

New Caledonia

October 10, 2020

The island nation has voted for a referendum claiming independence. It is necessary to know about the country, its geographic and demographic aspects as well as some map based questions on this region can also be expected.

In news: New Caledonia recently voted in a referendum on independence.

Placing it in syllabus: World Geography

Static dimensions

1. Historical aspects of the political problem
2. Geographical Aspects
3. Demographic Aspects

Current dimensions

1. In news

Content:

In news:

- The French South Pacific territory of New Caledonia voted in a referendum on independence.
- It has been French since 1853 and after Britain's exit from the European Union, is one of the few remaining EU outposts in the region.
- The French government subsidises the territory with around 1.5 billion euros every year, equal to more than 15 percent of New Caledonia's GDP.

Historical aspects of the political problem:

- The referendum is part of a carefully negotiated de-colonisation plan agreed in 1998, known as the **Noumea**

Accord.

- The accord was designed to put an end to a deadly conflict **between pro-independence indigenous Kanak population, and the descendants of European settlers known as “Caldoches”**.
- Violence in the 1980s culminated in a drawn-out hostage crisis in 1988 which resulted in the killing of 19 separatists on one side, and six police and special forces on the other.
- The **first referendum was held in 2018** which resulted in a status quo with 56.7% of the vote.
- This is the second time the archipelago went to the polls to decide on its fate.
- It is expected that the voters reject breaking away from France after almost 170 years despite rising support for the move.
- If New Caledonia votes for independence, France would, after a transition period, hand over control.
- If independence is rejected, there is the option of another referendum by 2022 so long as the poll is requested by at least a third of the local legislature.

The last former colonies to be given independence by France were Djibouti in 1977 and Vanuatu in 1980.

Geographical Aspects:

- New Caledonia is situated between Australia and Fiji and is sometimes called **“The Pebble”**.
- It is part of Zealandia, a fragment of the ancient Gondwana supercontinent.

- The world's largest extant species of fern, *Cyathea intermedia*, also is endemic to New Caledonia.
- It is one of five regions on the planet where species of southern beeches (*Nothofagus*) are indigenous.
- It is home to the New Caledonian crow, which are renowned for their extraordinary intelligence and ability to fashion tools to solve problems, and make the most complex tools of any animal yet studied apart from humans.
- The endemic kagu is a flightless bird which is able to use its wings to climb branches or glide. Its sound is similar to the bark of a dog.
- The nautilus—considered a living fossil and related to the ammonites, which became extinct at the end of the Mesozoic era—occurs in Pacific waters around New Caledonia.
- Several species of New Caledonia are remarkable for their size:

Ducula goliath is the largest extant species of pigeon;

Rhacodactylus leachianus, the largest gecko in the world;

Phoboscincus bocourti, a large skink thought to be extinct until rediscovered in 2003.

Economy:

- It has one of the largest economies in the South Pacific.
- The currency in use is the CFP franc.
- As much of the land is unsuitable for agriculture food accounts for about 20% of imports.
- New Caledonian soils contain about 25% of the world's nickel resources.
- The economy's mainstays are the production of metals, especially nickel, tourism and financial support from mainland France.

Demographic Aspects:

- At the last census in 2019, New Caledonia had a population of 271,407.
- Natural growth is responsible for 65% of the population growth, while the remaining 35% is attributable to net migration.
- The population growth is strong in South Province, moderate in North Province but almost stable in the Loyalty Islands.
- Over 40% of the population is under 20, although the ratio of older people in the total population is increasing.
- According to the 2014 census, 39.1% of the population reported belonging to the Kanak community, 27.2% to the European (Caldoche and Zoreille) community and 8.7% declared their community as “Caledonian” and others.
- Most of the people who self-identified as “Caledonian” are thought to be ethnically European.
- The predominant religion is Christianity and half of the population is Roman Catholic.
- The island also has numerous Protestant churches.