

Election date looks likely for Cook Islands

Contributed by Tangata Vainerere
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06 AUGUST 2010 RAROTONGA (COOK ISLANDS NEWS) -----Cook Islands Acting Prime Minister says setting date is the responsible thing to do

Acting Prime Minister Wilkie Rasmussen has indicated that an election date is likely to be announced next week. During the one and a half hour sitting on Tuesday, Mr Rasmussen said he believed having all the Members of Parliament agree by consensus to the calling of a day for the election is a responsible and diplomatic way to address the contentious issue.

Mr Rasmussen looks to be taking advantage of the fact that Prime Minister Jim Marurai and Deputy Prime Minister Robert Wigmore are both overseas to resolve the question of when the election will be called. Both should be back in the country when Parliament resumes on Monday. Since the Democratic Party's major split in December there has been an ongoing call for the PM to call an early election from the Opposition Party and the faction of MPs supporting former DPM Sir Terepai.

Mr Rasmussen said once the two budgets could be passed by Parliament and an election date agreed, then the Prime Minister would be obliged to tell Queen's Representative Sir Frederick Goodwin to dissolve Parliament.

"It's about time we discuss when will Parliament be dissolved and when will a date for the election be set. I am trying to be as diplomatic as I can," he told Parliament. Mr Rasmussen said this was why he had previously pleaded in the media that the House pass the supplementary and 2010-11 budgets for the good of the country.

"We shall not be thrown back into a time when there was disagreement about that.

"Opposition MP Norman George threw his two cents in from where he was seated saying Mr Rasmussen's announcement was the best news he's heard since Toagate.

"The Prime Minister can no longer enjoy the luxury of keeping this country in confusion," George later said in the sitting.

Mr George said Parliament should aim to complete the passing of the budgets by next Friday and then have the PM announce the calling of an election. However, PM Marurai stated in Parliament last week that he would not call an election before the end of the current term of government expires on September 26.

On Tuesday Opposition leader Tom Marsters supported the motion to adjourn until next week to allow further consideration to be given to the legality of the supplementary budget.-

"We are trying to find an amicable way around what may have been seen as an impasse," said Marsters.

Mr Rasmussen met with Marsters and other members of the opposition team before the short sitting on Tuesday to discuss the passage of the budgets and the calling of an election. Today's planned informal meeting of the MPs may also include talks on the election date....PNS (ENDS)