

PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI



PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DAILY HANSARD

WEDNESDAY, 4TH SEPTEMBER, 2024

[CORRECTED COPY]

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WEDNESDAY, 4TH SEPTEMBER, 2024

The Parliament met at 9.29 a.m. pursuant to adjournment.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

PRESENT

All Members were present, except the honourable Minister for iTaukei Affairs and Culture, Heritage and Arts; the honourable Minister for Youth and Sports; honourable V. Nath; and honourable A.A. Maharaj.

MINUTES

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I move:

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Tuesday, 3rd September, 2024, as previously circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed.

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I beg to second the motion.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE SPEAKER

Welcome

I welcome all honourable Members to today's sitting and those watching proceedings on the television and internet. I particularly extend a warm welcome to those of you in the public gallery and our friends in the media. Thank you for taking the time to join us today.

Official Event Invitation

Honourable Members, with due consideration to the official event later this evening, you will receive your invitations too, I assure you that right now. But if you have not received it yet, I will make sure that you receive those invitations.

Amended Order Paper

Given that items on yesterday's Order Paper - five Oral Questions, a Motion and Written Questions, have been moved to today's Order Paper, I will allow only one supplementary question from the Opposition side during question time, and this is only for today. I thank you, honourable Members, for your understanding. We will proceed to the next item.

PRESENTATION OF REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

Consolidated Review Report - Fiji Meat Industry Board 2018-2022 Annual Reports

HON. S. TUBUNA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, Sir, the Standing Committee on Economic

Affairs hereby submits to Parliament the Consolidated Review Report on the Fiji Meat Industry Board 2018-2022 Annual Reports.

The Fiji Meat Industry Board (FMIB) was established under the Fiji Meat Industry Act 237 of 1970. In 1976, the Suva Abattoir was established at 9 Miles, Nasinu, to provide slaughtering services in the Central Division. In the same year, a rendering plant was established next to the Abattoir to make high-quality leather. The company ventured out into animal feed by using the by-products from the Abattoir and fish processing facilities. The Suva property sits on 35.4 hectares of State land. The land has a 75-year Crown lease granted on 1st July, 1976.

The Vuda abattoir was established later at Vuda Point in 1983. It caters for the slaughter services in the Western Division. The Vuda property sits on 6.35 hectares of Native land. The land tenure is a 75-year Native lease granted on 1st January, 1982.

The core function of FMIB is to provide slaughtering services for butchers in Fiji. It has now ventured into a *magiti* concept where it also provides services for social obligations to meet our diverse markets.

The FMIB is committed to providing slaughtering and processing services in facilities that are of international standard to meet safety, hygiene and quality standards.

The FMIB has also ventured into implementing a food safety programme that complies with the Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) principles and conforms to guidance issued by the Food Safety Act 2003, Food Safety Regulations 2009 and Meat Industry Act 1993.

Pertinent issues identified by the Committee are as follows:

- (1) The FMIB incurred losses from 2018 to 2021, except in 2022, when it recorded a small profit of \$108,134. This profit is largely attributed to a reduction in the number of employees. The ongoing losses have been driven by low throughput and the rising cost of operations.
- (2) From 2018-2022, FMIB received an average of 8,542 cattle; 14,533 pigs; 347 sheep; and 1,548 goats, for slaughter annually. To break even, FMIB needs approximately 20,000 cattle per year and 30,000 pigs per year. Currently, the Abattoir is not working at full capacity due to a decline in livestock numbers, resulting in low number of livestock going through the Abattoir.
- (3) The livestock numbers have steadily declined over the years due to prevalence of diseases such as Tuberculosis and Brucellosis, and the decline in sugarcane farmers engaging in rearing livestock which has significantly impacted livestock population. Additionally, poor pasture management and the rising cost of feed, have further contributed to the reduction in livestock numbers and the lack of interest by farmers. This decline poses a broader threat to the sustainability of the livestock industry in Fiji.
- (4) There are several challenges affecting FMIB, such as:
 - (a) Needed investment to modernise facilities to meet new requirements for food handling, hygiene and security;
 - (b) A review of the Meat Industry Act 1969 is urgently needed to address the current issues facing the meat industry;

- (c) Bush slaughter needs to be curbed for health and commercial purposes;
 - (d) Meat grading needs to be introduced to protect consumers and farmers;
 - (e) Farmers are short changed where only carcass is weighed and paid and not the offal;
 - (f) Sharp increase in production cost; and
 - (g) Low livestock numbers.
- (5) Poor coordination and collaboration between FMIB and the Animal Health Division of the Ministry of Agriculture and Waterways is one of the problems that we have also identified.
- (6) The incentives, particularly the grant of around \$717,000(fencing kit support for beef, goat and sheep, beef stockyard, goat and sheep shed, goat rearing, pig farrowing crates and piggery pan development) provided to livestock farmers have not led to any noticeable increase in livestock production.
- (7) Committee also noted that the FMIB and Yaqara Pastoral Company Pte Limited (YPCL) are not collaborating effectively to boost livestock production and move Fiji towards self-sufficiency. (8) In addition, FMIB still relies on external service providers to develop 5-year Strategic Plan and to prepare accounts at a cost.
- (8) In addition, FMIB still relies on external service providers to develop 5-year Strategic Plan and to prepare accounts at a cost.
- (9) FMIB has \$31.9 million worth of investment property, primarily consisting of land, which is yielding no returns for the company.
- (10) FMIB's plans to improve profitability by setting up a restaurant, venturing into sausage production, and exporting pork and beef to the regional market raises concern. These initiatives are not the core business of FMIB, particularly when livestock production is declining.
- (11) The annual reports did not contain any performance matrix aligned with the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), making it difficult to assess the performance of the FMIB.
- (12) The Committee also noted that FMIB did not report on relevant Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which is a mandatory requirement of all Annual Reports presented to Parliament.
- (13) The Committee also noted that although FMIB depends on animals as its primary input, the Company has not considered the option of utilising land for animal rearing or producing young calves, kids, lamb and piglets for distribution to interested farmers.

I wish to extend my gratitude to the Chairperson of the FMIB Board, Dr. Kenneth Cokanasiga, and his staff, for their timely assistance in this inquiry.

At this juncture, I would like to thank our Committee Members who were part of the team that produced this report, the:

- (1) Honourable Assistant Minister for Women, Children and Social Protection – Deputy Chairperson;

- (2) Honourable P.D. Kumar;
- (3) Honourable Assistant Minister for Agriculture and Waterways; and
- (4) Honourable A. Bia.

On behalf of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs, I commend this Review Report to Parliament and request all honourable Members of this august Parliament to take note of the Report.

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. S. TUBUNA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 121(5), I hereby move:

A motion without notice, that a debate on the content of this Report is initiated at a future sitting.

HON P.D. KUMAR.- I beg to second the motion, Madam Deputy Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

Review Report on the Nadi Town Council 2016 Annual Report

HON. I.S. VANAWALU.- Madam Deputy Speaker. I am pleased to present the Report of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs on the Review of the Nadi Town Council 2016 Annual Report.

As mandated under Standing Order 109 (2)(b), the Committee looks into issues related to health, education, social services, labour, aviation, culture and media.

The Nadi Town Council, being one of the oldest municipalities and known for actively contributing to the tourism sector in Fiji, the potential for investment has been optimistic and these foreign investments have led to an increase in development and population as well.

The Nadi Town Council is the, therefore, embarking on a proposal for an extension of its town boundaries to cater for the increasing population and to continue with the necessary processes of declaring Nadi as a city.

The year 2016 was a great year that affected most people in Fiji, and Nadi was no exception, with widespread devastation and loss of life, on the infrastructure and the environment.

The Committee noted concerns raised by the Council in its key findings, particularly the constant flooding of Nadi Town.

I extend my gratitude and appreciation to the Chief Executive Officer and Management of Nadi Town Council for their contribution in this review process.

Finally, I take this opportunity to thank the former Chairperson of the Committee, the honourable Minister for Fisheries and Forestry, for her leadership and guidance; the former Committee Members, honourable Parveen Bala, and Alternate Members, honourable Ketan Lal and

honourable Penioni Ravunawa, for their constructive input and tremendous teamwork; and the current Committee Members for the finalisation of this Committee Report.

On behalf of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, I commend this Report to Parliament and request that all honourable Members of this Parliament take note of the Report.

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. I.S. VANAWALU.- Madam Deputy Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 121(5), I hereby move:

A motion without notice, that a debate on the contents of the Report is initiated at a future sitting.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I second the motion.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

QUESTIONS

Oral Questions

Town and City Rates for Municipalities in Fiji (Question No. 177/2024)

HON. I. TUIWAILEVU asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Housing and Local Government update Parliament on what measures are in place to recover the outstanding Town and City rates in all the Municipalities in Fiji?

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I thank the honourable Member for the question. It is, indeed, a pertinent issue for Municipalities around Fiji.

Madam Deputy Speaker, rates are a significant source of funding for Municipal Councils. Municipal Councils can make investments in their communities and improve the service they provide to ratepayers if they are able to collect the rates.

Madam Deputy Speaker, in Fiji, the number of ratepayers in towns and cities is around 44,749, with residential ratepayers making up 85 percent of that total. The Local Government Act 1972 makes it mandatory for residents living on rateable properties in towns and cities to pay their rates.

Municipal Councils rely on the rates to fund a variety of services including:

- (1) waste management;
- (2) maintenance and beautification of public spaces;
- (3) sanitation control;
- (4) planning national events; and
- (5) carrying out regulatory enforcement duties related to buildings, transportation and

littering.

The money received by Municipal Councils can be used to create and improve services, as well as foster an atmosphere that will attract investment, and stimulate the local economy.

Madam Deputy Speaker, Suva City Council has the largest ratepayer base, comprising of 11,468 ratepayers, of which 83 percent or 9,441 are residential ratepayers. Nasinu Town Council has 11,377 ratepayers, of which 10,953 are residential ratepayers.

In addition, with 8,169 ratepayers, 91 of whom are residential ratepayers for Lautoka City Council which has the third highest ratepayers in our country, whilst the 10 Municipalities make up the remaining 13,735 ratepayers.

The Municipal Councils, Madam Deputy Speaker, have the ability to supply services in carrying out its major projects have been seriously hampered by the delay in payment of rates. I would like to reiterate that for cities and towns to be able to provide greater services and to have strong infrastructure, the ratepayers have a responsibility to contribute to those expenditures.

Madam Deputy Speaker, as of 12th July, 2024, the interest on rates on arrears has reduced from 5 percent to 11 percent, and will now be charged on simple interest on arrears rather than the compound interest that was being charged. This will bring some relief to ratepayers who are not able to pay their rates in a timely manner.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Municipal Councils in consultation with the Ministry, have prepared their Rates Collection Plan and that will assist ratepayers who are facing financial difficulties. We have witnessed job losses in our country due to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, hence the Plan will accommodate those financially affected.

On the way forward, ratepayers will liaise with the relevant Councils on how they will settle or pay up their rates, as well as outstanding rates.

Madam Deputy Speaker, with the problem of rate arrears, the Ministry of Local Government has provided a rates amnesty period. One was given in 2018, two in 2019 and two in 2023. This was done to encourage the ratepayers to pay up their arrears, without having to pay the interest on the arrears. Every compound interest on arrears was eliminated during the amnesty period, provided that residential ratepayers paid their full principal amount within the allocated time. In addition, this allowed Municipal Councils to tidy up their books.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Councils have been making arrangements with struggling ratepayers - those ratepayers who have been facing financial hardships, to pay their rates in instalments or in small payments. Besides, the discount period for the current rates were extended by most of the Councils to encourage ratepayers to come forward and pay up their rates at reduced amounts.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Ministry, together with the 13 Municipalities around the country, have also conducted rate profiling exercises to ascertain the total outstanding, as well as aging rates, and identify the challenges in the rate recovery processes by the Councils.

While these rate profiling exercises was done, one of the objectives also is to identify some of the things that are lacking. If you go to some of the Municipalities around the country, they do not even have the right postal addresses, phone contacts and emails of most of the ratepayers. So, this was one of the objectives of why the rate profiling exercise was carried out by most Municipalities

around the country.

Madam Deputy Speaker, after going through these profiling exercises, Municipal Councils should be able to identify the right strategies that they are going to take to improve rates recovery, as well as how to enforce those who are defaulting on their rates.

Madam Deputy Speaker, as of 30th August, 2024, there is approximately \$67.2 million in town rates arrears in all Municipalities and approximately 27 percent or \$30.9 million of rates are in arrears for the past one to five years. Also note that 2,850 ratepayers are facing genuine financial hardships, whilst 10,869 can pay rates but are not paying.

We are working hand in hand with Municipal Councils to ensure that the focus is placed where it belongs. On those who have the capacity to pay but have chosen not to do so, the Councils are committed to recovering every dollar owed so that they can reinvest into the communities that need it most.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the strategy of this Government is to allow the Councils to improve rate collection, hence it is critical for the Councils to focus on those ratepayers who are in arrears for more than five years and those who are capable of paying their rates. This will also provide high returns on the efforts made.

Madam Deputy Speaker, our strategy is clear and uncompromised. We have advised the Councils of the full extent of their regulatory powers under the Local Government Act and they are implementing a range of strategies to recover these outstanding funds. These include:

- extended discount periods;
- allowing payment by instalments;
- engaging with major landlords like Ministry of Lands, Housing Authority, as well as TLTB;
- enabling online payments like M-PAiSA and payments through banks;
- taking this up with the Small Claims Tribunal for all rates that are more than \$5,000 and pursuing legal action where necessary to try and recover some of these rates that have been outstanding for quite some time; or
- even placing caveat on properties that have been there for some time.

Also, one thing that I have been reminding my team is that in any collection exercise, it is always important that you start with the low hanging fruits - those that are less than 12 months and less than two years. Those are the ones that are easily collected, and we must focus on those rates. Then we focus on those that are more than two to five years, as well as aging or rates that have been extending for quite some time. This would have come about after rate profiling exercises are done.

I thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to respond to the question.

DEPUTY SPEAKER. - Honourable Members, I am looking at the time and I figure we have time for more than one supplementary question. I ask that we make the questions concise and keep within our times.

HON. J. USAMATE.– Madam Deputy Speaker, I was on the verge of standing up to ask a supplementary question and to inform your esteemed position that we would not be asking supplementary questions as we thought it was extremely unfair and not in the spirit of this Parliament to limit the opportunities for Members of the Opposition to ask supplementary questions because we are representatives of the people.

(Chorus of interjections)

DEPUTY SPEAKER. - Order, order! We will allow honourable Usamate to continue.

HON. J. USAMATE. - This has never been done before and I thank you for giving us that time. We have been having our speaking times reduced, the number of weeks in a year that we meet, reduced, everything has been reduced and now, remove that opportunity for us to ask questions. I am thankful for your decision, Madam Deputy Speaker.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. P.D. KUMAR. - The so-called democracy.

DEPUTY SPEAKER. - Order!

HON. J. USAMATE. - I was given the right by the Deputy Speaker to speak and I withdraw that statement that I was about to make. Thank you for your ruling.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, as mentioned by the honourable Minister, recently, there has been the revision of interest rates, from compound to simple. My question to the honourable Minister is, what are the many advantages and benefits to this change? How much town rate arrears has been written off?

HON. M.K. NALUMISA. - Madam Deputy Speaker, I thank the honourable Member for that question. I think I had mentioned in one of my responses in Parliament the reason why we are reducing the interest rate, from 11 percent to 5 percent, as well as the changes in methodology. I think he was absent during that Sitting.

Now, if you look at the history of the town rates, one of the reasons why the interest rate compounds is the interest is being charged on these arrears because when you apply compound interest, then you are charging interest on the interest of that late payment. So, that adds more burden to the ratepayers.

I think the main objective of why the Coalition Government is reducing or changing the way the interest rate is charged is to assist the ratepayers in the repayment of their debt. I have been to some of these communities in Suva and Nabua, they have rates of more than \$11,000, \$12,000 and \$15,000, because they have been accumulating rates for the past 10 to 15 years. So, this exercise was done to assist the ratepayers in repaying their debt, to give them some incentive to come forward to pay their rates.

HON. S. NAND. - Madam Deputy Speaker, if the Government is really interested in helping the ratepayers and recover all the rates, instead of reducing the interest rate, why not just do away with the interest and get the principal only, so it makes it easier for the ratepayers to pay the principal only?

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, when I took office, one of the things I did was challenge the Councils to change the way they do business. They have been heavily reliant on Government to give them funds, especially the medium and smaller sized Councils, in order to fund projects and their basic services to ratepayers. If you look at the business aspects of things, someone in any institution, there is one way of enticing and encouraging people to come and pay their rates, like for them to avoid paying interest so they can pay their rates on time. That is one way of deterring the people from paying their rates late.

For repaying their rates, we have provisions in place in the Local Government Act, for all those that are facing financial hardships, the Minister has the power upon justification and verification of all the documents to nullify their position to pay their rates, the Minister has the full powers to waive the interest on those outstanding rates.

Fiji National Labour Mobility Framework and Strategy
(Question No. 178/2024)

HON. J.N. NAND asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Employment, Productivity and Workplace Relations inform Parliament on the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) regarding the development of the Fiji National Labour Mobility Framework and Strategy with the International Organisation for Migration?

HON. A.D. SINGH.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I thank the honourable Member for asking the question. It is my pleasure to update Parliament on the MOU that my Ministry signed on 9th August, 2024, with the International Organisation for Migration (IOM).

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Coalition Government is committed to reviewing and modernising critical national legislations and policies related to employment, including labour mobility. These reviews include, the Employment Relations Act, our OHS Regulations, and the National Employment Policy 2018.

Madam Deputy Speaker, in the context of these high level policy processes, labour mobility is unique, in the sense that it requires specific technical attention. As such, it is proposed to leverage the existing processes to develop a National Labour Mobility Policy, which would complement the National Employment Policy and other employment policies.

The proposed Policy would outline the three key priority approaches, from the governance of labour mobility, both incoming and outgoing. The policy is to ensure that Fiji has a well-managed labour mobility governance framework that forces the socio-economic benefits of migration for individuals and communities and aligns with international standards and best practises.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the signing of this MOU between our Ministry and IOM is a testament of our commitment to collaborative efforts in addressing labour mobility challenges and turning them into opportunities. It will enable us to benefit from technical assistance provided by the IOM towards the protection of migrant workers' rights, conduct research and build capacity on gathering labour migration data.

Madam Deputy Speaker, with funding from the Migration Partnership Trust Fund, IOM is already collaborating closely with the Ministry on the project: Labour Mobility for Sustainable Development and Climate Resilience in the Pacific. This initiative is being carried out in collaboration with the International Labour Organisation (ILO).

Madam Deputy Speaker, as part of this project, IOM will help Fiji build its National Labour Mobility Policy and Strategy. I wish to thank the IOM for their assistance and dedication towards the Fiji Government in sharing their experiences and resources to improve Fiji's Labour Mobility Programmes and efforts.

Madam Deputy Speaker, this collaborative approach for having an MOU was also discussed during our stakeholders meeting. These stakeholders are the Ministry of Education, Ministry of

Finance, Office of the Prime Minister and the Office of the Solicitor-General, during the consultation process for Cabinet endorsement to develop the Fiji National Labour Mobility Policy Framework and Strategy for Sustainable Development and Climate Resilience.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Honourable Minister, in light of the fact that if you are navigating labour mobility, it is quite a difficult task. Can you please tell Parliament that in terms of the collaboration with the UN based organisation, has the country's needs assessment being done already, and if it has been done, will we be seeing the outcome of that?

HON. A.D. SINGH.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I thank honourable Koya for the question. That is part of the exercise, Madam Deputy Speaker.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Madam Deputy Speaker, a quick question to the honourable Minister, we are hearing mixed messages about the benefits and, of course, the challenges we face as well. Will the work undertaken by IOM include the benefits to the economy of the receiving countries as against ours, because in some sectors, it would have been better if people remain here in Fiji, rather than go abroad? So, the benefits to the economy of the receiving countries versus the benefit it brings to us and the individual workers.

HON. A.D. SINGH.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I thank the honourable Leader of the Opposition for that question. It is part of the statistics, the data that we are collecting and the strategies will be drawn up thereafter.

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Thank you. We will move on now to the third of our 14 Oral Questions today. I now call upon the honourable Assistant Minister for Education to ask Question No. 179.

HON. I.S. VANAWALU.- Thank you, Madam Speaker, I believe this question was withdrawn.

(Question No. 179/2024 withdrawn)

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- That question has been withdrawn, and I understand there might be a Ministerial Statement that will follow later on this week.

Update on Velovelo Foreshore Land
(Question No. 180/2024)

HON. K.K. LAL asked the Government, upon notice.

Can the honourable Minister for Lands and Mineral Resources update Parliament on the Velovelo foreshore land at Lautoka which was under development for industrial purposes?

HON. F.W.V. VOSAROGO.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I thank honourable Ketan Lal for the question this morning. I, perhaps wish to begin by addressing a point of clarity that there is no such development that was undertaken by Government known as Velovelo Foreshore Development in Lautoka. What was undertaken by Government was an adjacent parcel of real estate which is called the Wairabetia Economic Zone Development. It is right next to each other, but they share the same parcel of foreshore.

By way of an update, Madam Deputy Speaker, that development that was undertaken by Government in Wairabetia of which the Approval to Lease was issued in 2017, has now been

completed. The peripheral survey has been approved, and the dry part of the leased land had been approved in January 2024. We continue to liaise with the Ministry of Trade, who are ultimately going to be the organiser of the development around that piece of land. What may have been the cause of delay from this development, which was first hatched between then and now, was the time taken between Government and iTLTB negotiations with the iTaukei landowners, who are owners of the parcels of land needed to be acquired.

A portion of the money that was set aside for this development, perhaps to the tune of a little over \$640,000 was paid to iTLTB for the lease. With the preliminary work, such as the acquisition and the periphery survey of the land completed, we will soon be handing over to the Ministry of Trade the leases from iTLTB through the Ministry of Lands and Mineral Resources, and once the leases have been registered, the Ministry of Trade will have their own plans on how to roll out that programme.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Honourable Minister, in terms of this Wairabetia lot, I know that FNP was actually involved in this and they had moved that special economic zone to Navutu also. But this spot, will it also entail getting a foreshore lease done for that particular part, specifically because, from what I understand, it has one of the deepest seaports in that particular area for future development? Once it is all complete, will it include some foreshore with respect to that particular development, whether it is industrial or commercial?

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I think ideally when we are looking at that real estate in Lautoka, we are looking at expanding to real estate well beyond the dry land. It has always been the ideal, that at some point, we are going to acquire or move the development beyond the high-water mark because that is where the real development would be. There is a huge amount of State foreshore beyond that, so I think that is going to be the real prime estate in this whole development.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.-Honourable Minister, one of the sensitive and controversial issues as well when it comes to foreshore development is the risk assessment, particularly, considering the value of the properties. This is particularly from a risk reduction perspective. There has been a lot of discussions on this issue previously from the real estates and from Municipal Councils that the price of properties are affected because of the risk assessments that are done on foreshore developments and existing properties. My question to the honourable Minister is, how is this being taken care of or progressed, given the plan that has already been undertaken?

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- Is this in relation only to Wairabetia or generally as a question?

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Wairebetia as foreshore development and for other foreshore developments as well.

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- At the moment, Madam Deputy Speaker, as I have clarified, Wairabetia is not a foreshore development, it is a dry land lease development. It can progress to a foreshore development, but that part is not yet confirmed.

2021 Pacific Literacy and Numeracy Assessment
(Question No. 181/2024)

HON. S. TUBUNA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Education update Parliament on the outcomes of the 2021 Pacific Literacy and Numeracy Assessment?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Madam Deputy Speaker, just by way of information, the Pacific Islands Literacy and Numeracy Assessment (PILNA), is a three-year cycle, which was first administered in 2012 and subsequently in 2015, 2018 and 2021. The next assessment is due in 2024.

In relation to the question, the findings of the PILNA Report for the 2021 cycle highlights that Year 4 and Year 6 students in Fiji perform above the regional level in reading. However, less than half of the Year 4 students reached the expected proficiency level. In numeracy, more than half of the students in both, Year 4 and Year 6, meet or exceeded the minimum proficiency level. Data from this assessment also revealed that girls out-perform boys in numeracy, reading and writing.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I had shared the data from this Report with the Ministry's Curriculum Advisory Services and the District Office of the Ministry, so intervention programmes are implemented which, in turn, are monitored from the school and at district level. One of the strategies is the improvement of reading and numeracy progress trackers in the Fiji Education Management Information System (FEMIS) dashboard. Currently, a coordinator for LANA phonics is working on these reading and numeracy progress trackers for the follow-up and feedback, which is an ongoing activity, with continuous monitoring done at the school and divisional level.

Madam Deputy Speaker, it is important that Fiji continues with this programme, since this is initiated by the regional Ministers of Education. So, PILNA addresses the targets identified in the Pacific Regional Education Framework (PacREF) in Sustainable Development Goal 4 by analysing and measuring results that provide the evidence of education quality for national governments and regional organisations.

HON. H. CHAND.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I am sure the Ministry has analysed the 2021 Pacific Literacy and Numeracy Assessment. I am interested in the performance of students schooling in remote areas. How did the rural remote and maritime students do compare to students in urban schools?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Madam Deputy Speaker, as I have said, the next cycle is due in 2024 and we can provide the information when the assessment is done.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I want to thank the honourable Minister for Education for his response to the question. The PILNA findings also showed that teachers have insufficient time for slow learners. I just read recently in Australia, they need about 20,000 ECE teachers, so there is a high demand for ECE teachers. We know that at that initial stage, if children are taught well in primary, they will do well in Years 4 and above, which has been tested. So, my question to you, honourable Minister for Education is, how are you going to address this particular finding from the Report?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Madam Deputy Speaker, this is an ongoing problem that has continuously been faced by Governments. In the Denarau Declaration documents, this has also been highlighted as part of the thematic areas that needed to be reviewed by the Ministry of Education and we are currently working on the implementation of the Declaration, addressing issues that you have highlighted.

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Thank you very much, honourable Members. It is 10.27 a.m. and we will take a tea break. The second bell will ring at 11.00 a.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 10.24 a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 11.00 a.m.

Measures to Address the Litter Act 2008
(Question No. 185/2024)

HON. A. BIA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, Climate Change, Environment, Civil Service, Information, Public Enterprises and Veteran Affairs inform Parliament on measures being undertaken by the Ministry of Environment to enforce the Litter Act 2008?

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I thank the honourable Member for his question. Protecting our environment from pollutants and waste is in the interest of everyone. However, we unfortunately continue to see the disregard for this important requirement.

Our island and its unique biodiversity and ecosystems are our inheritance. But before I go on, I would like to just comment on the question answered by the honourable Minister for Education about education and what we do when we grow up. It is exactly the same as our educating the populace on litter and the evils of littering.

When I came back from Tonga, I came back with a video recording of the trip we made to watch whales. I showed it to my great grandson who is in kindergarten, and he said, "What's that papa?" I said, "It's a whale." He looked at it and said, "That's not a whale." I said, "What is it?" He said, "Orca." And then went on to say, "That's a killer whale." Boy, kindergarten! What are we not doing right?

Our island's a unique ecosystem must be protected, unfortunately many of us have bad habits. In my trips to China and Japan and experiences of clean roads and roadsides, et cetera, I do not know whether I was driven through the VIP route which was clean before we drove through, but generally it is all clean. When we tried to enforce the Act, but the enforcement is not really discouraging enough, the fine is \$40; whether you dump a car, dump a fridge or plastic bag and get prosecuted, it is \$40.

The Litter Decree or Act and its amendment is now being reviewed, including the container deposits for bottlers and those that use plastic containers. As I have said, the fines are only \$40 and if you do not pay that within 30 days, you would be prosecuted. The Ministry had been diligently working on strengthening enforcement, which is really the issue, not the Act itself, it is the enforcement of the Act.

There have been 18 training workshops for public and non-public authorities in Fiji, a total of 598 Litter Prevention Officers have been trained and appointed. In 2019 during the FijiFirst Government, all 14 Provinces sent Provincial Conservation Officers and Litter Enforcement Officers to be trained under the Act of 2008.

There has been a training plan for new Litter Prevention Officers that has been developed for this fiscal year but despite the progress, we recognise that the Litter Act is now outdated. It lacks the definitions and differentiations that is needed in many cases to enable effective policing and enforcement.

There is an immediate need to introduce regulations to further enable the Enforcement Officers for the enforcement of this Act. However, introducing the regulations under the Act, it

presents its own problematic issues due to the nature of the meaning of the provisions of that Act. For example, the Act does not create sufficient differentiation within its definitions to reflect the difference in scale, as I mentioned earlier, and the implications of the different offences.

The fixed penalties, as I have said, is \$40, whether it is a used refrigerator that is no longer serviceable or in use and dropping paper wrappers on the side of the road or on parks. Instead, the Act only differentiates between litter and dangerous litter. The definition of dangerous litter is focussed mostly on the immediate danger to people. It does not include consideration of long-term dangers to the environment, as it continues to rust and pollute the environment they are in, whether its water, sea or on hard ground.

Furthermore, irrespective of those problematic definitions, there is no difference in the fines as I said earlier. Madam Deputy Speaker, the fixed penalty is \$40, it is not a deterrent. It is important to note that the penalty for corporate bodies that commits an offence is \$2,000, irrespective of the type and volume of litter that they deposit. It is wholly insufficient in the case of significant environmental offenses and the Litter Act only applies to lose definition of public places and the demarcation of boundaries for litter enforcement is not really clearly defined.

The Act is being reviewed and consultation is now in progress to bring the reviewed Act to Cabinet. But the Ministry acknowledges the existing gaps in the Litter Act of 2008 and its amendment in 2010 and the need to strengthen the enforcement and implementation of the Act through the thorough review which is on-going right now.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Madam Deputy Speaker, and I also like to thank the honourable Prime Minister for his response. I do understand the problems associated with the Litter Decree and he has rightly pointed it out, but I find that there is a disconnect between what students are taught in the schools and what they practice at home. In rural areas there is no disposal waste collection services, so the parents usually say, “take this rubbish and dump it.” That habit continues when they come out in cities and towns and we need to also look at this issue rather seriously as to how we can roll out this waste collection service across the country, that might help in educating our young minds.

Honourable Prime Minister my other question related to this particular topic is the enforcement. There is no money allocated for the enforcement of the Litter Decree. Do you think when you will be reviewing this legislation you are going to come to Parliament with a law and can you put a dollar value on it as well for the implementation of the Act?

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, yes, that will be done. I would like to comment on your remark on rural areas, maybe some rural areas, many of the villages have very strict litter laws according to the traditional leadership of the land. So, the answer basically is yes, that will be included in the review and the provincial councils enforce the *benu ca* rules in the villages.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Madam Deputy Speaker, honourable Prime Minister every year we do the Leptospirosis, Typhoid, Dengue and Diarrhoea (LTDD) campaign for almost all the agencies of government. You have highlighted about the household litter but one of the big issues we have now, Sir, is old automobiles, cars including tyres as well. Tyres is a big threat.

My question, Sir, is on recycling, part of the review, probably if I may ask, if it can be considered that we make advantage of some of these wastes, to convert it again into better use. The question is, has there been consideration on this in terms of the review that is being undertaken?

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, yes, that is also being taken into account

and there are already recyclers of rubber tyres who break them down into almost dust and that is shipped away to recycling factories overseas. However, we break them down and then send them overseas. Yes, that is part of the review.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Madam Deputy Speaker, one of the things that I have noticed when you go overseas and people walk their dogs, they have little plastic bags. When the dogs do their business, it is their responsibility to clean it. As a person that does not own dogs in Nakasi, I noticed that people there when the dogs have to do their business, they open the gates, let the dogs around, do their business and come back in. So, honourable Prime Minister, would you put in the law that makes it mandatory for people when their dogs do business outside, it is their responsibility to go and pick it up or if not for them to be fined?

(Laughter)

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Honourable Prime Minister, would you like to answer that question?

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- Madam Speaker, Sir, the point is taken.

Replacement of Hanging Bridge - Bua Lomanikoro
(Question No. 186/2024)

HON. J.R. VOCEA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Public Works, Meteorological Services and Transport update Parliament as to when the damaged hanging bridge in Bua Lomanikoro which was severely damaged in 2015 will be replaced?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Thank you, honourable Assistant Minister, for that question. I was just thinking about the questions relating to specific locations. I remember that in the last Parliament, we were barred from asking such questions on specific locations. I am not sure whether it was the previous government or the previous government working with the Speaker.

(Laughter)

There has been a proliferation of questions specific to locations...

HON. K.K. LAL.- Just answer.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- ... but what I wanted to say the difference is that we are accepting it in this Government ...

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- ...and in the last government, it was strongly opposed and disallowed.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- That is the feature of the new Government, we accept questions on specific locations and even operational matters.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Now the thing is here, right?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- A feature of good, open government.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Hogwash!

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- For this one, it is quite an interesting one because we had originally planned for a modular bridge (vehicle bridge). A scope had been done but the *Bose Vanua* had a meeting with the *Turaga Tui Bua* and did not agree with the vehicle. If you go there, it crosses directly into the village.

I suppose when you construct a road, and I had mentioned yesterday the framework for land acquisition and the need to look at social, economic and the various implications, it is commendable that they look at those implications, given the social issues we face today and the access of vehicles into our villages. Yes, we have noticed access of vehicles, it is good for the village in terms of transporting whatever is needed for the village for positive developments, but it can also give access for transport of illegal items such as drugs.

The framework in terms of looking at before you construct a road, what you need to comply with, that needs to be strengthened as we move forward in terms of the challenging environment we face and what the *vanua*, the community or the village would see as what is good for them. For this particular one, that was the feedback. We are looking at instead of that, a walkway and the Ministry, towards the end of last year, had worked on the design and scope so it is a longstanding request.

We have not specifically budgeted for it, but I have asked the Ministry for us to relook at that and also see what we can do in terms of the current budget. There are various stakeholders including our development partners who have expressed interest in funding walkways and bridges in terms of difficult areas such as this. In fact, there was a proposal I was reading regarding modular walkways and bridges which was done, but it is specified the various areas in Fiji, I think the former Minister is aware of it and that is something we also taking up in our discussions with our development partners.

HON. A.N. TUICOLO.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I ask to withdraw this Oral Question that is under my name. *Vinaka*.

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- I apologise, yes, I understand that, that question has been withdrawn.

(Question No. 187/2024 withdrawn)

Fiji Aviation Academy's Strategy in Saving Fiji Airways
(Question No. 188/2024)

HON. RATU R.S.S. VAKALALABURE asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Tourism and Civil Aviation update Parliament on what strategy was in place by the Fiji Aviation Academy in saving Fiji Airways over \$US10 million (FJD22.7 million) in training bills annually?

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise to provide an update on the strategic initiatives undertaken by the Fiji Airways particularly through the establishment of the Fiji Airways Aviation Academy. This Academy is not only an infrastructure investment, it is a testament to our national airlines commitment to self-reliance, operational excellence and sustainable financial management.

In an increasingly competitive global aviation market, the ability to manage costs while maintaining high standards of training and safety is paramount. The Fiji Airways Aviation Academy embodies this vision by providing a robust solution to the airlines pilot training needs, yielding significant financial and operational benefits.

At the heart of the Fiji Airways Aviation Academy's success lies a meticulously crafted strategy aimed at achieving self-sufficiency in pilot training. This approach has enabled the airline to realise substantial cost savings amounting to US\$10 million of FJ\$22.7 million annually. Allow me to elaborate more on the matter.

One of the most significant advantages of the Academy is its ability to conduct all necessary training internally. This includes initial type ratings, common type ratings, recurrent training, remedial training and licence conversion. By eliminating the need to outsource these training activities to third-party providers, Fiji Airways has avoided substantial fees that would otherwise be paid to external training centres. This move ensures that every dollar invested in training remains within the company, contributing directly to its financial stability.

Traditionally, pilots were required to travel to international training locations such as Singapore, Hong Kong, Honolulu, Brisbane, Seattle and Bangkok. These not only incur training fees but also significant costs related to accommodation and subsistence. With the establishment of the Fiji Airways Aviation Academy, these costs have been entirely eliminated. Pilots can now undergo all necessary training within the country, reducing the financial burden associated with overseas travel.

Beyond accommodation and subsistence, the costs with onward travel to these international locations were also considerable. The Academy has effectively eradicated these expenses, further contributing to the impressive annual savings achieved by Fiji Airways. While the financial savings achieved through the Fiji Airways are significant, the benefits extend far beyond cost reduction.

The Academy has also introduced a range of operational efficiencies that are driving the airline's success on multiple fronts. The Academy has also had a profound impact on pilot productivity. Previously, pilots were required to travel long distances to attend simulator training, which resulted in the loss of duty days and additional rest periods.

In conclusion, the Fiji Airways Aviation Academy represents a bold and forward-thinking investment in the future of our national airline. The financial savings and operational efficiencies realised through this initiative are a testament to the strategic vision and leadership that guide Fiji Airways.

However, beyond the numbers, the Academy symbolises something greater, it embodies our collective commitment to building a resilient and self-sufficient airline that can weather the challenges of a dynamic industry. It underscores the importance of innovation, not just as a means of survival, but as a driver of progress and excellence. Let this be a reminder to us all that that with the right strategy, we can transform challenges into opportunities, and pave the way for a brighter, more prosperous future for Fiji Airways and the nation as a whole.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Honourable Minister, I think at last count, we had about 120-odd local pilots engaged with Fiji Airways and some of them actually coming out of the Academy. In light of the fact that we have extended our fleet in terms of the A350-900s that we have, the Academy itself has flight simulators that are A330 and below the 787, I think it is, and then the smaller planes. Will the Academy be investing in A350 simulators, if there is a need to do so in terms of part of its expansion programme because I understand also that there is going to be accommodation, et cetera,

being provided? It is good to see that the honourable Minister is flying the flag of Fiji Airways.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Thank you honourable Koya. The simulators at the airport represent the entire fleet of the airline right now, and A350 is also part of it now, honourable Koya. I think in about two weeks' time, there will be two more that will be launched at the Academy in Nadi. Fiji Airways has about 2,200 staff and the number of pilots has also increased quite significantly and the vast majority, more than 90 percent are locals. Just to add, the Academy is also hosting pilots from other countries to come and train in Nadi. So that is quite a significant accomplishment on part of Fiji Airways.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Madam Deputy Speaker, this is again one of the great initiatives of the Bainimarama Government and as you have mentioned that the training is also provided to international and regional airlines. My question to you is, how much revenue has Fiji Airways generated from providing this training to regional and international airlines? We know how much it has saved but how much money has it generated?

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Good question, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am afraid I cannot give an exact number right now but I can assure you, it is quite significant because some of these simulators are fully booked throughout the year as an indication of the revenue potential of these simulators. I can provide that later, Madam Deputy Speaker.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- That is what these Ministers say, they do not provide the answers.

(Chorus of interjections)

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Perhaps, a Written Question at the next sitting.

(Chorus of interjections)

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Order!

Honourable Members, please join me in welcoming a delegation from the National Diet of Japan, Mr. Fujikawa Masahito, the Chairman of the Special Committee on Official Development Assistance, Mr. Ejima Kiyoshi, Deputy Secretary-General of the Liberal Democratic Party with their delegation and they are in the company of the Ambassador of Japan His Excellency Michi. Welcome Excellency, welcome Sirs.

Commercial Agriculture Development Programme
(Question No. 189/2024)

HON. S. NAND asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Agriculture and Waterways update Parliament on which sectors were assisted under the \$2 million Commercial Agriculture Development Programme in the 2023-2024 financial year?

HON. V.T.T.K. RAYALU.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I thank the honourable Member for the question. In response the Commercial Agricultural Development Programme was created in September 2021 to address the establishment and improvement of commercial agriculture as highlighted in the Ministry of Agriculture and Waterways' Strategic Priority 4 under the Five-Year Strategic Development Plan.

Madam Deputy Speaker, in the 2023-2024 Financial Year, a total of \$2 million was allocated which supported nine exporters and eleven food processors. This support focused on expanding, processing and storage capacities through improving electricity supply with the purchase of generators, value adding machines, cooler rooms, upgrading of infrastructure and the purchase of solar machines.

Madam Deputy Speaker, one of the supported exporters Kaiming Agro Processing Ltd has managed to increase its storage capacity from 300 tonnes to 450 tonnes of matured ginger. The exporter was able to purchase an additional 150 tonnes of matured ginger from farmers in November 2023, and early this year, 2024. This has provided much needed market to accommodate the high volume of ginger crops on the ground, as I highlighted in Parliament.

Following discussions with the Fiji Trade Commission in the United States of America, Kaiming Agro Processing Ltd has reached an agreement with the US importers to purchase matured ginger. This ginger undergoes value addition at their processing plants before export to the US market.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Ministry, through the CADP programme, also supported Juice Fiji Pte Limited with three ginger processing machines to increase the intake of ginger from farmers in Colo-i-Suva, Qiolevu, Lomaivuna and Tailevu areas. The company was producing 1,000 litre bottles of juice a week before the support, and it is producing up to 4,000 litre bottles a week to-date. They have increased their volume of ginger purchased from 200 kilogrammes a week to one tonne a week for processing.

The New Valley Processors (Fiji) Pvt Ltd in Sabeto, Nadi has been supported with the three-phase power electricity unit to help the company process cassava, *dalo*, chillies and vegetables to meet the local demand, as well as for exports to New Zealand and Australia. The exporter has been working together with partners in community development and 2,000 ladies from eight districts covering Keiyasi to Nadarivatu in the highlands of Nadroga/Navosa to plant 200,000 bongo chillie plants. With the support provided to New Valley Processors, they will now be able to process weekly 340 tonnes of cassava, 100 tonnes of *dalo*, 10 tonnes of chillies and 10 tonnes of vegetables for the export market.

Madam Deputy Speaker, support was also provided to Tavioka Organic Pty Ltd with the three-phase electricity power unit supplied to the factory to run the production of cassava flour using the cassava flour machines. With the support provided, the company is able to produce up to six tonnes to eight tonnes of cassava flour per day, as compared to two tonnes per day before the support was provided. As part of our ongoing commitment to help farmers access markets, the Ministry will continue to expand the support directed to food processors and exporters on agriculture export related produce that achieves sustainable economic growth and export competitiveness and boost value addition and diversification.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Ministry remains dedicated to decreasing the importation of dairy products, which was valued at around \$90 million in the last fiscal year. On this end, the Ministry has allocated \$110,000 to assist in the commercialisation of dairy farming operations. Madam Deputy Speaker, 21 dairy farmers have been assisted with fencing materials and dairy sheds to expand their farms to a commercial level and supply milk to the formal market.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the value of wheat imports was around \$140.8 million in 2023, and the Ministry has supported Women's Groups to the sum of \$100,000 to purchase 30 machines for the production of cassava flour as a substitute to imported wheat flour. Support to the Women's Groups have also been provided in the form of capacity building, training on the harvesting and

processing of cassava to produce flour. The broader objective is for the Women's Groups to be formed into co-operatives and combine their flour production firstly to meet domestic needs then to commercialise their operations to supply cassava flour to the formal market.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the \$150,000 was allocated to support the commercialisation of high value crops. These include green pearl guava, dragon fruit, mango, avocado, bananas, coconut breadfruit and citrus which includes oranges, lime and lemon. Through their support, 420 farmers have been trained in fruit tree propagation techniques to rapidly increase the numbers of trees and yield.

The support also include the establishment of nurseries and its associated capacity building trainings for farmers to improve their fruit orchards. There is a huge potential for these high-value crops to meet the hotel sector demands, however, the volume of production, consistency and quality of these high-value crops needs to be improved before the hotel markets can be accessed.

Madam Deputy Speaker, \$100,000 was allocated to support 10 youth farming clusters to raise their farm operations to a commercial level. This include the provision of infrastructure materials to construct farm sheds, water tanks for rainwater harvesting. The farm sheds and water supply was provided to assist with the harvesting, processing and storage of farm produce for the formal markets.

Madam Deputy Speaker, considering the characteristics and nature of agriculture, it is anticipated that the result of these interventions will become evident in the not too distant future. This is an opportunity to shape the future of our rural dwellers in a new era of prosperity and progress for our beloved nation.

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- We have a supplementary question from honourable Koya.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Honourable Minister, from the \$2 million that was part of the development programme, I only heard you speak about one organic farmer that was assisted. Because it such a huge value-add to us in terms of getting more money to our farmers, was that \$2 million or did part of that \$2 million have a dedicated portion to our organic farmers or looking at creating more organic farmers?

HON. V.T.T.K. RAYALU.- Yes, I agree with the honourable Member that organic farming is a high value method of farming in terms of the demand for organic products worldwide and the Ministry has dedicated personnel working on organic farming. In fact, years ago we have already developed the organic standards through been farming with the help of Pacific Community (SPC), but I do agree with the honourable Member that there should be more done by the Ministry in terms of developing the organic production even though it is a niche market.

HON. S. NAND.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I must thank the honourable Minister for a very comprehensive reply. Listening to him, I see a large chunk of the assistance has gone to the exporters and the processors of the agriculture product. Can the honourable Minister explain why a significant check was not used to assist the commercial farmers in leveraging their production so they can increase their production and then it goes to the processors? Development should be on the farm first and then to the processors.

HON. V.T.T.K. RAYALU.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I thank the honourable Member for that question. It is really chicken and egg and egg and chicken; hen and egg, egg and hen situation. I had already informed the House previously, that we are facing problems in the export of fresh agriculture products to our traditional export markets. I had already stated also that this is the way we want to go. We want to develop agro-processing and value addition locally, so that, first of all,

we get our people to get used to consuming locally produce products first before we even think of exports. When we assist the agro processors going into value addition, the moment their capacity increases like I have made known this morning, it is the farmers that benefit directly.

In commercial farming you have to produce for a market, it is either you produce for a market and you have a ready-made contract done or you will lose out and all your production will go to waste and it has happened. We are learning from history and trying to do something about it. In this case, as we have heard this morning, Madam Deputy Speaker, the agro processors that we have assisted have increased their capacity to buy local agriculture produce and that in itself is a big positive. I do understand where my colleague is coming from, but we have other programmes that assist production directly within the Ministry's budget.

Status of Standing Tree Compensation
(Question No. 190/2024)

HON. I.S. VANAWALU asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Lands and Mineral Resources update Parliament of the current status of Standing Tree Compensation for landowning units whose land were leased to the State for water catchment purposes?

HON. F.W.R.VOSAROGO.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I thank honourable Vanawalu this morning. Perhaps, may I be permitted within the time available just to explain this, rather interesting, but quite often misread and not a lot of accurate information is out in the public domain about this important topic.

As we are all aware, standing trees are important, and play a very critical role in water catchment areas as they stabilise the soil and reduce erosion. Secondly, they regulate water flow to mitigate floods and droughts. Thirdly, more importantly, is they purify water thus improving the water quality that we uptake in our tanks everyday.

By way of a legal framework, Madam Deputy Speaker, section 5 of the State Lands Act 1945, provides that any land taken on lease by the State shall be made out to the Director of Lands. Water catchment leases are currently leased under this provision as it is a lease for public purpose in the provision of water to all.

On behalf of the Government, the Director of Lands negotiates with the landowning units as well as with iTLTB, whilst rivers and streams themselves, the ground upon which water flows from hills to river belongs to the State for public use. The catchment dry areas around the rivers and streams belongs to mostly all of these catchment areas that belong to *iTaukei* landowners.

Madam Deputy Speaker, Fiji has no existing policy on Standing Trees Compensation. Currently, compensation for Standing Trees is being guided by a Cabinet Decision of 1987 which provides that should any merchantable timber be removed, royalty is to be paid. I emphasise that the payment is upon removal of the tree. But since water catchment leases condition that lessee, that is, the Director of Lands, is leasing the catchment area shall not dispose or by sale take or injure any forest, trees or otherwise any forest produce growing upon the demised land without the written consent of iTLTB, and such conditions as to the payment of royalty or otherwise prescribed by the Forest Regulations as the lessor may direct, consequently compensation is only applied to trees or forest which have been fell or removed. But because the primary purpose of the catchment area is to maintain the quality of water therefore, all standing trees around it are not fell and therefore, not compensatable. At the moment, as I had mentioned before, there are no policies on Standing Trees

on catchment areas and as usual, as one would expect that payments can and will only be made if there is a Cabinet directive or, of course, if there is a change in law.

Madam Deputy Speaker, recently, in a Cabinet decision in 2024, we have approved a paper on Standing Trees Compensation for Water Catchment Leases. The review will also include the development of a policy which is yet to be brought back to Cabinet and in the formulation of that policy, there is going to be strong consultations with the Ministry of Fisheries and Forestry, of course, the Ministry of Finance, the Lands Valuation Chief Valuer and the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs. After the formulation of this policy, we should be able to have a very clear pathway and an executable document on how to deal with Standing Trees that exist on water catchment areas.

Curbing Drug-Related Offences and HIV Cases
(Question No. 191/2024)

HON. V. LAL asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services inform Parliament on what measures have been taken to curb the surge in drug-related offences among young people and the doubling of HIV cases among our youths in recent years?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I thank the honourable Member for his question. The global picture of HIV is decreasing, in comparison to the last decade, and Fiji's story is a bit different. Fiji is showing to be the second fastest growing nation with new HIV cases in the Asia-Pacific region, and we are second only to the Philippines.

While HIV cases have significantly increased over the years, in 2023, the Government has exposed the issue of Injectable Drug Use (IDU) as a significant issue in Fiji. In 2024 alone, Fiji has seen in the first six months of the year, we have had seen 552 new HIV cases in Fiji of which 15 percent were secondary to Injectable Drug Use and this is the first time Fiji has noted this increase. The question is asking what measures have been taken.

I am pleased to highlight that the Ministry is committed to safeguarding the wellbeing of our youths by combining awareness, prevention and community engagement. In light of these challenges, the Ministry has taken steps to strengthen its HIV response and drug use through:

- (1) The development of national strategic plans, partnership with civil society organisations, and implementation of prevention, diagnostics, treatment and care programmes.
- (2) Leading the Harm Reduction and Rehabilitation sub-committee of the Counter Narcotics Committee in managing the activities of the Committee's action plans.
- (3) Efforts made to increase access to HIV testing and treatment services across the nation in a decentralised manner, promoting harm reduction initiatives and reducing stigma and discrimination against individuals affected by HIV and drug use.
- (4) Finalising the Fiji National HIV Surge Strategy 2024-2027 which will be submitted to Cabinet.

That strategy has five key priority areas and support the development of the strategic plan which addresses the need to reduce HIV transmissions and expedite public health, treatment care, human right and social justice for HIV and drug use.

For this financial year, Madam Deputy Speaker, the Government has allocated a budget of \$200,000 for the HIV/AIDS Prevention and Control Programmes and the Ministry will explore

additional funding option through donors and other relevant stakeholders who will contribute to the implementing strategic framework.

As I had mentioned, Madam Deputy Speaker, it is an issue for Fiji, and it is something not only the Ministry of Health is responsible for taking care of it. It is a whole of Government and whole of society approach and what the Ministry is currently doing right now, and we are grateful with the development partners for assisting us in this space.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, with 70 percent spike in newly reported HIV cases from 2022 to 2023 is really alarming for our beloved nation. Will the Ministry of Health consider boosting funding to provide a range of testing options at community-based testing and early antenatal care tests for all pregnant women?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Testing for antenatal care has been there for some time now, in terms of testing for certain number of diseases, that is part of antenatal care. But nevertheless, as rightly mentioned, the point of care testing, that is something that the Ministry is trying to enhance or improve on when it is decentralising the point of care testing right down to the sub-divisional hospital and health centre, if it may be. What we are seeing with the rise in numbers now is mostly attributed to the increase in the number of testing.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Honourable Minister, given that a lot of HIVs have been attributed to injectable drugs, is there any consideration of programmes around controlling the sale of syringes or Safe Syringe Programmes? Is there any consideration of things around that area?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Thank you, honourable Usamate. There are programmes through which the surge strategy will try and incorporate but it has to be contextualised in our setting. One is, as you had mentioned, the Safe Syringe Programme. It has to be seen to be not only reducing the transmission from injectable drug use but also from the perspective of, are we advocating for more drug use. So, it has to be done in the right context and it is also included in the surge strategy that will be a discussion that has to be done, with not only the Ministry or Government but with the relevant stakeholders.

MOU Between Suva City Council and Pacific Polytech
(Question No. 192/2024)

HON. S. TUBUNA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Housing and Local Government update Parliament on the Memorandum of Understanding that was signed between the Suva City Council and Pacific Polytech?

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- I thank the honourable Member for the question. The engagement with Pacific Polytech is a strategic initiative that marks a significant milestone with ongoing institutional reforms at the Suva City Council. This partnership is not just about immediate improvements, it is a forward-looking collaboration aimed at positioning Suva City Council as a leader in municipal governance, climate resilience and sustainable development in the region.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the initial engagement with Pacific Polytech was a result of proactive efforts by the Suva Council's Special Administrator who recognised the critical need for institutional strengthening to meet the demands of modern urban governance. This MOU which was signed on 12th August, 2024, is a product of thorough planning, consultations and a shared vision for

the future of Suva City. It is worth noting that the agreement is for three years since the execution of the Memorandum of Understanding.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the MOU is a framework that outlines the responsibilities of both parties and sets the foundation for a long-term partnership. Engagement is a transformative initiative that will elevate the capacity of Suva City Council to deliver enhanced services to its citizens. The key areas of focus include:

- (1) Capacity building through tailored training programmes for SCC employees, particularly those in waste management and related services will receive upskilling opportunities that are aligned with international best practices. This will not only improve service delivery but also empower a workforce to contribute more effectively to the Council's objectives.
- (2) Climate change mitigation, the partnership includes the development of innovative strategies to address climate related challenges particularly in waste management. This is aligned to the Coalition Government's commitment on environmental sustainability and climate resilience, ensuring that Suva City is better prepared to face challenges of the future.
- (3) Operational excellence, the first implementation of the MOU ensures that training is timely, relevant and aligned with the immediate and long-term needs of the Council. Each phase will be followed by a review and evaluation to ensure that we are meeting the goals and continuously improving.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the benefits of partnership are as follows:

- (1) Formal qualification - SCC employees will have an opportunity to gain recognised qualifications, enhancing their career prospects and contributing to a more skilled and motivated workforce.
- (2) Enhanced service delivery - With the improved skills and knowledge, staff performance will see a marked improvement, leading to a more efficient, and more effective service delivery.
- (3) More strategic and social issue - by outsourcing training to experts such as Pacific Polytech, SCC staff can focus on their core responsibilities ensuring that resources are used where they are most needed.

This initiative, Madam Deputy Speaker, is a testament to our Coalition Government's commitment to building a stronger and more resilient Suva City Council. It reflects a broader vision on municipal councils across Fiji, a vision of modern government cities that are equipped to meet the challenges of the 21st century.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the financial investment in this engagement has been carefully calculated to ensure that it delivers its value for money. The courses are within the allocated budget for SCC's institutional strengthening initiatives that are supported by a combination of operational funds, grant funding and contributions from development partners. It is not just an expenditure, it is a strategic investment to the future of Suva City. Moreover, the Suva City Council is committed to sharing the knowledge and best practices gained from this engagement with other municipal councils across Fiji. We are actively planning workshops, seminars, distribution of operational reports to ensure the benefits of this initiative are felt beyond Suva City.

Madam Deputy Speaker, this partnership with Pacific Polytech is complemented to the ongoing work by the Local Government in New Zealand, particularly in areas of waste management

and climate resilience. Aligned with aligned with Local Government in New Zealand standards, we are ensuring that Suva City's cultural strategies are not only locally relevant but also meet international best practices. This is a clear indication of our commitment to Government's excellence.

Looking to the future, Madam Deputy Speaker, the Suva City Council's long-term plan is built on three pillars:

- (1) Continuous improvement will ensure that staff receive ongoing professional development opportunities to keep pace with the evolving demands of open governance.
- (2) Strengthening of governance, enhancing internal controls and governance framework to ensure transparency, accountability and efficiency in all operations.
- (3) Strategic partnerships will continue to build and maintain partnerships with educational institutions, local governments and international bodies to remain at the forefront of innovation and best practices.

Madam Deputy Speaker, while we acknowledge the challenges we face including staff availability, change management and financial constraints that tackle these issues at home, through careful planning, active stakeholder engagement and continuous monitoring, we are confident that the objectives of this MOU will be met and the future of Suva City Council will be brighter than ever.

HON. K.K. LAL.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I have two questions - part (a) and part (b).

- (a) Can the honourable Minister advise us if there is any monitoring involvement in this partnership or MOU between Pacific Polytech and the Suva City Council?

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Is that the first of your two follow-up questions?

HON. K.K. LAL.- Yes, Madam.

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- I think I had also shared in my response one of the key focus of this MOU, which is operational excellence where, in each phase, there will be a review as well as an evaluation, to ensure that the training meets the goals as well as the objectives of the MOU. If there is continuous improvement, that can also be reviewed by the Ministry, as well as the Suva City Council.

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Your second follow-up question, honourable Lal?

HON. K.K. LAL.- Madam Deputy Speaker, my first question was basically if Suva City Council is paying Polytech for certain trainings, and if so, we normally have FNU levy that employers pay to NTPC. If I am correct, it is a one percent levy. If Suva City Council is paying that levy to NTPC, should not Suva City Council first give the chance to NTPC and utilise that levy?

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- I think the question raised by the honourable Member is a valid one, but that levy is not only used by the city council, it is also used by ACCF as well as LTA. The objective of having this initiative is to encourage and facilitate the upskilling and capacity building within Suva City Council because there is an urgent need right now to upskill the workers, especially those who look after garbage collection, even waste management as well as other related services. Suva City Council sees the need for it and that is the reason why we have engaged Polytech to provide training to Suva City Council.

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- I can see him getting very angsty, thank you honourable Ketan, I will allow this one.

HON. K.K. LAL.- My concern here, Madam Deputy Speaker, is that the Prime Minister, the Deputy Prime Ministers raised concerns in terms of saving money for the Government and here we have Suva City Council going to Polytech and paying another set of funding for training purposes when they can utilise the same funding with NTPC and our other established universities like FNU. I hope the honourable Minister can reassure us that in future they will utilise that FNU levy that they have been paying or employees have been paying and upskill and train their workers and officers.

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, I do not think that was a question, that was a statement. Thank you, I am sure the honourable Minister has taken note of that.

Criteria for Appointment of District Advisory Councillors
(Question No. 193/2024)

HON. J. USAMATE asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management inform Parliament, if the criteria for the appointment of District Advisory Councillors have been strictly adhered to in all appointments since January 2023?

HON. S.R. DITOKA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, the question was originally supposed to be asked by honourable Nath but I suppose his gone abroad, on a visit somewhere. The nature of the question has also changed a bit. The original question simply asked the criteria for the selection of the District Advisory Councillors which I had prepared for, but I will also answer the other question that has been asked by the honourable Member. I thank the honourable Member for the question, I think it is a topic that we are all familiar with.

The main purpose of the District Advisory Council was to provide a forum for multi-ethnic and minority communities to participate in the discussion and decision-making on development issues in their respective settlements.

The District Advisory Council is a crucial component of the rural development framework. It plays an important role in the identification of development needs, as well as providing support during response to natural disasters by the Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management for communities outside of registered village boundaries in the rural and maritime areas.

There are 302 constituencies in the 16 District Advisory Councils across the country. The number of Councils and constituencies by Division are as follows:

- (1) Central Division – four Councils with 71 constituencies;
- (2) Eastern Division – one Council with eight constituencies;
- (3) Northern Division – five Councils with 81 constituencies; and
- (4) Western Division – six Councils with 142 constituencies.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the number of members in each Council varies with the lowest for the Eastern Division comprising only of eight members, and the highest number being for the Nadroga/ Navosa comprising of 30 members. The term of District Advisory Council members is two years, and the current appointments will lapse on 31st July, 2025.

The criteria for appointment, there is a guideline for administration of District Advisory Councils which clearly stipulates the criteria for appointment of District Advisory Council members. In summary, a Council should have members whose skills, experience and attributes together reflect balance, cohesion, and ability to contribute effectively to the district. It should also reflect a fair representation in terms of area, gender and ethnicity.

Madam Deputy Speaker, as per the guidelines, the criteria for appointment includes the following:

- (1) Educational requirement: The candidate must have completed Year 12 education or an equivalent qualification to ensure they can effectively read, write and provide support on all Government policies and services.
- (2) Professional and ethical standards: The candidate must uphold high professional and ethical standards reflected in their conduct.
- (3) Character and legal standing: The candidate must possess good character, be sober minded and maintain a clean police record for the past 10 years. However, Divisional Commissioners may recommend individuals based on their good character and extensive community work after rehabilitation period.
- (4) Medical fitness: The candidate must be medically fit and of sound health as certified by a medical doctor.
- (5) Preference is given to candidates under the age of 60 years.
- (6) Service record: The candidate must have a proven record of service and commitment to the district or at the community level supported by a resume and character reference from credible community figure.
- (7) Residency requirement: The candidate must be a permanent resident of the constituency they represent. They must have resided in the community for at least 12 months prior to the consideration. This must be confirmed with a letter from the District Officer.
- (8) Employment status: The candidate may hold other employment except for civil service positions.
- (9) Political neutrality: The candidate must be apolitical and not actively involved in party politics.
- (10) Financial Standing: The candidate must not be declared bankrupt.
- (11) Tax compliant: The candidate must be compliant with tax obligations.

Madam Deputy Speaker, these are the criteria for appointments to District Advisory Councils. I just like to note that the Coalition Government does not agree with having Ministerial Vetting Committee to review recommendations that are submitted from the Divisional Commissioners Offices in its efforts to ensure that it appoints members that are apolitical. There are some discussions that will be going on after this. In answer to the question regarding the criteria, yes.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I just wanted to assure the honourable Minister that the change in the question was because of the protest from Members of the Business Committee who probably went beyond the guideline to appoint some.

My question to the honourable Minister is, in 2022 during the Opening of Parliament, the Government made a commitment, and that was part of His Excellency's Address that Government will hold elections for Municipal Councils, Sugar Cane Growers Council and the Advisory Councils as well. Is that still under consideration and will Government ensure that that is done?

HON. S.R. DITOKA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, yes, that is still part of the consideration. There is quite some work to do because of the constituency boundaries that we have to draw up. We believe the lines of the constituencies that we have at the moment are quite outdated and they do not

reflect the communities that are there at the moment.

There is a lot of movement and in some places the representation that has been represented by the District Advisory Councillors does not represent the numbers of the communities that are there. We believe that there needs to be a thorough study done and that is what we are doing at the moment to make sure that the constituency boundaries for District Advisory Council is done properly before we go into the elections which we had promised.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, what my good friend had just said is totally different on the ground.

HON. P. TIKODUADUA.- *Are yaar!*

HON. P.K. BALA.- God is watching!

(Laughter)

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- What did you do?

HON. P.K. BALA.- Let us remember that. I want to make it very clear that all those Advisory Councillors that have been appointed are all political appointments. I can get a list, you will find most of them were the campaign managers of different political parties. That is alright, it all water under the bridge.

(Laughter)

Madam Deputy Speaker, my real concern is...

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Sir, I am sorry to interrupt, do you actually have a question?

HON. P.K. BALA.- Yes.

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Thank you, the bell has just gone, please ask your question?

HON. P.K. BALA.- The Councillors that have been appointed are not from that respective areas. They reside in different areas and it becomes very difficult for the community to reach out to their Advisory Councillors. Can I suggest to the honourable Minister if they can find someone from that respective area to serve the community in those districts?

HON. S.R. DITOKA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, the concerns raised by my honourable friend is duly noted and we will surely take it on board. Just before I take my seat, I just like to remind our honourable Members on the other side that when we came in, we inherited a situation that is not ideal. In one particular municipality which I will not name, there was a representative of a political party who was also Chair of the District Advisory Council over there. He was issued a Government mobile phone and had use of Government facilities as well. According to the civil servants over there, they were quite afraid for their jobs because some civil servants in the past, because of the reports of that particular District Advisory Councillor had lost their jobs. I will leave it at that and I believe what we want to do is rectify that, so that will never ever get back to that kind of situation again.

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I am aware that there are a few honourable Members who are having a lunch appointment with the delegation from Japan and I would like to keep us on time.

Written QuestionsAssistance Through *Dalo* and *Yaqona* Farming Programmes
(Question No. 182/2024)

HON. N.T. TUINACEVA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Agriculture and Waterways inform Parliament on the following:

- (a) the number of farmers that were assisted in the *dalo* and *yaqona* farming programmes in the 2023-2024 financial year;
- (b) the allocation breakdown in terms of provinces; and
- (c) the expected return on investment from each farmer?

¹ HON. V.T.T.K. RAYALU.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I have the answer to the question.

Development of the Education Sector Plan
(Question No. 183/2024)

HON. P.D. KUMAR asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Education inform Parliament on the following in relation to the development of the Education Sector Plan which was funded by the Global Partnership for Education in 2022:

- (a) the specific milestones that have been achieved from 2023;
- (b) how much of the allocated funds have been utilised, and for what specific purposes; and
- (c) what are the tentative dates for the completion of the Education Sector Plan; and how will it be implemented?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Madam Deputy Speaker, according to Standing Order 45, I² hereby submit my response.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Very efficient government.

Upgrade of Health Centres - Rural and Maritime Areas
(Question No. 184/2024)

HON. RATU R.S.S. VAKALALABURE asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services inform Parliament on the number of Health Centres in our rural and maritime areas that are earmarked for upgrade in this financial year?

¹ Editor's Note: Reply to Written Question No. 182/2024 tabled by the honourable Minister for Agriculture and Waterways under Standing Order 45(3) is appended as Annexure I.

² Reply to Written Question No. 183/2024 tabled by the honourable Minister for Education under Standing Order 45(3) is appended as Annexure II.

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Madam Deputy Speaker, according to Standing³Order 45, I hereby submit my response.

Road Accidents and Fatalities – January to July 2024
(Question No. 194/2024)

HON. N.T. TUINACEVA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Public Works, Meteorological Services and Transport inform Parliament on:

- (a) the number of road accidents and fatalities from January to July 2024;
- (b) the number of infringement notices issued during the same period; and
- (c) the number of driver licence holders given final warning, suspended or cancelled as a consequence of continuous infringement?

⁴ HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- I thank the honourable Member for the question, I will provide the answer to the question.

COMMUNICATION FROM THE SPEAKER

Deferment of Motion

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Honourable Ministers and Assistant Ministers, the honourable Leader of the Opposition and honourable Members, the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance's motion is going to be deferred until tomorrow, because as I understand it, he is travelling to Nadi soon to meet the President of the World Bank, the traditional welcome for whom we are all invited to attend at the Matua Room, Grand Pacific Hotel, at approximately 6.10 this evening.

So, honourable Members just like yesterday, this brings us to an early end to our sitting today. For those of you who are going to have lunch with the Japanese delegation, do enjoy your lunch, and I thank you all for your contributions.

Parliament is now adjourned until tomorrow at 9.30 a.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 12.23 p.m.

³ Editor's Note: Reply to Written Question No. 184/2024 tabled by the honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services under Standing Order 45(3) is appended as Annexure III.

⁴ Reply to Written Question No. 194/2024 tabled by the honourable Minister for Public Works and Meteorological Services and Transport under Standing Order 45(3) is appended as Annexure IV.

ANNEXURE I

Reply to Written Question No. 182/2024 tabled by the honourable Minister for Agriculture and Waterways (Ref. Page 1783)



MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE AND WATERWAYS
(Hon. V.T.T.K. Rayalu)

Reply to Question No. 182/2024 is as follows:

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Prime Minister, the honourable Deputy Prime Ministers, the honourable Leader of the Opposition, honourable Cabinet Ministers, honourable Member of Parliament, ladies and gentlemen; I express my gratitude to the honourable Tuinaceva for the inquiry addressed to me in my capacity as the Minister for Agriculture and Waterways.

Mr. Speaker Sir, I write in response to the important inquiries concerning the:

- (a) number of farmers that were assisted in the *dalo* and *yaqona* farming programmes in the 2023-2024 financial year;
- (b) allocation breakdown in terms of Provinces; and
- (c) expected return on investment from each farmer.

Mr. Speaker Sir, in 2023, the Total Value of National Domestic Export was estimated to be FJ\$1.3 billion in which:

- 69.4 percent (FJ\$934.2 million) was the total share of All Agriculture Commodities to the National Trade including Forest products, sugar products and fisheries products. This was an increase of 0.7 percent, as compared to 2022 (FJ\$927.5 million).
- 25.5 percent (FJ\$343.4 million) was the total share for Only Crop & Livestock Commodities (fresh, chilled and value-added products). This was an increase of 9.2 percent, as compared to 2022 (FJ\$314.5 million).
- 10.7 percent (FJ\$144.7 million) was the total share for ONLY fresh and chilled crop and livestock produce. This was an increase of 17.3 percent, as compared to 2022 (FJ\$123.3 million).

In 2023, *Yaqona* and *Dalo* continue to be in the top five agricultural export commodities:

- *Dalo*: In 2023, the export value was approximately FJ\$39.8 million (0.03 percent share to the National Trade) in which 5,608.2 metric tonnes of *Dalo* produce were exported. This was an increase of 19.2 percent, compared to the previous year.
- *Yaqona/Kava*: In 2023, the export value was approximately FJ\$38.1 million (0.02 percent share to the National Trade) in which 501 metric tonnes of *Kava* produce were exported - this was an increase of 0.6 percent, compared to the previous year.

The main export destinations for the two agricultural commodities, that is, *Yaqona*/Kava and *Dalo* include Australia, New Zealand, the USA, and other Pacific Island Countries.

(a) Yaqona/Kava Farming Programme

In the 2023-2024 financial year, under the Yaqona Farming Programme, 257 individual farmers and five farming clusters groups were assisted through the provision of planting materials, pounding machines, construction of farmhouses, drying facilities and nurseries.

Details of farmers assisted under the Yaqona Farming Programme are attached in **Annex 1**.

Dalo Farming Programme

In the 2023-2024 financial year, under the Dalo Farming Programme, 674 individual farmers and three farmer cluster groups were assisted through the provision of planting materials, agro-inputs, infrastructure development, land clearing, land preparation, technical advisory services and training.

Details of farmers assisted and supported under the Dalo Farming Programme are attached in **Annex 2**.

(b) Yaqona/Kava Farming Programme

In the 2023-2024 financial year, \$500,000 was allocated for the Yaqona Farming Programme. To ensure the further development of Fiji's Kava industry, the Programme focused on the following strategic areas:

- Provided direct assistance to proficient *yaqona* cultivators by supplying clean planting materials to guarantee the success of large scale plantations.
- Strengthened the current *yaqona* growing areas to boost production through nursery support.
- Provided infrastructural support to ensure proper drying and storage of *yaqona* to meet export standards.
- Improved the quality of kava production through timely technical support services.

Activities funded under the Yaqona/Kava Farming Programme include the following:

- Procurement of Planting Material - \$190,000;
- Pounding Machines - \$40,000;
- Drying Facilities - \$38,000;
- Farm-House - \$80,000;
- Nursery Establishment - \$32,000; and
- Monitoring and Support - \$120,000.

Dalo Farming Programme

In the 2023-2024 financial year, \$450,000 was allocated for the Dalo Farming Programme. To ensure that Fiji's *dalo* industry remains successful, the project focused on the following strategic areas:

- To increase *dalo* production from 54,751 (baseline - year 2021) tonnes to 60000 tonnes by 2024; and
- *Dalo* farming aims to achieve SDP 4, which focuses on the establishment and

enhancement of commercial agriculture.

Activities funded under the Dalo Farming Programme included the procurement of planting materials, agro-input, infrastructure development, land clearing, land preparation, technical advisory services, and implementation and support services.

The Dalo Farming Programme is a crucial program implemented by the Ministry of Agriculture and Waterways where it supported the roles of men and women in the *dalo* farming. Through the Programme, it could be observed that *dalo* farming is a collective household member activity where men, women, girls and boys are all involved in the farming process.

The process is that women and girls are involved in *dalo* suckers' sorting, selection, and making bundles during harvesting. The *dalo* land preparation, land cultivation, harvesting, and transporting are done by men and boys. The *dalo* planting and weeding are often carried out collectively, that is, men, women, girls, and boys all participate.

A detailed breakdown per geographical division and assistance provided are attached in **Annexes 1 and 2**.

(c) Yaqona/Kava Farming Programme

With the support provided to farmers under the Yaqona/Kava Farming Programme, the following are estimated to be the projected benefits and return of investment:

- Economic benefits include an increase in income received by farmers.
- Environment benefits through best farming practices adopted via intercropping and integrated farming systems with agro-forestry systems has been practiced.
- Social benefits for farmers include infrastructural development - house improvements (renovations), footpath, improvements on water systems, purchase of vehicle, et cetera.

Furthermore, the projected Return of Investment for this Programme indicates that for every dollar invested by the Government, there is an anticipated return of \$25, thereby, demonstrating the Programme's viability.

Section 1.01 Dalo Farming Programme

The investment allocated to farmers through the Dalo Farming Programme was anticipated to yield the following projected benefits or returns on investment:

- Increase in the sales of *dalo* suckers for suppliers. For instance, 20 *dalo* planting material (suckers) suppliers will benefit from the sale of 250,000 *dalo* suckers.
- Farmers can meet their social obligations - income, education and health, social and religious obligations.
- Economic benefits for farmers include infrastructural development, especially on house improvements (renovations), footpaths, improvements in water systems, et cetera.
- Increase in export revenue where potential and available arable land will be developed for agriculture purposes - *dalo* farming.
- Environmental benefits through best farming practices adopted via intercropping and integrated farming systems with agro-forestry trees will be practised.
- The project encouraged full conservation practices through Sustainable Land

Management to reduce soil erosion and land degradation.

The Return of Investment for this Programme forecasted that for every dollar the Government spends on this Programme, a return of \$5 only to prove the viability of the Programme.

ANNEX 1:

YAQONA/KAVA FARMING PROGRAMME

Division	Province	No. of Farmers Assisted	Type of Assistance	Quantity	Value of Assistance (\$)	ROI (\$)
Eastern	Kadavu	42	Cuttings	48,351	24,175.50	604,387.50
		42				
	Lau	2 (Cluster)	Cuttings	3,000	1,500	37,500
		1	Farm House	1	3,000	75,000
		1&2 Cluster				
	Lomaiviti	15	Cuttings	31,750	24,125	603,125
		1 Cluster	Yaqona Pounding Machine	1 Set	8,000	200,000
	15 & 1 Cluster					
Western	Ba	1	Yaqona Potted Seedings	400	2,000	50,000
		1				
	Ra	7	Yaqona Potted Seedings	1,250	5,000	125,000
		7				
Central	Naitasiri	1	Farmhouse	1	3,000	
		1	Nursery	1		
		11	Yaqona Cuttings	18,000	9,000	225,000
		6	Potted Seedlings	2,306	9,000	
		19				
	Serua	3	Cuttings	2,560	1,280	32,000
		1	Potted Seedlings	156	624	15,600
		4				
	Namosi	3	Cuttings	3,012	1,506	37,650
		1	Yaqona Pounding Machine	1 Set	8,000	200,000
		4				
	Rewa	1 Cooperative (Raviravi, Beqa)	Cuttings	1,816	2,724	68,100
		1 Cluster	Potted Seedlings	1,769	7,076	176,900
	Tailevu	21	Cuttings	19,934	9,967	249,175
		5	Potted Seedlings	4,182	16,728	418,200
		1 Cluster	1 Drier	1 Set	1,192	29,800
	26 & 1 Cluster Group					
Northern	Macuata	41	Cuttings	31,546	22,082.20	552,055
		5	Farmhouse	3 Sets	6,775.11	169,377.75
		3	Solar Light	3	1,885.50	47,137.50
		1	Yaqona Pounding Machine	1 Set	4,600	115,000
		50				
	Cakaudrove	19	Cuttings	32,277	16,138.50	403,462.50
		1	Farmhouse	1	3,190.94	79,773.50
		20				
	Bua	57	Cuttings	68,300	28,650	716,250
		7	Farmhouse	7		
		1	Drying Facility	1	5,000	125,000
	65					

Division	Province	No. of Farmers Assisted	Type of Assistance	Quantity	Value of Assistance (\$)	ROI (\$)
	5 Clusters & 257 Individuals				\$226,219.75	\$5,655,493.75

ANNEX 2: DALO FARMING PROGRAMME

Division	Province	No. of Farmers Assisted	Type of Assistance	Quantity	Value of Assistance (\$)	ROI (\$)
Eastern	Lomaiviti	10	Dalo Suckers	13,805	8,000	40,000
	Sub-Total	10		13,805	8,000	40,000
Western	Ba	1	Dalo Suckers	2,500	250	1,250
	NN	30	Farmers Training	1	540	2,700
	Ra	2	Dalo Suckers	7,000	1,400	7,000
	Sub-Total	33		9,501	2,190	10,950
Central	Naitasiri	47	Dalo Suckers	38,108	11,432.40	57,162
		1	Land Preparation	1	4,300	21,500
		45	Agro Input	129	10,836	54,180
	Sub-Total	93		38,238	26,568.40	132,842
	Serua	31	Dalo Suckers	40,110	28,171.50	140,857.50
		1	Land Preparation	1	2,594	12,970
	Sub-Total	32		40,111	30,765.50	153,827.50
	Namosi	26	Dalo Suckers	23,500	7,050	35,250
		1	Land Preparation	1	2,594	12,970
	Sub-Total	27		23,500	9,644	48,220
	Rewa	41	Dalo Suckers	75,650	11,347.50	56,737.50
		1	Dalo Nursery	1	1,228.40	6,142
		41	Agro Input	96	7,896	39,480
		1	Land Preparation	1	4,300	21,500
		Sub-Total	84		202,972	105,590.90
	Tailevu	2	Land Preparation	2	8,000	40,000
11		Dalo Suckers	20,600	4,120	20,600	
32		Agro Input	32	2,688	13,440	
2		Land Preparation	2	8,000	40,000	
Sub-Total	47		20,636	22,808	114,040	
Northern	Cakaudrove	90	Dalo Training	2	1,485	7,425
		23	Agro Input	23	9,988.35	49,941.75
		4	Dalo Nursery	4	5,314.78	26,573.90
		1	Dalo Irrigation	1	3,010	15,050
		4	Dalo Suckers	22,000	15,400	77,000
		2	Land Preparation	2	12,870	64,350
	Sub-Total	124		22,032	48,068.13	240,340.65
	Bua	90	Dalo Training	1	1,350	6,750
		7	Land Preparation	7	12,000	60,000
		68	Agro Input	291	21,538.70	107,693.50
		15	Land Preparation	15	16,800	84,000
		2	Dalo Nursery	2	5,000	25,000
	Sub-Total	182		316	56,688.70	283,443.50
	Macuata	21	Dalo Suckers	12,500	10,000	50,000
		21	Agro Input	21	2,371.75	11,858.75
Sub-Total		42		12,521	12,371.75	61,858.75
Total		674			\$322,695.38	\$1,613,476.90

ANNEXURE II

**Reply to Written Question No. 183/2024 tabled by the honourable Minister for Education
(Ref. Page 1783)**



**MINISTER FOR EDUCATION
(Hon. A.M. Radrodro)**

Reply to Question No. 183/2024 is as follows:

(a) Background 2022

Fiji became a member of the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) in June 2022. As part of its membership requirements, Fiji needed to form a Local Education Group which includes Education Sector stakeholders. As such, the Education Partner Group (EPG) was established in 2022, co-chaired by the MOE (PSE) and the Australian High Commission (First Secretary AHC).

With GPE membership, Fiji received a System Capacity Grant (SCG) allocation of USD1.5 million with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) as Grant Agent, and DFAT is the Coordinating Agent.

An Enabling Factors Analysis (EFA) was produced by a core technical team, with active engagement across the Ministry, and, at key points, contributions from education stakeholders and partners to identify key priority areas for the Ministry that needs support.

The Enabling Factor Analysis (EFA) identified the following priorities:

- The Education Sector Analysis (ESA) which is an in-depth and holistic analysis of our education system. The objective is to ascertain and understand how the education system is currently working and how it can be improved. The ESA provides the evidence base for decision-making in preparing the Education Sector Plan.
- The drafting and development of the ten-year Education Sector Plan (ESP 2024-2034), as well as the extensive planning and consultation process for the Fiji National Education Summit (FNES). The FNES was convened in September 2023.
- An MOE ESP consultant was engaged to start work on the MOE ESP in 2022, followed by a series of workshop conducted for MOE officials and its stakeholders.

Article II. Programme of Work and Milestones 2023

The work on the Education Sector Plan came to a stop in 2022, following the change in MOE administration. The work on the Education Sector Analysis (ESA) began again in 2023. ESA progress in 2023, as follows:

- An ESA consultant was engaged to undertake the development of the ESA report.

The work of the consultant involved field work, consultations, research with MOE stakeholders and partners: Donor partners, faith-based organizations, teachers, Heads of Schools, students, community members, Teacher Unions, Teacher Training Institutions (TTIs), tertiary students.

- The ESA will provide an in-depth analysis of the current status of the Education Sector.
- ESA Report is in its draft form.

Article III. Compact Document

The compact document is the roadmap to transformation. It articulates how a GPE partner country intends to work with others around a priority reform with the potential to catalyse systemwide change.

The partner country leads and develops its compact with the support of an inclusive local education group. The compact document is shared with the GPE Board, which uses it as a basis for decision-making for GPE funding.

To develop the partnership Compact, the Ministry of Education, Fiji planning unit convened a broad technical group involving all its departments, ministerial advisors, partners, and pre-summit consultation workshops in Fiji's four geographical Divisions.

The compact document aims to strengthen system-wide collaboration to enhance teaching quality, thereby, improve learning outcomes. The compact document has since been submitted to the GPE for which approval has been granted. The release of the compact funding is dependent on the receipt of the Programme Development document.

A consultant has been engaged to develop the Programme Development document from the Compact Priority Areas as identified by MOE. This document is currently being drafted by the consultant and submission is due in the last quarter of 2024.

- **FIJI NATIONAL EDUCATION SUMMIT (FNES) 2023**
Nationwide consultation conducted from April - September 2023, culminating with the FNES at Denarau, Nadi. The outcome of the Summit was the confirmation of the 2023 Denarau Declaration, a 10 year Policy Framework of the Ministry.

The following documents will be used to inform and guide the MOE Education Sector Plan (ESP) for the next 10 years:

- 2023 Denarau Declaration;
- Education Sector Analysis Report; and
- Compact.

(b)

Window 1 Activities	Comments	Approved *SCG Funds by GPE (USD)	SCG Fund Spent (USD, est.)	Extra Funds Spent by UNICEF (Technical Partner Funding) [USD, est.]
Development of the Compact	EFA was not specifically listed but costs associated with	31,821	19,794	

	EFA development are included here.			
Education Sector Analysis, Thematic Analysis, Bottlenecks and Opportunities Study, Development of ESP, including the Education Summit Activities.	Costs for associated consultations are included. The contributions to pre-Summit and Summit costs are associated with consultations contributing to BSA and ESP.	497,472	534,257	70,432
Grant Agent Cost	Costs associated with UNICEF management of funds. Only partially reflects UNICEF Technical support to the work. Some technical support from UNICEF is funded through other sources.	58,586	33,829	24,757
Total		587,879	587,879	95,189

*SCG refers to System Capacity Grant

- (c) The tentative date for the completion of the 10 Year MOE ESP is March 2025. This 10-year plan will be implemented in phases. Implementation is informed by the priorities of the MOE.

ANNEXURE III

Reply to Written Question No. 184/2024 tabled by the honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services (Ref. Page 1784)



MINISTER FOR HEALTH AND MEDICAL SERVICES
(Hon. Dr. Ratu A.R. Lalabalavu)

Reply to Question No. 184/2024 is as follows:

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Member for the question. A total of 19 Health Facilities in our rural and maritime areas have been earmarked for upgrade in this financial year. They are as follows:

- (1) Eastern Division – 5 Facilities
Kadavu Hospital, Levuka Hospital, Rotuma Hospital, Lakeba Hospital, Vanua Balavu Hospital.
- (2) Western Division – 6 Facilities
Nacula Health Centre, Yalobi/Yaqeta, Naqalimare Nursing Station, Raiwaqa Health Centre, Tuvu Nursing Station and Tokaimalo Nursing Station.
- (3) Central Division – 3 Facilities
Tonia Nursing Station, Korovou Nursing Station and Nayavu Nursing Station.
- (4) Northern Division – 5 Facilities
Naqumu Nursing Station, Kubulau Health Centre, Dreketi Health Centre, Tawake Nursing Station and Qamea Health Centre.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry has continued with its health infrastructure improvement programme with the budgetary allocation from Government and together with the generous support of our partners, local businesses, civil society organisations, hospital board of visitors and community members.

List of Health Facilities Proposed for Upgrading in the Rural Areas

Division	No. of Health Facilities	Stations & Remarks
Eastern	5 [All under seed funding for groundwork this financial year and ready for the next financial year]	Kadavu Hospital - 1 x 6 Massonate Barracks
		Levuka Hospital - 1 x 4 Massonate Barracks
		Rotuma Hospital - 1 x 4 Massonate Barracks
		Lakeba Hospital - 1 x 4 Massonate Barracks
		Vanua Balavu Hospital - 1 x 4 Massonate Barracks
Western	6 [All under seed funding for groundwork this financial year]	Nacula Health Centre – Construction of 1 Grade 5 Quarters and Clinic - Relocate to the new site whereby a 1 duplex already there.
		Yalobi/Yaqeta - Old model nursing station conversation to new model. Separation of quarters from clinic.
		Naqalimare Nursing Station - Conversion to new model. Old model type of Nursing Station.
		Raiwaqa Health Centre - Construction of a new quarters.

Division	No. of Health Facilities	Stations & Remarks
		Tuvu Nursing Station - Relocation to New Site due to flood prone area of the existing site.
		Tokaimalo Nursing Station - Relocation to New site due to difficulty in access to health services because the current bridge that connect to the existing nursing station is damaged.
Central	3 [All under seed funding for groundwork this financial year and ready for the next financial year]	Tonia Nursing Station - Construction of new clinic.
		Korovou Nursing Station - Construction of 1 x 4 Massonate Barrack.
		Nayavu Nursing Station - Construction of New Mortuary.
Northern	5 [All under seed funding for groundwork this financial year and ready for the next financial year for PSIP submission for full funding]	Naqumu Nursing Station - Construction of 1 Grade 6 Quarters.
		Kubulau Health Centre - Upgrade of Nursing Station to a Health Centre Level C.
		Dreketi Health Centre - Construction of a temporary shed for clinic and then finalise plan for the new clinic ready for the next financial year.
		Tawake Nursing Station - Construction of Grade 6 Quarters
		Qamea Health Centre - Relocation of Health Centre from Dreketi to a new site at Ulunivatu
Total	19	

ANNEXURE IV

Reply to Written Question No. 194/2024 tabled by the honourable Minister for Public Works, Meteorological Services and Transport (Ref. Page 1784)



**MINISTER FOR PUBLIC WORKS, METEOROLOGICAL SERVICES & TRANSPORT
(Hon. Ro F.Q. Tuisawau)**

Reply to Question No. 194/2024 is as follows:

Mr. Speaker Sir, I thank Hon Naisa Tuinaceva for raising these important questions on the update of the crucial issues of road safety and traffic management in Fiji for the period from January to July 2024. The answers are as follows:

(a) Road Accidents and Fatalities

From January to July 2024, the Land Transport Authority (LTA) has, unfortunately, experienced a concerning number of road accidents. There has been a total of **30** reported road accidents during this period. Regrettably, these incidents have resulted in **31** fatalities.

There were two fatalities on 12th February, 2024. As for same period last year, Fiji recorded **57** fatalities. This statistic is 54 percent less, compared to the same period last year. These statistics underscore the need for enhanced road safety measures and continued public awareness campaigns.

The Ministry of Transport, in collaboration with law enforcement agencies, is actively working on strategies to address this issue, including improved road infrastructure, increased patrols, and educational programmes on road safety.

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Speeding	12	36	43	24	31	32	22	24	15	14	34	12
Drunk and Drive	6	2	1	2	12	15	3	1	2	6	4	3
Dangerous Driving	2	2	0	11	3	4	4	5	1	1	12	1
Careless Driving	2	0	1	3	3	5	7	2	0	6	3	1
Pedestrian at Fault	13	4	5	2	7	6	7	1	0	4	9	4
Drunkard Pedestrian	0	0	0	0	2	2	3	1	1	3	3	1
Improper Overtaking	0	0	6	1	1	0	4	5	2	2	3	2
Driver's Fatigue	1	1	3	4	1	4	7	0	0	4	6	2
Improper Turning	0	0	3	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	
Neglect of Parents	0	0	0	3	2	1	2	2	0	1	0	
Defective Brake	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Passenger at Fault	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Mechanical Defect	2	2	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	
Hit and Run	2	2	2	9	2	1	3	3	1	3	3	4
Hit Animal	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	2	0	0	
Total	41	49	65	60	65	70	63	45	25	44	78	31

The above table shows that speeding, driver fatigue and pedestrian at fault are still the main causes of fatalities on our roads.

(b) Traffic Infringement Notices

The Traffic Infringement Notices (TINs) issued by the LTA and Police totals up to **182,615** TINs from January to July 2024. This includes TINS issued by LTA Enforcement, LTA Red light speed camera infringements and Police TINs.

A total of **2,868** TINs have been issued for E-Ticketing offence. A total of **376** overloading TINs have been issued. A total **179,371** TINs have been issued for General Offences (speeding, Redlight speed camera, Police TINs, driver behaviour).

These figures reflect the ongoing enforcement of traffic laws and regulations aimed at curbing unsafe driving practices. It is imperative that we continue to strengthen our enforcement mechanisms and ensure that all drivers adhere to the traffic rules to reduce accidents, fatalities and promote road safety.

TIN ISSUED	
Category	Count of TIN
E-Ticketing	2,868
General	179,371
Overloading	376
Grand Total	182,615

(c) Driver Licence Actions

In relation to continuous infringements, a total of 106 drivers have been show-caused. The LTA carried out show-cause for 76 drivers in the Central Division, 18 drivers in the Western Division and 12 drivers in the Northern Division. 49 driver licences have been cancelled, nine driver licences have been suspended, 47 drivers have been given warning letters and one driver has been counselled. These actions demonstrate LTA's commitment to maintaining high standards of road safety and ensuring that individuals who repeatedly disregard traffic laws are held accountable.

The Government remains committed to improving road safety through a multi-faceted approach, including legislative reforms, public education and rigorous enforcement of traffic regulations. We encourage all Fijians to adhere to traffic laws and practise safe driving to protect themselves and others on our roads.

JANUARY-JULY 24 SHOWCAUSE DATA				
	Central/Eastern	Western	Northern	Grand Total
Counselled	1	-	-	1
Warning	44	3	-	47
Suspended	1	8	-	9
Cancelled	30	7	12	49
Grand Total	76	18	12	106