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SAI Tonga secures constitutional independence

Amendments to the supreme law of the Kingdom of Tonga—its Constitution—have formally recognised the independence of the position of Auditor General, providing protection from outside influence.

The amendments were recently passed by the Legislative Assembly and assented to by His Majesty, King Tupou VI.

Previously, the Tonga Office of the Auditor General (TOAG) scored low in the independence domain of its SAI Performance Measurement Framework (PMF) assessment.

Although Tonga’s Public Audit Act 2007 granted independence to the position of Auditor General and functional, organisational and financial independence to TOAG, the SAI PMF assessment highlighted the potential vulnerability of not having SAI independence enshrined in the Constitution.



It is a precept of [INTOSAI-P 1](#) (the Lima Declaration) that the independence of a SAI and its members be laid down in the constitution (with details in supporting legislation) to minimise the threat of legislative revisions.

On this major independence milestone, Auditor General, Sefita Tangi, said, “It enriches the accomplishment of our tasks objectively and effectively knowing the Constitution fully protects us against outside influence.

“This ratification importantly enhances the local awareness of the independence of the Auditor General and the Tonga Office of the Auditor General as well”.

Mr Tangi acknowledged the contributions of PASAI and the SAI PMF project to this achievement.

He also expressed gratitude for the assistance of Lord Fakafanua, Speaker of the Legislative Assembly, who tabled the bill in Parliament; the former Auditor General, Rev Dr Pohiva Tu'i'onetoa, caretaker Prime Minister and Chair of Cabinet; Hon Samiu Vaipulu, Minister for Justice, who submitted TOAG's policy paper to Cabinet; and the Attorney General, Linda Folaumoetu'i KC, and her staff.

Message from the Chief Executive



Esther Lameko-Poutoa

We have come to the end of another successful year. We would like to acknowledge and recognise the many achievements across the Pacific SAIs in advancing our audit mandates while overcoming challenges along the way.

We have made progress and milestone steps advancing audit independence but also experienced challenges with setbacks. We continue to work with SAIs and partners advocating for audit independence to strengthen the role of SAIs to audit public funds in a timely manner for a more accountable and transparent Pacific region.

We want to thank all of you: our members, the Controller & Auditors General, Public Auditors, development partners and colleagues for your continuous support and patronage of our programmes and work. Wishing you all a merry Christmas and happy new year!



SAI French Polynesia very concerned about environmental protection

In recent years, the Chambre territoriale des comptes Polynésie française (the Chambre) has completed environmental audits mainly focused on water management, sanitation and waste.

Not even 62 per cent of the population is served with drinking water. While the tourist areas are well served, access to drinking water in the residential areas of French Polynesia is far from complete. And although self-monitoring has been mandatory since 1999, 75 per cent of the municipalities do not do it, giving very incomplete census data.

The Chambre found many sanitation systems are not up to standard, resulting in direct discharges into the environment, too often left unchecked by the competent authorities.

It also found French Polynesia lags in waste management. More effort is needed to recover recyclable waste and to create proper landfills for non-recyclable waste, such as the Paihoro landfill. Outside Tahiti, waste is most often collected in illegal dumps, sometimes on sites with high environmental sensitivity.



Landfill in Fa'a'a, French Polynesia. Image source: [Tahiti Infos](#)

Insufficient attention and resources

The minister in charge of the environment portfolio is also responsible for the culture, youth, sport and crafts portfolios. This reflects the lack of importance the French Polynesian government gives the environment and limits any ambitions to fix problems.

Energy, which is arguably inseparable from the environment, is the responsibility of a different minister who is also in charge of finance, the economy and the coordination of government action.

Although the environment portfolio has recently been stabilised, having been the responsibility of nearly 20 ministers between 1995 and 2005 has not helped to build a long-term strategy.

French Polynesia is a territory of about 118 islands scattered over an area as large as Europe. However, the Environmental Department, a service centralised in Tahiti, has only three or four officers to address specific environmental protection offences. Criminal proceedings often do not follow rare government actions.

Technical assistance to the municipalities, particularly those in the most remote archipelagos, remains deficient.

A way forward

According to the Chambre, the French Polynesian government should define and monitor the implementation of environmental services at the local level, ensuring the municipalities are sufficiently skilled and organised to do so.

The National Centre for Territorial Public Service could set up a multi-year professionalisation plan, adapted to the Polynesian context and to the needs in skills.

The recent creation of an agency for urban planning and territorial development in June 2021 could serve as a tool for developing and monitoring environmental public policy strategies initiated by the French Polynesian government with the municipalities and inter-municipalities.



Although there is already a lot of financial support, additional avenues could be explored. Administered by the French Development Agency, the equivalent of the Green Fund, which offers subsidised loans and grants for pre-investment studies, could be transformed into a real fund, with a larger budget, capable of offering direct investment grants.

The French Polynesian government and municipalities cannot currently evaluate the performance of environmental initiatives. There needs to be rigorous monitoring and evaluation tools which make it possible to track funds and assess the efficiency of any programmes. Having environmental data is also crucial.

A Polynesian environment observatory should be created as soon as possible to identify, create and organise data regarding climate change, drinking water, sanitation, waste treatment and biodiversity preservation issues. French Polynesia would also benefit from integrating the Inform project, supported by the Pacific Regional Environment Programme, to have a reporting and decision support tool.

SAI Northern Mariana Islands on a path to digital transformation

This August the Office of the Public Auditor (OPA) contracted Tyler Technologies to implement audit and investigations case management systems it estimates will launch next month.

When the newly appointed Public Auditor, Kina B Peter, came into office, she vouched one of her immediate priorities was to, “implement a paperless, lean office focused on reducing costs and increasing efficiency and productivity”.

After becoming aware of the new financial systems implementation taking place under the oversight of the territory’s Secretary of Finance, Mrs Peter requested to meet with the vendor to learn more about audit and investigation modules.

Both OPA’s audit and investigations divisions agreed the software would meet their needs after viewing Tyler Technologies’ demonstration of the audit and case management systems back in March.

Mrs Peter also reached out to the OPA’s peer audit agency in Guam who provided a demonstration of its existing system.

The set-up costs of any information technology initiative can be prohibitive, but the OPA deftly managed to ‘piggy-back’ on the Central Government’s Enterprise Resource Planning contract.

Tyler Technologies has since assigned a project consultant to support the OPA with its implementation.

The new systems will streamline the processes of both the audit and investigations divisions. They will digitise the tracking, management and reporting on all operational data and documents.

The systems will properly collect, store, protect and share data. With all documents conveniently stored and available live in one location, they will also serve as an information portal for management.

As part of the planning phase of the project, Tyler Technologies and OPA staff are working together to customise the audit and investigations case management systems to best fit the office's needs.

Once the vendor completes the preparations and initial testing, they will give OPA staff a comprehensive demonstration and training.

"I am excited to be a part of an automated office. Having a system custom designed to fit our needs here at OPA will benefit the entire CNMI as streamlining our processes will result in more attention spent on our government agencies rather than focusing on manual file management." – OPA Auditor

"Moving away from the currently manual system to these automated systems will increase clarity and efficiency. These systems are designed to electronically support complex processes that requires a combination of human tasks and electronic workflow."

– Tyler Technologies Project Consultant

"With high hopes, the new system's launch will instill excitement and renewed vigor to our staff. Auditors and Investigators will have direct and real-time access to their case files from field locations. The ability to input data into the system directly from the field will reduce operational downtime by minimizing administrative time inputting data upon return." – OPA Investigator

"The implementation of an audit management system would automate the repetitive and manually performed procedures of documenting our audit work, thereby allowing our audit teams to plan and execute audits more efficiently and effectively."

– OPA Auditor

OPA's goal of digital transformation is now just around the corner.

SAI NSW continues to support SAI Solomon Islands despite pandemic challenges

The Audit Office of New South Wales (AONSW) and the Solomon Islands Office of the Auditor General (SIOAG) designed a programme based on the skills identified as requiring improvement at SIOAG as part of their twinning relationship.

With a focus on the financial audit branches there were to be six activities (workshops, coaching and file review etc), mainly completed in Honiara. However, not long after the SAIs finalised this plan, in March 2020 international borders closed indefinitely.

Undeterred, the two SAIs reshaped the delivery of this training and support. The revised plan had nine activities delivered virtually between November 2020 and September 2021 and included workshops on:

- basic accounting and audit assertions for account areas including revenue, expenses, payroll, cash, property, plant and equipment, and investment
- improving manager capability in reviewing the work done by an Audit Service Provider

- a more advanced look at property, plant and equipment, and investment properties, with a focus on audit risk, revaluation and impairment
- investment and cash flow statement
- identifying and responding to fraud risks and assessing the segregation of duties.

Alongside this, AONSW reviewed five complete files from SIOAG and provided a summary of areas of improvement. Based on review findings, AONSW staff created and delivered a series of refresher workshops to SIOAG staff to enhance audit skills.

Performance audit support

In August 2020, AONSW and SIOAG agreed on a mentoring programme covering the planning, conduct and reporting of performance audit, with activities scheduled to wrap up this month.

AONSW's performance audit team has provided guidance to SIOAG on its current work by running virtual sessions on reporting of compliance audit findings and reviewing and providing comments on a draft report.

AONSW's performance audit team and SIOAG continue to meet weekly to facilitate ongoing feedback.

The Australian Defence Force recognises SAI NSW for reservist support

The Australian Defence Force (ADF) has recognised the Auditor-General for New South Wales and the Audit Office of New South Wales (AONSW) with an honourable mention for supporting Major Ian Goodwin, Deputy Auditor-General for New South Wales, during his deployments on 'Operation Bushfire Assist 2019–20' and 'Operation COVID-19 Assist'.

Each year, ADF reservists across Australia nominate civilian employers for recognition in the Employer Support Awards.

The ADF presents awards to organisations for their commitment to supporting Navy, Army and Air Force reservists over a sustained period or through a special effort.



Auditor-General, Margaret Crawford, at an ADF reserves employer appreciation event with Deputy Auditor-General and ADF reservist Major Ian Goodwin (centre)

SAI Papua New Guinea facing delays tabling its audit reports

Papua New Guinea hosted the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) meetings in 2018.

To support the organising of the year-long events, the government established the APEC Papua New Guinea 2018 Coordination Authority.

Under its enabling legislation, a wind-up report for the dissolving of the entity was to include an audit report of the Authority's financial statements prepared by a first-tier firm of auditors and accountants with an office in Port Moresby, with the responsible Minister in Parliament to table the report.

In late 2019, the Auditor-General's Office (AGO) engaged a contractor that fit these requirements to undertake the audit on its behalf.

The contractor finalised the audit in January this year and provided it to the AGO.

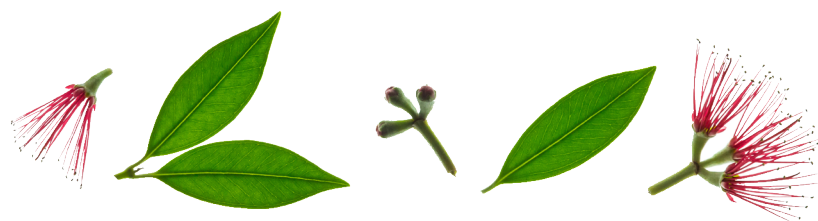
The audit report (and some performance audits previously provided to the Speaker) were finally tabled in Parliament in mid-November.

This means the AGO has been unable to publicly discuss the findings of the audits until very recently.

Auditor-General, Gorgon Kega, hopes planned reforms to Papua New Guinea's audit legislation will give the AGO greater independence and limit this from happening again.



Photo from the 11 July 2021 edition of the Post Courier newspaper showing the AGO's media launch of a then yet-to-be tabled performance audit report of the Tuition Fee Free (TFF) Policy



SAI Queensland launches interactive dashboard on status of its recommendations

Knowing how public sector and local government entities are progressing in implementing audit recommendations gives parliament, audit clients, and the wider community important information on the improvement of public service delivery.

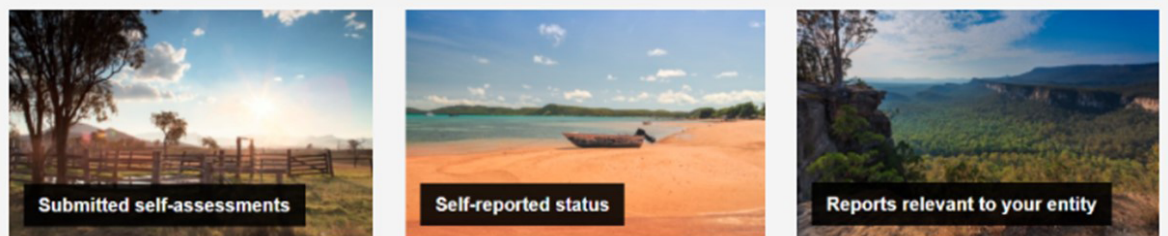
The Queensland Audit Office (QAO) has always asked entities for an update on the implementation of its recommendations and used the results to determine future follow-up audit topics. When preparing reports to Parliament, it also asks entities if they agree with the recommendations.

However, the office cannot force them to act. The desire for continuous improvement and a culture of change ultimately must come from within entities themselves.

With the opportunity to glean valuable insights, and with increasing interest from its stakeholders, in 2020–21, QAO developed a new online system for entities to self assess their progress.

This new system gives entities a record of all the recommendations QAO has made to them (including those re-directed from machinery of government changes). It enables their audit committees to better monitor progress over time. And it identifies the recommendations QAO made more broadly across government that may be valuable for all to consider or learn from.

This first use of the system in 2020 involved asking 50 entities to self-assess their progress on the performance audit recommendations from 32 reports to parliament, tabled between 2015–16 and 2017–18. QAO started with earlier reports to allow a reasonable time for implementation.

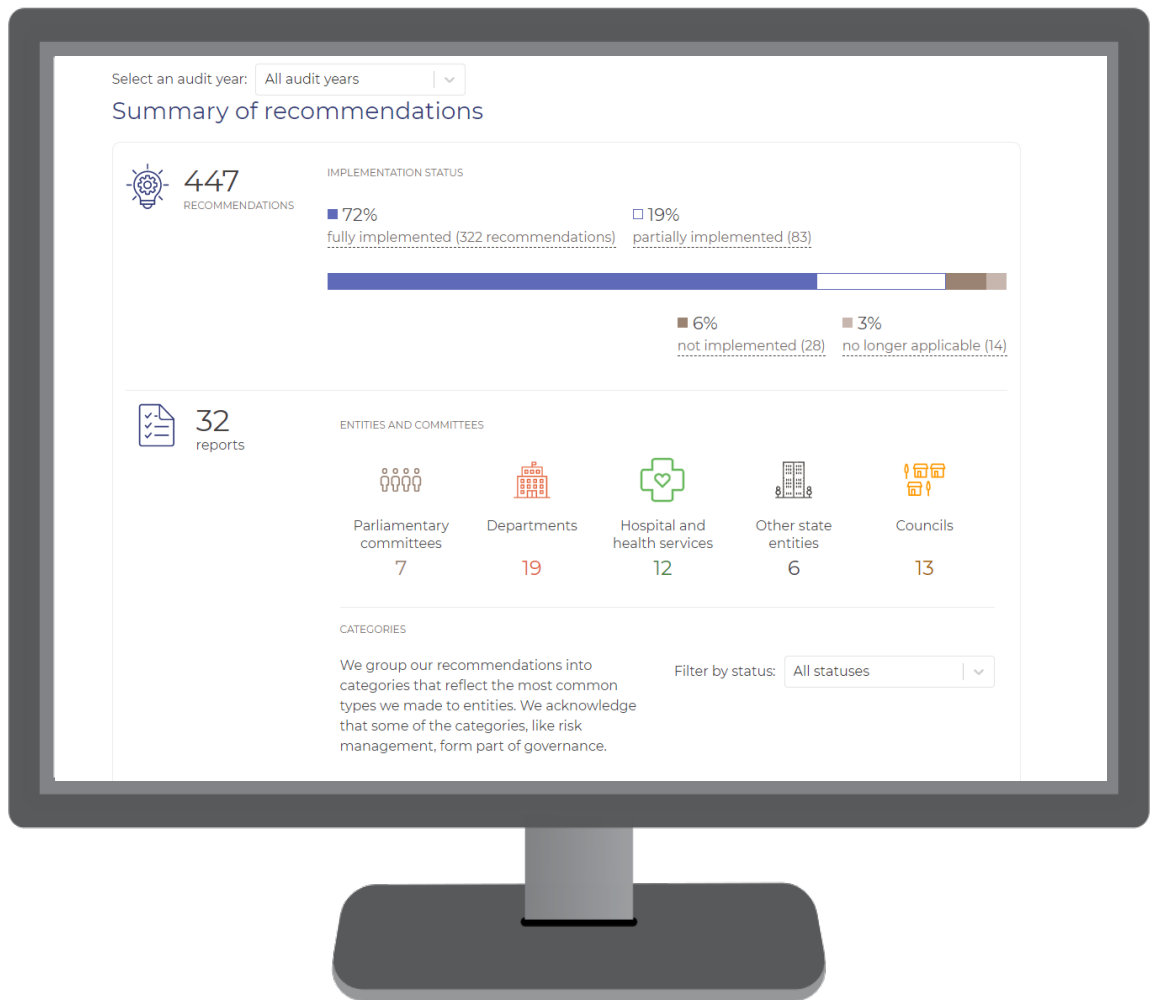


Screenshot of QAO's recommendations self-assessment system (not publicly available)

The self-assessments showed that 72 per cent of its recommendations were fully implemented, 18 per cent partially, seven per cent not implemented and three per cent no longer applicable. Of note, QAO did not audit the self-assessment response, or request supporting evidence, meaning it does not provide assurance over the results.

Valuably, QAO's new approach is showing which types of recommendations entities are not implementing as quickly or thoroughly as others. This indicates which areas of government service delivery entities are finding most challenging. It will also help QAO ensure its future recommendations are as relevant and practicable as possible.

On 17 November 2021, for the first time, QAO tabled a [report to parliament](#) on the self-assessment results, and insights around its recommendations. An [interactive data visualisation](#) accompanies the report that allows users to explore information in more detail based on their area of responsibility or interest.



Screenshot of QAO's status of Auditor-General recommendations interactive data visualisation

Next year, QAO will ask entities to report against 2018–19 and 2019–20 recommendations (and thereafter add another report year to each of the annual reports). It will also ask for updates on the ones that were reported as being partially or not implemented.

Over time, these yearly reports will provide insights on trends, challenges, and shared learnings, giving a more complete picture of the progress entities are making towards delivering better public services for Queenslanders.

Remote work the norm for new recruits at SAI Victoria

Graduate financial auditors John Deriu and Adem Nakis joined the Victorian Auditor-General's Office (VAGO) in early 2021. They reflect on a year of working remotely.

As graduate financial auditors we are well versed in the concept of balancing! So, while there are many positives to take away from our graduate year, it would be amiss not to talk about the challenges we have faced.

Embarking on our first audit cycle in a new organisation and during a pandemic was definitely a challenge! For example, not having onsite training and in-office experiences created uncertainty about learning and development opportunities.

However, there were measures implemented to help us adapt and make the most of the remote audit experience while also learning.

As a result, we have both completed comprehensive technical training with programmes on assertiveness and dealing with adversity. These programmes were delivered through adaptive e-platforms to ensure we were prepared for the busy year-end.

Long hours are not foreign to auditors, especially during the busy season. Typically, these hours are broken up by regular commuting and by team lunches, client interactions and quick coffee breaks. The shift to remote auditing changed all that, but management's focus on engaging everyone in online pep-talks and team building activities helped create a sense of normality and a social 'comfort zone'.

Having team members to virtually bounce ideas off has provided social interaction and has been instrumental in the way we have adapted and developed our skills.

A dynamic element of financial auditing is working on-site with clients. One minute you might be working with payroll to understand complex methodologies and the next minute jumping into a meeting with the finance team. During COVID-19 restrictions, this dynamic has still existed online, although it has been a little different. We were fortunate to work with clients who were sufficiently equipped and capable of adapting operations to meet the needs of a remote audit team.

Working together has been key to overcoming each of these challenges, and VAGO has taken an active approach to engaging in new forms of collaborating and knowledge-sharing.

We now appreciate the importance of effective communication and its role in adapting to an unfamiliar working environment. And as we conclude our graduate year, a notable takeaway is that we should never underestimate the importance of being adaptable and flexible.



VAGO's graduate financial auditors John Deriu and Adem Nakis

SAI Victoria wins performance audit awards

Each year, the Australasian Council of Auditors General (ACAG) recognises outstanding performance audits in three categories: Excellence, Innovation and Communication. Performance audit analysts Lucia Duan, Ryan Kennedy and Michaela Watson reflect on VAGO's two award-winning audits and their impact.

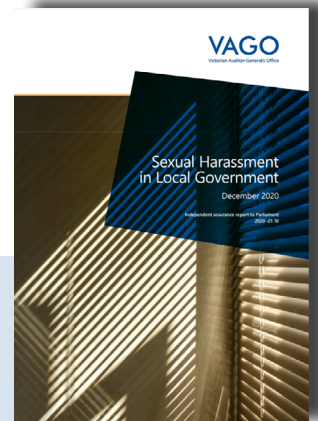
Every performance auditor will agree that nothing is as rewarding as seeing a report have impact in the community. But it's always nice to be recognised, so everyone at VAGO was thrilled when we picked up two awards at the recent ACAG Performance Audit awards ceremony!

Increasing public awareness about the value of audits is part of ACAG's strategy to provide a trusted and collective voice on public sector auditing.

2021 ACAG Communications Award: Sexual Harassment in Local Government (Local Government team)

For the 2020 [Sexual harassment in local government](#) audit, we surveyed nearly 10,000 employees at 75 local councils in Victoria, with 28 per cent of respondents saying they had experienced workplace sexual harassment in the last 12 months. Of these respondents, 25 per cent said this harassment negatively impacted their mental health.

Considering the prevalence of sexual harassment and the detrimental impact on individuals and employers, this audit was a necessary inquiry into whether local government provides workplaces free from sexual harassment.



Before our audit, there was no available sector-wide data on this issue. Conducting a survey addressed this gap and informed our [interactive data dashboard](#), which allows the public and Parliament to explore the data and quotes from survey respondents.

SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT



PREVALENCE



Overall prevalence



Council type



Risk factors

“

Does anyone really think that a young female like myself feels comfortable telling my team about it? Especially when my team has often talked about how young people these days are sensitive, and about how women are emotional and can't do certain things.

—Survey respondent

Another manager has made comments about childcare and that women should just stay home and then we wouldn't need to run childcare.

—Survey respondent

[I was] assaulted by a member of the public and called a [homophobic slur]. In front of the team leader and a new employee, my manager laughed as he said, "How did he know?"

—Survey respondent

”

Select a risk factor:

Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander

37%

of respondents who identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander experienced sexual harassment.

compared to

28%

of respondents who did not identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander experienced sexual harassment.

Note: The margin of error for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents is ± 14 per cent.

Dashboard example screen

The Gender Equality Act 2020 means councils will now collect data on sexual harassment in their workplaces each year.

The impact of this audit has been meaningful and widespread, and is a good example of how we can communicate what we do and increase our impact. The report, boosted by media coverage, has increased awareness about workplace sexual harassment as an issue.

Organisations from across the public sector have used it to inform a refresh of their sexual harassment policies, and both audited and non-audited councils are addressing our sector-wide findings. For example, in March 2021 the non-audited Monash City Council publicly voted to accept and implement our recommendations in its own policies.

The audit team has also had the opportunity to present its findings to audited and non-audited councils and organisations including the Australian Local Government Women’s Association and the 2021 Institute of Australian Auditors Local Government Assurance Forum.

2021 ACAG Innovation Award: Accessibility of Tram Services (Infrastructure and Transport team)

The [Accessibility of tram services](#) audit examined whether tram services in Melbourne meet passengers’ accessibility needs, both in terms of legislation and the practical needs of people with restricted mobility.

Given the expected technicalities of the audit, the team worked with our data scientists to create visualisations and lived-experience case studies that would make the findings more relatable.

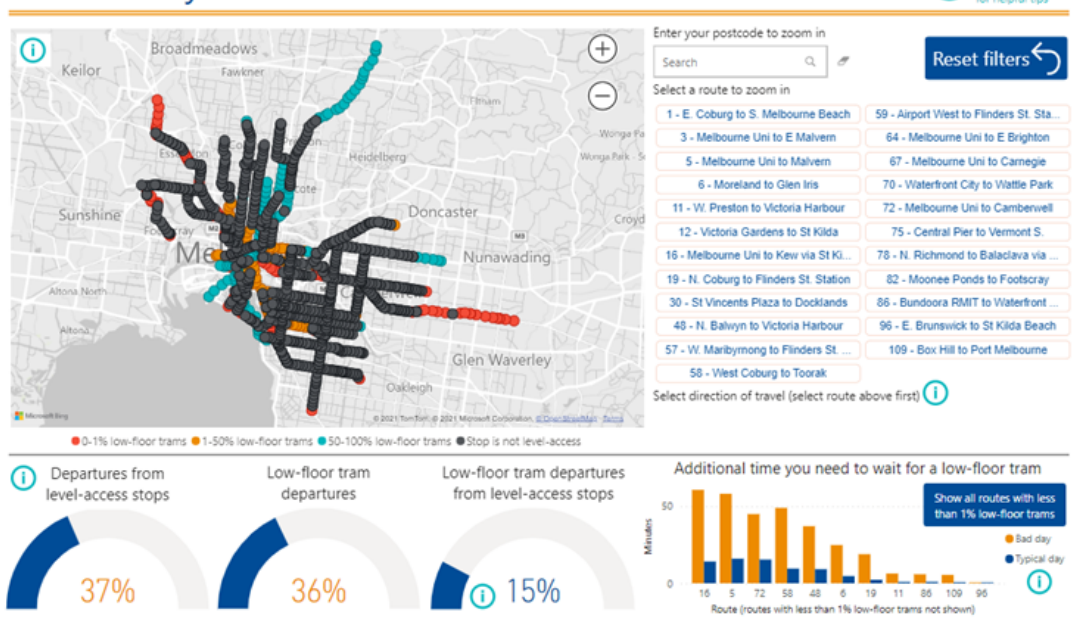
In-depth interviews with people living with diverse disabilities helped the team focus on the specific accessibility issues passengers face in using the existing tram network. De-identified case studies included in the report illustrate the personal challenges many tram users face.

The team also used geospatial joining techniques to link public and private data sets and create visualisations to portray the experience of a tram user with a mobility impairment. On the VAGO website, readers can access and personalise an [interactive dashboard and map](#).

These tools give the public detailed and digestible insights on the accessibility of Melbourne’s tram services. As well as overall network accessibility metrics, the map shows whether a stop meets the accessibility requirements and displays wait times for an accessible tram on a typical day and a ‘bad’ day.



Accessibility of Tram Services in Financial Year 2018–19



Dashboard [entry screen](#)

The Minister for Public Transport took an active interest in this audit and requested a direct briefing prior to the audit tabling in Parliament. The online dashboard has also proven valuable to disability organisations in their advocacy for more accessible services.

We would like to thank ACAG and acknowledge the excellent work of all the other audit offices in our region. For public sector performance auditors, most



of our days involve reviewing and analysing endless pages of evidence, back-to-back stakeholder meetings, and checking and rechecking each other's work. Therefore, an awards ceremony is an exciting event—even when online! But the real highlight is knowing that our hard work contributes to the transparency and accountability of the public sector, and that this impacts people's lives in a positive way.

A level-access stop with a low-floor tram

SAI Fiji maintaining international relations

The Auditor-General of Fiji, Ajay Nand, paid a courtesy visit to the Indian High Commissioner, His Excellency Shri PS Karthigeyan on 6 October 2021.

The Office of the Auditor-General (OAG) has valued the relationship with the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG India) over the years. More than 60 officers from the OAG have participated in CAG India's international training programme.

Mr Nand acknowledged the assistance received under the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation Deputation Programme during 2017. He said they would continue to explore more opportunities to develop the capabilities of the OAG and strengthen the relationships between the supreme audit institutions of both countries.

The High Commissioner thanked the Auditor-General for the visit and reiterated the commitment of the Indian Government to work closely with the Fijian Government to further strengthen the bilateral relationship for the mutual benefit of both nations.



The Indian High Commissioner, Shri PS Karthigeyan, with the Auditor-General of Fiji, Ajay Nand

Celebrating 120 years of SAI Australia

The Australian National Audit Office (ANAO) celebrated its 120-year anniversary on 23 July 2021 with a morning tea.

The Deputy Auditor-General gave a speech indicating some highlights over the previous 120 years and the Auditor-General presented his 2021 Outstanding Achievement Awards.

When the first Australian Parliament assembled in Melbourne in May 1901, its immediate task was to begin building the necessary institutions of national government. The fourth Act the Parliament passed created the Office of the Auditor-General.

The Auditor-General was intended to be an independent and impartial public official who could scrutinise Commonwealth administration and give true assessments on the state of the public accounts without intimidation by government or other vested interests.

The role was seen as fundamental to good government. Australia's first Commonwealth Auditor-General held the role for 24 years.

In 1998 the Auditor-General Act 1997 replaced the Audit Act 1901.

Over time, the Auditor-General's enabling legislation has been amended to ensure the role of the Auditor-General remains appropriate for the modern public sector environment.

The Auditor-General's mandate has expanded to encompass the audits of the financial statements of all Australian Government entities and performance audits of public sector programmes and entities, including Commonwealth partners.

The Auditor-General became an independent officer of the Parliament on the recommendation of the Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Administration.

Last October, Auditor-General of Australia, Grant Hehir, wrote a [mid-term report](#) reflecting on his first five years in the role.

The report presents a description and analysis of the role and impact of audit, as well as analysis of the financial audit and performance audit work of the ANAO.

It concludes with coverage of ANAO continuous improvement activities across audit quality, better communication, transparency, efficiency and workforce capability.



Auditor-General of Australia, Grant Hehir, speaking at the awards ceremony



Upcoming events / online training

9 December	International Anti-Corruption Day
14 December	SAI independence workshop (FSM Pohnpei)
21 December	SAI independence workshop (FSM Yap)
26–28 January	SAI PMF workshop on Domains B, D, E and F (South Pacific)
2 February	Leadership programme for SAI Heads
9 February	Media training
2 March	Leadership programme for SAI Heads
8 March	International Women’s Day
17–18 March	Engagement with stakeholders workshop

Dates may change. Find updated information about our events on the [eLearning calendar](#).

International Anti-Corruption Day

A six-week campaign that started at the beginning of November aims to highlight the role of key stakeholders and individuals in preventing and countering corruption in line with the theme, “Your right, your role: say no to corruption”.

The campaign concludes on [International Anti-Corruption Day](#) on 9 December 2021.

We encourage member SAIs to highlight their anti-corruption endeavours on social media and use the hashtags #NoToCorruption and #IACD2021.









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