

# **INTRODUCTION**

## **Brief highlights of significant events in the history of Samoa**

### **The First Settlers of Samoa Islands**

The islands of Samoa were believed to be first settled by Polynesians who migrated from South East Asia and due to archaeological excavations in Samoa, Lapita pottery remains were found and was dated back to about 800 B.C. The Samoa Islands are assumed to be inhabited by people for over 2500 years ago.

In about 950 A.D the Tongans invaded Samoa under the leadership of the Tui Tonga and remained for about 300 years. At about 1250 A.D the Tongans left Samoa.

### **Contact with the Western World**

In 1772 a Dutch navigator Jacob Roggewein discovered the Samoa Islands and in 1768 a French explorer visited the islands and was amazed of the islander's expertise in voyaging and named Samoa, 'Navigator Islands'.

In about 1800 the first Europeans who came and settled in Samoa were sailors, whalers and escaped convicts.

In 1830 John Williams and Charles Barff of the London Missionary Society arrived in Samoa.

The German Administration started from 1900 – 1914. In 1915 Samoa became a mandate of Britain under New Zealand administration.

In 1962 Samoa became independent and a Treaty of Friendship was signed with New Zealand so that New Zealand would consider Samoa's requests for technical, administrative and other assistance.

On the first of June this year (2012) Samoa marked a 50 years celebration of her independence which lasted for five days.

Every Samoans felt the pride of celebrating this important day and remembered the effort and hard work of our past leaders and those who have lead our country to this important success.

Before discovery of Samoa and the arrival of Europeans, the people of our tiny island nation have relied on oral traditions and clear memory as methodologies to preserve our history.

The history of our forefathers are often told by our elders and passed down from generation to generation.

Such information is regard to in our culture as very sacred and important as it defines a family's identity, status, properties (land) etc within villages and districts.

However I am very thankful to the invention of paper and ink and its introduction to the people of Samoa by the early Europeans.

The early missionaries in the 1800's, the German colonial administration in 1900 to 1914 and the New Zealand administration from 1915 to 1961 have all documented their businesses in Samoa and are now archives belonging to churches, government and the people of Samoa.

These archives are reliable sources of information in regards to government matters, cultural matters etc.

Identity and status of some families rely greatly on these documents as the only proof over rightful ownership of a land or a title when memories of family members fail.

However I can only imagined how easy it would be if every family, village and district cultural story was documented.

Our government will not worry about establishing a Lands and Title division in the Ministry of Courts.

## **Records Task Force**

An In-country training workshop on records retention schedules in 2003 identified that records managers across the Samoan government were faced with similar challenges.

A resolution was the establishment of the Records Task Force under the approval of the Public Service Commission in 2005 to support and implement the development and strengthening of public records management within the Samoan Government.

A Term of Reference was drafted to outline the overall goal and tasks to be achieved and the Records Task Force membership was agreed to include Records Managers of all Government Ministries with representatives of PSC, Office of the Attorney General, Audit Office and National Archives project.

The Records Task Force was established in 2003 it is comprised of records managers from all government ministries with the aim to network in identifying ways to improve the management of records within the government of Samoa.

Over the years some authorities and private organizations have taken interest and have now joined. The Records Task Force is consisted of more than twenty members.

The most recent members who have joined are SPREP, Congregation Christian office and the Housing Corporation.

## Overall Goal

The overall goal of the Records Task Force is to strengthen and develop public records management for Samoa.

### Their Tasks include:

- Facilitate networking and streamline records management in the public service
- Draft and revise records management policies and procedures for the public service, including the creation, use, storage and disposal of records.
- Investigate electronic records management systems, including the feasibility of introducing one common computerized records management system for all Ministries.
- Support the creation of disaster response plans in all Ministries, including the listing of all vital records.
- Co-ordinate the evaluation and review of job descriptions and organizational structure for records staff throughout the Public Service, incorporating any new responsibilities.
- Identify the needs, specifications suppliers and sources for records management supplies, including archive boxes, file covers, shelving and IT equipment.
- Raise awareness throughout government on records management issues, and provide relevant advice and information to senior management, IT staff and consultants engaged by Ministries to improve work processes.
- Identifying funding sources for the strengthening and development of public records management.

## Developments

Members have worked hard to develop and finalize the following records management schedules;

- **Code of Best of Best Practice and Common Administrative Retention Schedules were approved by Cabinet in September 2007.**

This standard has been established for the efficient management of Samoan Government Ministry records which are described in the schedule.

The aims of the schedules are to –

1. Identify records worth preserving permanently as part of the Samoan Government's archives.
2. Prevent the premature destruction of records that need to be retained for a specified period to satisfy legal, financial and other requirements of public administration
3. Authorize the destruction of those records not required permanently after specified period thus managing records storage space efficiently.

4. Promote efficient and effective records management practices within the Samoan Government.

The schedules has been developed using the methodologies of the International Standard for Records Management ISO 15489, and existing records retention and disposal schedules from Australian government archives authorities.

The schedule was drafted and revised by records management representatives of all Government Ministries and coordinated by the National Archives Project Team at the time.

Further input was provided through a stakeholder consultation workshop in October 2006 for all Government Ministries.

Upon the development of these two guidelines I would like to acknowledge the help of the Australian volunteer Ms Emma Murray who have worked alongside the Records Task Force to achieve this goal.

- **The Public Records Act was passed by Parliament in February 2011. This Act aims to direct public servants on how to preserve and manage all government records for future generations.**

The passing of this act promises the establishment of a National Archives and Records Authority with a lot more in particular to the management of records and archives of Samoa.

- **Awareness and Mapping Workshops**

Members of the RTF were targeted to conduct awareness training within their respective ministry as to refresh staff on the proper management of records as outlined by the two guidelines.

Mapping workshops were conducted with the aim to implement the *Common Administrative Retention Schedule*. Common Administrative records of Government Ministries were classified according to the twelve functions which have been detailed described.

The aim for these workshops is to standardized records management system across government through implementing the tools.

### **Ongoing routines**

Meetings are held in a fortnightly basis to discuss issues and challenges faced by records manager within their respective organization.

Representatives are expected to submit reports of these meetings to their ministries as a way to promote and strengthen records management across government.

Representatives of the Records Task Force are required to continuously apply appropriate actions and processes of best management of records within their ministries as to strengthen and upgrade records management across government.

### **Challenges & Issues**

Members of the RTF have faced multiple challenges throughout the years. All records managers have been working without standard job description.

Some have multiple responsibilities and in many cases, records management responsibilities were becoming secondary.

Many Records Managers have deep experience in managing correspondence registries but their experience does not extend to other areas of recordkeeping.

Old members are replaced with new this changeover evidently puts the RTF at risk of being active but unproductive in carrying out tasks to strengthen records management as specified in the Terms of Reference.

Meeting reports are not always submitted in time to their ministry managers hinder their chances of participating in the RTF fortnightly meeting.

### **Future Plans**

After mapping workshop, a follow up monitoring of ministries file rooms is to be carried out by Archives staff and members of the Records Task Force to ensure that all RTF members have done their part at their work place.

Upon research and implementation of the two guidelines Code of Best Practice and Common Administrative Retention Schedules it has been identified that changes have to be made to the two documents in order to accommodate and suit the situation of ministries. A review to the two guidelines is to be made.

Because of the growing number of members of the Records Task Force it has been discussed to elevate the standard to become a Records Association in the future.

## **Conclusion**

Significant records documenting the history of our tiny island nation are managed by ministries and up-skilling records managers and identifying the needs of appropriate resources to cater for those records is most important.

Since European settlement in Samoa records of their businesses have been created and archived. These records are scattered within the Government Ministries, Archives of Samoa and some with the Archives New Zealand and German Archives. Records of the activities of the plantations, personal records, court records etc are some examples of these vital documents.

Twelve common administrative functions have been identified that are performed by all Government Ministries however every ministry had its own core functions and such functions cannot be classified under the Common Administrative Retention Schedule guideline.

The work of the Records Task Force in Samoa is anticipated to grow and connect all Ministries and Government Corporation in the best management of records for efficiency and accountability in the Government of Samoa.

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