



FINANCE AND ADMINISTRATION COMMITTEE

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Headquarters Matters

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Prepared by the Secretariat

Introduction and Purpose

1. The purpose of this paper is to present information relating to current operations at Commission Headquarters (Secretariat) in Pohnpei, Federated States of Micronesia. Updates in this paper cover Secretariat property and staff housing, security, telecommunications, travel, environmental responsibility, medical care, and utility services.

Operations Updates

Headquarters Building

2. The Secretariat building remains in good condition due to ongoing maintenance. The Commission approved terms of reference and a budget for a consultancy to undertake a building survey and the development of a maintenance plan for the Commission buildings (WCPFC15-2018-FAC12-09). The consultant that was selected to undertake this work was scheduled to travel to Pohnpei in the first quarter of 2020. Unfortunately, the consultant did not reach Pohnpei due to COVID-19 travel restrictions and approximately half of the funds for the project were used to cover travel costs and delays resulting from COVID restrictions. Additional funding will be needed if the project is to resume in 2024.

Professional Staff Housing

3. There continues to be considerable pressure on the housing market in Pohnpei. With limited inventory and the establishment of a sub-regional UN office in Pohnpei, the cost of house rentals continues to increase. The Secretariat has managed to keep rental prices lower than the market rate for similar rentals due to long term leases and positive relationships with landlords.

Security

4. The Secretariat compound maintains 24-hour security through direct contracting of security guards. There were no security incidents reported at professional staff housing or the Secretariat over the last year.

Telecommunications and Internet

5. Communication systems and services experienced minimal downtime throughout most of the year. In addition to the fibre-optic connection to the Secretariat building provided by FSM Telecommunications Corporation, the Secretariat maintains a backup satellite connection with Kacific, which launched internet services in FSM in 2021. The Secretariat

is currently exploring the use of Starlink as a replacement for the Kacific satellite as Starlink provides a higher bandwidth at a comparable cost.

Travel

6. United Airlines increased the number of flights to Micronesia in the last year. Air Nauru has added an additional stop on its route and will now have a weekly direct flight from Pohnpei to Palau, which assists with connections between Pohnpei and Asia as well as south to Papua New Guinea. As noted in the report to FAC16 in 2022, the costs of flights have increased within the North Pacific and the Pacific region in general.

Environmental Responsibility

7. The Secretariat continues to be conscious of the impacts of its operations on the surrounding local environment. The Secretariat has greatly reduced its use of non-recyclable items and has worked to recycle as much waste as possible.
8. Electricity for the Secretariat is primarily generated by solar energy which makes up approximately 75-85% of the power consumed. Apart from the reduced impact on the environment, the cost saving to the Secretariat has been significant.

Medical Care in Pohnpei

9. Although Pohnpei opened its borders over a year ago, the effects of having closed borders for over two years has had an impact on the available healthcare workforce. With the shortage of medical workers, medical care in Pohnpei continues to be a concern for both support and professional staff. Many routine medical procedures are not available on island and staff are required to travel overseas for medical tests and treatments.

Utility Services

10. Electricity has been inconsistent throughout the year. There have been periods of time with rolling blackouts, and it is normal to have brief daily power outages. The backup generator for the office underwent some significant repairs this year and the contractor that was hired to do the repairs confirms that it is in good working condition.

Recommendation

11. The Committee is invited to note the updates provided in this paper.