

WRITTEN RESPONSE TO PARLIAMENT QUESTION TO DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER AND MINISTER FOR TRADE, COOPERATIVES, MSMES AND COMMUNICATION BY HON. PREMILA KUMAR

Monday, 30 September 2024

QUESTION:

225/2024 Hon. Premila Kumar to ask the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade, Co-operatives, Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises and Communications – Can the Deputy Prime Minister

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- a. **provide an update on the current status and progress of Fiji's 5G readiness;**
- b. **key initiatives being undertaken to facilitate this transition; and**
- c. **timelines for rollout.**

RESPONSE:

Advancements in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) have been foundational to the world's Digital Economy. One of the most significant advancements in the ICT space that has connected millions globally is mobile communication. Mobile communication has undergone several generational shifts, starting with 1G for voice calls, 2G for voice and SMS, 3G for voice, SMS, and basic mobile data, and 4G, which brought high-speed internet and video streaming. Now, we are amid the next revolution: 5G.

The newest generation of mobile cellular technology, 5G, promises unprecedented opportunities. It offers ultra-low latency, ultra-fast internet speeds, and the potential to connect millions of Internet of Things (IoT) devices, among other innovations. The ITU contextualises this in numbers to Mobile Broadband Data rates of up to 10 Gbits per second, latency as low as 1ms and a connection density of 1 million devices per square km.¹

Since Commercial deployment, 5G has reached 40% of the world population and is in its early stages of deployment across the Pacific Island Countries

¹ Recommendation ITU-R M.2083-0 - IMT Vision – Framework and overall objectives of the future development of IMT for 2020 and beyond. https://www.itu.int/dms_pubrec/itu-r/rec/m/R-REC-M.2083-0-201509-1!!!PDF-E.pdf

(PICs).² High-speed broadband services like 5G are critical for enhancing digital connectivity and empowering citizens to fully participate in the global digital economy.

The successful rollout of any advanced technology at the national level requires careful analysis of needs, scope, and resourcing. This applies to 5G as well. 5G has been rolled out in many developed countries globally and we have seen some great examples of how technology can be leveraged to improve the productivity, access and quality of life of citizens. However, at the same time we have also witnessed poorly managed rollouts which has widened the digital divide.

Key Initiatives:

Fiji boasts one of the strongest telecommunications infrastructures in the Pacific, a position strengthened by the recent introduction of Starlink and the anticipated arrival of Google's Tabua and Bulikula subsea cables.

A number of activities have been undertaken by the Department of Communications (Department) under the Ministry of Trade, Co-operatives, MSMEs and Communications (Ministry) for the introduction of 5G in Fiji, including the development of a 5G roadmap and the requisite governance, legal and regulatory framework— including commercial spectrum licensing framework. This is part of a concerted effort by government, regulator and service providers to properly deploy 5G technology.

There has also been significant interest expressed from Mobile Network Operators (MNOs) to launch 5G in Fiji.

After executive and technical discussions between the Ministry, Regulator and the MNOs, the Ministry issued 5G testing licences, allowing operators to test 5G equipment. This ensured MNOs could conduct relevant testing and planning for an eventual 5G rollout.

The Department, with the support of the USAID Digital Connectivity and Cybersecurity Partnership (DCCP), is developing a 5G readiness and spectrum assessment. A draft assessment report has been provided and is currently being finalised in collaboration with the Department.

Whilst the assessment has been in progress, the Department has been in close collaboration with the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) – the United Nations specialised agency for information and communication

² ITU Facts and Figures 2023 <https://www.itu.int/itu-d/reports/statistics/2023/10/10/ff23-mobile-network-coverage/>

technologies and which sets the global 5G standards. The ITU has been providing guidance through its extensive knowledge in telecommunications. Additionally, through Fiji's active membership in the Asia Pacific Telecommunity (APT), the Department recently attended a comprehensive 5G implementation training programme hosted by the Malaysian Government and the Malaysian Communications and Media Commission. This training has enabled the Department to build its capacity and better understand the opportunities for Fiji in implementing 5G, which extends beyond internet speed or gaming to various verticals. These verticals include sectors such as healthcare, education, agriculture, manufacturing and many more. 5G also enables Fixed Wireless Access (FWA) services, providing high-speed fixed-broadband to households and businesses, in areas without traditional fibre infrastructure as access to Fixed-Broadband for people in SIDS is half when compared to the rest of the world.³ These verticals together with the widespread availability of reliable internet connectivity will drive innovations and efficiencies, transforming MSMEs, Industries and boosting the Fijian Economy.

Timeline:

While the demand for cutting-edge technology is significant, the Government is taking a pragmatic approach to ensure the maximum positive impact on the people and the economy. Following the recommendations in the draft assessment report, the Department is working on a few key activities before 5G can be made publicly available. These include the formulation of a 5G Spectrum Plan and a Spectrum Valuation and Pricing Model. These activities will be carried out with the assistance of international partners to ensure that 5G is licensed for rollout with the best possible outcome for Fiji.

The final assessment report is expected to be completed this year, with the recommended activities set to follow. The Ministry aims to complete the necessary preparatory work and successfully launch 5G no later than the end of the first quarter of 2025.

³ The Facts and Figures: Focus on Small Island Developing States
https://www.itu.int/hub/publication/d-ind-ict_mdd-2024-1/