

LAND AND WATER RESOURCES MANAGEMENT BILL 2016
(BILL NO. 7 OF 2016)

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BILL NO. 7 OF 2016

A BILL

FOR AN ACT TO MAKE PROVISIONS FOR THE MANAGEMENT, CONSERVATION
AND IMPROVEMENT OF LAND AND WATER RESOURCES AND FOR OTHER
RELATED MATTERS

ENACTED by the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji—

PART 1—PRELIMINARY

Short title, commencement and application

- 1.—(1) This Act may be cited as the Land and Water Resources Management Act 2016.
- (2) This Act shall come into force on the date or dates appointed by the Minister by notice in the Gazette.
- (3) This Act shall bind the State.
- (4) The provisions of this Act shall apply to all land except those in town and city areas.

Interpretation

2. In this Act, unless the context otherwise requires—

“Board” means the Land and Water Resources Management Board established under section 3;

- “Cease Work Order” means an order issued by the Board under section 28 which forces the immediate cessation of work in relation to land and water resources;
- “conservation officer” means a land and water conservation officer appointed under section 21;
- “conservation orders” includes a Closing Order, Work Order and Cease Work Order issued pursuant to Part 4 of this Act, for the purpose of ensuring the sustainable management, use and rehabilitation of land and water resources;
- “Closing Order” means an order issued by the Board under section 26 directing that the land in respect of which a Closing Order is issued be directed as a closed area;
- “degradation of land” means any form of deterioration of land;
- “Director Land Resources Planning Division” means the Director responsible for the Land and Resources Planning Division of the Ministry of Agriculture;
- “land” includes messuages, tenements or hereditaments, corporeal and incorporeal, building and other fixtures, paths, passageways, watercourses easements, plantations, gardens, mines, minerals and quarries, the foreshore and seabed or anything resting on the seabed;
- “land and water conservation area” means an area designated by the Minister upon recommendation of the Board under section 20 for which a land and water use plan is to be formulated and implemented;
- “land and water use plan” refers to a land and water use plan specifically formulated for a particular land and water conservation area by a land and water use planning sub-committee appointed under section 23;
- “livestock” includes but is not limited to horses, donkeys, mules, cattle, sheep, pigs, goats and poultry;
- “Minister” means the Minister responsible for agriculture;
- “Ministry” means the Ministry of Agriculture;
- “noxious weeds” means any plant which either directly or indirectly causes injury to the health of human beings, animals or plants or which is, or is likely to become a nuisance to the owner, occupier or user of any land or water or of anything thereon;
- “owner” in relation to land, means a person, other than a mortgagee not in possession, who is entitled to dispose of freehold land and includes a person, group or legal entity holding land or entitled to the rents and profits of land under a lease registered under the Land Transfer Act (Cap. 131);

“Secretariat” means the Director Land Resources Planning Division or any other person appointed under section 11 to be the Secretariat of the Board;

“sub-committees” means the land and water use planning sub-committees appointed under section 23 of this Act;

“vegetation” includes but is not limited to trees, reeds, brush wood, undergrowth and grasses but in relation to any land, does not include any plant which is a noxious weed in an area which includes land; and

“Work Order” means an order issued by the Board under section 27 to do work to prevent degradation of land and water resources.

PART 2—LAND AND WATER RESOURCES MANAGEMENT BOARD

Establishment of the Land and Water Resources Management Board

3. This section establishes the Land and Water Resources Management Board.

Functions of the Board

4. The functions of the Board are to—

- (a) exercise general supervision over land and water resources and to plan for and implement their sustainable use;
- (b) create public interest and awareness for the conservation and improvement of land and water resources by stimulating capacity-building, providing incentives and educating members of the public;
- (c) identify and make recommendations to the Minister regarding relevant areas to be designated as land and water conservation areas;
- (d) facilitate co-ordination and co-operation between the land and water use planning activities of government agencies, communities and industry groups;
- (e) initiate the development of land and water use plans through co-ordination with all relevant stakeholders, including the landowners;
- (f) endorse, after consultation with the relevant stakeholders and the sub-committees, the implementation of land and water use plans developed specifically for particular land and water conservation areas;
- (g) monitor and report on the development, implementation and achievements of the land and water use plan around the country;
- (h) appoint sub-committees as necessary to undertake land and water use planning and to provide technical advice;
- (i) advise the Minister on the formulation of regulations necessary for the proper conservation and improvement of land and water resources;

- (j) make resolutions on the terms and conditions for a person invited by the Board to participate in the meetings of the Board; and
- (k) perform all other functions necessary for the proper implementation of this Act.

Composition of the Board

5.—(1) The members of the Board shall consist of—

- (a) a person appointed by the Minister with knowledge and expertise in land and water management as chairperson;
- (b) the Permanent Secretary for Agriculture or his or her nominee;
- (c) the Director of Environment or his or her nominee;
- (d) one representative appointed by the Minister from a non-government organisation involved in sustainable development and land and water resources preservation; and
- (e) four other members appointed by the Minister to represent the farmers in the Northern, Western, Central and Eastern Divisions.

(2) The chairperson must—

- (a) convene meetings of the Board; and
- (b) preside at all meetings, or in his or her absence, a nominee of the chairperson is to preside, or in that nominee's absence, the members present may, for that particular meeting, select a member to preside.

(3) All members of the Board appointed by the Minister under subsection (1) shall hold office for a term of 3 years and shall be eligible for re-appointment.

Invited members

6.—(1) Subject to the approval of the chairperson, the Board may invite any person as necessary to participate in one or more of the Board's meetings when and if the need arises.

(2) A person invited to a meeting of the Board must be an expert or have special knowledge or experience to provide expert advice to the Board on any matter relating to land and water conservation.

(3) A person invited under this section will be governed by the resolutions of the terms and conditions set out by the Board in accordance with section 4(j).

(4) Invited members may take part in the deliberation of the Board but must not have the power to vote on any matter before the Board.

Remuneration

7. Members of the Board, invited members and members of a sub-committee, other than members who are public officers may be remunerated in a manner and at rates subject to terms and conditions determined by the Minister.

Removal and resignation

8.—(1) The Minister may remove a member of the Board from office if the member—

- (a) conducts himself or herself in a manner which amounts to misconduct;
- (b) has been declared bankrupt and has not been discharged; or
- (c) fails to carry out or becomes incapable of performing satisfactorily the duties of a Board member due to medical reasons or otherwise.

(2) Where a member of the Board is removed under subsection (1) the Minister shall as soon as practicable appoint a new member who shall hold office for the remainder of the term for which his or her predecessor was appointed.

(3) A member of the Board may resign from the Board by giving notice in writing to the Minister, 14 days prior to his or her resignation.

Vacation of office

9. The office of a member shall become vacant if the member has been absent without leave of the Board from 3 consecutive meetings of the Board.

Defects in appointment of members

10. A decision, action or proceeding of the Board is not invalid by reason of a defect in the appointment of a member.

Secretariat of the Board

11.—(1) The Director Land Resource Planning Division or any other person appointed by the Board shall be Secretariat of the Board.

(2) The functions of the Secretariat are to—

- (a) manage and monitor conservation officers and any other staff or officers that may be employed or involved with land and water conservation activities;
- (b) report to the Board on the progress of work that conservation officers are involved in;
- (c) report to the Board on the progress and effectiveness of the land and water use plans and conservation orders issued;
- (d) encourage and organise active participation of stakeholders in land and water resources planning processes;
- (e) make recommendations to the Board on measures to improve the implementation of land and water use plans, conservation orders and any other activities in connection to the implementation of this Act; and
- (f) carry out and facilitate the implementation of this Act and its regulations.

(3) A person other than the Director Land Resource Planning Division appointed by the Board in accordance with subsection (1) shall—

- (a) hold office for a period of 3 years and shall be eligible for re-appointment; and
- (b) be remunerated at a rate and a manner determined by the Minister.

Quorum and proceedings of the Board

12.—(1) 5 members of the Board shall constitute a quorum of any meeting.

(2) At a meeting of the Board, the chairperson and all members present shall have the right to vote and in the case of equality of votes, the chairperson or in his or her absence, the member presiding shall have a casting vote.

Procedure of meetings

13. The Board shall regulate its own proceedings.

Funds of the Board

14. The funds of the Board must consist of—

- (a) any contribution or donation to the Board;
- (b) levies or fines imposed by the Board for the purpose of this Act;
- (c) any money borrowed by the Board;
- (d) any other money received on behalf of the Board; and
- (e) budgetary allocation or money appropriated by Government providing financial support for the operations of the Board.

Accountability of the Board

15. The Board shall—

- (a) be accountable to the Minister; and
- (b) act in accordance with the laws of Fiji and any directives issued by the Minister under section 38.

Annual report

16.—(1) The Board has a duty to prepare and submit to the Minister an annual report including its accounts for the preceding year, before the end of every financial year.

(2) The Minister is to present the annual report to Parliament, as soon as practicable after receiving it.

Accounts

17. The Board has a duty to keep proper accounts and other records in respect of its operations.

Audit

18.—(1) The Board shall be required to be audited once a year.

(2) The audit must be conducted in accordance with the Audit Act (Cap. 70) and the Financial Management Act 2004, except where the audit is conducted by a person appointed by the Board under subsection (3).

(3) The audit must be conducted by—

(a) the Auditor-General or a person authorised or contracted under the Audit Act (Cap. 70) to carry it out, unless the Board is so exempted from audit; or

(b) a person appointed by the Board, if the Board is so exempted from audit under the Audit Act (Cap. 70).

(4) The person appointed by the Board under subsection 3(b) must be—

(a) a person that the Minister for Finance directs the Board in writing to appoint; or

(b) if the Minister for Finance gives no such directions, the person chosen by the Board.

Disclosure of interest

19.—(1) If any member of the Board is present at a meeting of the Board where a matter is being considered and such a member has any direct or indirect pecuniary interest or other interests in the matter, he or she must immediately disclose that interest and take no further part in the consideration of the matter.

(2) Notwithstanding subsection (1), such disclosure of interest by any member of the Board must not affect the constitution of a quorum.

PART 3—LAND AND WATER CONSERVATION

Land and water conservation areas

20.—(1) The Minister may, with the recommendation of the Board, after consultation with the Minister responsible for lands, Minister responsible for iTaukei affairs and Minister responsible for works and transport, designate an area as a land and water conservation area.

(2) The land and water conservation area designated in subsection (1) shall be published as a notice in the Gazette and signed by the Minister.

(3) The notice of the land and water conservation area under subsection (2) shall specify the—

(a) name of the area of land;

(b) boundaries of the area; and

(c) period for which the area shall remain a land and water conservation area.

(4) Every land and water conservation area designated under subsection (1) shall be managed by a sub-committee appointed under section 23.

Appointment of land and water conservation officers

21.—(1) The Board must appoint officers of the Ministry as land and water conservation officers.

(2) Conservation officers appointed under subsection (1) should possess knowledge, skills and experience appropriate to the positions to which they are appointed.

(3) Conservation officers are to be responsible for supervising land and water resources and encouraging the conservation and improvement of land and water resources.

Right of entry by land and water conservation officers

22.—(1) A conservation officer shall have the right at any time to enter upon any land for the purpose of ascertaining whether—

- (a) any measures are necessary or desirable for the owner to comply with a land and water use plan or any regulations made under this Act;
- (b) the lands are being used in accordance with the provisions of this Act or any conservation order made hereunder; and
- (c) works or prohibitions ordered under Part 4 are or have been carried out and complied with.

(2) Any person who wilfully hinders or obstructs a conservation officer in exercise of his or her duties under this section commits an offence and shall be liable upon conviction to a fine not exceeding \$2,000, or for a term of imprisonment not exceeding 3 years, or to both.

Land and water use planning sub-committees

23.—(1) The Minister must as appropriate and upon the advice of the Board, appoint land and water use planning sub-committees which must include key stakeholders and technical specialists for the purposes of formulating and implementing land and water use plans for the conservation areas.

(2) Every land and water use plan formulated by a sub-committee appointed in accordance with subsection (1) for a land and water conservation area shall involve—

- (a) integrated land and water resources planning for the purposes of the management of catchments and sub-catchments;
- (b) floodplain management;
- (c) river and stream management; and
- (d) water use allocation for the flows and reserves in a river, stream or aquifer for the management of any area of land for which integrated land and water resource management planning is deemed necessary.

Functions of the sub-committees

- 24.** The functions of the sub-committees are to—
- (a) develop in consultation with and the approval of the Board, a land and water use plan for land and water conservation areas;
 - (b) supervise and monitor land and water conservation areas;
 - (c) implement and monitor the land and water use plans in each land and water conservation area;
 - (d) report to the Board on the implementation of components of the land and water use plan in the respective land and water conservation areas; and
 - (e) advise the Board on matters relating to the conservation of land and water resources in the areas for which the sub-committee is responsible.

PART 4—POWER TO ISSUE ORDERS

Conservation orders

25.—(1) The Board may, after consultation with the Department of Environment and with the approval of the Minister, issue conservation orders to ensure the conservation or improvement of land or water resources in a land and water conservation area in compliance with a land and water use plan applicable to the area.

(2) The objectives of a conservation order is to ensure the sustainable management, use and rehabilitation of land and water resources.

(3) A conservation order includes a—

- (a) Work Order;
- (b) Cease Work Order; and
- (c) Closing Order.

(4) Where a conservation order has been placed on a land and water conservation area the Board may, impose terms and conditions to—

- (a) prohibit, regulate and control the breaking up or clearing of land for cultivation or any other purpose;
- (b) prohibit, regulate and control the grazing and watering of livestock;
- (c) prohibit or restrict the cultivation of crops specified in the conservation order;
- (d) regulate the method of cultivation;
- (e) require the uprooting or destruction without payment of any compensation of any crop which has been planted in contravention of any of the provisions of a conservation order;
- (f) prohibit, regulate and control the use of sledges; and
- (g) prohibit, regulate and control the lighting of fires and burning of vegetation.

- (5) A conservation order must specify the—
- (a) area of land and water resources to which it relates;
 - (b) terms and conditions made in relation to that land in accordance with this Act;
 - (c) period for which the conservation order is enforceable; and
 - (d) be signed by the chairperson of the Board and approved by the Minister.
- (6) A copy of the conservation order made under subsection (1) must be—
- (a) addressed to and served upon the owner or occupier or both, as the Board may decide; and
 - (b) published as a notice in the Gazette.

(7) Any person who contravenes or permits another person to contravene the requirements of a conservation order and the terms and conditions therein, commits an offence and shall be liable upon conviction to a fine not exceeding \$5,000 or for a term of imprisonment not exceeding 3 years, or to both.

(8) Any person served with a conservation order who fails to comply with the order within a reasonable time fixed by the Board from the date of operation thereof, commits an offence and shall be liable upon conviction to a fine not exceeding \$5,000 or for a term of imprisonment not exceeding 3 years, or to both, unless he or she satisfies the court that such failure was due to circumstances beyond his or her control.

Closing Order

26.—(1) The Board may, where it is of the opinion that any land or water resource is being or has become degraded, with the approval of the Minister, direct that such land be a closed area for which a Closing Order is to be issued.

(2) Such a Closing Order shall specify precisely the area to which it relates and state that—

- (a) occupation of the land;
- (b) cultivation of the land;
- (c) the grazing of land by livestock; and
- (d) the cutting down and destruction of vegetation,

within the specified area is prohibited.

(3) Prior to issuing a Closing Order, the Board must ensure that the owner and the lessee, if any, are fully consulted and fully understand why that area is to be subjected to a Closing Order.

(4) Unless the Board obtains the owner's or the lessee's written acknowledgement of proof of consultation under subsection (3), a Closing Order is null and void.

Work Order

27.—(1) The Board may in writing, require an owner or lessee of land to construct and maintain on such land works for the conservation of land or water resources, or both, as are specified in the Work Order.

(2) Where an owner or lessee refuses or fails to comply with a written requirement issued under subsection (1), within such reasonable time as may be specified by the Board in writing, the Board must issue a Work Order.

(3) Pursuant to a Work Order, the Board and its servants and agents may enter upon the land and carry out the works specified in that Order if the—

(a) Board is not satisfied with work previously carried out by the owner or the lessee; or

(b) the owner or the lessee has refused or failed to comply with a written requirement issued under subsection (1).

(4) Where the Board carries out works under subsection (3), the reasonable costs incurred by the Board may be recovered from the owner or occupier as a debt due to the Government and a certificate signed by the chairperson of the Board stating the reasonable cost of the works will be conclusive evidence of its contents.

Cease Work Order

28.—(1) Where the Board is of the opinion that any works being carried out by the owner and or the lessee is causing degradation of land and water resources, the Board must issue a Cease Work Order requiring the immediate cessation of those works.

(2) A copy of the Cease Work Order issued in accordance with subsection (1) shall be provided to the owner of the land and to the lessee of the land over which the Order is being imposed.

(3) A Cease Work Order may only be removed once procedures are in place to mitigate the land and water degradation impacts to the satisfaction of the Board.

Time of operation of Orders

29.—(1) A conservation order is to come into operation immediately after service of such an Order by the Board to a person being an owner or occupier of the land to which the conservation order applies.

(2) A conservation order is to remain in force until such a date as specified in the notice, if a date is not specified in the notice that Order is to remain in force until such a date appointed by the Board being satisfied that the Order is no longer necessary or has satisfactorily been complied with.

Revocation and amendment of conservation orders by the Board

30. The Board may, with the approval of the Minister, at any time revoke or amend a conservation order previously issued.

Appeal

31.—(1) Any owner or lessee of any land affected by a conservation order, may, within 28 days of the publication of such Order in the Gazette, appeal by petition in writing to the Minister.

(2) Upon receipt of the appeal, the Minister may dismiss the appeal or revoke the conservation order or amend it.

(3) Any decision of the Minister in relation to an appeal under this section is to be final and conclusive.

(4) The decision of the Minister must be in writing.

PART 5—GENERAL

Increases of rent where works carried out by owner

32.—(1) Any owner of land may, apply to the Board for an order to increase rent where—

(a) such owner has carried out at his or her own expense any work which has been required by a Work Order issued under section 27; and

(b) any part of the land affected by the work is leased by such owner to a tenant on an annual tenancy or a tenancy for a term of years of which the unexpired portion is not less than one year.

(2) The applicant shall give notice of the application to—

(a) a tenant of that land; and

(b) sub-tenant, where the tenant has sub-leased any part of the land on an annual tenancy, or on a tenancy for a term of years of which the unexpired portion is not less than one year.

(3) Any party given notice in accordance with subsection (2) is to be made a party to the application.

(4) Upon receipt of an application made under subsection (1), the Board may issue an order to increase rent payable under the lease or sub-lease by any tenant or sub-tenant who is a party to the application by such amount, if any, as fairly represents the increased rental value of the land comprised in such lease or sub-lease attributable to the work carried out, and such lease or sub-lease must then be construed as if the rent so increased were substituted for the rent payable at the time of the order.

(5) Where, in any lease or sub-lease, there is provision for re-assessment of the rent, the value of unexhausted improvements resulting from a Work Order issued under section 27 may, notwithstanding any term of the lease or sub-lease which may otherwise provide, be taken into account on such re-assessment, provided that such improvement may not be taken into account in re-assessing the rent of tenant or sub-tenant who has himself or herself carried out the work to which the improvements relate or has under the provisions specified in the Work Order be deemed to have carried it out.

Compensation to tenants for improvements

33.—(1) Where a tenant has carried out at his or her own expense work which he or she has been required to carry out by a Work Order issued under section 27, or the costs of carrying out such work have been recovered from him or her under the provisions of that section, such tenant will be entitled at the termination of his or her tenancy and, on vacating the land, to obtain from his or her immediate landlord as compensation such sum as fairly represents the residuary value of such work to such landlord.

(2) Any person who pays compensation under subsection (1) is to be deemed to have been required to carry out the work by a Work Order issued under section 27 and deemed to have carried it out at his or her own expense.

Right of entry by worker

34. Any worker of land required by the Board under the provisions of Part 4 to construct or maintain works thereon, must at all reasonable times, enter upon such land for that purpose whether the land is leased to or is in the occupation of another person.

Service of notice

35.—(1) Any conservation order or written requirement authorised by this Act may be served on the person to whom it is to be given either—

- (a) personally;
- (b) by leaving it at that person's last known place of residence in Fiji; or
- (c) by sending it through the post.

(2) Where any such document is to be served on a person by registered post—

- (a) it will be deemed to have been served not later than the fourteenth day succeeding the day on which it was posted; and
- (b) for proof of such service it will be sufficient to prove that the letter containing the document was properly addressed, registered and posted.

PART 6—MISCELLANEOUS

Indemnity

36. Members of the Board, sub-committee and any officer, co-opted member or staff engaged by the Board shall not be held liable for any action, suit, proceeding, dispute or challenge in any court, tribunal or any other adjudicating body for or in respect of any act or omission done in the exercise or non-exercise of the powers conferred by or duties prescribed under the provisions of this Act or any other written law.

Regulations

37. The Minister may make regulations prescribing matters that are required or permitted by this Act to be prescribed or are necessary or convenient to be prescribed for carrying out or giving effect to this Act.

Directives by the Minister

38.—(1) The Minister may give directives to the Board from time to time, as the Minister deems appropriate.

(2) The Board must comply with any directives issued by the Minister under subsection (1).

Repeal

39. The Land Conservation and Improvement Act (Cap. 141) is hereby repealed.

LAND AND WATER RESOURCES MANAGEMENT BILL 2016

EXPLANATORY NOTE

(This note is not part of the Bill and is only intended to indicate its general effect)

1.0 BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The main objective of the Bill is to make provisions for the management, conservation and improvement of the land and water resources in Fiji.
- 1.2 The Bill addresses current land and water resources management concerns and promotes the implementation of sustainable land and water resources management practices. It proposes provisions which consider the present and foreseeable future land and water use trends including land and water conservation needs.
- 1.3 The proposed Bill has become necessary given that the Land Conservation and Improvement Act (Cap. 141) (**‘Act’**) has become almost irrelevant and out-dated in terms of today’s more stringent needs for environmental protection and the need to set out more clear and enforceable environmental friendly laws.
- 1.4 The Bill is intended to repeal the Act to allow for the following changes in paragraph 2.1 and other administrative changes.

2.0 CLAUSES

- 2.1 As opposed to the Act, the Bill offers a more cohesive and co-ordinated mechanism to better monitor and control the quality of land and water resources by safeguarding against its degradation through the following—
 - (a) empowering the Land and Water Resources Management Board (**‘Board’**) with the flexibility to identify, and recommend areas in Fiji to be designated as land and water conservation areas in order to restore and conserve degraded land and water resources. This land and water conservation areas may be issued with conservation orders to restrict the use of land and water resources and restore its quality;

- (b) allowing for a wider representation from government agencies, non-government organisations and stakeholders in Board membership, to allow for greater consultation and cooperation on land and water resources management issues;
- (c) setting out provisions for the appointment of land and water use planning sub-committees to create the necessary land and water use plans suitable and necessary for the rehabilitation of conservation areas identified by the Board as being at risk or already subject to degradation;
- (d) appointing skilled and specific land and water conservation officers who will work on the ground to monitor and report on the degradation and status of land and water resources in danger of further degradation;
- (e) increasing the penalties for the offenders who breach conservation orders and practice unsafe land use practices;
- (f) allowing the appointment of a Secretariat to the Board whose main responsibility will be to oversee and coordinate the effective enforcement of this Bill including the coordination of the land and water conservation officers and the day to day administration of land and water rehabilitation efforts; and
- (g) empowering the Board with the approval of the Minister to make conservation orders (which may be revoked or amended by the Board from time to time) to ensure the restoration and sustainable use of conservation areas.

3.0 MINISTERIAL RESPONSIBILITY

3.1 The Act comes under the responsibility of the Minister responsible for agriculture.

A. SAYED-KHAIYUM
Attorney-General