

Written Questions 104/2019

Hon. Inosi Kuridrani to ask the Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development, Waterways and Environment - Can the Minister update Parliament on the current status of the ALTA resettlement programme for ex-ALTA tenants.

Honourable Speaker, The Agricultural Landlord and Tenant Act (ALTA) was established on the 29th December, 1967 by the Fiji Government to rationalize the leasing of all crown, native and freehold land for agricultural purposes to protect both tenants and landowners. ALTA covers all agricultural land in Fiji, except where the land holding is less than one hectare, or where tenancies are held by members of a registered co-operative society, where the society is the landlord (often indigenous iTaukei), or where land is situated within a native reserve. Leasing of reserve land to indigenous iTaukei, called Class J lease, may only be allowed under the provision of ALTA, and then only under exceptional circumstances as determined by the Minister of iTaukei Affairs.

Honourable Speaker, A period of 30 years Agricultural lease term was approved under the ALTA Provision and the first batch of leases expired in 1997.

Table 1: Expiry of ALTA Leases (1997 – 2024)

Year	Leases	Year	Leases	Year	Leases
1997	134	2008	299	2019	306
1998	237	2009	278	2020	152
1999	1594	2010	374	2021	168
2000	1955	2011	445	2022	135
2001	458	2012	419	2023	148
2002	622	2013	487	2024	88
2003	432	2014	380	2025	85
2004	600	2015	784	2026	65
2005	463	2016	361	2027	54
2006	521	2017	177	2028	13
2007	652	2018	254		
TOTAL	7,668		4,258		1,214
GRAND TOTAL	13,140				

Source: Verification Status Report, Ministry of Agriculture & ALTA, 1997

Honourable Speaker, In 1998, Cabinet endorsed the establishment of the Department of Land Resources & Resettlement under the Ministry of Agriculture, Sugar and Land Resettlement (MASLR) to ensure proper placement of all ex- tenants and oversee the operation of the unit.

The Resettlement sites are; Raiwaqa, Vakabalea, Navudi, Navovo and Navunicibicibi Subdivision were established through government funding.

Honourable Speaker, In year 2000, the government assistance of \$28,000 were issued to outgoing farmers. From 2001 to 2006, the Farming Assistance Scheme (FAS) of \$10,000 were issued to out-going tenants and incoming replacement farmers. In 2008, the Cabinet decision approved for an increase in FAS assistance to \$15,000 which was to be funded in the 2009 budget.

Honourable Speaker, In the Western Division, there are 51 lots available in Navovo, Nadroga whereby 15 are currently occupied with an average land area of 8.747ha per lot. The remaining 48 lots are still vacant due to the following reasons;

- (1) lack of financial capital
- (2) poor infrastructure
- (3) lack of basic amenities (esp. water) and
- (4) lack of interest by would be tenants

However, government continues to support the program. In 2009, the government provided financial assistance of \$150,000 which was deposited to Fiji Development Bank (FDB) as part of their equity. A total of 15 farmers were resettled in Navovo, 8 farmers took up the offer while 4 withdrew.

Honourable Speaker, In the Central Division, a total of 69 farmers currently reside in the following localities; Raiwaqa and Vakabalea. While in the Northern Division, only 15 farmers are currently settled in Navudi and Vunicibicibi, Macuata.

Table 2: Distribution of lots under ALTA Program

Division	Location	Number of Lots	Occupied	Vacant	Remarks
Central	Raiwaqa	42	39	3	Average of 2.4 ha/lot
	Vakabalea	30	30	-	Average of 2.4 ha/lot
Northern	Navudi	54	12	42	Average of 6.6 ha/lot
	Navunicibicibi	42	3	39	Average of 5.8 ha/lot
Western	Navovo	51	15	36	Average of 8.7 ha/lot
Total		219	99	120	

Source: Land and Resource Planning and Development Unit, Crop Research & Extension Division, MoA

There are opportunities to develop the 120 vacant lots through the current and new initiative of the Ministry in collaboration with other potential partners.

Honourable Speaker, the Ministry of Agriculture continue to support our Resettlement farmers through the Committee of Better Utilisation of Land (CBUL), Commodity Development and Support Facility Programmes for both Crops and Livestock. The focus of CBUL is to finance the leasing native land for cane and non-sugar commodities with a budget of \$7.7million in this financial year (2018/19) and to date, the Ministry have utilised \$3.4 million for payment of expiry leases.

Honourable Speaker, In conclusion, despite the Ministry's effort to contribute to the success of the ALTA program, only 1% of the total farmers with expired leases opted to settle in the identified resettle areas. The other 99% have opted for other opportunities such as activities in other sectors, second generation farmers who are no longer interested in farming and some prefer to purchase only residential lots.