



STANDING COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND DEFENCE

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



PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI
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ACRONYMS

AVI	Australian Volunteers International
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations
GGGI	Global Green Growth Institute
IFC	International Finance Corporation
MCTTT	Ministry of Commerce, Trade, Tourism and Transport
MSME	Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises
UNESCAP	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
UNWTO	United Nations World Tourism Organisation

CHAIRPERSON'S FOREWORD

On behalf of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence, I am pleased to present this report on the review of the Ministry of Commerce, Trade, Tourism and Transport Annual Reports for the financial years 2019–2020 and 2020–2021.

The period under review was one of the most challenging in Fiji's recent economic history. The COVID-19 pandemic significantly disrupted tourism, trade flows, transport services, employment, and business confidence. These shocks placed substantial pressure on Government institutions to respond quickly, protect livelihoods, and position the economy for recovery. It is within this context that the Committee assessed the Ministry's performance, strategic direction, and use of public resources.

The Committee found that the Ministry played an important cross-cutting role in supporting national resilience. Through its oversight of trade, tourism, transport, micro, small and medium enterprises (MSME) development, co-operatives, standards, and investment facilitation, the Ministry was central to maintaining economic activity during a period of uncertainty. Its support programmes for MSMEs, concessional financing initiatives, domestic tourism campaigns, and policy reforms demonstrated an ability to adapt priorities in response to changing national needs.

The Committee also observed that the Ministry's broad mandate created opportunities for coordinated policy responses, particularly where commerce, mobility, investment, and enterprise development intersected. This integrated approach was valuable during the recovery phase, enabling collaboration across sectors that are often administered separately. However, the Committee notes that broad mandates also require strong institutional coordination, clear performance measures, and sufficient technical capacity to ensure effective delivery.

While notable progress was achieved, the review identified several structural constraints that may limit long-term outcomes if left unresolved. These include staffing shortages, turnover in key technical areas, limited monitoring and evaluation of support programmes, infrastructure and digital system pressures, and delays in implementation of some externally supported initiatives. The Committee considers that these challenges are not unique to the Ministry, but they require deliberate management attention if policy gains are to be sustained.

The Committee's site visit on the 12th of February 2026 highlighted practical operational issues affecting staff productivity and service delivery, including unsatisfactory office conditions and the need to modernise systems within the co-operative sector. In particular, the absence of a proper co-operative registry and limited decentralised services indicate areas where administrative reform could significantly improve accessibility and efficiency.

The Committee also notes positively the Ministry's alignment with broader sustainable development objectives. Programmes supporting entrepreneurship, women and youth participation, climate-

responsive tourism, transport accessibility, and strategic partnerships demonstrate that economic policy can advance both growth and social outcomes when designed inclusively.

Since the reporting period, the Ministry has undergone several structural changes, culminating in the establishment of the Ministry of Commerce and Business Development on the 3rd of November 2025. The Committee views this transition as an opportunity to sharpen institutional focus, modernise service delivery, and strengthen support for domestic enterprise, investment, and business growth.

The findings of this report are therefore intended not only as a retrospective review, but as a forward-looking contribution to public administration and economic governance. The Committee trusts that the observations contained herein will assist the Ministry to build stronger systems, improve accountability, and better serve the people of Fiji.

I extend the Committee's appreciation to the Ministry officials and all stakeholders who assisted in this review process through their submissions, evidence, and cooperation. I also extend my appreciation to the Members of the Committee for compiling this bipartisan report.

On behalf of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence, I submit this report to Parliament.



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Hon. Lenora QEREQERETABUA
Chairperson

1.0 Committee Remit and Composition

Under Standing Order 109(2)(e) the Committee is mandated to investigate matters related to Fiji's relations with other countries, development aid, foreign direct investment, oversight of the military, and relations with multi-lateral organisations. The members of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence are as follows:



Hon. Lenora Qereqeretabua
Chairperson
*Deputy Speaker of Parliament Assistant
Minister for Foreign Affairs*



Hon. Rinesh Sharma
Deputy Chairperson



Hon. Ratu Isikeli Tuiwailevu
Member
Assistant Minister for iTaukei Affairs, Heritage and Arts



Hon. Penioni Ravunawa
Member
Assistant Minister for Health and Medical Services



Hon. Virendra Lal
Member



Hon. Taito Rokomatu
Member

1.1 Committee Secretariat Team

The Committee is supported by Parliament officers serving as the Committee Secretariat. These officers are appointed and delegated by the Secretary-General to Parliament by Standing Order 15(3)(i). The Secretariat officers are as follows:

- Ms. Tirisiane Logavatu – Senior Committee Clerk
- Mrs. Katie Batikawai – Acting Deputy Committee Clerk

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2.0 Background and Terms of Reference

2.1 Presentation of the Annual Report

- 2.1.1 The Speaker of Parliament, on 29 September 2025, referred the Ministry of Commerce, Trade, Tourism and Transport (MCTTT) 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 annual reports to the Committee for review. The referral was made pursuant to Standing Order 38(2), which mandates that all annual reports tabled in Parliament be referred to the relevant Standing Committee for examination and report back to Parliament.
- 2.1.2 The Committee is responsible for reviewing matters concerning Fiji's international relations, development assistance, foreign direct investment, national security oversight, and engagement with multilateral organisations.
- 2.1.3 The MCTTT annual reports falls outside the Committee's mandate, but the referral was made to assist in balancing the distribution of workload among the Standing Committees of Parliament.
- 2.1.4 The Committee notes that the Ministry (MCTTT) was restructured and renamed as the Ministry of Trade, Co-operatives, Small and Medium Enterprises and Communications under the 2023–2024 Budget. Realigned responsibilities include trade, exports, foreign investment, trade policy, and the promotion of a conducive business environment, in addition to oversight of MSME and co-operative development, telecommunications services, and the Government's ICT network and infrastructure. Consequently, the tourism portfolio was separated and moved to a new ministry, namely the Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation.
- 2.1.5 The Committee further notes that, following the Government restructuring announced on the 3rd of November 2025, external trade functions were transferred to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, while responsibilities for cooperatives, investment, MSMEs, domestic trade, national trade measurement and standards, and business development were assigned to the newly established Ministry of Commerce and Business Development.

2.2 Procedure and Program

Public Submission

- 2.2.1 In relation to Standing Order 111(1), the Committee is committed to upholding public trust in Parliament, by ensuring that there is public participation and that all such participation is given due consideration. The current Ministry of Commerce and Business Development representatives appeared before the Committee at a public hearing in Suva on 12 February 2026. The public submission was broadcast live on the Parliament Facebook page and aired on the Walesi Parliament Channel.
- 2.2.2 A summary of the submission is provided in a later part of this report, under the heading 'Committee's Deliberation and Analysis'. Copies of the written submission can be obtained from the online Appendices of the report, which can be accessed from the Parliament website: www.parliament.gov.fj

Site Visit

2.2.3 As part of its review of the MCTTT annual reports, the Committee undertook a site visit to the Ministry's headquarters in Suva following the public submission held on 12 February 2026. The purpose of the visit was to observe the Ministry's operational arrangements, gain a clearer understanding of its programmes and processes, and assess the adequacy of its facilities and available resources.

3.0 Committee Deliberations and Analysis

3.1 Introduction

- 3.1.1 This report presents a consolidated summary and analysis of the MCTTT annual reports for the financial years 2019-2020 and 2020-2021. It highlights the Committee findings, which include key achievements and challenges, and provides recommendations for improvement to support the Ministry's operations.
- 3.1.2 The MCTTT formulates and implements policies and strategies to facilitate growth in industry, investment, trade, tourism, co-operative businesses, transport, micro small and medium enterprises; and enhance metrology, standards and consumer protection.
- 3.1.3 These roles and responsibilities are undertaken by the Economic Unit, Tourism Unit, Department of National Trade Measurement and Standards, Department of Co-operative Business, MSME Fiji, Transport Unit, Government Shipping Services and Corporate Services Division, within the Ministry, including Trade Commissions in New Zealand, North America, China and Australia. The Ministry supports seven (7) statutory organisations namely Consumer Council of Fiji, Investment Fiji, Film Fiji, Tourism Fiji, Real Estate Agents Licensing Board, Land Transport Authority and Maritime Safety Authority of Fiji.

3.2 Committee Findings

The Committee findings are outlined below:

- 3.2.1 The Committee finds that the Ministry maintained overall policy coherence across its portfolios by aligning programmes with national development priorities and strengthening public–private partnerships to support economic growth.
- 3.2.2 The Committee notes that despite significant disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ministry demonstrated resilience and adaptability through continued service delivery, relief measures, and the implementation of recovery frameworks.
- 3.2.3 The Committee acknowledges the Ministry’s substantial investment in Micro, Small and Medium Enterprise (MSME) development, including the provision of grants, concessional loans, and capacity-building initiatives, which contributed to job creation, sustained business activity, and increased economic participation, particularly among women and in rural and maritime communities.
- 3.2.4 The Committee recognises targeted initiatives such as the Trade Enhancement Programme and the Fijian Made – Buy Fijian Campaign, which promoted local production, increased digital uptake, and supported entrepreneurship and market access.
- 3.2.5 The Committee notes that while monitoring and evaluation mechanisms for MSME programmes have improved, further strengthening is required to effectively assess long-term sustainability and impact.
- 3.2.6 The Committee acknowledges the Ministry’s efforts in trade facilitation and export development, including strengthening international trade relations and advancing digital and e-commerce initiatives to enhance market access for local businesses.
- 3.2.7 The Committee finds that tourism recovery was appropriately prioritised through the development and implementation of coordinated frameworks, including phased border reopening strategies, health protocols, and domestic tourism campaigns.
- 3.2.8 The Committee notes ongoing efforts to diversify tourism products and support community-based tourism; however, the full impact of these initiatives remains dependent on sustained recovery and market conditions.
- 3.2.9 The Committee observed that the Ministry has taken steps to improve transport accessibility, safety, and affordability, particularly for remote and maritime communities, through regulatory frameworks, subsidies, and infrastructure planning. However, capacity constraints in enforcement remain a concern.

- 3.2.10 The Committee finds that financial management practices were generally sound, with appropriate internal controls, audit compliance, and prudent resource management during the reporting period.
- 3.2.11 The Committee notes ongoing human resource challenges, including staff shortages and turnover, which have affected institutional capacity and service delivery, despite measures taken to address these gaps.
- 3.2.12 The Committee acknowledges the Ministry's efforts to strengthen stakeholder engagement, transparency, and public accountability through consultations, digital platforms, and structured feedback mechanisms.
- 3.2.13 Notwithstanding these achievements, the Committee identifies key challenges, including regulatory complexity, infrastructure limitations, skills shortages, digital vulnerabilities, and climate-related risks, which may impact the Ministry's future performance.
- 3.2.14 The Committee further notes gaps in support for certain sectors during the reporting period, particularly tourism-related MSMEs, as well as concerns regarding high commercial rental costs and the absence of regulatory mechanisms addressing commercial tenancy.
- 3.2.15 The Committee highlights issues relating to consumer protection enforcement, including gaps in redress mechanisms and concerns regarding product labelling and the quality of imported goods.
- 3.2.16 The Committee observes challenges in the utilisation of Government-supported infrastructure, such as roadside stalls, and emphasises the need for improved planning, monitoring, and management.
- 3.2.17 The Committee acknowledges efforts to strengthen the cooperative sector, including the establishment of the Cooperative Tribunal and initiatives to promote inclusivity for women and youth, while noting the need for broader inclusion across all groups.
- 3.2.18 The Committee appreciates the Ministry's efforts in advancing legislative and policy reforms, including the Investment Act 2021, which was passed in June 2021 replacing the Foreign Investment Act 1999. Furthermore, the Competition and Consumer Protection Policy was aimed at improving the business and regulatory environment.
- 3.2.19 Overall, the Committee finds that while the Ministry delivered important outcomes under challenging circumstances, there remains a need for strengthened institutional capacity, enhanced monitoring and evaluation systems, and more targeted policy interventions to support sustainable and inclusive economic development.

3.3 Site visit summary

- 3.3.1 During its site visit to the Ministry of Commerce and Business Development office on the 12th of February 2026, the Committee observed that some air-conditioning units were malfunctioning. The Committee further noted that this issue has persisted for some time without any effective remedial action being taken.
- 3.3.2 The Committee also found that several operational and structural challenges affected service delivery. These included ongoing building maintenance issues, delays in repairs by landlords, and limited workspace capacity impacting productivity. The Committee also noted the need to decentralise services to improve accessibility for rural and remote communities. Furthermore, the Committee noted the need for the establishment of a proper registry for Co-operatives for effective monitoring and evaluation.
- 3.3.3 Human resource concerns were also raised, including challenges in recruiting qualified personnel, the need for continuous specialised training, and workload pressures on frontline officers.
- 3.3.4 The Committee noted challenges in monitoring and mentoring grant recipients, limited follow-up support after grants are disbursed, and misconceptions among beneficiaries that assistance ends once funding is received. Concerns were also raised regarding gaps in internal coordination, which can create confusion about eligibility for further support from development partners.
- 3.3.5 The Committee noted that annual reports alone do not fully capture operational realities, demonstrating the importance of on-site engagement. Infrastructure constraints, limited-service decentralisation, insufficient post-grant support, human resource shortages, and internal coordination issues continue to affect the Ministry's effectiveness.

4.0 Recommendations

The Committee made the following recommendations for the Ministry:

- 4.1 The Committee recommends that the Ministry strengthens its risk management and crisis preparedness frameworks, including the development of comprehensive contingency plans and scenario-based strategies to enhance resilience against future economic shocks. (*reference 3.2.2, 3.2.7*)
- 4.2 The Committee recommends that the Ministry establish and implement a robust monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework for all MSME support programmes, including clear performance indicators, post-assistance tracking, and impact assessments to ensure accountability and value for money. (*reference 3.2.5, 3.2.18*)
- 4.3 The Committee recommends that the Ministry integrate initiatives such as the Fijian Made – Buy Fijian Campaign into a broader industrial development and export strategy, with a focus on improving product standards, competitiveness, and access to regional and international markets. (*reference 3.2.4, 3.2.6*)
- 4.4 The Committee recommends that the Ministry develop a comprehensive long-term tourism strategy that prioritises resilience, market diversification, product innovation, and sustainable tourism development to mitigate vulnerability to external shocks. (*reference 3.2.7, 3.2.8, 3.2.14*)
- 4.5 The Committee recommends that the Ministry accelerates the implementation of trade and digital initiatives, including e-commerce platforms, by strengthening technical capacity, improving stakeholder awareness, and addressing barriers to adoption among MSMEs. (*reference 3.2.6*)
- 4.6 The Committee recommends that the Ministry ensures timely implementation and enforcement of legislative, data-driven decision-making and policy reforms, supported by adequate resourcing, stakeholder engagement, and public awareness to maximise policy effectiveness. (*reference 3.2.12, 3.2.18*)
- 4.7 The Committee recommends that the Ministry strengthens consumer protection enforcement mechanisms, including enhanced compliance monitoring, improved product quality control, and more accessible and efficient redress systems. (*reference 3.2.15*)
- 4.8 The Committee recommends that the Ministry improves planning, utilisation, and monitoring of Government-supported infrastructure projects, including conducting needs assessments and regular performance reviews to ensure optimal use and value for public investment. (*reference 3.2.16*)

- 4.9 The Committee recommends that the Ministry develops and implements a comprehensive human resource strategy to address staffing shortages, reduce turnover, and build specialised technical capacity, particularly in regulatory and enforcement roles. (*reference 3.2.11, 3.3.5*)
- 4.10 The Committee recommends that the Ministry strengthens support for the cooperative sector through targeted programmes, governance training, and inclusive policies to expand participation across all demographic groups. (*reference 3.2.17*)
- 4.11 The Committee recommends that the Ministry ensures more targeted and equitable allocation of support to vulnerable sectors, particularly tourism-related MSMEs, during periods of economic disruption. (*3.2.3, 3.2.5, 3.2.14*)
- 4.12 The Committee recommends that the Ministry, in collaboration with relevant stakeholders, explores policy and regulatory options to address commercial rental challenges, including mechanisms to promote fair and sustainable leasing practices for businesses. (*reference 3.2.14*)

5.0 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

5.1 The Committee notes that the MCTTT has undertaken several programmes and policy initiatives that align with the SDGs. While the reports do not always expressly identify each SDG, the Ministry's activities demonstrate significant contributions toward economic resilience, inclusive growth, gender equality, sustainable transport, climate action, and partnerships.

5.2 SDG 8 – Decent Work and Economic Growth

The Ministry's strongest contribution is toward SDG 8 through support for MSMEs, trade facilitation, tourism recovery, and employment generation. During the 2020–2021 financial year, the Northern Development Programme utilised 99 percent of its allocated budget and supported 76 projects, creating 228 jobs in the informal sector and benefiting 1,140 livelihoods.

Similarly, investment facilitation through Fiji Trade Commissions in Australia and New Zealand generated proposed investments of \$36.6 million and 206 new jobs. These initiatives indicate that the Ministry played an important role in stimulating employment and economic recovery, particularly during the COVID-19 period.

5.3 SDG 9 – Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure

The Committee observed that the Ministry advanced business reforms and innovation through digitisation and investment promotion. The bizFIJI online platform was enhanced to streamline business registration, licensing, taxation information, and investor services.

The reports also note support for infrastructure development, transport networks, and investment in the Navutu Special Economic Zone, intended to diversify Fiji's economy and strengthen productive capacity. These reforms contribute positively toward building resilient infrastructure and promoting sustainable industrialisation.

5.4 SDG 5 – Gender Equality

The Ministry demonstrated commitment to gender inclusion through programmes targeting women in co-operatives, agriculture, and maritime sectors. The Department of Co-operative Business focused on recovery and growth of co-operatives with emphasis on women and youth participation.

The 2019–2020 report also highlighted World Maritime Day celebrations under the theme “Empowering Women in the Maritime Community,” recognising female achievements in maritime industries. While these initiatives are commendable, the workforce gender breakdown in 2019–2020 showed women represented only 31 percent of staff compared to 69 percent male staff, indicating room for improvement in internal gender balance.

5.5 **SDG 11 – Sustainable Cities and Communities**

The Committee notes the Ministry's efforts toward sustainable transport systems through the Sustainable Urban Transport Index (SUTI), developed with UNESCAP to track city transport performance against SDG Target 11.2. However, the reports state that Fiji lost related funding after required timelines were not met. This highlights weaknesses in project coordination and timely execution, which may hinder progress toward sustainable urban mobility objectives.

5.6 **SDG 13 – Climate Action**

The Ministry contributed to climate-responsive development through sustainable tourism and maritime decarbonisation initiatives. In partnership with the Global Green Growth Institute, the Ministry committed to developing a Sustainable Tourism Framework for Fiji, aimed at supporting a green COVID-19 recovery.

The Pacific Blue Shipping Partnership was also advanced as a national commitment to decarbonisation and sustainable maritime transport. These initiatives demonstrate alignment between economic policy and environmental sustainability.

5.7 **SDG 17 – Partnerships for the Goals**

The Committee notes that many achievements were made possible through collaboration with international and regional partners including UNWTO, UNESCAP, IFC, GGGI, AVI, FAO, and the Australian Government. Such partnerships have strengthened technical capacity, tourism recovery planning, business development, and access to training opportunities.

6.0 Conclusion

The Committee concludes that the Ministry of Commerce, Trade, Tourism and Transport achieved key outcomes during the 2019–2020 and 2020–2021 period despite significant disruptions from the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly in trade facilitation, tourism recovery, transport continuity, MSME support, investment promotion, and consumer protection.

The Committee notes the Ministry's demonstrated resilience through targeted interventions such as MSME assistance, concessional financing, domestic tourism initiatives, digital service delivery, and policy reforms, which supported business continuity and economic recovery.

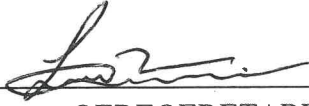
The Committee further acknowledges the Ministry's alignment with the SDGs, particularly in relation to economic growth, innovation, gender inclusion, climate action, sustainable transport, and strategic partnerships.

However, the Committee identified ongoing challenges including staffing shortages, technical capacity constraints, weak monitoring and evaluation systems, infrastructure limitations, regulatory inefficiencies, and gaps in consumer protection. The Committee also highlighted operational issues observed during the site visit, including inadequate office facilities and the need for a modernised and decentralised co-operative office.

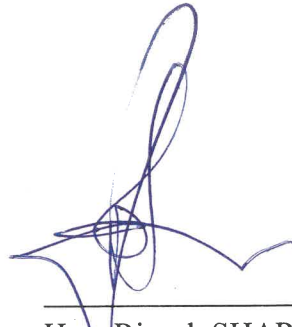
The Committee notes the recent Government restructuring and establishment of the Ministry of Commerce and Business Development as an opportunity to strengthen institutional focus, improve efficiency, and enhance service delivery.

Overall, while progress was achieved under difficult circumstances, the Committee emphasises the need for strengthened capacity, improved implementation systems, and continued reforms to support sustainable and inclusive economic growth.

7.0 Committee Members' Signatures



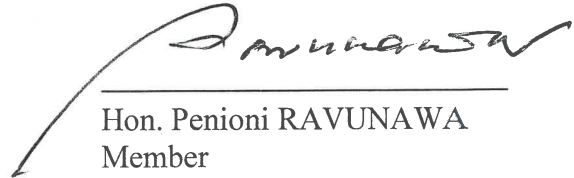
Hon. Lenora QEREQERETABUA
Chairperson



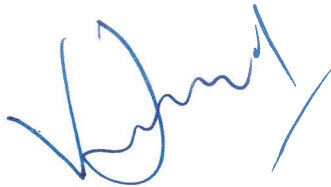
Hon. Rinesh SHARMA
Deputy Chairperson



Hon. Isikeli TUIWAILEVU
Member



Hon. Penioni RAVUNAWA
Member



Hon. Virendra LAL
Member



Hon. Taito ROKOMATU
Member

8.0 Annexure

Published evidence

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

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