMA Cocoa Laboratory, then issuing of the inspection certificates for exports.

NOTE:

MT - Metric Ton
CNO - Coconut Natural Oil
VCO - Virgin Coconut Oil



From: Board, Management, Staff and Members of the
Solomon Islands Chamber of Commerce & Industry
(SICCI)

To: The Solomon Islands Government, stakeholders and
the people of Solomon Islands

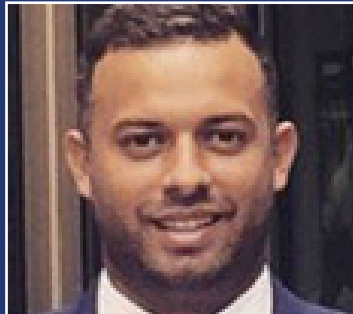
*Wishing you an enjoyable and
safe festive season!*

Merry
Christmas
&
Happy New Year

The Solomon Islands Chamber of Commerce & Industry wishes to inform the public that the SICCI Office will close for the festive season from Tuesday 22nd December 2020 and resume normal business on Monday 4th January 2021.

Know Your Board

SICCI Board Members for 2020/2021



CHAIR

Jay Bartlett
Director
Hatanga Ltd



VICE CHAIR

Ricky Fuo'o
General Manager
TGA



Belinda Botha
Owner Operator
Dive Munda



Bob Pollard
Managing Director
Kokonut Pacific Solomon Islands (KPSI)



Craig Gibsone
General Manager
GPPOL



Hilda Lamani
Manager
Star Supplies Company



Daniel Tucker
Country Manager
Kramer Ausenco (SI) Ltd



Frank Wickham
General Manager
NFD



Qila Tuhanuku
Marketing & Corporate Manager
Solomon Breweries Ltd

Meet the SICCI Team



Natalina Hong
Chief Executive Officer (CEO)



Shaun Konaga
*Administrative Manager &
Assistant Finance Officer*



John Ta'amora
Advocacy Officer



Naomi Mara
Membership & Services Officer



Philip Lilomo
Media & Communications Officer



Ronnie Galopitu
*Export Industry Development
Officer (EIDO)*



Emmanuel Pitakaka
YECISI Coordinator

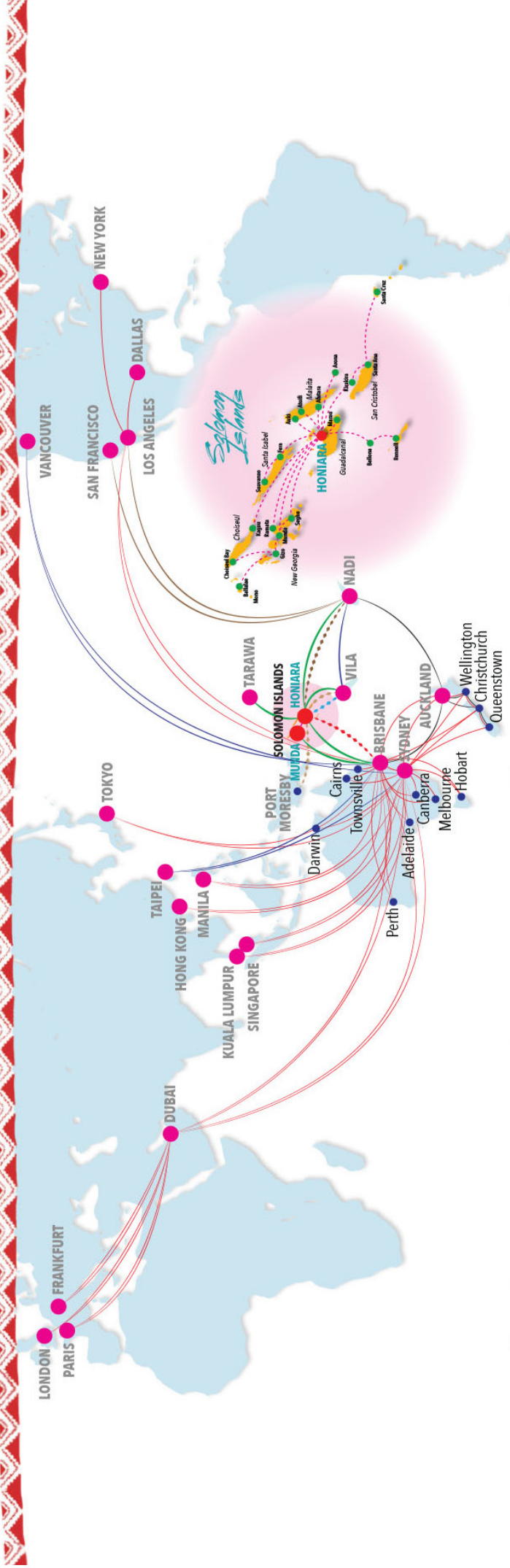


Rosslyn Ramoifuiia
*YECISI Membership & Partnerships
Officer*



Chantelle Lincoln
*YECISI Organisational
Development Adviser*





CONNECTING OUR ISLANDS WITH ASIA AND THE WORLD

Legend

- Codeshare with Qantas
- Qantas Domestic/International Interline
- International Partner Airline
- Interline with Air New Zealand
- Codeshare with Fiji Airlines
- Interline with Fiji Airlines
- Codeshare with Air Niugini
- Domestic island connections
- Fly Solomons International services

Flying to the Solomon Islands is easy with five weekly flights from Brisbane and twice weekly from Nadi. And now we fly direct from Brisbane to Munda in our Western Province – one of the world's most beautiful dive sites. Dive at Munda or other pristine locations for amazing corals and WWII wrecks. Take a trekking or fishing adventure. Discover our friendly island culture soon. Visit flysolomons.com

A THEME PARK DESIGNED BY NATURE



Solomon Is.