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## **STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL AFFAIRS**

### **Consolidated Review Report of the Levuka Town Council 2016- 2017 Annual Reports**



**PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI**  
**Parliamentary Paper No. 33 of 2025**

*March 2025*

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## **CHAIRPERSON’S FOREWORD**

I am pleased to present the Standing Committee on Social Affairs report on *the Consolidated Review Report of Levuka Town Council 2016 and 2017 Annual Reports*.

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

The Committee reviewed the Annual Reports and identified important issues, which were then brought to the attention of the Levuka Town Council for necessary action.

The Committee also visited Levuka Town Council and identified a major concern: the town's Heritage status. The Council requires funding to maintain the monumental heritage buildings within the municipality.

The Committee recognizes the need for solid collaboration between Levuka Town Council, Ministry of Local Government and Department of Culture and Heritage to maintain the Levuka Heritage Status.

Furthermore, the Committee also witnessed the new Levuka Market, which opened in November 2024, another revenue source for the council.

I sincerely thank the Acting CEO and the Special Administrator of Levuka Town Council, his team, the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Local Government, and her officials for their valuable contributions to this review process.

Finally, I would like to thank the current and former Hon. Members of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, Hon. Ratu Rakuita Vakalalabure, Hon. Sashi Kiran, Hon. Ioane Naivalurua, Hon. Viam Pillay and Hon. Parveen Bala for their valuable input and support. I would also like to thank Hon. Taito Rokomatu, Hon. Joseph Nand, Hon. Alipate Tuicolo and Hon Shalen Kumar for their assistance on several occasions as alternate standing committee members.

On behalf of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, I commend this report to Parliament



.....  
**Hon. Ilesia Vanawalu**  
**Chairperson**



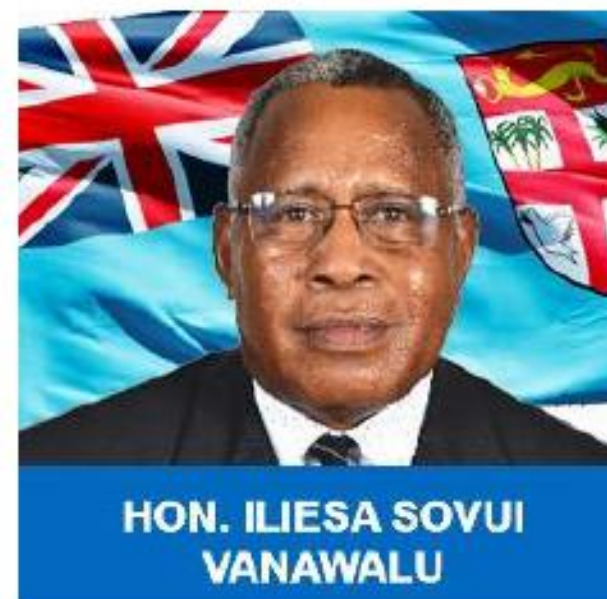
## ACRONYM

| Acronym |                         |
|---------|-------------------------|
| CEO     | Chief Executive Officer |
| MP      | Member of Parliament    |
| SO      | Standing Order          |



## COMMITTEE REMIT AND MEMBERS

The Standing Committee on Social Affairs (**‘Committee’**) is established under Section 70 of the Constitution and SO 109. The Committee’s mandate and functions are provided under SO 109 (2) and 110 (1) (a)-(d) & (f). The Committee consists of the following members:



HON. ILIESA SOVUI  
VANAWALU

**Chairperson**

Government Member



HON. RATU RAKUITA  
S. VAKALALABURE

**Deputy Chairperson**

Government Member



HON. VIAM PILLAY

**Opposition Member**



HON. TAITO ROKOMATU

**Alternative Member**

Government



HON. PARVEEN KUMAR

**Opposition Member**



# **1. INTRODUCTION**

The Levuka Town Council Annual Reports 2016 and 2017 was tabled in Parliament on 15<sup>th</sup> April 2024 and referred to the Standing Committee on Social Affairs.

Standing Orders 109 (2)(b) allows the Standing Committee on Social Affairs to examine matters related to health, education, social services, labor, aviation, culture, and media.

## **1.1. Committee Procedures**

Deliberations on Levuka Town Council began on November 12, 2024. The Committee read through the reports and prepared clarifications on key issues of interest, which were then sent to Levuka Town Council.

The Committee held a Public Submission with Levuka Town Council on 20<sup>th</sup> November 2024.

Upon receipt of all relevant information on the committee's queries, it was subsequently endorsed on March 11<sup>th</sup> 2025.

The Committee received the responses from Levuka Town Council which can be viewed at the following link. <https://www.parliament.gov.fj/committees/standing-committee-on-social-affairs/>



## **2. LEVUKA TOWN COUNCIL**

### **2.1 Background**

Levuka Town Council was established as the first municipality in 1877 as the capital of Fiji. It has been noted historically as the first in many things in Fiji, like the first hotel, the first bank, etc. The Town achieved a milestone in 2013 when it was declared a Heritage Town by UNESCO and joined the Organization of World Heritage Town/Cities. Again in 2017, the council celebrated its 140 years of existence as a municipality. The challenge for the council is to maintain its heritage status while adhering to the needs and demands of modern development and technologies.

### **2.2 Committee Deliberation and Analysis**

The committee noted and deliberated on Levuka Town Council's undertaking to improve its operations and service delivery.

- The committee noted that for the period under review 2016 and 2017, the Auditor-General issued a disclaimer opinion for both years. The Committee noted that Levuka Town Council failed to comply with the relevant financial regulations.
- The committee noted the challenges that Levuka Town Council encounters on its Heritage status regarding development within the municipality.
- It is also crucial to review the relevant legislation and regulations to empower Levuka Town Council.
- Levuka was once the hub of the Eastern Division, with the relocation of the Commissioner Eastern Office in the Central Division, it has decreased the economic activity within the municipality.
- The Council is in the process of formulating its 2024-2029 Strategic Plan.



### 3. KEY FINDINGS

Below are the key findings that the committee compiled through its deliberations.

- 3.1 **Review of Legislations:** The Committee noted that the Local Government Act needs to be reviewed to better control the activities in all municipalities.
- 3.2 **Financial Management:** The Committee noted that Levuka Town Council did not observe the proper accounting protocols for the period under review. The Town has implemented a Finance Manual and departmental SOPs for each accounting function and has strict check-and-review measures in place.
- 3.3 **Audit of Financial Reports:** The Committee noted the delay in the Auditor General's Office auditing the Council's accounts.
- 3.4 **Collection of Rate Arrears:** The Committee noted the increase in rate arrears for the Council. Levuka Town Council has taken measures to address these issues with the small claims tribunal and other strategies for recovering rate arrears.
- 3.5 **Levuka Heritage Status:** The Committee noted that Levuka Town Council is challenged by its heritage status for further developments within the municipality.
- 3.6 **Levuka Government Services:** Levuka was the administrative Centre for the Eastern Division. The Committee noted that the relocation of the Commissioner Eastern Office to Suva has decreased the moral and economic viability of the people of Ovalau and the services to the remaining Eastern Division.
- 3.7 **Levuka Town Scheme Plan:** The Committee noted that the Council, together with the Ministry of Local Government, National Fire Authority (NFA) and the Department of Heritage is reviewing Levuka Town Scheme Plan.
- 3.8 **Collaboration and Networking:** The Committee noted that the Ministry of Local Government and the Councils need to improve their coordination and collaboration to improve service delivery. The Council must establish its Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) and strengthen its network with other key agencies.
- 3.9 **Security Plan for the Council:**  
The Committee noted that with the rise of criminal activities within the municipality, there needs to be a Plan for a more secure, safer, peaceful and welcoming environment within the municipality.
- 3.10 **Fight against Drugs:** The Committee noted that Levuka Town Council is working with the Police together with the villages in Ovalau on community policing in curbing and raising awareness on drugs.



3.11 **Monitoring and Oversight:** The Committee noted the Ministry of Local Government's lack of proper oversight and monitoring, resulting in inefficient service delivery.



## **4. COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Committee recommends the following:

- 4.1 That Ministry of Local Government urgently expedites the review of Local Government legislation.
- 4.2 That Levuka Town Council must take measures to fully comply with the financial regulations and procedures to meet standards from the Auditor General's Office.
- 4.3 The Office of the Auditor General must prioritize the auditing of accounts for the Council.
- 4.4 The Ministry of Local Government to collaborate with the Department of Heritage to reinstate the Heritage Grant for the maintenance and upkeep of the monumental sites and buildings.
- 4.5 Government to reconsider the relocation of Commissioner Eastern office back to Levuka for the effective services in the Eastern Division.
- 4.6 The Ministry of Local Government must strengthen its oversight and monitoring of all municipalities.
- 4.7 The Committee supports Levuka Town Council's efforts to reduce its outstanding rate arrears through various legal means.
- 4.8 The Ministry of Local Government must assist the Council with funding to improve the condition of all recreational parks and public conveniences within the municipality.
- 4.9 Levuka Town Council must work closely with the Fiji Roads Authority (FRA) and other stakeholders to address the issues of poor road conditions, blocked drains and malfunctioning street lights.



## **5. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS AND GENDER ANALYSIS:**

Levuka Town Council's commitment to the SDGs are as follows:

The Council's actions such as upgrading Nasau Park, renovating market spaces, and fostering partnerships for educational access (such as the MoU with the University of Fiji), contribute to achieving SDGs 4 (Quality Education), 5 (Gender Equality), and 10 (Reduced Inequalities).

Each initiative promotes inclusivity and local access to resources, reducing the need to travel to urban centers like Suva. Additionally, the planned improvements to monuments, landscaping and heritage lights all tie into SDG 11 by enhancing public spaces and fostering a sense of community pride.

### **Gender Analysis:**

In its strategic plan for 2024 -2029, the Council has planned out this in a more upgraded Nasau Park. This project will genuinely reflect the needs and preferences of Levuka's residents. This could enhance the overall appeal of these areas, making them safer and more comfortable for all users.







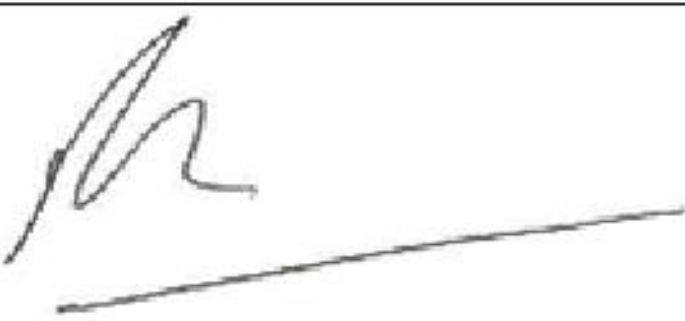
## 5. CONCLUSION

Levuka is a historical town that deserves recognition and appreciation. As a Heritage Town, Levuka Town Council requires all stakeholders' assistance and support to maintain its Heritage status.

In this review report, the committee highlighted various areas that the council needs to strengthen and formulate relevant recommendations for resolution.

## COMMITTEE MEMBERS' SIGNATURE

We, the Members of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, hereby agree with the contents of this report:

| Committee Member                                     | E-Signature   |
|--|---|
| Hon. Ilesia Vanawalu<br>Chairperson                  |  |
| Hon. Ratu Rakuita Vakalalabure<br>Deputy Chairperson |  |
| Hon. Taito Rokomatu<br>Alternative Member            |  |
| Hon. Viam Pillay<br>Member                           |  |
| Hon. Parveen Bala<br>Member                          |  |
| Date: 11 <sup>th</sup> March 2025                    |   |



# ANNEXURE

## Published evidence

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Written evidence, transcripts, and supporting documents can be viewed on the Parliament website at the following link:

<https://www.parliament.gov.fj/committees/standing-committee-on-social-affairs/>



# Levuka Town Council

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Our Ref:

Date :18<sup>th</sup> November,2024

The Hon. Iliesa Vanawalu  
Chairperson  
Standing Committee on Social Affairs  
Parliament of the Republic of Fiji  
Suva.

Dear Sir

## **RE: CLARIFICATION OF ISSUES-- LEVUKA TOWN COUNCIL 2016 -- 2017 ANNUAL REPORTS**

Further to your letter on the 15<sup>th</sup> November, 2024 on the supplementary questions, I hereby submit our responses accordingly.

### **Question1:**

**The Committee would like to know if whether the Municipal Council has any current or upcoming plans to address the issue of drug use, particularly the consumption of hard drugs, in public areas. Given the growing concern around public safety and health, could you please provide any information on strategies or initiatives the Council may be considering combating this issue?**

Response:

The Levuka Town Council recognizes the critical importance of maintaining a safe and healthy public environment. While addressing the drug issue, particularly the use of hard drugs, is a concern for many, the Council understands that tackling this effectively requires a multi-faceted approach.

Currently, Levuka Town Council is exploring the following strategies:

1. Collaboration with Law Enforcement: The Council is in discussions with the Fiji Police to increase patrolling in high-risk public areas and to enhance law enforcement presence where issues have been reported.



2. Community Awareness Programs: In partnership with local organizations, the Council aims to implement awareness campaigns. These would focus on educating the community, particularly youth, about the dangers of drug use.

3. Public Safety Infrastructure: To deter drug use in certain public spaces, the Council is considering measures such as improved lighting, security cameras, and increased signage in key locations. These steps are intended to make public spaces safer and more secure for all residents.

4. Community Reporting Mechanism: The Council is considering setting up a mechanism for residents to report instances of drug use or suspicious activity, allowing timely intervention by relevant authorities.

These strategies are in the planning phase, and the Council will continue to explore additional measures to ensure that Levuka remains a safe place for its residents and visitors.

## **Question 2:**

**The Committee would like to enquire whether the Municipal Council has a comprehensive Natural Disaster Management Plan that addresses the risks of tsunamis, flooding, earthquakes, landslides and cyclones. Specifically, the strategies the Council has in place to mitigate these disasters, as well as the implementation measures to effectively respond to such events when they occur. Could you please provide details on the Council's plans and preparedness efforts for these natural hazards?**

Response:

Levuka Town Council places a strong emphasis on disaster preparedness and has developed a Natural Disaster Management Plan to address various risks, including tsunamis, flooding, earthquakes, landslides, and cyclones. Here are the core elements and strategies the Council employs to mitigate and respond to natural disasters effectively:

### **1. Risk Assessment and Hazard Mapping**

The Council has conducted assessments of vulnerable areas, particularly those prone to flooding and landslides, to understand risk levels better and to inform planning.

**Hazard Mapping:** This includes identifying evacuation zones, especially for tsunami and flood-prone areas, and demarcating high-risk zones where construction may be limited.



## 2. Disaster Mitigation and Infrastructure Resilience

**Flood Control and Drainage Improvements:** The Council has prioritized drainage upgrades in flood-prone areas and is continuously improving infrastructure to manage floodwaters more effectively.

**Landslide Prevention and Slope Stabilization:** Regular inspections and stabilizations are conducted in vulnerable hillside areas, with barriers or retaining walls installed where necessary.

## 3. Evacuation Plans and Shelter Readiness:

**Designated Evacuation Center:** Specific community centers and schools serve as emergency shelters, and the Council regularly updates its list of facilities capable of accommodating residents during disasters.

**Evacuation Routes and Drills:** Clear evacuation routes are established for each hazard, and the Council conducts regular community drills, particularly for tsunamis and cyclones, to ensure residents know how to reach safety quickly.

The Council continually reviews and updates its Natural Disaster Management Plan to address emerging risks and improve preparedness. These measures aim to reduce the impact of natural disasters on the community and facilitate swift and efficient responses when events occur.

### **Question 3:**

**Could the Levuka Town Council kindly provide confirmation of the status and details of the Master Plan for the city? Specifically, the Committee would like to understand any key developments and priorities outlined in the plan.**

Response:

The Levuka Town Council is actively working on a Master Plan aimed at guiding the sustainable development of Levuka, with special consideration for its unique heritage and the well-being of its residents. The Master Plan is designed to align with national objectives while preserving Levuka's historical and cultural significance as Fiji's only UNESCO World Heritage site. Here are the key developments and priorities outlined in the Master Plan:

### 1. Heritage Conservation and Tourism Development

**Historical Preservation:** Priority is given to preserving Levuka's historical architecture and landmarks. The plan includes structural upgrades, conservation of heritage sites, and guidelines for new developments to harmonize with Levuka's historic character.



Tourism Promotion: The Council is working with the Department of Heritage to enhance Levuka's appeal as a tourist destination. Planned projects include improving infrastructure around monuments, installing heritage-style lighting, and creating more visitor-friendly public spaces.

## 2. Infrastructure and Utilities Improvement:

Roads and Drainage: Significant upgrades to the road network and drainage systems are part of the Master Plan to improve accessibility and reduce flooding risks, particularly during the rainy season.

## 3. Community Amenities and Public Spaces

New Levuka Market and Nasau Park Upgrades: The recently completed Levuka Market and Nasau Park improvements are part of the Master Plan's focus on enhancing community spaces. These projects provide vendors and visitors with modern facilities while supporting local business.

## 4. Economic Development and Revenue Generation

Business Incentives: The Council is exploring incentives to attract new businesses, with a focus on sustainable industries.

## 5. Environmental Sustainability:

Green Spaces and Landscaping: The Master Plan emphasizes increasing green spaces in and around Levuka to beautify the town and improve air quality. This includes tree-planting initiatives and landscaping along main streets and public areas.

## 6. Education and Community Engagement:

Educational Partnerships: The recent MoU with the University of Fiji supports the educational aspirations of Levuka's youth, especially those in remote areas. This partnership will facilitate access to higher education locally.

## 7. Future Land Use and Zoning

Zoning Guidelines: The Master Plan includes zoning updates to support balanced land use, ensuring adequate space for residential, commercial, recreational, and heritage areas. Specific guidelines are being established to regulate development in alignment with Levuka's heritage status.

The Master Plan serves as a strategic blueprint to address Levuka's immediate needs while setting a sustainable path for future growth. This ongoing initiative ensures that Levuka remains an attractive, livable, and economically vibrant town with a commitment to its rich heritage.



**Question4:**

**Can the Council confirm the details of its current investment portfolio? And any insights into the types of investments and the Council's strategy in this area.**

Response:

**"Sinking Fund for Emergencies and Investment Opportunities"**

**Sinking Fund:** Recognizing the importance of preparedness for both emergencies and future opportunities, the Council is in the process of establishing a sinking fund. This fund will be reserved for:

- **Emergency Expenses:** Unforeseen repairs, disaster recovery, or urgent capital requirements.
- **Strategic Investment Opportunities:** New projects or investment opportunities that align with the Council's mission to enhance Levuka's infrastructure and services.

Humbly submitted for your information.

Yours faithfully



-----  
Nunia Labati  
**Acting Chief Executive Officer**  
**Levuka Town Council.**



# **[VERBATIM REPORT]**

## **STANDING COMMITTEE ON** **SOCIAL AFFAIRS**

### **ANNUAL REPORT**

**2016-2017 Annual Report**

**SUBMISSION: Levuka Town Council**

**VENUE: Big Committee Room, Government  
Buildings, Suva**

**DATE: Wednesday, 20<sup>th</sup> November, 2024**







**VERBATIM REPORT OF THE MEETING OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL AFFAIRS HELD AT THE COMMITTEE ROOM (EAST WING), PARLIAMENT PRECINCTS, GOVERNMENT BUILDINGS, ON WEDNESDAY, 20<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER, 2024, AT 10.25 A.M.**

**Interviewee/Submittee: Levuka Town Council**

In Attendance:

1. Ms. Nunia Labati - Acting CEO
2. Mr. Nemani Bulivou - Special Administrator

Ministry of Local Government

1. Ms. Seema Sharma - PS
  2. Ms. Bindula Devi - Director
  3. Ms. Saidi Nazrana - PACO
  4. Mr. Navin Chandra - Manager Finance
- 

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members and the Secretariat, a very good morning to you all. It is a pleasure to welcome everyone to this meeting.

At the outset, for information purpose, pursuant to Parliament Standing Order 111, all Committee meetings are to be opened to the public. Therefore, please, note that this submission is open to the public and the media, and will also be aired live via the Parliament Channel on the Walesi platform and will be streamed live on the Parliament *Facebook* platform.

For any sensitive information concerning the matter before us this morning that cannot be disclosed in public, this can be provided to the Committee either in private or in writing. However, please, be advised that pursuant to Standing Order 111, there are only a few specific circumstances that allow for non-disclosure and these include:

- (1) National security matters;
- (2) third party confidential information;
- (3) personnel or human resources matters; and
- (4) Committee deliberation and development of Committee recommendations and reports.

This is a Parliamentary meeting and all information gathered is covered under the Parliamentary Powers and Privileges Act. However, please, bear in mind that we do not condone slander or liable of any sort, so any information brought before this Committee should be based on facts.

In terms of the protocol of this Committee meeting, please, minimise the usage of mobile phones and all mobile phones are to be on silent mode while the meeting is in progress. I also wish to remind honourable Members and our guests that all questions asked are to be asked through the Chairman.

I would like, at this time, to introduce the honourable Members who are here this morning.

(Introduction of Members of the Standing Committee)



MR. CHAIRMAN.- I am chairing this important meeting today. This is my third month in this Standing Committee. I believe the honourable Members are very clear to the team.

Today, the Committee will be hearing submission from the Chairman and Acting CEO, Ms. Nunia Labati, and her team from the Levuka Town Council. This is in relation to the Levuka Town Council 2016-2017 Annual Report. I acknowledge the presence of the Permanent Secretary from the Ministry of Local Government, Ms. Seema Sharma. I would like to thank you, Madam for availing yourself and being present here today with your team.

I now invite our guests from Levuka Town Council to introduce themselves and then begin with their presentation straightaway, after which, there will be a question and answer session. Please, also note that if there are any questions from the Members of the Committee, they may interject or we will wait until the end of the presentation to ask questions.

(Introduction of Officials of Levuka Town Council and Ministry of Local Government)

MR. N. BULIVOU.- At this juncture, I would like to respectfully offer the apologies of the Chairman, who is the second Special Administrator, Mr. Ben Naidu. Unfortunately, he is caught up in another responsibility. I am presenting his apology this morning.

MS. N. LABATI.- *Bula vinaka*, Mr. Chairman and honourable Members, I will start right away with the questions.

**Question No. 1**

**Regarding the operation of the municipality as outlined in the 2016 and 2017 Annual Reports, what was achieved during the years under review? What were the targeted outputs in terms of services provided? What was not achieved?**

The following are the targeted Outputs in terms of services provided:

- (1) Rehabilitation of the old market - the initial discussion was in 2016 and the construction of the new market will be opened next week on Friday, 29<sup>th</sup> November, 2024.
- (2) Proper Solid Waste Management – continuous composting programmes for the ratepayers and also the rural setting.
- (3) Proper drainage systems – continuous upgrading.
- (4) Building and Health Inspections – continuous monitoring.
- (5) Business to expand towards the Northern side of Town - there were new businesses in Levuka in 2017.
- (6) LTA Office Branch in Levuka – still under process. We are hoping to get in the LTA Office. We are also hoping that they will open with us when the new Levuka Market opens.
- (7) Upgrading of the road from Nasova to Levuka - we have confirmation from FRA that they will start the upgrading in this new financial year, 2024-2025.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Mr. Chairman, I have a question with regards to the new market. I had visited Levuka previously with the Committee and we saw that the market was under construction and as the CEO has said, it will be opened soon. Are the market vendors currently operating from the market or are you waiting for the opening of the new market?

When we visited last time, there were some issues with regards to market vendors selling their crops and vegetables beside the seawall. It was raised with the Committee that they had some



issues in regard to moving them into the new market. We would like to know whether that was sorted out and whether the market vendors are still operating from outside or are they still waiting for the market to be opened and then they will officially start selling their crops and vegetables in the new market?

MR. M. BULIVOU.- Mr. Chairman, you asked three questions. The market was ready for some time now but was unable to be occupied because the fabrication of the furniture - tables and seats, was not ready until about a week ago.

We are intending, and the Board has approved, that they come next week - this coming week, so that they can occupy their setup before it officially opens next Friday at about 9.30 in the morning. Because of that challenge and dilemma, they have continued to sell across the shore fronts in Levuka Town. Very soon, there will be transiting from the seafront to the market and it will be ongoing until it is fully occupied, and the tables are ready before its commissioning on the 29<sup>th</sup>, that is, Friday.

The issues came out because of natural things. Sometimes the winds are hard and the rain, et cetera, and they complain a bit and that is understandable. We try to manage it as the best we can. We have just had a meeting, and we have a very cordial relationship with the vendors' association and all is working good now, Mr. Chairman, so they are very happy and are looking forward to its opening come next Friday.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Thank you, Special Administrator and CEO, for the response. Also, Mr. Chairman, through you, in regard to managing the drainage within the Municipality of Levuka, I understand until 2022, there was a grant given by the Ministry of Waterways to all the Municipalities. Are you receiving that grant now or how are you managing the drainage issues in regard to the funding, whether that grant is still being given to the Municipality or not?

MS. S. SHARMA.- Mr. Chairman, if I may, with regards to grants, there is currently no grant provided to the Councils ever since the formation of the Ministry of Waterways because in 2018 when Ministry of Waterways was formed, they took the responsibility of all the drainage. That was the natural creeks and drainage that did not come under the purview of the Fiji Roads Authority.

Obviously, there is an amendment done to the Act that has reversed some of the ways the Ministry of Waterways was working, and we are working very closely with the Ministry of Waterways to look at how the Drainage Board which used to be pre-2018, sort of, comes into play and how the Councils can coordinate with the Drainage Board. As far as we know, pre-2018, there was a grant sharing where the Drainage Board would share with the Councils a funding that was provided to them so the Councils would look after all the drainage within the Municipal boundaries.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- You may continue now.

MS. N. LABATI.-

### **Question No. 2**

**What is the progress of all capital projects initiated in the years under review?**

There were two soft grants that were ceased, especially the CEO Grant in the 2023-2024 financial year, the Environment Officer salary was ceased in 2020, and Health and Building Inspector Grant was ceased in 2020.



The Taxi Stand was completed in 2017 and minor repairs were made in 2024. Footpath upgrades were completed in 2017, and the Drainage Upgrade was completed in 2017. There was continuous drain cleaning by field workers, Sir.

**Question No. 3**

**What is the Town Council doing to ensure that there is a timely collection of town rates on an annual basis and arrears, and at the same time, reducing expenses?**

The following strategies are in place to monitor our debt collection:

- There is a discount period offered to ratepayers;
- consistent follow ups;
- home visitations;
- emails and phone calls;
- final warnings as last resort; and
- Small Claim Tribunal.

In terms of reducing expenses, the Council has properly monitored its cashflow to reduce expenses.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- I was trying to ask another question on Question No. 3. You have indicated that you have six areas in which you used to collect your debt arrears. While analysing this, out of the six, what are the best ways the Council can utilise in order to collect your debt arrears?

MR. M. BULIVOU.- Mr. Chairman, thank you for your interest in this very important area. We find that when we talk to people and this is the most effective one, we get to understand what their (ratepayers) challenges are and by working and communicating with them, we are able to come up with reasonable models for them to be able to pay their rates. I think we would point to that as one of the best ways to do it.

When that does not work, in Levuka, majority of the 144 ratepayers are old people. We have profiled them - they are retired, they used to professionally work for Government but they are retired. As a result, because of their arrangements for their pensions, they do not have that cashflow anymore. As a result, we have to escalate it to other means, and they look to their children, et cetera. But directly, when we talk to them, we can find solutions before we escalate it to these various areas. Thank you, Sir.

**Question No. 4:**

**On Collection of Arrears:**

- (a) **What improvements have been brought about in the collection of arrears by the Levuka Town Council?**
- (b) **What measures have been put in place to promptly address the grievances of ratepayers? How many grievances were recorded from 2016 to 2017 and what was the nature of these complaints? How has this been addressed?**
- (c) **How have the following services and facilities provided to ratepayers in the Levuka Municipality been enhanced through:**
  - (i) **Maintenance of public amenities:**
  - (ii) **Rubbish collection and grass cutting; and**



- (iii) Road maintenance and drainage?**
- (d) How has the service delivery in the following areas been enhanced:**
- (i) Health and hygiene;**
  - (ii) Security and safety;**
  - (iii) Impacts of climate change/environment;**
  - (iv) Poverty;**
  - (v) Squatter settlements;**
  - (vi) Disaster risk analysis; and**
  - (vii) Gender mainstreaming?**

MS. N. LABATI.- In response to the question:

- (a) For Levuka Town Council, improvements in arrears collection typically centres on several strategies as follows:
- (i) Regular follow-ups: Engaging in consistent follow-up communications with defaulters through reminders or notices, encouraging timely payments, which reduces backlog.
  - (ii) Flexible Payment Plans: For those facing financial hardship, introducing structured payment plans helps individuals or businesses meet their obligations over time without straining their budgets.
  - (iii) Incentives for Early Payment: Offering discounts or waivers on penalties for early payments or for paying within a particular timeframe has proven effective in motivating compliance.
  - (iv) Strict Enforcement Measures: For persistent defaulters, issuing fines, imposing penalties or taking legal action, act as deterrents and encourage regular payments.
- (b) To address ratepayer grievances promptly, the Council has often put measures in place such as:
- (i) Creation of Complaints Policy for the Council.
  - (ii) Establishing a dedicated Customer Service Team.
  - (iii) Creating regular feedbacks.
  - (iv) Setting Response Time Benchmarks where clear timelines are established to resolve various complaint types, making response timeframes predictable.

The nature of complaints in those years were:

- (i) General
  - Break-in in market restaurants;
  - Missing of drain covers;
  - Compilation of rubbish behind supermarkets;
  - Green rubbish not collected;
  - Stale coconut buns, et cetera.
- (ii) Building
  - Deterioration of buildings; and
  - Sewer overflow.



HON. V. PILLAY.- Mr. Chairman, through you, I understand that this outstanding rate issue is for all Municipalities. The last report which we went through which was the Suva City Council Report, there was mention about the 11 percent compound interest which attributed to the large rates that being owed by rate payers. Since Madam PS is here from the Ministry of Local Government, I would like to ask whether there are plans to waive this interest rate across Municipalities, or what is the Ministry actually doing to see how best the ratepayers can pay the outstanding rates to the Councils?

MS. S. SHARMA.- Mr. Chairman, with regards to your question, first, there have been a number of amnesties provided, which means there were interest rate waivers given. I think from 2018 to 2023, about five periods of amnesty was provided.

The second approach that the Ministry undertook last year was to look at the review of that 11 percent compounded interest rate. It was actually amended and came into effect in July this year. Firstly, the compounding of the interest rate has been changed to simple interest rate collection. Secondly, the interest rate has been reduced from 11 percent to 5 percent.

In addition to that, Mr. Chairman and honourable Members, the Act allows for hardship. As the Special Administrator was mentioning, there are certain ratepayers within Levuka who have retired. We do have this clause in the Local Government Act that allows Councils to assess the ability of ratepayers, whether they are able to pay or not. If they are not able to pay, the ratepayer makes a request to the honourable Minister because the Act allows only the Minister, to allow for that waiver - either to waive the payment of the interest rate or you could waive the payment of the principal or the total amount.

It is a case by case assessment that is undertaken and the Councils also need to do their assessment in terms of their ability to profile their ratepayers and say whether the ratepayers have the ability to pay the rate or not.

MS. N. LABATI.- Mr. Chairman, most of the issues raised were resolved on the same day or not more than three days.

Response to part (c) of the question is as follows:

- (c) Enhancements to services in Levuka's Municipality often focus on improving efficiency, regularity and quality.
- (i) Maintenance of public amenities
- Restoration and upgrading of facilities like public restrooms and benches. This includes re-structural repairs, fresh paint and adding necessary improvements.
  - Heritage preservation - given Levuka's heritage status, maintaining historical landmarks and structures with appropriate materials and methods ensures they remain in good condition and attract tourists.
- (ii) Rubbish Collection and Grass Cutting
- Increased collection frequency.
  - Regular grass cutting whereby there are regular schedules for grass cutting to ensure public spaces, especially parks, remain inviting and safe.



- Public awareness campaigns encourage residents to dispose of waste responsibly.
- (iii) Road Maintenance and Drainage  
Routine Maintenance Schedule -
- Drainage System Upgrades: Improving drainage capacity with regular desilting and maintaining. Clear water channels help reduce the risk of flooding during heavy rain.
  - Collaboration with Stakeholders: Working with national agencies to leverage additional funding or expertise for larger road maintenance projects that can enhance service delivery, for instance, Fiji Roads Authority.
- (d) Improving service delivery in Levuka in these critical areas has enhanced the services in the Municipality of Levuka:
- (i) Health and Hygiene
- Regular cleaning and maintenance of public restrooms and installation of sanitation stations promote hygiene. Adding more waste bins, especially in crowded areas, helps manage littering.
  - Partnerships with the Ministry of Health and NGOs has supported vaccination drives, health checks, awareness campaigns on disease prevention.
  - Expanding garbage collection schedules to rural areas.
- (ii) Security and Safety
- Regular patrols in key areas improve security, especially in public spaces, and build trust with residents.
  - Ensuring sufficient lighting in public spaces and residential areas reduce crime risks, enhances visibility, and improves nighttime safety. For instance, installation of more solar lights within the town areas.
- (iii) Impacts of Climate Change and Environment
- Installing seawalls, planting mangroves and maintaining proper drainage systems help mitigate flood risks, especially during storm surges.
  - Engaging communities in clean-up drives, tree planting and sustainable practices have built a stronger environmental commitment.
- (iv) Poverty
- Offering vocational training programmes with support from Government and NGOs help residents gain skills that increase employment opportunities.
  - Providing financial support or micro-loans and holding workshops on entrepreneurship empower residents to start small businesses.
  - Collaborate with the Department of Social Welfare to expand welfare programmes and food assistance which ensures that basic needs are met, reducing financial strain.
- (v) Squatter Settlements



- Upgrading Settlements: Improvement of sanitation facilities and access roads.
- (vi) Disaster Risk Analysis
- Educating communities on response measures, like evacuation routes and emergency first aid, builds resilience.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Madam CEO, may I refer back to Question No. 5, please, about squatter settlement. I believe in every Council, this can be classified as one of the areas that needs to be addressed because when you talk about paying levy to the Councils, I am not too sure whether they are doing the same in Levuka, to pay rates. On most occasions, they are the ones who mess up most of this, especially for rubbish disposal. Can you briefly enlighten us on how this is being done in Levuka?

MR. M. BULIVOU.- Mr. Chaiman, thank you very much for taking interest in these particular areas. We recognise exactly all the points that you have mentioned. We are a bit fortunate in a way that we do not have a glaring squatter that is developing in Levuka, however, we have settlements. On the periphery of those settlements, we have observed two things, there are people coming who build their homes out of substandard materials. These are indicators of a kind of housing going on which eventually, if not contained and properly managed, could escalate to squatters. So, we keep our eyes on the button in that particular area.

Within the settlements, you are absolutely correct, Sir, they use a lot of our resources and they do not pay rates, but they demand a lot of us. They are our Fiji citizens and we have observed that in our resources, we take care of them too. So, it is happening in Levuka, and the support that we are having there is not, I suppose, with all due respect, as glaring and as powerful as in Suva. But we have our developments, as I have described there, so we are monitoring it.

One of the biggest settlements for us is behind the Levuka Town which is generally called Baba - four settlements. A big group of Melanesians are living there and the periphery is expanding. I was born in Levuka in the colonial days in the 1960s and this is one family with six generations of Melanesians and they are increasing. Their houses are made out of old corrugated, cardboards and all that kind of things, so those indicators are happening, Sir. Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- You may continue, CEO.

MS. N. LABATI.- Gender Mainstreaming - creating or supporting programmes that empower women in business, education and leadership roles builds a more balanced community. For example, trainings provided from the UN Women platform.

### **Question No. 5**

**The Committee noted that the challenge faced by the Council is to maintain its heritage status and at the same time adhere to the needs and demands of modern development and technologies. What is the current status of this situation?**

The challenges for the Council, ratepayers and residents are all the same, aligning to the General Provisions approved in 2016. Some of these conditions limit the development of Levuka as a town. The lack of funding to sustain the heritage site has been a great challenge for the Council.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- If I may, CEO, when you talk about heritage site within the Municipality, is that the responsibility of the Council when you talk about the old buildings?



We were in Levuka last year and we saw the status of the buildings and we can see that it is deteriorating. How will you encompass that when you look at the developments of the Council, moving forward. Is there special care for them in order to be incorporated in the Council's strategic plan in moving forward?

MR. M. BULIVOU.- Mr. Chairman, thank you very much for your interest in this area, Sir. I can draw your attention to Question No .9, there are three statistics and according to the statistics, you will find that it quotes that there are 22 heritage buildings.

Sir, we have a list of buildings that are over 100 years. I own one, mine is about 165 years, a big colonial building belonging to the first Harbour Master of Levuka. There are many buildings like this - big, big buildings, all made of wood, hard to maintain. In this particular statistic, there are 22 buildings, followed by 11 monuments, followed by other natural features like this.

Sir, this is a very challenging area for the Council. All these heritage assets sit within the Municipality of Levuka, and according to our Local Government Act, because it sits within the Municipality, we see it as our responsibility. But we have the Department of Heritage, which is also responsible for these, in a way.

To-date, since our appointment from 1<sup>st</sup> January this year, we have had, with due respect, very little support - funding for looking after these assets. We have just had the 11/11 celebrations, we had to paint it, we had to repair it, we had to present it, and all the funding came from our very limited budget. So, there is no funding inflow from the Department of Heritage. It is a consistent challenge for us.

Sir, the big picture is, all these heritage assets are important to our country, but in terms of the funding support to the Council to carry out looking after these on a daily basis, there is very little inflow. That is the strategic challenge. I wish that the co-ordination is better at the macro level so in short, that seems to paint the picture and as a result, as you have said, Sir, you come to Levuka, you will see very good buildings, but they are in very dilapidated state.

There is confusion in terms of the funding model for this and all the rest of it. Visibility-wise, it has run down and as a result, it has adverse effects. The tourists come almost regularly, but there is nothing good to look at because the funding model is not right.

**Question No. 6**

**We note that the Auditor issued a disclaimer of opinion on the 2016 and 2017 accounts of the Council on the 14 grounds provided as highlighted on pages 6, 7 and 8 of the audited financial statements. What measures has the Council undertaken to address all these issues and what internal controls are in place to prevent their re-occurrence?**

MS. N. LABATI.- The Council confirms that significant changes and improvements have been made on the issues raised by the Auditor-General, which were the basis of its disclaimer opinion on the 2016 and 2017. Details of the corrective measures taken by the Council are contained in our letter of 26<sup>th</sup> May, 2023, a copy of which is attached for your perusal and record.

Sir, the issues were mostly resolved in the submission of 2018 Financial Report.

**Question No. 7**

**What budgetary support has the Council received from Government during those financial years? Provide a breakdown.**



In 2016, the CEO salary given was \$30,000; heritage grant - \$100,000; and challenge grant - \$30,895. The CEO salary doubled in 2016 by another \$30,000. In the year 2017, the CEO salary was \$50,000 and heritage grant was \$100,000.

**Question No. 8**

**What funding was received from NGOs, donor partners and other business communities during those financial years review? How was it utilised?**

The funding was received from the Japanese Embassy Grant with a total of \$244,000. This was utilised in the rehabilitation of the seawall that was destroyed by *TC Winston*. Secondly, the New Zealand Grant of \$14,000 was used for the beautification and the Council nursery.

**Question No. 9**

**The Committee noted that the Council was given a special treatment due to its heritage status. Can the Council elaborate?**

I believe, Sir, as already been mentioned by our Special Administrator, Levuka Town is listed under World Heritage Site. Due to this, a general provision under the Town Planning Act was enacted in 2016 to guide developments by the Council, ratepayers and residents in Levuka Town.

Under the Heritage Management Plan, the following have to be protected:

- Heritage buildings - 22 buildings;
- Monuments - 11; and
- Natural features -17.

**Question No. 10**

**The Committee noted that the following capital projects were undertaken during the review:**

- (1) **Fallen seawall's rock lining and beautification of Totogo Creek;**
- (2) **Upgrading of footpath and road to Baba Settlement;**
- (3) **Heritage Park;**
- (4) **Drainage Project;**
- (5) **Delana Footpath; and**
- (6) **Vunibua driveway access.**

**Can the Council provide an update on above?**

MS. N. LABATI.- Our response is as follows:

- (1) The seawalls were initially completed. However, over the years, some sections have experienced damage due to strong waves. The Council is aware of these issues and will consider further reinforcement or repairs as needed to maintain effectiveness.
- (2) This project remains intact with no damages found. The beautification and rock lining have successfully preserved the creek area to-date.
- (3) The Baba Access Road project was completed and is actively in use by residents of the Baba Settlement, providing essential connectivity and convenience for the community.



- (4) The seawall along the CBD area seaside is still in good condition and continues to serve its purpose of protecting the coastline and infrastructure from erosion.
- (5) This project was left incomplete due to the drainage issues that affected further development. The Council may consider re-evaluating potential solutions to address the drainage challenges for future completion.
- (6) The Drainage Project was successfully completed and is regularly maintained by the Council, with cleaning efforts in place to ensure it functions effectively in preventing flooding and water logging.
- (7) Both the Delana Footpath and Vunibua Driveway projects are still in use, providing valuable pedestrian access to the local community.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Mr. Chairman, on point 5 – Heritage Park Project. As mentioned by Madam CEO, this project is still not completed and still have that issue of drainage. Madam CEO, how are you going to sort this out because this is 2024 and this report is from 2016-2017?

MS. N. LABATI.- Mr. Chairman, getting the 2022 accounts, currently the status of all those areas have been covered. Sir, I believe those were 2016-2017 financials. After questioning the staff and those involved, it was unsuccessful. This was funded by the Council itself, so they were looking for other ways to redo that project because of the storm surge along those coastlines.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Do you have any plans to complete this project in future and how are you going to address that?

MS. M. LABATI.- Based on our financial status, we are going to look into that but not right now, Sir.

MR. M. BULIVOU.- Mr. Chairman, may I add a bit more on this one; our 2024-2029 Strategic Plan has begun, it is in draft stages and we have identified the heritage park as a particular asset that we need to upgrade.

The challenge for us is the funding for that. The economy of scale of Levuka Town is very small with 144 ratepayers and 287 rateable properties. Our operation is about \$400,000 per annum. So, while it is an asset sitting there, we have challenges there as well and we surely need support for this. People come to Levuka and international tourists come to Levuka and they see this much. We desire that it be fixed but we have our challenges in the financial modelling of it. That is our situation at the moment.

The solution for us is that the assets that we own in Levuka have been identified, like land, et cetera, and it is important for us now in our Strategic Plan 2024-2025 to monetize it, use it smartly and make sure that it runs profits and things like that. This is going to come out more in our 2024 financials so that we clean up our own selves. Some of our assets are not properly monetised so that is one way of trying to help ourselves first but we still need the support from outside. Thank you, Sir.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- You may continue CEO.

**Question No. 11**

**What rehabilitation works was done post TC Winston? What was the cost?**



MS. N. LABATI.- Mr. Chairman, the total cost was \$5,499 and continuous drain cleaning and tree trimming during that year, Sir.

**Question No. 12**

**The Committee noted that the Council received \$20,000 from the Department of Local Government for financing assistance in the cleanup after TC Winston. What was the outcome of this clean up?**

1. Scope of Clean Up  
The cleanup involved clearing debris, removing fallen trees and restoring public spaces and facilities damaged by *TC Winston*.
2. Community Impact  
The cleanup efforts have contributed to restoring normalcy in the affected areas, enabling residents to return to their daily lives more quickly.
3. Infrastructure Restoration  
Damaged infrastructure, such as roads, schools and public buildings have been assessed and repaired, improving safety and accessibility.
4. Health and Safety  
The cleanup has helped mitigate health risks associated with standing water and debris, preventing the spread of disease and ensuring a cleaner environment for residents.
5. Community Engagement  
The process has involved local community members, fostering a sense of ownership and involvement in the recovery efforts.

**Question No. 13**

**In relation to health services, the Committee noted the receipt of complaints. How were these complaints addressed?**

In summary, the Health Department addresses complaints through a structured process:

1. Filing a Complaint  
Complainants fill out a form at the Levuka Town Council Office front desk with necessary details.
2. Complaint Registration  
The Receiving Officer logs the complaint and assigns the relevant officer to handle and attend.
3. Initial Review and Assignment  
Within three days, the Handling Officer reviews the complaint to determine its urgency and seriousness, addressing critical issues as soon as possible.
4. Investigation and Handling  
Two officers investigate complaints, following the Public Health Act Cap 111, involving the police, if needed.
5. Resolution and Action Reporting  
Within three days of addressing the complaint, the officers document the outcome in the Complaint Register.
6. Feedback to the Complainant  
The complainant is informed of the complaint's status and resolution through appropriate channels.

The Complaint Register is reviewed periodically to ensure timely resolution, with escalated complaints flagged for management's attention.



**Question No. 14**

**In terms of COVID outbreak, how did this affect the Council's operations and cashflow?**

The Council's operations were not significantly affected since it was classified as a Green Zone during the outbreak. However, the effects on our cashflow were cushioned by Government grants in vulnerable areas, such as fees and charges.

**Question No. 15**

**In terms of educating the younger generation about active participation in environment conservation, what is the progress on the Clean School Programme? Is this Programme still being implemented in schools?**

The Clean School Programme was initially successful in promoting active environmental conservation among students, aiming to instill waste management practices from a young age. However, the programme was put on hold during the COVID-19 pandemic, and its revival has faced challenges this year due to the reassignment of teachers to different schools.

To overcome these challenges and ensure long-term impact, there is a proposal to formally integrate the programme into the school curriculum, especially at the primary school level. This stage is ideal for shaping young minds and establishing positive habits, as children are more receptive to learning and applying environmental practices.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- When you talk about Question No.15, I believe a lot has been said in your response, but when you talk about curriculum that has to be impact, do you have any interaction with the Heads and the Ministry, to actually get this on board, and for the review of the curriculum itself to be incorporated, whereby the Ministry can look at reviewing its Acts, so that the coverage can involve all schools around Fiji? This is just a comment and not a question. I believe if we can relook at it right up to the Ministry level so that they can make comments and table it to Cabinet as part of their Cabinet paper.

MR. N. BULIVOU.- Mr. Chairman, a very wise comment. We will take this up. When we interface with the schools, we have observed that the curriculum does not capture this. It is not nuances, it does not have the fine definition to bring this particular variable into play and as a result, their know-how in terms of knowledge, therefore, the skills they implement at schools are not quite up to the standard. Therefore, long story short, with due respect, we need the curriculum to be revised to capture sensitivity and awareness to green spaces environment. At the moment in Levuka, and I would probably assume nationally, it does not capture this quite so well, Sir.

**Question No. 16**

**The Committee noted that the Council launched home composting initiatives to encourage residents to reduce household waste and create natural fertilizers for their gardens. Can the Council provide an update on this initiative?**

MS. N. LABATI.- The Council's home composting initiative has been well-received and continues to be utilised by residents. Initially launched to encourage waste reduction and promote sustainable gardening practices, the programme has now expanded beyond urban areas to include rural communities as well. Residents in both settings are actively using composting techniques, turning household waste into natural fertilizer for their gardens.



The Council has also facilitated workshops in rural areas to educate residents on effective composting methods, which have helped increase participation and further reduced the overall waste sent to landfills. The initiative remains a positive step towards sustainable waste management and community involvement in environmental conservation.

**Question No. 17**

**Does the Council have any plans on clean up and maintenance of drains? What are some of the challenges?**

Yes, the Council has a monthly monitoring sheet detailing all existing drains within the Town boundary. We track the last attended date for each drain and monitor some specific drains weekly. After heavy rainfall, we check the drains for blockages and clear them immediately.

**Question No. 18**

**Does the Council have plans to create inclusive recreational facilities and public spaces to cater for gender needs?**

The Council, in its 2024-2029 Strategic Plan, has planned out this in a more upgraded Nasau Park. This project will genuinely reflect the needs and preferences of the Levuka residents. This could enhance the overall appeal of these areas, making them safer and more comfortable for all users.

**Question No. 19**

**In terms of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), how is it relevant and achieved during the years under review?**

During recent years, the Council's actions, like upgrading Nasau Park, renovating market spaces and fostering partnerships for educational access, such as the MOU with the University of Fiji, have contributed to achieving SDG4 - Quality Education, SDG5 - Gender Equality and SDG10 - Reduced Inequalities.

Each initiative promotes inclusivity and access to resources locally and reducing the need for travel to urban centres, like Suva. Additionally, the planned improvements to monuments, landscaping and heritage lights all tie into SDG 11 by enhancing public spaces and fostering a sense of community pride.

**Question No. 20**

**When will the Council submit its outstanding Annual Reports?**

The Council has been drastically affected by its preparation of its Annual Accounts for the Year 2019 and onwards when the Chief Executive Officer retired and the accountant performing the dual role as Acting Chief Executive Officer to-date as well. This setback has hindered her in her reconciliation of the Council Accounts for the years 2019 and onwards. However, it is confirmed that the draft Financial Statements for the said years will be submitted to the Auditor-General before 31st December, 2024.

That is all from us Mr. Chairman.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you very much, CEO, and the Team, and likewise for the Ministry of Local Government.



Honourable Members, I believe we have another copy of response to our supplementary questions that usually comes after your first discussion with the Council. A copy is with us and it would be good for us to complete the supplementary questions before we look into the supplementary question. The floor is open again to the Council for your response on those supplementary questions that were sent to you.

**Question No. 1**

**The Committee would like to know whether the Municipal Council has any current or upcoming plans to address the issue of drug use, particularly the consumption of hard drugs, in public areas. Given the growing concern around public safety and health, could you please provide any information on strategies or initiatives that the Council may be considering, combating this issue?**

MR. M. BULIVOU.- In terms of the responses sent to the Secretariat, the Levuka Town Council recognizes the critical importance of maintaining a safe and healthy public environment. While addressing the drug issue in Levuka and Ovalau, particularly the use of hard drugs, it is a concern for us.

Just this morning I inquired with the Station Officer in Levuka about the statistics on that. Sir, we would like to report that according to the intelligence and crime statistics in Levuka it is heavy in two specific areas, that is, cultivation and possession. So far, from its beginning, they have just detected one Methamphetamine case.

The intelligence around this case is Suva to Levuka kind of development. We do not have centers in Levuka where Meth has been caught so I suppose in our situation, it is very early, but in terms of what has been done at the moment, the Council is working alongside the lead agency, which is Police, under the narcotics agenda and all that, and we welcome that very much.

What has been achieved so far is that there is an initiative led by Police to go to all the villages on Ovalau and they have appointed two from each village to be like their community policing arm and capability and assets in these villages. These representatives will then link up with the committee that will be sitting in the municipality of Levuka, who will report to a board which will report the Commissioner of Police and the divisional level within the Police and other agencies.

At the moment, this is work in progress. For my own sake, they have invited me to consider sitting on this board. As part of my past career, I was also in the Police for about 16 years working here and abroad as well. So, that is us coming alongside the lead agency to try and have a reactive capability on this.

While we are doing our best effort for the reactive, Sir, we would really like to, with all due respect, at current the proactive bit. When we look at this drug situation also in Levuka, the fundamental motivation is money. When they do not have jobs, they easily slide and go into these areas. So, what we are trying to do is to encourage areas of proactivity. Sir, it is always best to fix it before it comes. So, because of this, we are very happy that we are improving our connectivity. We have shipping agents in Levuka and it is connecting now with Levuka, Koro, Qarani in Gau. Because of this, it is a platform now for them to be able to get that connectivity and also help them to market their products from Levuka, Levuka and on to Suva - that kind of connectivity.

Sir, we would like to encourage central government to invest in proactivity. We will do our best in the reactive bit but for me, the permanent solution is upping all our assets and capabilities into the proactivity. If they have employment, Sir, a lot of traction can be done and we can reduce the



amount of challenges and resource deployment into the reactive area. This is the trend that we are noticing in Levuka.

**Question No. 2**

**The Committee would like to inquire whether the Municipal Council has a comprehensive Natural Disaster Management Plan that addresses the risks of tsunami, flooding, earthquakes, landslides and cyclones, specifically, the strategies the Council has in place to mitigate these disasters, as well as the implementation measures to effectively respond to such events when they occur. Could you please provide details on the Council's plans and preparedness efforts for these natural hazards?**

MS. N. LABATI.- Levuka Town Council places a strong emphasis on the disaster preparedness and has developed a Natural Disaster Management Plan to address various risks, including tsunamis, flooding, earthquakes, landslides and cyclones.

Below are the core elements and strategies that the Council employs to mitigate and respond to natural disasters effectively:

1. Risk Assessment and Hazard Mapping

The Council has conducted assessments of vulnerable areas, particularly those prone to flooding and landslides, to understand risk levels better and to inform planning. This includes identifying evacuation zones, especially for tsunami and flood-prone areas, and demarcating high-risk zones where construction may be limited.

2. Disaster Mitigation and Infrastructure Resilience

- Flood control and drainage improvements: The Council has prioritized drainage upgrades in flood-prone areas and is continuously improving infrastructure to manage floodwaters more effectively.
- Regular inspections and stabilizations are conducted in vulnerable hillside areas, with barriers or retaining walls installed where necessary.

3. Evacuation Plans and Shelter Readiness

- Specific community centres and schools serve as emergency shelters, and the Council regularly updates its list of facilities that are capable of accommodating residents during disasters.
- Clear evacuation routes are established for each hazard, and the Council conducts regular community drills, particularly for tsunamis and cyclones, to ensure residents know how to reach safety quickly.

The Council continuously reviews and updates its Natural Disaster Management Plan to address emerging risks and improve preparedness. These measures aim to reduce the impact of natural disasters on the community and facilitate swift and efficient responses when events occur.

**Question No. 3**

**Could the Council kindly provide confirmation on the status and details of the Master Plan for the Town? Specifically, the Committee would like to understand any key developments and priorities outlined in the plan.**



The Levuka Town Council is actively working on a Master Plan, aimed at guiding the sustainable development of Levuka, with special consideration for its unique heritage and the well-being of its residents.

The Master Plan is designed to align with the national objectives, while preserving Levuka's historical and cultural significance as Fiji's only UNESCO World Heritage site. These are the key developments and priorities outlined in the Master Plan:

- (1) Heritage Conservation and Tourism Development  
Priority is given to preserving Levuka's historical architecture and landmarks. The plan includes structural upgrades, conservation of heritage sites, and guidelines for new developments to harmonize with Levuka's historic character.
- (2) Tourism Promotion  
The Council is working with the Department of Heritage to enhance Levuka's appeal as a tourist destination. Planned projects include improving infrastructure around monuments, installing heritage-style lighting, and creating more visitor-friendly public spaces.
- (3) Infrastructure and Utilities Improvement  
Significant upgrades to the road network and drainage systems are part of the Master Plan to improve accessibility and reduce flooding risks, particularly during the rainy season.
- (4) Community Amenities and Public Spaces  
The new Levuka Market and Nasau Park Upgrades - the recently completed Levuka Market and Nasau Park improvements are part of the Master Plan's focus on enhancing community spaces. These projects provide vendors and visitors with modern facilities, while supporting local businesses.
- (5) Economic Development and Revenue Generation  
The Council is exploring incentives to attract new businesses, with a focus on sustainable industries.
- (6) Environmental Sustainability  
The Master Plan emphasises increasing green spaces in and around Levuka to beautify the Town and improve air quality. This includes tree-planting initiatives and landscaping along the main streets and public spaces.
- (7) Education and Community Engagement  
The recent MOU with the University of Fiji supports these educational aspirations of Levuka's youth, especially those in remote areas. This partnership will facilitate access to higher education locally.
- (8) Future Land Use and Zoning  
The Master Plan includes zoning updates to support balanced land use, ensuring adequate space for residential, commercial, recreational and heritage areas. Specific guidelines are being established to regulate development, in alignment with Levuka's heritage status.

**Question No. 4**

**Can the Council confirm the details of its current investment portfolio, and any insights into the types of investments and the Council's strategies in this area?**



Currently, we are creating a sinking fund for Levuka. As you all know, we have challenges of having the lowest ratepayers - 144. At the moment, we are trying very hard to monitor our cashflow, but we are opening, as approved by the Ministry of Local Government, one account for sinking fund. This account will help in emergencies and for investment opportunities.

That is all from us, Sir, thank you.

HON. A.N. TUICOLO.- Mr. Chairman, through you, I have three supplementary questions. My first question is on the income streams. Apart from the town rates and grants, what other revenue streams are there for the general operation of the Town Council? The second question is, what benefits in monetary value, does the Council receive from the preservation of the heritage site?

MS. N. LABATI.- Mr. Chairman, in regards to extra revenue streams, as you all know, apart from rates, we also collect garbage fees, building fees and rentals but it is still not enough for the Council. So, in our Strategic Plan, moving forward, now since the Government is not funding the Council, not giving us more grant, it is the biggest challenge at the moment. Right now, we are trying to sustain the Council. Both the Special Administrators are creating this new strategy for the Council to sustain itself. So first of all, we are relooking at all our current assets - what are the revenue streams that we can get.

As you all know, the Levuka Scheme Town Plan is just within the town area. As I always mention, when you move outside, you have the sea. It is very hilly so that is one of the limitations, so that is why the capital of Fiji was shifted to Suva.

Moving forward, we are trying, at the moment, to relook at our current assets - what can we do to create more revenue streams. Basically, with the Special Administrators, we are looking at rental mode - we buy buildings and rent them out. We are in discussion with some of the ratepayers, if they are selling their properties, and that is why the Sinking Fund is there.

We can also request the Government for support but, first of all, we have to create that Sinking Fund for the development. I believe that is the only way we can sustain Levuka, to create more profit-oriented because right now, we are just providing the service. If we cannot sustain ourselves, how can we provide these services to the ratepayers? So, that is the only way, moving forward, for Levuka Town Council.

MS. S. SHARMA.- Mr. Chairman, it is totally incorrect to say that all Government grants have been withdrawn. The Government currently and still provides for the Special Administrators of the Levuka Town Council. We do not provide the salary for the CEO anymore as a grant, but the salaries of the Special Administrators are provided by Government.

There is also a waste management subsidy that is provided to the Councils which is around \$50,000 and because in 2018 there was a delegation of boundaries done where Levuka was given additional areas to look into, a rural local authority grant is provided to them. The new fee that should be applicable soon at the opening of the market would be the new market fees that should allow for the operations of the market so basically to be able to generate revenue out of it.

The important thing to note is that the cost of building the market was not that of the Council -b the cost was to the central government. So, in fact, the Council have actually got a resource which is free for them which provides them rental space where they can have the market vendors who will be paying market fees, plus they have a conference facility which is, sort of, limited in Levuka which



they can, sort of, put up for hire. So, it is probably totally incorrect to say that the Government has withdrawn all its support from Levuka.

If I may just add and I was not able to do that during the responses to the supplementary questions with regards to the Masterplan, the Levuka Town Council alone cannot work on its Masterplan because the masterplan is the central government's responsibility which comes through the Department of Town and Country Planning, who are currently working with the Levuka Town Council, the National Fire Authority and the Department of Heritage to look at the review of the Levuka Town Scheme Plan. So that would, obviously, help the wider implications as mentioned by the Acting CEO in her submission. So, that is the initiative that is, sort of, not in isolation, just being worked by the Council but it is, sort of, an overall central responsibility also. Thank you.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Mr. Chairman, the Department of Heritage and Arts which was with the Ministry of Education before and has shifted to the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs is looking at some of the challenges for Levuka Town Council with regards to preserving the heritage sites. Was there any meeting between the Department of Heritage and Arts which is under the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs now with the officials of Levuka Town Council to discuss some of the challenges being faced and how the Department can come in and assist the Council? Thank you.

MR. M. BULIVOU.- Mr. Chairman, through you, for this very interesting and very exciting question also, this year, we have had two meetings - a meeting with the honourable Minister and a meeting also with the honourable Assistant Minister for iTaukei Affairs at the Council Chambers in Levuka. The challenge for us is the resourcing that they should be giving us which is absolutely not there at the moment.

There was \$100,000 Heritage Grant quoted in that tabulation but not any more in 2024. As a result, because of reasons that they better understand and can better define, their support for these heritage assets is just not coming at this point in time. We would like to encourage them to expedite their efficiencies in that area so that they can deploy resources in looking after these heritage assets.

In this particular area, it set ways into the income stream. There is a greater opportunity in Levuka to get additional income streams if we were to fix, paint and preserve these heritage assets in Levuka whereby it would get people to come to Levuka as local tourists and international tourists. At the moment, that is not happening and as a result, it is a big opportunity loss for Levuka, as well as the national coffers too, Sir, so because of our slowness in these areas, we are not able to capitalise on this.

Levuka is the only heritage brand that we have but it has not been properly configured up to date. All years gone by, over 20 years of work, but up to 2024 until 20<sup>th</sup> date today is not in position yet and as the result, that is a great opportunity loss there, Sir.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Mr. Chairman, why I had actually raised that question is that the honourable Minister for iTaukei Affairs during his Ministerial Statement, he had highlighted the plans in regards to Levuka and how the assistance will go to assist in regards to the number of challenges. So, what we have heard today is that to-date, nothing has eventuated. That is the reason why I asked that question because that Department also plays a role and how they can work closely with Levuka World Heritage site, how they can play an important role to assist in the number of challenges that the Levuka Town Council is facing.



The other question, through you Mr. Chairman, is in regard to the Master Plan which Madam PS has mentioned. So, it must be similar to all Municipal Councils, Madam PS, because it is being done by the central government, as you had mentioned?

MS. S. SHARMA.- Mr. Chairman, if I may, with Master Plans, it is actually a very big undertaking. It is not looking at just in isolation of any town or any city, it is looking at how do you plan the growth of your towns and cities for the next 50 years, which sets the Blueprint and, obviously, it would be the same across. Right now, we are working on Viti Levu which is looking at the Master Planning for Viti Levu which is being completed. Then there is work being undertaken in collaboration with the Ministry of Tourism on the Master Plan for Vanua Levu. However, the learnings from these Master Plans can be very easily applied to other towns, including the island of Ovalau, to be able to apply this.

Obviously, Levuka is a bit of a special zone for us because of the heritage site and declared UNESCO Heritage Town which requires certain other guidelines that need to be met. So, we are trying to work with certain development partners to look at how we can develop an investment and economic focussed guideline for Levuka where they look at what kind of investment needs to be done in Levuka, how do people do investments, et cetera. Obviously, the private buildings that are privately owned in Levuka is not the responsibility of the Town Council to repair or the Department of Heritage, it is the responsibility of the individuals. But when they do invest in repairing these buildings, they need to follow the heritage guidelines, which means you have to maintain the facade as it is and to use the similar structures, the similar colours, and using the similar timber and materials that was used then. You would look at one of these structures which I think is the Westpac Bank. If you look outside, it has the heritage structure, but if you walk into the Bank, it is quite a modern Bank inside. It is how you maintain the façade, which is the outside.

The important thing for Government, and this is where the coordination between the Department of Heritage and agencies is important, is to look at the monumental sites - the monuments and the natural features. How do we make sure of their regular upkeep, cleanliness and making sure they are good for tourists to go and visit? Obviously, there are other things also in relation - the infrastructure. How do you maintain the infrastructure in Levuka? So, it is not something that can be just decided in a few months, it does take a bit of time to develop the right policies.

Unfortunately, it has been a while. We do not know why, after 2016 and 2017, the heritage support was withdrawn. We will have to go back and see what the Council was actually doing with that \$100,000 that was given to them. Were they actually using it? The thing is you will see how budgets work. If you do not utilise that money for a couple of years, you will not get that budget at all because it just shows you do not need to use it. So, we need to go back to the drawing board and help Levuka.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Mr. Chairman, as mentioned by Madam PS, it is the responsibility of the individual owners to maintain their buildings. Currently, we see that a lot of them are not able to pay their rates. With the guideline given by Government or Ministry of Local Government, do you think they will be able to repair their own buildings without any financial support?

MR. N. BULIVOU.- Mr. Chairman, the answer simply, Sir, is no.

HON. A.N. TUICOLO.- Mr. Chairman, my supplementary question is in relation to Question No. 18. How many open spaces are there within the Town boundaries which serves for recreational purposes and how is the Council maintaining these recreational spaces?



MS. N. LABATI. Mr. Chairman, the only space is at Nasau Park. Currently, we have received a grant of \$300,000 to upgrade the Nasau Park facilities. That is one of the main areas too, we really need a support from the Government in upgrading all the facilities. In that way, we can also create additional revenue for Levuka.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- I believe this may be the last one. When you talk about the issue of drug use, I believe it was really addressed by the Council, when you talk about what is current, how you look at it in terms of how best we can all work together. If you talk about councils, we may call they are not standalone. When we talk about councils, these are the areas that most of the drugs have been circulated all around Fiji. So, my question is such that, when you talk about other stakeholders, the faith-based institutions, the *vanua*, what are the plans for the old town of Levuka, whether they can embark on other areas that need to come on board to help the Council?

We know that Levuka is an island on its own, isolated and mostly, people are just like neighbours. There are lots of issues discussed at the *tikina* and the village level. How do you look at the involvement of these stakeholders, way moving forward, for the better management of drugs in Levuka?

MR. N. BULIVOU.- Mr. Chairman, thank you very much for that most relevant question. I have just received some current statistics from the Police in Levuka. You are correct, one of the biggest platforms for resource is the *vanua*. In Levuka, it is composed of a number of *tikina*. For example, the *tikina* of Levuka, under the jurisdiction of the *Turaga Bale na Tui Levuka*, there are 10 Villages. In these Villages, they have been able to form Community Policing Communities, in all the villages, except for four Villages. This is a current work to try to get in the *vanua*, capability, people and all the resources and the traditional leverages they have to support this initiative.

When we move to Lovoni, it has six Villages and two are yet to go. Four have identified and it is current work. Again, that exemplifies that we are trying to get the *vanua* and all the individual villages, two people in there are going to be in the Crime Policing Committee.

When we move into other areas, for example, Moturiki, all the villages have not yet formed its committee, that is current. So, the *tikina* of Levuka, *tikina* of Bureta, *tikina* of Lovoni and *tikina* of Nasinu are current work that is ongoing to get people in specific villages to be on the Crime Prevention Committee.

So, that is the first thing. It is a strategic realisation that if we get the *vanua*, that will be the bull work or the parameter fence, if we so wish, to prevent this thing from coming in. This is a very strong realisation for us. If we get the *vanua* in, which we are trying to do, in relation with the police taking the lead agency, it will achieve a lot.

Then there are linkages right up to the board, as I have described before, so for us, all these things sit on the *vanua*. This is why in our variable, the *vanua* is very important and very important to the municipality. We are about to open our market and all the five key chiefs are very interested and they bring in the traditional *vanua*, all the vendors are from their villages, they are under the hierarchy of leadership there.

So, for us it has that very particular nuance that we all have to sensitise ourselves to the *vanua*. This is just a very brief acknowledgement and recognition that we need the help of the *Turaga Bale na Tui Levuka*, *Turaga na Ratu mai Moturiki*, *Turaga na Tui Wailevu* from Lovoni, *Turaga mai na koro Wato* of Nasinu and, of course, the *Ratu mai Bureta* and we work. Certainly, in my time in the Council I work to go visit these five key villages where these chiefs sit to try and sag way into that



one. I certainly take in my responsibilities to make sure that the five traditional chiefs of these areas are well informed so that we can bring in that asset and capability, Sir.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you very much honourable Members and the Team from the Levuka Town Council, as well as the grateful team from the Ministry, for always supporting us during our public submission.

On that note, at this juncture, I wish to sincerely thank you all for availing yourselves to this meeting. We thank you for your time and hope that you will avail yourself for any further queries or clarifications that the Committee may have on these Annual Reports.

With those concluding remarks, I now close this meeting. Thank you.

The meeting adjourned at 11.48 a.m.