



Sir Brown Bai KBE, CSM, CBE 1951-2019

Sir Brown Bai, who hailed from Galilo village, near Hoskins, was one of Papua New Guinea's new generation of public sector leaders at Independence and one of the finest to serve this nation. He graduated in economics from UPNG, and became Deputy Director of the National Planning Office in his mid-twenties, before heading back to his home province of West New Britain to be the Administrative Secretary. Having gained valuable experience at the provincial level he returned to the National level as Secretary for Primary Industry in 1984, then responsible for agriculture, forestry and fisheries. There had been a succession of capable and distinguished agriculture secretaries in the 1970s and 80s, and together with Rabbie Namaliu as Minister, Sir Brown was able to drive a wide range of projects, as well as strengthening the capacity of the Department and governance of the sector agencies; this might have been called a blossoming time in the sector.

Sir Brown progressed to the position of Secretary for the Prime Minister's Department in 1986, and again set high standards of administration and introduced reforms to improve the policy capacity of the Department. When Sir Rabbie took over as PM in 1988, he readily retained Sir Brown as Department head during a challenging period of PNG's history, not only with the Bougainville crisis, but also severely low commodity prices badly affecting the lives of cash crop farmers across the

country. Sir Brown was determined to ensure that the Department adhered to high standards in public administration and provided honest and professional policy advice to the Prime Minister and Government, and that government was responsive to the needs of the citizens needing services, including the farmers who make up the majority of households and were struggling at this time.

He then served a term as PNG's Ambassador to the European Union, once again showing his professional and diplomatic skills and ensuring timely access and utilisation of EU resources, particularly mechanisms such as Stabex and Sysmin, to invest in and support the agriculture sector, while raising Papua New Guinea's profile with EU and ACP Member States and leaders.

Upon returning to PNG he held the post of Secretary for Treasury (combining Finance and Treasury), during another tumultuous period for fiscal management, but again he set high standards, providing a calm hand in the face of some highly erratic, and at times misguided, policy decision-making and measures by government. He sought to avert some major mismanagement of funds, including in the private sector superannuation fund (NPF) putting in place auditors to check the books over concerns of severe mismanagement; he was, however, then sidelined from his role as ex-officio Chairman, and an outside chairman appointed, inconsistent with Act, leading to a period of further mismanagement and fraud, as highlighted in the subsequent Commission of Inquiry. Sir Brown always took a stand for good governance, persistently pursuing cases of misconduct and maladministration, including through the courts where necessary. He was passionate for the interests of ordinary Papua New Guineans, with the lives of the people dependent on the land and sea always near the centre of his attention.

During the 2000s and this past decade, Sir Brown moved to the private sector and State-owned corporations, as Managing Director of PNG Banking Corporation, and subsequently Chairman of Petromin and some finance companies, but a major focus of his time, effort and passion was with the agriculture sector, as chairman of the Rural Industries Council, constantly raising the needs and concerns of the often marginalised but pursuing the needs of the critical agriculture sector with successive governments. He had an oil palm block back home in Hoskins from early on and grew up with this major industry in his home province from its early years. He became a director of Hargy Oil palm and Galley Reach (rubber) Holdings in 1999, and was chairman of the Palm Oil Producers Association, and Chair of the Oil Palm Industry Corporation, responsible for oil palm extension, and later also served as a Board of New Britain Palm Oil. Over the past 2 decades or so, he was also on the Board of the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR), which commissioned and supported relevant research in partnership between Australian research organisations and counterparts in developing countries, including PNG, in agriculture, horticulture, and aspects of forestry and fisheries.

Sir Brown was responsible or jointly responsible for innumerable agricultural initiatives, but also committed much time to consultations and forums addressing concerns over falling standards of governance and accountability in the public sector. He stood twice for Parliament, coming close each time, but living away from one's home province much of the time tends to undermine one's prospects in elections, especially when adhering to high ethical standards in one's campaigning. In 2016 Sir Brown chaired a major Symposium with the Institute of National Affairs looking at the country's performance over the past 40 years of Independence and where the country had gone right or wrong. The Symposium, held in Alotau, had some 35 participants, including some of the most experienced Papua New Guineans holding high public sector office and involved in policy and administration during that period. He also presented a paper himself on the economy and its poor outcome, and the weakness of GDP as a measure of performance. The Symposium, examined many aspects of the economy, politics, administration, society and international relations, but concluded that, at the core, the country's problems lay with poor adherence and respect for the principle and rule of law and good governance, and that allowing systems and accountability to decline, whether with contracting and

licensing, or election processes, land administration or simple timeliness at work, whether in high or lower office, had resulted in poor performance and service delivery by government and ultimately of the whole economy. Address the deficient respect and adherence to basic principles of law, or, if you like, just doing things right, and the country's political, social and economic will be addressed, and opportunities flourish; the answer doesn't lie in pursuing the next big commercial or resource venture to fix the economy, but, in respecting and adhering to basic rules and systems, whether within government, the village, on the road or business. Sir Brown constantly advocated this basic application of the law and proper conduct, including for the functioning of the agricultural sector.

Sir Brown sadly suffered ill-health, including diabetes in recent years, necessitating an amputation, but that didn't stop him leading a very active work schedule, and was always ready to respond and contribute. His courage and determination, commitment to PNG and loyalty were always present, as was his charm, knowledge and understanding, good humour and generosity. Even in his final days before he sadly passed away, he was busy attending a series of meetings, and actively preparing material, plans and initiatives and exploring ways to promote and safeguard agriculture. He will be sadly missed by friends and colleagues, those that valued his time as their boss, or his patience and guidance, as well as farmers and the whole agriculture sector.....His was a polished performance, setting and applying high standards in public office and expecting these standards in others. He carved an important place for himself in PNG's history.

And when he wasn't working...? He was a man of many talents, from his time as a soccer star and captain, to conducting a talented choir, to his beloved fishing in Kimbe bay, and, of course, family and friends....