

# PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI



## PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

### DAILY HANSARD

**TUESDAY, 1ST OCTOBER, 2024**

[CORRECTED COPY]

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**TUESDAY, 1<sup>ST</sup> OCTOBER, 2024**

The Parliament met at 10.00 a.m. pursuant to adjournment.

MR. SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

**PRESENT**

All Members were present, except the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance and Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics; the honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services; the honourable Minister for Home Affairs and Immigration; the honourable Minister for Multi-Ethnic Affairs and Sugar Industry; the honourable Assistant Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister; and honourable S.S. Kirpal.

**MINUTES**

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

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Monday, 30<sup>th</sup> September, 2024, as previously circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed.

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I second the motion.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

**COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE SPEAKER**

Welcome

I welcome all honourable Members to today's sitting, those joining us in the gallery and those watching the proceedings on television and the internet. Thank you for your interest in the workings of your Parliament.

Honourable Speaker - South Australian Parliament

Honourable Members, please, join me in welcoming the Speaker of the South Australian Parliament, the honourable Leon Bignell; accompanied by the Deputy Australian High Commissioner, Ms Clair McNamara; and the First Secretary, Ms. Rebecca Brown.

(Acclamation)

Thank you for joining us today. You are most welcome to the Fijian Parliament, and I hope that you are enjoying your visit to our beautiful shores.

Establishment of Sub-Committee

Honourable Members, having discussed the audit issue which was tabled by the Public Accounts Committee in the last sitting period with the Business Committee, please, take note of the unresolved issues reported by the honourable Chairperson. You have done a wonderful job, honourable Chairperson, by fully reporting all that you are supposed to be reporting, even the missing files and those that have disappeared, to be interviewed. We are grateful that the honourable Speaker

from Adelaide, the Deputy High Commissioner, together with the First Secretary – Ms. Rebecca Brown, are here to witness this.

I am invoking Standing Order 20 for the purposes of ensuring oversight and scrutiny in this serious matter. I hope you are all listening. In that regard, pursuant to Standing Orders 20, I am now calling for the establishment of a Sub-Committee, under Standing Order 122, and that Sub-Committee will further investigate the unresolved issues and report back to my Office. My Office will determine the membership of the Sub-Committee, as well as issue a Terms of Reference, and the Sub-Committee will report back to my Office as per the deadline that will be issued to them.

That is all, honourable Members, *vinaka*.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, just a point of clarification, this is with regards to your ruling this morning. For the information of honourable Members in this august House, quite interestingly, this Report was initiated by a former Minister.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Housing Authority was always audited by KPMG. This special investigation was done as per the official request coming from the Minister to the Board, and then a special investigation was carried out. Just because the Office of the Auditor-General was involved in carrying out this special investigation, this particular Report ended up in Parliament as per Audit Act 1965. Had the Minister back then used any other audit agency, for example, BDO, that Report would not have ended up in Parliament.

Sir, can we first identify as to how this Report ended up in Parliament in the first place? If it was BDO, that Report would not have come here because after that Report itself, KPMG did another report and a special investigation into Housing Authority on the same case and that Report was never tabled in Parliament. So, there are certain clarifications, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that need to be made well before we can go into what you have recommended.

There is no issue in forming a Sub-Committee, Sir, but for the sake of clarification, I thought of bringing this to the floor of Parliament, that there was another report which was not tabled in Parliament. This was initiated by a Minister, and it should have been reported back to the Minister because the Minister initiated that particular investigation. It was not something that was done or initiated by the Office of the Auditor-General.

Although the law says that any audit carried out by the Office of the Auditor-General should be tabled in Parliament, however, this was a very special case, Mr. Speaker. That Report should have been dealt with by the Board and the Minister, rather than it coming to Parliament and then referred to the Public Accounts Committee. The honourable Attorney-General is here and he can provide clarification at a later stage, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

MR. SPEAKER.- No, no, it is not for the honourable Attorney-General to rule on this.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- No, the ruling is definitely from you.

MR. SPEAKER.- I am ruling on this based on the content of the Report that was elaborated upon by the honourable Chairperson of the Committee, and based on his Report, things should have ended there. But, again, there are very serious issues highlighted by the Chairperson based on the Performance Audit Report that we need to look into; one is the disappearance of files, secondly, those who were supposed to be interviewed are no longer there. Taxpayers' money, honourable Member, has been used. We need to go through this with a thorough investigation.

Since we have the powers that we have taken on board after the trip down to Melbourne and Canberra, it is only proper, honourable Member, that we kick in the powers to scrutinise and do oversight on these particular areas, so we dig more into that. That is why we had discussed this thoroughly in the Business Committee. The powers are with me, and I am invoking those powers to the establishment of the Sub-Committee and a Terms of Reference be provided also, and then we will take it from there. That is all.

If that second report is still there with you, then we will see because we are working on a Performance Audit done by the Auditor-General. Again, the honourable Attorney-General has provided the audit review which we will be conducting sometimes this week and maybe you can bring that in.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ. - That was exactly my point, Mr. Speaker, Sir, because we are going to debate a Bill that is supposed to amend the Audit Act, in future, if any Minister or anyone conducts a special investigation which is not done by the Office of Auditor-General, that Report also needs to be presented in Parliament. That is all I am saying.

MR. SPEAKER.- Well, it was not presented by the honourable Chairperson. We are just working on the report that was tabled here by the honourable Chairperson, and that is all we are doing. If you want to bring that in, then you can bring that in through the Sub-Committee. Am I clear?

We need to be moving forward, honourable Member, and we need to try and utilise these powers that we have - the powers of scrutiny and oversight, so that not only are we at par with our counterparts in Australia and New Zealand, but at the same time, we are gearing towards something that will bring out the best in whatever we do. People can have faith and continue to trust in what our Parliament is doing. Thank you.

There will be no further questions on that. I have made my ruling, honourable Members, and let us abide by that.

## **PRESENTATION OF REPORTS OF COMMITTEES**

### Consolidated Review Report – Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts 2018-2021 Annual Report

HON. I.S. VANAWALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am privileged to present the Report of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs concerning the consolidated review of the Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts for years 2018 to 2021.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in accordance with Standing Order 109(2)(b), our Committee is tasked with scrutinising issues related to health, education, social services, labour, aviation, culture and media.

Through our comprehensive review, we have identified several key concerns and challenges affecting the education sector and, we have put forward a series of recommendations to address these issues.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we recognise and commend the Ministry of Education's ongoing efforts to enhance the education sector through its current policies and procedures. Nevertheless, we believe that a thorough review of the Education Act 1966 is essential for further advancement. Additionally, appointing the Education Commissioners is crucial to ensure the continued improvement and effectiveness of the Ministry's services.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as part of our duties under Standing Order 110, the Committee conducted site visits to schools across the Western and Central Divisions. These visits highlighted several concerns which we subsequently raised with the Ministry Officials during their public submissions to the Committee. Our Report details these concerns and offers actionable recommendations to address them.

I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to the Permanent Secretary and her team for their valuable contributions to this review process.

I also wish to acknowledge the outstanding leadership and guidance of the former Chairperson of the Committee, honourable Alitia Bainivalu. My gratitude also goes to the former Committee Members - honourable P.K. Bala; honourable K.K. Lal (Alternate Member); and honourable P.K. Ravunawa (Alternate Member); and the current Committee Members, for their dedicated efforts in finalising this Report.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on behalf of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, I commend this Report to Parliament and encourage all Members of this august House to review its findings and recommendations.

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

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

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

HON. V. PILLAY. - Mr. Speaker, Sir, I second the motion.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

Consolidated Review Report –  
Ministry of Women and Poverty Alleviation 2019-2021 Annual Reports

HON. I.S. VANAWALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am pleased to present the Report of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs on the Consolidated Review Report of the Ministry of Women and Poverty Alleviation 2019 to 2020 and 2020 to 2021 Annual Reports. As mandated under Standing Order 109 (2)(b), the Committee looks into issues related to health, education, social service, labour, aviation, culture and media.

The period under review was during the time that Fiji and the world were hit by a global pandemic, COVID-19, which resulted in changes to the normal standard operating procedures. In light of this development, the Ministry continued to provide service to its clients through the deployment of staff in areas that were on lockdown.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Committee, through its mandatory role stipulated under Standing Order 110, conducted a visit to the Golden Age Home and the St. Tabitha Orphanage Home in Lautoka. The Committee noted concerns from the visit, which were also raised with the Ministry Officials during their public submission to the Committee. Moreover, the Committee highlighted concerns raised during the visit and identified possible recommendations.

I wish to convey my gratitude and sincere appreciation to the Permanent Secretary and her team for their valuable contribution to this review process.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I take this opportunity to thank the former Chairperson of the Committee, honourable Alitia Bainivalu, for her leadership and guidance; to the former Committee Members for their constructive input and tremendous teamwork - honourable P.K. Bala, honourable K.K. Lal (Alternate Member) and honourable P.K. Ravunawa (Alternate Member); and the current Committee Members for the finalisation of the Committee Report.

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

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

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

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

HON. A. A. MAHARAJ. - Mr. Speaker Sir, I second the motion.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

#### Review Report on the Anti-Doping Bill 2024

HON. RATU R.S.S. VAKALALABURE.- Mr. Speaker, I stand before this august House as the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights to report back on the Committee's work that had been entrusted to us by this august House. Sir, I would like to begin by giving a brief background of the Bill.

Mr. Speaker, the Anti-Doping Bill 2024 was formulated to provide the legal framework for the establishment of the Drug-Free Sport Fiji (DFSF) as a National Anti-Doping Organisation. The Bill also establishes and mandates the DFSF to formulate, draft and implement proper frameworks, rules and educational curriculum on anti-doping in sports.

Sir, the main objective of DFSF is to ensure the proper implementation of, and compliance with, the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) Code on creating a more accountable framework, which will provide strategic direction, guide and monitor the development of clean sports in Fiji.

Given Fiji's geographical size, the sudden influx of doping in sports has increased significantly amongst athletes. Unless a National Anti-Doping Organisation is established, it is certain that Fiji will remain vulnerable to doping in sports.

The DFSF will be the overarching body established through the legislative frameworks of the UNESCO Convention against Doping in Sport and the WADA Code, which converges on all efforts to promote clean sports.

The DFSF, Sir, will be an independent body, free from the influence and interference of government and sports federations. It will provide a clear and national regulatory, law enforcement,

policy and programme delivery response to doping in sports.

The setup of the organisation will ensure Fiji is in compliance with the world anti-doping standards and frameworks. It will also allow Fiji to participate in future internationally world-sanctioned sports events. The organisation will work in close collaboration with international anti-doping agencies, sporting bodies, and relevant stakeholders to ensure that our anti-doping efforts align with global practices and uphold the principles of fair play.

Mr. Speaker, the Committee also notes that failure to comply with the Convention may result in the ineligibility of Fiji to bid for and host international events, forfeiture of offices and positions within the WADA and any other consequences pursuant to the Olympic Charter.

Mr. Speaker, this is something we learnt during the review. The South African Rugby Team faced a similar consequence, whereby team they were almost sanctioned from WADA due to non-compliance with the latest World Anti-Doping Code. Two days before the match, the South African Team was advised by WADA that their rugby team will not be allowed to raise their national flag or sing the national anthem during a rugby world cup match. Fortunately, Sir, South Africa managed to appeal and had their penalties reverted. As for Fiji, the Committee is adamant that the Bill, in its current amendment form, is compliant with international standards and does not pose any risk, especially, to our athletes.

Mr. Speaker, I will now go into the actual work of the Committee, beginning by covering the process followed by the Committee for the review. The Committee, firstly, examined the Bill Clause by Clause and a briefing was conducted with the Drafters and the Ministry of Youth and Sports, on the technicalities of the Bill. At the outset, Sir, there were miscommunications along the way that led to the delay of the review, and this was, we were having two separate legislations that were proposed for adoption. However, the Committee conducted its own deliberation on the Bill and noted the following issues.

With respect to Clause 2 on the definitions of “local sports entities”, the Committee was of the view that there has to be some degree of inclusivity, and clarification was sought on the definition of ‘local sports entities’ and how other sporting bodies in Fiji are included or involved. The rationale was that the non-inclusion of other sports would pose risks of breach of anti-doping conditions.

The Committee further noted in Clause 2 that there was no definition classified for the term “athlete” in the Bill. The Committee understands that leaving the term undefined would pose an open field of recruitment for a person with any sporting background to be an eligible member to the DFSF Board. The Committee suggested that the person with limited sporting background with experience would be an eligible member of the DFSF Board.

In relation to Clause 21(2)(e), the Committee observed that an individual committing an offence could face a fine of \$10,000 or a two-year prison term. Additionally, it was noted by the Committee that there is no existing legislation that permits the Minister to criminalise an athlete for offences committed. The Committee believes that an athlete should not be criminalised for such offences but should, instead, face fines or a lifetime ban if they violate anti-doping regulations.

In Clause 23, the Committee was of the view that there should not be further inclusion of personal officers as suggested by the public, given that the more people involved, the more risk it poses on the tampering of evidence.

Additionally, there were other matters noted from this initial deliberation, which included the:



- (1) issue concerning the player welfare within the Bill;
- (2) issue whether there are sufficient facilities available to conduct anti-doping testing in Fiji;
- (3) issue whether there is an association of players established in Fiji;
- (4) absence of appeal process to cater for athletes that have tested positive, and the Committee noted in the current drafting of the Bill that the DFSF stands as a judge, jury and the executioner; and
- (5) rationale of the Fiji Police Force's involvement in the investigation process when the DFSF already has the mandate to investigate on matters relating to anti-doping.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Committee was fortunate to be invited to the Annual National Sporting Organisation Conference that was held at the Grand Pacific Hotel in June this year. The Committee capitalised on the opportunity and reserved a session for public consultation on the Bill. There were a total of 43 sporting bodies present at this meeting whereby various suggestions and opinions were raised, and the Committee gave due consideration to these, by having extensive deliberation and seeking legal clarification on all issues, so as to ensure that these were properly considered.

At the final stage of the review, the Committee resolved to make changes to the Bill, which could contribute to the achievement of its objectives and also comply with the World Anti-Doping Standards. I will not take much time, but will just highlight a few key changes that the Committee recommended to be made to the Bill, and these include:

- (1) providing a broad definition of sports entities that includes a broader spectrum of sports federation;
- (2) a provision to mitigate the risk of abuse of office for any person intending to assume the membership of the advisory council; and
- (3) including a provision that provides responsibility to the Minister in ensuring that proper funding is appropriated to the functions of this Bill.

At this juncture, Mr. Speaker, we would like to thank the members of the public and the sporting bodies that participated in the public consultation, the Permanent Secretary for Youth and Sports and his Team, and that provided their input on the Bill, which greatly assisted the Committee in its review.

Finally, I wish to express my gratitude to the honourable Members of the Committee for their thoughtful deliberations and contributions. I also acknowledge the former members of the Committee who started off with the consideration of the Bill, namely, honourable Koya and honourable Niudamu, and thank them for their insightful contributions in the initial stages of the Committee deliberations; and the honourable Naupoto and honourable Matasawalevu, who stepped in when the Substantive Members were unavailable. We thank you, Sirs.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Committee, through this bipartisan Report and consensus, commends the Anti-Doping Bill 2024 and its amendments to Parliament.

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, pursuant to the resolution of Parliament on Monday, 20<sup>th</sup> May, 2024, the Standing Committee has now tabled its Report accordingly. The Bill will be debated and voted upon by Parliament on Thursday, 3<sup>rd</sup> October, 2024.

I now call on the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights to table his second Report.

### Review Report on the National Disaster Management Bill 2024

HON. RATU R.S.S. VAKALALABURE.- Mr. Speaker, I stand before this august House as the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights to report back on the Committees' work that had been entrusted to us by this august House. Sir, similar to my speech I made earlier this morning, I would like to begin with giving a brief background of the Bill.

The Natural Disaster Risk Management Bill 2024 seeks to repeal the Natural Disaster Management Act 1998 and to make provisions for disaster risk management governance arrangements to ensure clarity and efficiency in response to new hazards and disasters.

Amongst the key changes to the Act is the expanded mandate for the disaster legislation to not only cover natural hazards, but now focus on all hazards that have the potential to cause disasters, with the exception of civil unrest and terrorism. This is in line with all the hazards approach for disaster and disaster risk management that is the global best practice, and which is promoted under Fiji's National Disaster Risk Reduction Policy and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, the global framework guiding Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) and Disaster Risk Management (DRM) across the world.

The Bill also places emphasis on disaster risk reduction and its practical application in the form of disaster risk management measures, due to the growing recognition of the role that early mitigation and prevention of risk plays in the alleviation and avoidance of disasters.

In that regard, the Bill will now be known as the National Disaster Risk Management Bill 2024 as opposed to its former title of Natural Disaster Management Act 2024, reflecting its expanded scope on all hazards rather than just natural phenomena and its focus on disaster risk management.

In the same vein, Mr. Speaker, the Act amalgamates the functions of the current Preparedness and Mitigation Sub-Committees to form the Disaster Risk Reduction Sub-Committee, which will now be responsible for all disaster risk management activities, except those for disaster and emergency response, which remains the mandate of the Emergency Sub-Committee.

The Bill also formalises and legislates the Fiji Cluster System for better coordination of humanitarian actors in the country. The Fiji Cluster System will foster collaboration and partnership across mechanisms and institutions for the implementation of instruments relevant to disaster risk.

In terms of the subnational disaster risk management arrangements, the Bill allows for the establishment of the Disaster Risk Management Committees at Divisional, Provincial, District and Community levels. This will strengthen coordination for preparedness, response, disaster management, and climate change adaptation at all levels.

It also provides for the establishment of subnational offices of the NDMO to be headed by Divisional Disaster Risk Management Officers, which will ensure the mainstreaming and the coordination of activities and provision of advice to Divisional Commissioners on subnational activities related to disaster risk management, disaster risk reduction and disaster management.

The Bill also strengthens the role of Disaster Service Liaison Officers (DSLO), who are government agency focal points for disaster risk reduction and disaster risk management across all Government Ministries. The DSLOs' role was provided for under a single provision in the Act. However, past experience and the feedback from consultations, have demonstrated the critical role that DSLOs play for the implementation of disaster risk management through all Government Ministries.

The Bill also encompasses the regulation of international aid, featuring provisions designed to mitigate any adverse consequences stemming from unsolicited bilateral donations to oversee assistance that could potentially contribute to the issue of disaster-generated waste. Additionally, it includes the establishment of Single Window International facilitation teams.

The Integrated Multi-Hazard Early Warning System (IMEWS) is developed and functional across all levels. There are provisions in the draft Bill that establishes an Integrated Multi-Hazard Early Warning System at the national level by linking the existing various early warning systems that exist in various sectors and institutions. The technical capacity for hazard monitoring and early warning is proposed to be housed in the National Emergency Operations Center and be linked to all key institutions issuing early warning in real time.

With regards to Disaster Risk Management Volunteers, this provision requires volunteer organisations to formally register their intentions to engage disaster volunteers. The aim is to provide a protective framework for volunteers, safeguarding them from any potential violations during their participation in disaster response efforts.

Mr. Speaker, I will now go into the actual work of the Committee, beginning by covering the process followed by the Committee for the review. The Committee, firstly, examined the Bill Clause by Clause and a briefing was conducted with the Drafter and the Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development on the technicalities of the Bill.

At the outset, the Committee conducted its own deliberation on the Bill and noted the following issues:

- (1) With respect to Clause 28, the Committee noted that the Ministry of Health, the Fiji Police Force and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, in coordination with NDMO, have specifically confined their roles to facilitate international assistance for the purpose of providing assistance to victim identification and mortuary services. With regard to international assistance to other needed services required in disaster recovery, clarification was sought in removing certain words from the Clause that could possibly address this issue.
- (2) With regards to Clause 30, the Committee noted that the Disaster Service Liaison Officer established in the Bill has significant roles and functions, and clarification was sought on the due process in situations whereby the person holding the position is absent from the office. Who, in this case, does take up the role as per the establishment of this particular provision?
- (3) In relation to Clause 33, the Committee noted there were two actions specified in the Clause which provides for international assistance to waive quarantine requirements, specifically with regards to rescue dogs. Thus, in the same provision, it states that this assistance should comply with quarantine requirements, which led to the Committee to seek clarification from the Ministry, particularly regarding the intent to bypass the 14-day quarantine period.

Additionally, there were other matters noted from this initial deliberation, which included the undefined terminology that are listed in the Bill and the issue of drafting on certain Clauses of the Bill that were not clear.

At the final stage of the review, the Committee resolved to make changes to the Bill, which could contribute to the achievement of its objectives. Some of these recommendations, Sir, have been reflected in the amendment to the Bill.

At this juncture, Sir, we would like to thank the members of the public in the public consultation, the Permanent Secretary and Director of NDMO who provided their input on the Bill, which greatly assisted the Committee in its review.

Finally, I wish to express my gratitude to the honourable Members of the Committee for their thoughtful deliberations and contributions. I also acknowledge the former Members of the Committee, namely, honourable F.S. Koya and honourable Ratu J.B. Niudamu, for their insightful contribution during their tenure as Members of the Committee; the Alternate Members - honourable V. Naupoto and honourable T.R. Matasawalevu, who stepped in when the Substantive Members were unavailable. Thank you to you both.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Committee, through this bipartisan Report and consensus, commends the National Disaster Risk Management Bill 2024 and its amendments to Parliament.

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, pursuant to the resolution of Parliament on Monday, 20<sup>th</sup> May, 2024, and the Communications from the Speaker on Monday, 5<sup>th</sup> August, 2024, the Standing Committee has now tabled its Report accordingly. The Bill will be debated and voted upon by Parliament on Thursday, 3<sup>rd</sup> October, 2024.

### MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the following Ministers have given notice to give Ministerial Statements under Standing Order 40:

- (1) Honourable Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, Climate Change, Environment, Climate Service, Information, Public Enterprises and Veteran Affairs;
- (2) Honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade and Cooperatives, Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises and Communications; and
- (3) Honourable Minister for Fisheries and Forestry.

The Ministers may speak for up to 20 minutes. After the Minister, I will then invite the Leader of the Opposition, or his designate, to speak on the Statement for no more than five minutes. There will also be a response from the Leader of the G-9 Bloc, or his designate, to speak for five minutes. There will be no other debate.

#### Development of the Foreign Policy White Paper (FPWP)

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- *Ni sa bula vina 'a* and a very good morning to you all.

Mr, Speaker, Sir, may I also greet those who are watching us on livestream and those listening in on the radio. I, together with you, Sir, also acknowledge the presence in the gallery of the Honourable Leone Bignall, Member of Parliament and Speaker of the House of Assembly and Member for Mawson in the Parliament of South Australia; the Deputy High Commissioner of the Australian High Commission, Ms. Clair McNamara; and Ms. Rebecca Brown, First Secretary in the Australian High Commission.

I also apologise to honourable Tunabuna for cutting in on his question on this subject. I believe, Sir, that the Ministerial Statement would answer his question better, so I have asked that this Ministerial Statement be made instead of his question.

One of the important steps that the Coalition Government took since coming into office is to put in place important rebuilding blocks that provide clarity, direction and certainty for Fiji and its people. Foreign policy is one of them.

Earlier in the year, I mentioned that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs wants to produce Fiji's Foreign Policy White Paper, to develop a document that will articulate Fiji's Foreign Policy priorities and guide its international engagements in the next decade. Mr. Speaker, Sir, as part of the formulation, a whole-of-Government process was activated and the views of the Ministries and agencies and entities outside of the public sector were also incorporated.

A reference group was also engaged, comprising renowned persons who are current and former diplomats, former Permanent Secretaries, former Ministry of Foreign Affairs Ministers and diplomats, leaders and scholars in foreign relations with longstanding experience at national, regional and international levels.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Steering Committee, also led by the Permanent Secretary for Foreign Affairs, was established with the support of a technical advisor who was engaged to provide expert support. The expert, Professor Peter Varghese, is the Chancellor of the Queensland University, a former diplomat and a former Secretary of Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and External Trade.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs allocated six months for this project. I am pleased to inform the House that the project was completed on time that culminated on Monday, 23<sup>rd</sup> September, 2024, when I launched Fiji's Foreign Policy White Paper at the Grand Pacific Hotel, with invitations extended to all Members of this august House. This is a first for Fiji and the launch was a landmark occasion in Fiji's history, and I thank all honourable Members who came to that launch.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, before I elaborate on the White Paper, I would like to take this opportunity to welcome the honourable Assistant Minister for Finance, the honourable Assistant Minister for Foreign Affairs, the honourable Assistant Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister, the honourable Leader of the Opposition and the honourable Leader of the G-9 Bloc, on their return after representing Fiji to the 79<sup>th</sup> United Nations General Assembly (UNGA). I know that having returned from their respective engagements at the high level forums of UNGA, they would be pleased with Fiji's first ever Foreign Policy White Paper. Very soon, Fiji's Permanent Representative to the UN (PRUN) will be visiting the country and will be available for briefing for all Members of Parliament who are interested in the functioning of the various organisations under the United Nations for our general education and information.

As I had mentioned during the launch, the White Paper outlines the path that Fiji will follow to meet the complex foreign policy landscape and its challenges that we face as a nation. It is a definitive statement of the Government's foreign policy and Fiji's place in the world.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the White Paper explains how Fiji sees itself and how we wish to present ourselves to the world. It also outlines Government's foreign policy initiatives, including the promotion of the Pacific as an Ocean of Peace, which is the single most significant contribution that Fiji has made to peace and security in our neighbourhood and the broader Indo-Pacific region.

The policy, Mr. Speaker, Sir, also reaffirms the central position of the Pacific region in our foreign policy calculations and that in all we do, we will put the Pacific family first.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the foundation of this White Paper is a whole-of-nation approach that integrates all elements of policy, domestic and external, and recognises that our security and

prosperity ultimately depend on a clear-eyed view of our national interests and values and how best to advance them.

The White Paper is also reflected on Chapter 3 of Fiji's National Development Plan and is the proposed response to the current National Security and Defence Review. Together, these forms the foundation of the Government's strategy to advance Fiji's strategic and economic interests and strengthen its social cohesion. What follows builds on the three interconnecting themes of Fiji's foreign policy - sovereignty, security and prosperity. These are the traditional pillars of foreign policy, but the context in which we must pursue them has profoundly changed.

The White Paper states Fiji's identity and values. It states where we stand on issues. While some areas may not be popular to some, I had remarked in an earlier speech in this House that the Government stands for what is right for Fiji, not necessarily what is popular.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the White Paper is made up of three complementary elements, namely, analysis, policy positioning and the machinery of delivery. The White Paper comprises eight chapters. I will expound each of the chapters briefly. I ask that we peruse the document, to enable us to understand its contents and draw informed conclusions through the following lenses - the White Paper:

- is different from all others;
- is a headline document;
- comprises of high level statements;
- is not a checklist of all we are doing in our foreign policy; and
- is not a catalogue of all our bilateral and multilateral relationships and activities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in addition, the White Paper:

- sets out the underlying principles of Fiji's foreign policy, our overarching objectives and our broad priorities.
- captures the way in which domestic and foreign policies are intertwined.
- allows flexibility to work on issues without being constrained by specificity.
- allows for context and nuance to be made for circumstances that Fiji might find itself in.
- is further unpacked into the 2024-2027 Strategic Plan of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, that guide its operationalisation through its operational and business plans.

The White Paper, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is also the basis for Ministries to connect and coordinate across the Government system and in areas touching external interactions.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Chapter 1 of the White Paper examines sovereignty, with a focus on identity and values. It defines who we are and what we believe in. It presents Fiji to the world and emphasises the characteristics that define our society, that define our values. This is central to how we engage with the world.

Further, the Chapter delineates our interests, our international relationships, the ideas we bring to building a stronger region and the bilateral and multilateral investments to be undertaken to protect the Fijian society.

Chapter 2, Mr. Speaker, Sir, focuses on security with the preamble on Fiji's physical security and border protection, economic security, environmental sustainability and the capacity to address non-traditional threats and challenges to social cohesion. It highlights Fiji's leadership and

stewardship roles in the Pacific - the leverage we have as a regional hub, the influence on regionalism, broader multilateral cooperation and the Ocean of Peace.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Chapter 3 examines transnational security issues and poses strategic remedies to the transnational challenges which have the potential to erode social stability, wreak havoc on livelihoods, threaten the health of our community and sustainability of our environment.

Chapter 4, Mr. Speaker, Sir, addresses Fiji's vulnerability to climate change. The Chapter proposes the need for national policy setting and unremitting advocacy for action at regional and global level. This is in addition to the grounds set on the importance of comprehensive climate governance, the green economy, SDGs, the National Oceans Policy and investments in sustainability.

Mr. Speaker, Chapter 5 examines Fiji's approach to bilateral relations, bearing in mind that there are no neat distinctions between bilateral and multilateral diplomacy, and that the success in one helps build success in the other. It singles out that the texture and priorities of our relationships are inevitably shaped by Fiji's geography, history and values. The 'family first' approach for the region and the links with key strategic and traditional partners beyond the region are important to foster familial bonds and shared prosperity.

Chapter 6 on prosperity, Mr. Speaker, Sir, stresses the importance of centrally advancing Fiji's economic interests for all Fijians. It highlights the importance and quality of our domestic economic policy settings, the enterprise of Fijian businesses, the hard work of Fijian labour and our ability to effectively navigate the regional and global economies and their underpinning institutions.

It states what the backbone of Fiji's economy is, and the need to empower enterprises is fundamental for fostering inclusive growth and reducing income inequality. The Chapter further expounds the importance of an open economy, trade and investment liberalization, the growth of the Fijian diaspora around the world and their economic importance to our country.

The Foreign Policy and Developmental Assistance in Chapter 7, Mr. Speaker, Sir, highlights the important support of our international partners and the need to manage these relations across Government. It places importance on the work of diplomatic missions, honorary consuls and trade commissions, to promote Fiji's economic interests and attract foreign investment. There is emphasis on the need for robust systems for coordinating, monitoring and evaluating development support and outcomes.

Chapter 8, Mr. Speaker, Sir, sets out the Government's approach to implementing Fiji's foreign policy and the systems and resources required to drive the whole of Government machinery. The Chapter also looks at policy stewardship, coordination and management, and the governance structure to churn out professional cohorts with appropriate skillsets.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I conclude with thanks to all the officials and expertise under the leadership of the Permanent Secretary for Foreign Affairs, in the formulation of this document. I acknowledge the wise counsel of the Reference Group, which helped guide its preparation. I sincerely thank the White Paper's principal author, Mr. Peter Varghese, Officer of the Australian Order (AO). I acknowledge the honourable Ministers and their Permanent Secretaries, the honourable Leader of the Opposition, the Chairman of the Great Council of Chiefs, former Ministers, Senior Officials and Fijian diplomats, Academia, industry representatives, regional organisations and members of our community, who came forward and shared their knowledge and skills during the formulation of our policy paper.

Once again, I acknowledge with appreciation the Government of the Commonwealth of Australia and its High Commissioner in particular, His Excellency Ewen McDonald, for the technical and financial support provided through our renewed and elevated Vuvale Partnership. *Vina'a va'alevu* and God Bless Fiji.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I intend to adjourn the House now for tea break and resume when the bell is sounded.

The Parliament adjourned at 11.00 a.m.



The Parliament resumed at 11.50 a.m.

MR. SPEAKER.- I now call on the Leader of the Opposition, or his designate, to make their response.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Prime Minister, honourable Deputy Prime Ministers, honourable Cabinet Ministers and honourable Members of Parliament; I stand to provide a response to the Ministerial Statement by the honourable Prime Minister on Fiji's Foreign Policy White Paper.

Honourable Prime Minister, thank you for the invitation to support His Excellency and our Permanent Representative in the United Nations (PRUN) in the most recent United Nations General Assembly (UNGA). As you are well aware, UNGA is hectic, but we have to shoulder the responsibility, its national duties and a lot of learnings as well. It is interesting to see how the world is developing and trying to cope and adapt to the challenges. I know that there will be more opportunities later to discuss on this.

On Fiji's Foreign Policy White Paper, honourable Prime Minister, Sir, congratulations to Government. I know that all these while, we have always been guided by a Foreign Policy Statement rather than a Foreign Policy White Paper. I think I have that small document with me. This was what was guiding us. But, of course, our principles and national interests remain important, and I would like to speak on it as well during the course of my response.

Honourable Prime Minister, honestly, I have not read the Foreign Policy White Paper in detail. I contributed, and most of what I had raised during my discussions with Mr. Varghese is what I will share today. It is not criticising, but it is more of constructive dialogue on some of the issues because we discussed the Foreign Policy White Paper, honourable Prime Minister, without the National Development Plan and, of course, that has been launched. I took a copy with me, but I did not read it as well. Of course, the Defence Policy is pending because of the National Defence Review.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in the limited time this morning, I want to go quickly into Chapter 5 of the Foreign Policy White Paper which is on bilateral relations, including the major powers. For Fiji, multilateralism and the region are, of course, foreign policy force multipliers. I had a bit of interest in the subsequent paragraph, Mr. Speaker, Sir, through you, particularly, on our start point. The Foreign Policy White Paper says that there is no neat distinction between bilateral and multilateral diplomacy, but geography, history and values, inevitably, shape texture and priorities of our bilateral relationships.

On relationships with fellow members of the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF), for example, are of a different order to our relationships with countries outside the Pacific Region. I do agree with that but with the word of caution, honourable Prime Minister, Sir, you are well aware of the incidents of 1987 - we went North, because our traditional partners had issues with us, and the same in 2000. That led the current relationships that led to the Vuvale Partnership and the Pacific Reset. Hopefully, we will anchor on respect for sovereignty, equality, independence and, of course, common interests. These are very, very important because we know for a fact from previous, and I hope that this will not restrict us, honourable Prime Minister, Sir. I know that you very well understand what I am talking about because of how we were treated when we had our own internal issues.

However, on sovereignty, honourable Prime Minister, Sir, how does this align with not having sovereign capabilities to manage our nation as a sovereign State? It is not only about our defence set-up, but we are looking about the brain-drain, issues of governance and our industrial, economic logistical research and educational capabilities. These are requirements for us in order to achieve our

strategic sovereignty and, of course, includes safety and health, defence wellbeing, food security, energy, key material supplies, infrastructure security and environmental sustainability, which are all dependant on development partners and foreigners. That is why SDG 17 is very, very critical, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

On security, of course, the Ocean of Peace or the zone of peace has prominence but, of course, I did raise then, Mr. Speaker Sir, how it aligns, and I have been listening. I attended the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), I attended the Pacific Small Island Developing States (PSIDS) Meeting, and how these aligns with the 2050 Strategy as you are well aware of but, again, honourable Prime Minister, Sir, for us, we cannot give something that we do not have and that is why sorting out the issues in Fiji is so important.

There are governance issues and honourable Prime Minister, Sir, I hope that you will take responsibility for the issues that are arising in the papers, to sort out these issues because these all contribute to this Ocean of Peace and, particularly, for the long-term security of the region. I hope that there will not be interference in the way things are dealt with but, of course, we must make sure that good governance, institutional integrity as raised by honourable Naupoto, are part of all these, so that we can have that peace first within Fiji before we take it into the region.

On prosperity, I am thankful that the National Development Plan is out, honourable Prime Minister, Sir, that we, of course, have to address. This is not only Government, but we take equal responsibility on the issues that we have, such as inflation, cost of living, unemployment, brain drain, housing, government debt, all these things, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Of course, let me assure you, honourable Prime Minister, and all Fijians that we, the G-16 Bloc in the Opposition, will always work together in the common interest for Fiji. This document is going to contribute and, of course, with the Defence Policy that we are waiting for and the National Development Plan, they will all be important for Fiji in terms of the way forward. Thank you, Sir.

MR. SPEAKER.- The Leader of the G-9 Bloc?

HON. I. NAIVALURUA.- Mr. Speaker Sir, *ni bula vinaka*. I would like to thank the honourable Prime Minister for the presentation of the Foreign Policy White Paper, and I think it articulates very clearly the areas that we should focus on, given the huge challenges ahead of us.

At this point, I just wanted to say, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the world is changing, and changing very, very fast. There are things that you and I can control and there are things that we cannot control. It is our ability to identify our area of influence, the areas of responsibility, and above all, the areas of our operations. Our area of operations is basically the whole wide world, our ability to influence what particular areas in our engagements and our greatest area of responsibility is really here, in the Pacific and, of course, our home here in Fiji.

For me, I have not really studied the document itself, Mr. Speaker, Sir. As I have said in one of my earlier contributions on the floor, our ability to thread together key guiding documents for our nation, one of it which is this one here, the other one was launched - the National Development Plan, and the Security and Defence Review are critical documents which will help to give us a better understanding on how we relate with the world and how things that we engage with, and the ability to identify what we should do first and what comes second in order of priorities, given the limited resources that we have.

I always view the foreign policy work as our ability to fight the forward battles effectively, and that is the key, in my view. How we do it, given the amount of work that needs to be done here? And this is why I am saying, Mr. Speaker, Sir, our ability to see the security defence issues, national

development plans, et cetera, and how we thread all these together to be able to relate to the outside world and tell them, through our networking, through our relationship and through our engagement, what we really need to do here in Fiji to take us forward.

I draw the attention of the floor this morning to the National Development Plan (NDP), our vision on Chapter 10, it is an honourable and a noble articulated 2050 vision on how we can prosper, how our nation can be inclusive and, above all, sustainable. And I think that is a very important part in how we engage the whole wide world out there through our networks with them.

Also, I would like to take note, at this point, of the importance of the role of the military, our police and correctional officers, and how, at the earlier stages of shaping our engagement with the whole wide world and how their books shaped our foreign policy. They are basically our foreign policy tool. There is some importance too, at this point, of sports tool which is also a very important part of how we are going to shape our foreign policy tool. And this is very well articulated in Chapter 2 of our Foreign Policy White Paper - the foreign or soft face of our engagement with the whole wide world. Sports and our cultural identity, those are important aspects of how we can engage with the whole wide world.

From the G-9 Bloc, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we will study the document, but I stand this morning to assure the honourable Prime Minister and the Government that we look forward to the implementation of the Foreign Policy White Paper to achieve the noble objectives that have been set by Government.

#### Update on the National Taskforce to Address Pornography

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, *Na Turaga na Tui Cakau*, the honourable Prime Minister, honourable Deputy Prime Ministers and the honourable Leader of the Opposition and fellow Members of Parliament; I stand before you today to provide an update on the efforts undertaken by the National Taskforce to Address Pornography, and the complementary efforts by the Coalition Government in actioning the commitment made in this very august Parliament when I took the floor late last year. This important National Taskforce was approved by Cabinet earlier this year to better understand the societal risks of pornography in Fiji and to provide recommendations to effectively address these risks.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, keeping our people safe, both in offline and online spaces, is of paramount importance to the Coalition Government. Therefore, to demonstrate this and to ensure we are effectively understanding and addressing the societal and technical aspects of this issue, this Taskforce is jointly chaired by the honourable Minister for Women, Children and Social Protection and myself.

I am pleased to inform you that the Taskforce held an introductory meeting earlier this year at its first official meeting in August, with active participation and contributions from the Opposition represented by honourable Ketan Lal, various Government Ministries and agencies, telecommunication companies, NGOs, civil society organisations, academia, as well as religious and community organisations, each of them providing a unique and important perspective during these discussions.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as we are all aware, the internet, which is a tool of immense potential for progress, has, unfortunately, furthered the reach of cyber criminals and has become a breeding ground for predators who exploit the innocence of our children, and online sexual abuse is an extension of the existing threat of child sexual abuse. As we delve into the stark realities of these issues, we are confronted with alarming statistics that highlight its pervasive nature and the profound impact it has

on our society.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the last time I took the floor when we discussed this issue, I had shared that when we talk about the web traffic to pornographic sites, for one network provider in Fiji, over a period of three months, the download of about 626TB of data consumed ranking in one of the top 10 most used data traffic by that operator in Fiji. To put this into context, 626TB is approximately equal to a 100 million books. Imagine, having a collection of movies that would take over 150 years to watch non-stop, even if you watched one movie every single day. This shows how large this traffic data is.

For a period of one month, another network provider found that the total adult content was 92TB or 1.6 percent of their total data volume for one month. We can see that the adult content and pornography have carved out a significant presence, consuming a substantial portion of network traffic. The numbers do not lie. Although it is impossible to put any realistic numbers on how much of the internet is made up of adult content, we can be assured that the industry is huge. It is a silent epidemic, shaping our digital world and impacting countless lives.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, indeed, this is a global and regional issue. Last year, 245 electronic service providers made over 35 million reports of suspected Child Sexual Abuse Material or commonly known as CSAM, on their platform. According to the Association of Internet Hotline Providers (INHOPE), in 2023, 83 percent of child abuse victims reported to it were between the age of 3 and 13 years old. Sir, INTERPOL's Child Sexual Exploitation Database showed that in 2018, 65 percent of unidentified victims were girls and 93 percent of visible offenders were male.

The establishment of this National Taskforce, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is not merely a symbolic gesture, but a powerful demonstration of the Coalition Government's commitment to action. It is a tangible step towards safeguarding our communities and protecting our most vulnerable citizens. Which is why the Taskforce has agreed that the first work stream of the Taskforce should be to combat child pornography, now being referred to as Online Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (OCSEA).

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the CyberTipline of the United States National Centre for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC) serves as United States national clearinghouse for leads on child exploitation crimes as electronic service providers in America are mandated by law to report. These reports are then referred to law enforcement for prosecution. Sir, 99 percent of the cyber tips are received from electronic service providers such as *Meta*, *Google* and *TikTok*. A small number are also received from the public.

In 2023 alone, Mr. Speaker, Sir, NCMEC received 3,638 suspected CSEM reports from Fiji. One key action item is for our law enforcement to investigate the CyberTip reports which we are already in discussions with NCMEC and the Fiji Police Force on, with the support of the United States Government to provide the needed training to our law enforcement. This is an addition to the earlier training sessions that have been held.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I also urge parents, guardians and communities to be vigilant about the images and videos of our children that we share online. It is critical to avoid uploading pictures or videos of our children when they are not appropriately clothed. Once these images and videos are online, they can be exploited by perpetrators in unimaginable and harmful ways. Let us work together to safeguard our children in both, the physical and digital worlds.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I had spoken about the complementary efforts that we are progressing to ensure our people, in particular, our children and vulnerable groups are protected, and I would like

to share these as well. In June, we deposited our Instruments of Accession to the Budapest Convention. The Budapest Convention also has a dedicated article for offences related to child pornography and to modernise criminal laws to more effectively address the use of computer systems in the commission of sexual offences against children. This is also captured in our Cybercrime Act 2021, and we have also commenced capacity building sessions for our criminal justice authorities.

In August, as a member of the UN Ad Hoc Committee and after three years of negotiations that we were actively participating in, the UN concluded a landmark treaty against cybercrime, which also included provisions for the protection of our children in online spaces. We are also having discussions with the Council of Europe on the Lanzarote Convention, which is the Convention on the Protection of Children Against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse. These strategic partnerships ensure that we holistically address this evolving threat, build capacity and foster international cooperation with stakeholders.

The Online Safety Commission also collaborates with NCMEC on the Take it Down online reporting service and with the Australian E-Safety Commission and the Cyber Safety Pasifika initiative, through our law enforcement, to distribute information on options for reporting abuse, protecting accounts and personal information, including blocking people.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are in the process of finalising a Cabinet paper for the Fiji Government, through the Ministry of Trade and Cooperatives, Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises and Communications and also jointly with the Ministry of Women, Children and Social Protection, to join the WeProtect Global Alliance - the Global Taskforce on Child Sexual Abuse Online.

The Global Taskforce is a governmental grouping which focuses on creating a coordinated global approach to online sexual abuse, promoting collaboration among governments, and addressing critical issues such as child exploitation, online grooming, sextortion and harmful content on digital platforms. The Online Safety Commission is already a member of the WeProtect Global Alliance and important work is already being done with digital safety initiatives in schools and communities. The two Ministries joining the Global Taskforce of governments will further enhance Fiji's capacity to address the issue of online child sexual abuse effectively.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, coming back to the work of the National Taskforce, during the inaugural meeting, the Taskforce explored the importance of international collaboration and strengthening legal frameworks to protect children from online sexual exploitation. The members discussed existing child protection laws and the need for more comprehensive policies to address the evolving challenges in the digital landscape.

A significant part of the first meeting involved the validation of the Terms of Reference for the National Taskforce and the Terms of Reference of the Working Groups. There are three working groups, Mr. Speaker, Sir, established with specific objectives related to the overall goals of the Taskforce. Their mandates are clearly defined in the Terms of Reference - to develop concrete strategies and implement tangible solutions that align with our overarching mission. Each working group will focus on a thematic area and operate under the guidance of a designated working group Chair. This ensures that we have an action-oriented approach (not a top first) in the work we are doing.

The first Working Group will focus on Policy, Legislation, Governance and Criminal Justice, and is chaired by the Ministry of Women, Children and Social Protection. The second Working Group, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is chaired by the Online Safety Commission which focusses on Survivor Support, Empowerment, Society and Culture. The third Working Group will be the Industry and Technology Response and is chaired by the Telecommunications Authority of Fiji. Each Working

Group consists of different stakeholders who have their main expertise to actively participate in these Working Groups. The Working Groups have started to convene meetings with their stakeholders.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to ensure the effectiveness of our initiatives, the Taskforce will implement robust mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation. We will establish feedback channels for the community to provide input on our efforts, ensuring that we remain responsive to the needs of our citizens. The next meeting of the National Taskforce will be conducted this month, where the Working Groups will present their findings, and we will continue to engage in discussions to address the issue of pornography use in Fiji comprehensively.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have been saying in this august Parliament that we are very serious in what we are doing, to the extent that we are actually looking at even banning some sites, if necessary. On that note, I would like to personally thank the honourable Minister for Women, Children and Social Protection as we are standing shoulder to shoulder together as part of this Taskforce and to address this issue comprehensively; all the stakeholders who are part of the workforce; and the Working Groups, for their contributions. I also invited more members of the Opposition to come and be part of this Working Group, given the importance of the work that we are doing.

In closing, the fight against online child sexual abuse and pornography requires a collective responsibility from all sectors of society. We urge each stakeholder to take an active role in this national effort. Mr. Speaker, Sir, we remain committed in our resolve, and I am more than happy to provide further updates as we move along. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, for this opportunity.

MR. SPEAKER.- I now call on the Leader of the Opposition, or his designate.

HON. K.K. LAL. - Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise today as a member of the National Taskforce on pornography and as a voice for the many victims who have suffered in silence due to the proliferation of explicit content on social media platforms. While I appreciate the honourable Deputy Prime Minister's update on the work undertaken by the Taskforce, I must emphasise that the Government's efforts to-date have been largely bureaucratic.

The establishment of the Taskforce was, indeed, a step in the right direction. However, we must acknowledge the realities that our people, especially our young, and women continue to face everyday. Victims of online sexual harassment, cyberbullying and non-consensual sharing of nude images have been long calling for stronger legislative measures and more robust enforcement to protect them. Yet, Mr. Speaker, Sir, this Taskforce has far produced more discussions and reviews than actual results.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is imperative that we do more than just talk. Our people are losing trust in processes and commissions that make grand promises but deliver little to no outcomes. The honourable Deputy Prime Minister mentioned that this Taskforce aims to better understand the societal risk of pornography in Fiji, but, Mr. Speaker, Sir, do we need another review to tell us what we already know? We are aware of the devastating impact that unregulated access to pornography is heavy on our society, contributing to increase cases of online harassment and violence against women and children.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I urge the Government to prioritise the implementation of practical solutions that are already within our reach. Strengthening our cybercrime laws, improving reporting mechanisms and increasing resources for our law enforcement to track and prosecute offenders are essential first steps.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we also need to work closely with social media companies to ensure that they have robust policies for removing harmful content swiftly and efficiently. Furthermore, we must stand united as a Parliament in condemning the perpetrators who use these platforms to exploit and humiliate others. There are too many instances where victims, especially young women, have had their dignity stripped away online while authorities have remained either powerless or too slow to act. The taskforce should not only be focussed on preventative measures, but also on providing support systems for victims, psychological, legal and emotional.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this Government is very fond of establishing taskforces, conducting research and forming committees. But the real test is whether these initiatives can bring about meaningful change. The real change that they promised. It is easy to announce yet another review or report, but it is far more challenging to implement real reforms that can safeguard our people. I sincerely hope that the recommendations of this taskforce will not gather dust on the shelves of their cabinet, but rather be translated into concrete actions that will make our online spaces safer and more secure.

We, on this side of Parliament, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the G-16 Bloc, stand ready to work together to ensure that our children, our sisters, our mothers and all Fijians are protected from the behaviours that thrive on these platforms. We need less bureaucracy and more action! Less talk and more decisive moves! Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is high time this Government moves beyond taskforce and research and start showing us results. I call the taskforce to expedite its work and to focus on outcomes that will restore faith and the Government's ability to tackle these pressing issues. Our people deserve no less.

On that note Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank you and I also want to congratulate my friend on the other side, the honourable Minister for Public Works, Transport and Meteorological Services, for becoming the new Deputy Leader for the People's Alliance Party. I hope that he will do his work very well and also fix the potholes on our streets.

(Laughter)

MR. SPEAKER.- You started off well, honourable Ketan Lal, but you ended up with the potholes again.

I now call on the Leader of the G-9 Bloc, or their designate.

HON. P.K. RAVUNAWA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, for allowing me the space to respond to the Ministerial Statement by the honourable Deputy Prime Minister.

Mr. Speaker, as an independent Member of Parliament, I am tasked with the privilege of offering a distinctive view to this conversation, one that is shaped by my Christian faith and rich depository of the faith-based community I am part of.

The establishment of the National Taskforce to tackle the societal risks associated with pornography is a reaffirming parallel to the views and the values, I and thousands across Fiji resonate with, rooted in respect of human person and a sanctity of relationship. These challenges are more than a societal issue, it is about the preservation of our moral fabric, the essence of human dignity and a concern that is central to our people and our faith.

As a Fijian citizen, deriving our strength from faith, we understand the harms of pornography, Mr. Speaker, Sir, not only in terms of societal risk, but also as a moral concern that negatively impacts relationships, our family values and individual growth. We acknowledge that pornography is harmful

of the materials that objectifies individuals, distorts the healthy understanding of human sexuality and the impacts on mental and spiritual wellbeing.

Whilst we applaud the Taskforce's effort, the Christian faith and the faith-based community would like to ensure that our actions are holistic, not only centred merely on punitive measures, but develop a regulation that will play a role, so does the education of our community. The teaching of Christ moves us towards understanding empathy and rehabilitation over punishment and judgment, Mr. Speaker, Sir. We should strive to foster an environment where the inherent dignity and word of each person are respected, human sexuality are not degraded. This involves an open conversation and a comprehensive education about the impact and the explicit content with digital safety consent and healthier relationships.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in this discussion, it is crucial to remember the *Bible* verse, Matthew 18:6, reminding us that leading children astray brings great moral responsibility. We must ensure that our children and vulnerable population are offered the utmost protection with wisdom to make sound morale upright and instil decisions in the cyberspace.

Moreover, as protectors of individual freedom, we must find a balance between safeguarding morale standards and protecting privacy rights. This delicate balance necessitates the inclusion of legal, ethical and spiritual consideration in our decision-making process, aligning the State's affairs and resources with our moral compass as a guiding light.

Lastly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, in our pursuit to curtail the adverse effect of pornography, we must be reminded to uphold the principle of compassion, understanding and forgiveness that our faith teaches us. The pathway we propose in this Parliament should inspire transformation and healing, rather than stigmatisation and shame. I trust that the honourable Deputy Prime Minister, the Taskforce and each one of us in this room uphold this principle close to our hearts. I stand with them in their fight against the societal risk of pornography, echoing our faith, call, dignity, respect, responsible freedom and a holistic approach in addressing this issue.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, it is almost 12.30 p.m., so I would like to adjourn Parliament now. We will resume at 2.30 p.m., and we will continue with the Statement made by the honourable Minister for Fisheries and Forestry. Thank you.

The Parliament adjourned at 12.28 p.m.



The Parliament resumed at 2.42 p.m.

### Causes of Fish Poisoning in Fiji and the Pacific Islands

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Speaker, the honourable Prime Minister, the honourable Leader of the Opposition, honourable Cabinet Ministers and Assistant Ministers, honourable Members of Parliament and all those tuning in live on Parliament's *Facebook* page – *ni sa yadra vinaka*.

Mr. Speaker, this afternoon, I am pleased to deliver a Statement on the Ministry of Fisheries work on managing fish poisoning in Fiji and the research undertakings on ciguatera fish poisoning, one of the common causes of fish poisoning in Fiji and the Pacific Islands.

Mr. Speaker, fish is an important protein rich food source which contributes significantly to the health and economic livelihood of our people. Fish consumption in Fiji is estimated at between 15 and 113 kilogrammes per capita and there is a higher per capita consumption in rural coastal communities.

The presence of toxins in fish will significantly impact the economy and public health of Fijians, especially when it involves our export market and the hospitality industry. In Fiji, Mr. Speaker, fish poisoning affects health, trade and livelihood. Fish poisoning can be caused by:

- (1) improper fish handling;
- (2) fish not chilled and refrigerated properly; and
- (3) eating reef fish that have accumulated naturally occurring toxins called ciguatoxin. The ciguatoxin is produced from small sea plants called dinoflagellates and as it enters through the food chain, it becomes progressively more concentrated affecting humans.

Mr. Speaker, to address improper fish handling and the maintenance of fish quality, the Ministry of Fisheries has established 24 Fisheries Centres across the country. These Centres supply ice to fishers to preserve fish, maintain freshness and prevent the release of enzymes from fish which speeds up the fish's spoilage rate and causes fish poisoning.

Mr. Speaker, our Extension and Advisory Division serves in the four Divisions and provides post-harvest training to licensed fishers on how to maintain seafood freshness and quality. The training includes the proper use of ice and adequate hygiene during harvesting, processing, distribution and marketing of the fish product.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry commends the tremendous support the Government of Japan provides through the Overseas Fisheries Cooperation Foundation in installing and monitoring ice machines in the 24 stations, including ongoing training and capacity building of our technical services staff in operating and servicing the ice machines.

Mr. Speaker, ciguatera fish poisoning is primarily prevalent during the warmer months or cyclone seasons from November to April. However, with the frequent changes in weather patterns, increased natural disturbances and climate change impact, the occurrence is frequent and varies.

In Fiji, Mr. Speaker, the management of ciguatera fish poisoning depends mainly on Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) which is not adequately documented.

Mr. Speaker, since 2002, the Ministry of Fisheries has conducted a baseline questionnaire survey to identify major hotspots, seasons and fish species implicated in ciguatoxin, including

treatment and traditional remedies. This work documented the effort to manage, prevent and reduce the incidence of fish poisoning, especially given the impact of climate change that may contribute to the spread of ciguatera toxin.

Mr. Speaker, the work on ciguatera fish poisoning is included in the Ministry workplan with the following objectives:

- (1) Improve the reporting mechanism for ciguatera incidence in coastal and maritime communities; and
- (2) Assess the environmental and ecological presence of marine biotoxin-identified hotspot areas in Fiji and provide recommended adaptations strategies.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry has created awareness through community outreach, talkback shows, trade shows, journal publications and public awareness materials. News alerts and awareness are published through the Ministry of Fisheries *Facebook* page and other media outlets during the cyclone season.

In 2016, Mr. Speaker, and with the support of our local institutions, the University of the South Pacific and the Fiji National University, the Ministry undertook a validation research approach to investigating the hotspots identified through traditional ecological knowledge and the scientific process to determine the occurrence and accumulation in seafood. The study discovered some unknown knowledge and confirmed some of Fiji's fish poisoning traditional science. The sampling was conducted in Kadavu, Nadroga, Navosa and Tailevu.

Mr. Speaker, in collaboration with the Ministry of Health and the Fiji National University, the village nurses, village headmen and community workers were trained to collect data on ciguatera fish poisoning incidents using a specifically designed fish poisoning notification book. The pilot project was conducted in Tailevu and Kadavu.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry appreciates and acknowledges the support of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (UNFAO) for assisting in setting up a mini laboratory in the Ministry by donating laboratory equipment and providing capacity building for staff to enhance their field sample collection, identification and preservation skills. Because of the need to undertake a comprehensive research approach to manage, prevent and reduce the incidence of ciguatera fish poisoning in Fiji, the Ministry is in the process of entering into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Fiji National University. The focus is to undertake a complete research approach based on the impact of health, environment, socio-cultural, food security, livelihood and trade.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry would like to acknowledge and appreciate the Government of Japan's instrumental roles in developing Fiji fisheries sector. Last Wednesday, as Minister for Fisheries, I signed a MOU with the Ambassador of Japan for funding projects for our provisional fisheries research vessel and ice making machines. These infrastructures will continue to support managing and preventing fish poisoning in Fiji by enabling research and ecological assessment in remote maritime areas and assisting maritime communities with access to ice, proper fish handling and better markets.

Mr. Speaker, the work on managing, reducing and preventing fish poisoning needs a multi-disciplinary collaboration between Government agencies, research institutions and local communities. As we approach the cyclone season, the Ministry will intensify public outreach and release awareness materials on ciguatera fish poisoning. I urge the public to remain vigilant especially in identifying and avoiding fish associated with ciguatera toxin.

MR. SPEAKER.- I now call on the honourable Leader of the Opposition, or his designate.

HON. I. B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, I thank the honourable Minister for her Ministerial Statement. Of course, we are all concerned about the safety, health and well-being of our people and providing them information in advance, our taking pro-active measures is a good initiative to ensure that our people, of course, do take heed particularly when it is in season.

As alluded to by the honourable Minister, I will not go into detail on it but perhaps an advice to the honourable Deputy Prime Minister for Trade, “if you want to avoid fish poisoning, why not go for *kaikoso*? Perhaps a better alternative. It is safe and of course you will enjoy your long life as well. That is perhaps a recommendation to the other side of the House, there is an alternative to fish for those of you who do eat fish. The honourable Minister for Rural and Maritime Development and I, we abstain from eating fish.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, what is important, perhaps to what the honourable Minister has stated is how people can realize or identify the symptoms when they are affected. This is particularly relevant for those in the outer islands where they do not have easy access to health facilities.

I remembered my days as an officer in the RFMF, we had exercise in Nabukavesi and the late Dr. Ifereimi Buaserau shared to us his experience in Lau. Because of the implications, they usually lie to the doctors about what they ate and when it gets worse, then that is where they revealed things, especially, Sir, in the first three hours and, of course, in the first 72 hours as well. This is very important, particularly, for our people to know the symptoms and differentiate between the symptoms as they go through the pain or whatever we may call it during the first three hours and the first 72 hours as well. Of course, prevention is better than cure. The season, we need to also avoid particularly those that do feed on coral reefs and organisms that live on our reefs because this is a common problem in sub-tropical and, of course, tropical countries as well.

Apart from the season, Mr. Speaker, Sir, as a means of prevention as well, one is avoiding reef fish particularly the recommended sizes according to science is fishes over 2.7 kilogrammes because of probably, it is related to their eating patterns. The other one, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is apart from the fillet, the flesh itself, people need to avoid eating the liver, intestines, head and the roe of small reef fish. Roe is another name for fish eggs. Those are the things that are also recommended for us to avoid if we do happen to choose.

I commend the Ministry for the work that they do in terms of awareness. We need to have these aggressive campaign on awareness, so that we can also ensure that the message reaches out. I am particularly pleading for those in the rural areas and the outer island communities, if we can use all the arms of Government, not only Ministry of Fisheries, to reach out to our people and, of course, the involvement of academia, is important. That is my contribution but once again there is an alternative, go for *kaikoso*.

MR. SPEAKER.- Yes, you have tonnes of knowledge about fish.

The G-9 Bloc, or their designate?

HON. V. NAUPOTO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, thank you honourable Minister for the Statement this afternoon. Very important on fish poisoning; ciguatera poisoning is something that I am very well versed with; not as a scientist but for someone who suffers from it a lot.

From my island, Sir, years ago all the fish were poisoned with ciguatera. We know very much the symptoms when you get it, one of them is temperature reversals, so the hot things get cold

and cold things feel hot. So, if you put your hand under the tap, you think it is hot, so you put it away.

The problem with ciguatera poisoning is that you cannot test the fish beforehand, you will only know it after you eat it. One of the preventative measures, I think, is for people to understand which fish and the season when fish are usually the prevalence of ciguatera is there which is coming up now - October (*Vula i Balolo Lailai*) and November (*Vula i Balolo Levu*) is when fish poisoning occurs. Generally, we know the fish species that are easily poisonous at this time. I think the Ministry puts out some awareness material on fish. The problem is not so much for those who live in the islands, they know the season, they know the fish that they should avoid. The problem is with us in the urban areas where our fish identification is very bad.

Generally, you will not be able to differentiate between the two-spot red snapper and the normal mangrove jack which is a nice eating fish. The two spot ones are poisonous one in Fiji. I think the Fijian name for it is *bati*. They look very familiar but the *bati* is the one that usually is poisonous. I know in Natewa Bay, Udu Point, no fish is poisonous that side. They think they are all good.

Fish identification, this is something that is almost disappearing now. Our children do not know the Fijian name of our fish and even trees. I think that area is also the same. If the Ministry can put out public awareness during seasons like now, when ciguatera poisoning would be high, the risk for it is high, the types of fish to avoid, I think that will help a lot because in some cases, people die from fish poisoning.

I have on a few occasions, when lining up to buy fish and there is someone who is picking up one of these species that I know that are usually poisonous, I will lean across to them and tell them, "Do you know what that fish is?" And no, so at this time, *Bati* is not a safe fish to buy, oh okay and they will change. But that comes from the experience of getting fish poisoning a lot of the time and I was on the island, but it is an important aspect of fisheries work.

Again, perhaps if the enforcement officers could go around and look at the fish that has been sold and if you see those that we should be avoiding during this time where the ciguatera poisoning where the chances of it is high. We should tell them that you should not be selling these types of fish. But it is a good initiative from the Ministry, and I think awareness is the key, because you do not see it, you will learn only after you eat it. And perhaps, some education on the symptoms that you get so that you know that when you get fish poisoning, you can go to the hospital and get the right treatment.

## QUESTIONS

### Oral Questions

MR. SPEAKER.— Honourable members, this is the first oral question for today and I have approved the request from the Government Whip for Oral Question No. 228/2024 to be asked on Thursday.

(Question No. 228/2024 deferred)

On the second Oral Question for today, honourable Members, please, take note that Oral Question No. 229/2024 has been adequately addressed through Ministerial Statement by the honourable Prime Minister earlier today, even though the honourable Prime Minister has insisted that the question continue.

At the same time, I would like to bring to your notice, honourable Members, that I will be very strict next time around. Once the author of the question is not present, then that question lapses. So, we are kind of going back to the old ways when we deal with those who are not present, and they have questions under their name to be asked. So, for this one here, the honourable Prime Minister has stated or has alluded in his Statement that he would like to see that this question is raised. So, that is your question, honourable Tunabuna.

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA.- Mr. Speaker Sir, I would like to withdraw my question.

(Question No. 229/2024 withdrawn)

Grants for Persons with Disabilities  
(Question No. 230/2024)

HON. RATU J.B. NIUDAMU asked the Government, upon notice.

Can the honourable Minister for Women, Children and Social Protection inform Parliament as to the types of grants provided to organisations for persons with disability?

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, firstly, I would like to wish all Members a Happy Pinktober Month. As we raise awareness on the issue of breast cancer, I would like to invite all honourable Ministers and ministerial departments and Opposition Chambers as well to host their morning tea to raise funds for the Fiji Cancer Society, as is usual practice during the month of October.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Member for the question regarding the types of grants provided to organisations for persons with disability. I give credit to the former FijiFirst Government for initiating the grants to organisations for persons with disabilities in 2017, during a face-to-face budget consultation organised by the then Ministry of Economy that was done in Lautoka and Suva and where the organisations requested for grants to help with operations and capital purchases from the Government. That request was approved in the same financial year and \$1.1 million was allocated for the grant.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Government continues to fund organisations for persons with disabilities, but over the years, due to the low utilisation as a result of various things including lack of audited reports and acquittals, as well as deregistration issues, the fund has been reduced to \$300,000.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, since the inception of this grant, Government tries to provide capacity building on the financial requirements of the grant, and at the same time, ensuring that these organisations are assisted, and we have had good technical assistance from the Pacific Disability Forum, as well as our donor and development partners. So, this is provided to these organisations who are the recipients of the grant.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, of course, we conduct an analysis on those that need this grant and so recipients are chosen through the usual process. We do want to acknowledge our core partners, such as DFAT, UNFPA, AUSFACILITY, MFAT, UNICEF and others, to name a few.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this measure is a priority area for the Ministry. Now, while we look after the human resources and operating costs for these organisations, the development partners help to fund their other various activities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as I had alluded earlier about the need for a continued capacity building for these organisations to account back and to acquit on what they use, as well as the need to generally have more activities by these organisations for our people with disabilities and more engagement in the community, we encourage the SMEs in the hope that this will improve, which would mean more funding requests and more funding allocated in the budget for these organisations. But we are committed, Sir, as a Ministry to attend to the needs of our disability service providers, as well as our persons with disabilities, to improve social inclusion and access to these services. Thank you, Sir.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, just a very simple question to the honourable Minister for Women; for future developments, how is your Ministry promoting and ensuring disability inclusive infrastructure?

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, that is a very good question. As we look across the Ministries and their programmes, there is certainly a need for disability mainstreaming in other Ministries. I am happy to share in this Parliament that even programmes are now moving towards disability inclusion, including the Ministry of Housing, where they currently have a budgetary allocation for disability retrofitting. So, retrofitting of housing for people with disabilities.

However, Mr. Speaker, Sir, what they are committing to in moving forward as we are looking at the affordable housing scheme for low-income earners, is also to have allocation for people living with disabilities, especially accessibility on the bottom floor, to ensure that across development of projects, that there are disability inclusive access. As far as working with the Town Councils and City Councils, there is also an opportunity in terms of disability parking, as well as making our restaurants and buildings to conform to a building code which needs disability access as well, and that is something that we are also working on with the line Ministry.

We hope that that will be realised. Of course, it takes budget allocations, but there is a commitment, Mr. Speaker, Sir, from the Coalition Government to ensure that there is disability inclusion and mainstreaming across the Ministries. Our Ministry is committed also. As we deal with people with disabilities, hopefully, there is a department under the Ministry dedicated towards people living with disabilities which is also our commitment under the Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities, so we hope to move towards that as well.

MR. SPEAKER. – Thank you. I have a question, is it already part of the building code?

HON. L.D. TABUYA - Yes, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER.- There should be provisions made for people that are suffering from some kind of disability, for example, wheelchairs and all that.

HON. L.D. TABUYA - Yes, as I understand it, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is part of the building code.

HON. T.R. MATASAWALEVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Minister for what has already been mentioned about the allowances that people with disabilities are receiving. My question is, are people with disabilities receiving the same allowance or it depends on the type of disability that they have?

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I believe the question is related. This is about our people with disabilities receiving the disability allowance under Social Protection. Yes, there are certain disabilities that are certified by doctors, that are accepted by the Ministry. It is not all disabilities, but certainly the ones where we receive from a doctor a certificate, that qualifies them to

to receive disability allowance.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Minister for her responses. We want to ensure that no one is left behind and, particularly, the physically challenged are not deprived of such assistance. My question is on data. Do we have data that captures those who come under your list? And if so, how current is it? The other part to the question is, what would you expect from us and stakeholders in order to assist in this regard? I ask this question because as a former Commissioner, we would go around and they would ask for wheelchairs, crutches, et cetera.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Thank you, honourable Leader of Opposition. Yes, data is always important, as we formulate policies, for our people living with disabilities. I want to acknowledge the support of DFAT in assisting the National Council for Persons with Disabilities (NCPD) in collecting data, so that is what they are currently undertaking.

The difficulty they are facing is, of course, accessing data from Ministries and Departments, as well as the Fiji Bureau of Statistics. We have constantly been reminded by our honourable Prime Minister that we should be able to access data across Ministries, that we do not necessarily need an MOU to be receiving data from each other. I think that this is something that we trying to improve on in terms of sharing data across Ministries. But, as far as going outside to a stakeholder, like NCPD, there is still that process they need to follow in order to access the data, but DFAT in assisting NCPD has been very helpful.

Now, we are also using this data to formulate our National Disability Policy, which is in draft form at the moment, so it is informing that Policy which is yet to come to Cabinet. We are finalising that as well because there were some issues that we had as a Ministry towards reviewing the Policy. I thank Dr. Helen Tavola, who is the consultant from DFAT and has been spearheading that, working with NCPD, but the collection of data is crucial to formulating the Policy, so that certainly helps us in our work.

As far as the data within the Ministry's database, as you know, we are digitising our database but, yes, there is still the need to be able to have proper data when it comes to informing our policies. We hope that with this National Disability Policy, which will be evidence-based data inform, then we will be able to have that data. We also hope that across the Ministries, things like village profiling, now we are doing informal settlement profiling, that there will also be a collection of that data in the process.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Honourable Minister, it is really hard to believe that the budget allocated for the disability-related NGOs has reduced from \$1.1 million to \$300,000, when you take into consideration the population of disabled people have increased due to NCDs. My question is, what are you doing about that? People do need help, the number is going up, funding has come down, so how are we providing this assistance? Are we creating enough awareness to the disability organisations that this is where the fund is, this is what the criteria is, and this is how you can access?

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Yes, the allocation has come down, as I explained. It is dependent on the utilisation as well as reporting back, so that is something we need to build capacity on.

One of the issues we face with our disability recipients is the increasing demand for assistive devices and retrofitting of their homes to enable them to move around in their homes. It is usually bathroom fittings which is very susceptible to slipping and you can have injuries, as well as ramps and walkways to access their homes back and forth.

In villages, it is difficult to get around in a wheelchair, so the need for more footpaths, so disability access is certainly something that can be done across the Ministries. The allocation for disability housing for the need to retrofit that does not sit within our Ministry. It sits within the Ministry of Local Government and Housing. Yes, I believe they could certainly do with more funds because of the increasing demand for the need to retrofit housing. I thank Public Rental Board who have now allocated their bottom flats for disability access, and they have actually put on Ramps, as well as easy access, and this is from your Government taking these initiatives. This is really important as we move forward for our people with disabilities.

Of course, the issue with transport - moving around in buses, we still have buses that are not disability friendly, even if they make the choice, it is difficult for them. Again, we need to keep talking to our bus operators to bring in disability friendly buses, it is a cost for them. We are still trying to sort the e-ticketing system, but I believe it is work in progress and it is for the Ministry to continue to advocate and speak to our line Ministries and stakeholders to assist our people with disability.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we move on to the fourth Oral Question for today. I understand that the honourable Assistant Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister, I do not know whether he forgot or got stuck during his visit to the United States. So, that question has now lapsed because he is not present.

(Question No. 231/2024 terminated)

Budget Utilisation - Coastal Erosion Protection  
(Question No. 232/2024)

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU asked the Government, upon notice.

Can the honourable Minister for Agriculture and Waterways inform Parliament on the work that has been undertaken to utilise the \$1.5 million allocation for Coastal Erosion Protection in the 2023–2024 financial year?

HON. V.T.T.K. RAYALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Leader of the Opposition for the question.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to respond to the question regarding the utilisation of the \$1.5 million allocation for Coastal Erosion Protection in the 2023-2024 financial year. Several key project locations were identified under this allocation to mitigate the impacts of coastal erosion and protect vulnerable communities from the threats posed by rising sea levels and erosion.

Coastal erosion protection works are essential for ensuring the safety and resilience of our coastal communities. The allocation and budget for these initiatives in the 2023-2024 financial year were as follows:

- (1) Salevukoso Village in Macuata- \$200,000;
- (2) Tubou Hospital in Lakeba, Lau - \$240,000;
- (3) Ovea Village, Bau, Tailevu - \$750,000;
- (4) Nawaisomo Village, Beqa - \$200,000; and
- (5) In-house Nature Based Projects - \$110,000.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, all projects were mandated to follow a transparent and competitive tender process in compliance with Government's financial regulations, thereby, ensuring accountability and



effective governance.

Evaluation for tenders were carried out for coastal erosion protection works that was required to safeguard the Tubou Hospital in Lakeba with 150 metres of coastal protection works. In Nawaisomo Village in Beqa, it was 310 metres. Unfortunately, the tender for Salevukoso Village in Macuata that requires 200 metres of work was withdrawn as the bid substantially surpassed the engineer's financial estimate as to the cost of the lowest bid which was 20 percent more. Plans are in place to re-tender that project.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ovea Village project in Tailevu was advertised for a tender, the contract was awarded in the third quarter of the 2023-2024 financial year, following a contract duration of six months. Construction commenced in 2023 and is expected to extend into the 2024-2025 financial year. This involves 470 metres of erosion protection works for Ovea Village. This should be completed by the end of this month.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the allocation of \$110,000 for the in-house nature-based projects was designated specifically for the procurement of construction materials intended for nature-based seawalls located in Navunievu Village in Bua, where 450 metres of coastal erosion protection works have been completed and in Namatakula Village, Nadroga, where 100 metres out of the 400 metres of coastal protection works have been completed. These initiatives are designed to offer sustainable low impact coastal protection by utilising local materials and environmentally friendly technologies, thereby, strengthening the resilience of these communities against coastal erosion and saltwater intrusion.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there is an additional support and funding of \$1.7 million from the Kiwa Initiative through the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture and Waterways which has identified six sites for nature-based solution seawalls, and they are as follows:

- Navolau in Ra - 400 metres of seawall;
- Navola Village, Nadroga – 450 metres of seawall;
- Somosomo Village, Taveuni - 425 metres of seawall;
- Nakawaga Village, Mali Island, Macuata - 420 metres of seawall;
- Ligaulevu Village - 200 metres of seawall; and
- Vesi Village – 150 metres.

The nature-based seawalls in Navolau, Navola in Nadroga and Somosomo in Taveuni are anticipated to begin this month. The support of the Kiwa Initiative through IUCN is much appreciated, and it takes a shorter process before the work can start on the ground.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, despite our diligent efforts, the delays encountered in the tender approval processes resulted in the Ministry's inability to execute all the coastal protection works for the 2023-2024 financial year. This will be completed in the current financial year.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in response to the delays, the Ministry was compelled to re-evaluate its intervention plans and redeployed a portion of the budget to improve the utilization of funds for the coastal erosion protection works for the 2023-2024 financial year. As a result of this redeployment of funds, \$329,000 was allocated for the reinstatement of the Drainage Boards for the Central, Western and Northern Divisions. The funds were allocated to set up office space, recruit staff, equipment purchase, vehicle and selected machinery, as well as for the maintenance of approved drainage schemes. Some of these activities will commence in this financial year.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, although the coastal erosion protection project experienced setbacks, the redeployment of funds effectively addressed other critical needs for the Waterways Division during the last financial year.

In conclusion, the Ministry is steadfast in its dedication to advancing the coastal erosion protection activities and is working closely with the Government Tender Board and the Ministry of Finance to accelerate the approval processes in this financial year.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to thank the honourable Minister for the response and the work undertaken as well. This is very critical for us in terms of our adaptation and resilience programmes. The honourable Prime Minister, this morning, talked about our Foreign Policy White Paper and one of the key elements within that is our bilateral and multilateral connections.

I am interested honourable Minister in the costings that you may, I hope, already have for the other projects. Sir, COP29 is a finance COP, and it is expected of, particularly, small island countries to come up with their plans. Has there been scoping done on how many or all the projects that you have? Unfortunately, I did not include riverbank protection. If you can highlight to the House because this is very important for the protection of our people and, particularly, linking up to COP29 - the finance COP?

HON. V.T.T.K. RAYALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Leader of the Opposition for raising that point. For coastal protection works, we have done scoping for 156 sites, that is, 80 sites in the Central Division, 29 sites in the Western Division, 30 sites in the Northern Division and 58 sites in the Eastern Division. The total cost comes to around \$100 million.

For watershed management, we have identified eight sites; seven in Ba and one in Nadi. Those eight sites, the scoping we have come up with amounts to \$24 million. Having said that, Mr. Speaker, Sir, there is also the dredging of our major rivers, drainage and the flood protection which we have already done. All in all, the total cost would be about \$464.5 million.

Sustainable Water Management Practices  
(Question No. 233/2024)

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA asked the Government, upon notice.

Can the honourable Minister for Agriculture and Waterways inform Parliament on the measures being undertaken by the Ministry to ensure the implementation of sustainable water management practices among farmers, particularly, with the increasing impacts of climate change?

HON. V.T.T.K. RAYALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Member for the question. The increasing impacts of climate change continue to challenge agriculture production and food system in Fiji. Sustainable Water Management is a concept with deep historical roots, having been practised by our ancestors over time. It has been refined and developed into contemporary methods such as advanced irrigation technologies, innovative farming systems and effective water retention and utilization methods.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Waterways Division within the Ministry of Agriculture and Waterways manages a project focussed on supporting irrigation systems for agricultural development. Recipients are selected through an Expression of Interest process which is followed by on-site verification. The irrigation systems have the aim of improving the use of limited water supply in dry farming areas to

improve farm production. A weir with 1.2 million cubic metres water storage volume was built by the then Land Water Resource Management Unit across the Nawaka River in Nadi in 2010.

These are the objectives of constructing this weir:

- Flood mitigation for food security, to manage water levels effectively thereby reducing the likelihood of flooding in adjacent regions. By regulating floodwaters, it protects agricultural land which in turn supports uninterrupted crop production and secures food resources for the local population.
- Irrigation support during dry season. In terms of droughts and insufficient rainfall, this weir serves as a dependable water source for irrigation. This guarantees the continuity of agricultural operations thereby preserving crop yields and sustaining livelihoods even during the dry season.

Fishing for food security, the weir establishes a more stable aquatic ecosystem that enhances freshwater fish habitats thereby offering a reliable food source for the community. This plays a significant role in ensuring long-term food security for the villages.

The integration of flood management dependable irrigation systems and improved fishing prospects are designed to enhance the resilience of the local communities while fostering sustainable development.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as a young student at Queen Victoria School, I used to spend a lot of my school holidays in Nawaka. I was asking Tui Nawaka when I went there lately the existence of this weir, but he said that it is all now under a lot of shrubs. We will try to clear all the debris so that it is functional once more.

For those of you who do not know or may not be clear with what I am talking about, these are in iTaukei, *na tore. Na tore o koya dau vagolei tani ga na uciwai, qai dua na tamani tobu vakaitamera. O ira na tobu ogo, mai Nawaka ena gauna oya, e caka tu kina na siwa. Era dau siwa maleya kina, era nunu.* It was so big that if you were fishing on this side of the weir, you will not know the other person on the other side. That was how big it was but, unfortunately, it has not been maintained.

All we need is to clear up the debris. It is a direct answer to the flooding that happens in Nawaka. I told Tui Nawaka, "If we are going to clean the weir once again and make use of it, it is going to be a source of food security for you and also, it is a flood mitigation method." This is what I have talked about here, I hope it is clear.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Land Use Division of the Ministry has established two demonstration sites for rainwater harvesting in Namuka-i-Wai Island in the *Tikina o Dogotuki* and Nagugu Settlement in the *Tikina o Naduri*; both in Vanua Levu. This initiative is part of the Climate Smart Agriculture Programme and was established in the 2023-2024 financial year and is currently implemented in collaboration with the Live & Learn NGO.

In both demonstration sites, water tanks are being installed to collect rainwater. These tanks are linked to drip irrigation system that supplies water to vegetable gardens. The concept of water harvesting involves a collection of rainwater occurring in a specific location and its subsequent transfer to another area. This process enhances the availability of water for sustainable use in regions where water resources are limited. The garden serves as a source for nutritious food for the

community that depend on an irregular water supply from the mainland for their daily sustenance in the past.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, given Fiji's susceptibility to climate change, the implementation of sustainable water management practices is also essential for livestock production. Some of the key strategies include efficient water use, forest management, legume-grass mixtures, silos production and livestock management through genetic selection, and the development of livestock breeds that exhibit greater resilience to drought conditions, including heat tolerant breeds for those with reduced water needs such as the Droughtmaster breed in cattle.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Agriculture and Waterways has adopted Climate-Smart Agriculture as one of its strategic priorities and this includes activities to reforest watershed areas to ensure sufficient and good quality water is available to farmers. The inclusion of agroforestry will ensure water loss from the soil is reduced and integrated farming system will ensure water is utilised efficiently.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me enlighten the House that in certain areas in Fiji that are separated by mountains, we have areas where you have an abundance of water on the other side. But then, directly on the other side, there is a big difference of no water. You just have to go along the coast in Nakorotubu and have a look at the Bureiwei area where there is no water. But up in the mountains, on the other side, there is abundant of water, *ia rau tikina vata tikoga*. So, that requires big infrastructure projects, and I hope that it can be part of the infrastructure vision for Fiji - to get water from those areas and channel it to other areas that do not have water. It is a challenge for Parliament, it may be very costly.

As I have stated earlier in my answer to the honourable Leader of the Opposition's question, infrastructure is a costly thing. If we spend peanuts on our infrastructure, we will get monkeys! We spend money, we throw money into the infrastructure, it will last us a lifetime. These infrastructures that are here that are now falling to pieces were infrastructure from the 1960s, so I hope the Ministry is given the money to fix all these infrastructure.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, be assured that we will fight for the money to get it from Government.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- For you!

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Honourable Minister, this is a very interesting topic.

MR. SPEAKER.- Where is the money?

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- It is with the Government, Mr. Speaker, Sir. They have to get it. Otherwise, as I have stated, that is why COP29 is so important and your Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), the consistency in our messaging, given our special circumstances and challenges.

Honourable Minister, for the *tore* (weir) concept, if you cannot just look at Nawaka in isolation but the whole area that is being included already under the Nadi River Strategy, that is very important. That is my first question, is that something that you are going to consider? And, I will have more questions as well.

HON. V.T.T.K. RAYALU .- Yes, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that is included in the plans. We want to revisit that area.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, if I may just combine the next two questions together; honourable Minister, you are aware of the Sigatoka Valley. You also have the irrigation system, but it has also been neglected for ages. I hope you can consider that. If you can state an answer to that as well. You have talked about the irrigation system from rainwater harvesting. What is the Ministry's plan for drip systems from underground water sources, like boreholes?

HON. V.T.T.K. RAYALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the saltwater intrusion phenomenon is real. When you go up the Sigatoka Valley, saltwater has intruded right up to the upper valley, and the same goes for the Rewa River. If you happen to stand beside the Rewa River up in Kabara, an estate in Naitasiri past Nabaitavo Village, you stand beside the river at Kabara, you can smell the sea. So, it means that saltwater intrusion has gone right up to those places.

Definitely, we have to be serious about the irrigation systems that the honourable Leader of Opposition is talking about, whether it is a drip irrigation or rainwater harvesting, all these will help. Likewise, we must not forget the big infrastructure projects to take care of - our national needs, as I have talked about earlier. It may cost us a fortune, but it is a necessity. I say that it is a necessity because our survival depends on it, water is a basic need. We have to fix it, otherwise farming or agriculture will suffer, and we will become a country that will keep importing food up to the extent where we become a net-food importing country, and surely, we do not want that. Thank you.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Honourable Minister for Agriculture and Waterways, my question is in regards to water management and utilisation, and is in terms of the risks - some of the irrigation support mechanisms that farmers are facing. For example, if a farmer is given the borehole system or the irrigation system, then of course, due to some mechanical failures, the system is now not functioning anymore, and the farmers are not in the capacity to get it fixed. Does the Ministry come in and assist these farmers, or do they have to wait for the next budget? What is the process like, just for the information of the farmers?

HON. V.T.T.K. RAYALU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. The simple answer is, yes, we can assist.

HON. P.K. RAVUNAWA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, my question is in regards to the dredging in the Rewa River. There is dredging along the other end of Nausori Town, and there is soil erosion on the highway that is connected. There is civic lot where there is Mosque and a Church seated. Also, there is commercial lot on that end of Nausori Town that is eroding fast due to the dredging. My question is, who monitors the dredging because dredging should be in the middle of the river rather than on the side where soil erosion will just continue?

HON. V.T.T.K. RAYALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the dredging is monitored by the Ministry of Agriculture and Waterways Officials, from our Waterways Division, so I will find out if what you are saying is true.

Accountability in the Distribution of Social Pension  
(Question No. 234/2024)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Women, Children and Social Protection inform Parliament on the measures in place to ensure accountability in the Government's management and distribution of social pensions?

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Thank you honourable Premila Kumar for the question. Before I do

so, I would be remissive, and I apologise for missing this out in my previous response, it does cut into my answer for this question. To acknowledge, PhysioNet UK, Mr. Speaker, Sir, who are collaborating with the Vodafone ATH foundation in a huge donation they made yesterday to the National Council for People with Disabilities, donating \$1.2 million worth of assistive devices, and these includes motorised scooters, multiple wheelchair types in designs, hospital beds, both electronic and manual, commodes, shower chairs...

HON. P.D. KUMAR.— That was not my question.

HON. L.D. TABUYA .- ...crutches, medical consumables, adult diapers, gloves, face masks and sanitary pads.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.— Just answer my question.

HON. L.D. TABUYA. – Mr. Speaker, Sir, it does relate to this question, because of course these organisations and the donations they make are not just limited to people living with disabilities, in fact, there are donations also made accessible to people who are on social pension. So, our elderly who are also accessing these assistive devices as well. So, I acknowledge their support to the Government to assist our people...

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Answer the question!

HON. L.D. TABUYA,- ...living on pensions. And on that note, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I also wish to respond to honourable Ketan Lal because I see him throwing his hands up in terms of his response to the Anti-Porn Taskforce, please, I urge him to attend the meetings because he cannot just come and bark here and not attend our working group meetings, not informed of the progress of the work. So, please attend the meeting then come and report correctly to Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the research and studies have found that income inequalities is prevalent in old age, and most of us are almost in that category. So, we do need to be concerned about what is available for us as we go into this age category. Rapid population growth, combined with lack of adequate social security, will likely increase poverty amongst older persons. The latest statistics released by The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) clearly indicated...

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Irrelevant!

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- ...that 10 percent of our total population are under the older persons category and it is also forecasted to increase to 15 percent by 2050. So, what is the relevance to this answer?

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Answer the question.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- The Ministry is in the process of formulating its Ageing Policy because 15 percent of our population, we do need to do a deep dive into how we can make our people with older persons have a more meaningful quality of life.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Coalition Government is committed to our people living with an older persons in this category who are accessing the social pension. Our social pension scheme is one of the best in the Asia-Pacific region and this was acknowledged recently during our Regional Conference on population ageing in Bali, Indonesia, where our Director Social Protection was asked to be part of the panel discussion on how we can enhance old age financial security in the emerging

Asia Pacific and using Fiji as an example.

Now, we have got to recognise as there is an ongoing evolution of social assistance, looking at a comprehensive life cycle approach. So, just because you turn 60, does not mean everyone forgets you, it happens.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- They may forgotten...

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, to correct honourable Premila Kumar stating that there is no bus fare assistance for 65 and under. They are receiving bus fare assistance, 65 and under. And her concern about them not receiving it, I think she has been misinforming Parliament. They continue to be on bus fare assistance, but the only thing that has changed is that those that are turning 60 after 1<sup>st</sup> August, yes, they will not be receiving it. Why? Because the retirement age has increased to 60! They continue to work to 60. That is what the Coalition Government brought about. There is financial security until 60. There is a buffer zone of five years to 65 where they have the ability to support themselves.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- When it was 55 retirement, they started from 60. So, what happened to the five years there? Why could we say, why did it not start from 55? Same logic! So, please just reflect a little bit, reflect a little bit. Thank you.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I want to acknowledge the previous government from 2013 where the Social Pension was implemented in terms of the amount given for age 70 and above, and then it was reduced to 68, then to 66 and now it is 65.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, again, I reiterate the Coalition Government, increased the retirement age, so in fact, under the previous government from 55 to 65, they were on their own. They were not entitled to a Social Pension Scheme.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Those who are over 60...

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- They were not taken care of, in fact, their FNPF balances were deteriorated. So, it created poverty amongst those who had retired at 55. We have breached that gap to 60 and given financial security for our older persons, and, yes, they can sustain themselves for bus fare assistance to 65 where they then get the cash transfer. And with the cash transfer, they are not limited to the bus, which is what they did not do. Now they can travel in the fibre, they can travel in a minivan, in a taxi, gives them the quality of life and ability to travel.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, under our reformed agenda, we continue to try to ensure that monitoring of the Social Pension Scheme is done properly.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- This Government, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is committed to digitising our records, it has been a nightmare trying to digitise these manual records, missing records. Trying to bring in to digitise has taken a long time.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Under 60, relevance. She is wasting everyone's time. I have asked a specific question, so I need a specific answer. Do not go beating around the bush! Come to the point!

MR. SPEAKER.- Please, continue, honourable Minister.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, can I remind honourable Premila Kumar of her question? Can the honourable Minister inform Parliament on the measures in place to ensure accountability in the governance, management and distribution of the social pension?

If we are digitising our records, we are making it mainstream so that we can ensure those who are not supposed to be on the programme, what scheme of the programme, for example, when we have manual records, Mr. Speaker, Sir, members of the family are accessing this pension because we do not have the manual records, it goes to someone's M-PAiSA or mobile phone and we have lost record of that. So, it is manually recorded, and we cannot trace back that information.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, by digitising, we can ensure that it is tagged to the person's Birth Registration Number and I thank the Births, Deaths & Marriage Registry (BDM), the Ministry of Justice who have come on board, so that through the digitising process, we are now talking to the BDM, we are now talking to the Fiji National Provident Fund (FNPF), we are now talking to other stakeholders like Fiji Revenue & Customer Services (FRCS), so we are ensuring we are identifying that this is the one same person.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, what happens, is that we lose track of an older person, and we are trying to find that person, what we do, and it works every single time, we stop the payment, because the payment is going to another family member.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Listen, we stop the payment and sure enough Mr. Speaker, Sir, the family member who has been receiving, comes to us to ask, "We have not been receiving the money," So we ask them, "where is the person, who is receiving these funds? Please, give us the contact details." Oh! my grandfather has moved to another village. We need to trace that person down, so we find that person, so that the person is receiving the benefit and not a family member. That is what we are trying to fix for better management and accountability of our social pensioners.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, in the last budget, the Minister for Finance made the announcement that anyone turning 70 will be receiving \$150, and there are people who have been complaining that they have not been receiving the \$150. First of all, in the month of August, they did not receive timely pension, and this question I had actually requested for August, but anyway, it came now, but whatever it is, they did not receive \$150. And I had simply asked those members to go to the Ministry and sort it out. So, my question to the honourable Minister is, what specific measures are in place to track and resolve complaints from pensioners about underpayment and is there a dedicated system in place to handle these complaints and grievances and track it? Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER.- Before she answers, honourable Minister, let me make it very clear honourable members, the delay in payments, that is an occurrence that has happened in the past. It depends on the cash flow of the government of the day. If there is enough money to cater for all these commitments, et cetera, then payment will be timely. Otherwise, the usual thing happens and at times it will be late, but it will still be forthcoming. Yes, honourable Minister?

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, to answer your question, honourable Kumar. Yes, we will always receive complaints, we want anyone who's not receiving to file the complaint with



the Ministry through our offices, through our phone numbers that we have available, and we do attend to it to ensure that they do receive their money.

(Honourable Opposition Member interjects)

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Honourable Premila Kumar is saying that we do not pick up the phone. Please, file the complaint, honourable Kumar; file it directly with me. We will ensure that the person who is not ...

(Honourable Opposition Members interject)

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Unbelievable, Mr. Speaker, Sir! We come here to Parliament to make this, but not one of them has come directly to me, except honourable Virendra Lal and honourable Sharma and I thank them. Come to me and we will take care of it. Our people are important and the services to them are important.

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to remind the honourable Minister for Women that because of the increase in VAT and cost of living, more people are on social welfare pensions. The complaint by many senior citizens that if they get \$125 and they go to the bank and withdraw this money, they are not able to withdraw \$125. Somehow the bank is holding the \$5 maybe for maintenance fee, activity fee, I am not too sure, but this is what I have been hearing when I visit the communities. How are you going to make sure that the people receive \$125?

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Again this is the first time I am hearing of it from honourable Sharma. We meet every time at morning tea, afternoon tea, but now, he chooses to bring it out here to the public. Please, get a formal complaint and provide the evidence. If the banks are doing that, then we need to deal with the banks. However, it is important for our people to receive the money, yes, on time. Sometimes, it does not happen and, yes, we had apologised for that occurrence, honourable Kumar, and we have dealt with it internally. But what we need to do, as we prioritised our older persons, we need to work together in the House to do so. If you have complaints, please, file them formally, then we can act, and we will ensure that we do serve our people with older persons.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Just tell the people to file the complaint.

MR. SPEAKER.- We seem to be engaged in a running commentary all the time. I think the interest is there. Please, lodge your complaints directly with the honourable Minister.

The next Oral Question for today, Question No. 235/2024, has already been approved that it be asked on Thursday, 3<sup>rd</sup> October, 2024, after a request from the Government Whip.

### Written Questions

Data on Justices of Peace  
(Question No. 236/2024)

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Justice inform Parliament on the following –

- (1) how many Justices of Peace have been appointed in the last 6 months by Province and Division;
- (2) the names and addresses of these newly appointed Justices of Peace; and
- (3) how many applications were received for the appointment of Justice of Peace from January to June, 2024 and how many of those applications have been processed?

<sup>1</sup>HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Mr. Speaker, I will table my written answer.

MR. SPEAKER.- Thank you very much.

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Kumar is in a different mood this afternoon.

(Laughter)

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- I just want them to work hard, Sir.

Civil Service Data – December 2022 to August 2024  
(Question No. 237/2024)

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU 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 provide the following in relation to the Civil Service for the end of December 2022 and the end of August 2024:

- (1) the roll or total number of Civil Servants on the two dates;
- (2) the staff turnover rate by the Ministries on both dates; and
- (3) what plan are in place to address skilled staff shortage?

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, may I table my response now as permitted under Standing Order 45(3).

MR. SPEAKER.- *Vinaka vakalevu*, Sir.

**CONSOLIDATED REVIEW REPORT -  
ASSETS FIJI PTE LIMITED 2016-2019 ANNUAL REPORTS**

HON. S. KIRAN.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I move:

That Parliament debates the Review Report on the Assets Fiji Pte Limited Annual Report for the years 2016 to 2019, which was tabled on 3<sup>rd</sup> September, 2024.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I beg to second the motion.

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<sup>1</sup> Editor's Note: Reply to Written Question No. 236/2024 tabled by the honourable Minister for Justice under Standing Order 45(3) is appended as Annexure I.

HON. S. KIRAN.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Prime Minister, honourable Ministers, honourable Assistant Ministers and honourable Members of Parliament; I am honoured to present the overview of Assets Fiji Pte Limited 2016 to 2019 Annual Report. The Standing Committee on Economic Affairs tabled its Consolidated Review Report on Assets Fiji Pte Limited on 3<sup>rd</sup> September, 2024.

The Committee commends Assets Fiji Pte Limited (AFL) for the handling of its assets during the period under review. The Committee acknowledges the successful vesting of 35 land titles, which are strategically located near Lautoka, Levuka and Suva Port areas.

The independent valuation of assets underscores AFL's ability to manage its real estate portfolio. While reviewing AFL's Reports, the Committee identified some pertinent issues which were as follows:

- (1) The Committee expressed concern on the low rental yield generated from the asset portfolio valued at over \$57 million.
- (2) While some were compensated by higher dividend provided by Fiji Ports Corporation Limited, the Government Printery and Stationery Department has been a non-performing entity.
- (3) The Committee noted that an independent external valuer conducted a valuation of all land vested into the company on 10<sup>th</sup> February, 2017. The valuation was based on market value, however, land title spending was not included in the fair value assessment.
- (4) The Committee noted that Government grants were continuously issued to AFL from 2016 to 2019 to support its operations.
- (5) The Committee strongly suggests that AFL should work closely with relevant authorities to expedite the vesting of 10 pending land titles from Fiji Ports Limited and Fiji Ships and Heavy Industries Limited.

Finalising these transactions will enable AFL to fully integrate these assets into its portfolio to increase the company's overall value. I would like to thank the honourable Assistant Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister, honourable P.D. Kumar, the honourable Assistant Minister for Agriculture and Waterways, honourable A. Bia, and the Secretariat staff for their invaluable support in preparing this Report.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate on the motion and I have a list with me that has been supplied by the honourable Whips. Before I go straight to that, I would like to just allow this time for the undertaking of housekeeping matters. For the purpose of complying with Standing Orders with respect to sitting times, I now call upon the honourable Leader of the Government in Parliament to move a suspension motion.

### **SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDERS**

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I move:

That under Standing Order 6, that so much of Standing Order 23(1) is suspended so as to allow the House to sit beyond 4.30 p.m. today to complete the remaining items listed in today's Order Paper.

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I second the motion.

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, we still

have the current motion to be debated on Assets Fiji Limited and, in addition, Fiji Meat Industry Board Annual Reports and Review Reports on Investment Fiji.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate on the motion, if any. I now call upon the Leader of the Government in Parliament to speak in reply, if any.

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Sir, I do not have any further comments.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

### **RESUMPTION OF DEBATE ON THE CONSOLIDATED REVIEW REPORT - ASSETS FIJI PTE LIMITED 2016-2019 ANNUAL REPORTS**

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, as I have stated before, there are four speakers that has been listed by the two Whips, as follows:

- (1) Honourable P.D. Kumar;
- (2) Honourable Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, Climate Change, Environment, Civil Service, information, Public Enterprises and Veteran Affairs ;
- (3) Honourable M.D. Bulitavu; and
- (4) Honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade, Co-operatives, Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises and Communications.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to support the recommendations made by the Standing Committee on the Assets Fiji Pte Limited Annual Reports for the period 2016 to 2019. Assets Fiji Pte Limited, established in 2015, is the Government's asset holding company and it forms part of a broader divestment strategy aimed at securing public assets. Currently, Assets Fiji Limited (AFL) holds the assets and leases the land on which the buildings for three entities are situated. These entities are Fiji Ports Corporation Limited, Fiji Ships and Heavy Industries Limited and the Government Printery and Stationery Department.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I really want to highlight this particular point, that the Report highlights the failure of the Chairman of Assets Fiji Pte Limited, who was the former Permanent Secretary in the Prime Minister's Office, who had no time to acknowledge or even respond to the Committee's request for a public meeting. Sir, this is unacceptable. I want to stress once again and I did that in the last Parliament session, that we must stop appointing Permanent Secretaries and CEOs to multiple Boards when they have failed to manage their own Ministry's companies or are too busy to attend crucial meetings. This is really a disservice to the people of Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, AFL currently holds \$57 million worth of assets, as we have heard from the Deputy Chairperson, ensuring that public property is not lost when shares are divested. This allows assets to be leased, generating revenue for the Government so that revenue comes from two sources - one is from the land that is leased and other one is from the shares and how well the company does.

Let us not forget, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that AFL was an initiative of the Bainimarama-led Government which created a pathway for privatisation without losing control of public assets to private interests, as we saw in the past. In our last parliamentary debate, which was just in the first week of September, as usual, the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance and Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics made typical baseless claims, stating that

we did nothing for 16 years. He shamelessly claimed that only under this Government, there has been major reforms by public enterprises.

What reforms, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is he talking about? What we are witnessing now are quick fixes, cosmetic changes, like rebranding bizFIJI to businessNOW. Is this what the Coalition Government calls 'reform'? The truth is that the Bainimarama-led Government spearheaded the real reforms with the enactment of the Public Enterprises Act 2019, which sets up the robust governance framework of State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs) and this can be confirmed by the Asian Development Bank's Report on co-funding balance 2023 which very clearly stated that Fiji's SOEs performance was one of the best in the region for 2015 to 2020. That was largely due to the reforms that were undertaken. Often, there is a misconception when we talk about privatisation. The misconception is that if we undertake privatisation, we will lose control of the Government companies and also the assets.

The reforms we introduced restored confidence in the governance of Public Enterprises by giving opportunities for Public Private Partnership (PPP), for example, FNPF. Sir, FNPF's investment in Fiji Ports Corporation Limited, for the first time in an infrastructure area as part of the PPP Programme, we have seen FNPF's acquisition of 39 percent shares. It not only protected national interests, but also contributed towards high returns that FNPF members are receiving. That is what long-term investments look like.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we must not forget the disastrous experiments with privatisations that took place during the SVT government. I want to emphasise because that was the era when privatisation and corporatisation took off. During that period, we saw several public assets sold off or lost forever. This is the stark reminder of what happens when privatisation is handled, not responsibly.

The first wave of Public Sector Reforms targeted key state enterprises in 1990, for example, the Post and Telecommunication Department was corporatised as Fiji Post and Telecommunications Limited which later split into Telecom Fiji Limited and Post Fiji Limited. What followed was the sale of majority shares in Telecom Fiji, again a big mistake.

Similarly, the corporatisation of IKA Corporation and National Trading Corporation collapsed soon after. The Government Shipyard and public slipways which is also now under Assets Fiji also suffered from this reckless push towards privatisation. Once corporatised, it was then privatised, only to be nationalised again when privatisation failed miserably.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Government Shipyard had a very good ship building capacity. Building vessels for Blue Lagoon Cruises, Kiribati Government and even built *Reef Endeavour* for Captain Cook Cruises of Australia.

Building of *Reef Endeavour* became one of the biggest disasters in the history of shipyard. The Reef Endeavour Project started in 1989 with an initial cost of AUS\$7.7 million ballooned to \$22 million by the time it was completed in 1996. This disaster lack to severe financial losses. The Government decided to sell 51 percent of Government Shipyard to a \$2 New Zealand company, a move that led to a disposal of public assets. Later the Government had no choice but to buy back the 51 percent shares when the company went into receivership leaving the State with about \$9 million in liabilities.

Fiji had to learn the hard way, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and we have. All these disastrous privatisation happened when Fiji saw some of the most valuable assets lost for ever. Let us not forget, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that under the same Government, Fiji lost its National Bank of Fiji (Fiji's only bank) due to mismanagement or corruption you can call it, at a cost of about \$220 million.

The Government decided to sell 51 percent of the National Bank of Fiji which was our only bank to Colonial Mutual Life Assurance for only \$9.8 million and later in 2005 the Qarase Government sold the balance of the 49 percent stake for \$28 million. We lost the bank completely.

HON. S.L. RABUKA. –Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to contribute to this debate on the reviewed Report of Asset Fiji Limited (AFL). Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Premila Kumar has highlighted the background, I will go straight to the recommendations in the Report. The old recommendations are noted, and the Ministry of Public Enterprises undertakes to carry out the necessary actions as recommended by the Committee.

The first recommendation, Sir, AFL should work closely with relevant authorities to expedite the vesting of pending land titles from Fiji Ports Corporation Limited (FPCL) and Fiji Ships and Heavy Industries Ltd, finalising this transaction to enable AFL to fully integrate these assets into its portfolio to increase the company's overall value.

That recommendation is noted, Mr. Speaker, Sir. As alluded earlier and also highlighted by honourable Premila Kumar, the land asset of FPCL and Fiji Ships and Heavy Industries Ltd were transferred to AFL following the divestment transaction. The exercise commenced in 2016 and so far, 37 land titles have been vested to AFL.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, at present, only five land titles are yet to be vested. During the vesting exercise, it was noted, that the original titles of these properties could not be located. Thus, AFL is actively working with the management team of FPCL to coordinate the surveys of the properties before lodging the plans with the relevant authorities to issue new titles.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, AFL also conducts a valuation exercise of the land assets every five years. In fact, in 2017, the market valuation assessed the land assets at \$57.3million. The land was re-valued in 2022 and noted the valuation of the land had gone to \$84.3 million, which resulted in a revaluation surplus of \$24.3million in 2022 financials.

The second recommendation, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the rental income generated from AFL's real estate portfolio is currently below expectations. So, AFL should consider renegotiating this rental agreement to ensure that the rental rates reflect their market value.

While this is being done, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the native landowners are also putting their hands up for the onward transfer of these land to the original owners. The Committee recommendation is noted and Mr. Speaker, Sir, AFL's rental income is currently below the market rate as the company is constrained by the terms outlined in the lease agreements which permits rental increase up to 30 percent every five years.

It should be noted, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that many of these long term leases and lease agreements were inherited from FPCL, however, AFL is currently conducting its due diligence to resolve that challenge.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to make a contribution to the motion that is before the Parliament and that is for Parliament to note the Committee Review Report on the Assets Fiji PTE Limited Annual Report.

I have nothing further much to say, rather the Committee has rather a limited scope of our debate given the layout of the Report has only two findings and most of the findings has been read by the mover of the motion herself and also honourable Kumar. The recommendation has been touched by the honourable Prime Minister. I suggest that probably in future to improve the

information and to also improve the Report, if some verbatim too can be part of the Report to allow us, before we go into the debate, the information that actually, the questions and what was answered by those organisations, so it gives honourable Members to prepare for debate. I also noted after checking with the Secretariat during lunch hour that the Committee was not even privy to a hard copy, and they only worked on a soft copy that was provided by this particular company.

However, the reporting year is 2016 to 2019. To take you back, Mr. Speaker, Sir, given what honourable Premila Kumar has gone back over the years, pointing fingers to the previous government. But again, this particular organisation was established in 2015 and you know very well Mr. Speaker, Sir, during that time when we were in the Opposition, we queried this question of divestment when the issue of Aitken Spence came to buy our ports from Fiji Ports Corporation Limited. We were not consulted, there was not much consultation done. We only heard about the divestment when it was brought into that particular budget in 2015 and 2016.

And probably over the years, now nearly nine years. I would suggest a review should be done to relook at the arrangements done then, given that we had to protect our sovereignty. Given these are our assets, the Fijian Government's assets. It is now in this particular company the assets as per land but as divestment in terms of the commercial activities is run by those companies. Some of them are foreign companies from Sri Lanka. We only earn in terms of the leases that are there.

Probably we should review some of those arrangement to see whether we are getting maximum returns from this or we can make other choices to see that we can properly use those. Those decisions were done by the FijiFirst Government, but it is up to the Coalition Government to review this. Given it is about 10 years, we need to see if the arrangements still benefits us or those that are benefiting from it now.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, you will also remember questioning this company called the Government Printery on how it was closed down or given out to some other private companies who are now doing government diverse, outsource to these private contractors like Star Printery et cetera.

There were some questions during that time about political association, affiliations and beneficiaries. They were probably friends of some of the members of the previous government but some of the things that could be revisited and reviewed in terms of relooking at these assets, especially government printing and how we can revive this which could lessen government expenditure. Those are few things that I suggest to government to take on board, things that happen during the reported year as I had alluded to and also responding to honourable Premila Kumar.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, so much has been said. Fingers pointed at the previous government. The government before that, in fact, I spent some time in the Opposition pondering over this, and one of the issues that we were kind of confused with was in the way the motions were brought in, all the recommendations were brought in by the FijiFirst Government, and that is selling of shares and the divestment of shares. We were all informed in this august Parliament, we have not transferred any shares, we had just divested the shares.

Did it spoke about the same thing or is it different? But this was the message that was provided to us when we queried, and that caused a lot of grey areas on our path as to how best we can understand what is happening to Government assets. So, that will be best answered by people who know best, either they are chartered accountants or economists, because they would better understand these two different words and that even happened with the divestment of the shares in the FEA when it was sold in Singapore or transferred. So, I wanted to add that so as to provide you, honourable Members, with some of the words that confused us a lot. So now, I open the floor to the

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade, Cooperatives, Small and Medium Enterprises and Communications.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.– Mr. Speaker, Sir, and I thank you for the opportunity to provide some commentary on the Assets of Fiji Pte Limited General Reports from 2016-2019. But before I do, since a lot of points have been addressed, I will just spend a bit of time in addressing some of the comments frivolously made in this Parliament.

The first was by my colleague, honourable Ketan Lal, when talking about the National Pornography Taskforce in saying we are taking too much time and have not done much. Sometimes, I feel the other side of Parliament get forgetful very quickly, Mr. Speaker, Sir. The reality with the National Pornography Taskforce and there are a few other major national issues when it comes to issues of national importance, that the other side of Parliament did very little with or even zero.

I remember, the Minister for Women, Children and Social Protection begging at that time in Parliament, that something be done about national pornography. And what did that side of the Parliament do? Absolutely nothing! Some of these national issues need political whips, and all I can say to that side of the Parliament, be assured this side of the Parliament has the political whip and we will address all the problems that we have inherited because it needs political will to solve. And one of them is of course this issue that is in front of us, Mr. Speaker, Sir. There is a structured approach and, oh, he is back! And we will deal with it.

The second commentary I would like to make, Mr. Speaker, Sir, there is always accusations about taskforces being created and I am one of the culprits. I would just like to offer this counsel to my learned colleagues, Mr. Speaker, Sir. The difference between that side of the Parliament, that was run by two people, and this side is that we collaborate and we listen, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. M. S. N. KAMIKAMICA.– We collaborated and we listened, so that is the big change that is happening in our country, Mr. Speaker, Sir. We actually seek opinions. If we look at the taskforce, it is very big, it is actually too big, but that is okay because that is the nature of what we are dealing with. It is a national issue, we need a national conversation and then move forward. So, collaborate and listen, you will learn something from it, honourable Ketan Lal.

I will address the business now, on the very flippant comment about business, now. Firstly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we rebranded it to be fair, but it was an initial initiative by the FijiFirst Government which we have taken on. But the semantics when it comes to the rebranding. What is important is, we are actually moving forward with the business now. We have just launched the first automation of a business process in Government which is starting a business, the honourable Koya will know this very well and we are about to do the building permits. In terms of ease of doing business, Mr. Speaker, Sir, these are very significant actions.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, very briefly with regard to Assets Fiji Limited, the significant thing, I think that comes from the Report that was done by the Committee, is that the returns are low and that needs to be worked on. The honourable Prime Minister just mentioned that the property revaluation went from \$57 million to \$84 million. So, in other words, if you take the \$3 million return after tax as a percentage of the current valuation, we are looking at well below 5 percent return on assets.

The challenge on this side of Parliament is, how do we unlock the potential of these large assets that sits within Assets Fiji Limited? Of course, will be left to the Board and the honourable Prime Minister who leads the public enterprise, I am sure will be very keen to ensure that we start to



get better returns. An interesting point, the total assets right now for public enterprises is about \$9 billion. You have to ask the question, in that \$9 billion, does every single asset in that \$9 billion are they of the good returns? Probably the answer is, as with Assets Fiji Limited, no, and of course we wholeheartedly support the recommendations by the Committee and look forward to more returns being generated by Assets Fiji Limited. I thank you, Sir.

HON. S. KIRAN.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank all honourable Members who have contributed to the debate and we look forward to Assets Fiji Limited doing its part and taking necessary steps and actions in the implementation of the Report. We also look forward to the Reports from 2020 onwards, with that, I thank you Mr. Speaker, Sir.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, Parliament will now vote to note the content of the Report.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I intend to adjourn Parliament now for afternoon tea and we will return when the bell is sounded.

The Parliament adjourned at 4.38 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 5.16 p.m.

## **REVIEW REPORT ON FIJI MEAT INDUSTRY BOARD 2018-2022 ANNUAL REPORTS**

HON. S. KIRAN. – Mr. Speaker, Sir, I move:

That the Parliament debates the review report for the Fiji Meat Industry Board Annual Reports 2018 to 2022 which was tabled on 4<sup>th</sup> September, 2024.

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I second the motion.

HON. S. KIRAN.- Mr. Speaker, honourable Prime Minister, Cabinet Ministers, Assistant Ministers, Members of Parliament, I am honoured to present the review report of Fiji Meat Industry Board 2018 to 2022 Annual Reports.

The Fiji Meat Industry Board (FMIB) was established under the Fiji Meat Industry Act 237 of 1970. In 1976, Suva Abattoir was established at Nasinu 9 miles to provide slaughtering services in the Central Division. 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 Western Division and sits on 7.35 hectares of Native land with a land tenure of 75 acres Native lease granted on 1st January, 1982.

Pertinent issues identified by the Committee are as follows:

- The Fiji Meat Industry Board 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 operation.
- Currently the Abattoir is not working at full capacity due to decline in livestock numbers resulting in low number of livestock going to the abattoir.
- The livestock numbers have steadily declined over the years. The decline poses a broader threat to the sustainability of the livestock industry.

There are several challenges affecting FMIB, I will just mention a couple:

- An urgent need for investment to modernise facilities to meet new requirements for food handling hygiene and security; and
- A review of the Meat Act is urgently needed to address the current issues facing the meat industry.
- The Board has \$31.9 million worth of investment property, primarily consisting of land which is yielding no returns for the company.

I would like to extend my appreciation to the Chairperson of the Fiji Meat Industry Board, Dr. Kenneth Cokanasiga, and his staff for the timely assistance in this inquiry. I would also like to thank our Committee Members who were part of the team that produced this Report:

- (1) Honourable Assistant Minister, Office of the Prime Minister – Chairperson;
- (2) Honourable P.D. Kumar;
- (3) Honourable Assistant Minister, Ministry of Agriculture and Waterways; and
- (4) Honourable A. Bia.

I also thank the Secretariat for their invaluable support.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate and I have just been given the list of speakers, four have been identified by both the Whips, and the batting will be led off by:

- (1) Honourable S. Nand;
- (2) Honourable Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, Climate Change, Environment, Civil Service, Information, Public Enterprise and Veteran Affairs;
- (3) Honourable N.T. Tuinaceva; and
- (4) Honourable Minister for Agriculture and Waterways.

HON. S. NAND.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to contribute to the motion before the House. I thank the Members of the Standing Committee for their work on the Report. As the mover of the motion had already said, the Fiji Meat Industry Board was established in 1976 via under the Fiji Meat Industry Act 1970.

In the Report, there are three main issues that has been identified:

- (1) Aging equipment and set up.
- (2) Lower throughput. The Abattoir, at the moment, is operating below 50 percent capacity.
- (3) Economic viability of the Abattoir.

They have always recorded a loss, except 2022, and this was attributed to staff reduction.

I believe, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that all three issues can be solved by vertical integration. Vertical integration refers to FMIB's strategy of controlling multiple stages of sourcing, processing, marketing and distribution within the meat industry.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I do not see any reason why Yaqara Pastoral Company and Fiji Meat Industry Board needs to operate under two separate entities, two different boards, two separate CEOs and two separate fully functional offices. This can be integrated to bring about efficiency in the system and there is no reason why both the entities cannot operate under one board and one CEO.

For Fiji Meat Industry Board, vertical integration is possible in the following ways:

- (1) Supply Chain control – Fiji Meat Industry Board merges with Yaqara Pastoral Company to ensure consistent supply of animals. This helps in managing the cost, ensuring the quality and ensuring availability of animals for slaughter. This can be supplemented by the Government's beef schemes which I understand should be a multiplication centres and distributed around the country.
- (2) Processing and Packaging – FMIB already has two abattoirs that can be upgraded with Government's assistance and the money is saved by removing one set of overheads. The second is FMIB can get into value adding products, expanding production into sausages, cured meats and ready-to-cook cuts. This can diversify the income streams and enhance profitability of the organisation. FMIB already has an established distribution mechanism and this can be further enhanced to increase efficiency; and
- (3) Retail operations – I believe the last part of vertical integration is ensuring you meet your customers from farm to fork. FMIB can operate a retail butcher and operate their own butchers, allowing them to sell directly to the consumers and enhance profitability.
- (4) Waste management - FMIB already has a rendering plant. I am sure that with little

more investment, its efficiency can be enhanced. This can generate more income by selling the by-products of the rendering plant to the other industries. However, I have heard a lot of complaints from residents around that area of the foul smell. Probably they should start working on the foul smell coming out of the rendering plant and be eliminated somehow.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the benefits from the vertical integration or merging the three elements would be:

- (1) Cost control - we will be able to reduce the cost of all the various stages, ensuring profitability.
- (2) Better price to suppliers – the supplier farms can get a better price for the animal supplied to the abattoirs.
- (3) Market stability – by merging with Yaqara Pastoral Company, FMIB can stabilise operations against market fluctuations.
- (4) Customer trust - direct involvement in all stages of production, FMIB can build the consumer-supplier trust.
- (5) Ensure quality - greater quality control in the supply chain can improve the quality and safety of the meat products. Currently most of the animals going through the abattoirs are mostly culled animals from the cane belt areas or culled animals from the dairy farms. Because of that, FMIB fails to supply quality that the consumers frequently look for or demand.

In the tourism sector, Mr. Speaker, Sir, there is a huge demand of premium cuts and most of it is supplied through imported meat. If you are not able to maintain that quality and supply, we will be able to hit the hotel industry. This industry wants two things: quality and consistency, and that is where we fail.

However, Mr. Speaker, Sir, doing this needs commitment from the industry, and more specifically from the Government. It requires capital investment and expanding operation requires significant investment of resources. It also requires investment in training so that you can cross-train staff in all aspects, from rearing, processing and selling. It will also require a significant investment in enterprise and management software, so that it is easier to maintain all stages of the process. The most important one, it requires amendments to the legislation to ensure that both the entities can operate under one umbrella.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I believe vertical integration will be able to solve most of the issues identified in this Report. If this Government is interested in ensuring sustainability of FMIB and the meat industry in Fiji, I am sure it will act sooner than later. With those words, I support the motion before the House.

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Deputy Chairperson for presenting the Report and honourable Sachida Nand for his contribution. I also thank all the honourable Members of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs for the work they have put in, in compiling this Report. As I have done with the various reports dealt with previously, as line Minister for Public Enterprises, I will go straight into the recommendations.

I agree with what the honourable Sachida Nand had said. He is sure and I am committed that the recommendations will be carried out by the FMIB.

#### Recommendation 1

The Committee commends FMIB for developing its 5-year Strategic Plan.

The preparation of the five-year strategic plan from 2024 to 2028 was launched in 2021. While the pandemic delayed the progress on the development of the plan, FMIB's five-year strategic plan was successfully completed in 2023.

Various stakeholders had also been consulted throughout the drafting process including the Fiji Crop and Livestock Council, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Finance, private sector and farmers involved in the livestock industry for their feedback on the plan.

Mr. Speaker, as the honourable Nand had alluded to, consistent and quality supply of animals will continue to be a problem with FMIB when we rely on hobby livestock farmers.

The strategic plan focuses on four important things including business model and commercial sustainability, legal framework and governance, aged facilities and suitability of location and quality standards of people and processes.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have right now a group of young men and women who have gone to New Zealand and Australia and many of them work in meat industries. I am sure that when they come back, if there are opportunity available for them to be employed in the Fiji Meat Industry, they would perform very well and would raise the quality of workmanship in those facilities.

#### Recommendation 2

That, Fiji Meat Industry Board include a performance matrix aligned with the KPIs in all future annual reports to justify budgetary allocations, demonstrate accountability and ensure a thorough and transparent assessment of its performance.

The Committee's recommendation is noted. It should also be noted that while FMIB is collaborating with the Ministry of Agriculture in terms of increasing supply of animals to its abattoirs, it does not have direct control over the said supply. In view of these external factors hindering FMIB's performance may not be accurately reflected in the performance matrix.

That being said, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it should also be noted that FMIB's recent annual reports particularly the 2021 – 2022 Report comprise of not only the background and financial statements of the entirety of the entity, but also has specific sections on its finances, its operations, quality assurance, its achievements and its challenges, human resources and future plans. The finance section of the Annual Report includes a high level comparative financial analysis between the current and prior financial year.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, FMIB will take into consideration the Committee's recommendation and determine the best method to enhance accountable and transparent reporting of its performance in its future annual reports.

#### Recommendation 3

That, Fiji Meat Industry Board should report on relevant SDGs in its annual reports as required by the Parliament, to align with Fiji's commitment to the international goals.

The Committee's recommendation is noted. Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji Meat Industry Board recognizes the importance of environmental sustainability and adopts values that promote responsible resource-use waste reduction, energy efficiency and eco-friendly practices.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji Meat Industry Board quality assurance team monitors environmental related issues and assist in addressing the same, so that Fiji Meat Industry Board is operating in a more environmentally friendly manner. Fiji Meats Industry Board had also

concentrated its efforts in modernizing its abattoirs to move towards more cost efficient and environmentally friendly operations.

#### Recommendation 4

The Committee recommends the Review of the FMIB pricing strategy that is needed to mitigate ongoing losses. Additionally operational efficiency should be explored to reduce costs without compromising service quality.

That recommendation is noted.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in accordance with the Fiji Meat Industry Act of 1969, the Minister for Agriculture may prescribe levies or charges in respect of the slaughtering of animals. Therefore, FMIB slaughter fees are regulated, and the entity does not have arbitrary control over its fees. Mr. Speaker, Sir, FMIB slaughter fees were last reviewed and increased in November 2023, after 18 years. Therefore, FMIB pricing has increased but the impact will be seen in the 2024 financial year.

#### Recommendation 5

The Committee recommends addressing the underutilisation of the Abattoir as mentioned by the honourable Nand. It is recommended that FMIB, in collaboration with relevant stakeholders, particularly with the Ministry of Agriculture and Waterways, implement strategies to increase livestock numbers. This includes providing targeted support to farmers to boost livestock production to not only break even, but to make profits and to make FMIB self-sufficient.

That recommendation is also noted, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and the Ministry of Agriculture and FMIB are jointly working to identify solutions for the decrease in supply of livestock.

In regard to current initiatives employed by the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry is providing assistance to farmers around Fiji in terms of breed research, pasture management and providing grants for fencing kit support.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I know that many, many years ago, we copra producers used to have assistance. But mostly from our *lavo musu ni iTaukei*, where we would put our deduction or the funds into the iTaukei Affairs. I do not know whether they can continue to do that, but many of the coconut growers we have in the islands can easily be developed with pasture grown to produce quality animals for the abattoirs.

HON. N.T. TUINACEVA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to contribute to this debate on the Review Report for the Fiji Meat Industry Board 2018-2022 Annual Reports. I want to begin by thanking the Committee for putting the Report together and their ability to critically analyse and identify the issues at the Fiji Meat Industry Board, is commendable.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I noted that, honourable Nand and the honourable Prime Minister has covered most of the items highlighted in the recommendations and in the findings. I will therefore touch on one or two parts of the investigation and some recommendations.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, first and foremost we must acknowledge that FMIB has faced significant financial difficulties, incurring losses from 2018 to 2021 with only a small profit recorded in 2022 due to what the Report stated as workforce reductions. The core issues of low through put and high operating costs remain consistent challenges that we must confront head on.

Secondly, the underutilisation of our abattoir is alarming. This decline is largely driven by

decreasing livestock numbers compounded by an increase in diseases like tuberculosis and brucellosis, as well as the decline in the sugarcane farmers engaging in livestock rearing. The poor pasture management and rising feed costs further complicates this issue. The truth is, if we do not act swiftly, we risk undermining our meat industries viability.

Additionally, the facilities require urgent modernisation to meet contemporary food handling and hygiene and security standards. It is unacceptable that our infrastructure lags behind current requirements and we must prioritise upgrading these facilities to ensure safe and efficient operations. Mr. Speaker, Sir, moreover, we cannot look or overlook the need for comprehensive review of the Meat Industry Act. The legislation must be updated to address the ‘my right’ challenges facing the industry today. So, without this critical step, we will continue to hinder progress and innovation.

Cooperation is essential, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Currently, the partnership between FMIB and the Ministry of Agriculture, according to the Report is not functioning effectively. We must foster better cooperation, not just with the Ministry but also with stakeholders like Yaqara Pastoral to announce livestock production and maximise the abattoirs operational capacity. To that end Mr. Speaker, Sir, I strongly support the Committee’s recommendations which include:

- (1) FMIB must review rising strategies and explore operational efficiencies to ensure financial stability. FMIB must get back to its feet and explore ways and means to grow in its financial capacity.
- (2) Collaboration with stakeholders is crucial to increase livestock supplies to the abattoir which is not operating to its full capacity at the moment. The equation is simple, no livestock, no abattoir work.
- (3) The relocating and modernisation facilities will enable FMIB to meet food hygiene and safety standards. The market flavour and attraction depends on standards offered by FMIB.
- (4) A thorough review of the Meat Act is essential to address the current challenges we face. The principle is clear, if products and its quality are to be enhanced, then processes and systems demands a review. Obviously, in this case, the Act must go back on the table for review.
- (5) We must put to an end bush slaughter practices which compromise meat safety and quality. It is a sensitive issue to some level but if we are serious about standards and quality, we must take immediate and prompt action on this.
- (6) Revising the farmers payment process to include offer way is a necessary step towards fairness and transparency.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, merging the operations of FMIB and Yaqara Pastoral and make them report to the Minister for Agriculture and Waterways can create a more cohesive strategy for livestock production. FMIB will lead to reliable and consistent livestock supply, something they can manage and control and that is only possible on the involvement of the Ministry of Agriculture.

Lastly, introducing a meat grading system will enhance the quality and marketability of meat products in Fiji. To conclude Mr. Speaker, Sir, the FMIB is at a crossroad. The decisions we make today will shape the future of our meat industry and livelihoods of countless farmers. I urge each of you honourable Members to prioritise these recommendations and work collaboratively to revitalise the FMIB and secure a prosperous future for Fiji Meats Industry. With all that being said, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I support the motion before the Parliament.

MR. SPEAKER.- I now offer the floor to the Minister for Agriculture and Waterways. The floor is yours.

HON. V.T.T.K. RAYALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank the Standing Committee for the analysis of those reports from 2018 to 2022. All in all, the major challenge across our livestock numbers, formerly slaughtered was the COVID-19 pandemic. Cattle numbers decreased after the COVID-19 pandemic due to restrictions of movement, however this had gradually improved, and it is better than pre-COVID-19 days.

For pigs, the numbers drastically reduced due to the closure of hotels, high-end restaurant and outlets during COVID-19. The breeding stock in commercial farms also reduced and some farms ceased their operations. Breeding stock takes time, we expect high numbers now.

For goats, it increased in number, having been the impact of government assistance where farmers were also encouraged to supply formerly to the abattoir. Sheep hazard made challenges during COVID-19 due to restrictions of movement where farmers held on to their stock however, the average rate of animals supplied has increased.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, through government consistent support, farmers have recovered and bounced back stronger, contributing to high production levels. Programmes planned in the 2023-2024 financial year and now in the 2024-2025 financial year has targeted to boost the livestock sector and ensure that we utilise the capacity of our abattoirs.

There is a list of programmes that is currently being implemented by the Ministry, notable is the Beef Breeding Programme which is \$1.04 million; the Beef Revitalisation Programme of \$1.5 million; and the upgrade of the Nasinu and Vuda abattoir with an allocation of \$400,000.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, large scale intensive technology is a proposed solution that enables farmers to raise up by numbers and quality to the abattoirs. The rapid multiplication that is currently underway by the Ministry through artificial insemination and embryo transfer will contribute to the improvement in the throughput to the abattoir over the next few years.

However, Mr. Speaker, Sir, one of the experiences that we have gone through is the failure of farmers to re-invest into their operations locally. This has been a long-standing issue where we have tried to encourage our local livestock, even dairy farmers to re-invest into their operations, but very little has been done. I think the offer of assistance year in, year out by the Ministry, farmers are sort of getting used to being assisted all the time. But then the commitment must come from the farmers themselves, from the industry themselves to see that they re-invest into their farming operations before government comes in with its assistance.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, while we are upgrading the abattoir facilities, plans and consultations are also underway between government and stakeholders on the relocation of the Nakasi abattoir given the expanding residential and business lots in the area. Having said that, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I support the motion before Parliament, and I thank you for the opportunity.

HON. S. KIRAN.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is obvious that the Fiji Meats Industry Board (FMIB) is a crucial entity for the value chain of livestock and availability of quality meat for our consumers. I thank the honourable Minister for sharing in-depth, the processes in place for improving the work of FMIB, and I would like to thank all honourable Members who have contributed. We hope that the Board will take this into consideration, and we look forward to the implementation of the recommendations.

With that, I thank you, Mr. speaker.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, Parliament will now vote to note the content of the



Report.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

**CONSOLIDATED REVIEW REPORT –  
INVESTMENT FIJI 2019-2022 ANNUAL REPORTS**

HON. S. KIRAN.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I move:

That Parliament debates the Consolidated Review Report on the Investment Fiji Annual Report 2019-2020 and 2021-2022 which was tabled on 5<sup>th</sup> September 2024.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- I second the motion, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. S. KIRAN.- Mr. Speaker, the honourable Prime Minister, honourable Ministers and Assistant Ministers and honourable Members of Parliament, I am honoured to present the overview of the Review Report for Investment Fiji Annual Reports 2019, 2020, 2021 and 2022.

Investment Fiji was established in 1980 under the Economic Development Board Act Number 11. It serves as Fiji's Trade and Investment Promotion Agency, with the primary goal of promoting, stimulating and facilitating economic development in the country.

The Committee acknowledges positive developments in the Reports and identified areas that require improvement.

The Committee commends Investment Fiji for successfully developing a 3-Year Strategic Plan, that aligns with its new role, as outlined in the new Investment Fiji Act 2022 passed on 7<sup>th</sup> April, 2022.

The Committee expressed its concern that the Annual Reports did not contain any performance matrix alignment with the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), making it difficult to thoroughly assess the performance of Investment Fiji. However, when requested, Investment Fiji did provide the performance matrix which could have been included in the Report from the outset.

The Committee also noted that Investment Fiji did not report on the relevant Sustainable Development Goals, which is a mandatory requirement for all Annual Reports presented to Parliament.

While the Committee recognizes the progress made in specific activities, such as the number of trade missions and investment promotions conducted, the Report lacks detailed information on the level of interest these activities generated and how these interests, if any, translated into actual investment.

The Committee noted the importance of tangible data and reliable statistics relating to the operations of Investment Fiji, which hinders comprehensive evaluation.

The Committee expresses concern about the failure to report on the expected targets verses actual achievements, which is necessary to justify the budget reallocations provided to Investment Fiji.

The Committee observed that Recommendation 6 of the previous Committee Report on full disclosure of data and key information is not fully implemented.

I wish to extend my appreciation to the Chief Executive Officer of Investment Fiji, Mr. Kamal Chetty, and his staff for their timely assistance in this inquiry on answering various questions raised by the Committee through face to face public hearing.

I would also like to thank our Committee Members and Alternate Members who were part of the team that produced this Report –

- Hon. S. Tubuna - Chairperson;
- Hon. P.D. Kumar;
- Hon. T.N. Tunabuna;
- Hon. A. Bia; and
- Hon. P. Ravunawa.

I also thank the Secretariat for their invaluable support in the preparation of this Report. Mr. Speaker, I thank you.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate on the motion. I have a list with me provided by the Whips.

- (1) Honourable F.S. Koya;
- (2) Honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of External Trade, Cooperatives, Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises and Communications;
- (3) Honourable V. Naupoto; and
- (4) Honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Tourism and Civil Aviation.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, because it is fairly late in the day, I will try and be short. In any event, Sir, I want to thank the Committee on the Report that has been tabled. In terms of the recommendations, at first glance, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is fairly innocuous in terms of the recommendations that have been given, but there are a couple of things that stand out and need to be vented so as that we actually make it better in the next time that we are reporting.

The Committee has actually reported on implementation and outcomes of the three-year strategic plan that Investment Fiji has, and it has to come through the Annual Report. I think we must also come to a realisation that this particular Report comes on the back of COVID-19. So very little activity and a lot may have gone on some things may have been missed. I take my hat off also to the team led by Mr. Chetty at Investment Fiji; very young team, they have done extremely well. We must always look at Investment Fiji as one of our premier most institution, Sir, because it is at the forefront of what we are trying to do in terms of Fiji being a premier investment destination. The minute it had turned into an investment promotion agency, there are certain things that we need to make sure that we keep a check on, and these reports are vital in terms of getting that done.

I am grateful that the performance matrix was actually handed in and now they have learnt a lesson. It ought to have been given in the first place. In terms of SDGs, I think it is also every other institution has actually put in, whether they are compliant with SDGs and that is important to Government also as a whole and in Fiji we do that. I think Investment Fiji should ensure that actually that gets done in all the reports that we do.

One of the most important things that we need to realise, Sir, is that one of the only tools that Investment Fiji has, is actually trade missions and investment promotions, et cetera that they do.

When they do that, because this is a taxpayers' money, we need to ensure that we report back. There is the back to office report to find out how good it is, what has actually transpired, have we been able to ensure that it was effective, and all these activities need to be evaluated. With the information that is provided, it allows us to closely monitor what actually is good for us and what is not. When we do these missions, the data and the level of interest generated, et cetera needs to be quantified somewhere so that the Committees that look at it say, "well this is worthwhile, that is not worthwhile" and it can be openly discussed in Parliament.

Having said all that, Sir, because it was post-COVID, I think they may have been a lot of budgetary restrictions that Investment Fiji had. I know the honourable Minister for Finance is not but I will plead with the Minister responsible that in order for Fiji to be promoting itself as a premier destination for investment purposes, I think the Minister may need to also see if we can actually get Investment Fiji more money to be able to do their activities that is designed to do. I know that previously it was a bit difficult because of COVID-19 but I think we are in a better and healthier position to be able to do that.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as an investment promotion agency also, we need to be making sure that we are accountable for everything that we do, the trade missions are going overseas. Most recently, I think the honourable Minister took a mission up to North America which I understand was fairly successfully, but we would love to see the data on that at a later stage obviously. These are things that need to be included in the Report.

Glaring amiss, as I said earlier was the misnomer one in terms of SDGs, it is an important tool. Mr. Speaker is always ensuring that we actually do that but in short, I think it is a fairly good report that actually come out, but I would urge the Government to see if we can give Investment Fiji a whole lot more dollars for it to be able to succeed and do what it does. It stands at the forefront, and I have been on these trade missions myself, just post-COVID especially with Expo 2020 and also out in Portugal with respect to the outsourcing industry. In terms of Government doing all that it can, in terms of diversification, this is the agency that needs to be empowered to be able to sell Fiji in terms of all that we need to do to become bigger and better. With those few words, I totally agree with the Report, and I wish the Investment Fiji team well.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to provide comments in terms of the debate on the Investment Fiji Annual Reports for 2019 to 2020 and 2021 to 2022. Firstly, Sir, as the Minister responsible, it is obvious that there was one year that was missed from the tabling which is the 2020 to 2021 reports. So, I will take that on myself to ensure that that is tabled in-house as quickly as possible, to ensure that we keep in train with the tabling of reports in a timely manner but also make sure in a complete sense as well.

I thank the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs for providing the consolidated report after conducting a review of the relevant Annual Reports. I think stepping back, Mr. Speaker, Sir, just in terms of the economic climate that we are currently facing, you would have heard the remarks of the honourable Gavoka about the revision upwards of the economic growth in the country. It is now at 3.4 percent which is very positive. I suspect if we keep on doing what we are doing, we probably might go to 4 percent, but certainly into next year, all going well, I am expecting a much stronger economic growth.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is also on the back of a very strong investment pipeline, and it is a credit to Investment Fiji in terms of following up on investments. As has been mentioned in the House, the Fijian pipeline is now at \$6 billion, and there are more opportunities coming at us. It is about 185 projects in total and what the other side of the House will start seeing is a roll out of these projects.

The Sofitel Vatutalei Project has started already, they are now starting to build up, so that will create a lot of momentum. There is also another hotel that is going to be announced shortly Sir, in the West. These are the types of projects that are coming at us, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and augurs well for the economy, augurs well for the country and of course, I do not need to talk about the Google entry, I do not need to talk about commercial agriculture ventures of Fiji Water. These are type of diversification initiatives that are coming through Investment Fiji.

In terms of the Reports themselves, I think it is fair to say that over this period there was a transition in Investment Fiji and that probably explains why there was a bit of a paucity of information apart from COVID-19 as eloquently articulated by the honourable Koya. There was also the fact that they were, credit to FijiFirst, we were transitioning Investment Fiji from being a regulatory agency, in other words, more policing focussed, to an investment promotion agency. That happened on 1<sup>st</sup> August, 2022, and I am certain that going forward, the reports that will come from Investment Fiji will be a lot more comprehensive and detailed in terms of the information that was lacking from the Reports that were mentioned.

Mr. Speaker, in terms of what the Committee alluded to regarding trade missions, understanding what interest was there in terms of investments, you would have heard me updating the House about the hundreds of millions that have been generating through the trade missions. That will actually find its way into the reports hopefully, Mr. Speaker so that we get a bit more granularity in terms of what we actually see in terms of the reporting from Investment Fiji.

I also concur with the reporting on SDGs and that was a fair comment. I know that the Chief Executive and his team will actually ensure that the future reports actually do have SDGs mentioned. One of the things that I thought I would just share with the House as well, some of the positive changes that we brought into being. When we started, there was something called the Investment Facilitation Committee that was in existence, but perhaps not operating fully fledged and this, Sir, is a conglomeration of all the agencies that are important for investment. We are now meeting at least at the minimum once every two months, it is chaired by either myself or the Permanent Secretary.

What we are doing, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is actually drilling down on key investment opportunities and try to unlock bottlenecks. We are doing this, Sir, because right now as we know, we are still in the process of trying to improve the ease of doing business in Fiji. So, this is being done and we are starting to see a lot of good results from it, a lot of positive comments. Everyone is on the same page, from the FRA, to EFL, to FRCS. We are all in the same room together, so there is the ability to resolve a lot of issues regarding investment.

I have given the Investment Facilitation Committee a challenge, Sir, we will get to a stage and I am hoping that the Committee will no longer have to meet because we will have a fully digitised systems and so the need to actually have committee meetings to try and fix things will ultimately go away. That is kind of where we headed, Sir, in terms of Investment Fiji and its performance.

Right now, there is a lot of work going on with Tourism Fiji. As we know tourism in our country is very hot at the moment and there is a lot of hotel projects that are on the cusp of going to breaking ground. You will see the honourable Prime Minister getting very busy with some of the openings; one in Nadi very shortly. These are the types of opportunities that are there.

Google is on its way to Fiji, Sir, and there will be some exciting announcements later this year. These are the types of opportunities that we are starting to unlock through Investment Fiji and the future, Sir, for the country from an economic perspective, if I do say so myself is rather bright and with the right disciplines, we continue with the focus that we are focusing on, there are some very good times ahead.

Finally, Sir, for the first time in the country, the Prime Minister's Business Awards that will be done annually, we will have a category for the iTaukei Provincial Councils; first time. What does that mean, Sir? There is a pivot to ensure that over the next few years, the iTaukei economy starts to grow. If we unlock that potential, Sir, our country will grow in leaps and bounds. We own the resources; we just need to match that up with the right capital mix and we will be on our way.

There is a lot of positive things happening, Sir, I congratulate Investment Fiji for their reports, we do note that there are some things that they need to do better, which I will ensure as their line Minister that are done, but I thank the Committee once again for the Report and I fully support the motion before the House.

HON. V. NAUPOTO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, before I very briefly contribute to the debate, I think few minutes ago our baby Flying Fijians, our Under 18 have won their second game against the Australian Under 18. Certainly, congratulations to them.

I thank the Committee for the Report, and I certainly concur with the sentiments that has been expressed already. Yes, Investment Fiji is an important institution for Fiji. I had the honour to Chair it for two years when it was the Fiji Trade and Investment Bureau, I think it was called then.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I just would like to look at the issue of the labour force and the correlation connection that the labour force has with, trying to get companies and people to come and invest into the country. Reading through the review Report, trying to find that connection, we have been talking about brain drain in this Chamber in past sittings, and it is a reality that the fluidity and movement of our mobile labour force is really on the go.

It is important for Investment Fiji as they go out and try and attract investors to come to Fiji, to ensure that they coordinate with all the other agencies that are watching this movement of the labour force, to ensure that when they come to Fiji to invest, they are not faced with the shortage of labour where they do not have the exact skill sets that they would love to employ in order to set up their business in Fiji. It is just a minor point or perhaps a major point, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that I would like to add to this debate.

I thank the Committee for the Report and certainly some very worthwhile recommendations for the Ministry in the Report.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to provide my contribution to the debate on the Consolidated Review Report of Investment Fiji Annual Report 2019-2020 and 2021-2022.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, allow me to acknowledge the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs for its deliberation on the Annual Reports. As an investment arm of Government, Investment Fiji plays an extremely critical role in the health of our economy. No matter what sector we stand to represent in this august House, we recognise the imperative of having a driving body that not only attracts interests from potential investors but ensures that they are realised.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, over the weekend at the Fiji Tourism Convention, the CEO of Investment Fiji highlighted that Investment Fiji is supporting 185 projects at the moment; 83 are in construction, 35 in trade development and 67 in conceptual stages. As the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade, Co-operatives and Small and Medium Enterprises and Communications noted, because they are at a very young stage, their realisation on the ground too varies. I ask everyone for their support and ensure the completion of all these projects.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, if I may, let me highlight some of the opportunities and issues in tourism, relative to investments. We all know that tourism is one of the leading sectors, and although driven by accommodation, it is a mix with other tourism-related offerings - retirement villages, medical tourism, sports tourism and glamping. These are excellent opportunities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there are about 45 projects that once realised, will bring in 3,500 rooms. Some of these are already under construction. With Fiji Airways now expanding rapidly, this is very much welcomed. As you know, Mr. Speaker, there is a mismatch between the Airline inventory in terms of number of seats and the ground inventory in terms of rooms - hotel beds.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, at the Fiji Tourism Convention, we noted that, firstly, for domestic investors, one of the hardest things is to get approvals on investment. However, Investment Fiji's role now as an investment promotion agency and the establishment of the Investment Facilitation Committee, I know has helped a lot in navigating bottlenecks. Also, the Sub-Committee is doing exceptionally well in these areas.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, during the Convention, there was the usual concern about immigration, and the RESET Sub-Committee is doing quite a great job on this. And the numbers that was shared by the Chairman of the RESET Sub-Committee, kind of, blown us away. I do not remember the exact number, but it was something like 800 applicants or work permits almost every month. When you look at figures like that and the backlog that we have which has improved now, you just begin to wonder, something must be happening in this country that is attracting all these applications.

As the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade, Co-operatives and Small and Medium Enterprises and Communications has indicated, the economy is growing very, very well, Mr. Speaker, and the 3.4 could actually become much higher come the end of the year. So, when you see all those applicants for work permits, it is a good sign - it is positive for the country.

Secondly, land and resource owners want to play a great role, calling for equity partnerships and the Coalition Government has a range of facilities to encourage this. This came out very strongly during the Convention, Mr. Speaker, the resource owners want to play a part in equity's involvement in tourism. Bodies such as the Fiji Indigenous Business Council (FIBC) and the Resource Owners Council, play a big role in facilitating meaningful partnerships.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this body is being revived under the Coalition Government. You may recall the FIBC used to be a very robust body back in those days and it was badly impacted over the last couple of years, reducing the membership quite drastically.

Advocacy is critical to resource owners who really want to invest in the tourism industry, and they need to be industry ready. We will be preparing them, as many have the aspiration but not the know-how. There is a lot of interest from resource-owners. It was quite welcomed to see the number of resource owners who participated in the Convention, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

The need for investment in supporting infrastructure. As we build more rooms, the pressure on other sectors - infrastructure and utilities, increases.

Stakeholders raise the supply chain issue and cost remains a challenge for outer islands and remote areas. In agriculture, I have asked my colleague, the honourable Minister for Agriculture, for more intense involvement in tourism. We have about a million visitors forecasted to arrive this year, and in the future years, so we need to feed these million visitors, and we can do that from local producers.

Limitation in investment was another matter. Concerns were raised on whether we should allow for 300 room hotels in the outer islands. I think some people are concerned about building resorts in the outer islands, but to combat such questions, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is the ability of tourism to reverse the migration from the outer islands to the urban areas.

As we know, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it has been publicly noted that some islanders are now street dwellers and most live as squatters in informal settlements, creating all sorts of social challenges. Tourism is largely rural based, and those idyllic islands can be home to some well-planned exotic resorts. Such developments can provide economic opportunities for islanders who will visit the cities only to shop and the likes, instead of relocating wholesale as we currently see today.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we also had an international guest speaker from SCAF Advisory, a Canadian company, who shared, based on their research, tourism and hotel investors having a great deal of choice in which destination they will risk their capital. But Fiji, is doing well, attracting investors as we see today.

A phenomenon, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that he shared with us was the Saudi Arabia phenomena. Saudi Tourism is investing up to trillions in the tourism industry, effectively pulling many investors away from other parts of the world into Saudi Arabia. This Canadian gentleman said even in Canada, they feel this. Such is the impact of the trillions that the Saudis are spending on their tourism.

For those who play golf will know that now Saudi Golf, has virtually taken over from other established golfing fraternity worldwide. If you watch boxing, most of the big bouts now are staged in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. Such is the pull of Saudi Arabia in developing its tourism and sports. So, it is a phenomenon that we need to understand. It could play a big role. It could impact on the way investors move around the region also.

I concur with the Committee's findings on ensuring we set concrete KPIs and continuously report on our performance. Every statutory body should, but you should also recognise the fast-paced environment we are in, and the rigid matrix may not capture all forms of success. So, the road ahead is quite long.

Now, I would like to conclude by thanking the Investment Fiji's Chairperson, Ms. Jenny Seeto, and CEO, Mr. Kamal Chetty, for their continued efforts in positioning us as an investment destination of choice.

Thank you, once again, to the Committee for your deliberations. I am certain under my colleague, the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade, Cooperatives, Small and Medium Enterprises and Communications' guidance, that Investment Fiji will continue to progress as an agency so critical for Fiji. Thank you and *vinaka vakalevu*.

MR. SPEAKER.- I now call on the Deputy Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs to speak in reply.

HON. S. KIRAN.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, it has been well expressed how important Investment Fiji is to the economic growth. I thank the Deputy Prime Minister for his commitment to improving, not only the Annual Report, but ensuring that Investment Fiji is robust.

I would also like to thank the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Tourism and Civil Aviation also for sharing the different opportunities that lay out there and specifically in tourism. I would like to thank other honourable Members for their contributions, and I hope that

Investment Fiji will take this into account, and we look forward to Investment Fiji taking these recommendations on board.

With that, I thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, Parliament will now vote to note the content of the Report.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, that brings us to the end of the items listed in today's Sitting. I thank you all for your contributions. Parliament is now adjourned until tomorrow at 9.30 a.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 6.24 p.m.





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**Reply to Written Question No. 236/2024 tabled by the honourable Minister for Justice (Ref. Page 2025)**

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**MINISTER FOR JUSTICE  
(Hon. S.D. Turaga)**

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Reply to Question No. 236/2024 is as follows:

Mr. Speaker Sir, I would like to acknowledge honourable Qereqeretabua for raising the question on the number of Justices of Peace (JPs) appointed in the last six months, their names and addresses and the number of applications received and processed from January to June of this year.

The Fiji Coalition Government has made significant strides in increasing the number of JPs across the country. Sir, JPs play a vital role in both, our legal system and broader community. Their primary functions include:

- witnessing the signing of important documents, such as affidavits of service and statutory declarations; and
- certifying copies of documents.

These services are crucial for various legal proceedings, ensuring that individuals can fulfil their legal obligations and access necessary benefits. Some documents verified by JPs may be required for court cases, while others are needed for everyday legal and administrative processes.

The appointment of an individual as a Justice of the Peace carries with it a profound trust in their honesty, diligence, and caution in performing their duties. Mr. Speaker, Sir, JPs are entrusted with a duty of care, particularly when handling the documents they witness or certify. This responsibility requires them to follow correct procedures at all times, to prevent any potential harm. For instance, if a JP fails to properly witness the signing of a document, and this oversight results in someone suffering a financial loss, the affected individual may have legal recourse against the JP. Therefore, the role demands a strong commitment to accuracy and adherence to legal protocols to uphold the trust placed in them by the community.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, JPs are bound by a strict code of conduct, which is thoroughly explained during their induction process. They are appointed for a three-year term, during which they must uphold the standards outlined in this code. The code of conduct sets clear expectations for their behaviours and responsibilities. Upon appointment, each JP is assigned a unique registration number, which they are encouraged to include in their official stamp when providing services to the public.

Before assuming their duties, JPs are made aware of the following key points:

- **TERM OF APPOINTMENT:** Justices of Peace serve a three-year term.
- **CODE OF CONDUCT:** They must adhere to the established standards of behaviour.
- **JP REGISTRATION NUMBERS:** Each JP is issued a unique number for identification.
- **NOTIFICATION OF CHANGES:** JPs are required to notify the Ministry of Justice if there are changes in their name, address, or contact details.
- **MOVING OVERSEAS:** JPs must inform the Ministry if they plan to move abroad.
- **DEATH OF A JP:** The Ministry must be notified in the event of a JP's passing.

- **TRAINING:** JPs are expected to participate in any training offered by the Ministry of Justice.
- **CHANGE OF ADDRESS:** JPs must promptly inform the Ministry if their address or contact information changes.
- **DISPLAY OF CERTIFICATE:** A JP must display their certificate of appointment at the location where they provide services, as registered with the Ministry of Justice.

These guidelines ensure that JPs maintain the highest standards of professionalism and accountability throughout their term.

As part of their responsibilities, JPs are required to submit reports detailing the services they provide to the public. These reports are due in March and September each year during their term of appointment. Maintaining these reports is crucial for the following reasons:

- **OFFICIAL REQUIREMENT:** Submitting these reports is a formal obligation set by the Ministry.
- **RECORD OF SERVICES:** It helps JPs track the type of services they have provided and to whom.
- **SERVICE TRANSPARENCY:** The reports offer a clear reflection of the services rendered to the public.
- **FRAUD PREVENTION:** They protect JPs from potential fraudulent claims or issues.
- **RENEWAL CONSIDERATION:** The Minister uses these reports to assess whether a JP's appointment should be renewed at the end of their term.
- **MINISTRY OVERSIGHT:** The reports enable the Ministry to monitor the quality and integrity of the services provided, especially if a complaint is lodged against a JP.

These reports ensure accountability, transparency, and professionalism, supporting both the JPs and the Ministry in their shared mission of upholding justice.

Currently, the number of JPs in Fiji stands at **625**. In the last six months, the total number of Justices of the Peace (JP) appointed is **84**. The breakdown as per province is as follows:

Province	Total No. of JPs
Lomaiviti	1
Kadavu	0
Rewa	8
Naitasiri	24
Tailevu	7
Ra	1
Ba	22
Nadroga	3
Serua	0
Namosi	3
Lau	0
Macuata	8
Bua	3
Cakaudrove	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>84</b>

The breakdown of the total number of JPs as per Division in the last six months is as follows:

Division	Total No. of JPs
Central	39
Eastern	1

Western	26
Northern	18
<b>Total</b>	<b>84</b>

For the information of Parliament, I present the list of 84 newly appointed Justices of the Peace, including their names and respective addresses. This comprehensive list reflects our ongoing commitment to ensuring equitable access to justice and upholding the integrity of our legal system.

No.	Names	Addresses
1.	Abdul Shaizad	Velovelo, Lautoka
2.	Abraham Dalip Pratap	8 Tabua Place, Ba Town
3.	Aisea Buludrau Korovuli	Laselase Village, Sigatoka
4.	Alan Walker Petersen	Tovu Tovu, Naselesele, Taveuni
5.	Alipate Tuinabai Tavai	Padarath Road, Saweni, Lautoka
6.	Amuk Prasad	Bulileka, Labasa
7.	Anaseini Bulivativati	Navuniivi Village, Navitilevu, Ra
8.	Apisalome Waqainavunivalu Metuisela	Jalil Lane, Togoru Road, Navua
9.	Avitesh Rohit Deo	Naduna, Labasa
10.	Bhim Chand	Nabouono, Taveuni
11.	Cordelia Martha Stolz	Vunimaqo Estate, Matei, Taveuni
12.	Dharam Raj	Airport Road, Waiqele, Labaasa
13.	Dharmendra Raj	Navukula Street, Tavua Town
14.	Eparama Uluiviti	Nakelo District School Compound, Nakelo, Tailevu
15.	Fazim Sheikh Tahsheen	Nawaka, Nadi
16.	Ilisoni Taginadavui Nairobi	Nasawana Village, Nadi, Bua
17.	Isaia Maku	Koro Island Government Station, Koro
18.	Isikeli Banuve	Nasoso, Nadi
19.	Jitendra Kumar	Siberia, Labasa
20.	Kiritesh Sandeep Prasad	Lomawai Health Centre, Lomawai, Nadroga
21.	Milia Lideth Simmons	44 Macuata Drive, Delailabasa, Labasa
22.	Mohammed Shafeem Manu	Lovu, Lautoka
23.	Nemani Tarotaro	Government Quarters 279, Waya Street, Lautoka
24.	Nilesh Shailend Singh	Tomuka, Tavakubu, Lautoka
25.	Pushpa Karan Nadan Naicker	Lot 23 Kartaram Road, Votualevu, Nadi
26.	Rajend Singh	Matanitobua Street, Suva
27.	Rajesh Sharma	Matanagata Back Road, Vatukoula, Tavua
28.	Ranadiniceva Raluna	Vunivutu Village, Nadogo, Macuata
29.	Ro Bolamatua Pauliasi Taukeinikoro	Bua Provincial Council Compound
30.	Sanaila Yamaka	Malawai, Billa, Votualevu, Nadi
31.	Shahil Shajal Kumar	12 Loloma Street, Tavua
32.	Shiu Narayan	Vitadra, Bulileka, Labasa
33.	Shyam Kumar	Mataniwai Settlement, Tavua
34.	Simeli Cokomata	Bilolo, Sorokoba, Ba
35.	Steven Abraham Tikina	Yavulo Village, Sigatoka
36.	Taniela Naika	Narokorokoyawa Village Sabeto
37.	Tekata Toaisi	Nacula Methodist Compound, Naodamu, Labasa
38.	Timoci Tinaviti	Bua Provincial Quarters, Nabouwalu
39.	Veena Kiran Sharma	Navau, Ba
40.	Viliame Saqusaqu	Lot 15 Kartaram Subdivision, Votualevu, Nadi.
41.	Adi Lusiana Buna Qolikoro Navusolo	14 Kaunitoni Street, Waiyavi, Lautoka
42.	Akili Masi	Viseisei Village, Lautoka
43.	Amar Deep Narayan	Lot 27 Stage 1, Kalokalo Crescent, Makoi
44.	Amrit Narayan Singh	Lot 2 Bau Road, Nausori
45.	Anthony Suliano	Vunivau, Labasa
46.	Apimeleki Tola	Lot 7 Nabou Road, Davuilevu Housing
47.	Ashni Prasad Ashyanna Ali	Lot 9 Nawame Road, Tacirua East
48.	Avishay Shahil Singh	10 Miles Farm Road, Nakasi
49.	Deep Chand	Lot 40 Laqio Road, Davuilevu Housing

50.	Emori Koroiravudi	River Road, Narere, Nasinu
51.	Epineri Qila	Lot 27 Kaci Road, Legalega, Nadi
52.	Jiokapeci Beitaki Baledrokadroka	Delainabuni Road, Stage 1 Cunningham Road, Suva
53.	Kirtik Kaushak Prakash	Lot 40 Vatoa Road, Narere, Nasinu
54.	Leone Naivalu	Navatuyaba Village, Toga, Rewa
55.	Maleli Nasaunivotua	Vuninokonoko Road, Navua
56.	Melania Daliga Alumita	Lot 2 Waituri Road, Vuci
57.	Mereoni Senivesi Tadulala	Nabitu Village, Tokatoka, Tailevu
58.	Mohammed Ishtehar Hussan	60 Panapasa Road, Namadi Heights
59.	Paulo Ravunikau Baleinakorodawa	51 Yasiyasi Road, Nadera
60.	Peni Naqaqa Drodrolagi Tove	15 Nuqa Place, Valelevu
61.	Peni Vuli	Lot 5 Wainibuku Road, 9 Miles
62.	Peni Yabakivou	Lot 1 Tamole Street, Newtown, Nasinu
63.	Radhikash Kapoor	Lakha Singh Road, Tacirua
64.	Rahul Ritesh Sharma	Varadoli, Ba
65.	Ratu Iosefo Roragaca Vereivalu	Lot 12 Saqali Place, Nawanawa, Nadera
66.	Risita Devi	Kavuli, Tavua
67.	Samisoni Reboni Waqavou	Lomaivuna, Naitasiri
68.	Sanjeet Prasad	Lot 21 Vishnu Deo Road, Nakasi
69.	Sanjeesh Abay Nand	Muaniweni College Compound, Naitasiri
70.	Satya Deo	C.O Singh Road, Koronivia, Nausori
71.	Shanti Singh	Yalalevu, Ba
72.	Shubila Wati	Lot 16 Pundit Mahanbu Maharaj Street, Vesivesi Road, Kinoya
73.	Suruji Deo	20 Raghu Raj Street, Davuilevu, Nausori
74.	Tarisi Ratawa	Bagasau Village, Fawn Harbour, Cakaudrove
75.	Uday Singh	6 Cunningham Street, Nausori Town
76.	Umesh Chand	Tuatua, Labasa
77.	Vijay Singh	Nakoba Settlement, Galoa, Pacific Harbour
78.	Vijendra Mani	Nawai, Nadi
79.	Vineshwar Chand Sharma	Lot 27 Kaci Road, Legalega, Nadi
80.	Wee Kong Ou	15A Tikaram Street, Namadi Heights
81.	Niko Buke Waqadav	Lot 11 Soqe Place, Nadera, Nasinu
82.	Jacoro Kenatale	Vuci Road, Nausori
83.	Amitab Amit Prasad	92 Kalokalo Crescent, Makoi, Nasinu
84.	Bimla Wati Deo	Lot 13 Frangipani Avenue, Waila

Tabulated below are the applicants distributed according to Ethnicity, Division and Province.

<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Total No. of JPs</b>
iTaukei	12
Indo-Fijian	26
Others	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>38</b>

<b>Division</b>	<b>Total No. of JPs</b>
Central/Eastern	21
Western	11
Northern	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>38</b>

<b>Province</b>	<b>Total No. of JPs</b>
Lomaiviti	2
Kadavu	-
Rewa	7
Naitasiri	7
Tailevu	5

Ra	4
Ba	7
Nadroga	-
Serua	-
Namosi	-
Lau	-
Macuata	4
Bua	-
Cakaudrove	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>38</b>

Apart from these 38 applicants, there are 28 applications still pending due to missing support documents required for further processing. One application was found to have an adverse criminal record spanning over 10 years, and the individual has been advised to obtain a rehabilitation certificate. Additionally, nine applications are currently awaiting police reports to proceed further.

As more applications are received, the Ministry will facilitate the induction process to ensure that these services are enhanced and made readily available to the public. Our goal is to continuously improve access to these vital services for the community.

In conclusion, the Ministry of Justice is making significant strides in modernizing its operations and enhancing service delivery for the people of Fiji, particularly in the appointment and support of JPs. These individuals play an essential role in upholding justice and ensuring access to legal services across the country. The Ministry's ongoing efforts reflect a strong commitment to integrity, efficiency, and fairness in the appointment process, ensuring that JPs are well-prepared and fully equipped to serve their communities with professionalism and dedication.