

Government House,
Fiji.

21st February, 1947.

Dear Maude,

South Pacific Commission.

You will be receiving copies of the Agreement and annexures as soon as I get them. In the meantime, you might like to have a note on what transpired, and what was agreed on, at the recent discussions at Canberra.

2. There were six participating Governments, namely, the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, France, United States and Netherlands. The U.K. delegation consisted of Mr. Thomas, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, Mr. Williams, U.K. High Commissioner at Canberra and myself, with Robertson and Sidebotham as Advisers. The conclusions of the discussions were drawn up in the form of an Agreement. This Agreement will have to be ratified by the participating Governments.

3. The object of the discussions was the desire

"to encourage and strengthen international co-operation in promoting the economic and social welfare and advancement of the peoples of the non-governing territories in the South Pacific."

COMMISSION.

4. With this object in view, it is proposed that a Commission shall be set up. Each of the participating Governments will appoint two Commissioners, it being hoped that

"in designating Commissioners to the proposed South Pacific Commission, each Member Government will designate as one of its Commissioners, persons whose services, to the fullest extent possible, will be made available for work and activities in connection with the Commission throughout the year."

In other words, that one of the Commissioners will be a full-time man. In the case of the U.K., it is probable that the second Commissioner will be the High Commissioner, Western Pacific.

5. The powers and function of the Commission will be to act as a consultative and advisory body to the participating Governments, in matters affecting the economic social development of the territories concerned. The Commission shall meet at least twice a year. Two-thirds of the participating Governments shall form a quorum at meetings, and voting will be by two-thirds majority, except where decisions on financial matters may involve a financial contribution by the participating Governments, in which case the voting will have to be unanimous.

AUXILIARY BODIES.

6. "In view of the special importance of research for the carrying out of the purposes of the Commission, there shall be established a Research Council which will serve as a standing Advisory body auxiliary to the Commission".

The Council will consist of part-time members and full-time members. The object of the part-time members is to get the most eminent men in the world to take some hand in the work of the Research Council, whilst the full-time members will ensure continuity. It is not necessary for me to specify the functions of the Research Council, as that is obvious from its name.

CONFERENCE.

7. "In order to associate, with the work of the Commission, representatives of the local inhabitants of, and or official and non-official institutions directly concerned with, the territories within the scope of the Commission, there shall be established a South Pacific Conference, with advisory powers, as a body auxiliary to the Commission".

The number of delegates for each territory, e.g. Fiji, Samoa, etc., shall be determined by the Commission; in general the representation shall be at least two delegates for each territory. In the case of the High Commission territories, the delegates will be very few in number, and will probably be officials. In the case of Fiji, on the other hand, there will be at least three, one European, one Indian and one Fijian. The first meeting of the Conference is to be within two years of the Agreement coming into force. Thereafter meetings will be held at intervals not exceeding three years. The functions of the Conference are

"To discuss such matters of common interest as fall within the competence of the Commission and to make recommendations to the Commission on any such matters".

SECRETARIAT.

8. A Secretary General and staff will be appointed after the Commissioners have themselves been appointed and get down to work. In the meantime, Australia and New Zealand will make such preliminary arrangements as may be necessary. Nevertheless there is a danger that the Commission may tend to interfere with the local Governments. However, there is nothing we can do about it at the moment, and it depends to a considerable extent on personalities. It is evident that when the Commission gets going, it will send out a flood of questionnaires which will throw additional work on to the local administrations which may necessitate extra staff at headquarters. This again is a matter that can only be dealt with in the light of experience.

12. So far as the Research Council is concerned, I think that the Commission will do very useful work, for it will enable the territories to pool their knowledge, experience and resources. The Commission will also be useful in bringing together officials and others from different territories. For the rest it is largely a matter of window-dressing, and the Conference will serve little useful purpose. There was quite a battle at Canberra over this Conference idea. The U.K. followed by France and the Netherlands did not wish to have it, but instead, to attach Advisers to the Commissioners: the Advisers being unofficials, preferably and with the right to speak. I am still of the opinion that this would be much the better arrangement, but U.S.A. and Australia were strong on the Conference idea, and New Zealand backed them. Since a matter of principle was not involved, the U.K. decided to withdraw its suggestion. There was also a bit of a fight over the headquarters question. Australia wanted it to be in Australia. Everyone else wanted it to be somewhere in the islands, preferably in Suva. I think that the final decision, namely, somewhere in the islands to be selected by the Commissioners within six months of the Agreement coming into force, but, owing to lack of suitable accommodation in the islands at the moment, Sydney, to be (the temporary) headquarters, was right.

13. The proceedings during the discussions at Canberra were quite amicable and all the decisions were unanimous; this of course meant give and take by the different delegations.

Yours very sincerely,

A.W. GRATHAM.

TELEGRAM.

From THE GOVERNOR OF FIJI
To THE SECRETARY OF STATE.

1.1.1947.

IMPORTANT. NO.1. SECRET. Your telegram 449 SOUTH PACIFIC REGIONAL COMMISSION. Only British territories in South Pacific which are anywhere near as advanced as West Indies are Fiji and Samoa (Tonga being here considered an independent country). It is important that Fiji should have unofficial representation at either Commission Conference or Committees level of South Pacific set-up. This is not really necessary in respect of W.P.H.C. territories since peoples there look to Government and anything beyond that (apart from H.M.G.) would tend to confuse them. Nor would it be possible for them to be represented at any regional meeting except by European planters or missionaries for several years to come.

2. Amplifying above. At Commission level if a Fijian were appointed an Indian and a European would also have to be appointed. This would inevitably make the Commission very large since other territories would demand equal representation. A suitable unofficial European would be acceptable to the Fijians and if he had a special claim for appointment, e.g. senior unofficial member of Executive or Legislative Council he would not (repeat not) be objected to by the Indians. W.P.H.C. territories have no outstanding planter or missionary who could be considered for membership of the Commission. There would be no (repeat no) resentment in those territories to Fiji having one unofficial on Commission whilst they had none at any rate not at the outset.

3. At Conference level Fiji would have to have three unofficial delegates (one from each race) chosen by Legislative Council and not less than one official. Whilst unofficial delegates from W.P.H.C. would have to be European planters or missionaries nevertheless I consider that if a Commission and a Conference are set up the W.P.H.C. territories should have representatives on the Conference. I would suggest that B.S.I.P. and G.E.I.C. combined should send not more than four delegates, half being unofficials. All should be chosen by the High Commissioner. In the case of the New Hebrides the British and French High Commissioners would presumably each have to appoint one official and one unofficial.

4. It appears to me that to establish two bodies, that is the Commission and the Conference is making the whole thing too top heavy. Would it not be better at any rate at the beginning to have one comparatively small body with some unofficial representation on it. There should of course be in addition the Research Council which in my opinion will be the most useful organ of the lot. If the thing is to be a success it is important that we should make haste slowly and not be stampeded by Dr. Evatt into agreeing to something that has a high publicity value but is unlikely to benefit the island territories or their inhabitants.

5. Your paragraph 1 (c). I am visiting Tonga on January 13th to 16th and will discuss with premier. At present I am of opinion that formal offer should be made after Canberra meeting.

6. Please inform me as soon as possible of date of Canberra meeting and probable duration. Meeting of legislative Council is to be held in February but I cannot fix date until I know when I am likely to be back in Fiji.

Governor.

Copy to: W.P.H.C.

TELEGRAM.

From THE SECRETARY OF STATE

To THE GOVERNOR OF FIJI

No. 449 (FIJI)

28th December, 1946.

IMPORTANT. SECRET. My telegram 444. South Pacific Regional Commission.

In connection with the preparation of draft brief for United Kingdom representatives at Canberra Conference, I should be grateful for your observations on the following points.

(a) It seems likely that Caribbean Commission will to a considerable extent be taken as the model for the South Pacific Commission as regards organization, etc. It will no doubt be urged that South Pacific Commission should aim at giving fullest possible chance to local inhabitants to participate in its work though difference in the standard of political and social development between most of these people and those of the West Indies must obviously be taken fully into account. Of the four British members of the Caribbean Commission, two are unofficial West Indians and I should be grateful for your views as to the extent to which you consider the various British regions in the South West Pacific could be represented by delegates chosen from among the people themselves. I realise that such a proposal may not be free from difficulty, e.g. if a Fijian member were appointed presumably the Indians in Fiji would also demand non-official representation. I am uncertain whether it would be possible to secure any such representation in respect of the W.P.H.C. territories. In this respect the special position of Tonga would also have to be carefully borne in mind if Tonga were to desire to participate in the work of the Commission.

(b) Connected with the Caribbean Commission a West Indian Conference has been set up as an auxiliary body of unofficial representatives of the people of the region, elected by the Colonial Legislatures, advisory to the Commission to which it may make recommendations. It appears to me that similar questions to those raised in paragraph (a) above would arise if formation of a similar body was contemplated for South Pacific area. I should be grateful for an expression of your views as to the desirability and practicability of representation on above lines both on the Commission itself and in form of a "Conference" body if such were to be proposed.

(c) I should also wish to know whether you would consider it desirable to ask Tonga Government definitely before Canberra Conference meets, whether they would wish to be associated with the Commission's work and would wish to be directly represented on it or on any auxiliary body formed in relation to it (if it appears to you that that would be appropriate) or whether you consider it would be sufficient to consult them on such points after preliminary conference has taken place. Your telegram No. 160 para. 2 refers.

2. I should be grateful if you could let me have your views as early as possible as I am anxious to proceed with preparations of brief in immediate future.

Secretary of State.

FOR THE PRESS:

Statement by the Minister for External Affairs.

SOUTH SEAS COMMISSION.

The Minister for External Affairs, Dr. H.V. Evatt, today announced that a Conference will shortly be held in Australia to set up the South Seas Commission. Australia and New Zealand have invited the Governments of the United Kingdom, the United States, France and the Netherlands to a conference to be held for this purpose early in the coming year.

The Governments mentioned, in response to informal approaches, recently expressed their desire to join with Australia and New Zealand in forming a regional advisory organisation for the promotion of welfare in the island territories in the South and South-west Pacific. Formal invitations have now been issued to them.

The project of a Regional Advisory Commission for co-operation in regard to territories in the South and South-West Pacific Area has been advocated by the Australian and New Zealand Governments since the Canberra Conference of January, 1944.

Following upon discussions of the project between the Prime Minister, Dr. Evatt and United Kingdom and New Zealand Ministers in London, last May, enquiries were made of the Governments of the United States, France and Netherlands, all of which have direct territorial interests and responsibilities in the area. All Governments concerned indicated their interest in the work of such a Commission, and their willingness to join in a conference for the purpose of establishing the South Seas Commission in the near future.

Dr. Evatt emphasised that the proposed Commission would not deal with questions of defence or security and would not interfere in political matters. The main functions of the Commission will be to advise the member Governments in regard to the promotion of native welfare and the economic development of the island territories of the area. Mutual co-operation and exchange of information and views between member Governments will undoubtedly assist materially the organisation of health and education for the native peoples and improve standards of native welfare generally.

Dr. Evatt indicated that the territories concerned will be those lying generally south of the Equator and eastward from and including Dutch New Guinea to the French Establishments (Tahiti, etc.).

The Australian and New Zealand Governments are very gratified at the encouraging reception given to the plan by the other Governments concerned. The Australian and New Zealand Governments have consistently emphasised the need for such a body in the South Pacific areas. Their views on the subject were clearly and concisely expressed in the Australian-New Zealand Agreement of January, 1944.

The Australian Government has always stressed the necessity for planning and co-operation by all Governments interested in the welfare of the peoples of the South Seas. It believes that the South Seas Commission will greatly help the Governments concerned in dealing with economic difficulties such as those experienced in the thirties when contracting markets and falling prices had devastating effects on the economic life and welfare of the Pacific Islands peoples.

In carrying out its objectives the Commission will bring together the ideas and experience of those who possess firsthand knowledge of South Seas Territories. Administrators, anthropologists, medical officers, economists, missionaries, planters and traders, all can contribute to the effectiveness of the work of the Commission in ensuring that the native peoples for whom member Governments of the Commission are responsible are assisted to improve their standards of living, to develop their ways of life and adjust themselves to the changing conditions of the post-war Pacific world.

Department of External Affairs,
CANBERRA.

26th September, 1946.

TELEGRAM.

From THE SECRETARY OF STATE
To THE HIGH COMMISSIONER.

No. 129

21st June, 1946.

Rec'd: 21.6.46.

CONFIDENTIAL. My immediately preceding telegram. Following is summary of tentative draft memorandum on Regional Commission. Begins.

1. Region to include all island territories except Hawaii south of longitude 23 degrees north, east of longitude 130 degrees east and west of longitude 120 degrees west. All these territories except Japanese mandated islands are dependencies or mandated territories of the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand United States of America, France or the Netherlands.
2. Title of Commission will depend on area of region but on above basis "South Pacific" seems most appropriate.
3. Membership will be limited to States with administrative responsibility in region.
4. Terms of reference proposed in Canberra agreement 1944 seem appropriate on the understanding that Commission is an advisory body only. Some means should be devised for associating local inhabitants in work of Commission. For example one or more representatives of member Governments might be local men or women and government of dependent territories in region might be directly represented at Regional Conferences held under the auspices of the Commission. Research council should be established as offshoot of Commission.
5. Headquarters must be in one of the island territories in region not (repeat not) in metropolitan territory of any member state. United Kingdom would prefer Suva but would consider any other suitable location in region. High proportion of English-speaking member Governments on Commission seems strong argument for choosing some English-speaking territory.
6. An integrated Secretariat is essential and membership should be limited to nationals of member States composing Regional Commission. Suitable candidates from dependencies of these states in region should be considered. Secretary General would be selected by member Governments and be responsible to the Commission. He would select subordinate staff who would be responsible to him. Staff might reasonably be given certain diplomatic privileges and immunities analogous to those granted to United Nations staff. If appointments are made on contract involving secondment from National Civil services some provision will have to be made for continuity of pensionable service.

7. Budget would have to be approved by Regional Commission, each representative taking instructions from his Government as necessary. Cost should be met by bloc contributions from member states on a fixed percentage subject to periodical review.

8. It is undesirable to establish any formal relationship with United Nations which would have the effect of subordinating Regional Commission to that organization. Since Commission is composed of all States exercising jurisdiction in region, any system which would permit outside interference should be avoided. Nevertheless many of the subjects which Regional Commission will discuss will have general international aspects within the scope of some existing or contemplated international functional body such as international Labour Office and some informal arrangements for liaison with these bodies would seem necessary, including interchange of documents and in joint conference with any Regional representatives of such international agencies. Regional Commission could best work out details when established.

9. Regional Commission will formulate its own agenda but following matters might conveniently be discussed at early stage:-

- (a) Medical and Health arrangements,
- (b) Inter-island communications,
- (c) Copra trade,
- (d) Relationship with United Nations and specialised agencies.

Ends.

Secretary of State.