

SPECIAL PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE
2022 NATIONAL ELECTIONS IN NEW IRELAND PROVINCE



Dear Honorable Chairman,

NATEL 22 IN NEW IRELAND PROVINCE

Greetings Chairman and Committee members, thank you for the opportunity to make a submission on what I have experienced and to make some suggestion as one of a field officer taking part in all Election activities since 2012. I have been through 3 National Elections and have seen and experienced the change in the attitudes and mind sets of voters and candidates including interested parties during election activities like Roll Update, Campaign, Polling, Counting and Declarations.

I further thank the Committee to take lead in hearing what we have gone through despite facing difficulties we still succeeded in our role as the responsible organization to deliver Elections. We are glad to be part of your report to present to Parliament from what you collected from all the provinces on behalf of our people in this beautiful Country, especially the silent majority in the rural areas.

Firstly, a rundown of the election in New Ireland Province with points of concern and suggestion as per the SPC TOR and hope it may be taken into consideration to assist in the Committees review plans for future elections.

Elections in New Ireland was conducted generally well with all parties involved. New Ireland Province has:

- 2 Districts being (Kavieng and Namatanai,
- 10 LLGs
- 142 Wards

PESC

We greatly appreciate the assistance and advice from PESC members during the NATEL 22 elections under the chairmanship of the recent outgoing PA Mr Lamiller Pawut. PESC meets were held constantly leading towards the elections for the purpose of updating members of the election operation plans throughout the Province and any changes with regards to the election dates etc..

All Provincial public servants took part in the elections and were the lead election workers with the inclusion of the National public servants who always played an important part in assisting during election time in the Province.

Recommendations of Returning Officers were submitted by the Office and PESC to HQ for gazettal however, the final decision still came from the Headoffice who then forwarded names of the final gazetted officers for us to work alongside with during the NATEL 22.

Police, NBC, and Telikom were some of the key stakeholders and members of the PESC who assisted were they could during the election period while other members observed throughout.

I believe not all PESC are the same in all provinces and must be reviewed individually and not to be seen as the same across all province.

NIP Electoral office did not receive any funding assistance from the Provincial Administration for the NATEL 22.

Recommendations

- If some responsibilities of logistics or counting venues be given back to the PESC so we can work together it would be able to assist in some areas. The PESC Chairman as the PA can recall back all government logistics for the LLGs, Wards to be used during elections, it would help cut down cost in some areas. It doesn't mean come election time PNGEC will always hire for the AROs or ROs.
- PESC in general must not be politically affiliated in any way.
- Any assistance of any kind must be made known to the provincial office.

ROLL UPDATE ACTIVITY

We had about 3 and a half months of updating the Electoral Roll throughout the Province which was very limited time.

Issues that we faced were:

- Limited time
- Funding (late, IFMS issue)
- Limited Enrolment Forms (Form 11)
- Movement of voters
- Ignorance of voters

During updating of the Roll in the field there were issues faced in some areas which hindered the work of the Enrolment Agents. In one ward in Sentral Niu Ailan LLG the Enrolment Agents were confronted by another group claiming to do enrolment as well causing confusion among the villagers or voters while in another ward in Lavongai LLG the agents couldn't continue to enroll because of ethnic fights and there was no one in the ward. Villagers were scattered and it was difficult to enroll voters. Written reports of these incidents were submitted by the enrolment agents and copies of it given to PESC. 14 days were given for the roll update field work.

The LLGs assisted well with logistics support while PNGEC assisted in funding, fuel and allowances during the update. There were issues of missing names and more people to be enrolled however we were supplied with limited Enrolment Forms and as a result we were faced with the issues listed above.

All wards in New Ireland had ward recorders responsible to update the Village Record Book so we decided to verify against the VRB tool with the assistance of the ward recorders and the Enrolment Agents with the Working Base Roll during the field work. All electoral agents were equipped with the Working Roll to do update however, we were advised that the ward recorders were not equipped with the VRB data to assist verify so due to the limited time we had the agents did their best they could with the limited time and submitted back all their field work in time to prepare for the Elections. We did not utilize the ward recorders because there was a lot of misperception from people about the ward recorders across the Province therefore we gave the responsibility back to the LLGs to recommend agents (VPC rep, a youth, village elder, women rep, etc) to assist with updating of the Rolls within their respective wards.

We totally understand the purpose of the VRB but it can also be used as a tool to assist verify voters to be enrolled. The Roll has a different criteria from the VRB. To be in the Roll you have to go through an Enrolment Form (Form 11) before you get into the Electoral Roll. That needed to be considered as well during the short enrolment period.

We then did the data entry in the office after field work was done. The data entered was from the information collected from the field work in Form 11 and was uploaded to the server at the headoffice for the preliminary roll to be produced for the Roll Display at the LLG level, we allowed for 14 days Roll Display in which the LLGs supported well. The final entries were then done after Roll Display and the Final Roll was produced at the headquarters for the Elections.

Roll update can be done if the issues faced during the Updating of the Roll be taken into consideration to assist PNGEC.

Recommendation;

- More time
- Full funding given straight to the province all at once
- Supply the requested number of Enrolment Forms (Form 11)
- Police to take part in the Roll Update process
- Ongoing funding to the Provinces to work together with other agencies to continue updating the roll and not just before the elections

ROLL

The total voting population on the Roll is 93,682 with a 7% increase from the previous 2019 Base Roll. The total voters for NATEL 22 for NIP was 58,024 which was 61 % of the total voting population that casted votes in NATEL 22.

NOMINATION

Nomination was conducted in 3 locations

1. The Provincial Electoral Office (Regional Seat)
2. The Public Servants conference room in Kavieng (Kavieng Open Seat)
3. The District Service conference room in Namatanai (Namatanai Open Seat)

A total of 46 candidates contested from all 3 seats in which 7 were females.

Regional – 14 candidates (1x female)

Kavieng Open – 17 candidates (4x female)

Namatanai Open – 15 candidates (2x female)

POLLING

We had a total of 95 polling teams.

41 teams in Kavieng

54 teams in Namatanai

Kavieng Urban LLG had a One Day polling while the other LLGs had a maximum of 5 – 7 days polling.

The major problem faced was missing names in the Roll and voters had to be turned away from the polling booth this is a main concern among voters and I believe was also faced by all other provinces as well.

Logistics was managed well with the assistance of the well experienced Assistant Returning Officers (AROs) for all the LLGs. We made sure all polling logistics were returned straight after polling ended to avoid additional costs while a few vehicles remained to cater for the counting period in all three count stations.

Our main concern is funding, funding must be given in full on time in order to also cater for other issues like the weather conditions to supply additional fuel or boats especially for the island LLGs and island wards. Island province like NIP are open to bad sea conditions and strong winds and we need active disaster and emergency agency fully equipped to be on standby.

Recommendations

- Timely funding
- Review the current DPM approved allowance rates,

COUNTING

We had two big counting venues.

1. National Fisheries College – Provincial and Kavieng Open seats respectively
2. Namatanai Catholic Mission Hall – Namatanai Open Seat

We had to build a shelter to cater for the Kavieng Open primary counts. We thank the Management and staff of the College who were willing to contribute in one way to allow us to use their premises for free during the counting period. The College had their ground rules we had to follow and with the good assistance of police, CS and PNGDF personals on ground we were able to control the scrutineers, candidates and the general public including traffic as well in and

outside of the Count center. In Kavieng, we counted during the day only while Namatanai has 2x shifts and counted till night as well.

For Namatanai, police and PNGDF personals were present as well and maintained control during counting, we did not receive any reports of major incidents apart from Scrutineers only.

Counting for Namatanai took two weeks to complete while for both Kavieng Open and the Provincial Seats respectively it took 9 days to complete.

We realized that the less the scrutineers new about the counting process etc the more they will disrupt the process and delay counting. We had a day each to meet with the Scrutineers in both Districts reminding them of their roles and responsibilities during polling and counting. However, there was not enough time to go through the counting process with the Scrutineers.

Recommendation

- Timely funding
- All primary counts to be done straight after polling, to shorten the counting period.

DECLARATION

Declaration was done well with no major disruption in both Districts.

Provincial seat declared	- July 20 th , 2022
Kavieng Open Seat declared	- July 20 th , 2022.
Namatanai Open Seat declared	- July 24 th , 2022
All 3 Seats returned on Wednesday	- July 27 th , 2022

SCRUTINEERS & CANDIDATES

Despite scrutineers being appointed we also had candidates turning up at the counting venues raising concerns of scrutineers not present to commence count etc. However, we had a deadline to return the Writs therefore we had to weigh out the complaints and attend to them formally before counting proceeded. Overall there was no major problems but we saw certain behaviors change unlike previous elections eg: the scrutineers wanted the police to thoroughly check vehicles entering the count venue following suspicions of hidden ballot papers which has never been practiced in previous elections.

Some candidates were rowdy however generally behaved well with no major disruptions We noticed that if information passed on from polling should be maintained throughout the counting to declaration by the appointed scrutineers to avoid unnecessary disruptions.

Recommendation

- Scrutineers should know well the election process before taking part in the elections as a scrutineer. Candidates to be responsible to educate them.

EXPENDITURE OF FUND

Initial Budget was 2.7 million and New Ireland received a total of K1.2m for the Elections which was less then what we budgeted for given the increase in cost of goods and services.

Nomination – K33,000

Polling – K700,000

Counting – K90,000

After the actual polling and counting we received 450,000 and that we used to pay off half of the polling logistics and some counting bills. We still have a total of about 1 million outstanding bills to pay both for Namatanai and Kavieng respectively.

Full financial report has been given already to the headoffice as soon as election was over and Writs were returned.

We received no funding assistance from the NIP Government or the DDAs respectively.

Recommendation

- Give the full funding as per the provincial budget submitted directly to the provinces to the Provincial Operating Accounts.
- Review election activities after election.
- Any funding assistance must be parked in one account and reports can be forwarded after to responsible partners.
- Ongoing funding and not only during election time.

SECURITY DURING ELECTION

There was very good coordination from the security under the leadership of recent outgoing PPC Felix Nebanat. Upon advise from their intelligence reports through PESC meets it helped us to make decisions regarding the count venues and the hotspot areas bearing in mind limited police manpower. We had police personals attached to all polling teams throughout polling. We appreciate for the first time the engagement of the PNGDF personals in the Province in this election which was a boost to completing counting on time with no major issues reported.

Recommendation

- Maintain PNGDF presence on ground to work alongside the police and CS during elections.
- Police personals must be sent out also during Roll Update.

In conclusion, I take this opportunity to thank the Committee to hear us (provinces) out at a higher level. The process of elections is the foundation of our Country and must not be manipulated in any way whatsoever.

All in all, funding and time is needed to deliver well. There is a lot of experience from the electoral officers but we lack the full support to do more better. We have delivered with what we have and what little that was given and this already shows the commitment to this Country. I am prepared to work with other agencies to update the Roll going into the LLG Elections.

Thank you for the opportunity given to raise concerns and hope we change moving forward.



Mrs Annette Bais
Election Manager
New Ireland Province