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Verbatim Report

[VERBATIM REPORT]

STANDING COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND DEFENCE

ANNUAL REPORTS

- (1) 2019-2020 Annual Report**
- (2) 2020-2021 Annual Report**

ENTITY: Ministry of Commerce and Business Development

VENUE: Big Committee Room (East Wing)

DATE: Thursday, 12th February, 2026

**VERBATIM REPORT OF THE MEETING OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON
FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND DEFENCE HELD AT THE COMMITTEE ROOM
(EAST/WEST WING), PARLIAMENT PRECINCTS, GOVERNMENT BUILDINGS,
ON THURSDAY,
12TH FEBRUARY, 2026, AT 9.11 A.M.**

Present

- | | | |
|-----|-------------------------|---------------|
| (1) | Hon. L.S. Qereqeretabua | - Chairperson |
| (2) | Hon. R.R. Sharma | - Member |
| (3) | Hon. P.K. Ravunawa | - Member |
| (4) | Hon. V. Lal | - Member |
| (5) | Hon. T.R. Matasawalevu | - Member |

Apology

- | | | |
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| (1) | Hon. I. Tuiwailevu | - Member |
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Interviewee/Submittee: Ministry of Commerce and Business Development

In Attendance:

- | | | |
|------|------------------------|---|
| (1) | Mr. Peni Sikivou | - Acting Permanent Secretary |
| (2) | Mr. Iosefo Koroidimuri | - Director/Registrar of Co-operatives |
| (3) | Ms. Virisila Tuimanu | - Director, National Trade Measurement and Standards |
| (4) | Ms. Deepika Singh | - Director, Trade |
| (5) | Ms. Jacinta Lal | - Director Tourism |
| (6) | Ms. Monica Dawai | - Programme Director, MSME Fiji and Officer in Charge,
Economic Unit |
| (7) | Ms. Joy Khan | - Head of Finance |
| (8) | Ms. Prem Lata | - Head of Human Resources |
| (9) | Mr. Iliesa Moceituba | - Principal Business Advisory Officer, Economic Unit |
| (10) | Ms. Unise Druavesi | - Policy Business Advisory Officer, Economic Unit |
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MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Honourable Members, Officials from the Ministry of Commerce and Business Development, members of the media and the public, ladies and gentlemen; a very good morning to you all. It is my pleasure to welcome everyone present in the room, as well as those joining us via live broadcast.

Pursuant to the Standing Orders of Parliament, specifically Standing Order 111, all Committee meetings are open to the public and the media, so this meeting is open to the public. Should there be any sensitive information relating to the submission that cannot be disclosed publicly, that information can be provided to the Committee either in writing or in a

closed session, but this is only permitted in limited circumstances, including matters relating to national security, third party confidential information, personnel or human resource matters, and during the time when the Committee sits to start to build its report back to Parliament.

I just want to remind everyone, please, that comments and questions should be directed through me, the Chairperson. For those of you watching this live, if you have any questions, you may submit them through the comment section on *Facebook* feedback and note that only relevant questions will be considered by the Committee.

Members of the Committee, you are allowed to interject during the submission, or alternatively, wait until the end of the submission to ask your questions. I want to remind everyone that this is a parliamentary proceeding, so all information provided is protected under the Parliamentary Powers and Privileges Act and the Standing Orders of Parliament. Slander or libel of any sort will not be condoned, and all information presented to the Committee should be factual.

In terms of meeting protocols, because we have cameras all around us, we ask that you keep movement to a minimum and the usage of mobile phones is discouraged. All mobile phones must be placed on silent or vibrate mode during the duration of the meeting.

I now want to introduce to you the Members of the Committee.

(Introduction of Committee Members and the Secretariat)

Today, honourable Members and Secretariat and those of you watching, the Committee will receive an in-person submission from the Ministry of Commerce and Business Development in relation to the 2019 to 2021 Annual Reports of the Ministry of Commerce, Trade, Tourism and Transport.

I will now invite the witnesses from the Ministry to introduce yourselves before proceeding with your submission. You have up to 30 minutes to present your submission, and we will allow 30 minutes to 40 minutes for questions from the Committee. Please, I remind you again to turn your microphones on before you speak and turn them off afterwards, so that we can avoid any disruption to the live submission. *Vinaka vakalevu*, the floor is yours.

MR. P. SIKIVOU.- Madam Chairperson and honourable Members of the Committee, we will now introduce our Team, after which we will then make our presentation.

(Introduction of Officials from the Ministry of Commerce)

MR. P. SIKIVOU.- Madam Chairperson and honourable Members of the Committee, *ni sa bula vinaka*, and a very good morning to you all. In my current capacity as the Acting Permanent Secretary for Commerce and Business Development, it is my honour to present this submission on the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 Annual Reports of the Ministry of Commerce, Trade, Tourism and Transport.

Madam Chairperson and honourable Members, given that I am new to the Ministry, having been appointed as Acting Permanent Secretary for the current portfolio on 5th January, 2026, I have present here with me are the Heads of Departments and some senior staff from the Ministry, for the respective programmes, who will be assisting me with the presentation and questions.

The two Reports highlighted the Ministry's work during the financial years under review, a period shaped by the unprecedented challenges of COVID-19. Despite those difficulties, the Ministry remained focussed on resilience and recovery. So, some of the key achievements of the Ministry during that period include:

- strengthening our MSME development and entrepreneurship with emphasis on youth and women;
- advancing trade facilitation and regional economic integration;
- supporting tourism recovery through targeted campaigns and sustainable frameworks;
- expanding cooperative businesses to generate employment and empower our communities throughout Fiji;
- implementing corporate services reforms and staff development, including wellness programmes;
- developing standards and legislative frameworks to safeguard consumers; and • promoting fair trade.

Madam Chairperson and honourable Members, the Ministry's efforts to demonstrate adaptability and commitment is through inclusive growth. The team present here today - my colleagues, look forward to engaging with the Committee and providing clarifications, as well as discussing how our programmes continue to support Fiji's economic resilience. *Vinaka vakalevu.*

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you very much, Permanent Secretary. I understand that Ms. Jacinta Lal, Director Tourism, who is joining us live, will begin with the presentation from the Ministry. Miss Lal, are you online?

MS. J. LAL.- Yes, Madam Chairperson, and thank you.

Good morning and *yadra vinaka*, again, from Nadi, Madam Chairperson and honourable Members of the Committee, Acting Permanent Secretary and colleagues. Apologies for not being there in person. I have to travel to Nadi early this morning with the honourable Minister for consultation. I will try to keep it very brief, with respect to the Tourism Unit which is now with the Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation.

Madam Chairperson and honourable Members, for the period under review, 2019-2020 and 2020-2021, the Tourism Unit's work for the first six months or seven months, largely focussed on continuing the deliverables that we had and the strategic plans, but much of the remaining period focussed primarily on COVID-19.

Unlike other Departments and Ministries, our focus really was on reopening, recovery and resilience. So, in the next slide, Madam Chairperson, perhaps, I will just briefly speak on some of the efforts of reopening and recovery, which was quite substantial and really a whole of government approach.

In terms of the Department of Tourism's role at the time in the period under review, it was for the resumption of tourism, trade and services. As you will recall, in one of the initial years towards early 2020, we very quickly continued our work with the Ministry of Health and Medical Services through the COVID-19 incidental alcohol regulations, and this really was one of the foundational works that helped us to form the Fijian COVID Safe Economic Recovery Framework.

That Framework, Madam Chairperson, was really our guiding principle, our guiding bible at that time, to reopen Fiji, our economy, our communities and our borders. It was a very strategic document which outlined a three-phase approach, really focusing on stopping the importation of COVID-19 into our communities, and being able to reopen our borders. It was a phased approach.

Phase 1 really looked at no travel. We were repatriating our citizens. Much of the work began in Phase 2, which was going towards 2020-2021, where we acquired RT-PCR test vaccines. We worked very closely with the Ministry of Health, the Republic of Fiji Military Forces and the Ministry of Economy to go with it.

We also had the COVID-19 Risk Mitigation Framework, as we have seen, which was basically mandated by Cabinet to lead our COVID-19 recovery efforts at that time. That had the Permanent Secretary for Commerce and Tourism, PS Health, PS Finance and PS Works, under

the Framework and under the guidance of the COVID-19 Risk Mitigation Taskforce (CRMT) where we had introduced initiatives such as the Blue Lanes, the Bula Bubble, the Pacific Pathways, to really target visitors and to ensure there was continuity and safety as we return to some normalcy. We engaged very closely with the Tourism Risk Mitigation Taskforce and the Tourism Recovery Team, to ensure that private sector was involved in shaping the decisions of government at that time.

We had launched very quickly, with the support of Tourism Fiji, the Care Fiji Commitment, which essentially became regulations later, to ensure that only the CFC certified businesses were allowed to receive visitors, for example, transport providers. We did a lot of trainings, developed systems like the entry test portal, to ensure guests, over time, had the ease of uploading their results before coming in.

We launched the 'Love Our Locals' Campaign which was primarily, again, just for domestic tourism at that time when borders were closed. There were substantial cuts in budgets, and the Head of Finance would speak on this from the 2020-2021 period, especially the reduction in Tourism Fiji's marketing budget. That really allowed us to re-strategize, redirecting some of our budgeting efforts from the long-haul Asian markets to primarily Australia and New Zealand, looking at high value businesses so that we were able to receive visitors through guided processes and procedures.

I think that really was a lot of our effort, not just as the Department of Tourism, but with all other Departments to just ensure that we reopen our borders and got back to some normalcy. Our colleagues in the Economic Unit will speak a little bit more on the business side of things, as we go on.

Very quickly on the next slide, in terms of market diversification and product diversification, we started with a lot of work which, somewhere along the line, was put on hold or, sort of, subdued until we were in a better place with more borders opening and, again, realising the realities on the ground with no jobs and losses in the economy. So, we did start work on cruise tourism, for instance. We worked with International Finance Corporation (IFC) to undertake rapid a assessment of the value of the cruise market to Fiji, what are some of the quick wins, look at how we are suspending, et cetera.

We worked with our counterparts on the Vanua Levu Tourism Market Demand Assessment.

This essentially looked at the market opportunities in Vanua Levu, as far as tourism was concerned. What are the quick wins, again, and what the demand is there from aviation perspective, from tourism and looking at the products essentially. This has, today, enabled us to inform that Vanua Levu with the Na Vualiku Project is what we are successfully currently undertaking.

In terms of our markets as well, we are really focussed on high value markets. Again, at that time, the US market was one of our biggest markets, coming in through luxury VIP lanes. So, we continued to look at countries and determine which ones were a priority at that time. Again, looking very closely with Dr. Fong and Dr. Alisha to see which countries we had to scale back on or stop them from coming, looking at cultural tourism, heritage tourism, there was a lot of work that was done with UNESCO in Levuka, to try and look at heritage tourism opportunities within the capital.

In terms of environment and sustainability, we commenced work on a new succession plan. We previously had a Fiji Tourism Development Plan 2020-2021. With that concluding, we began work with the Global Green Growth Institute to really ensure that a new plan is based on the principles of environmental stewardship. That initial work has now led to a new sustainable tourism principle of environmental stewardship. That initial work has now led to a new sustainable tourism framework.

We worked with the Australian Volunteers Initiative on a Child Safe Tourism, really going into communities, socialising to the do's and don'ts when it comes to children, when children come into communities, taking photographs, et cetera.

We had commenced work on a code of conduct for tourism operators. This essentially was more of a document to guide how practices are done within the tourism industry. When you go to villages, how you should behave, what you should inform the tourists, free, prior and informed consent, et cetera, this piece of work we have now picked up to introduce sustainable tourism standards into law as we go forward.

In terms of looking forward, employment and capacity building, we worked through an MoU with the University of South Pacific's School of Tourism and Hospitality on a careers fair. We worked very much with students about internship programmes within government. We worked with the UN World Tourism Organization on a rapid COVID-19 assessment which was supposed to be a full-fledged assessment into the HR needs of the tourism industry, but, understandably, that was during COVID and there were cyclones at that time too, so we had to, sort of, shorten that survey and provide very quick baseline assessments.

The Team continued its community awareness initiatives around Fiji, and that is something that we continue to do till today - going to communities, speaking with them, understanding their needs, especially those who want to venture into tourism as we go forward. That work continues today.

We worked very closely with the Fiji Chefs Association, the Fiji Hotel and Tourism Association, in really bringing farmers and hoteliers and purchasing managers into single rooms - talking about agriculture, tourism and other resource-based sectors, as we go forward.

Madam Chairperson and honourable Members, in a nutshell, those were some of the areas that the Department of Tourism, at that time, focussed on for the years under review – 2019-2020 and 2020-2021, with a very strong focus on reopening and recovery at that time. Thank you.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you very much, Director Tourism. I know you have a very busy day, so if you do not mind, Ms. Lal, I might just give this time to the honourable Members of the Committee to ask any pertinent question that relates to the years that are being reported.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Madam Chairperson, through you, I have a question regarding departure tax. We talk about tourism and Fiji being a destination, we have seen departure tax increase from \$125 to \$140, \$170, and now \$200. Apparently, the Civil Aviation Authority of Fiji (CAAF) is calling for a further increase. In terms of your policies or your strategic plan, is your Ministry looking at reducing this tax and, probably, explore other alternatives so that Fiji becomes a cheaper destination for people around the world?

MS. J. LAL.- Thank you, honourable Member. Madam Chairperson, through you, the taxes and tourism have been a part of the colourful history of Fiji, especially, departure tax. There was a strong call from the industry, despite Fiji and the economy returning to normalcy, there was a big plea. It does not mean that the tax regime has to return to that status quo was no longer pre-COVID, so this discussion has been very strong.

One of the negotiations we have had with the Ministry of Finance was, at least, to stagger the increase, that has come, and as you have mentioned, CAAF, again, is one of the biggest beneficiaries of departure tax. This discussion was recently brought up, again, at our recent Fiji Tourism Convention, on whether we can explore ways of relooking at the departure tax or repurposing it, at least, looking at seasonal travels when Fiji is very low, reducing some of the taxes to ensure that the transit market can grow. So, we do hope to continue these discussions with the Ministry of Finance, as we go forward, to make sure that the tax is flexible enough, whilst not impacting the overall fiscal space that the Fiji economy is in.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you very much, Ms. Lal. We have one more question from honourable Ravunawa.

HON. P.K. RAVUNAWA.- Madam Chairperson, through you, good morning, Ms. Lal.

MS. J. LAL.- Good morning, Sir.

HON. P.K. RAVUNAWA.- My question is in relation to MSMEs. You have mentioned about the strategic objectives and the implementation, but you forgot to give us the number. How many projects were implemented? What are some of the success stories from the MSMEs operators and what are some of the challenges? Also, if you can give us some numbers in terms of grants or loans that were provided for MSMEs. I believe the members of the public would love to know that. Thank you.

MS. J. LAL.- Thank you very much, honourable Member. Madam Chairperson, through you, with respect to MSMEs and just a bit of context as well, at that time, tourism was very small. We still do not have any legal mandate on dedicated programmes, so one of the opportunities we had was working (because we were a bigger portfolio) at that time with the Ministry of Commerce, Trade, Tourism, Transport and Cooperatives.

The Department of Tourism really leveraged the MSME Fiji and Cooperatives grant programmes that they had. At that time, the Department of Tourism had no dedicated access to finance programmes or dedicated training votes or big programmes, as you will see with other programmes within the then Ministry of Commerce, Trade, Tourism, Transport and Cooperative. So, we worked very, very closely with MSME Fiji, with Mr. Koroidimuri, Ms. Monica, to leverage those existing programmes, for example, the Integrated Human Resource Development Programme (IHRDP) and Cooperatives, so some of the beneficiaries and recipients, which I am sure the team will speak with, were part of tourism. However, some of the things we realised going forward was, we did want dedicated access to funding programmes for tourism specific businesses, especially micro and small, those in communities and those led by indigenous people. Now, having become a dedicated Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation, we have begun implementing some of these programmes and having dedicated line budgets for it.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you very Ms. Lal. I know you have a busy day in front of you, so we will let you go. Have a great day in Nadi. Thank you very, very much for your time.

We will now hand over the microphone to the rest of the Team to continue with your presentation, keeping in mind that we do not have a lot of time because we want to open the floor for questions from honourable Members.

MS. M. DAWAI.- Thank you very much, Madam Chairperson. Through you, this is just the Ministry's overview before we go into the different departments.

I do not think we need to spend a lot of time on the values and we can skip that. However, just to give a brief update to the honourable Members, at the point in time when the Annual Reports were released, the Ministry had about 11 Units under it - Tourism, Trade, Standards, Transport, Government Shipping Services, Business Reforms, the MSME Fiji, Human Resources and the Finance Units.

In addition to those Units, through the Trade Unit, they oversaw the operations of four Trade Commissions in North America, China, Australia and New Zealand. In addition to the four Trade Commissions, there were seven statutory organisations that reported to the Ministry, which are, as stated on the slide, Consumer Council of Fiji, Film Fiji, Investment Fiji, Land Transport Authority (LTA), Maritime Safety Authority of Fiji (MSAF), Real Estates Agents Licensing Board (REALB) and Tourism Fiji. I will now hand over to Ms. Khan, to take us through the budget allocation utilisation.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you.

MS. J. KHAN.- Madam Chairperson and honourable Members, the 2020-2021 financial years were significantly affected by COVID-19 pandemic. Despite these challenges, there were significant improvements, and the Ministry was able to maintain sound and financial management and achieved unqualified audit opinions in both years.

In the 2020 financial year, the Ministry was allocated \$57.8 million and utilised 87 percent of the budget. Over half of the allocation was directed towards capital projects. Comparing to the previous year, the budget decreased due to the reallocation of funds to priority areas, particularly health, in response to the pandemic.

In the 2021 financial year, the budget increased to \$87.1 million, of which 76 percent was utilised. This represented a 51 percent increase from the previous year, largely due to the merger of the Department of Transport and Government Shipping Services with the Ministry, resulting in higher operating grants and transfers. Thank you.

MS. M. DAWAI.- The next Unit will be the Economic Unit. I will call upon, Ms. Druavesi, please.

MS. U. DRUAVESI.- Madam Chairperson, through you, the Economic Unit operates as a central nerve centre for private sector policy. Our mandate is active and broad. We create the policy, we help implement it, and we review its effectiveness.

Our work directly impacts key economic sectors, and we provide essential oversight to two critical statutory bodies - Consumer Council of Fiji and REALB.

One of the key achievements for these two financial years was promoting local production under the Fijian Made - Buy Fijian Campaign. Promoting local industry is a top priority. In the two financial years, the Fijian Made - Buy Fijian Campaign showed strong growth. We licensed 39 businesses across 139 products, 27 of which were new entrants. Significantly, 14 of these new licences were issued to MSMEs, covering 34 products and demonstrating our grassroots impact.

Our multi-channel promotion, especially our digital strategy, was highly successful, building a community of over 200,000 engaged followers online.

Our sector specific work involves both, facilitation and regulation. In the high value audiovisual sector, we issued 15 licences, promoting and supporting major productions, like *Survivor* and *Eco-Challenge*, and we quickly adopted protocols for filming safety as the pandemic emerged.

In the scrap metal trade, our focus was on the strict regulatory oversight, renewing licences and granting special approvals to maintain control and prevent the theft of critical public assets, such as cables and pipes.

Moving on to empowering grassroots and communities, empowering communities is direct for the Economic Unit through the Standardised Roadside Stall Scheme. We constructed 11 new stalls in that financial year, bringing the national network to 102 stalls. This initiative directly improves the working conditions and market access for local vendors.

We also piloted an innovative funding model, engaging private sector sponsors to share the cost of stall development and leasing, ensuring sustainability and expanding reach.

With regards to youth and entrepreneurship development, in December, the Ministry launched the Prime Minister's National Youth Awards, receiving 157 applications and securing 15 private sector sponsors - a strong show of support, although postponed, the framework was set more immediately.

Through the YES Programme, we provided \$219,500 in financial assistance to 10 young entrepreneurs. Their ventures ranged from fitness to the innovative Pacific Heartbeat Health app, and we showcased the diversity and potential of Fijian youth-led businesses.

Moving on to policy and legislative framework, the long-term economic resilience requires a robust legal framework and in that financial year, we achieved a major milestone through our competition and consumer protection policy which, after extensive consultation, was endorsed by Cabinet.

The policy is the foundation for modernising the Fijian Competition and Consumer Commission Act 2010, a process we have now begun, with technical support from the Asian Development Bank. Concurrently, we advanced the Landlord and Tenancy Bill to bring clarity and fairness to the residential rental market.

Moving on to investment and MSME support framework, which is also a key achievement for the Economic Unit, we strengthened the entire support ecosystem for businesses, working with the Department of Tourism which was also part of the Ministry.

Then we revitalised the Fiji Investment Corporation Limited - a State-Owned Enterprise for Government, appointing a new private sector Board to steer it as a vehicle for domestic investment, especially for MSM recovery.

Furthermore, we established the dedicated MSME Fiji Unit. This Unit is now the central hub, not only in administering key financial schemes, but also providing the essential training, mentorship and monitoring to ensure funded businesses thrive in the long term.

Madam Chairperson, through you, Ms. Lal had elaborated on the COVID-19 responses, so I am going to skip this slide and move on and conclude with the Economic Unit presentation.

In conclusion, the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 financial years brought substantial achievements and proactive adaptation that the Economic Unit delivered across every front, from driving the Fijian Made - Buy Fijian Campaign and empowering youth, to launching the vital COVID passport for over 10,000 businesses. We established key institutions like the MSME Fiji Unit, secured major policy endorsements and provided direct crisis relief. So, our work has not only promoted growth, but also fundamentally strengthened the foundation of a more resilient Fijian economy through digital, institutional and policy pillars. *Vinaka.*

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you, Ms. Druavesi. Can we continue with your presentation, unless someone has a question for Ms. Druavesi? Please, can we keep our questions to the years under review?

HON. V. LAL.- Madam Chairperson, through you, you spoke about the standardised roadside stalls. When you drive around, you see most of the stalls are idle now. Has there been any follow ups on that?

MS. U. DRUAVESI.- Madam Chairperson, through you, yes, Sir. We have just recently done a monitoring exercise to address the issue of having vacant stalls, especially in the Western Division. We are doing a relocation of stalls, currently being done at the moment, so we will be relocating some of the unused vacant stalls to areas that are requiring the construction of new stalls to cater for the community.

HON. T.R. MATASAWALEVU.- Through you, Madam Chairperson, the grant allocation of \$57 million for the cooperatives, if the community wants to access those funds, how do they go about doing that?

MS. U. DRUAVESI.- Madam Chairperson, through you, I do not recall mentioning that cooperatives grant on my presentation, but we have Director Cooperatives present here to respond to that and any other questions that you have on cooperatives. Thank you.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Honourable Members, can we just keep our questions to the years under review, please, because we do have a site visit after this. If we have any follow up questions, you are welcome to let Secretariat know and we will send our questions, for future reference, to the Officials presenting today.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- On page 13 of the 2019-2020 Annual Report, I have two questions for you which are pretty short and simple.

You have the Landlord Tenancy Bill. Businesses do find it difficult when the landlord suddenly increases the rent. We cannot have a rent freeze but, at the same time, we also need to ensure that they cannot charge ridiculous amounts of rent, increase the cost of goods and then boom - the business is closed and people are sent home. What is the Ministry looking forward to, to curb this problem in terms of the high rent spikes?

Also, the Competition and Consumer Protection Policy and legislation, what powers does FCCC have to get consumers justice? The reason is because if it goes to Tribunal and it is below

\$5,000, you will see that the referee and the complainant are sitting and laughing together, and next thing you know, the decision has turned against the consumer who was probably cheated by the person he bought goods from. We really need to fix this, between the Tribunal

and FCCC. Someone needs to have the powers to do justice for the people who have been wrongly or cheated by businesses. So those are the two questions.

MS. U. DRUAVESI.- Madam Chairperson, through you, in response to the Landlord and Tenancy Bill, I would like to bring to clarity that the whole reason why we are engaged in ensuring that a Bill is prepared is that, we do take note of the high rentals in the market, however, you may note, that there is a rental freeze at the moment.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Commercial?

HON. U. DRUAVESI.- Rental freeze on residential. The Landlord and Tenancy Bill is mainly to address the residential market, not the commercial market.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- I would like to change my question; I want answers on the commercial. I am talking about businesses here.

MR. U. DRUAVESI.- For businesses, at the moment, it is the market rate. We are not really setting the rates for the commercial market, but we are just focussed on the residential market.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Then I think the Ministry should look into it because I run a business and I talk to so many business owners. When the rent increases, the cost of goods increases. They do not want price control. The businesses suffer and actually die out. Please, do look into commercial rentals for businesses. If there is no business, then there is no tax collection and economic growth will be very slow.

MS. U. DRUAVESI.- Madam Chairperson, through you, again, we take note of your comments, Sir. In terms of ensuring that price is controlled in the commercial market, it would have to take consultation. We would have to do extensive consultations with the relevant parties and relevant stakeholders. However, we do take note of your comments.

With response to the Competition and Consumer Protection Policy, we also take note of your comments. Just an update, the Ministry is currently working in close consultation with FCCC, Reserve Bank of Fiji, as well as Consumer Council of Fiji, to address the issues that you have highlighted. At the moment, on the status of this Bill, a draft has been prepared and is currently with the Office of the Solicitor-General for vetting. Once we get the vetted draft, we should be doing another round of consultation before this is passed on to Cabinet for approval.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- *Vinaka.*

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you, Ms. Druavesi.

HON. P.K. RAVUNAWA.- Madam Chairperson, through you, also on consumer protection and this is to do with the Food Unit. There are goods that are on the supermarket shelves and shops that are purely written in Chinese and other languages. What would be your take on that?

MS. U. DRUAVESI.- Madam Chairperson, through you, with the Competition and Consumer Protection Bill, we have taken note of all aspects of the market. That is why we will also be consulting with the Ministry of Health and Medical Services. We have our Standards Team as well in this meeting that would also be looking at the labelling of the products and for consumable items, we will definitely take into consideration the Ministry of Health's comments and ensure that all issues are addressed in the Bill. I hope that answers your question, Sir.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you, Ms. Druavesi. Would you like to carry on with your presentation, Ministry Officials?

MS. M. DAWAI.- Madam Chairperson, we will now hand over to the Trade Unit.

MS. D. SINGH.- Madam Chairperson and honourable Members, just very broadly on the mandate of the Trade Unit, the Trade Unit has served as a central coordinating body for all matters relating to Fiji's international trade policy. It leads the negotiations, implementation, monitoring of trade agreements, as well as defending Fiji's interest across the various spectrum of bilateral, regional and multilateral platforms.

The goal has always been securing market access, supporting export diversification and also strengthening Fiji's participation in global trading systems. The Trade Unit has also been providing strategic guidance on trade policy formulation, in ensuring that the alignment remains with Fiji's broader economic and development objectives as well.

Apart from the national policy coordination, we also oversaw the functions of the Trade Commissions. In addition to this, we were also responsible for monitoring activities of Film Fiji and Investment Fiji.

Madam Chairperson and honourable Members, for the period under review, Fiji actually maintained Trade Commissions in Australia, New Zealand, China and North America, and they

played a very critical role in terms of promoting trade and investment opportunities for Fiji and supporting our exporters in those key priority markets.

During the COVID-19 period, their role became even more strategic because efforts needed to be intensified in terms of supporting economic recovery by helping MSMEs transition into not just normal commercial activities but also transitioning to e-commerce related platforms. In that regard, there were efforts made to actually build capacity and provide technical guidance to a number of MSMEs to link with platforms such as Shopify, Amazon, Pacific-based other digital providers. So, there was organisation of a trade event, business forums and also outbound investment missions that were looking at these commercial engagements.

To also address supply chain disruptions, export strategies were also developed, to ensure the continuity of trade flows. Again, we worked very closely with all our stakeholders domestically – the Fiji Revenue and Customs Service, Biosecurity Authority of Fiji, Ministry of Health and Medical Services, all the broad spectrum of stakeholders, including Trade Commissions.

One of the critical milestones during the period under review, Madam Chairperson and honourable Members, was the relocation of our Trade Commission in North America. It used to be in Los Angeles, and it was relocated to San Francisco and was driven by two key objectives. First, it was to strengthen our engagement with the Fijian diaspora. The diaspora is often the first to invest back into our country and we wanted to be closer to our diaspora community in this area. The second was to also enhance our access to the global technology sector, as we know that the Bay area is home to the Silicon Valley as well, so that provided us with an opportunity to liaise with and talk about investments into Fiji. Those were the efforts that were put in place during that period, which then sustained the investment from Google into Fiji.

Additionally, the Trade Commissions, during that period, had also collaborated, for instance, with Fiji Airways, to facilitate air freight for essential goods, as well as support the repatriation of Fijian citizens who were stuck during the crisis.

Madam Chairperson and honourable Members, the Ministry had also engaged in high level roundtable discussions to strengthen Fiji's trade and economic relations. These events were done with the aim of bringing together key partners and to foster closer collaboration, cooperation and also explore investment opportunities and identify areas for deeper economic integration. Such engagements were important because they provided a platform for dialogue, build networks and also enabled Fiji to promote trade and investment, supporting sustainable economic growth.

The Ministry also participated in other meetings, one of which was notably the Commonwealth Trade Ministers Meeting. That was done with the intent of ensuring that the voices of Small Island Developing States, such as Fiji, is always taken into account when global agenda and trade policy related considerations are being made.

Fiji, also during this period, had participated in the China International Import Expo, known as the CIIE, and this participation actually provided our Fijian businesses with the opportunity to use that platform to actually showcase their products, connect with buyers globally because it is a global platform, as well as look at investment opportunities that could strengthen trade and investment ties between Fiji and China.

In 2019, Fiji also hosted the 7th Interim Economic Partnership Agreement Trade Committee Meeting. This is a very important agreement, the IEPA, that is between the Pacific parties and the European Union and actually enables trade between our two countries. It also featured the first special committee that looked on customs cooperation and rules of origin under this Agreement, so it was one of the very important milestones that was also achieved during that time.

There is also a Reform Unit that is within the Ministry that also made important strides to improve Fiji's business environment. During the period under review, some of the key achievements that were achieved during the period was simplifying the business licensing through a risk-based approach and from 1st January, 2023, there was a full elimination of business licence requirement, which was also announced through the budget process. Thereafter, businesses only needed to register their business name, obtain a TIN, identify their risk category and start their business, with high-risk businesses actually having to complete additional requirements such as fire - NFA or OHS.

We also had the bizFIJI platform launched, which was basically to provide transparency in terms of information about how you start a business, how you obtain permits, and in parallel, there was a Building Permits Evaluation Committee that was also established to help with commercial and industrial projects and fast-track the process for obtaining permits.

Finally, the Doing Business Taskforce was also established, comprising of all senior officials and it was chaired by the Permanent Secretary for Commerce at that time. It enabled approved agencies to actually come to that platform and discuss issues, deliberate on areas where improvement needed to be made, and there were opportunities for the private sector to also bring to the table certain bottlenecks that they were facing for resolution.

During that period, Madam Chairperson and honourable Members, the Ministry also worked together with the World Bank and IFC to establish the Investment Act 2020, that actually

repealed the Foreign Investment Act 1999. A number of policy reforms were done, and these changes were done to transform the role of Investment Fiji and enabled it to function as a fully-fledged investment promotion agency and focus on attracting and facilitating investment.

One of the other critical reasons was to modernise the Investment Act 2020 and also strengthen Fiji's investment framework. The previous legislation - the Foreign Investment Act 1999 was a bit outdated, which focussed more on foreign investors, whereby we made it uniform that whether you are a domestic investor or a foreign investor, treatment should be the same.

In terms of the rest of the work, under the multilateral trading system, Fiji was also actively preparing for the 12th WTO Ministerial Conference, and we were engaged during this period of time in very important negotiations and one of which was on the Fisheries Subsidy Agreement. There was also discussion during this time because of the COVID period, a waiver on the trade-related aspects of intellectual property rights so that vaccines were easily accessible. There was also continued discussion in terms of the plastic pollution and Fossil Fuel Subsidy Reform as well.

Madam Chairperson and honourable Members, during this time, we were also engaged in a particular negotiation which was called the Agreement on Climate Change, Trade and Sustainability, with countries like Costa Rica, Iceland, New Zealand, Norway and Switzerland. As one of the countries that you know is most vulnerable to climate change, Fiji joined this first of its kind initiative, to ensure that trade policy actually supports climate action and sustainable development. The Agreement sought to actually remove tariffs on environmental goods, strengthen commitment to environmental services, and also discipline harmful fossil fuel subsidies. There was also discussions on the side on eco-labelling practices as well.

The Ministry, during this time, also participated in some regional trade initiatives and one of these was doing a comprehensive review of existing trade agreements. We were also in a committee where the Rules of Origin of the PICTA Agreement was being relooked at, to meet the current context and business needs. In addition to that, we also participated in the assessment of the regional labour mobility programmes. There are a number of labour mobility programmes that are being utilised currently, so we actually did a comprehensive assessment on that.

Apart from the PICTA Agreement, we also undertook a technical review of the IEPA in order to update its market access schedules from the 2002 nomenclature to the 2017 nomenclature.

One of the other major milestones during this period, Madam Chairperson and honourable Members was that we had actually signed a bilateral Trade and Investment Framework

Appendices - Consolidated Review Report on the Ministry of Commerce, Trade, Tourism and Transport 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 annual reports.

Agreement (TIFA) with the United States (US). This was not only Fiji's first trade and investment agreement with the US, but also first for the Pacific. The TIFA is a platform that enabled structured dialogue on trade and investment-related issues between Fiji and the US. It also provided us with a framework to address a number of market access concerns issues related to transparency and to also promote business to business links.

During this period, the Ministry had also advanced in domestic and regional e-commerce initiatives, as earlier mentioned, and some of the key programmes that we actually ran during this period was facilitating webinars with platforms, such as Amazon, Pacific Shiuuu, Shopify.

We also participated in the development of the Pacific Regional E-Commerce Strategy and Roadmap. This also had translated back in that time in our national assessment of Fiji's own ecommerce architecture. We looked at the different sets of regulations that can facilitate e-commerce, the financial aspects, the payments gateway, so a number of issues were actually brought out and that study back then had enabled the E-Commerce Strategy that we are now implementing.

Another important initiative was also building capacity for our exporters of agriculture products. We had partnered with the New Zealand's Ministry of Primary Industries (MPI) and a global certification platform called Global G.A.P., and focus of that was to build skills, knowledge and provide assistance to our producers in terms of gaining market access and ensuring that their products actually meet the quality standards required in the respective market.

Beyond some of the agricultural products, we also did a number of awareness sessions on kava, its potential globally, and also liaised with a number of countries in terms of how we can use some of our traditional niche products to produce value-added commodities and dietary supplements, even in terms of capsules. Those were also being discussed. Apart from that, I think discussions on kava had also started considerations on matters of intellectual property rights and how we protect kava as a medicinal drug as well.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Ms. Singh, could you, please, round up? We still have a few presenters to go. Thank you very much.

MS. D. SINGH.- Madam Chairperson, just two more points. In terms of Film Fiji, we just wanted to say that Film Fiji had actually continued to drive the development and promotion of the audio-visual sector at this time. Despite the uncertainties during this period, Film Fiji had actually facilitated two of their production - the *US Survivor Series* Seasons 41 and 42. Also, in terms of the economic activity, it had generated around \$70 million worth of economic activity and around 408 Fijians were employed during this period in this sector. Thank you.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you very much, Ms. Singh. Do we have another presenter from your team, please?

MS. M. DAWAI.- My apologies, Madam Chairperson, Ms. Virisila Tuimanu, our Director for Department of Standards.

MS. V. TUIMANU.- Madam Chairperson and honourable Members, I am just going to give a little bit of introduction on the role and the mandate of the Department of National Trade Measurement and Standards. Given the time constraints, I am going to try to be really quick.

The Department actually implements laws and regulations to protect consumers. With that, we administer two very important legislations that looks after standards - the Trade Standards and Quality Control Act 1992 and a piece of legislation that looks after measurements which is the National Trade Measurement Act 1989. This legislation develops national systems of units and standards of measurement, which we are looking to adopt from international best practices. The other important standards, as I had mentioned, develops national and international standards for quality, safety and reliability. Together with our colleagues from the Economic Unit, we also look into the enforcement of the scrap metal trade in Fiji.

As I had mentioned, under the period of review, we had a legislative framework, and we had looked into the review of the Trade Standards and Quality Control Act 1992. We completed our stakeholder consultations. Also, during that period, we started with the preparation of reviewing the second piece of legislation, which is the National Trade Measurement Act 1989, and its government arrangements had also been established during the period under review.

The Standards' development project under that period, Madam Chairperson, we had new requests that came in. Those were very technical standards and one of them was the structural design action on wind loads. The other one was the electrical appliance safety and gas appliance safety. So, those requests came from the industry and from proponents who came and applied to the Ministry if those standards could be adopted, either mandatory or voluntarily.

The ongoing projects under the period of review, as mentioned, were wind load standards, sheet, roof and wall cladding, and these standards are standards that would fall under building and construction material standards - something which the industry needed, and we went ahead to adopt that.

During the period of review as well, through the help of the World Bank, we were able to establish guidelines for improving building safety and resilience. This is a publication developed by the World Bank. It was launched in September 2019 with a little bit of training with the agencies and the main stakeholders that were involved. It is in the Hindi and iTaukei language. It provides basic building guidelines for single storey houses and schools in rural Fiji, and that is also available on our website.

One of the Units under the Department is the Metrology Unit. Metrology is the science of measurement. Metrology inspectors go out and help in the verification and certification of trade instruments. These inspectors are mandated under the National Trade and Measurement Act 1989 and during inspections, there is a fee schedule that is attached in the Act. We also have a regulation and that is why you will see in the Report that we also collect revenue for verification and certification of instruments, licensing of traders to verify equipment, as well as the issuance of import licences on certain building materials that come through from abroad.

Madam Chairperson and honourable Members, that is, in a nutshell, the figures of what we do as per the activities that had been mentioned.

During the period in question, certification of weighing and measuring instruments, the total was about 5,327 and that was across the Divisions. We have three Divisions - the Central/Eastern Division here in Suva, the Northern Division and the Western Division.

We inspected traders as well. We went to markets and did their weighing scales, supermarkets and even fuel dispensers and flow metres under all our big fuel stations in Fiji. So, the traders, at the time under review, we had inspected 2,000 traders.

The revenue collected during that period was about \$890,000 and is actually collected on an annual basis. The next slide shows the Standards' development projects that were adopted during that year. We had electrical home appliances and plywood standards that were adopted.

The Standards' development process is a bit long. It takes about 18 months to 24 months. What you can see in the reports, Madam Chairperson and honourable Members, is that from 2019 onwards to the following year, some standards proposal projects continued, given the time that they actually took.

Our weighing and instruments during this period, we had inspected 4,458 instruments all over the Divisions. Traders visited were about 1,600. Revenue collected was around the same, it was about \$827,000, similar to what we had collected the previous year.

That is the submission from the Department of National Trade Measurement and Standards.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you very much, Ms. Tuimanu. At this juncture, I am going to ask the Members if they have any questions for Ms. Tuimanu or Ms. Singh. Please, keep your questions related to the years under review, honourable Members. Thank you.

HON. V. LAL. Through you, Madam Chairperson, my question is to Ms. Singh. During the period under review, there were certain Fiji Missions overseas that were closed. How did you go about doing your trade business when these Missions were closed?

MS. D. SINGH.- Madam Chairperson, through you, the Trade Commissions and the High Commissions are separate. So, under the Ministry, we had four Trade Commissions that were specifically established to act as a bridge between Fiji and the rest of the world. Those Trade Commissions continued to operate. However, we do reach out to the High Commissions and ask for their assistance, but they are not under the portfolio of the Ministry of Trade. Thank you.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- My question is on trade. With the Trade Commissions that you have, in the future Annual Reports, I would like to see their strategic plan in terms of where Fiji is headed. Are we solely focusing on just imports or exports? If we can have more clarity on the domestic trade as well, in terms of what is happening in Fiji because I am encouraging the youth right now, “Go to the Parliament page and read the Annual Reports. You'll get a clear idea of what happens in the country.”

My second question is to Ms. Tuimanu. We have a \$7.4 billion import, as stated for last year. How do you really monitor the quality or standards of goods that come into Fiji? I would like to see more clarity on that. I will give you a very short example.

A 2MP camera, the person buying it from Fiji tells the supplier in China to put 5MP, although the quality is 2MP. That is one of the things that comes into our market. How do you measure that? It says here on page 29 that currently, both legislations are under review. Are they still under review, or what is the update?

MS. V. TUIMANU.- Madam Chairperson, through you, the Department would like to see that all goods and services that are imported from overseas are of quality. We have certain standards that are actually mandated to look after certain materials, so as I had just mentioned that during the period under review, the focus was on building and material standards, but we would like to see that in the future.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Can we give the floor to Director Trade who is going to answer the question, too.

MS. D. SINGH.- Madam Chairperson and honourable Member, your point is very well noted. Just to further elaborate that any outbound Trade Missions served the dual purpose of promoting exports and also getting investment deals. So, the export promotion missions enabled the buyers in those countries to look at the types of products we sell and make business deals.

We also hosted inbound missions whereby there are businesses who come and travel to Fiji and see what their needs are, and they link up with the exporters or producers here on the ground. With that said, I think we will, in future, incorporate further information in terms of the investment missions or the trade missions.

However, yes, of course, the goal has been to promote exports. Whilst we also recognise that we do import a number of commodities that are actually intermediary goods and are used in the process for manufacturing, which are then, in return, exported or used domestically as well, we try and maintain a balance and also see what is needed in the trade process as well.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Thank you.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you, Ms, Singh.

HON. P.K. RAVUNAWA.- Through you, Madam Chairperson, my question to Ms. Singh is in regard to film and audio-visual sector. After the *Survivor* Series shooting in Fiji with over 400 workers, has there been any interest in that area after that?

MS. D. SINGH.- Madam Chairperson, through you, thank you, honourable Member, for that question. I think there has been other productions that are currently going on and one example is *Love Island*. It is a UK-based production, and there has been a couple of others. We can share more details with you on that.

HON. V. LAL.- Madam Chairperson, my question is, again, to Mr. Singh in regard to labour mobility. We are losing a lot of skilled labourers to overseas countries. Having said that, how practical is it to still have this PALM Scheme?

MS. D. SINGH.- Madam Chairperson, through you, I am the right person to comment on that particular scheme, but it is under the purview of the Ministry of Employment. However, we do

incorporate these discussions in our regional trade discussions and see that whilst we are the skills, how do we also ensure that there are ways in which Fiji also benefits from it, either through retention of those skills, or through other mechanisms. These are, perhaps, discussions that are still developing in the forum and I think further dialogue needs to happen on how countries actually domestic policies in this area have to participate in these programmes but also retain skills domestically.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you very much, Ms. Singh, we will carry on.

MR. P. SIKIVOU.- We invite Director Cooperatives, please?

MR. I. KOROIDIMURI.- Madam Chairperson and honourable Members, I have only three slides which I will briefly go through.

The first one is on our strategic focus. The emphasis is on the recovery and growth postCOVID-19. The major focus is on women, youth, the revival of non-operating cooperatives and the strengthening of the cooperative movement across Fiji.

Basically, the strategic focus during that time was to revive cooperatives. It used to be big at one time, especially in the rural and maritime areas, registering almost about 3,000 cooperatives. During COVID, a lot of focus was on the revival of cooperative movements in Fiji.

On the second slide, in terms of the milestone, I think one of the major achievements there is the establishment of the Cooperative Tribunal within the Ministry of Justice. The purpose of this Tribunal is to resolve disputes for and among cooperatives, as well as strengthen governance and accountability within the sector. If you are familiar with cooperatives, this is a key fundamental, especially in the resolving of cooperative disputes.

Finally, on the last slide, the Department of Cooperative Business, during the reporting period, reinforces cooperative sector resilience and inclusivity through expanding cooperatives, creation of jobs, and empowerment of youth and women. The focus is on recovery and growth, especially in the rural and maritime areas.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you very much, Sir. Any questions from Members?

HON. V. LAL.- I have a small question on the establishment of the Cooperatives Tribunal. What does this indicate? Are there a lot of disputes within cooperatives in Fiji?

MR. I. KOROIDIMURI.- Through you, Madam Chairperson, yes. In any organisation, there is always a dispute. What we have done is, we have built in the SOPs in terms of addressing those disputes.

There are three lines of defence in that dispute. The first one, when there is a dispute amongst cooperatives, we encourage the cooperatives themselves to solve that issue. That is between the board and the cooperative members.

The second line is if that cannot be done, then they escalate it at the Director and Registrar of Cooperatives level. So, this is where the Director Cooperatives comes in to try and mitigate and solve those issues at the ground.

However, there are still others that need to be sorted out at the high level when they are dissatisfied. This is where the Tribunal comes in, through the Ministry of Justice. There is a judge that sits on it and everything is tried to be sorted out.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Madam Chairperson, through you, cooperatives have been quite a success for Fiji and thank you for the hard work you have put into it. My question is, apart from the funding, is there any other support in terms of capacity building, connecting to the markets, conferences that they are invited, where they can further create value for export or for domestic market? Is there any build up on this, because there's always room for improvement? Please, highlight the Committee on that.

MR. I. KOROIDIMURI.- Madam Chairperson, through you, yes, there is currently work in progress with regards to the revival of this, especially in connecting the whole value supply chain.

We are currently working on two things right now, firstly, is doing a national policy for cooperatives because there has not been any and, secondly, the review of the Cooperatives Act 1996. All those things will address the very issues that the honourable Member is alluding to in terms of connecting the whole value supply chain from the grassroots level right to the value addition, into the export market where the trade comes in. Yes, actually, there is work going on in there.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- *Vinaka.*

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you very much. That is very encouraging. Honourable Ravunawa, one last question from you.

HON. P.K. RAVUNAWA.- I noticed in your mandate and your role that it is more focussed on women and youth. How about the men folks?

HON. I. KOROIDIMURI.- Madam Chairperson and honourable Members, it is a long discussion, if I have to go into that. Yes, traditionally, if you are aware of cooperatives, when we go into those cooperative meetings, it is always the men who are driving it. The focus now is on women and youth, for obvious reasons and for many reasons, but one of them is, we are building the succession plan whereby the youth and women will come in to drive cooperatives, especially in the rural areas. That is where we want to bring in cooperatives, especially for women cooperatives.

I had mentioned about the policy that will come in. What we are looking at is a classroombased or school-based cooperatives. So, for cooperatives to be successful in the long term, a lot of aspects that we are looking at and key to this is women, youth and technology. It is a forward-looking policy.

Yes, men will always be there, but if you look at the history of cooperatives, when you go into those meetings, it is always the men who are leading those meetings. It is not saying that we cannot do it, but what we are looking at is building into the future the succession plan for cooperatives, and to grow into the future.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Just one last comment from me, Mr. Koroidimuri. Perhaps, if we could also include people living with disabilities when you are talking about the policy, going forward.

MR. I. KOROIDIMURI.- Yes, Madam Chairperson, that is noted. I forgot to include that when I was alluding to the policy, but that exactly is another key aspect of the policy, inclusivity.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you so much, Sir. Can we carry on, Acting PS.

MS. M. DAWAI.- Thank you, Madam Chairperson. The next Unit is MSME Fiji. I will try to be as brief as possible.

MSME Fiji, as alluded to by my colleague, Ms. Druavesi, was established in 2019. It was meant to be a central coordinating agency for all MSME support policy items and monitoring and evaluation of grant recipients under the grants administered by the Ministry.

In addition to policy and the roles that I had mentioned, the Unit also administers the four grant programmes which is the:

- (1) Young Entrepreneurship Scheme;
- (2) National Export Strategy;
- (3) Integrated Human Resources and Development Programme; and
- (4) Northern Development Programme.

We also have a Training Team, as well as a Monitoring and Evaluation Team.

Just to give a snapshot, over the two years, in 2019-2020, about 31 recipients were supported at a value of \$842,000. In 2020-2021, 85 recipients were supported at a value of \$906,000. This is just central to the four grant programmes that I had mentioned.

Because this period was a COVID intensive period, the Unit's mandate had to pivot a little bit, to assist Government in the implementation of its COVID Response Plan. So, members of the Unit assisted the Economic Unit in the implementation of the COVID response programmes, and we also developed the COVID Safe Ambassadors monitoring programme.

In addition to assisting the Economic Unit in the rollout of the COVID implementation plans, we also rolled out the COVID Safe Ambassadors, which was led by the MSME Monitoring and Evaluation Team. Basically, they conducted the monitoring of all businesses who had received COVID safe passes to be able to operate during this time.

In addition to that, the Unit also provided secretariat support for the MSME concessional loans. Through this programme, the Ministry supported 6,000 businesses at a value of \$32 million. The loans were implemented in partnership with the private sector, namely, Fiji Institute of Accountants, Fiji Commerce and Employers Federation, the Fiji Chamber for Commerce and Industry and Women in Business. They provided the assessment arm of all loan applications that were received.

In addition to that, although we had COVID safe guidelines, the Training Team still managed to carry out, at least, 18 training sessions to about 331 entrepreneurs at this time through virtual training sessions. That was one achievement that we were able to do, to ensure that MSMEs, although they applied for grants, they were not missing out on the opportunity on being upskilled to handle those grants.

I think just to round off MSME Fiji, that was the major achievement that we had through those two years.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Honourable Members and submittees, we have just had a power outage in the media room, but we will continue as if the power was still on, so ignore your microphones. We have Hansard recording for now. Thank you very much.

Honourable Members, do you have questions?

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Madam Chairperson, I would like to declare my interest because I was a recipient of the YES and PM's Award. I was nominated for the National Award or something that was there.

What I went through was, I received the funding, and full stop. That was it. How you use it - you can put it into a bank, get more funding out of it. So, my question is, in terms of sustainability, my request to your Ministry is if we can have a table where there is clear indication that this is the funding or millions of dollars Government is pumping into these kind of initiatives that are going to, obviously, help our economy, and provide goods and services to the people.

However, at the same time, how long has these entities lasted? Taking off an idea' is tough. What I went through personally, the market is, you have the business sharks or mafias. If they cannot buy you, they will suppress you, so that is the reality. They do need continuous support until they find that customer because our market is very small, we must remember that. If I grow something at a cost, it would be higher than someone who just decide, "I'll export a container of lettuce", and someone who has grown it locally is expensive. That is just a request - if we could compare and see how many businesses.

Also, if you can confirm the number of applications that are sitting at your office, which you know you do not have the finance to fund those. Please, I think, we need to look into that as well. That is just from me, thank you.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Your comments are noted, honourable Sharma.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Thank you, Madam.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Is there anyone else to make a submission from the Team?

MS. M. DAWAI.- Our apology, Madam Chairperson, through you, there was meant to be a submission by the Department of Transport, unfortunately, she was unable to make it. She had

a family emergency. However, there is the Corporate Services Division presentation, if you would like to hear them. How long will be your slides?

MS. M. DAWAI.- It should be just a few minutes, Madam.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- It looks like we are coming back online. Perhaps, change positions during this time when we are back online. We will be continuing with our broadcast. I apologise to those of you who are viewing. We had an outage in our media room, so broadcast was interrupted.

I now give the floor to Ms. Prem Lata, Head of Human Resources from the Ministry. *Vinaka.*

MS. P. LATA.- Madam Chairperson, very briefly, the Corporate Services Division provides support to the Ministry, including all administrative aspects. Our establishment for 2019-2020 and 2020-2021, 451 in the first year and then 330 the following year.

We did come across transitions during these two financial years. Initially, the National Centre for Small and Micro Enterprise Development (NCSMED) and Northern Development Programme coming on board the Ministry, followed by the Department of Transport and Government Shipping Services.

The variation you see in gender, the GSS was the department that played a major role in this imbalance because GSS was a male dominated agency.

In terms of our staff movement, we had been working continuously to fill our vacancies, and, at the same time, we were facing a high staff turnover, which was addressed by the end of 2021.

In terms of staff development, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we were unable to train our staff because of social distancing reasons and travel ban, but we picked up on that in the following financial year (2020- 2021), whereby we were able to train more staff, compared to the first reporting period.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- It is just the years – I am noticing that the years are the same, but I think the second lot is supposed to be....

MS. P. LATA.- The second lot, Madam, is the local training, which was in 2020-2021.

In terms of internal HR policies, we have been developing our own policies, such as the Energy Management Policy, Social Media Policy, Discipline Manual, Human Resources Manual, Staff Retention Policy and the COVID-19 Policy and Vaccination Directives Circular.

In terms of fleet management, we mostly have leased vehicles and seven State owned vehicles at that time.

The ministry also had to recognise the hard work and the commitment of the workers - workforce. So, we had given some recognition awards and those were the Employee of the Month, Customer Service Award, Leadership Awards, Employee of the Year Awards, Best Performing Awards and a special award was awarded to Government Shipping Services for the work that they did during the natural disasters and the pandemic.

The Ministry also had the corporate social responsibility commitment. We also visited the needy people, and we donated ration packs to aged care homes. We also visited the CWM Hospital's Oncology Ward, as well as visited and donated to the SPCA.

We also promoted healthy living and wellbeing for our workforce. We conducted health checks and health screenings and encouraged staff to participate in physical activities through wellness hour on Wednesdays.

Throughout the two periods we had remained focussed and strengthened the policies and staff development initiatives. We continued to focus on resilience and workforce empowerment. *Vinaka.*

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you, Ms. Lata.

Thank you very much, Acting PS and your Team for your time and your submission today. I will now give the floor to the honourable Members in case they have some questions, keeping in mind the time that we have and, of course, that we will be following with a site visit.

HON. V. LAL.- Through you, Madam Chairperson, my question is in regard to freight cost. During COVID, the freight cost skyrocketed. Now, well after COVID, we still have not reached preCOVID levels. I do not know who will answer, but is there any way we can go back to pre-COVID level?

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- If you need a clarification on that question, please, say so. Otherwise, we can send you a written question and then we will ask for you to send us a

written reply, if that suits you better. Honourable Lal, we will write to them, and they will give us a written reply.

HON. V. LAL.- Thank you, Madam Chairperson.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you.

HON. P.K. RAVUNAWA.- Madam Chairperson, through you, just with the number of resignations, what are some of the reasons that your officers are leaving the Ministry?

MS. P. LATA. - Madam Chairperson, through you, it is mostly greener pastures, migration and better opportunities. They find that the job offers from outside the Civil Service were more lucrative.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you.

HON. P.K. RAVUNAWA.- Just a follow up question on that, when was the last Job Evaluation Exercise for the Ministry conducted?

MS. P. LATA.- Madam Chairperson, through you, Sir, where the HODs feel that there is a need to review a role, we review that role and evaluate it. Currently, we are evaluating some positions, so it is an ongoing process.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Madam Chairperson, through you, in your presentation, you have said that your Ministry is a male-dominated Ministry. Please, tell us why females are not applying for positions, or what is being done so that more females apply and be in that environment to work under your Ministry? What has changed since this year's report?

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- If I can just cut that off at this juncture, Madam had explained that the heavy male component of their headcount was because of the Government Shipping Services, which is very, very male dominated. They are trying to change things there because of the watchkeepers, the captains, the engineers, the crew has mostly been male up to this date. However, if you go to the maritime school, the intake of women for vessels is increasing, but I think that might answer your question. I am sorry to cut in.


MS. P. LATA.- Thank you, Madam. Also, if I may add, if you look at our current composition, we are now female- dominated.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you very much. I know I wanted to keep this to an hour, and we have gone well over that time, but it just means that we have had a lot of questions for your Team. For that, we want to say thank you very, very much.

After this, we will have a discussion, and we might be sending you some more written questions for which we look forward to written replies. *Vinaka sara vakalevu.* I now declare this meeting closed.

The Committee adjourned at 10.42 a.m.

Written Response



**PRESENTATION BY THE MINISTRY
OF COMMERCE AND BUSINESS
DEVELOPMENT TO THE STANDING
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
AND DEFENCE**

**MINISTRY OF COMMERCE, TRADE, TOURISM AND TRANSPORT
ANNUAL REPORTS FOR
2019 – 2020 AND 2020 - 2021**

Introductory Remarks by the Acting Permanent Secretary for Commerce and Business Development

The report highlights our work during the financial years under review, a period shaped by the unprecedented challenges of COVID-19.

Despite these difficulties, the Ministry remained focused on resilience and recovery. Key achievements include:

- Strengthening MSME development and entrepreneurship, with emphasis on youth and women.
- Advancing trade facilitation and regional economic integration.
- Supporting tourism recovery through targeted campaigns and sustainable frameworks.
- Expanding co-operative businesses to generate employment and empower communities.
- Implementing corporate services reforms, staff development, and wellness programmes.
- Developing standards and legislative frameworks to safeguard consumers and promote fair trade.

The Ministry's efforts demonstrate adaptability and commitment to inclusive growth. We look forward to engaging with the Committee, providing clarifications, and discussing how our programmes continue to support Fiji's economic resilience.

MINISTRY OVERVIEW

VISION

Brighter Economic Future for All

MISSION

Creating sustainable growth of commerce and industry through innovative and sound policies that lead to improved livelihoods for all Fijians.

MINISTRY

OVERVIEW

VALUES

'GREATEST'

Good Governance

Respect and value for people

Excellence in Service – innovation in delivery

Affirmative – being positive

Trustworthy

Equality for all and equal participation

Socially Responsible

Team Fiji – collaboration with our stakeholders

WHAT WE DO

The Ministry of Commerce, Trade, Tourism and Transport is responsible for formulating and implementing policies and strategies that create and facilitate growth in industry, investment, trade, tourism, transport, co-operative businesses, micro, small and medium enterprises and enhance metrology, standards and consumer protection.

These roles are undertaken by the Economic Unit, Trade Unit, Tourism Unit, Department of National Trade Measurement and Standards, Department of Co-operative Business, Department of Transport, Government Shipping Services, Doing Business Reform Unit, Micro Small Medium Enterprises Fiji Unit (MSME Fiji), Human Resources Unit and Finance Unit.

Internationally, we have Trade Commissions in North Americas, China, Australia and New Zealand who are also responsible for driving trade and investments.

The Ministry is supported by seven statutory organisations, including the Consumer Council of Fiji, Film Fiji, Investment Fiji, Land Transport Authority, Maritime Safety Authority of Fiji, Real Estate Agents Licensing Board and Tourism Fiji.

BUDGET ALLOCATION AND UTILISATION

FY 2019 - 2020

Budget allocation - \$57,838,023
\$50,505,854, or 87% was utilised.

Approximately 54% or \$31,165,315 of the budget was allocated to capital projects.

In comparison to the revised 2018-2019 budget, a significant decrease in the budget was noted due to the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Capital expenditure decreased by \$26,435,126 and Operating expenditure decreased by \$14,424,483

Initial Budget allocation - \$87,113,375 - inclusive of 34% was capital expenditure.

Revised budget allocated to Ministry - \$86,904,375.

BUDGET ALLOCATION AND UTILISATION continued

FY 2020 - 2021

Upon revision of the budget, \$209,000 was redeployed

76% of the revised budget or \$65,963,060 was utilised.

**STRATEGIC
ACHIEVEMENTS FOR
FINANCIAL YEARS
2019 – 2020
AND
2020 - 2021**

ECONOMIC UNIT

Mandate and Strategic Focus

I. OUR MANDATE & OPERATIONAL SCOPE:

- Core policy & implementation division within the Ministry.

II. KEY MANDATE:

- Formulate, implement, monitor, and review policies for private sector development.

III.SECTOR OVERSIGHT:

- Industry, Investment, Services, Competition & Consumer Protection.

IV. REGULATORY STEWARDSHIP:

- Consumer Council of Fiji; and
- Real Estate Agents Licensing Board.

ECONOMIC UNIT

PROMOTING LOCAL PRODUCTION – FIJIAN MADE BUY FIJIAN CAMPAIGN

I. Campaign Momentum:

- Licensed 39 businesses to use the emblem.
- Covered 139 products.
- 27 New Businesses & 12 Renewals.
- 14 new licences issued to MSMEs for 34 products

III. Multi-Channel Promotion:

- Trade shows, festivals, and socials/digital presence.

IV. Digital Success:

- Facebook page surpassed 200,000 followers with 161,000+ engagements.

- V. Key Result: Strengthened brand identity and market access for local producers.

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ECONOMIC UNIT

STRATEGIC SECTOR DEVELOPMENT & REGULATION



I. Audio-Visual Sector :

- Issued 15 licences to service companies for major productions (Survivor US, Eco-Challenge).
- Collaborated with the COVID-19 Taskforce to enable safe continuity of filming.

II. Scrap Metal Trade Regulation:

- Renewed licences and granted special approvals to ensure a lawful, controlled trade.
- To ensure a lawful and controlled trade of non-ferrous metals and combat theft of public infrastructure.

III. Key Result:

Supported high-value economic activity while maintaining robust regulatory oversight.

FOUNDATIONAL POLICY & INSTITUTIONAL REFORM

I. Competition & Consumer Protection:

- Cabinet-endorsed policy completed after extensive consultation.
- Act Reform Initiated: Now drafting amendments to the FCCC Act with ADB support.

II. Landlord Tenancy Bill:

- Advanced to clarify rights/responsibilities in the rental market.

III. Institutional Strengthening:

- Revitalised Fiji Investment Corporation Ltd (FICL) with a new private-sector Board.
- Established the MSME Fiji Unit as the central coordinating body for small business support.

IV. Key Result:

- Building a fairer, more robust, and investor-friendly legal and institutional framework.

COVID-19 RESPONSE, DIGITAL INNOVATION & RECOVERY

STRATEGIC SECTOR DEVELOPMENT & REGULATION

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III. Key Result:

Supported high-value economic activity while maintaining robust regulatory oversight.

IV. Direct Business Relief:

- Launched the MSME Concessional Loan Scheme (May 2020) to provide pandemic relief.

IV. Key Result:

- Provided strategic direction, critical data, and immediate financial support to cushion the economic impact.

BUILDING AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT FOR RESILIENCE

I. Annual Summary:

•A year dedicated to creating an enabling environment for private-sector growth.

II. Cross-Cutting Focus:

•MSME development, consumer protection, and legislative reform.

III. Maintained momentum in supporting businesses and empowering communities.

IV. The Unit's work in 2019/2020 and 2020/2021 laid crucial groundwork for a resilient and inclusive economic recovery.

MSME and Investment Support

- **Revitalised Fiji Investment Corporation Limited
(new Board appointed)**
- **Administered financial assistance programs:**
- **Young Entrepreneurship Scheme**
- **National Export Strategy**

ECONOMIC UNIT

COVID-19 RESPONSE

- **Developed Fijian COVID-Safe Economic Recovery Framework (3-phase approach)**
- **Developed sector-specific COVID-Safe Business Protocols**
- **Launched COVIDPass Portal (digital permits for 10,000+ businesses)**
- **Ensured movement of essential goods/personnel during lockdowns**



ECONOMIC UNIT

- **Economic Unit demonstrated resilience, adaptability, and commitment to private sector growth through being:**
- **Focused on MSME support, local production, and resilience during COVID-19 for 2019 – 2020 FY; and**
- **Strengthened recovery through digital solutions, industry promotion, and legislative reform in 2020 – 2021.**

TOURISM UNIT

Strategic Focus

- Post-COVID-19 recovery and sustainable development
- Deliverables reprioritized due to pandemic impact
- Emphasis on resilience and sector-wide recovery

TOURISM UNIT

Coordination and Recovery Efforts

- **Guided by Fijian COVID-Safe Economic Recovery Framework**
- **Key coordination bodies: CRMT & TRT**
- **Initiatives:**
 - **“Love Our Locals” domestic campaign**
 - **Care Fiji Commitment (CFC) – internationally recognized health & safety assurance**
 - **Resources focused on reopening and recovery**

Market and Product Diversification

- **Expanded tourism appeal and reach**
- **Cruise Tourism promotion**
- **Development of Vanua Levu tourism sector**
- **Outreach to long-haul markets (e.g., United States)**
- **Scoping studies for Heritage Tourism initiatives**

TOURISM UNIT

Environmental and Social Sustainability

- **Development of Sustainable Tourism Framework**
- **Child Safe Tourism initiative**
- **Preparatory work on voluntary Code of Conduct for operators**
- **Promoted responsible and ethical practices**

TOURISM UNIT

Employment Creation and Human Capital

- **Policies designed to maximize tourism's employment potential**
- **Focus areas: agritourism, community-based tourism**
- **Direct initiatives such as:**
 - **World Tourism Day Careers Fair**
 - **Rapid Human Resource Needs Assessment to address labour gaps**

TOURISM UNIT

The Tourism Unit during the reporting period opted for strategy balanced recovery with sustainability; strengthened domestic tourism and diversified markets; supported communities, MSMEs, and employment creation; and laid groundwork for a resilient and inclusive tourism sector.



TRADE UNIT

Mandate and Role

- **Formulate and implement trade policies**
- **Enhance market access for Fijian goods and services**
- **Strengthen regional and global economic integration**
- **Oversight of five Trade Commissions (Australia, NZ, China, North America, Pacific)**

TRADE UNIT

Key Engagements

Expanded PNG Trade Commission to wider Pacific market
Supported recovery through trade promotion activities:

- Fine Food Shows, business dialogues, forums, seminars
- Outbound investment missions
- E-commerce webinars (Shopify, Amazon, Facebook) for MSMEs

Developed export strategies to mitigate supply chain disruptions

Targeted investments in ICT, BPO, and manufacturing

Relocated North America Trade Commission to San Francisco for access to Silicon Valley

International Engagements

Hosted Fiji–NZ Trade Roundtable and Accelerated Export Mission

Represented Fiji at:

- Commonwealth Trade Ministers Meeting
- China International Import Expo
- EU Interim EPA Trade Committee Meeting

Hosted Pacific ACP & Forum Trade Ministers Meeting (Suva)

- Endorsed Pacific Aid for Trade Strategy 2020–2025
- Consultations on PICTA Rules of Origin

Ease of Doing Business and Reforms

Streamlined business licensing and regulation

Fast-tracked construction permits

Enhanced bizFIJI portal

Developed Investment Act 2020

Positioned Investment Fiji as full investment promotion agency

TRADE UNIT

Strategic Focus

Advanced regional trade and economic initiatives

Emphasis on digital economy and e-commerce

Co-chaired Joint Trade & Economic Ministers Meeting
(with Tuvalu)

Developed Blue Pacific Economic Strategy

E-commerce assessment (TradeCom II): policies, ICT,
logistics, payments, financing, skills

E-Commerce and Digital Growth

Fiji recognised as advanced economy in Pacific (ICT investment, transport hub, telecom reforms)

Supported businesses via e-commerce webinars (Amazon, Pacific Cell, Shopify)

Participated in Pacific Regional E-Commerce Strategy & Roadmap workshop

TRADE UNIT

Trade Facilitation and Agreements

Implemented WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA)

Addressed non-tariff barriers for exporters

Built capacity for agricultural producers

Collaborated with World Bank, WCO, NZ MPI

Bilateral/regional agreements:

- U.S.–Fiji Trade & Investment Framework Agreement (TIFA)
- Pacific ACP meetings
- EU–Fiji High-Level Political Dialogue

Labour Mobility and Regional Co- operation

Strengthened labour mobility initiatives

**Employment opportunities in healthcare, tourism,
education**

Enhanced regional collaboration for COVID-19 recovery

TRADE UNIT

Trade Commission Achievements

Exports facilitated

- **\$47.2M to Australia**
- **\$65.2M to New Zealand**

Promotional efforts

- **Kava awareness campaigns**
- **Online marketing (Google Ads, product directories)**
- **Trade expos and MSME capacity-building webinars**

Film & audiovisual sector

- **Survivor productions generated \$70M economic activity**
- **408 locals employed**

TRADE UNIT

The Trade Unit worked towards positioning Fiji as a regional hub for trade, investment, and digital growth through strengthened trade promotion, reforms, and international engagement despite COVID-19 and advanced digital economy, trade facilitation, and regional cooperation.

DEPARTMENT OF NATIONAL TRADE MEASUREMENT AND STANDARDS

Mandate and Role

- **Implement laws and regulations to protect consumers**
- **Promote fair and efficient trade**
- **Develop national and international standards for quality, safety, reliability**
- **Maintain national system of units and standards of measurement**
- **Regulate scrap metal trade to prevent illegal sale of public infrastructure**

**DEPARTMENT OF
NATIONAL TRADE
MEASUREMENT AND
STANDARDS**

Legislative Framework Review

- **Comprehensive review of Trade Standards and Quality Control Act 1992**
- **Stakeholder consultations completed**
- **Preparations for review of National and Trade Measurement Act 1989**
- **Governance arrangements established to initiate process**

**DEPARTMENT OF
NATIONAL TRADE
MEASUREMENT AND
STANDARDS**

Standards Development Project

New Requests (3):

- **Structural Design Actions: Wind Loads (AS/NZS 1170.2)**
- **Electrical Appliance Safety (IEC 60335)**
- **Gas Appliance Safety**

Ongoing Projects (8):

- **Wind loads for housing**
- **Sheet roof and wall cladding**
- **Reinforcing steel materials**
- **Energy performance labelling (refrigerators, televisions)**
- **Food guidelines, gold articles, fireworks labelling**

**DEPARTMENT OF
NATIONAL TRADE
MEASUREMENT AND
STANDARDS**

Published Guideline

Guidelines for Improving Building Safety and Resilience

- **Focus: single-storey houses and schools in rural Fiji**
- **Developed with World Bank Group**
- **Training held Sept 2019 with agencies and ministries**
- **Translated into Hindi and iTaukei by end of 2020**

Trade Metrology Achievements

Verification and certification of trade instruments

- **Enforcement under National and Trade Measurement Act 1989**

Revenue collected from:

- **Verification and certification of instruments**
- **Licensing traders to verify equipment**
- **Issuance of import licences (roofing coils, cyclonic screws)**

DEPARTMENT OF NATIONAL TRADE MEASUREMENT AND STANDARDS

Table 1: Certification of weighing and measuring instruments from Quarter 1 – Quarter 4 (2019-2020)

Divisional Office	No. of weighing and measuring instruments stamped				Total	No. of weights and measuring instruments rejected				Total
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	
Central/Eastern	537	220	251	427	1,435	0	0	0	0	0
Western	961	880	442	767	3,050	0	0	0	0	0
Northern	148	168	264	262	842	1	3	1	0	5
Total	1,646	1,268	957	1,456	5,327	1	3	1	0	5

DEPARTMENT OF NATIONAL TRADE MEASUREMENT AND STANDARDS

Table 2 below shows the traders visited by the trade measurement team from all the three divisions. The Western division visited the highest number of traders that is 852 while Central/Eastern visited 713 trader and the Northern division visited 435 traders.

Table 2: Traders Visited from Quarter 1 – Quarter 4 (2019-2020)

<i>Divisional Office</i>	<i>No. of Traders Visited</i>				<i>Total</i>
	<i>Q 1</i>	<i>Q 2</i>	<i>Q 3</i>	<i>Q 4</i>	<i>Total</i>
Central/Eastern	144	135	123	311	713
Western	71	296	221	264	852
Northern	84	115	100	136	435
Total	299	546	444	711	2,000

DEPARTMENT OF NATIONAL TRADE MEASUREMENT AND STANDARDS

Table 3 below shows the total revenue collected by the trade measurements team from all the three divisions. Western division collected the highest revenue that is \$ 395,319.89. The total revenue collected from Q1 – Q4 (2019-2020) is \$ 890,196.15.

Table 3: Revenue Collected from Quarter 1 – Quarter 4 (2019-2020)

Divisional Office	Revenue Collected Q1 – Q4 (2019 – 2020)				Total
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
Central/Eastern	\$ 166,323.46	\$ 96,754.05	\$ 50,522.82	\$ 80,644.10	\$ 394,244.43
Western	\$ 60,428.60	\$ 152,369.33	\$ 63,775.92	\$ 118,766.04	\$ 395,319.89
Northern	\$ 25,008.21	\$ 21,182.01	\$ 16,397.21	\$ 38,044.4	\$ 100,631.83
Total	\$ 251,760.27	\$ 270,305.39	\$ 130,695.95	\$ 237,454.56	\$ 890,196.15

DEPARTMENT OF NATIONAL TRADE MEASUREMENT AND STANDARDS

Table 1 below shows the number of instruments stamped or verified from 2020 August to 2021 July which was 4,458 instruments. There were no instruments rejected by the NTM team in the financial year 2020 – 2021.

Table 1: Certification of weighing and measuring instruments from Quarter 1 – Quarter 4 (2020-2021)

Divisional Office	No. of weighing and measuring instruments stamped				Total	No. of weights and measuring instruments rejected				Total
	Q 1	Q 2	Q 3	Q 4	Total	Q 1	Q 2	Q 3	Q 4	Total
Central/Eastern	605	558	170	17	1,350	0	0	0	0	0
Western	637	896	676	323	2,532	0	0	0	0	0
Northern	179	146	27	224	576	0	0	0	0	0
Total	1,421	1,600	873	564	4,458	0	0	0	0	0

DEPARTMENT OF NATIONAL TRADE MEASUREMENT AND STANDARDS

Table 2] below shows the traders visited by the trade measurement team from all the three divisions. The Western division visited the highest number of traders that is 706 while Central/Eastern visited 583 trader and the Northern division visited 338 traders.

Table 2: Traders Visited from Quarter 1 – Quarter 4 (2020-2021)

<i>Divisional Office</i>	<i>No. of Traders Visited</i>				<i>Total</i>
	<i>Q 1</i>	<i>Q 2</i>	<i>Q 3</i>	<i>Q 4</i>	<i>Total</i>
Central/Eastern	218	254	107	4	583
Western	227	96	361	22	706
Northern	79	96	47	116	338
Total	524	446	515	142	1,627

DEPARTMENT OF NATIONAL TRADE MEASUREMENT AND STANDARDS

Table 3 below shows the total revenue collected by the trade measurements team from all the three divisions. Central/Eastern division collected the highest revenue that is **\$ 451,814.68**. The total revenue collected from Q1 – Q4 (2020-2021) is **\$ 828,067.12**.

Table 3: Revenue Collected from Quarter 1 – Quarter 4 (2020-2021)

<i>Divisional Office</i>	<i>Revenue Collected Q1 – Q4 (2020 – 2021)</i>				<i>Total</i>
	<i>Q 1</i>	<i>Q 2</i>	<i>Q 3</i>	<i>Q 4</i>	
Central/Eastern	\$281,079.70	\$105,941.73	\$54,083.75	\$10,709.50	\$451,814.68
Western	\$79,274.66	\$87,370.95	\$82,394.77	\$62,595.74	\$311,636.12
Northern	\$26,906.72	\$9,530.18	\$3,650.47	\$24,528.95	\$64,616.32
Total	\$387,261.08	\$202,842.86	\$140,128.99	\$97,834.19	\$828,067.12

**DEPARTMENT OF
CO-OPERATIVE
BUSINESS**

Mandate and Role

- **Formulate policies and strategies for co-operative promotion**
- **Facilitate establishment and monitoring of co-operatives**
- **Support inclusive growth through women and youth leadership**

DEPARTMENT OF CO-OPERATIVE BUSINESS

Key Achievements

- 371 operating co-operatives by end of FY 2020 - 2021
- 62 new co-operatives registered (majority in agriculture sector; 4 women-led co-operatives)
- 235 jobs created through co-operative establishment
- 70 women and youth empowered in leadership roles
- 140 financial accounts received from operating co-operatives
- Asset base: \$127.5M | Revenue: \$16.3M (2019 – 2020)
- Asset base: \$147M | Revenue: \$18.9M | Net Profit: \$2.4M (2020 – 2021)

**DEPARTMENT OF
CO-OPERATIVE
BUSINESS**

Strategic Focus

- **Emphasis on recovery and growth post-COVID-19**
- **Focus on women, youth, and revival of non-operating co-operatives**
- **Strengthened co-operative movement across Fiji**

Major Milestone

- **Establishment of Co-operative Tribunal with Ministry of Justice**
- **Purpose of Tribunal**
 - **Resolve disputes for and among co-operatives**
 - **Strengthened governance and accountability within the sector**

**DEPARTMENT OF
CO-OPERATIVE
BUSINESS**

The Department of Co-operative Business during the reporting period reinforced co-operative sector resilience and inclusivity through expanding co-operatives, creation of jobs, empowerment of women and youth; and focused on recovery, growth, and institutional strengthening.

Mandate and Role

- **Central coordinating agency for MSME policy, support, and monitoring**
- **Established after repeal of Small & Micro Enterprises Development Act**
- **Functions:**
 - **Business training, advisory, and mentoring**
 - **Focus on access to finance and information**
 - **Monitoring & evaluation team to track beneficiaries**

Grant Programmes

- **Young Entrepreneurship Scheme (YES)**
- **National Export Strategy (NES)**
- **Integrated Human Resources Development Programme (IHRDP)**
- **Northern Development Programme (NDP)**

Young Entrepreneurship Scheme (YES)

FY 2019 – 2020

- \$130,000 disbursed
- Supported 10 youth-owned businesses
- New projects: CrossFit gym upgrade & “Pasifika Heartbeat” health app

FY 2020 – 2021

- Continued support to same 10 businesses
- Cumulative funding: \$222,000
- 27 jobs created, 44 livelihoods supported
- Completion of CrossFit facility & launch of health app

National Export Strategy (NES)

FY 2019 – 2020

- \$130,000 disbursed
- Supported 10 youth-owned businesses

FY 2020 – 2021

\$185,000 support for Lami Kava, Star Hospitality, South Pacific

Coffee

**Expanded kava sourcing, coffee processing, and sublimation
uniform orders**

Intergrated Human Resources Development Programme (IHRDP)

FY 2019 – 2020

- Funded equipment for 3 community projects (Lomaiviti, Lautoka, Kadavu)
- \$15,000 second-phase funding for 4 communities
- Managed contributions via IHRDP Trust Account

FY 2020 – 2021

108 EOIs received (value \$10.9M)

6 projects approved, \$229,352 disbursed from \$300,000 allocation

Supported start-up and expansion of income-generating activities

Northern Development Programme (NDP)

FY 2019 – 2020

- **Assisted 24 enterprises with \$200,000**
- **All recipients trained before grants**
- **77 monitoring visits conducted**

FY 2020 – 2021

99% of \$500,000 budget used

Supported 76 projects

Created 228 jobs, supported 1,140 livelihoods

Since 2008, 2,440 projects supported, \$24.4M in grant-loan packages

MSME Fiji

The MSME Fiji Unit during the reporting period strengthened MSME ecosystem through training, mentoring, and financial support; delivered targeted programmes addressing access to finance and market opportunities; supported youth, communities, and exporters despite COVID-19 challenges; and contributed to job creation, livelihoods, and inclusive economic growth.

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORT

Mandate and Role

The Department of Transport is responsible for the provision of an enabling framework to ensure efficient and affordable land and maritime transportation systems by using the two modes of transport under our Ministerial portfolio. The key focus is to provide appropriate policy advice and regulatory framework required to create an investor friendly environment and satisfy the travelling needs of the community. This is to facilitate, promote and support trade and tourism, through transportation of goods and people.

The Department Government Shipping Services promotes and addresses the need for safe and affordable sea transportation systems that enhance economic growth in the Maritime sector. The provision of market accessibility to the maritime communities through reliable shipping services further contributes to growing our national economy. Through the provision of Government's shipping and marine aid to navigational services, Fiji also continues to meet its obligations to the maritime community and comply with international maritime conventions. The Department also provides a quick response and support services during and after any natural disasters.

Key Achievements

Reforms of Land Transport Act

Maritime Transport Act

Maritime Travellers Rights

Road Safety Decade Plan

ITS Policy development

Sustainable Initiatives

Implemented SUTI with UNESCAP

Advanced Pacific Blue Shipping Partnership (PBSP).

COVID – 19 Response

Adopted COVID-Safe Framework

LTA/MSAF recovery frameworks

Issued safety protocols for PSVs, maritime travel, and cargo

Government Shipping Services

Adopted COVID-Safe Framework

MV Veivueti and crew were part of COVID-19 Medical Operations

Over 260 subsidised trips; \$1.539M paid to operators supporting uneconomical routes.



Complaints and Oversight

Improved responsiveness – 8 complaints (2019–20) and 27 (2020–21).

Strengthened monitoring of LTA/MSAF.

Corporate Services Division

Mandate and Role

The Corporate Services Division (CSD) provides the essential internal support functions that enable the Ministry to operate efficiently. It acts as the administrative backbone of the organisation.

Corporate Services Division

Staff Establishment

FY 2019 – 2020

- Establishment: 451 | Positions Filled: 337 | Vacant: 114
- Gender: 223 Male, 104 Female
- Salaried: 253 | GWE: 184

FY 2020 – 2021

- Establishment: 330 | Positions Filled: 318 | Vacant: 12
- Gender: 221 Male, 97 Female
- Salaried: 197 | GWE: 133

Corporate Services Division

Staff Movement

FY 2019 – 2020

- Appointments: 61
- Promotions: 13
- Resignations: 25
- Retirement: 3
- Expiry of Contract: 2

FY 2020 – 2021

- Appointments: 35
- Resignations: 9
 - Deemed Resignations: 1
- Retirement: 8
- Expiry of Contract: 19
 - Posting: 2

**Corporate
Services
Division**

Staff Development

FY 2019 – 2020

**Local Training - 47
Overseas Training - 7
Study Leave with Pay - 7**

FY 2019 – 2020

**Local Training - 97
Overseas Training - 70
Study Leave with Pay - 2**

Corporate Services Division

Internal HR Policies

Energy Management Policy

Social Media Policy

Discipline Manual

Human Resources Manual

Staff Grievance Policy

COVID-19 Policy and Vaccine Directive Circular

Fleet Management

FY 2019 – 2020

- **State Owned Vehicles: 7**
- **Lease Vehicles: 21**

FY 2020 – 2021

- **State Owned Vehicles: 7**
- **Lease Vehicles: 25**

Corporate Services Division

Staff Recognition and Awards

Awards presented:

- Employee of the Month
- Customer Service Award
- Leadership Award
- Employee of the Year
- Best Performing Unit

2020–2021 Special Team Award:

Government Shipping Services (COVID-19 and disaster operations)

Corporate Services Division

Corporate Social Responsibility

Donation of ration packs to Age Care Homes (Suva)

Visit to CWM Hospital Oncology Ward (linen & refreshments)

Visit and donation to SPCA

Corporate Services Division

Health and Wellness

Promoted healthy living and wellbeing

Awareness programmes conducted

Physical activities encouraged for staff

Corporate Services Division

The Corporate Services Division during the report period:

Strengthened HR policies and staff development initiatives

Recognized staff contributions through awards and CSR activities

Enhanced fleet management and wellness support

Continued focus on resilience and workforce empowerment.



Vinaka

Q & A

Additional Information

Guiding questions for review of the Ministry of Commerce, Trade, Tourism and Transport 2019 - 2020 and 2020 - 2021 Annual Reports

A. Governance, Leadership and Strategic Direction

1. How does the Ministry ensure coherence and coordination across its four portfolios—commerce, trade, tourism and transport?

The Ministry of Commerce, Trade, Tourism and Transport ensured coherence by aligning all portfolios with the Government's National Strategic Plan, focusing on sustainable, resilient economic growth. Key strategies included integrating MSME development across all sectors, leveraging the bizFiji portal to streamline regulations, and fostering public-private partnerships to align policies with tourism and trade needs.

The Ministry had further aligned all departmental plans with the overarching national economic development goals.

The Ministry had strengthened partnerships to actively work with public and private sector stakeholders, including Financial Service Providers and development partners.

The Ministry provided support for local Industry by promoting "Fijian Made" and "Fijian Grown" products through coordinated marketing campaigns and export strategies that linked local manufacturers with the tourism sector.

2. What were the Ministry's top three priorities during the reporting period, and were they achieved?

The Ministry of Commerce, Trade, Tourism and Transport prioritized support for Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs); enhancing trade through international, regional, and bilateral agreements and growing the tourism industry. The COVID-19 pandemic had severely impacted these priorities which halted international tourism, though recovery efforts began in late 2021.

The Ministry has largely achieved support for MSME's through provision of relief packages, grants, and training to help businesses survive the pandemic's impact.

Trade enhancement initiatives were partially achieved. Trade enhancement initiatives could not be achieved in full as the Pandemic had severely affected shipping disruptions, but the Ministry continued to facilitate, and in some cases, increase trade in essential goods (like food) and agricultural products.

The plans for growth of the tourism industry could not be achieved due to the COVID19 pandemic. Closure of international borders in 2020, had a significant impact on the economy. However, the

Ministry was able to establish the *CareFiji Commitment* (CFC) to safely reopen the Tourism industry, which successfully initiated the recovery of the sector by late 2021.

3. How does the Ministry measure success beyond outputs, particularly in terms of economic and social impact?

The Ministry measures success beyond outputs by focusing on sustainable and inclusive outcomes, The Ministry uses digital tools like the bizFiji portal to track ease of doing business and by the reduction in administrative barriers for businesses, aiming to shift regulatory agencies from a "control" to a "facilitation" mindset.

Success is also measured by the growth of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) through improved access to finance, infrastructure, and digital tools, focusing on rural and remote areas to ensure equitable economic participation.

4. What mechanisms are in place to ensure accountability of statutory bodies and agencies under the Ministry?

The Ministry ensures accountability for statutory bodies under the Ministry through mandatory annual audits by the Office of the Auditor-General, strict adherence to the Public Finance Management Act, and oversight from the Ministry's Finance Unit to maintain transparency in reporting and accountability for their operational and financial activities.

B. Commerce and MSME Development

The Ministry of Commerce, Trade, Tourism and Transport which is now known as the Ministry of Commerce and Business Development is responsible for the formulation and policy development to grow MSME in Fiji. This also includes grant programmes and business training.

In the two annual reports, the Unit has outlined the tangible results through MSME assistance programmes such as the Young Entrepreneurship Scheme (YES), National Export Strategy (NES), Integrated Human Resources Development Programme (IHRDP) and Northern Development Programme (NDP). These initiatives have created jobs, boosted exports and enhanced livelihoods across Fiji.

1. What concrete outcomes have resulted from Government assistance programmes for micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs)?

In the 2019/2020 and 2020/2021 financial year, the Ministry has invested over **\$840,000 and \$33 million** respectively to MSMEs in Fiji. The \$33 million includes the MSME Concessional Loan that was administered by the Ministry whereas the disbursement of funds was carried out by the Ministry of Finance to the Fiji Revenue and Customs Services.

The MSME programmes generated concrete impacts, including 27 jobs from YES which supports approximately 44 livelihoods, 228 jobs and 1,140 livelihoods from NDP's 76 projects, and

equipment upgrades for exporters under NES enabling market expansion such as Lami Kava supporting more farmers. The IHRDP disbursed \$229,352 to 6 communal projects, while co-operatives created 108 jobs with 56 women/youth in leadership.

2. How does the Ministry ensure MSME support reaches rural and maritime communities?

The Ministry targets rural and maritime areas through the NDP (76 Northern Division projects), IHRDP such as Lovu Co-operative, Nabonu Land Purchase, and Government Shipping Services delivering to remote islands like Yasawa, Lau, and Lomaiviti.

Additionally, Co-operative registrations (42 new, many agriculture-linked) and a total of 102 standardised roadside stalls further extend support to grassroot communities.

3. What measures are in place to monitor and evaluate the sustainability of funded MSME projects?

The MSME Fiji Unit was established in late 2019, which also saw the formation of a dedicated Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) team. Through internal development and resource support, this team was tasked with visiting and verifying business activities funded under the Unit's grant programmes to assess their viability. The requirement for monitoring was also stipulated in the grant agreements signed between the Ministry and grant recipients. To date, the Ministry has conducted 77 site visits under the NDP.

4. How has the Ministry addressed barriers faced by women-led and youth-led businesses?

From the period between 2016/2017 to 2018/2019 financial years, the YES funded 10 youth entrepreneurs, with the value of over \$200,000.

Furthermore, the co-operatives registered 4 women-led groups, placed 56 women/youth in leadership, and trained 593 (53% women).

The NDP and IHRDP prioritize communal/rural youth/women projects such as Veidrala Youth Fishing Co-operative.

5. What lessons were learned from COVID-19 MSME support initiatives, and how are these informing future programmes?

- Under the oversight of the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry led the operational rollout of the Concessional Loan Package for Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs). Business Assistance Fiji—comprising Women in Business, the Fiji Commerce and Employers Federation, the Fiji Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and the Fiji Institute of Chartered Accountants—served as the formal partner responsible for the assessment and approval of applications.
- The Ministry is pleased to provide a snapshot of the Programme's impact. Of the 9,152 applications received, a total of 6,093 recipients were approved, collectively receiving \$32,634,531 in financial support.

- The Concessional Loan Programme specifically targeted individuals who lost their jobs during the COVID-19 pandemic—particularly within the tourism sector—and turned to entrepreneurship. It offered them the opportunity to establish businesses that utilised their technical skills and experience. Existing business owners also benefited by diversifying their operations. For instance, one tailor successfully expanded her business from producing garments to designing and retailing face masks.
- The Programme demonstrated strong potential to enhance the trade and technical capabilities of MSMEs. Building on this success, the Trade Enhancement Programme (TEP) was subsequently established to further strengthen business growth and skills development opportunities.
- Several key learnings emerged from the administration of the Concessional Loan Programme, notably the challenge of manually processing over 9,000 applications. In response, the Ministry enhanced delivery mechanisms under the TEP, achieving several important outcomes:
 - **Empowering women entrepreneurs:** 72% of TEP recipients are women, advancing Sustainable Development Goal 5 (Gender Equality) by helping bridge the financial access gap for women in business.
 - **Digital innovation:** The application process is now fully online, requiring only five mandatory documents. Since its inception, 6,507 applications have been received, reflecting greater digital participation and reduced resistance to online platforms.
 - **Sectoral focus:** 34% of supported businesses operate within the Food and Beverage sector, including local juice stands, home-based caterers, and small food vendors—highlighting the Programme’s contribution to grassroots economic activity.
 - **Positive results:** Monitoring data indicates an impressive 82% project success rate under TEP. Collectively, these projects have generated approximately 520 jobs, with beneficiaries earning an average annual income of around \$16,000.

C. Trade, Investment and Market Access

1. How has the Ministry supported exporters to access regional and international markets?

The Ministry’s support to exporters during the 2019–2020 and 2020–2021 financial years must be viewed in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, which significantly disrupted global supply chains, restricted international travel, and limited the ability to conduct in-person trade and investment missions.

The Ministry has supported exporters access to regional and international markets through a combination of policy, financial, facilitation, trade and investment promotion events, and targeted capacity-building measures. During the 2019-2020 financial year, the Ministry provided grant assistance to two exporters, Ace Kava and Vanua Chocolate and during the 2020–2021 financial year, through the National Export Strategy (NES) programme, assisted exporters like Lami Kava, Star Hospitality Limited, and South Pacific Coffee Company. The assistance enabled these exporters to expand production capacity, improve operational efficiency, and strengthen their ability to meet export market requirements.

Outside the COVID-19 period, the Ministry routinely supports exporters through the organisation and facilitation of trade and investment missions, buyer–seller meetings, and participation in international trade fairs. In previous years, these activities have included trade and investment missions to Australia, New Zealand, China, and other key markets, as well as coordinated participation in regional and international expos and business forums aimed at promoting Fijian goods and services and establishing commercial linkages.

In addition, the Ministry's export promotion efforts are complemented by the work of Fiji's Trade Commissions, which play a critical frontline role in supporting market access. Trade Commissions assist exporters by:

- identifying market opportunities and potential buyers;
- providing market intelligence and regulatory information;
- facilitating business-to-business linkages and commercial introductions; • supporting incoming and outgoing trade and investment missions; and
- promoting Fiji as a competitive trade and investment destination.

Recognising the growing importance of digital trade, particularly during COVID-19, the Ministry also undertook the National E-Commerce Fiji Assessment Report in 2019-2020. The purpose of this assessment was to evaluate Fiji's e-commerce ecosystem, identify policy, regulatory, infrastructure, and capacity gaps, and assess how digital trade and online platforms could better enable MSMEs and exporters to access overseas markets. The findings of the assessment informed the development of the National E-Commerce Strategy 2025–2029, which aims to expand export opportunities through cross-border e-commerce, digital payments, and improved logistics.

In addition, the Ministry continued work on trade facilitation reforms, including coordination through the National Trade Facilitation Committee, engagement with border agencies, and implementation of Fiji's trade agreements to improve market access conditions for exporters. The Ministry also engaged with exporters and industry stakeholders to address regulatory, logistical, and compliance-related challenges affecting export performance.

2. What progress has been made in improving trade facilitation and reducing regulatory burdens?

Progress in improving trade facilitation and reducing regulatory burdens during the 2019–2020 and 2020–2021 financial years was undertaken in a challenging environment, as both periods coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic, which significantly disrupted border operations, supply chains, and normal regulatory processes. The Ministry worked closely with border and regulatory agencies to support **continuity of trade**, including facilitating policy coordination on essential goods, export processes, and operational flexibility where possible. This included engagement with stakeholders to address emerging regulatory and logistical challenges faced by exporters and importers during border restrictions.

To support continuity of trade during movement restrictions, the Ministry worked closely with the Ministry of Health and Medical Services and other relevant agencies to facilitate the issuance of COVID-19 movement and operational passes for businesses involved in logistics, manufacturing, and export-related activities. This enabled exporters, transport operators, and essential service providers to continue operating and moving goods during lockdowns, thereby reducing disruption to supply chains and regulatory delay

Recognising the growing importance of digital trade facilitation, the Ministry also undertook the National E-Commerce Fiji Assessment Report during this period. The assessment evaluated Fiji's legal, regulatory, institutional, and infrastructure framework for e-commerce, with a focus on identifying gaps that increase regulatory and compliance burdens for businesses engaging in cross-border trade.

While large-scale system reforms such as the National Trade Portal and National Single Window were initiated more fully in subsequent years, the 2019–2021 period laid important groundwork through institutional coordination, regulatory review, and digital readiness assessments.

3. How does the Ministry balance trade liberalisation with protection of local industries?

The Ministry balances trade liberalisation with the protection and development of local industries through a sequenced, evidence-based, and consultative approach to trade policy. While Fiji pursues trade liberalisation through regional and international trade agreements to secure market access for exporters, the Ministry ensures that these agreements include appropriate flexibilities and safeguards. This includes the use of gradual tariff reduction schedules, exclusions for sensitive products, and special and differential treatment provisions for developing and small island economies, allowing local industries time to adjust and build competitiveness.

Where necessary, the Ministry also supports the application of standards, SPS, and technical regulations to protect consumers, human, animal, and plant health, while ensuring these measures are not more trade-restrictive than required.

4. What role does the Ministry play in negotiating and implementing trade agreements, and how is Parliament kept informed?

The Ministry plays a central role in both the negotiation and implementation of Fiji's trade agreements. In relation to negotiations, the Ministry leads and coordinates Fiji's participation in

bilateral, regional, and multilateral trade negotiations. This includes developing negotiating mandates, undertaking technical and economic analysis, coordinating positions across government agencies, and consulting with the private sector and other stakeholders to ensure that national interests and development priorities are reflected. Throughout the negotiation process, the Ministry provides regular submissions to Cabinet, including on negotiating objectives, progress, emerging issues, and proposed outcomes and approval for signing. Following the signing of a trade agreement, the Ministry submits the treaty for Parliamentary approval for ratification. The Ministry supports this process by providing the necessary legal analysis, explanatory notes, and implementation information to Cabinet and Parliament. Only after Parliament approves ratification does Fiji proceed to deposit its instrument of ratification with the relevant depository, enabling the agreement to enter into force for Fiji in accordance with its terms.

With respect to implementation, the Ministry coordinates the domestic processes required to give effect to trade agreements once ratified. This includes overseeing legal and regulatory reviews, coordinating implementation across relevant ministries and agencies, participating in agreement-specific committees and institutional mechanisms, and monitoring compliance with Fiji's commitments. Cabinet continues to be kept informed of implementation progress and any policy or legislative actions required.

5. How does the Ministry assess whether trade policies are delivering tangible benefits to ordinary Fijians?

The Ministry assesses whether trade policies are delivering tangible benefits to ordinary Fijians through a combination of performance monitoring, stakeholder feedback, public consultations, institutional evaluation frameworks, and alignment with national development objectives. The Ministry collaborates with partners such as Fiji Revenue and Customs Service and private-sector associations through structures like the National Trade Facilitation Committee (NTFC). A concrete example of this is conducting of regular Time Release Study (TRS), which measures the time taken to release goods at the border. The TRS is a globally recognised diagnostic tool endorsed by the World Customs Organization and World Trade Organization Trade Facilitation Agreement to assess trade facilitation performance. It tracks the number of days and hours taken for consignments to clear customs and other regulatory agencies from arrival to release, helping identify bottlenecks in border procedures and quantify time-related trade costs. Progress reported by the NTFC, including simplified border procedures, risk-based controls, and coordinated border management, is used to assess whether trade processes are becoming faster, cheaper, and more predictable for traders, benefits that ultimately flow through to producers, suppliers, and consumers.

D. Tourism Development and Recovery

1. What strategies are in place to diversify Fiji's tourism markets and products?

- During the period under review, 2019-2020 and 2020-2021, much of the Department's focus was on minimising and recovering from the impacts of COVID-19.

Appendices - Consolidated Review Report on the Ministry of Commerce, Trade, Tourism and Transport 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 annual reports.

- However, efforts were made to diversify Fiji's tourism markets and products.
- In terms of diversification, the Ministry focused on a few areas:
 - **Cruise Tourism:** In partnership with the International Finance Corporation (IFC), the Department of Tourism commissioned a report estimating that increased investment in attracting cruise tourism could contribute an additional US\$43.98 million to Fiji's economy over the next decade.
 - **Vanua Levu Tourism Development:** The Department utilized the findings of the IFC's Vanua Levu Tourism Market Demand Assessment to help design what is now the Vanua Levu Tourism Development Programme.
 - **Long-Haul Markets & Industry Partnerships:** Under the Fijian COVID Safe Economic Recovery Framework, significant effort was placed on expanding market reach, specifically targeting the US market in addition to traditional markets like Australia and New Zealand. The Department consistently collaborated with industry partners on initiatives, including Luxury Tourism and the Blue Lanes.
 - **Heritage Tourism Scoping:** The Department, alongside partners such as Tour Managers, the Department of Heritage and Arts, and the Lomaiviti Provincial Council, conducted a tourism scoping exercise in preparation for the Back to Levuka Week Programme. This involved visiting three districts (Nasinu, Lovoni, and Bureta) and the New Hebrides community in Levuka, Ovalau. The primary goal of this exercise was to identify cultural and heritage assets suitable for tourism purposes.

2. How is the Ministry supporting community-based and small tourism operators?

a) Community Engagement and Market Linkage:

- **Community Awareness:** Community awareness activities were conducted in areas like Yasawas and Serua, focusing on community product development.
- **Industry Connection:** Participation in events such as the HOTEK Trade Show aimed to strengthen the connection between local farmers and the tourism industry.

b) Capacity Building and Business Support:

- **Chefs Training:** In collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture, the Department led four Chefs Training sessions. These sessions engaged 80 chefs across four regions (Yasawa, Coral Coast, Rakiraki, and Savusavu).

The primary goal was to equip smaller tourism businesses to incorporate more local produce into their menus, thereby offering long-term support to local farmers and producers.

- **Access to Finance:** The Department also partnered with the Department of Co-operative and MSME Fiji to utilize their access to finance programs for the benefit of local stakeholders.

3. What measures ensure tourism growth is environmentally and socially sustainable?

- As part of our strategic approach to develop a successor Fiji Tourism Plan grounded with the principles of environment and social sustainability, we partnered with the Global Green Growth Institute, to support the development of a Sustainable Tourism Framework for Fiji.
- The Department partnered with the Australian Volunteers International (AVI) on the Child Safe Tourism Stakeholders workshop – bringing together key stakeholders of the tourism sector to identify the role of tourism operators in keeping children and communities safe. The workshop dialogue focused on interaction and impact tourism activities have on children through tourism activities and minimise negative impact of tourism on children and communities.
- In parallel, the Department also commenced work on a Code of Conduct for Tourism Operators. The Code of Conduct sets voluntary service standards, ethical business practices, and respect for local culture and environment. It requires operators to ensure safety, promote child-safe tourism, provide honest information, and engage responsibly with host communities.

4. How does the Ministry coordinate tourism recovery efforts with other agencies and the private sector?

Strategic Frameworks and Coordination Mechanisms:

- *Fijian COVID Safe Economic Recovery Framework:* This framework was established following the global lockdown. It outlines a three-phase approach focused on stopping the importation of COVID-19, ensuring health system readiness, and breaking transmission chains, while simultaneously enabling safe economic activity.
- *COVID-19 Risk Mitigation Taskforce (CRMT):* Endorsed by the Cabinet, the CRMT was formed to implement, manage, and mitigate risks across the framework's phases. It was chaired by the Permanent Secretary for Finance and included the Permanent Secretaries for Health and Medical Services, and Commerce, Trade, Tourism and Transport, with secretarial support from the Ministry. The CRMT actively assessed applications for the Blue Lanes initiative, Specific Requests under Significant Economic Value, and cases involving Fijian Citizens, Permanent Residents, and Other Permit Holders. It also explored options for safely reopening Fijian borders to drive economic recovery.

- *Tourism Recovery Team (TRT)*: Chaired by the Permanent Secretary for Commerce, Trade, Tourism and Transport, the TRT brought together representatives from key industry stakeholders such as Tourism Fiji, the Fiji Hotel and Tourism Association, Fiji Airways, the Reserve Bank of Fiji, the Society of Fiji Travel Associates, and the Ministry of Health and Medical Services. Initially focused on information sharing, compliance with government mandates, and visitor repatriation, the group was later formalized to offer strategic and visionary guidance for the long-term viability of the tourism industry.
- *Tourism Talanoa*: As part of the Ministry's ongoing efforts to strengthen public-private partnership in Fiji's recovery efforts, a Talanoa Forum was held with the aim to address immediate concerns faced by the industry amidst the pandemic and the aspirations of the 2021-2022 National Budget. A major element that underpins all of these opportunities is the Industry's preparedness and ability to maintain capacity as well as competitiveness to re-enter the market in a Covid safe manner.

Operational and Marketing Initiatives:

- *COVID Business Survey*: To inform targeted support, a survey of business owners and managers was conducted. This aimed to gauge the pandemic's impact, understand how businesses were adapting, identify resources they had accessed, and determine additional short-term and recovery support needed.
- *'Love Our Locals' Campaign*: Launched by the Ministry and championed by Tourism Fiji, this domestic tourism initiative was part of stage two of the market re-entry strategy. It encouraged Fijians to holiday at home and support local restaurants, tour operators, and hotels, thereby sustaining businesses, employment, and practicing the "new normal."
- *COVID Safe Operations: Guidelines for the Fiji Tourism Industry*: Complementing the Economic Recovery Framework, which set entry and operational parameters, these guidelines were developed by the Ministry. They are designed to guide tourism businesses in the new operating reality, restore confidence in the Fijian brand, and promote compliance within the industry.
- *Care Fiji Commitment (CFC)*: Developed in consultation with the tourism industry and endorsed by the CRMT and the Ministry of Health and Medical Services, Tourism Fiji launched the CFC as part of Fiji's market re-entry strategy. The CFC serves as Fiji's destination-wide assurance regarding the health and safety of visitors.
 - It establishes a consistent communication platform for demonstrating Fiji's health and safety credentials and COVID-19 management protocols to both local and international visitors.
 - It emphasizes restoring confidence through security protocols designed to reduce risks across every step of the tourism value chain.
 - In February 2021, the CFC was recognized by the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC), a global Travel and Tourism body, and was awarded the 'Safe Travels' stamp. This recognition increases confidence for international travelers and is intended to ensure a seamless travel experience as border restrictions ease. Awareness and advocacy for the CFC were further driven through targeted roadshows.

5. How are tourism policies aligned with employment creation, particularly for youth and women?

- Fiji recognizes tourism as a highly labour-intensive sector with significant multiplier effects across various industries, including transport, agriculture, construction, and services. The nation's tourism policies reflect this recognition.
- Policy priorities have focused on broadening tourism beyond traditional resorts to incorporate community-based tourism, agritourism, and cultural enterprises. Initiatives were also undertaken to encourage women and youth to participate in the sector through community awareness.
- In line with the United Nations World Tourism Organisation's (UNWTO) 2019 theme of 'Tourism and Jobs: a better future for all,' the Ministry celebrated World Tourism Day (WTD) by partnering with the University of the South Pacific's School of Tourism and Hospitality Management (STHM) for their annual Careers Fair. This event successfully engaged 99 students (62 graduating and 37 interns) and 42 industry representatives.
- To support the recovery and revitalization of the Fijian tourism workforce, the Ministry collaborated with the UNWTO and Victoria University to conduct a rapid Human Resource Needs Assessment. This assessment provides baseline data on the opportunities and barriers affecting both the demand and supply sides of the workforce.
- Crucially, the Assessment offers recommendations, including options and scenarios for human resources development, framed within the context of COVID-19 tourism recovery. The Assessment is a key deliverable of the Fijian Tourism 2021 plan and aligns with Fiji's commitment to the UN Sustainable Development Goals.
- Furthermore, Fiji was awarded five scholarships through the UNWTO for the Tourism Industry Management online course. Ministry staff members and two University of the South Pacific tourism students were among the successful recipients. The six-month course enabled participants to deepen their knowledge of tourism industry management and provided future tourism students with essential insights into the sector's current and future challenges.

E. Transport and Connectivity (Land, Maritime and Aviation)

1. How does the Ministry ensure affordable, safe and reliable transport services, particularly to outer islands and remote areas?

The Ministry ensures affordability, safety and reliability through a mix of **route planning, targeted support to priority routes, safety regulation, and service monitoring** across land and maritime transport.

Appendices - Consolidated Review Report on the Ministry of Commerce, Trade, Tourism and Transport 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 annual reports.

Maritime (Outer Islands Connectivity)

- The Ministry is progressing the **Sea Route Licensing (SRL)** framework to secure reliable services on priority routes, including the following routes already identified for consideration:
 - Route 1: Natovi/ Savusavu/ Natovi
 - Route 2: Suva/ Koro/ Suva
 - Route 3: Suva/ Vunisea/ Kavala/ Suva
 - Route 4: Suva/ Savusavu/ Suva
 - Route 5: Buresala/ Natovi/ Nabouwalu/ Natovi/ Buresala
 - Route 6: Natovi/ Nabouwalu/ Natovi
 - Route 7: Natovi/ Levuka/ Natovi
 - Route 8: Natovi/ Savusavu/ Taveuni/ Savusavu/ Natovi
 - Route 9: Natovi/ Koro/ Natovi
 - Route 10: Natovi/ Savusavu/ Lautoka
 - Route 11: Taveuni/ Natuvu/ Taveuni
 - Route 12: Suva/ Koro/ Savusavu/ Suva
 - Route 13: Ellington/ Natovi/ Nabouwalu/ Ellington
- The Department of Transport, in collaboration with **MSAF**, is finalising route definitions and service requirements (e.g., minimum service frequency, safety and compliance requirements), after which **a tender will be called**, with consideration given to existing operators currently servicing these routes.
- For **uneconomical routes**, the Ministry is undertaking **desktop analysis** to review and strengthen the **Government Shipping Franchise Scheme (GSFS)** to maintain essential services for remote communities.

Land (Remote/Rural Access)

- Reliability and affordability are supported through planning and coordination with key delivery agencies to improve **road access, safety interventions, and public transport service continuity**, particularly where rural access affects health, education and markets.
- Safe transport systems through the re-establishing the National Road Safety Council (NRSC) and also through amending the Land transport regulations to ensure that the drug test are prescriptive for enforcement purposes.

2. What criteria are used to determine transport subsidies, and how is value for money assessed?

Transport subsidies are determined using a transparent assessment of **service necessity, route viability, cost structure, and community benefit**, with value for money assessed through performance and compliance monitoring.

Key criteria used

- **Route economics** (passenger and freight demand, distance, frequency, seasonality, load factors).

- **Operator cost structure**, including:
 - **Direct costs:** fuel, crew costs, maintenance and spare parts, port/wharf charges, insurance, compliance costs.
 - **Indirect costs:** administration, financing costs, overheads, contingency, depreciation.
- **Service standards** required (minimum schedule, reliability targets, safety compliance, customer service expectations).
- **Affordability considerations** (fare levels, freight rates, and impact on remote communities).

How value for money is assessed

- Use of **contract/tender conditions** tied to service delivery outputs (frequency, reliability, safety compliance).
- **Verification mechanisms**, such as statistical report submission by vessel operators and on-shore confirmation submission by the Shipping Franchise Observers (SFO)
- Assessment of **cost per service outcome** (e.g., cost per sailing/, cost per passenger movement, cost per tonne of freight moved).
- **Compliance and performance consequences**, through the performance score calculation

3. How does the Ministry monitor the safety performance of transport operators?

Safety monitoring is undertaken through the relevant regulators and strengthened by Ministry policy oversight and inter-agency coordination.

Maritime

- **MSAF** monitors maritime operator safety through:
 - vessel surveys and inspections;
 - certification and compliance checks (including operational and crew requirements);
 - audits where applicable and enforcement actions for non-compliance;
 - incident reporting and investigation processes, including corrective action follow-up.

Land

- **LTA** monitors land transport operator safety through:
 - vehicle fitness and roadworthiness controls;

- licensing and operator compliance requirements for public service vehicles and commercial operators; ○ enforcement support mechanisms and compliance monitoring;
- review of crash/fatality trends to target habitual offenders and high-risk behaviours.

Ministry-level coordination

- The Ministry supports an integrated approach by coordinating: ○ information sharing between regulators and stakeholders; ○ policy directives and reforms to strengthen compliance; ○ targeted programmes addressing high-risk corridors and operator performance issues.
- We have just completed our National Transport Infrastructure Consultative Forum.

4. What progress has been made in improving maritime and land transport infrastructure?

The Ministry continues to progress infrastructure improvements through coordinated planning, prioritisation, and project delivery with relevant agencies and partners.

Maritime/Ports and Jetties

- Ongoing work to strengthen maritime connectivity includes initiatives to improve port/jetty functionality, safety, and service reliability, particularly for routes serving outer islands and remote communities.
- Safety and operational requirements are incorporated into route and service planning under SRL and GSFS, ensuring infrastructure upgrades align with service delivery needs.

Land Transport

- Continued focus on improving road access, safety measures, and efficiency, including upgrades and interventions that support rural connectivity, freight movement, and access to essential services.
- Integration of road safety considerations into planning and investment prioritisation, including targeted interventions based on data trends.

5. How is climate resilience integrated into transport planning and development?

Climate resilience is integrated through **risk-informed planning, resilient design standards, and prioritisation of investments** that reduce vulnerability to floods, cyclones, coastal hazards and landslips.

Key approaches include:

- **Climate and disaster risk screening** at planning stage (hazard mapping, vulnerability assessment, and criticality of links/routes).
- **Resilient engineering and design standards**, including improved drainage, slope stabilisation, erosion control, and strengthened coastal/riverine protection measures where relevant.
- **Asset management and maintenance planning** to protect critical links and maintain service continuity after extreme events.
- Alignment with national priorities under **Fiji's National Development Plan 2025–2029 and Vision 2050**, including resilience and sustainability objectives.
- Where appropriate, mainstreaming low-emission and energy-efficient options alongside resilience measures (e.g., operational efficiency, technology upgrades, and future-proofing infrastructure).

F. Regulatory Oversight and Safety

1. How effective is the Ministry's oversight of regulatory bodies such as LTA and MSAF?

The Ministry's oversight is exercised through **policy direction, governance and accountability mechanisms**, and structured coordination.

Key oversight mechanisms include:

- **Ministerial and Permanent Secretary policy direction**, including priorities for safety, affordability, and service reliability.
- **Monitoring of corporate plans, annual reporting, and performance targets**, ensuring alignment with national transport objectives.
- **Governance arrangements** (including Board-level accountability frameworks as applicable) and inter-agency coordination platforms to resolve cross-cutting implementation issues.
- **Regulatory reform and continuous improvement**, where the Ministry progresses amendments and policy updates to strengthen compliance and service outcomes.

2. Are there capacity constraints affecting enforcement of transport and maritime safety standards?

Yes—capacity constraints can affect enforcement effectiveness, particularly where demand increases and standards evolve.

Common constraints include:

- **Specialised technical capacity** (inspectors/surveyors, investigators, safety auditors, and enforcement officers).
- **Resources and logistics**, including inspection coverage for remote maritime routes and outer islands.
- **Data and systems**, including the need for stronger integrated digital systems for compliance monitoring and incident trend analysis.
- **Training and retention**, especially for highly specialised maritime and safety roles.

Mitigation actions include:

- targeted **capacity-building and training programmes**;
- the need to increase budget allocations for our enforcement
- strengthened **inter-agency coordination** and operational planning;
- progressing **regulatory and process improvements** to modernise enforcement approaches.

3. How does the Ministry respond to safety incidents and ensure corrective action is taken?

The Ministry responds through established regulatory processes led by the competent authorities, supported by coordination and follow-up to ensure accountability.

Key steps include:

- **Immediate response and stabilization**, including notification protocols and coordination with relevant responders as required.
- **Investigation and reporting** led by the responsible regulator (MSAF for maritime, LTA for land), including evidence collection and root-cause analysis.
- **Corrective actions**, such as compliance notices, operational restrictions (where necessary), training requirements, maintenance directives, or enforcement action.
- **Follow-up monitoring** to confirm that corrective measures are implemented and sustained.
- Use of incident trends to inform **policy updates, targeted enforcement, and safety campaigns**.

4. What reforms are planned to strengthen regulatory compliance and public safety?

Planned reforms focus on strengthening the regulatory system through **modernised frameworks, clearer compliance requirements, stronger monitoring, and improved enforcement tools**.

Key reform directions include:

- **Finalisation and rollout of Sea Route Licensing (SRL)** to secure reliable services with clear minimum service and compliance requirements.
- Strengthening the **Government Shipping Franchise Scheme (GSFS)** for uneconomical but essential routes.
- Continued **review and update of legislation, regulations and SOPs** to close enforcement gaps, strengthen penalties where appropriate, and improve compliance clarity.
- Enhanced **data-driven safety management**, including stronger incident trend analysis and information-sharing between agencies.
- Re-establishment of the National Road Safety Council and re-enactment of the repealed NRSC Act
- Capacity strengthening through targeted training, operational resourcing, and process modernisation to improve inspection and enforcement coverage.
- Increased focus on **habitual/high-risk offenders** (land transport) while ensuring implementation does not unfairly impact compliant operators and drivers with clean records.

G. Financial Management and Value for Money

1. Were there any significant budget variances, and what explains them?

There were **significant but well-explained budget variances**, primarily driven by **COVID-19 disruptions, policy decisions, and operational efficiencies**, rather than weaknesses in financial management.

Key variances include:

- **Operating Grants and Transfers** decreased by **\$5.84 million (43%)**, largely because:
 - The budget for the **Fijian Competition and Consumer Commission** was transferred to Head 13 (Independent Commissions);
 - **Tourism Fiji** did not receive its fourth-quarter marketing grant due to sufficient savings; and
 - Reduced activities across agencies during COVID-19.
- **Special Expenditure** declined by **47%**, as many planned activities—such as trade missions, workshops, international meetings, tourism forums, and cooperative events—were cancelled or deferred due to travel restrictions and social distancing requirements.
- **Capital Grants and Transfers** decreased by **65%**, following the removal or reduction of major initiatives including the Super Rugby hosting programme, MSME central coordination, Special Economic Zones, and youth and microbusiness schemes.

- **Capital Construction** increased by **\$206,628**, reflecting the reclassification and implementation of the **standardised roadside stall programme**, which was previously funded under capital grants.

2. How does the Ministry prioritise funding across its diverse responsibilities?

The Ministry allocates funding based on national policy objectives, legal requirements, and the expected impact on society, while staying flexible to respond to new challenges

Funding decisions are guided by:

- **Alignment with national** priorities:

Funding is directed towards:

- MSME and cooperative development
- Trade facilitation and consumer protection
- Tourism recovery and standards enforcement
- Employment and livelihood programmes (e.g. IHRDP)

- **Agency performance and savings consideration:**

Grants are adjusted where agencies demonstrate sufficient reserves/savings or reduced operational needs, especially during fiscal constraints brought on by COVID-19.

During the 2019–2020 financial year, resources were redirected toward **essential services, regulatory functions, and recovery-focused interventions**, while non-critical or travel-dependent programmes were scaled back.

3. What steps are taken to ensure public funds allocated to grants and subsidies are properly accounted for?

The Ministry applies **multiple layers of financial control and accountability** to ensure that grants and subsidies are properly managed.

These include:

- **Appropriation controls** - ensuring all expenditures remain within approved budget lines;
- **Formal grant agreements** with implementing agencies and grant recipients, outlining permitted use and reporting requirements;
- **Staged releases of funds** that is linked to performance, cash-flow needs and acquittal based;

- **Monitoring through financial acquittals** - Agencies and/or grant recipients are required to submit bank reconciliations, financial KPI achievements, programme reporting and copies of receipts/invoices/delivery notes; and
- **Audit oversight** which includes annual audits by the Office of the Auditor General.

The decision to **withhold or partially release grants** when agencies have sufficient savings from previous quarter, demonstrates prudent financial management and responsiveness to agency savings and reduced activity levels.

4. How does the Ministry address audit findings and strengthen internal controls?

The Ministry takes audit findings seriously and acts promptly to address them.

The Ministry received an **unqualified audit opinion** for both the financial years, confirming compliance with the Financial Management Act 2004 and Finance Instructions. As such no material misstatements, fraud, or losses of public funds were reported.

To strengthen internal controls, the Ministry:

- Regularly reviews financial procedures and compliance with Ministry's Finance Manual;
- Implements **segregation of duties**, approval hierarchies, and reconciliation processes;
- Enhances capacity building and on job training within the finance unit and programme units; and
- Works closely with the Ministry of Finance and the Office of Auditor-General to continuously improve governance and accountability.

H. Human Resources and Institutional Capacity

1. Are there critical staffing shortages affecting service delivery?

The Ministry in 2019 and early 2020 had faced constraints attracting and retaining suitable candidates for critical roles within the Economic Unit, Tourism Unit and Department of National Trade Measurement and Standards.

The Ministry also had to attract suitable candidates for MSME Fiji critical roles which had to be created upon the transition of NCSMED and NDP to the Ministry.

The staffing shortage did have some impact on service delivery, however, by late 2020, the staffing shortage issue was pretty much resolved.

2. How does the Ministry build technical expertise across commerce, tourism and transport sectors?

The Ministry has always supported capacity building opportunities for the workforce. The Ministry has been grateful for the international training opportunities that are available through ITEC, JICA, KOICA and Singapore Co-operation and APO.

Locally the Ministry has used local institutes like the University of the South Pacific, Fiji National University and APTC offered short courses to enhance the knowledge and skills of the workforce.

The staff of the Ministry are also given exposure to relevant local, regional and international seminars, meetings and workshops as a means of capacity building.

3. What steps are being taken to improve gender balance, particularly in leadership and technical roles?

The Ministry supports and is committed to workforce diversity.

The Executives of the Ministry have always provided support and guidance towards emerging women leaders and there is no bias against working mothers to ensure that support is always available for work-life balance.

The Ministry has transparent processes for recruitment and promotion to ensure that women have equal opportunities for advancement. The Ministry is also committed to cultivating an inclusive culture that values diversity.

4. How does staff turnover impact continuity and institutional memory?

In any organisation, high staff turnover severely disrupts work continuity and drains institutional memory, creating significant operational, financial, and strategic risks. The Ministry has gone through this phase too. When employees left, they took with them to some extent institutional knowledge which was not documented or recorded. There is also a threat put on the work culture of the Ministry when long serving employees leave and “new blood” comes in as replacement.

To address these issues the Ministry ensures a proper handing over to be carried out by departing employees and information sharing to ensure knowledge remains within the Ministry.

New recruits are provided on-the-job training with coaching and mentoring from their immediate supervisors and Directors to ensure that they are able to efficiently fit into the role and organisation within a short time frame of approximately 3 to 6 months.

I. Stakeholder Engagement and Public Accountability

1. How does the Ministry engage with the private sector, unions, communities and civil society?

The Ministry engages with stakeholders through targeted consultations, collaborative workshops, and strategic partnerships, primarily focusing on policy formulation, MSME development, and

tourism growth. Key methods include public-private dialogues, industry-specific consultations (e.g., with FCEF), community awareness workshops, and utilizing the National Trade Facilitation Committee (NTFC) for trade policy input.

2. What mechanisms exist for receiving and acting on public complaints or feedback?

The Ministry uses a variety of, often concurrent, channels to ensure accessibility for all community members, including marginalized groups through digital channels (online submission of forms on websites, dedicated email addresses, and social media platforms), telephone hotlines, and "open door" policy.

For in person feedback, the Ministry provides feedback/suggestion boxes in public spaces, monitoring visits and awareness sessions.

The Ministry also has a Standard Operating Procedure in place for dealing with complaints whereby upon receipt of the complaint, it is registered, assigned to an officer, investigated and resolved before the complainant is updated within at least 5 days before the case can be closed.

3. How does the Ministry ensure transparency in decision-making, particularly around grants and licences?

The Ministry ensures transparency in decision-making, grants, and licenses by digitizing processes, using public-private panels for evaluation, and creating centralized, accessible platforms.

4. How are stakeholders informed of policy changes and regulatory requirements?

The Ministry ensures that stakeholders are informed of policy changes and regulatory requirements through a combination of targeted, multi-channel communications, digital compliance management tools, and formal training programs designed to ensure transparency and accountability. Effective communication often involves tailoring messages to specific audiences such as providing high-level summaries for executives and detailed, actionable guidelines for operational teams.

J. Future Priorities and Risks

1. What are the Ministry's key priorities for the next financial year?

Given the current portfolio assignment, for the next financial year, Ministry of Commerce and Business Development is prioritizing the diversification of the economic base, further strengthening of MSMEs (Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises), enhancing trade through new market access for "Fijian Made" products, and driving digital transformation via the National E-commerce Strategy. Key focus areas also include cooperative revitalization, consumer protection, and improving the ease of doing business through policy reforms.

2. What risks could significantly affect the Ministry's ability to deliver its mandate?

Based on 2025–2026 strategic reports and operational plans, the Ministry of Commerce and Business Development faces several significant risks to its mandate of enhancing economic diversification, improving the ease of doing business, and fostering MSME growth.

Some of the key risks include:

- **Complex Regulatory Environment** - High compliance costs, burdensome licensing, and unclear policies limit MSME growth and discourage formalization.
- **Infrastructure Deficits** - Inadequate high-speed internet, electricity, and expensive transport logistics inhibit business efficiency, particularly for rural and maritime enterprises.
- **Skills Shortages and Turnover** - A lack of specialized skills and high staff turnover makes it difficult to manage and implement long-term strategic projects.
- **Digital Transformation Vulnerabilities** - As the Ministry shifts to digital platforms for MSME support (e.g., P2P lending platforms, e-commerce strategies), the risks of cybersecurity breaches and lack of digital literacy among users increase.
- **Climate-Driven Disasters**: High vulnerability to natural disasters (cyclones, floods) causes direct damage to infrastructure and interrupts supply chains.
- **Impact on Primary Sectors** - The climate crisis directly threatens the agricultural sector, which is crucial for MSME revenue.

3. How prepared is the Ministry to respond to economic shocks or future crises?

To counteract the risks above and in preparation for future economic crisis, the Ministry is implementing the Access to Business Funding Act to reduce reliance on traditional bank financing; MSME Strategic Plan 2025–2030 for better data-driven support; and Peer-to-Peer (P2P) lending platform to ease credit access.

Site Visitation –
[12 February 2026]

Images Taken During the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence Site Visitation to the Ministry of Commerce, Trade Tourism and Transport Head Office Suva on Thursday 12 February 2026.

The Committee conducted a site visitation on 12 February 2026 to complement its consideration of the Annual Reports. While the Annual Reports provide a consolidated overview of institutional performance, the visitation enabled the Committee to gain deeper insight into matters not always fully reflected in written submissions. In particular, the visit allowed the Committee to verify and contextualise reported information, identify operational and capacity challenges, assess staff workload and morale, and gather first-hand evidence to support realistic, practical, and evidence-based recommendations to Parliament.

Committee with the Executive Team of the Ministry at Parliament after the Public Submission



Committee Members with staff of the Ministry discussing issues and challenges



