

LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN THE BAHAMAS



In The Bahamas, all of the islands except New Providence are referred to as 'the **Family Islands**.' During the early period of settlement, the management of affairs, or **administration**, on each island was carried out by resident justices. In 1908 this system changed: the justices on the island were replaced by District Commissioners. Later, they were called Family Island Commissioners. An Act of Parliament in 1996 changed the name to Family Island Administrators.

Family Island Administrators

The administrator is appointed on the advice of the Governor-General and the Director of Lands & Local Government. He/She is the chief representative of government on that island and has to keep them informed about everything that is happening there. Therefore the administrator acts as a link between government and the people. Their main job is to help the people of the island and must therefore keep in touch with them at all times. Some islands have more than one Administrator. The Administrator can be assisted by a Senior Deputy, a Deputy or an Assistant Family Island Administrator. The Administrator does not have to be a native of the island on which he lives.

Duties of the Family Island Administrators

As a magistrate

- Presides over civil cases and can send a defendant to prison for up to six months
- Presides over civil cases and can levy fines up to \$286
- Can decide whether there is sufficient evidence for a defendant to stand trial in the Supreme Court in Nassau

As a coroner

- A **coroner** is an official who can determine someone's cause of death
- An administrator does this if someone dies suddenly, or suspiciously

As a Justice of the Peace (JP)

- conduct marriage ceremonies
- sign or endorse papers like passport forms or deeds of a will

Other responsibilities

- Can order an immediate search and investigation if someone goes missing.
- Collecting taxes or **revenues** (government income) for the Government Treasury
- Distribute funds on behalf of some government ministries and departments
- sign request for licenses for shops
- issue birth and death certificates
- The Post Office of the island is their responsibility too which includes the sale of stamps, money orders and the operation of the Post Office Saving Bank.

District Council



All Family Islands have Local District Councils that are responsible for repair work on all government facilities which include roads, street lighting, garbage collection, parks, burial grounds, harbours and docks and government buildings. There are 32 Local/District Councils.

The members of the District Council are elected by the people of the island. Each member is nominated by at least two people, and then an election is held to decide which of the nominees will become members of the Board. Elections are held every three years. The Administrator is the chairman of the board. The members of the board serve as a link between the people of the island and the Administrator. The Local District Council receives a sum of money, or **budget** from central government to be used in managing the affairs of the island.