

# TOKELAU

Some background information

**Greetings in Tokelauan**

**Some stats from the 2006 NZ Census**

**Statement of Aspiration**

**Background:**

**Name Usage**

**Geography**

**History**

**Government**

**Economy**

**Demographics**

**Miscellaneous**

**Bible Translation**



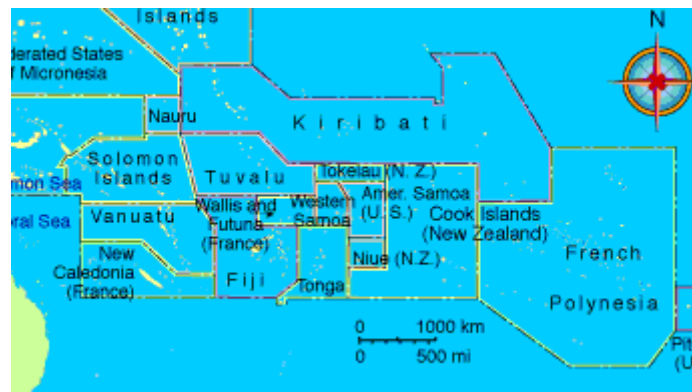
Photo courtesy of [Joel Abroad](#)

***Greetings in:***

**Tokelaun (Tokelau, New Zealand)  
Tokelaun (Tokelau, New Zealand)**

**Taloha  
Taloha ni**

[Tokelau](#), overseas territory of [New Zealand](#), consisting of the Tokelau Islands, in the southwestern Pacific Ocean. It comprises three coral atolls—Atafu, Fakaofu, and Nukunono—and has a total area of 10 sq km (4 sq mi). The islands were first visited by the British in 1765 and became a British protectorate in 1877. Administration of the islands was transferred to New Zealand in 1926, and in 1948 they were included within its territorial boundaries. In 1976 the territory's name was officially changed from Tokelau Islands to Tokelau. Population 1,577 (1991).



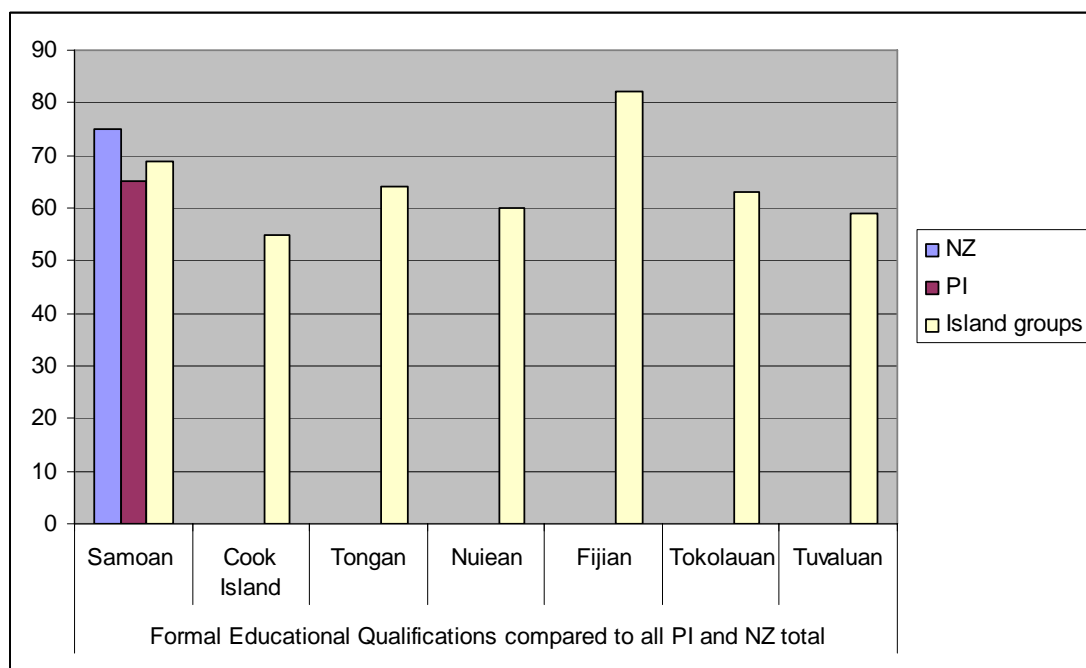
*Islands north-east of New Zealand and Australia:  
Samoa, Cook Islands, Tonga, Niue, Fiji, Tokelau, Tuvalu*

## Tokelaun People

- In 2006, Tokelaunians were the *sixth* largest Pacific ethnic group in New Zealand, making up 6,819 or 3 percent of New Zealand's Pacific population (265,974).
- The Tokelaunian population increased by 10 percent (615) between 2001 and 2006.
- The median age of the Tokelaunian population (half are younger and half are older than this age) was 19 years. By comparison, the median ages for the total Pacific and total New Zealand populations were 21 years and 36 years, respectively.
- Tokelaunians *born in New Zealand account for 69 percent* (4,626) of the total Tokelaunian population.
- 40 percent (2,505) of Tokelaunians are able to hold an everyday conversation in Tokelaunian.

- 86 percent (5,514) of Tokelauans affiliated with a religion. Of those Tokelauans who affiliated with a religion, 98 percent (5,439) affiliated with a Christian religion.
- 63 percent (2145) of Tokelauan adults have a formal educational qualification (secondary school or post-school qualification). The comparable figures for the total Pacific and New Zealand populations were 65 percent and 75 percent, respectively.
- 51 percent (3462) of the Tokelauan population live in the Wellington region, which is a decrease of 2 percentage points since 2001

*Formal Educational Qualifications compared to all PI and NZ total*



*Tokelau's aspiration to continue to develop as a country and a people in this region is very important to us. My hope is that the wider region also sees it that way. Although we are small we are also a people of this region and we are keen to participate as a responsible member of the Pacific family. We are working towards realigning our limited resources to the needs and aspirations of our people.*

**39th Pacific Island Forum, Alofi, Niue**  
**[Statement by Faipule Pio Iosefo Tuia](#), Ulu o Tokelau (Titular Head of Tokelau), Tuesday 19 August 2008**

The following material is an abridged and edited version of the Tuvalu entry on [Wikipedia](#).

**Tokelau** is a territory of New Zealand that consists of three tropical coral atolls in the South Pacific Ocean. The United Nations General Assembly designated Tokelau a Non-Self-Governing Territory.

Until 1976 the official name was *Tokelau Islands*. Tokelau is sometimes referred to by Westerners by the older, colonial name of *The Union Islands*.

## Name usage

The name *Tokelau* is a Polynesian word meaning "north wind". The islands were officially named the *Union Islands* and *Union Group* at unknown times. *Tokelau Islands* was adopted in 1946, which was contracted to *Tokelau* on 9<sup>th</sup> Dec, 1976

The change in usage between *Tokelau Islands* and *Tokelau* marks a slight shift in emphasis, with consequences in regional diplomacy, in that the term *Tokelau Islands* clearly and substantially refers to a geographical expression, that is, a range of islands, whatever else it may connote. Thus it is not necessarily controversial to refer to a range of islands by one name, even though politically they may come under two jurisdictions. Whereas *Tokelau* can be taken to refer more immediately to some concept of nationhood, arguably infusing increased meaning to the draft 2006 independence constitution of Tokelau which, controversially or not, defines Swains Island, currently part of American Samoa, as part of the national territory.

## Geography



*Map of all Tokelau Islands. Swains Island is shown to the south*

Tokelau comprises three atolls in the South Pacific Ocean, approximately midway between Hawaii and New Zealand, and about 500 km north of Samoa.

The islands are Atafu, at one time known as the Duke of York Group, Nukunonu, also the Duke of Clarence Group, and Fakaofu, once Bowditch Island.

Between them they comprise a land area of 10.8 km<sup>2</sup>. There are no ports

or harbours.

Tokelau lies in the Pacific typhoon belt. A fourth island that is culturally, historically, and geographically, but not politically, part of the Tokelau chain is Swains Island (Olohega), under United States control since about 1900 and administered as part of American Samoa since 1925.

Tokelau is in a different time zone from most of New Zealand, being 10 hours behind Coordinated Universal Time (UTC) rather than 12 hours in front, meaning a 22 hour time difference for much of the year (New Zealand has daylight saving time (DST) for part of the year while Tokelau never participates). Tokelau is in the same time zone as the Cook Islands and Hawaii rather than neighbouring Samoa and American Samoa.

## History

Missionaries preached Christianity in Tokelau from 1845 to the 1860s. French Catholic missionaries on Wallis Island (also known as 'Uvea) and missionaries of the Protestant London Missionary Society in Samoa used native teachers to convert the Tokelauans. Atafu was converted to Protestantism by the London Missionary Society, Nukunonu was converted to Catholicism and Fakofu was converted to both denominations. Peruvian slave traders arrived in 1863 and took nearly all (253) of the able-bodied men to work as labourers. The men died of dysentery and smallpox, and very few returned to Tokelau. With this loss, the system of governance became based on the "Taupulega", or "Councils of Elders", where individual families on each atoll were represented. During this time, Polynesian immigrants and beachcombers from other nations settled, marrying local women and repopulating the atolls.

## Government

Villages are entitled to enact their own laws regulating their daily lives and New Zealand law only applies where it has been extended by specific enactment. Serious crime is rare and there are no prisons - offenders are publicly rebuked, fined or made to work.

## Economy

Tokelau is reported to have the smallest economy of any country in the world with an annual purchasing power of about US\$1,000 per capita. The government is almost entirely dependent on subsidies from New Zealand and deficits are made up by aid from New Zealand. Tokelau annually exports around US\$100,000 (€67,400) of stamps, copra and woven and carved handicrafts and imports over US\$300,000 (€202,197) of foodstuffs, building materials, and fuel to, and from, New Zealand. New Zealand also pays directly for the cost of medical and education services. A large number of Tokelauans live in New Zealand and support their families in Tokelau through remittances.

Tokelau has added 10% to its GDP through registrations of domain names under its top-level domain, .tk. Registrations can be either free, in which case advertising is displayed on the site along with other restrictions, or paid, which allows the domain owner to remove the advertising and other restrictions.

Tokelau gives most domain names under its authority away to anyone for free to gain publicity for the territory. This has allowed the nation to gain enhanced telecommunications technologies, such as more computers and Internet access for Tokelauan residents.

## **Demographics**

Tokelau has a population of 1,433 Polynesian inhabitants (as of July 2008), a decline from 2007. This is due to emigration to New Zealand and Samoa.

There are no minority groups, and everyone speaks English and Tokelauan. The major religion is the Congregational Christian Church.

While slightly more females than males live on Atafu and Fakaofu, males make up 57% of Nukunonu residents. Only 9% of Tokelauans aged 40 or more have never been married. One quarter of the population were born overseas; almost all the rest live on the same atoll they were born on. Most households own 5 or more pigs.

Despite its low income, Tokelau has a life expectancy of 69 years, comparable with parts of Europe

## **Miscellaneous**

Many Tokelauan youth travel to New Zealand to further their education and the ship is full around Christmas time with students returning home and then heading off for another year of study.

Cyclone Percy struck and severely damaged Tokelau in late February and early March 2005. It coincided with a spring tide which put most of the area of the two villages on Fakaofu and Nukunonu under a metre of seawater. The cyclone also caused major erosion on several islets of all three atolls, damaging roads and bridges and disrupting electric power and telecommunications systems. The cyclone did significant and widespread damage to food crops and property. The geographic future of Tokelau depends on the height of the ocean. No significant land is more than two metres above high water of ordinary tides. This means Tokelau is particularly vulnerable to any possible sea level rises caused by global warming.

## **Bible Translation**

- In 2003 the four gospels were translated into Tokelauan for the first time (previously Tokelauans had had to use a Samoan translation). Work is slowly proceeding on the Old Testament.

- Virtually all religious functions in Tokelau have been conducted in the Samoan language since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.
- Samoan missionaries—Catholic, [London Missionary Society](#), and Presbyterian—established mission schools on the islands, using Samoan.
- Samoan became the language in which all important Tokelau cultural functions were eventually conducted.
- Tokelauan was confined to unimportant and 'mundane' spheres of the culture.
- Even family prayers were conducted in Samoan.

When Western Samoa was declared independent in 1962, Tokelau opted to remain under New Zealand, and the language gradually became one of the topical points for discussions in various village circles in Tokelau. In the early 1960s English became the language of education *until Tokelauan was used from the 1970s*.

The ongoing Bible project is seen as an important step in preserving the Tokelauan language, which is currently taught in New Zealand at language nests and some primary schools.