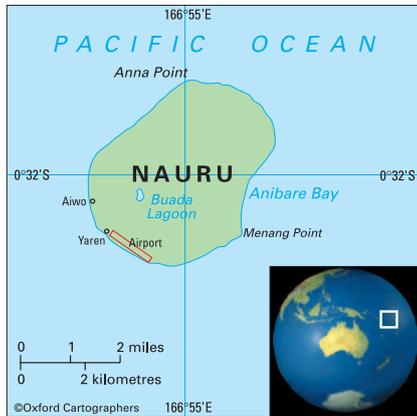




Nauru



KEY FACTS

Joined Commonwealth: 1968

Population: 10,000 (2013)

Official language: English

Time: GMT plus 12 hrs

Currency: Australian dollar (A\$)

Geography

Area: 21.3 sq km

Coastline: 30 km

Nauru is a small oval-shaped island in the western Pacific Ocean.

Topography: Phosphate mining in the central plateau has left a barren terrain of jagged coral pinnacles, up to 15 metres high. A century of mining has stripped four-fifths of the land area. The island is surrounded by a coral reef, exposed at low tide and dotted with pinnacles. The island has a fertile coastal strip 150–300 metres wide. Coral cliffs surround the central plateau. The highest point of the plateau is 65 metres above sea level.

Climate: The climate is tropical, with sea breezes. North-east trade winds blow March–October. Day temperatures range from 24 to 34°C; average humidity is 80 per cent. Rainfall is erratic and often heavy; average annual rainfall is 2,060 mm. The monsoon season is November–February. With the destruction of the forested areas on the plateau land to enable phosphate mining, climate changes have been noted with extensive dry periods. If global warming causes sea level to rise, the habitable low-lying land areas will be at risk from tidal surges and flooding.

Environment: The most significant environmental issues are devastation of some 90 per cent of the island by intensive phosphate mining during most of the 20th century, and dependence on an ageing desalination plant and collection of limited rainwater for water supply.

Vegetation: The only presently fertile areas are the narrow coastal belt, where there are coconut palms, pandanus trees and indigenous hardwoods such as the tomano, and the land surrounding Buada lagoon, where bananas, pineapples and some vegetables are grown. Some secondary vegetation grows over the coral pinnacles.

Wildlife: Many indigenous birds have disappeared or become rare, owing to destruction of their habitat, notably the noddy, or black tern. Frigate birds have traditionally been caught and tamed.

Main towns: Yaren (pop. 4,800 in 2010), Aiwo, Denigomodu, Uaboe, Anabar, Ijuw and Meneng. Nauru has no capital; government offices are in Yaren district.

Transport: A sealed road 19 km long circles the island. Other roads run inland to Buada District and the phosphate areas. A 5 km long railway serves the phosphate workings and carries the phosphate to the dryers preparatory to loading on ships.

The airport is in the south-west of the island. The national airline, Our Airline, offers services to Guam, Fiji, and Brisbane and Melbourne in Australia.

Society

KEY FACTS 2013

Population per sq km: 476

Life expectancy: 66 years (est)

Population: 10,000 (2013); 100 per cent of people live in urban areas; growth 0.4 per cent p.a. 1990–2013; birth rate 20 per 1,000 people (est); life expectancy 66 years (est).

The indigenous people of Nauru are Micronesians. Increased population since the 1960s has put extreme pressure on the coastal fringe surrounding the island, which is currently the only space available for housing.

Language: Nauruan and English are spoken, but English, the official language, is the usual written language.

Religion: Mainly Christians (predominantly Protestants).

Health: There is a high incidence of diabetes, cancer and heart disease. There is no malaria. Medical and dental treatment is free for all Nauruans and for government employees and their families. There are two hospitals, one for Nauruans and one provided by the Nauru Phosphate Corporation, which is mainly for employees of the corporation. A pure water supply is provided by the Nauru Phosphate Corporation's desalination plant. Infant mortality was 30 per 1,000 live births in 2013.

Education: There are 11 years of compulsory education starting at the age of six. Primary school comprises six years and secondary six, with cycles of four and two years. The school year starts in January.

Students go overseas for higher education, mainly to Australia and New Zealand, and scholarships are available for this. Nauru is a partner in the regional University of the South Pacific, which has a centre in Nauru and its main campus in Suva, Fiji.

Media: There is no daily newspaper. *The Bulletin* is published weekly in Nauruan and English by the government, and *Central Star News* and *The Nauru Chronicle* fortnightly.

The Nauru Broadcasting Service provides public radio and TV services. Radio Nauru broadcasts in English and Nauruan and includes material from Radio Australia and the BBC, and Nauru Television includes programmes from Australia and New Zealand.

Communications: Country code 674; internet domain '.nr'. Digicel introduced a mobile phone service in 2009.

For every 1,000 people there are 678 mobile phone subscriptions (2012) and 540 internet users (2011).

Public holidays: New Year's Day, Independence Day (31 January), Constitution Day (17 May), Angam Day (26 October), Christmas Day and Boxing Day. The word *Angam* means 'homecoming' and Angam Day commemorates the various times in history when the size of the Nauruan population has returned to 1,500, which is thought to be the minimum number necessary for survival.

Religious and other festivals whose dates vary from year to year include Good Friday and Easter Monday.

Economy

KEY FACTS 2012

GNI: US\$103m

GNI p.c.: US\$10,277

GDP growth: 7.1% p.a. 2009–12

Inflation: 3.7% p.a. 2009–12

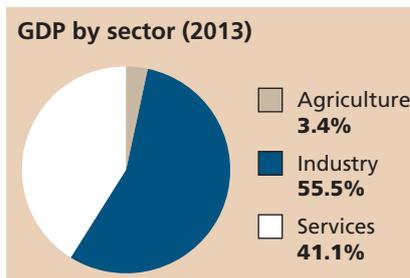
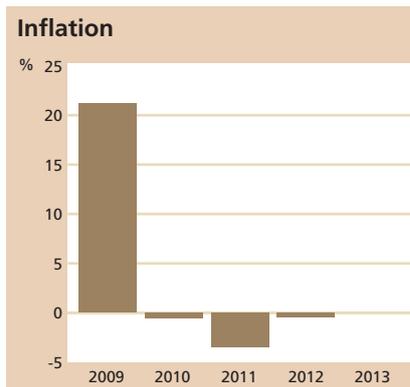
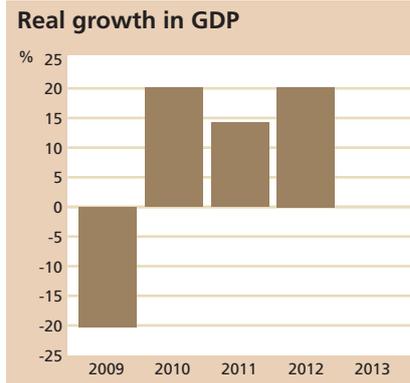
Nauru's economy is based on phosphate mining, and phosphate revenues have given the country a relatively high per capita income (though little economic data is published). Phosphate reserves are not, however, expected to last beyond the late 2010s, and the government has been exploring other sources of income (for example, fishing, tourism and offshore financial services). There is very limited potential for agriculture and the country is dependent on imports for basic necessities such as food, consumer and capital goods. Very few Nauruans work, or are permanently resident, abroad.

Surpluses from the phosphate industry have been invested abroad by the Nauru Phosphate Royalties Trust to provide income as the phosphate runs out. The management of these funds has for years been one of the major issues on the island.

The Nauru Agency Corporation was established to encourage foreign investment in international financial services; it assists with the registration of holding and trading companies and in obtaining banking, trust and insurance licences.

In January 1999 Nauru signed its first loan agreement with the Asian Development Bank, under which the government was to diversify the economy to prepare for the exhaustion of phosphate reserves and to embark on a programme of economic reforms, including a sharp reduction in public sector expenditure and rises in taxes and duties.

From 2001, when its centre for processing asylum seekers was established, Australia made substantial contributions to government revenues and there was, for



several years, a boost for the catering sector. By 2007 revenues generated by the processing centre amounted to around a fifth of the country's GDP. Following its decision to close the centre during 2008, the incoming Labor administration in Australia committed itself to maintaining its aid programme, which was worth about US\$31.8 million in 2012/13. In September 2012 Australia re-opened the processing centre which was to accommodate up to 1,500 asylum seekers, and by 2013 was employing some 600 Nauruans; it was, after the government, the largest employer in the country.

Nauru on the international stage

With populations in the region of 10,000, Nauru and Tuvalu are the smallest Commonwealth member countries. They are also two of the world's smallest democracies. Nauru was admitted as the 187th member state of the United Nations in September 1999.

Marcus Stephen, born in 1969, won gold weightlifting medals at the Commonwealth Games in 1990, 1994 and 1998. In his subsequent political career he has held a number of ministerial posts, and served as Nauru's President between December 2007 and November 2011.

GDP fell by about a third over 2005–07 owing to a fall in public expenditure and suspension in phosphate mining following storm damage to the island's port facilities. The resumption of phosphate mining in mid-2006 led to a substantial hike in GDP in 2008, when it almost doubled. A fall in GDP of 20 per cent in 2009 was then followed by double-digit growth in 2010–14.

History

By the time of the first recorded European sighting of Nauru (by Captain John Fearn in 1798), the Nauruans were a distinct people with their own language and culture. They had little contact with Europeans until whaling ships, traders and beachcombers began to visit regularly in the 1830s.

The introduction of firearms and alcohol destroyed the social balance of the 12 clans living on the island and led to a ten-year internal war, which reduced the population to around 900 by 1888: in 1843 there had been 1,400 people on Nauru. Peace was only restored when Germany took action to remove firearms from the island.

The island was allocated to Germany under the 1886 Anglo-German Convention. Phosphate was discovered a decade later and the Pacific Phosphate Company started to exploit the reserves in 1906, by agreement with Germany. The island was captured by Australian forces in 1914 and administered by Britain. In 1920 the League of Nations gave Britain, Australia and New Zealand a Trustee Mandate over the territory. In reality the island was administered by Australia. The three governments bought out the Pacific Phosphate Company and established the British Phosphate Commissioners, who took over the rights to phosphate mining.

Nauru was damaged by German naval gunfire and later by Allied bombing in World War II. During Japanese occupation (1942–45), 1,200 Nauruans were deported to work as labourers to Truk (now Chuuk), Micronesia, where 463 died as a result of starvation or bombing. The survivors were returned to Nauru in January 1946.

After the war, the island became a UN Trust Territory, administered by Australia in a similar partnership to the previous League of Nations mandate, and it remained a trust territory until independence in 1968. Anticipating the exhaustion of the phosphate reserves, a plan by the partner governments to resettle the Nauruans on Curtis Island, off the north coast of Queensland, Australia, was put forward in 1964. However, the islanders decided against resettlement. Legislative and executive councils were established in 1966, giving the islanders a considerable measure of self-government.

In 1967, the Nauruans contracted to purchase the assets of the British Phosphate Commissioners and in June 1970 control passed to the Nauru Phosphate Corporation.

Nauru became independent as a republic in 1968. Following a constitutional convention in 1967–68, a new constitution protecting fundamental freedoms and establishing a parliamentary democracy was adopted. Sir Hammer DeRoburt became President and went on to dominate Parliament during the next 20 years, leading the government for most of the period. In the absence of a formal party system, there have been many periods when governments have been sustained by a single vote.

In August 1989 DeRoburt was ousted in a vote of no confidence. Kenas Aroi succeeded him but was himself succeeded by Bernard Dowiyogo after he suffered a severe stroke in November 1989. Dowiyogo went on to win the next presidential election, but in the November 1995 election was narrowly defeated by Lagumot Harris (nine votes to eight). In November 1996, there was an early general election which, due to a number of votes of no confidence, was followed by three changes of President in as many months.

Kinza Clodumar was elected President in a further general election in February 1997. He was defeated in a no-confidence vote in June 1998 when Dowiyogo again took over the leadership. In April 1999 Dowiyogo was himself defeated in a vote of no confidence and René Harris was chosen by Parliament to succeed him. Following the general election in April 2000, the 18 newly elected members re-elected Harris as President. When he resigned a week later, Dowiyogo was chosen for the sixth time. In March 2001, when Dowiyogo was in Australia undergoing medical treatment, he was narrowly defeated in a no-confidence vote; Harris was then chosen to succeed him. Having superseded René Harris in January 2003 following a no-confidence vote, Bernard Dowiyogo died in March while on a visit to the USA, and an election was held in May 2003.

In August 2001, the government agreed with the Australian government – for an initial A\$30 million – to accommodate some 1,000 mainly Afghan boat people while their eligibility for asylum in Australia was

assessed. In October 2005 the Australian government decided to bring 25 of the remaining 27 asylum seekers to Australia. Only one asylum seeker remained on the island in mid-2006, but seven Burmese asylum seekers were transferred to Nauru for assessment in September 2006 and 82 Sri Lankan refugees in March 2007. Then in late 2007 the new Australian Labor government indicated the camp would be closed.

On 27 February 2010, a popular referendum rejected a package of proposed changes to Nauru's constitution, following a constitutional reform process which had been under way for several years. Among other things, the changes had been intended to stabilise government and establish a popularly-elected presidency.

Constitution

Status: Republic with executive President

Legislature: Parliament of Nauru

Independence: 31 January 1968

The constitution of the Republic of Nauru came into force in January 1968. It provides for a unicameral Parliament, whose 19 members – increased from 18 in July 2010 – are elected by universal adult suffrage in multi-seat constituencies. Voting is compulsory for all Nauruans over the age of 20. It is mandatory for a parliamentary general election to be held not less than once every three years.

The President is the head of state and head of government and is elected by the Parliament from among its members. Executive authority is vested in the cabinet, which consists of the President and four or five members of parliament chosen by the President. The cabinet is collectively responsible to Parliament. The Parliament also elects a Speaker and a Deputy Speaker.

The 19 members of parliament represent eight constituencies. The number of representatives for each constituency is determined on the basis of population numbers.

The constitution protects fundamental rights and freedoms. There is a treasury fund from which monies may be taken by appropriation acts. A public service is provided for and the chief secretary is the public service

commissioner. Special mention is made in the constitution of the allocation of profits and royalties from the sale of phosphate.

Politics

Last elections: 8 June 2013

Next elections: 2016

Head of state: President Baron Waqa

Head of government: The President

Ruling party: No party system

Women MPs: 5%

By 2003 the country faced a severe financial crisis. The government was unable to pay salaries and was under pressure from OECD countries to regulate offshore banking and stop money-laundering. Following elections in May 2003 – the first after formation of the Nauru First party – the three presidential candidates were each supported by six members and there were no candidates for the post of Speaker, and it was three weeks before the Nauru First members gave their support to Ludwig Scotty. However, he retained the confidence of the MPs only until August 2003, when Parliament chose former President René Harris to be President.

In September 2004 Scotty was again elected to the presidency and an early general election was held in October 2004, observed by a joint Pacific Islands Forum/Commonwealth observer mission. The new Parliament then elected Scotty unopposed as President.

In the general election in August 2007, President Scotty's supporters took 14 seats and MPs subsequently re-elected him. His opponent, Marcus Stephen, was supported by three members. However, Scotty's third term lasted only four months; he was deposed in a vote of no confidence in December 2007 and Marcus Stephen was chosen by Parliament to be President.

Following his election Stephen had the support of only nine of 18 MPs. The government was paralysed; Stephen declared a state of emergency and dissolved Parliament. At the ensuing elections in April 2008 the President's supporters achieved a working majority, winning 12 of the 18 parliamentary seats; Stephen was re-elected President and the deadlock ended.

An early general election in April 2010, occasioned by the defection of three members, returned exactly the same members, and Parliament continued to be deadlocked. Negotiations and another election in June 2010 failed to secure a resolution. The deadlock finally ended in November 2010 when Parliament re-elected Stephen as President, defeating Milton Dube 11:6.

Further information

Government of Nauru:	www.naurugov.nr
Parliament of Nauru:	www.naurugov.nr/parliament-of-nauru
Nauru Bureau of Statistics:	www.spc.int/prism/country/nr/stats
Commonwealth Secretariat:	www.thecommonwealth.org
Commonwealth of Nations:	www.commonwealthofnations.org/country/Nauru

President Stephen stepped down in November 2011 amid opposition allegations of corruption in a phosphate deal. In two parliamentary votes in November – both won by nine votes to eight – Freddie Pitcher defeated Milton Dube only to be ousted by Sprent Dabwido less than a week later.

In the general election, held on 8 June 2013, 19 members were elected, seven of whom were new members. In the parliamentary vote that followed on 11 June, Baron Waqa was elected President, defeating Roland Kun 13:5.

International relations

Nauru is a member of the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States, Pacific Community, Pacific Islands Forum and United Nations.

Traveller information

Immigration and customs: Passports must be valid for at least three months from the beginning of stay. Visas are required by all Commonwealth nationals.

Travel within the country: Traffic drives on the left. Cars can be hired with a national driving licence. Nauru has a free public bus service and taxis are available. There is no passenger rail service on the island.

Travel health: Prevalent diseases where appropriate precautionary measures are recommended include hepatitis A, hepatitis B and typhoid.



[Click here to find out more about the 2015 Commonwealth Yearbook](#)

[Click here to find out more about Nauru](#)