

PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI



PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DAILY HANSARD

FRIDAY, 10TH FEBRUARY, 2017

[CORRECTED COPY]

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FRIDAY, 10TH FEBRUARY, 2017

The Parliament met at 9.30 a.m. pursuant to adjournment.

HONOURABLE SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

PRESENT

All Honourable Members were present, except the Honourable M.D. Bultavu.

MINUTES

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

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Thursday, 9th February, 2017 as previously circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed.

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- Madam Speaker, I second the motion.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE CHAIR

Welcome

HON. SPEAKER.- I welcome all Honourable Members to the final day of the February sitting of Parliament. I wish to welcome members of the public joining us in the gallery and those watching proceedings on television and the internet and also listening to the radio. Thank you for taking interest in your Parliament.

Delay – Daily Hansard

For the information of Honourable Members, due to the prolonged sitting last night, the *Daily Hansard* Report for yesterday will be delayed today and will be circulated as soon as it is finalised. Thank you.

QUESTIONS

Oral Questions

Consultation on the *Qoliqoli*
(Question No. 43/2017)

HON. S.D. KARAVAKI asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Fisheries explain why Ministerial officials are conducting consultation on the *Qoliqoli* and are referring to “*Qoliqoli* Owners” as “*Vakatawa ni Qoliqoli*”?

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Minister for Fisheries, you have the floor.

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU (Minister for Fisheries).- Thank you, Madam Speaker and I thank the Honourable Karavaki for the question. It is basically the interpretation that they give on the fishing right owners.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Do you have any supplementary question? Honourable Ratu Sela Nanovo.

HON. RATU S.V. NANOVO.- Supplementary question, Madam Speaker. I thank the Honourable Minister for the explanation given. However, I have a question for him. Can the Honourable Minister advise this august House whether NLC Officers, who know all the boundaries of the *qoliqoli* in Fiji are also part of this team and if not, why?

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Minister.

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Madam Speaker, I thank the Honourable Member for his question. The consultation is basically on the fishing fees, licence fees, and it does not need the *iTaukei* Affairs to be involved. It is just the stages of licensing that needs to be instituted. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Ro Kiniviliame Kiliraki, you have the floor.

HON. RATU K. KILIRAKI.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. With reference to the interpretation as "*Vakatawa ni Qoliqoli*", what is the position in terms of the *iTaukei*, knowing that they are the *iTaukei ni Qoliqoli*. Can the Honourable Minister please define those two positions in common understanding? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Minister.

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Madam Speaker, the *iTaukei*, they are the rightful fishing right owners.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Semesa Karavaki.

HON. S.D. KARAVAKI.- Madam Speaker, can the Honourable Minister explain, if they are the *Vakatawa ni Qoliqoli*, then who is the owner of the *qoliqoli*?

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Madam Speaker, I think it is quite clear that the State owns and the rights is to the *itaukei ni qoliqoli* right owners.

(Inaudible interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now give the floor to Honourable Ratu Kiniviliame Kiliraki to ask his question.

Sustainable Mahogany Industry Licence
(Question. 44/2017)

HON. RATU K. KILIRAKI asked Government notice:

Can the Honourable Attorney-General, Minister for Economy, Public Enterprises, Civil Service and Communications advise the House as to whether Sustainable Mahogany Industry (SMI) still has a Mahogany Licence?

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Attorney-General, Minister for Economy, Public Enterprises, Civil Service and Communications, you have the floor.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM (Attorney-General, Minister for Economy, Public Enterprises, Civil Service and Communications).- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am glad this question has been restructured. The answer is no.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Ro Kiliraki.

HON. RATU K. KILIRAKI.- A supplementary question, Madam Speaker. SMI has the exclusive licences for Grade I with Pacific Western holding about 70,000 cubic metres, exclusive licence for Grades I and II. If SMI does not have the licences now, what is the position in terms of the harvesting of the Grades I and II, if there is no licence?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Attorney-General.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- First, he has got the structure of the SMI wrong and secondly, obviously new licences will be an issue.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Dulakiverata.

HON. J. DULAKIVERATA.- Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Grades I and II mahogany used to be processed by the Fiji Hardwood in Waivunu Sawmill in Galoa. When the licence was given to SMI, SMI is now closed, and there is no licence being issued. Now Waivunu has been closed with millions of dollars' worth of equipment rusting up there, will this licence be given back to Fiji Hardwood Corporation Limited? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Can you repeat the question?

HON. J. DULAKIVERATA.- Will this licence, which has been taken off SMI be given back to Fiji Hardwood so that they can use the Waivunu Sawmill again?

HON. SPEAKER.- The Honourable Attorney-General.

HON. J. DULAKIVERATA.- Fiji Hardwood.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Member again has got it wrong. You see the problem with them when they talk about mahogany, they are all whipped up and they tend to cast away facts. It is all very highly politicised. Waivunu, as he should know, if he is going to ask a question was in fact a dodgy deal from the beginning.

When Fiji Hardwood Corporation Limited bought that mill from someone else, an Australian company, they paid a lot more than the market price and in fact the blades there were crooked. If he

wanted to cut a 20mm, he probably would have to cut about 30mm because the fact of the matter is that, it was crooked; he never could get a straight line. That was the problem with Waivunu, he should know that, Honourable Leawere should also know that.

The fact of the matter is, Madam Speaker, that Grades I and II licences were not taken off Sustainable Mahogany Industries Limited, they did not want it renewed and Grades I and II which were not used, temporary licences were given to three companies; Bua Mahogany, Dayal Sawmillers Limited, and Novelea.

They have used up those ones and, Madam Speaker, new licences will now be issued for all the grades, all starting at the same time.

We have a new Chairman of Fiji Hardwood Corporation Limited, Mr. Adrian Sofield and he has been having very useful and fruitful discussions with all the current licence holders and the Chairman of the Fiji Mahogany Industry Council who is the Honourable Prime Minister. They have passed a number of resolutions in that respect. In fact, the Chairman has also been having discussions with the Fiji Mahogany Trust, which is where they are coming from and they have also had very useful discussions with them, Madam Speaker.

So, the way forward is that, all the current licence holders will be able to put in their bids, all of the current licence holders have also agreed to have one starting date for licences so we do not have different licences for different grades being issued at different times and, Madam Speaker, Fiji Hardwood Corporation Limited in fact, let me remind them of this. We have had the largest planted mahogany forest in the world, largest planted, not indigenous but planted. There is a huge world of difference, Madam Speaker, and planted forest actually attract more revenue or more value from international markets because there is a move in the world not to cut indigenous species or indigenous forest because the world want to preserve forests. But planted plantations obviously have a higher value for that. However, Madam Speaker, notwithstanding the fact they had that large stock of mahogany until 2008, Fiji Harwood Corporation, since the George Speight days and all the other days, never made a single cent of profit.

Madam Speaker, it had a debt stock, let me remind this House again of \$19 million, it had a debt stock, in fact it had about \$23 million. It owed money to FNPF, it still owes money to FNPF, owes money to FDB. Today, the debt stock of Fiji Hardwood Corporation Limited has come down to about \$5 million from the \$19 million. All of these debts are being paid off, they do not understand that, they do not want to understand that because they are actually going out to the electorates and whipping them up because they are politicising the issues. Madam Speaker, if Fiji Hardwood Corporation Limited does include....

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Point of Order.

HON. SPEAKER.- Point of Order.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Point of Order under 45(4). Madam Speaker, I have been thinking about this for a while. I think the Ministers must adhere to the Standing Orders when they answer the question, instead of meandering and extending and saying a lot of things outside the

question.

The Point of Order is, 45(4) 'The Minister must reply to a question, unless it would be inconsistent with the public interest to do so. A reply must be relevant, concise and confined to the subject-matter of the question asked. It must not contain -'

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- I think we waste a lot of time, Madam Speaker. We did that yesterday, we had long answers from Ministers, sometimes written answers, and we waste a lot of time. The question time, the answer time is concise. The Opposition has one minute to ask supplementary questions, the Ministers must not abuse their time. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- The Minister was asked a question, and the Minister was answering the question. Honourable Minister, you may continue.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. They are frightened to hear the truth but more importantly, they are frightened that the public will get to know the truth.

HON. GOVT. MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- That is what it is, Madam Speaker, as you can see they come here with skewed questions and then they do not want to hear the truth. So, Madam Speaker, as I was saying, it continued to make a loss, those debts are now being paid off, if Fiji Hardwood Corporation does do well, Madam Speaker, then obviously the industry will do well, which will include the people on whose land the plantation is planted on.

Let me also tell you, Madam Speaker, in 2016, the Mahogany Industry Council approved the increase of the following payments to landowners; stumpage increase from 10 percent to 12 percent, rent from \$10.50 to \$12.50 lease rates of premium from \$13 to \$15.50. All of these increases, Madam Speaker, were backdated to 1st January, 2016, and anyone that reads the Mahogany Industry Act that we put in place under the Bainimarama-led Government will see that one of the major objectives of that law is to provide greater benefits to the landowners and this is precisely, it is working, it is happening and will see more and more results as more and more of stabilisation comes with the new laws in place, lot more benefits will flow not only to the landowners, will also flow to the entire industry in Fiji. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now give the floor to the Honourable Aseri Radrodro.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Madam Speaker, a question to the Honourable Minister, can you confirm and advise how much does Fiji Hardwood Corporation owe SMI for the advance payment of logs?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, this is statistical in nature, tell him to put another question later on because I do not have these figures here. If they want to ask statistical questions ...

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Listen! Read the Standing Orders.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Madam Speaker, can I be allowed to

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now give the floor to the Honourable Prem Singh to ask his question.

Chemicals to develop x-ray films – CWM Hospital
(Question No. 45/2017)

HON. P. SINGH asked the Government, upon notice:

Would the Honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services inform Parliament why the Colonial War Memorial Hospital, being the largest hospital in Fiji, ran out of chemicals to develop x-ray films?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services.

HON. R.S. AKBAR (Minister for Health and Medical Services).- Thank you, Madam Speaker, I thank the Honourable Member for asking this question.

Madam Speaker, the Medical Imaging Section, which is more commonly known as the X-Ray Department in CWM Hospital uses three processes to produce x-ray images;

1. Wet Film Processing;
2. Dry Film Processing; and
3. Digital Imaging.

Wet Film Processing uses chemical reagents to develop films after an x-ray is done, while the other two processes, dry film and digital, are computerized and do not need chemical reagents to create the x-ray image. Clearly, Madam Speaker, the question raised by the Honourable Singh is related to the Wet Film Processing system.

Madam Speaker, this is a very old system, based on old technology, which has already been abandoned in many countries and is being phased out globally. I am pleased to say that Fiji is acting in step with the rest of the world and my Ministry is in the process of replacing Wet Film Processing with the latest methods of digital imaging processing.

There are two types of chemicals used to produce x-ray images by Wet Film Processing and they are:

1. Chemical X-ray Developer; and
2. Chemical X-ray Fixer.

Both those chemicals are currently available and services are still being provided with appropriate measures in place to manage stocks in the period before the next shipment arrives at the end of the month.

Madam Speaker, due to a period when the digital Dry Film Processing System at CWM was not operational, there was a surge in the use of Wet Film Processing system. That contributed to higher than normal use of the chemical reagents. Arrangements have been made with our supplier to fast track the supply of chemicals to Fiji but since they are regarded as dangerous cargo, they cannot be air freighted in large quantities.

Given the global move towards digital imaging, the chemicals used for wet film processing are slowly being phased out. Fiji's adoption to the newer digital technology will mean, we are less reliant on offshore suppliers of increasingly outdated chemicals.

Madam Speaker, x-rays and other imaging services are a vital part of any modern health system. The Ministry is committed to ensuring that all Fijians enjoy access to those services when and where there need be.

Madam Speaker, I would like to also provide some additional information in regards to what I believe questions that are going to follow. Forecasting medicines demand is never always accurate and this is a universal practice seen in developing nations, and Fiji is a developing nation. Research suggests that this is a common occurrence in major hospitals, even in developed countries. We are looking at improving our information and data system to improve forecasting. The Civil Service Reform is assisting us in getting a consultant to study our system for improvements, advertisements and funding of the procurement and distribution specialists will be funded by development partners..

Madam Speaker, the objective of this position is to identify the systematic issues preventing the timely provisions of medical supplies and equipment to support our health services, to identify issues, proposed solutions will be implemented to achieve sustainable improvement.

Madam Speaker, in terms of our medicine procurement, we had 20 approved manufacturers and this is approved through our prequalification process to establish quality and safe measures. We do not want to compromise quality and safety of our people at any one time.

The way forward, Madam Speaker, is through the reform of the procurement process, which will be spearheaded by the Ministry of Economy.

Madam Speaker, coming to some medicine shortage, cloxacillin injection which was at a very critical low position in the country, we have 80,000 vials that will be arriving on 13th of this month which will ease our issue there, but nevertheless we had alternative antibiotics to be used in place of cloxacillin. The Ministry has a total budget of \$49 million for medicines and biomedical equipment and utilisation of those funds is usually 90 percent annually.

Madam Speaker, during disaster periods, the Ministry of Health and Medical Services usually experiences a higher demand of medical supply in all our facilities. After *TC Winston*, we observed a surge in the demand of consumption of chemical supplies, now as a result of that, the Ministry's building safety stock levels for only critical items that will be used for national disasters.

Madam Speaker, according to World Health Organisation, the wastage level should be 5 percent. Fiji currently has a wastage rate of less than 2percent on medicines. Wastage is inevitable, however we always ensure that we keep it at the minimum.

HON. SPEAKER. – Honourable Semesa Karavaki.

HON. S.D. KARAVAKI.- Thank you. This is a supplementary question, Madam Speaker, I will come back to the x-ray. Would the Honourable Minister consider changing the x-ray machines in the CWM Hospital because they actually belong to archives? Can she consider as soon as possible changing the x-ray machines and shifting those ones to archives? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Madam Speaker, I just said we are moving towards digital technology.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Prem Singh.

HON. P. SINGH.- A supplementary question. In view of the Honourable Minister's answer, I believe procurement is the problem - procurement of medicines and chemicals. The question is, will the Honourable Minister, as she has alluded to, in reviewing the procurement process, will she inform this House whether the current procurement process serves its purpose?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister.

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Madam Speaker, it has been serving our purpose, but like I said, the way forward is to relook and reform it.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Salote Radrodro.

HON. S.V.RADRODRO.- Thank you, Madam Speaker and I thank the Honourable Minister for her response, but the question itself reflects the very poor management of ordering, stocking and inventorising of the chemical. The question is, Madam Speaker, can the Honourable Minister confirm whether this is a national problem also affecting other bigger hospitals, like Lautoka, Labasa, Nadi and other subdivisional hospitals where they have x-ray machines? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I am afraid the question was referring only to the Colonial War Memorial Hospital. So the question really is irrelevant to the subject at hand. I now give the floor to the Honourable Viam Pillay.

Fiji Police Force – Recent information and statistics
(Question No. 46/2017)

HON. V. PILLAY.- Madam Speaker, I withdraw my question, thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you the question has been withdrawn and I therefore give the floor to the Honourable Jilila Kumar.

Qamea Health Facility
(Question No. 47/2017)

HON. J.N. KUMAR asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services inform this House on what were the actions of the Ministry in regards to Qamea Health Facility that was destroyed by the landslide during *Tropical Depression 04F*?

HON. R.S. AKBAR (Minister for Health and Medical Services).- Thank you, Madam Speaker, I thank Honourable Kumar for the question.

Madam Speaker, *Tropical Depression 04F* brought about heavy rain that caused the severe landslide on Qamea Island. Unfortunately, our health facilities at Dreketi Village, the Qamea Health Center and three staff quarters were totally destroyed, along with the school and about 20 houses.

The Ministry of Health and Medical Services, Madam Speaker, acted very promptly by taking immediate actions after the landslide:

- i. the staff from the Health Centre were evacuated to Taveuni Hospital;
- ii. a health team was immediately deployed to Qamea Island;
- iii. a temporary health centre manned by a nurse was set up at Vadravadra settlement;
- iv. additional health supplies and drugs were dispatched from Suva to Qamea; and
- v. patients who required further treatment were referred to either Taveuni or Labasa Hospital.

The Health team also conducted an intensive two weeks health outreach programme after the landslide, which included assessments of the following communities:

- i. Dreketi;
- ii. Ucunivatu;
- iii. Kocoma;
- iv. Togo;
- v. Waibulu ;
- vi. Vatusogosogo;
- vii. Nadilo;
- viii. Yanuca; and
- ix. Naivivi.

Madam Speaker, the Government's multi-sectoral approach to respond with urgency to the needs of those on Qamea had brought relief in terms of addressing their most immediate needs and plight. A second medical team was deployed as part of a multi-agency working group, under the guidance of the National Disaster Management Office. Their role was to:

- i. conduct detailed damage assessment ;
- ii. carry-out relief assistance;
- iii. conduct debris clearance; and
- iv. provide sanitation and hygiene services to the affected population.

Madam Speaker, looking beyond the immediate response, the Ministry is also considering how best to meet the future health needs of the people of Qamea.

Following the loss of the Qamea Health Centre, we are now considering what should replace it and a Geo-tech team from the Department of Mineral Resources has already completed a survey of potential sites for a new Qamea Health Centre.

The details of the survey findings will be presented to the Honourable Minister for Rural and Maritime Development and National Disaster Management. A decision on the site will then be made in consultation with technical teams for the design and construction timelines, subject to Cabinet's approval.

Madam Speaker, apart from the services provided by the temporary health center at Vadravadra, a medical officer, a public health nurse, and a dietician have also been despatched to complete a comprehensive health outreach on Qamea. The team has completed its task and returned to Taveuni. We also had a health inspector along with a peer educator and a labourer from Qamea

conduct environmental health, water and sanitation awareness. The team also further conducted disinfectant and anti-mosquito spraying in communities. Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) kits were also distributed as part of this intensive outreach.

Madam Speaker, apart from Emergency Health Care Services, the Ministry was also successful in addressing psychological concerns of people affected by the landslide.

Empower Pacific teams of counsellors were deployed to Qamea to provide Psychological First Aid (PFA) and crisis intervention support in the identified affected communities.

The clinic nurse will continue to provide the medical service based from Vadravadra Settlement in Qamea and Taveuni Hospital will also continue to provide assistance and support for the health needs of our people residing on Qamea. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Ratu Kiliraki.

HON. RATU K. KILIRAKI.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. My question is; does the Ministry make assessments of other health centers to make sure that what happened at Dreketi will not happen anywhere else, given the frequency of tropical depressions, especially during this time of the year? Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister.

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Madam Speaker, thank you very much. I am not clear as to what kind of assessment the Honourable Member is talking about, but I can inform the House that my Assistant Minister has been travelling around maritime health centres, and after Parliament we will sit with our senior management team at headquarters and we will give progress with what the report indicates. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Nawaikula.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- The new complex at this new site; when can the people of Qamea expect it to be completed and fully staffed?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister.

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Madam Speaker, I would like to say soon, but as I have mentioned, the assessment report has been completed and the report will be presented to the National Disaster Management Office and to the Minister for Rural and Maritime Development, and we wish to speed up the processes so that we can provide those services to the people of Qamea.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now give the floor to the Honourable Dr. Brij Lal to ask his question?

Initiatives for Improving Rice Production
(Question No. 48/2017)

HON. DR B. LAL asked the Government, upon notice:

Majority of our population consume rice at least once daily. Can the Honourable Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development and National Disaster Management inform this House on the initiatives that have been put to strengthen rice growing to decrease our rice imports?

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU (Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development and National Disaster Management).- Madam Speaker, I rise to respond to the question asked by the Honourable Member and I thank him for his question.

Madam Speaker, again, I wish to acknowledge the effort undertaken by all stakeholders – farmers, particularly Rewa Rice that does the processing; our partners who have assisted us in terms of technical expertise; as well as the Ministry of Agriculture, for those who are in the field, for the positive turnaround shown in the rice sector.

Let me begin by giving a few figures on the rice import levels as raised in the question. Madam Speaker, from 2013, we imported about 38.9 thousand tonnes of rice and that is worth about F\$39 million.

In 2014, we had a slight drop in the rice import level of 38.3 thousand tonnes, as compared to the 38.9 thousand tonnes in 2013, with an import value of about F\$38 million.

In 2015, the volume dropped significantly to about 25,000 tonnes, a drop of almost 13,000 tonnes of rice and its import value is about F\$27 million. So in terms of value, Madam Speaker, dropping from F\$38 million to F\$27 million shows and confirms the positive trend and the positive turnaround as a result of the various interventions in the rice industry. Again, we are indeed thankful to all the stakeholders, the farmers in particular.

Madam Speaker, the initiatives undertaken by the Ministry for Public Enterprises as I had mentioned earlier, Rewa Rice is very much critical in the value chain because they process the paddy that the farmers produce.

Madam Speaker, the price has to be attractive to the farmers, although we are still discussing this with the farmers because they want the grading system to be taken around. However, Rewa Rice has what we call the 'premium price' for paddy which, Madam Speaker, ranges from \$650 to \$750 per tonne, so we are thankful for that.

I was in Dreketi on 2nd February and again last week, most farmers are now adjusting and, of course, they are meeting the requirements, particularly because grading is essential as we are dealing with food and that needs to be processed so that we can have the best quality. When you compare that price, Madam Speaker, with other rice producing countries, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region, Fiji's price for paddy is amongst the highest in the region. So that price is very attractive to the farmers and as a result, farmers want to plant more so that they can also have more in terms of income.

On subsidizing farm machineries for rice farmers, Madam Speaker, the average is about \$28 per hour for machineries whether it be the harvester or tractor or the swamp dozer. So in terms of production costs, that really assists the farmers in reducing costs.

Free transportation of paddy, Madam Speaker. Rewa Rice does go around and collect rice paddy from Vuniuto, Korokadi, Luvuluvu, Vunivau and all the rice producing areas. I will be concentrating my response this morning on to Vanua Levu because that is the main rice scheme now, although machineries have been distributed to most parts of Fiji, particularly the Central Division and, of course, the intermediate zones in the Western Division. So farmers enjoy this free transportation.

Instant payment system, Madam Speaker, we all know the history of Rewa Rice, it was struggling in terms of their cash flow but with the new management and new Board, it has made that

positive turnaround as well. So farmers are paid instantly and that is a big incentive for the farmers. As soon as the rice is weighed with the correct moisture content, they are paid immediately.

We have also installed new electrical driers, I have talked about the grading system. We have purchased four driers because the rice mill that is in Dreketi is a 1970 technology and it has served its time. We are talking about driers that are filled by kerosene so that has been replaced, Madam Speaker, and that has assisted the farmers in terms of getting the moisture content to the right level before they are given that \$750 per tonne.

Madam Speaker, a few week ago I was in Vanua Levu to do the ground breaking ceremony for the new mill. I have talked about the old mill and again, we are thankful to Government that we are now investing in the new mill so we just need more rice so that more can be processed and help the cash flow for Rewa Rice as well. Of course, Rewa Rice has extended its operating hours. Weather patterns has changed and rice needs to get immediately to the silos, otherwise most of them will germinate. That is why Rewa Rice has also extended its operating hours.

Madam Speaker, Rewa Rice operates until 2200 hours so that it can facilitate the rice coming from a distance. They have now leased the land as well because that is their core business and they need more paddy. They have also considered having their own farm which is a good initiative.

Madam Speaker, very quickly, these are some of the initiatives from Government. Firstly, FAO helped us under the country programme and framework with the training of trainers programme in 2014. If you go around Fiji today, you will see rice trial plots. For those who travel through the King's Road, you would have seen one last year as you approach Korovou Town on the left. That was because for all those who were trained under the training of trainers programme funded by FAO, it was mandatory for them to come up with trials in their respective zones and start convincing farmers to produce rice, particularly in the main rice season. We had the assistance from China, Madam Speaker, and we are into the second stage of that, which includes the \$12 million package, where we had a lot rice machinery, and I will not go into the details.

Secondly, mechanization is critical. Labour shortage is one of the critical issues that we face in Fiji now, not only in rice but in sugar as well. Children are getting educated and they are leaving the farm, so we need to get in machinery. Therefore, we have distributed machinery all over the rice growing regions.

Madam Speaker, for those in Vanua Levu, we also given them free water from the dam, that is, irrigation. They used to pay water but to entice farmers to continue to plant more rice, we have given them free water, apart from the subsidized fertilizer which we also give them and the subsidized machinery as well. We have also changed the Farm Manager as there were a lot of complaints from Vanua Levu. The Farm Manager now is doing a brilliant job.

We have also taken an integrated approach, Madam Speaker. Before the rice research is done in Koronivia and all the Research Officers are in Koronivia but we have made a change, we have shifted them. There is a Research Officer based in Dreketi now, together with the Extension Officers, so the transfer of knowledge and technology is given to the farmers immediately. That has worked very well most recently.

We have also continued to train our farmers abroad. We do send farmers to Indonesia, for those who are doing well and of course our staff as well, we keep sending them particularly to China and Thailand and all the other rice growing countries.

Madam Speaker, those are some of the initiatives. As I have said, it is positive, our imports have started to drop and that saving of \$14 million is definitely going into the pockets of most of our farmers, so that is a very good indication for Fiji.

(Acclamation)

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Professor Biman Prasad.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Madam Speaker, I want to thank the Honourable Minister, I know he is very passionate, he had done a lot of work and I acknowledge that.

I declare my interest, my brother is a farmer in Dreketi.

HON. MEMBERS.- Ohhhhhhhhh.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- This is about the price, the three categories of prices that the Honourable Minister said. The three categories have different moisture deduction. What they end up doing is putting all those categories into the same silo and what the farmers are saying is that they just need one price and one standard moisture deduction.

I have raised this with the Honourable Minister so I just want to put this question to him whether he is still considering reviewing that price grading system and having one grade because everything ends up in one silo. The farmers are saying that because of the three categories, they are actually losing out.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Madam Speaker, that decision is not taken by the Minister for Agriculture, it is taken by the Board.

Madam Speaker, pricing is a business decision by the Board of Rewa Rice but simply, it is just about quality because when there is no grading system, farmers unfortunately are not giving us high quality paddy and most of it comes with other debris.

Again, we continue to discuss this in every meeting - the President of the Rewa Rice, the Farmers Association, Mr. Paras Nath, but it is between the Board of Rewa Rice Limited and the farmers. For the Ministry of Agriculture, we are there just to provide the technical assistance to support both entities.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Leawere

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the Honourable Minister, regarding rice and how it has improved in the country. From his response, I heard about the lack of workers in the rice industry. My question is, why not use the seasonal workers whom we send overseas to come and work in the rice farm because at the end of the day, it is value added? They will learn something and go back to their respective areas and start their rice planting as well.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister?

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Madam Speaker, when they go abroad they are paid about \$20 to \$30 an hour. Therefore, farmers cannot afford and even for Government to subsidise, it is beyond us, Madam Speaker. We wish to encourage, particularly the youths and we need a lot of replacement farmers; huge opportunities in the rice industry. It is good money, Madam Speaker,

and rather than be used only as labour, we want them to be replacement farmers, be involved and take the initiative.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

HON. RO T.V. KEPÄ.- Madam Speaker, I thank the Honourable Minister for his response. My question is on Grace Road and I declare my interest. We have a very small farm in Burebasaga and its income goes to scholarship for the children of Rewa. My question to the Honourable Minister is what difference is Grace Road making in terms of the decrease in rice imports?

HON. SPEAKER. – Honourable Minister?

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Madam Speaker, again, Grace Road based in Navua is a key stakeholder. They are producing rice as well. Few of the major contributions by Grace Road is, yesterday I talked about Fiji being the organic capital of the world and Grace Road is doing organic rice. They do their own organic fertilizer. Our technical team are working very closely with Grace Road so that we can access the technology that they have and, of course, give it to our farmers as well so that they can reduce production costs.

Grace Road brings their own technical expertise. We work with Grace Road even before the arrival of the machinery from China, a few of Grace Road's machinery were given to the Ministry of Agriculture through this cooperation that we have.

We are thankful to Grace Road because they are also establishing what they call 'farmer schools' and they will be putting up structures very soon. We have that undertaking to work very closely with them because they are a key stakeholder and we acknowledge that. And, also the rice projects that they undertake not only in Viti Levu but also in Vanua Levu. We encourage most of our people, particularly in the rural communities, whether it be through the Ministry of Agriculture or whether it be Grace Road, and of course FNU is partnering with Grace Road as well in most of the rice producing areas, and of course, in the province of Serua because that is where they are located, they are working very closely with them. Let me assure this august House that they play an important role. Grace Road just came in one or two years ago so they work very closely with us, of course, given the figures that we have.

You will be amazed to see what is happening in Vanua Levu, particularly in the rice growing areas starting from Luvuluvu in Bua, Tausa, Korokadi, Vunivutu and, of course, in Muanidevo, the rice fields in Qelewaqa, Wailevu, even as far as Wainikoro, Madam Speaker. So majority of this rice is not from Grace Road, it is coming from Vanua Levu.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Viliame Gavoka, for his last question.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Minister spoke about mechanization but I believe in the Ministry of Agriculture there are only 37 tractors in the whole of Fiji, only one in the Sigatoka Valley.

(Inaudible interjections)

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Can we see some reality on the ground in terms of mechanization and ensure that it is sufficient to grow rice or whatever crops that our farmers wish to grow?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister?

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Madam Speaker, Government does allocate \$2 million under the farm mechanization initiative, and we continue to distribute machinery. I was in Vanua Levu last week, I took three tractors: two tractors to Government, one for Bua Province, additional one for Macuata Province and one for a community in Nasarawaqa Village, those who have paid their contributions.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Cakaudrove?

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- For Cakaudrove, definitely we are only looking at the programmes. For Cakaudrove, it will be my priority, be assured Honourable Member.

(Inaudible interjections)

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Madam Speaker, we continue to provide machinery for the farmers in Fiji. Let me assure this august House that we have that machinery now but we are working on the operators. For example, in Lakena, they have six tractors but they only have two operators. Now, we are converting most of our drivers to become machinery operators but definitely, you will have your machines.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Nawaikula.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Madam Speaker, 10 years and the rice industry has been dead, stagnant, just like the sugar industry, they killed it. So what assurance do we have that these new initiatives will make a change?

(Inaudible interjections)

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Madam Speaker, change does not happen overnight, but it is happening and it will continue to happen.

(Acclamation)

HON. RATU K. KILIRAKI.- Madam Speaker, 16 percent of land in Fiji is flat and arable land and it has been taken over by housing developments, so it is decreasing which means that rice plantations will be decreasing. My question is, what is the progress towards developing or cultivating rice on the other 84 percent on the slopes, hills so that we can increase the production of rice?

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Madam Speaker, the answer to that is, we have different rice varieties. We have dry land rice and we have wet land rice so it is not a question of what will happen to the other land, but it is good that this is all coming from the Opposition. Please, let us go and advocate because there are a lot of idle land. Machinery is there, technical expertise is there, funds are there as well but people are just not taking ownership of the programmes and they are not willing to come forward and be involved.

Madam Speaker, I have talked about research, we are doing a lot of research work now, assisted by the Korean experts who are with Grace Road. We have the experts from China, we are into the second phase of that programme now, our people continue to go abroad and with the new husbandry practices, Madam Speaker, it is not only about moving into new areas because it is about maximising production. Even now, again, that will be farmers who have adapted to the new technology, the same field that used to give us two tonnes are even hitting six tonnes now. That is good news for us rather than utilising all the other land which can be used for other purposes. It is about good research and, of course, maximising production with the new rice varieties, particularly for dry land.

Camera Installed Programme
(Question No. 49/2017)

HON. S.B. VUNIVALU asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Local Government, Housing and Environment, Infrastructure and Transport update the House on speed cameras that were installed on our highways around the country?

HON. P.B. KUMAR (Minister for Local Government, Housing and Environment, Infrastructure and Transport).- Madam Speaker, I rise to respond to the question asked by the Honourable Member and I thank him for his question.

Madam Speaker, LTA has continued with this programme of installing red lights and speed cameras across Fiji. There are currently 25 fixed poles on which 10 cameras are operated on a rotational basis. Three of these cameras are dual, which is red light and speed, whereas seven are speed cameras only. Madam Speaker, this programme has assisted the Authority in terms of automatic red light and speeding enforcement. The first cameras were installed in 2013 and since then, close to 200,000 Traffic Infringement Notices (TINs) have been issued for speeding.

In the 2016 calendar year, the numbers of TINs processed was 65,169, of which 24,873 was for red light and 40,296 was for speeding. Furthermore, Madam Speaker, from 1st January, 2017 to-date, a total of 11,703 TINs were issued, of which 1,057 are for red light and 10,646 for speeding.

Madam Speaker, the LTA has made good progress on its camera installation programme and I am pleased to say that the expansion on the coverage alone and identifying black spot areas on the Queen's Highway has contributed to the reduction of road accidents.

Madam Speaker, the LTA will address some teething issues on the timely notification to offenders within the legislated 21 days from the date of offence. In order to improve on the timelines, the Authority has outsourced its notification delivery services to the Post Fiji Limited, and I have also asked LTA to look into amending the current legislation timeline for the customers who pay at LTA from 21 days to 48 days.

Madam Speaker, in conclusion, I would like to inform the House that the red light and speeding cameras is one of the enforcement tools in improving road safety. It complements the joint enforcement initiative undertaken by the LTA, the Fiji Police Force and, of course, the drivers' attitude and behaviour.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Madam Speaker, I thank the Honourable Minister for the information regarding red lights. Regarding offences that are captured by the speed cameras, who gets to be penalised for those offences that are captured under the speed cameras; is it the drivers or vehicle owners?

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- The answer is, it is the driver.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Madam Speaker, I would ask the Honourable Minister to consider streamlining the speed restrictions on the highways because for me, it is costing me a fortune to drive from Sigatoka to Suva because of the cameras. I noticed that when you go to the Post Office in Sigatoka, there are mountains of envelopes for claims to people who drive at high speed, but I have since learnt to drive appropriately. However, Madam Speaker, the problem is that, there are too many speed limits, there are some 80 areas, there are some 60s and there are some 50s. As a driver on the highway, we would rather that you just bring it down to two, instead of 80, 60 or 50. We are

respectful of the speed limit but when we are driving, our minds are on other things and we do not realise that we are driving at 60 in a 50 area. For instance, Navola is 50, Korolevu is 60. You can very easily be driving at 60 in Navola and you get penalised. So, can I ask you to just streamline it, make it 2 instead of 3 or 4 or, whatever we have today?

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- Madam Speaker, when these initiatives were not taken, these were the same words from the Honourable Member; what is the Government doing? He is worried about his speed limit travelling to Suva and back to Nadroga but what the Honourable Member has said, I will refer this to the Board for consideration.

HON. A.T. VADEI.- Madam Speaker, my question is, with the number of speed cameras, the infringements and the attitudes have not changed with offenders increasing. What can the Ministry do to change and cultivate a new culture of drivers in Fiji?

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Member is quite right, there were a lot of TINs that were issued but I think majority of the drivers were not aware that the cameras are in operation. Now, this information has gone out loud and clear and I can tell you, this will reduce.

HON. J. DULAKIVERATA.- Madam Speaker, I thank the Honourable Minister for the information. You mentioned that drivers are charged for the offence, but when the notification comes, if you have a speed offence, the charge comes to the owner of the vehicle. So what is the case?

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. J. DULAKIVERATA.- He said the driver is charged but the owner of the vehicle is notified.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. J. DULAKIVERATA.- And what happens to those who do not have information about their postal address and this type of information?

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- I have already answered that.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Being a victim, the form comes to the owner of the vehicle and the owner of the vehicle writes down who the driver was according to the time and date. We will now move onto the next item of the agenda - Written Questions and the question is from Honourable Aseri Radrodro.

Written Questions

Compensation for the Water Authority of Fiji (WAF) complex
(Question No. 50/2017)

HON. A.M. RADRODRO asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Public Enterprises, Civil Service and Communications advise how much has been paid out as compensation from the budgeted amount of \$4.575M under Head 50 in the 2016 – 2017 Budget Estimates in regards to land acquisition and compensation for the Water Authority of Fiji (WAF) complex?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM (Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Public Enterprises, Civil Service and Communications).- Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I will table my answer at a later sitting day as permitted under Standing Order 45(3).

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. The second written question from the Honourable Niko Nawaikula, you have the floor.

Progress of water upgrading projects in villages
(Question No. 51/2017)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Local Government, Housing, Environment, Infrastructure and Transport explain the progress of water upgrading projects in the villages of Navetau, Wailevu, Muana, Naqaravutu, Natewa, Vusa, Dawa, Karoko, Lumiboso, Koroivonu, Kanakana, Nawi, Waivunia and Nagigi in Cakaudrove? Nothing done.

HON. P.B. KUMAR (Minister for Local Government, Housing, Environment, Infrastructure and Transport).- Thank you Madam Speaker. I will table my answer at a later sitting date as permitted under Standing Order 45(3). The Honourable Member is saying that nothing has been done; he is quite wrong. You have been to a lot of places with wrong information but what I am saying is, Madam Speaker that we will make sure that for 2017, this programme is done and completed.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I give the floor to the Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

Schools repaired after *TC Winston*
(Question No. 52/2017)

HON. RO T.V. KEPA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Attorney- General and the Minister for Economy, Public Enterprises, Civil Service and Communications provide the list of schools that were damaged during *Tropical Cyclone Winston* that have been repaired and are Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) compliant?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM (Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Public Enterprises, Civil Service and Communications).- Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker as we are aware that the rebuild of schools are being done at full throttle with a lot of quality and building better - resilience. Madam Speaker, I will table my detailed answer at the later sitting day as permitted under Standing Order 45(3).

Detailed Report on the After Care Fund
(Question 53/2017)

HON. M.R. LEAWARE asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Public Enterprises, Civil Service and Communications provide a detailed report on the After Care Fund allocation for the years 2009 – 2015?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM (Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Public Enterprises, Civil Service and Communications).- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I will table my answer at a later sitting date as permitted under Standing Order 45(3).

Natadola's Facilities
(Question 54/2017)

HON. V.R. GAVOKA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Industry, Trade, Tourism, Land and Mineral Resources provide an indication if the public are at Natadola can have its own facilities, especially the conveniences for day trippers, including those from Cruise Liners, as opposed to them using the facilities of the two resorts at Natadola Beach?

HON. F.S. KOYA (Minister for Industry, Trade, Tourism, Land and Mineral Resources).- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I thank the Honourable Member for his question I have his answer for him here.

(Written response handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Members, although not in the Order Paper the Secretariat has received a notification for the Honourable Minister for Agriculture, Rural Maritime Development and National Disaster Management that he has a written response for tabling and I now call on the Honourable Minister.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. Pursuant to Standing Order 45(5) I hereby table my written response to Question No. 41/2017 by the Honourable Leader of the Opposition. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Please hand your written response to the Secretary-General.

(Written response handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- What a big document, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Question time is now over. We will move on to the next item in the agenda.

BIPARTISAN SELECT COMMITTEE ON SUGAR

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call upon the Honourable Prem Singh to move his motion.

HON. P. SINGH.- Madam Speaker, I move:

That this Parliament agrees to establish a Bipartisan Select Committee on Sugar to collectively find solutions to revive the sugar industry to ensure it remains a vibrant industry economically benefitting all stakeholders.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Do we have a seconder?

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Honourable Speaker, I beg to second the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- Before I invite the Honourable Prem Singh to speak on his motion, Honourable Members should note that we have only one End of the Week's Statement, pursuant to Standing Order 35(2). This means that debate on this motion whether completed or not will be suspended at 12.10 p.m. to allow for the End of the Week's Statement. I now invite the Honourable Prem Singh to speak on his motion.

HON. P. SINGH.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, before I delve into the motion proper, may I just reflect on the proceedings of this House last night where both sides of the House jointly in a bipartisan fashion agreed to address many issues of national interest and it is my fervent hope that this motion will be treated in the like manner.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. GOVT. MEMBER.- Dream on, dream on.

HON. P. SINGH.- Madam Speaker, in the last ten years since the events of 5th December, 2006 had been very difficult for the cane growers, their families and in fact for the industry. Statistics prove beyond any doubt, Madam Speaker, that the Government which has been in place up to 2006 and now the FijiFirst Government, the sugar industry has been in the sole control of the Honourable Prime Minister. Madam Speaker, needless to say that we have miserably failed to revive the sugar industry which for over 100 years has been the backbone of this country and our economy. Even the Honourable Prime Minister has time and again stated that 200,000 people directly or indirectly are dependent on the industry for their livelihood. This is more than 20 percent of our population.

Madam Speaker, statistics do not lie. To prove what I am saying, the following are official statistics for the last ten years and I will just give you two statistics. In 2006 we had 18,636 registered growers and we crushed 3.226 million tonnes of cane and produced 310,140 tonnes of sugar at a TCTS ratio of 10.4 and the price paid to the growers per tonne was \$58.60. In 2016, we had 12,872 growers and we produced 1.38 million tonnes of cane and produced 139,502 tonnes of sugar at a TCTS ratio of 9.9. Madam Speaker, the growers were paid \$52.56 if they had been paid 80 percent of the forecast price so far.

Without rounding up the figures as highlighted, cane production declined by 453,000 tonnes. Sugar production declined by 82,432 tonnes. Labasa Mill was the best performing, recording a TCTS ratio of 8.9, and crushing almost half of the total crop and producing more than 50 percent of the total tonnage of sugar. The performance of Rarawai Mill, the worst, Madam Speaker, recording a TCTS of 12.4. This is due to cartage of stale cane from Penang Mill area that was closed after suffering damage during *TC Winston*.

Madam Speaker, in the last 10 years, there have been no politics in the sugar industry. So this Government and the Honourable Prime Minister cannot blame the politicians but the blame lies squarely with his Government. This Government led by the Honourable Prime Minister, both in his capacity as Military Commander and the elected PM, has been the judge, jury and the executioner as far as the industry is concerned because they have total control of the industry.

Madam Speaker, the industry's best hope of recovery 10 years ago was derailed by the events of 2006. The Government deliberately sacrificed the injection of \$315 million grant to the industry by the European Union. Had this materialised, Fiji from 2011 onwards would have been producing a minimum of 4 million tonnes of cane and around 400,000 tonnes of sugar using more efficient methods than we are using now.

Sugar is a life blood industry, Madam Speaker. It is far too important to be allowed to die, but this Government and now the FijiFirst administration, instead of providing both, theoretical and practical

solutions, has been adopting a “firefighting” approach which in reality just like most fires witnessed in the country in the last two years, has destroyed the properties it was supposed to protect. So, again Madam Speaker, it is clear where the fault lies, not with the politicians, but with the Government which has politicised the industry like never before. People who cannot tell the root of a cane plant from its top are tasked with making decisions to the detriment of the growers and the industry as a whole.

Madam Speaker, with the cost of producing, harvesting and delivery of cane averaging \$45 to \$50 per tonne and with the price averaging \$75 per tonne, some 9,200 growers who produce less than average 150 tonnes of cane earn a net income of \$4,500 in a season. This is \$11,500 below the tax threshold of \$16,000 and this is one of the reasons why growers are in debt in perpetuity.

The forecast price for the last season was \$65.70 per tonne of cane. Forecast price is discounted by 15 percent therefore, the projected final price would be \$75. With the devastating effects of *TC Winston*, growers in the affected areas of Viti Levu will receive depleted incomes due to crop damage.

Madam Speaker, over 70 percent of growers numbering over 9,000 will have received \$4,029 as net income for the 2015 season, minus the average cost of production of \$45 per tonne of cane. This is almost \$1,400 less than the \$5,428 earned annually by a worker on a minimum wage rate of \$2.32 an hour.

With the abolition of European Union sugar production quotas on 30th September, 2017, our industry will be doomed unless cane production is significantly boosted.

Madam Speaker, Government must realize its reforms are unworkable, its plans and reforms for the industry has been an exercise in futility, driving growers out of cane farming and making the FSC technically insolvent because the four mills do not crush sufficient cane to remain profitable.

In here, Madam Speaker, to have a vibrant sugar industry and to enable the mills to make profit, we need to produce at least 3 million tonnes of cane, and to do this, we have 24,000 hectares under ratoon cane. Ratoon cane, their average life ranges from 10 to 30 years in some places. Whilst we are encouraged by Government’s policy on replanting, this has to be coordinated and to coordinate this, we have had cane replanting programmes for the last 5 years, but then we have been planting in the wrong seasons. It is just that the money is not put to use where it is designed for, hence the crop size has not increased. It is still not too late for the Government to reconsider our proposal that was flatly rejected last year.

A kind and caring Government which FijiFirst professes to be will gladly embrace any realistic and constructive solution proposed by anyone, even the Opposition, to fix problems that it has failed to resolve for ten years. Government is not asking itself why the number of active cane growers has fallen by almost 5,600 in the last ten years. This is because they have lost interest in cane farming as it cannot sustain the livelihood of their families. For ten years, Madam Speaker, we have been lectured about the sugar industry by those who cannot differentiate the root (as I said) of a sugar cane from its top and this is an insult to growers.

Madam Speaker, our former colleague Honourable Roko Tupou Draunidalo rightly observed during the debate in Parliament on the Sugar Cane Growers Council (Amendment) Bill on 25th August, 2015 and I quote:

“Our cane growers struggled for dignity, justice and freedom which was given to them by the late Mr. A.D. Patel, the founder of our Party who negotiated the Denning Award which still forms the basis of the sharing formula of proceeds from the sale of sugar.

The late S.M Koya, former leader, who negotiated the Sugar Industry Act with the late Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, the then Prime Minister, and Mr. Jai Ram Reddy, also our former leader, Madam Speaker, who during his leadership, led cane growers at a time when their future, both politically and economically in this country was under siege as a result of the *coup* culture which began in 1987.”

HON. A. SAYED- KHAIYUM.- What did they do?

HON. P. SINGH.- They negotiated on a bipartisan basis.

HON. A. SAYED- KHAIYUM.- What did the leader of SODELPA do? What did he do to the sugar industry?

HON. P. SINGH.- Madam Speaker, we have heard since 6th September, 2013 ...

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. P. SINGH.- ... since the promulgation of the 2013 Constitution ...

(Hon. Member interjects)

... on a new Fiji, truly genuine democratic practice as it preaches equal citizenry, accountability and transparency.

Madam Speaker, cane growers have been reduced to mere pawns, battered from pillar to post and asked to pay through direct and indirect taxes again through the administration of an organisation that they have no say or control. This is reminiscent of the days of CSR when the master imposed his will on helpless growers. It is telling the growers, “you just harvest and plant cane, we decide what is best for you and you pay for our indecisions through direct and indirect taxes, and you do not question what we decide on your behalf.”

Madam Speaker, Roko Draunidalo’s comments are highly relevant and prove that bipartisanship resulted in a thriving industry.

The Government has absolute control over growers and the industry. Appointments of all elected leaders of the Council were terminated. The Sugar Commission of Fiji and Fiji Sugar Marketing were dissolved. Growers have no say on how our sugar is marketed or sold. It is entirely controlled by FSC.

All changes to the industry have been done under the pretext of removing politics. As the largest stakeholder in the sugar industry, growers have no say whatsoever. Whilst we are all concerned about finding solutions to ensure the industry remains viable post-September 2017, this Government is fast tracking its demise.

Madam Speaker, democracy is vitally important in any organisation and here we are talking about cane growers who are the largest group in our agricultural sector. A feeling of disenchantment is undoubtedly being felt by the farmers, their families, cane cutters, lorry operators, lorry drivers, labourers and farm hands. The absolute control of the industry by Government is the disincentive for a segment of Fiji’s population who have sacrificed their livelihood and triumphant days to ensure the sugar industry remains an economic mainstay. In the last 10 years, they have continued to faithfully perform their duties to the industry and the nation despite difficult times. They deserve

honest answers and all stakeholders in the sugar industry owe it to them to be transparent and accountable.

Madam Speaker, the Government will be responsible for the demise of the sugar industry and the destruction of livelihood of our cane farmers who already are struggling to survive. The betrayal of trust of cane growers by this Government is now written in indelible ink. It is not too late, Madam Speaker, Government should show courage and adopt a bipartisan approach both in and outside of Parliament to find a meaningful solution to resuscitate the industry.

We lost a golden opportunity with the loss of the European Union Grant and amongst other things, it would have boosted the production in a new methodology for cane farming which would have benefited not only the segments but the whole country.

Madam Speaker, despite bitter acrimonious debates, bipartisanship worked well in the past. We can do the same. Madam Speaker, 200,000 people are looking at us for solutions. We cannot and must not wait any longer, therefore a Joint Parliamentary Select Committee involving bipartisanship is the only way forward. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Now the motion is open for debate and I invite input from the floor.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Madam Speaker, I wish to contribute to this debate in support of this motion. I am part of a Committee that is dealing with Bills 19 and 20 and we have covered the cane belts from Vanua Levu and Viti Levu. One thing is very obvious is that the solutions are there but it is our differences that is affecting the application of the solutions to make sugar become what it used to be. We have all the answers, it is just that our differences are there, that is why I agree with my colleague. Honourable Prem Singh that we should have the courage to go forward from here. Let bygones be bygones and let us just move on. We know what needs to be done, hence the need to sit together as bipartisan to show the country, sugar industry and the farmers that the leaders of this country at the highest level are approaching this in a joint manner. We need to send out that signal, otherwise, Madam Speaker, these differences, and many of them are quite small, quite petty, if allowed to survive will destroy the industry.

Fiji has everything going for it, we have this history of sugar going back more than a 100 years and it was interesting during the Committee hearings that people from Mauritius came to Fiji in the 1970's to come and learn about the industry. Today, they are now producing 10 million tonnes in a land area that is 20 percent of Viti Levu. I understand that the formula there is different, they work on a scale basis, and they work on huge farms as opposed to small holdings, but there are things that we can learn from a country like that and adapt that in Fiji.

Fundamentally, Madam Speaker, we must grow more cane, that is the answer to all of these; grow more cane. We see huge tracts of land that are now lying idle is because of leases that have expired and also people who hold leases in Fiji but now living overseas. There is quite a bit of that we discovered during our consultation.

This is like there is nearly a bipartisan approach, we must agree. The same way that Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, S.M Koya, and A.D. Patel sat together in those years to put this together including the crafting of legislation for the land for ALTA. I always remember ALTA. ALTA made what today is Sigatoka, Nadi, Lautoka, Ba, Tavua and Rakiraki. That legislation helped create the sugar economy that made the West what it is today and we must rise up to the challenge.

We all know the answers to this, the cost of harvesting. I was a cane farmer from Sigatoka but I just gave up because it was too expensive taking my cane to Lautoka. The solution is perhaps

a syrup extraction facility in Sigatoka, so that I deliver my cane 20 kilometers from my farm into the facility. Likewise in other parts of Viti Levu, in the extreme ends of Ra. These are all the solutions, we have talked about this. They can be done but all it needs is for us to sit together as one, driven by Parliament to do it.

One of the significant areas that used to be so obvious in the past was the indigenous cane farmers. It used to be a source of pride for someone in my village to have a contract with FSC to have that number, “what is your number?” - 6298 was mine. It was a source of pride because that gave you your ability to go to the bank, to borrow money, to go on a crop lien and all that. Within our community, it used to be big.

In our consultation, a lot of the Indo Fijian farmers are saying, “get the indigenous farmers back to start growing cane again.” I have spoken to a lot of my people in the Nadroga Province, they want to get back into cane farming in a big way.

We went to Labasa, there is a joint venture there between FSC and a farmer in Labasa, a young man in his late 30s or 40s and when we saw his farm, I told him, “if people from my province come and see your farm, they will all go back to farming tomorrow.” Such was the quality of his farm, the quality of the cane that he grew reminded me of what it used to be in my province. These are things that we can revisit and bring to the table and as leaders set a new platform to move the cane industry forward.

Madam Speaker, I would ask the House to do this in a bipartisan manner, let us all do it. Our farmers out there are crying out for some leadership, for a definitive direction on how to get our cane industry back into become the mainstream of the economy in Fiji. I would urge my colleagues in the House, let us do it, otherwise it is too fragmented, it is too political but we can address all that if we come together in unity, accept the challenge and move forward as leaders. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Nawaikula, you have the floor.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- I would like to make a contribution, Madam Speaker. The failure of the sugar industry we must accept is a failure of this Government

HON. GOVT MEMBER.- You're the one.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- And there are many examples of that, and they must admit to that as they have admitted, and if you allow me to refer to some examples of their failures.

HON. GOVT. MEMBER.- You're the one.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- The Honourable Prime Minister admitted here his failure to submit the report on the Constitutional Commission, a very important directive from the Constitution.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- The Honourable Attorney-General admitted here his failure to complete and comply with the National Development Plan, it is only on second stage, and these are the examples of the failure from that side, and if I can go on. The Honourable Minister for Defence; did they not sink that naval boat last year? That is the boat that belongs to the people. Failure over and over again.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- The Honourable Minister for Education did he not promise to us that the schools will be completed before the first term? And where is that \$31 million, where has it been spent?

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Point of Order. What has that to do with the motion before Parliament? What has the Honourable Minister for Education got to do with that? The motion is not about the failure of the Government, the motion in Parliament at the moment is about the Sugar Industry, he is totally out of context.

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- What's your point of order?

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Madam Speaker, I am illustrating, I am giving examples of the failures before I come to it. I started saying that these are examples of failures and let me outline the failures you have done and this is it.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Who pointed your failures?

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- I will come to you later, please.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you for responding to that point of order, you may continue.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Minister of Health, is the lift at CWM still fixed? Have they paid the overtime payments for the unestablished workers? No, failures. These are examples of failures and let me come to the Minister for Infrastructure. What is the situation of the Water Authority of Fiji, did you read the report? It is very sad, it is dead. What happened to NAIM - \$200 million wastage? What happened to MWH - \$60 million last year – owed? What did they do? Nothing. Consultation company being paid for doing nothing, under your bad management.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Point of Order. Madam Speaker, I am quite amazed, it is absolute irrelevance, irrelevance of what we are talking about. We are talking about establishing a bipartisan committee as the motion by Honourable Prem Singh. He is shaking his head, look he is touching his head, he is getting a headache from listening to you. Please, Madam Speaker, spare us from listening to this drivel that is going on. Let us focus on the motion before us.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, the Honourable Member has 20 minutes to have an input to this debate and I am giving him that with the freedom of speech to justify the principles behind what he is trying to elaborate on with respect to the performance of the Government on the sugar industry.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Let me come to the Fiji Sugar Corporation. Ten years they have been managing this industry. All the time, the Honourable Prime Minister points to me for being at NLTB in 1997, but this Government, and he has been handling this industry from 2006, ten long years and it is dead.

HON. MEMBER.- We are fixing up your problem.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- As I speak, it is \$31 million in the red - the Fiji Sugar Corporation.

HON. MEMBER.- We are fixing up your problem.

They cannot do anything in the 10 years that they have been handling this very important industry and this industry is the mother to half the population of this country. It nurtured them, it looked after them.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- You forgot, you were at NLTB!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- You, you in your 10 years here, what have you done? Nothing, you have killed this baby, it is dead as I speak.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Will tell you what you did.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Madam Speaker, \$31 million, and as I speak, this industry, the Fiji Sugar Corporation has stopped all capital works because it has not got the money and the people, the person that they elected or they chose to manage this very important firm was more concerned about setting up his own company and he has been investigated, as I speak now.

So, the Government must accept and admit that they can do nothing, that all the solutions that have put into this, the big problem has not worked and we should now go bipartisan ...

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Hear, hear.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- ... they should look at other views, our views, my view, yes, my view because 10 years of your view had done nothing, it killed the industry ...

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- ... it is dead, dead on your lap. Yes, that baby is now dead on your lap, you must admit that and that will be your legacy, that will be the legacy of this Government. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- I have to give the floor to the Government now before another one from the Opposition. I now give the floor to the Honourable Viam Pillay.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Thank you, Madam Speaker, I rise not to support the motion. I am a cane farmer, my farm number is 851 in Mota Sector in Ba, and I am part of Nadrau TT46 gang. I am also the gang secretary.

I am very much surprised to hear from people like Honourable Nawaikula who is speaking on the sugar industry.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. V. PILLAY.- And if anyone has ever stood for the farmers of Fiji, it is only the Honourable Prime Minister.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. V. PILLAY.- This is well-known to all the farmers of Fiji, Madam Speaker, he is well-known to all the farmers of Fiji and through past experiences we have seen, when former leaders used to go and do consultations, farmers who used to harvest thousand tonnes, 900 tonnes, 800 tonnes and 700 tonnes of cane used to sit in front. Now, it is totally the opposite, Madam Speaker. In front

of the Honourable Prime Minister are those who are in real need. They are right beside him to give their consent, that is the difference, and people like Honourable Nawaikula is talking on the sugar industry. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now give the floor to the Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Leader of the Opposition, you have the floor.

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- Madam Speaker, you have to give us extra time for all the distractions that are coming from the other side.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Actually you have not started, but you can start now.

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. In regards to the finger pointing from the Honourable Prime Minister to Honourable Nawaikula who has already responded and also to me, I thank him for his finger pointing this morning.

In terms of the sugar industry, it is very difficult to bring any sugar matters to this House, Madam Speaker, and the fact that Honourable Prem Singh has spoken very articulately on an issue that is very close to his heart, we could feel his passion and very sympathetic towards the sugar industry as presented by him this morning.

Now, in terms of the SDL, which the Honourable Prime Minister keeps on pointing to me about, in 2006, Madam Speaker, we had a very good Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Kaliopate Tavola who had a very good background into the sugar industry especially the economics of it. He was able to negotiate on behalf of the government, that is the SDL government at that time, with the European Union (EU) and the EU actually allocated EUR300 million in 2006 for implementation in 2009. But what happened in 2006, everyone knows, Madam Speaker and that has been the contributing factor into the demise of the sugar industry in that the EUR300 million which was to be implemented in the sugar industry in terms of the mills, sugarcane farms, farmers themselves. For implementation in 2009, it is the Honourable Prime Minister who has been the cause of the demise of the sugar industry.

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- No, I am not the cause of the demise.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Alvick Maharaj.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Madam Speaker, let me remind this august House that whatever happened in 2006, that is the very reason we have our sugar industry at the moment. Had SDL continued to be in power, I do not think even the FSC Mill would have survived until 2016.

Madam Speaker, I do not understand why NFP thinks if they only formed a bipartisan committee, then only would the sugar industry survive.

Madam Speaker, let me remind this august House that people do not lie. Farmers are happy with what the Bainimarama-led Government has done and they have spoken in the 2014 General Elections. That is why, Madam Speaker, they want our Honourable Prime Minister to lead us because what he has done for the farmers in the past 10 years, no other government has done it. Where was NFP, Madam Speaker, when they were asked to come on board? Honourable Attorney-General has

informed this House that in 2008, Honourable Prasad was asked to come on board and help, but he opted to stay out. So, now why, Madam Speaker?

On one side, they do not want to help, but now since they are part of Parliament, they want to show the people that they now come as a Messiah. They had criticised and opposed everything Government has done for the farmers. In his speech, Madam Speaker, nowhere did Honourable Singh come up with any suggestions on how to improve the industry. All he and other members did was criticise the Government. Everyone knows what NFP is doing, yet FijiFirst is being criticised of politicising the issue. We urge the Opposition to stop playing with the farmers' feelings.

Honourable Gavoka spoke about land leases. What was happening before 2006 with SVT and SDL Governments - everyone knows. People of Labasa were forced to move out of their land and had to come and settle in Viti Levu because their leases were not renewed, yet Opposition Members stand up here in Parliament and say, "what have they been doing prior to 2006?" It is a shame, Madam Speaker.

It is only the FijiFirst Government led by the Honourable Prime Minister who is ensuring that leases are now renewed for all the farmers.

(Honourable Members interject)

I ask, where were these people in late 90s and early 2000 when people were asked to vacate their land, home and their farms? For this reason, Madam Speaker, I oppose the motion. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Mohammed Dean.

HON. M.M.A. DEAN.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I see this motion as another reason by the Opposition just to put the Government down and they are making lots of generalisations like Honourable Nawaikula did. He just stood up and started making generalisations about all the Ministers and the ministries that they are failing. We do understand that there is a freedom of speech here, but if you are making a generalisation about a particular ministry that they are a total failure, I think....

HON. SPEAKER.- Order! You are criticising the Speaker. Please, you may not criticise the Speaker, when I had made my ruling. Keep the Speaker out of your speech, you may carry on.

HON. M.M.A. DEAN.- Madam Speaker, I also come from a farming background and words have been used from the Opposition side that the industry is doomed, the people are crying. I just want to say that under the leadership of the Honourable Prime Minister, people are feeling safer and secure, especially in terms of land leases and security of land tenure.

Madam Speaker, we have also visited certain institutes that are related to the sugar industry and one institute in particular is the Sugar Research Institute. They are developing cane seedlings and they have informed us of the immense support that they are receiving from the Government to help in the long-term initiative to implement in the sugar industry so that the industry survives. So, I really do not know where they are getting the information from that in the long-term the industry will be doomed. They are using words like "doom". Doom means complete failure. The sugar industry has not failed, Madam Speaker. Farmers are still farming. They are using words which are creating a lot of negative attention and I think that they should not be doing that. We also visited the Sugar Research Tribunal Office in Lautoka and they were also saying that they are very supportive of what the Government is doing.

As a matter of fact, Madam Speaker, they have developed a programme whereby they have clustered the farmers in different sectors so that there is more communication between the farmers and the stakeholders who are involved in the sugar industry. So, these are some of the indications whereby very positive feedbacks are coming, not only from the farmers, and the people but also from the different stakeholders and the institutes that are involved with the sugar industry. This also gives us an indication that there are positive plans under way which are in actuality having a good promise that the sugar industry, under the leadership of our Honourable Prime Minister, the future looks good. So, it is very surprising when they are coming with the information that the industry is getting doomed, that people are crying, that the industry will not survive and that the stakeholders are getting fed up.

Madam Speaker, these are some ways that they are distorting information to the public through this august House, like I said, creating a very bad picture of what the Government is doing. The examples I have used, Madam Speaker, are the ones where I have gone out in reality and seeing the feedback that is being given by different people, institutes and the stakeholders and in that capacity, Madam Speaker, I strongly stand to object the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister for Fisheries, you have the floor.

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Madam Speaker, I will have a very short contribution in opposing the motion on the floor. I think the consequential events of 2006 had created a lot of disturbance and confusion within the farming industry in Fiji.

I think Honourable Prem Singh would agree with me, if we visit the farms around the western areas, we will see a lot of vacant land just growing with bush. Basically what happened is that the *iTaukei* landowners were encouraged not to lease out their land, to take over the land. This land, has from since then have been left idle and there has been no farming activity, sugarcane or whatsoever that have been created in this vacant land.

The Opposition basically I think is trying to contribute and have some say in the running of the industry itself.

Madam Speaker, this morning I was given a small plaque that I was going to be part of a delegation to New York and I thought that I would read the contents of the plaque so that it gives an indication, this is for Valentine. It is a passage given to me by my wife before I leave with the delegation tomorrow. It reads: "God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can and the wisdom to know the difference." Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call on the Honourable Niumataiwalu.

HON. M.A. NIUMATAIWALU.- Madam Speaker, I am not a cane farmer but I was a media person covering Lautoka, from Sigatoka to Rakiraki in the 1980s and 1990s. I stand to oppose the motion because I thought that Honourable Prem Singh had alluded to last night how the relationship was through bipartisan between both sides, but then he started to run the Government side down and say that under this Government, things were politicised.

I have covered the sugar industry in the West, based in Lautoka, the Prime Minister then was Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, following that was Prime Minister Chaudhry and then Prime Minister Qarase. The sugar industry was politicised then in 2006, and it was so difficult to get the industry to work together. Being based in the West for Fiji Broadcasting, for the old *Fiji Sun*, I covered the Prime Ministers where they went and things were so politicised.

I was also there when the issue of Agricultural Landlord and Tenants Act (ALTA) and Native Land Trust Act (NLTA) came up and seeing how the leases were not being renewed and there was this push that really promoted the NLTA instead of the ALTA, and to say the politicisation of the sugar industry began in 2006 is false, because I have been covering Elections since 1982, talking about people like Balwant Singh Rakha, et cetera.

I have been there and seen how things have been politicised in the sugar industry. I thank this Government for the direction that it is taking and yet I commend the Government for Permanent Secretary, Yogesh Karan for the work he is undertaking at the moment. I believe for a bipartisan state, hopefully the Opposition will come on board and support what the Government is doing because to say that it has been politicised since 2006, no, it was before that. I thought that we will probably be going to give an olive branch to Honourable Prem Singh when he talked about it last night but then he started to attack the Government. I thought we might as well just withdraw that olive branch and say that we oppose the motion before the House this morning. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I give the floor to Honourable Sudhakar.

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- Thank you, Madam Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to make my contribution to the motion on the floor.

Madam Speaker, I was listening with keen interest when the Honourable Prem Singh was presenting his motion and I also had the opportunity to hear my esteemed colleagues on this side of the House when they made their contributions and also to some of the distortion of facts that was made by Members on the other side of the House (a section on this side).

Madam Speaker, it has been said by Members of the Opposition that the current supposed state of decline in the sugar industry is because of the events of 2006. Nothing can be further from the truth, Madam Speaker. It is a fact that the Act on which most of the sugar leases were subjected to was the Agricultural Landlord and Tenants Act. It was formed in 1967 and that Act provided for a 30-year lease for agricultural leases with an automatic 20-year renewal. So from 1967 to 1997, all the sugar industry leases had a 30-year term and then there was the 20-year extension.

The leases that expired after 1997 had no provision for extension or no provision of renewal, so the leases started expiring on the sugar industry cane leases before the FijiFirst came into power.

The sugarcane does not grow on water, it does not grow in thin air, it grows on land and the single most important reason which Honourable Prem Singh has left out of his submission is the lack of arable cane land to plant sugarcane, and that has happened because of some people on the other side of the House.

The *Soqosoqo Duavata ni Lewenivanua* (SDL) was in power when the leases expired. The SDL was in power when members of the Native Land Trust Board (one of the members had just walked in now) went around telling the people not to renew their leases. It was a trump card and a political card to hold on to power.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Years ago.

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- Yes, you were in power at that time.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- What have you done today?

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- The land leases were expiring and farmers were chased out of their houses in the middle of the night. It only stopped in 2006 when this man came to power. Our Honourable Prime Minister stopped mass eviction. I have been to places like Lagalaga, Daku, Qeledamu, Koronubu, Veisaru, Binai in Ba. These people were chased in the middle of the night and they are now living in the slum areas of Vatuwaqa and other places near Nasinu because they do not have a place to stay. The Honourable Prime Minister came and stopped that.

If some of the Members on the other side go around and ask the people like taxi drivers where they came from, they would say, “I had a very large cane farm in Labasa, the lease expired, it was not renewed, the landowners came and took over, now I am here driving a taxi.” Same story all over the place.

It is very easy, Madam Speaker, for the other side to point fingers but the fact is, before 2006, the Members on the other side (in a different name) were in power, what did they do? What action did they take to renew the leases? Nothing was there and that is the result of the rural-urban migration.

Now coming to the fact of what this Government is doing to save the industry, it is a fact. This Government has renewed 85 percent of the cane leases to salvage the industry. People are going and coming back for farm. People from overseas are returning to Fiji to start their cane farms because they now have the political security, the economic security and the peace of mind that they needed. Something that was lacking from 1997, all the way to 2006, when Honourable Nawaikula was in the Native Land Trust Board. It was his responsibility to encourage the landowners, he did not do it, now he is asking questions of the Government what we are doing.

Let me give some simple facts of what the Prime Minister and this Government have done for the industry.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- (Inaudible)

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- Where is the land, you took the land away?

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- (Inaudible)

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- Madam Speaker, currently when a farmer ploughs and tills his land, he is given \$2,000 for tilling and ploughing, up to \$2,000 per acre. For planting, there is another grant, even for the seeds that we get to plant, there is a grant for that.

This Government is giving cash and incentives to the farmers so that they plant more cane. The trouble is, there is no land and the Government has established Committee for Better Utilisation of Land (CBUL) where officers of the ministries go and discuss with the landowners and tries to negotiate. This bipartisan Committee that they are trying to form, we are already practising that. We are going around, talking to the landowners and farmers and agreeing to good deals so that the farmer gets the land, he plants and the landowners get the good return for that.

Now the previous governments, before 2006, have actively engaged in discouraging the landowners from renewing the leases, so what that resulted in, the farmers lost their leases, the landowners lost their revenue.

If you go up to places like Veisaru, Koronubu in Ba, Lagalaga in Labasa, and Drasa in Lautoka, a lot of arable land there has got *vaivai* trees, which is ready for harvest now because it is 20 years of neglect.

HON. MEMBER.- Tell them.

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- In fact, the Minister for Forests should look into that, how are the *vaivai* trees now, because it is their doing?

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- Yes, it is your doing.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- This Government

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- There is no incentive here.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- Listen to this one, I will tell you the incentives.

What this Government is doing, Madam Speaker, is not only....

(Honourable Opposition Member interjects)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order! Interjections are getting frivolous. I will not vigorously, allow them Honourable Sudhakar.

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- Madam Speaker, let alone the direct intervention in the industry, what this Government is doing is trying to stop the rural-urban migration. If someone goes to Namau area at this time, a place is 20 kilometres away from the main Ba town centre, with the help of the Honourable Minister for Infrastructure there is now power lines going all the way up to Navala. What that means is that, when the farmers have the facility and the infrastructure there, they will not move from rural areas to urban areas. This Government is investing in that area, it is not only investing in cash incentives for the sugarcane farmers, it is even investing in the infrastructure so that farmers stay on the farms and produce. When they have the electricity there, they will do their boreholes, they will do their water catchment and they will water their plants. During dry times we see farmers using water pumps to water the cane farms near the rivers. We can do that through this incentive.

One of those assistance was the Help for Home Initiative. After *TC Winston* last year a lot of farmers have nowhere to go. They would have left their place on the farms and come to stay in slums in the city, causing more damage to the industry but what the Government has done, it has allowed them to stay in their place, rebuild their houses and keep on farming, save the industry.

The issue that they have generalised by saying that the Government has not done anything, the Government has destroyed the industry, the Government has done this, the Government has done that, but I am highlighting what the Government is doing well for the industry. As I have said, apart from the direct incentives and direct interjection of cash in the industry, the Government is doing other things to protect the farmers so that they do not move away and neglect the farm.

If one takes a drive around places like Varadoli, behind the town where they are planting cane now, farmers are coming back, coming all the way from overseas. I have a friend who was a bank manager with Westpac, Mr. Rakesh Kumar, who has left his job and is doing farming now. He is happy with the Government's incentives, he is happy with the investment that the Government is doing for the farmers. Now if the Government is doing so much and if the other side stops

manipulating the landowners and influence them to renew their leases, the problem will be solved. The problem is, when the Government side is trying to do the good the work, we always hear negativities from the other side. If they stop that, the industry will survive and flourish. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Dulakiverata, you may have the floor.

HON. J. DULAKIVERATA.- Madam Speaker, I just want to make a very short contribution to the motion before the House. Let us all put politics apart, elections is over, we have been elected to this House. You are the Government, we are the Opposition. Madam Speaker, by harping on the past will never do us any good.

We all agree, Madam Speaker, that the industry is not functioning as it should be. It is about time we all work together to make it work. We have heard in this House that 200,000 people's livelihood depend on this industry. So it is important that we pull our resources together to make this industry work. With that, Madam Speaker, I support the motion before the House.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, I now give the floor to the Honourable Samuela Vunivalu.

HON. S.B. VUNIVALU.- Madam Speaker, I will work on the calendar. I come from a cane farming background and I know what sugarcane is all about. There are 365 days in a year, Madam Speaker, and within these 365 days, 52 days are Sundays and for us *iTaukei*, we go to church on this day.

Madam Speaker, I am saying this because some of the leases expired and they were not renewed during the term of the previous Government. There are 52 Saturdays where most *iTaukei* go and watch rugby or play rugby but they never touch cane. I was very upset because some of our friends their leases were not renewed by the previous Government because these are the people who are planting cane. My family does not work in the farm on Saturdays and Sundays.

Apart from that, there are times when there are deaths in the family and for the *iTaukei*, death ceremony means one week. We do not go out and see our cane fields. Also there are times when there are weddings, which is the time when we stay in the village. We do not see our cane fields.

I am very happy now, Madam Speaker, that we are giving back leases to those people who can plant cane. That is my contribution, Madam Speaker, and I do not support the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I call on the Honourable Minister for Agriculture.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Madam Speaker, I will contribute to the motion, I do not support the motion and I will justify why. Let me state a few things before I go onto the issues that I want to cover very briefly. Firstly, Rome was not built in one day, give this Government time to fix what needs to be fixed.

Madam Speaker, I have spoken about the positive turnaround in the agriculture sector and sugar is one of the sub-sectors, a major contributor in this positive turnaround. I am again urging all Honourable Members and, of course, the people of this nation to give Government time.

Madam Speaker, when we want to get rid of cobwebs, we have to get rid of the spider. Unfortunately for the sugar industry for a long time, we were just trying to dust off the cobwebs but the spider was well alive and active and doing all the damages that it was doing.

Madam Speaker, the Government got rid of the spider so that we can then get rid of the cobwebs. That is very, very critical, Madam Speaker. To me this bipartisan approach is what I call crocodile tears. The damage has been done, the victim is already being swallowed, hurt and then weep to show emotion, and crocodile tears.

I am an active cane farmer and I know the issues in the sugar industry. I will talk about what affects production, put aside the milling and the marketing component. There are few things and the first one is land. From 1993 land leases were not renewed. In 2008, CBUL came into place. So production even then was affected.

Madam Speaker, five years from expiry, cane farmers do not reinvest in their farms, in their business. Never, because of the uncertainty then. Land again was the major downfall in sugar production, Madam Speaker, until 2008 when most of the land leases were then renewed under the current Government.

If you go to Taveuni most of the farmers there now are from the sugar belt areas. If you go to Manoca in Nausori or Vakabalea or Raiwaqa in Navua, you will find cane farmers who left because of the non-renewal of leases, Madam Speaker. If go to Davuilevu, Veidogo in Vatuwaqa this is where they all ended up because of the non-renewal of leases. I will not dwell more on that.

Soil degradation; farming is a business but we need productive soil. The Honourable Prem Singh talked about ratoon crops that are more than 20 to 30 years. You keep pumping in chemical fertilizer without any remedial action, it degrades soil fertility, and definitely it is going to affect production.

HON. MEMBER.- They cannot afford it.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Fertilizer is being subsidised but it is the farmers that make the choices and unfortunately for some, definitely they are small holder farmers, they are not reinvesting.

Changing weather patterns; cycles of El Nino comes every four years. According to a reputable soil scientist at New Castle University, I had a session with him last year when he visited Fiji, he said that whenever there is an El Nino, production decreases automatically or affects production automatically by 18 percent.

Madam Speaker, these are contributing factors, Government is creating the environment but these are external factors that are beyond our influence.

Labour and ageing farmers; this is a fact. It is in the rice industry, it is in the sugar industry, we have a lot of ageing farmers and we respect the commitment for those that are remaining, but that is a fact. We have a lot of ageing farmers and, of course, there is a shortage of labour because not all cane gets to the mill. There are some leftover cane in the field because of the shortage of labour issues. I know that there are few others who would like to take the floor on this motion, Madam Speaker, but again to me, crocodile tears, damage has been done but let us give Government time to clean up the rest of the cobwebs because we have got rid of the spider. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Prime Minister, you have the floor.

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, this motion should not have been entertained in the first place because you know and everyone knows, especially the Honourable Prem Singh and Honourable Gavoka that this motion is in the two Bills that is with the Committee.

We also know, Madam Speaker, why at the end of the day we entertained this motion because they did not have any motion to bring forward as they were a bit incompetent in putting their motions together. This motion, Madam Speaker, as I understand it is about nine months old and we only brought it forward because they did not have any other motion to bring forward.

At the outset, Madam Speaker, let me highlight again that our sugarcane industry is here to stay. My Government is committed to creating a modern, economically viable and sustainable sugar industry through the reforms that I have implemented. There are a lot of reforms which will, of course, be highlighted to the Committee when it meets. We do not need a political answer to this sugarcane industry but we need a commercial answer to this which is being provided by this side of the House because we are not politically motivated to harass the sugarcane industry and, of course, the farmers. I will not read out the reforms that we have put in place, Madam Speaker, but I have heard someone mention from the other side of the House that capital works have been stopped. Capital works has been stopped until the appointment of the new CEO who is going to come and review the projects in place. That is fairly clear to everyone who understands the work of a Board but then again, the other side of the House do not know this.

I want to mention, Madam Speaker, that there is talk from the Honourable Prem Singh about the disenchantment by the Sugar Cane Growers and farmers, but I would like say that the disenchantment is created by people like Honourable Prem Singh, seriously. I heard last week in a hotel in Nadi where they paid an hourly rate, there was a gathering of political group of people at San Bruno and the gathering was told, Madam Speaker, that if FijiFirst wins, the sugarcane industry will collapse, so vote NFP. This is the kind of message that brings disenchantment to farmers and it is very sad.

Honourable Prem Singh has talked about the fall of the industry in 2006. I think he would be wise to listen to the Honourable Minister for Agriculture, a farmer who's talked about all the factors that have affected the sugarcane industry in this statement. Please, go and read his statement again, it will help you talk to the farmers.

But when he talked about 2006, it is not 2006, Madam Speaker, as highlighted by the Honourable Minister Agriculture, one of them was about the renewal of land lease, I think that man there (pointing towards an Opposition Member) is responsible for that. All Honourable Prem Singh has to do, is to find out whose....

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

HON. SPEAKER.- Point of Order!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Can the Honourable Prime Minister refer to the Honourable Members when addressing them. That is not the parliamentary way of doing things.

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- I want to make sure that this is on, Madam Speaker. Honourable Nawaikula.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Thank you.

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- But if Honourable Prem Singh wants to know one of the people that was involved in the non-renewal of leases, he does not have to go far, he just has to walk about 10 meters and he meets up with Honourable Nawaikula.

(Laughter)

He is talking about bipartisan approach, Madam Speaker, bipartisan approach is the agreement or cooperation of two political parties that usually oppose each other's policies. We have three political parties here, Madam Speaker, I think this bipartisan approach that is recommended by Honourable Prem Singh should be done between the NFP and SODELPA.

(Laughter)

Seriously, Madam Speaker, these are two political parties who have opposing views of what life should be in Fiji.

We listened to the Honourable Nawaikula talk about all the villages that lack water. He never talked about his village, or the Honourable Leader of the Opposition's village. He has confined himself to Cakaudrove, very limited in scope in his mentality of what politics is about in Fiji.

We and this side of the House will look after their villages and their settlements. That is the difference between that side of the House, except that group and this side of the House, Madam Speaker. I think the bipartisan approach that the Honourable Prem Singh wants done should be between SODELPA and the NFP; leave us out of it.

And bipartisan approach, Madam Speaker, means getting together. I do not think the Members of the SODELPA on that side of the House have ever gotten together, seriously. I do not know if they have ever had a caucus.

Remember, Madam Speaker last year, when we talked about the flag, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition was seen in one of the media, holding a Fiji flag walking down the street. Yes, she looked nice holding the flag.

(Laughter)

I remember, Madam Speaker, on that day I highlighted to you and the Members of this House that none of the Honourable Members on the other side of the House was behind her. She was all alone. I do not know what the story behind that was but the only thing that I can gather is that, there is no togetherness on that side of the House. So we cannot have a bipartisan approach to this, if there is a big separation in that group on that side. There should be a bit of love. Someone mentioned that one day this week we will celebrate Valentine's Day. Please feel free.

(Laughter)

Honourable Prem Singh mentioned the former Member of Parliament, Honourable Draunidalo. He has forgotten that when the....

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- I rise on a point of order, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Point of Order.

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- He should not be pointing at people and also be relevant. It is a sugar issue and there should be no personal vendetta. Thank you.

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- I apologise, Madam Speaker, I will not point at her.

Honourable Prem Singh mentioned the former Member of Parliament, Honourable Draunidalo. He has forgotten that when Honourable Members of SODELPA walked out when Prime Minister Modi was here, Honourable Draunidalo walked out as well. They were left on their own.

Yet, he wants a bipartisan approach to the sugar reform, Madam Speaker, that cannot happen. I am saying that we should leave it to the Committee to look after this problem that they think that we have, and I am sure it will come out. If he has any questions with regards to the sugarcane industry please, feel free to right to me, not only as Prime Minister who will look after you and the cane farmers, but also as Minister for Sugar.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- I rise on a point of order.

HON. SPEAKER.- Point of order.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Madam Speaker, allow me to stand under Standing Order 81 to correct a misrepresentation that was alleged against me. The allegation by the Honourable Prime Minister was that, I renewed leases.

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- You did not.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- I did not renew leases!

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- I did not renew leases.

And that is the only thing that you have been harping about. You have been there for 10 years, what have you done? You killed the industry. It is dead and buried. 10 years! So it is wrong to say that I did not renew the leases. No!

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. The issue is on the content of the speech and not on the rules and procedures of the House. So it does not qualify a point of order.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Madam Speaker, I was not going to speak on the motion, but I am compelled to, listening to the Honourable Prime Minister. I want to say that the Honourable Attorney-General yesterday or day before yesterday made reference to our meeting in a hotel. Today the Honourable Prime Minister makes reference to a hotel, yes it is a cheap hotel. We cannot afford Denarau, unlike the FijiFirst Party.

(Laughter)

And I would urge the Honourable Prime Minister and the Honourable Attorney-General not to devalue that hotel. It is owned by an investor. He is trying very hard to build more and is contributing to the tourism industry. But very briefly, Madam Speaker, it is really sad that the Honourable Prime Minister used the occasion to really talk about politics which he himself has been saying over the years that the sugar industry was politicized. Listening to all the contributions from the Honourable Members on the Government side, it appeared to me that they are stuck in the pathway, we would not know.

Madam Speaker, after the 2000 events, there was this big issue about leases and I remember talking to the then General Manager of the NLTB to convince him and say, "Look, non-renewal of leases is going to affect the sugar industry drastically" so we understand that. I think as the Government always says, we should not be stuck in the past.

Let us not get stuck in that past and I have not heard many suggestions or examples of what the Government is doing that is helping the farmers bring back the confidence and increase the production. So really, Madam Speaker, I am saddened by the outright rejection of this bipartisan

proposal because we believe that it is not just about the commercial aspects of it, it is about politics and it is about getting the farmers together.

Madam Speaker, when we had the Growers Council, when we had farmer's organisations operating effectively, the farmers could get together, they could share knowledge and they could discuss.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- I rise on a point of order, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Point of Order.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, just a clarification; the Honourable Professor Prasad is talking about a subject matter that is actually in the Bills themselves, in terms of farmers representation. It is in the Bill itself. So whether you are talking about farmer representation in the Council, that is actually the subject matter in one of the Bills. So, he is now traversing on that area.

If you heard all the other speakers, both from this side and the other side, none of them actually spoke about farmer representation or Council representation because it is actually in the Bill itself. I am sure Honourable Members in the Committee can verify that. So, it would be nice if he can sort of stay away from that. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Please note what has been said. Not only that, you have about 13 minutes because Honourable Prem Singh has to give his right of reply and the whole time allocated for this motion is up to 12.10 p.m.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- I will finish soon, Madam Speaker, to give Honourable Prem Singh the opportunity for the right of reply.

Madam Speaker, I was just talking about politics, that is why I made references to that issue.

Madam Speaker, just on the subject of the renewal of leases, as I said, we agree with what happened in 2000 and that is history but in the last 10 years, the renewal rate has just been about 49 percent. So we still have this issue under this Government and that is why we are suggesting this bipartisan parliamentary committee because we are saying that the bipartisan committee itself is going to bring back that unity and understanding as to what needs to be done to rescue the industry. There are people on the other side who may have a different opinion in 2000 but today, they are talking about getting together, today they are prepared to deal with the issues and we are belittling them. We have all had past....

HON. SPEAKER.- If you are to give Honourable Prem Singh 10 minutes for his right of reply, you have only one minute.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Madam Speaker, in that case, I will stop and give the opportunity to Honourable Prem Singh.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now call on the Honourable Prem Singh to give his right of reply.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, just for clarification because some Honourable Members on this side of the House wanted to speak, so we cannot speak now?

HON. SPEAKER.- No, time limits us on that. I call on the Honourable Prem Singh.

HON. P. SINGH.- Thank you, Madam Speaker

Thank you for all the views expressed in this House. Madam Speaker, let me make a few clarifications. Honourable Alvick Maharaj said that I have not proposed any way forward. In fact, I had in my presentation very clearly outlined that for an industry to survive we need to entice the farmers, give them the confidence to cultivate land. As it is, we know the agriculture landlord tenant non-renewal of leases had a great impact. He acknowledged that, it has been said in this House, it has been expressed outside this House and it remains a fact and I agree with some of the Honourable Members particularly Honourable Sudhakar who said that the lease renewals continue to be a setback for the industry.

Madam Speaker, the lease renewals and non-lease renewals continue to be a problem till this day. Leases have expired after 2006 and they have not been renewed. So, the percentage that we are talking about; 49 percent of leases that have been renewed on agricultural leases, this greatly impacts, Madam Speaker. I have also said that we must increase the crop size and I had given an example that 24,000 hectares of ratoon cane out there and the only way the FSC and other industry stakeholders, this is their estimation.

Now, the cane production is around 18 to 32 tonnes per acre and by replanting these ratoons we will achieve 50 to 70 tonnes an acre and this is where we acknowledge these problems. The motion sets to set in place how we can restructure the industry as a nation for the benefit of the nation. It is not about politics, politics has its own game plan, the politics that we have seen, I do not want to traverse into the Bills that are before the Standing Committee but needless to say that, that bipartisanship has eluded us for a very long time. It is my sincere and fervent hope that we think outside the box and address a problem that is now being left on our doorstep and particularly after the expiry of the exported preferential quotas to EU in September 2017, it is to map a way out of the situation that we are in.

Madam Speaker, let me at this juncture say that no one single viewpoint can prevail when we are talking about reorganisation of an industry, an industry of the magnitude that we have. It needs a divergent of views collectively addressed to suit the needs of the industry at this time. So, Madam Speaker, whilst the Government is doing its part, we are offering a hand to compliment the reforms that are there. The lease renewals, Madam Speaker, it is solely upon the landowners and the TLTB.

The Honourable Prime Minister as the Minister for *iTaukei* Affairs and also a member of the TLTB, he should set in motion a programme with CBUL or other organisations to map a way out and put a moratorium on all expiry leases, which means that all those leases which expire, the tenant farmers are not evicted, instead they are given the opportunity to remain until we sought this problem out.

We have harped about non-renewal of leases but what actually is happening on the ground, leases continue to expire particularly in the peri-urban proximity because the land is needed for other purposes. We also acknowledge the resources owners, they need land for themselves, but the question is, Madam Speaker, that despite the 47 leases which expired in 1997 up until 2004 where a majority of the cane leases expired, we managed to produce 3.2 million tonnes of cane from the existing land. You do not need new land, and FSC will tell you this. We can make do with what we have, provided we do it in a coordinated way and in a way which paves the path for that confidence to come back.

There are many farmers who have exited the land are not willing to go back. Why? They have left the farm because of no confidence in the industry, the prices, the cost of production is going up and for us to say that the existing structure will be the saviour, I doubt it very much. We need new ideas, we need innovation, we need mechanisation and to do all these we need a bipartisan

approach. It is not something that can just come about as I said from one single viewpoint but collectively we can do it. I know the Honourable Members on the other side of the House would be willing to support this but because of some political considerations they cannot.

Madam Speaker, this is the height of politics in this House. But anyway, I acknowledge the Honourable Prime Minister's acknowledgment that he would listen to me and I can write to him, and probably this would be a start point but in the end, Madam Speaker, it is only a small step, we need a bigger step to solve a bigger problem and the bigger problem is, no one wants to acknowledge and no one want to let go off the very big picture out there which is looming in 2018. We are doing it for the benefit of not only the farmers but the industry as a whole which has 200,000 mouths to feed every day. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Parliament will now vote on the Honourable Prem Singh's motion. The question is that this Parliament agrees to establish a Bipartisan Select Committee on Sugar to collectively find solutions to revive the sugar industry to ensure it remains a vibrant industry economically benefitting all stakeholders.

Does any Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of "ayes" and "noes")

HON. SPEAKER.- There being opposition, Parliament will now vote on the motion.

Votes Cast:

Ayes	:	13
Noes	:	32
Not Voted	:	4

There being 13 Ayes, 32 Noes and 4 Not Voted, the motion is defeated.

We will move onto the next item on the agenda.

END OF WEEK'S STATEMENT

EIA Report – Extraction of Sand-Ore in Kulukulu

HON. SPEAKER.- Before I call on the Honourable Member, I wish to remind the Honourable Members that 10 minutes is given to the mover and 10 minutes to the Minister responding. There is no other debate and I now call upon the Honourable Prem Singh to have the floor.

HON. P. SINGH.- Madam Speaker, I move:

That this Honourable House calls on the Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development and National Disaster Management to make publicly known the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) report for the extraction of sand-ore (magnetite) in Kulukulu, Sigatoka in line with the High Court Order of 2016 pertaining to the public's entitlement to access and obtaining copies of EIA reports without restrictions.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now call upon the Honourable Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development and National Disaster Management to reply to the motion and you

have 10 minutes.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. P. SINGH.- Madam Speaker, Point of Order. I need to move the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- Right, you have 10 minutes to speak before the response from the Honourable Minister.

HON. P. SINGH.- Madam Speaker, this is the End of the Week's Statement which whereby I request this august House and call on the Honourable Minister responsible to make publically known the Environmental Impact Assessment.

Madam Speaker, during the Business Committee, you would recall that there was confusion about the exact site that I wanted to speak about. I intend to clarify that here now. We understand that the Australian parent company, "Dome Gold Mines" has been granted Special Prospective Licence, 1495 for the Sigatoka Ironsands Project where sand ore (magnetite) is the target mineral. We have seen the maps projected online and they are being transmitted on the feed now. We also understand, that the Special Prospective Licence was inching towards a Full Mining Licence as at November, 2016.

Madam Speaker, we have been inundated with call of concern from angry residents and communities who are situated near where the mouth of the Sigatoka River meets the sea because of what looks to be like aggressive dredging happening there. The Public Special Prospective Licence 1495 documents provided by Dome show that part of their project includes dredging and this is our concern. There is no clarity on who is doing dredging and what the parameters are. The residents and communities that we have spoken to are outraged because of environmental devastation that they see on a day to day basis.

The eyewitness accounts say that China Railways is doing the dredging for which the machines operate day and night, pausing only for two hours in a day causing sleepless nights for those in the immediate surrounds.

The Muasara Wetlands was an idyllic river mouth environment with a natural beachfront and abundance of fish and thriving marine biodiversity. The local residents used to welcome surfers and locals who enjoyed that beautiful beachfront. It is now a very sorry and ugly site. Environmental devastation, Madam Speaker, you do not need to be a scientist to figure that out. There are dead pools of still water stagnating there. The residents and local communities said that baby fish were seen dead along the shoreline. Dead fish floating at the river mouth have been sighted upstream in Lawai Village and in waterways along the Coral Coast.

A Kulukulu farmer said that his farm was totally destroyed because the dredging waste blocked the natural water drainage during the last heavy rain. His entire crops were swamped with the muddy slush and could not be saved.

Madam Speaker, every mining campaign knows the importance of a Social Contract. When mining company seek interest for investors to get on board, the first thing investors will look at is whether or not there is a social contract. From the documentation that we have seen provided to the Australian Stock Exchange for transparency purposes, we know what Dome Mining has strong Japanese backing, with additional investment from China. But Madam Speaker, the Social Contract for this Special Prospecting Licence does not exist regardless of how effectively the regulators think they can manipulate consent, as we know they have been doing.

Madam Speaker, the Honourable Minister responsible for the EIA document for this project is of our Climate Change Champion. We commend that, however, we ask that it be proven here first in Fiji. The importance of thriving marine ecosystems cannot be understated and it is a crying shame that easy money is being sought through extraction, at the cost of the life of our environment and the livelihoods of the local community.

Madam Speaker, in order for Fiji to realise the potential of the micro life, we need to understand not only the minerals but the life and the genetic resources that we have. The Muasara Flats was teeming with life. That is why, also related to this is the need for this House to see the draft laws that we know is sitting in the Office of the Attorney-General related to Traditional Knowledge Cultural Expression to ensure that the genetic resources related to the Nagoya Protocol is understood and protected from pharmaceutical and such like interests. Those are also multi-billion dollar industries, Madam Speaker, and our thriving biodiversity is a gold mine – we just do not know what we have.

If the Honourable Minister sees fit to make the full EIA report public to us and the people out there, he can help to ensure that laws and regulations are upheld because Fiji must come first. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now give the floor to the Honourable Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development and National Disaster Management to have the floor.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. Before I make reference to the specific question which is on the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), let me say and assure all Fijians that of course are for this Government Fiji and the interest of its people is always first and will always remain as the priority of this Government.

Madam Speaker, the Honourable Member touched on dredging. Dredging is the responsibility of the Agriculture Ministry and of course we have a unit in the Ministry called the Land and Water Resources Management that is responsible for dredging in Fiji. We have conducted dredging of the Qawa River in Labasa, Ba River, Navua River as well as the mouth of the Rewa River and now it is in Sigatoka area. Let us distinguish between general dredging operations and of course mining which is a separate issue altogether, Madam Speaker.

On mining, the Ministry responsible is the Ministry for Lands and Mineral Resources. On environmental issues and the custodian on the Environment Management Act is the Department of Environment. I am responsible for dredging and I will explain the role that we play in this, Madam Speaker, there is magnetite in the Sigatoka River. Before the signing of the contract for the dredging of the Sigatoka River, the Ministry and of course Government ensured that an EIA was conducted because without an EIA, Government through the Ministry of Agriculture cannot conduct its dredging operations. That is one of the conditions; when the Ministry of Lands and Mineral Resources is satisfied that there is an EIA then it will give authorisation to the Ministry of Agriculture to conduct the dredging. That has been done and they just tabulated this morning, Madam Speaker, as per Question No. 41/2017 raised by the Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

You see on the table, the folder itself is the Environmental Impact Assessment Report, Madam Speaker. We have conducted consultations with all the stakeholders including the company that is responsible for mining as well as Ministry of Lands and Mineral Resources and of course the Department of Environment and the Ministry of Agriculture before the commencement of the dredging. Let me assure all Fijians that all the requirements has been fulfilled before we started with

the dredging operations, and of course the dredging operations is clearly marked in the Environment Management Plan, it will be in three stages and of course coming into the Kulukulu area as well.

Madam Speaker, let me respond to the question on the EIA. The Honourable Member clearly has not read the law in relation to EIA Report. Let me once again tell the other side what the law is. Section 17 of the Environmental Management Act, 2005 states: "that the Department must establish (I am talking about the Department of Environment), and maintain an environment register for the purpose of this Act into which:

1. prescribed matters must be recorded to a person is entitled to have access to any record of documents recorded in the Environment register;
2. Moreover, Regulation 41 of the Environment Management (EIA Process) Regulations 2007 provides as follows:
3. Regulation 41(1), Madam Speaker, says -

The Environmental Register maintained under Section 17 of the Act must include information about –

- (a) every site inspection report produced under Regulation 15;
- (b) the result of every screening of proposals under Part 2;
- (c) every EIA report produced under Part 4;
- (d) every review of an EIA report under Part 4;
- (e) every EIA approval granted under the Act;
- (f) every compliance report produced under regulations 34 and 7;
- (g) any variation of EIA approval granted under regulation 35;
- (h) any amendment of the identity of a corporate body assented under regulation 36;
- (i) every consultant registered under these regulations;
- (j) every environmental bond taken under these regulations.

I invite the Honourable Member to listen very carefully to this as well as the other side of the House.

1. The register or a copy of it must be: -
 - (a) kept at the office of the Director; and
 - (b) made available for inspection and copying by the public during normal office hours on payment of the prescribed fee.

So, the simple answer, Madam Speaker, is for the Honourable Member and any member of the public just to go now to the office of the Director Environment during operating hours and pay the fee because the Environment Impact Assessment Report has been handed over and approved by the Director Environment on 8th October, 2015.

In light of the above provisions, it is imperative to note that the EIA Report is a public document and is made available to the public for inspection and copying upon payment of the prescribed fee. The Honourable Member simply needs to go to the Office of the Director of Environment during normal office hours, request for a copy of the report and pay the requisite fee.

Madam Speaker, it is really that simple, the law is abundantly clear, the EIA Report is a public document, it is made accessible under the law for all Fijians and I urge the Honourable Member to read the law. Madam Speaker, this is what the Honourable Member is about but he has to go and pay for it from the Director of Environment. Thank you.

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDERS

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, a suspension motion has been brought to our attention and noting the time, I now call upon the Honourable Leader of the Government in Parliament.

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

That under Standing Order 6, that so much of Standing Order 23(1) is suspended so as to allow the House to sit beyond 12.30 p.m. in order to complete a Government business for the day.

HON. SPEAKER.- Do we have a seconder?

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- Madam Speaker, I second the motion.

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Madam Speaker, thank you. Honourable Members, we just want to table a Bill that needs to go before the Committee responsible so that it comes back in the next sitting of Parliament and thus this requirement. Madam Speaker, thank you for your indulgence.

HON. SPEAKER.- Do we have any comments from the House?

HON. MEMBERS.- No.

HON. SPEAKER.- There being no comments, the motion is therefore agreed to.

ELECTRICITY BILL 2017

HON. SPEAKER.- As Honourable Members are aware, Bills introduced under Standing Order 51 do not require notice however as it is Opposition day, Opposition business took precedence, I now call upon the Honourable Attorney-General to move his motion.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAYUM.- Madam Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 51, I move:

- a) That Electricity Bill 2017 be considered by Parliament without delay;
- b) That the Bill must pass through one stage at a single sitting of Parliament;
- c) That the Bill must be immediately referred to the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights;
- d) That the Standing Committee must report on the Bill to Parliament in the March sitting of Parliament;
- e) That upon presentation of the Report on the Bill by the Standing Committee, the Bill must be debated and voted upon by Parliament in the March sitting of Parliament but then one hour be given to debate the Bill with the right of reply given to me as the Member moving this motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Do we have a seconder?

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Madam Speaker, I beg to second the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now call upon the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Public Enterprises, Civil Service and Communications to have the floor.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, the Electricity Bill 2017 being tabled in Parliament by way of Standing Order is a result of Government's intention to corporatize the Fiji Electricity Authority which we discussed at some length and creates a company that will be registered under the Companies Act 2015.

The Company will subsequently be partially divested, Madam Speaker. Under the Electricity Act, FEA is currently enjoying a monopolistic status in the retail, transmission and distribution of electricity in Fiji. Traditionally, FEA also performs regulatory functions of approval of licences and compliance with safety standards.

A key feature of this Bill, Madam Speaker, is a proposed regulatory reform in the electricity industry in Fiji, given that partial divestment is not appropriate for the company to regulate the electricity industry or to issue electricity-related licences. The objective of establishing an independent regulator is to deregulate the electricity industry to further enhance Government's policy for good governance, transparency and accountability.

The primary roles and responsibilities of the regulator and the Minister will be to issue licences in relation to generation, transmission and supply of electricity to determine tariff supplies methodology of electricity and the administration, enforcement and regulation of the electricity industry. The Bill, Madam Speaker, also includes consequential amendments to the Commerce Commission Act 2010 to give effect to the proposed role of the regulator to the Fiji Commerce Commission.

Madam Speaker, I do not want to talk too long about this matter. We have highlighted the benefits of divestment, what is the need of it in particular also to get more renewable energy and to minimise Government's exposure as far as Government guarantees are concerned.

This Bill, Madam Speaker, is brought about by way of SO 51 because once the Bill becomes an Act of Parliament, it will give a lot of confidence to the would-be investors who will actually see that specific laws are there. If there is more transparency, the value of the company does go up and we are in a critical stage of those negotiations through our investment advisors.

Madam Speaker, that is all I will say by way of introduction. Of course, we will get to go to the Committee and the Committee will give its Report and come back in the March sitting of Parliament for us to vote upon. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- The motion is up for debate, I now invite comments from the House, if any? If there are no comments then the motion is agreed to.

Pursuant to Standing Order 51 the question:

- a) That the Electricity Bill 2017 be considered by Parliament without delay;
- b) That the Bill must pass through one stage at a single sitting of Parliament;
- c) That the Bill must be immediately referred to the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights;
- d) That the Standing Committee must report on the Bill to Parliament in the March sitting of Parliament;
- e) That upon presentation of the Report on the Bill by the Standing Committee, the Bill must be debated and voted upon by Parliament in the March sitting of Parliament but that one hour be given to debate the Bill with the right of reply given to the Honourable Attorney-General as the Member moving this motion.

Does any Member oppose the motion?

HON. MEMBERS.- No.

HON. SPEAKER.- There being no opposition, the motion is agreed to. Thank you, Honourable Members.

ADJOURNMENT

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

That Parliament adjourns until Monday, 20th March, 2017 at 9.30 a.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- Do we have a seconder?

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- Madam Speaker, I second the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- Question put.

There being no opposition, the motion is agreed to unanimously.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank you all very very much, Honourable Members of Parliament. Parliament is now adjourned until Monday, 20th March, 2017 at 9.30 a.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 12.29 p.m.