

## To raise or to bury?

**T**HE controversy over the propriety of Finance and Fiscal Commission chairman Murphy Morobe's appointment as chairman of Ernst & Young is a storm in a teacup, given the low-key role the under-resourced FFC plays nowadays. But it raises questions about the commission's future.

The FFC is a far cry from the watchdog envisaged by the constitution. It rose to prominence through its role in ensuring the revenue cake is divided fairly between provinces — a function now requiring only minor annual adjustments. Its constitutional task is to act as a counterweight to the finance ministry. It should be available to offer research and advice on policy, budgeting and the like to provincial and local authorities and the finance portfolio committee in parliament, to empower these structures to carry out their functions more effectively.

As it is the FFC has been increasingly marginalised by central government. Finance Minister Trevor Manuel and his departmental colleagues have succeeded in doing this without much public opposition, probably because they themselves are generally doing a decent job.

However, constitutional checks and balances were not created for fair weather times. The FFC may not always appear to be as dispensable as it does now.

A choice needs to be made whether to strengthen the FFC — starting perhaps by installing a high-powered economist as head if Morobe's leaves at the end of his term — or to downgrade, or even scrap it. At the moment its role belies its official status.