

AN OVERVIEW OF THE FIJI PARLIAMENT 2014-2018



FOREWORD BY THE HONOURABLE SPEAKER



HON. DR JIKO LUVENI

As Speaker of the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji, I am delighted to present this ground-breaking publication that aims to provide an overview of the Fiji Parliament during its 2014-2018 term. The Parliament of Fiji is for the people of Fiji and should operate in an open and transparent manner.

This report is part of my commitment as Speaker to open the doors of Parliament to the people and provide as much statistical information as possible to highlight how the Parliament has operated during the Parliament term. This overview provides data to allow us to analyse how the Parliament has functioned. While it is for others to judge the quality of discussions and debates in Parliament, the report highlights

the immense amount of work that Parliamentarians from all sides have undertaken during the 2014-2018 Parliament term.

There have been 144 sitting days during the Parliament term with over 160 Bills approved by the Parliament. Government Ministers have faced over 2500 questions and supplementary questions in the chamber over the term of Parliament, highlighting that in addition to its legislative role, the Parliament has also been instrumental in holding Government to account.

This report highlights the increasingly important role of Parliament Committees in the legislative process and in providing oversight of the Executive. Over 1500 Standing Committee meetings have been held with more than 120 Committee reports tabled in Parliament. I am particularly encouraged at the way in which Fijian citizens have interacted with Parliament. There were over 2600 appearances by individuals before Parliament Committees and more than 700 written submissions by citizens were made to Committees during the Parliament term.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank every Honourable Member who has served during this term. Your service and dedication to your people and your country has made the 2014-2018 Parliament the success it has been.

I also take this opportunity to thank the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) for the Fiji Parliament Support Project that has provided invaluable support to the Parliament during the 2014-2018 term. Your support, which has been funded through the generous contribution from the Governments of New Zealand, Australia, Japan and the European Union, has allowed this generous contribution from Parliament to grow and flourish during the term.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'J Luveni'.

HON. DR JIKO LUVENI

October 2018

INTRODUCTION BY THE SECRETARY-GENERAL



**VINIANA
NAMOSIMALUA**

This statistical overview of the functioning of the Fiji Parliament 2014-2018 has been developed by the Parliament secretariat to provide an overview of how the Parliament has operated. The statistics have been collated by the Parliament Tables Office and Committees Unit with support from numerous other units and staff. While we have worked to ensure the highest levels of accuracy, any errors are the responsibility of Parliament alone.

As a Parliament secretariat, we are always striving to improve our support to Honourable Members of Parliament to ensure that Parliament can function effectively and efficiently. Collating this statistical information for the 2014-2018 Parliament will assist the Parliament staff to review the way we work and the support we provide in the next Parliament.

The collated statistics cover a number of different areas of Parliament's work including the number of sitting days, the number of Bills approved by Parliament, Parliament's role in scrutinising the national budget, oral and written questions, motions and debates, as well as the detailed work undertaken by the six Parliament Standing Committees.

Each Parliament staff has played a role in ensuring that our national Parliament has functioned effectively over the course of the 2014-2018 term. I have been privileged to serve as a Secretary-General for a dedicated team who have always strived for excellence and have undertaken their duties diligently and in an impartial manner. I would also like to personally thank all Honourable Members of Parliament who have served during the term.

The United Nations Development Programme has provided assistance in developing this publication, and their Fiji Parliament Support Project has always been there throughout the Parliament term whenever called upon for assistance and for support. For this, we cannot thank them enough.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Viniana Namosimalua', written in a cursive style.

VINIANA NAMOSIMALUA
Parliament Secretary-General
October 2018

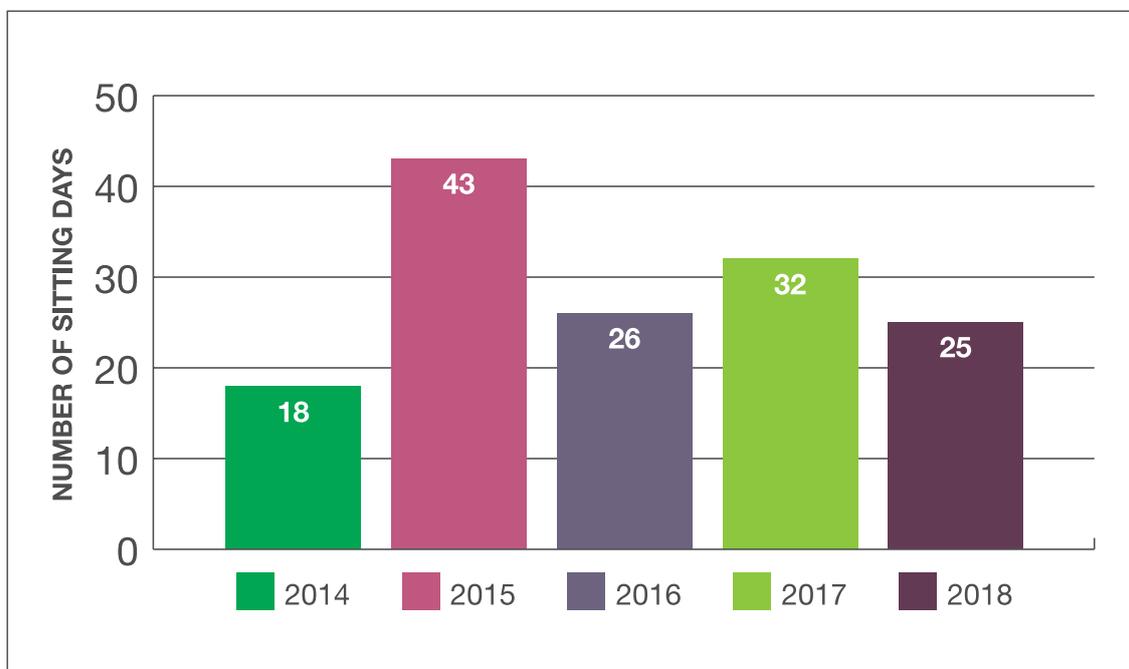
PARLIAMENT SITTINGS

During the Parliament term from the first sitting of Parliament on 6th October, 2014 until the dissolution of Parliament on 30th, September 2018, there were a total of 144 Parliament sitting days.

Sitting days in Parliament according to the Standing Orders are from 9.30am – 12.30pm and from 2.30pm until 4.30pm. However, on occasion the Parliament adjourned before the end of the full sitting day, and on numerous occasions the Parliament agreed to procedural motions to extend the sitting hours of the Parliament beyond 4.30pm.

Long sitting days were a particular feature of the sittings days dedicated to budget scrutiny.

It should also be noted that in the Fiji Parliament, when the Parliament is sitting the vast majority of Honourable Members are present and remain present throughout the sitting day. During the Parliament term 2014-2018, there was not a single occasion when there was no quorum in the chamber, with quorum being one-third of all Members during debates or a majority of Members if there is a vote.

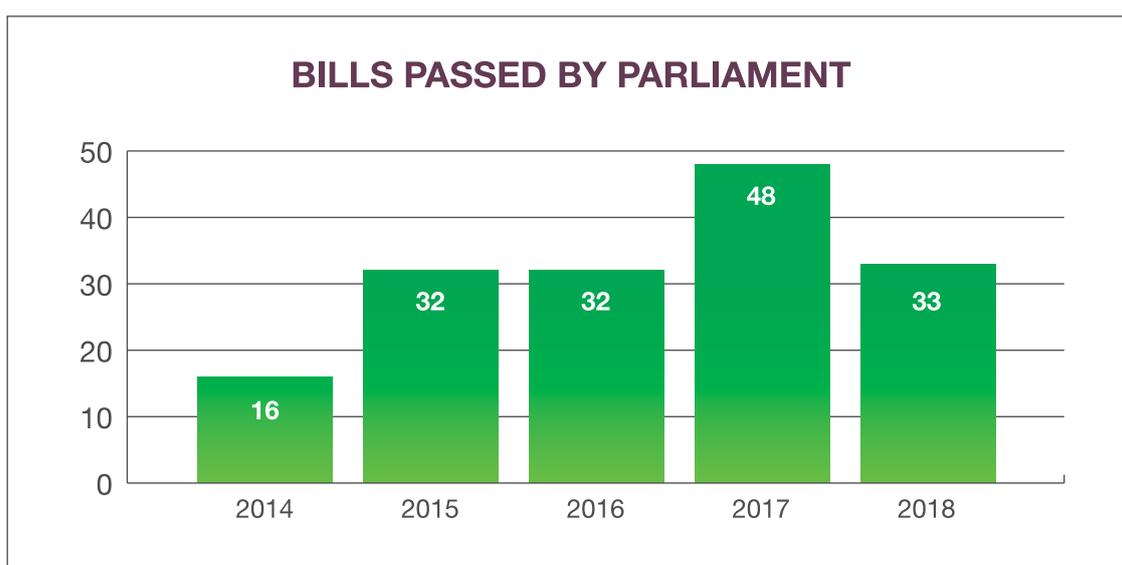


APPROVAL OF LEGISLATION

One of the key functions of any Parliament is scrutiny of proposed laws and final approval. Section 46(1) of the Fiji Constitution states that *“The authority and power to make laws for the State is vested in Parliament consisting of the members of Parliament and the President, and is exercised through the enactment of Bills passed by Parliament and assented to by the President.”*

In total 161 pieces of legislation were passed by the Fiji Parliament during the term 2014-2018.

Details of legislation passed by calendar year are below, with the 2017 calendar year being the busiest legislative period with 48 bills being approved by the Parliament.



Scrutiny of legislation by the Parliament’s Standing Committees was also a feature of the Parliament term 2014-2018. Committee scrutiny of legislation included opportunities for the citizens of Fiji to engage in the parliamentary legislative process through provision of written or oral evidence to committees and further information on citizen engagement in the legislative process can be found on page 17.

INTERNATIONAL TREATIES AND CONVENTIONS

Section 51 of the Fiji Constitution outlines that an international treaty or convention binds the State only after it has been approved by Parliament. Parliament Standing Order 130 outlines the process by which Parliament approves an international treaty.

International Treaties and Conventions are usually sent to the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence for consideration and review who then in turn report back to Parliament before the debate on the motion to ratify. During the process of reviewing and considering the Treaty or Convention, the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs makes a call for public submissions in order to hear the views of interested groups or individuals.



The Chair of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence, Honourable Netani Rika, tabling a Committee Report in Parliament. (Photo: Fiji Parliament/Bale Dolokoto)

During the Parliament term 2014-2018 a total of 24 International Treaties or Conventions were considered and approved by Parliament. Of these, 23 were referred to the Committee with only one motion to approve ratification being moved in the chamber without prior scrutiny by the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs. This was the Paris Climate Change Agreement with all MPs agreeing to immediately debate the motion in Parliament without the treaty being referred to a Standing Committee.



The Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Public Enterprises, Civil Service and Communications, Hon. Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum debating on an International Treaty in Parliament. (Photo: Fiji Parliament/ Bale Dolokoto)

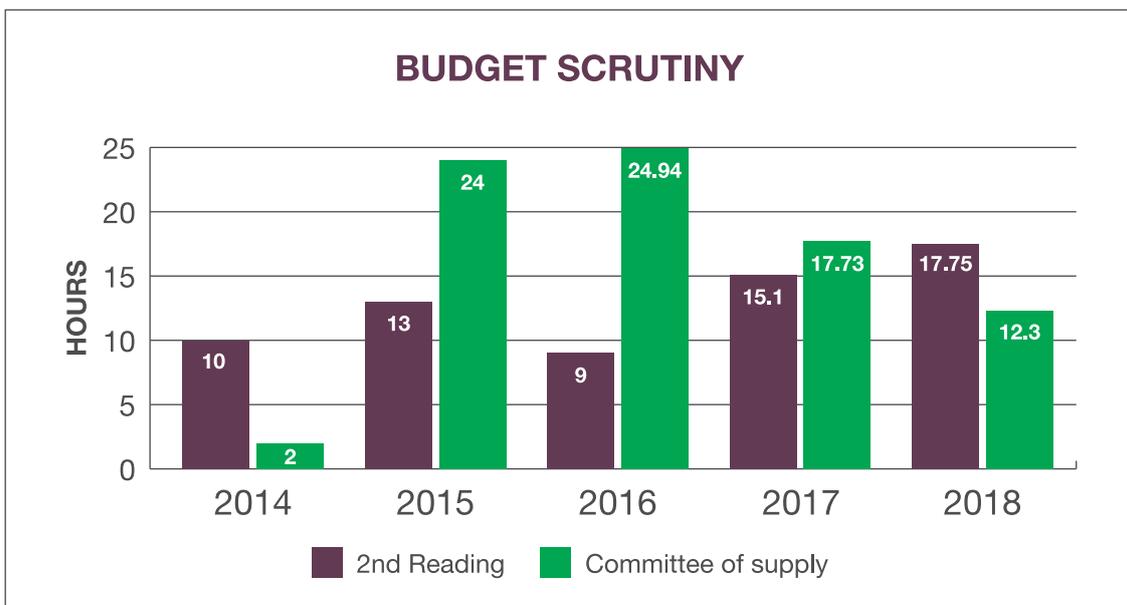
BUDGET SCRUTINY

Another important role of the Fiji Parliament is to consider, scrutinise and approve the national budget each year. Due to the change in dates of the financial year in 2016, in the Parliament term 2014-2018 the budget was scrutinised and approved on 5 occasions.

In the Fiji Parliament the budget process begins with the first reading of the Appropriation Bill. In tabling the Bill for first reading, the Minister for Economy is given leave to speak at length on the Bill with Parliament then adjourned for a minimum of six days before the second reading debate begins.

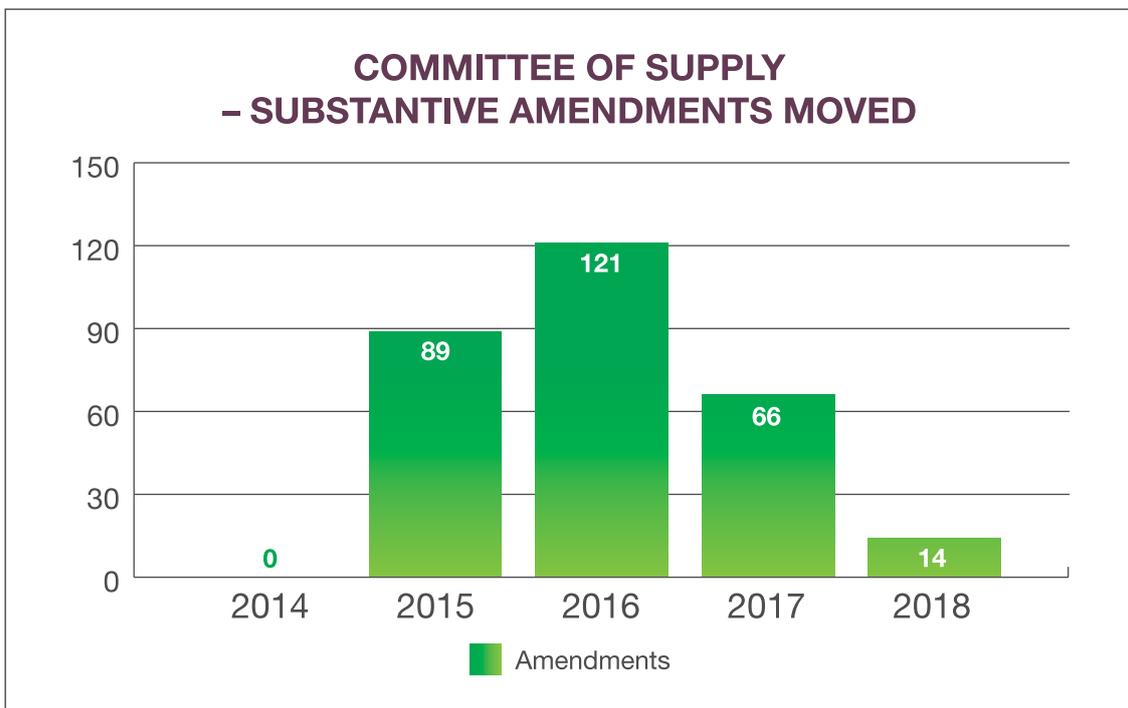
During the budget process, the Parliament has been tracking the time spent on the 2nd reading of the Appropriation Bill. The second reading phase allows all Honourable Members to provide their views on the content of the proposed national budget. As per Standing Order 68 on length of speeches, all Honourable Members are restricted to 20 minutes each at second reading, with the exception of the Shadow Minister for Economy who, through leave of the House, is traditionally afforded the same amount of time to respond to the budget as was given to the Honourable Minister for Economy when presenting the budget during first reading.

In total, during the Parliament term 2014-2018, almost 65 hours of debate were held on the second reading stage of the budget.



Following second reading of the budget, the estimates are scrutinised in detail by the Committee of Supply which consists of all Honourable Members of Parliament. It is at this stage of the budget process that Honourable Members may table amendments. In total over the term 2014-2018, the Fiji Parliament considered the national budgets for almost 81 hours during Committee of Supply. The shortest Committee of Supply Stage was in 2014 due to the fact that Opposition Honourable Members were not present in the chamber, and the longest Committee of Supply was in 2016 where the Bill was scrutinised for almost 25 hours at this stage.

Members of Parliament also utilised their right to move amendments to the Appropriation Bills with a total of 290 amendments being tabled and voted upon in the Committees of Supply during the 2014-2018 Parliament term.



Honourable Members addressing Parliament during budget debate. (Photo: Fiji Parliament/Bale Dolokoto)

OVERSIGHT OF THE EXECUTIVE

QUESTIONS

Members of Parliament are responsible for holding the Government of the day to account, and the Standing Orders of the Fiji Parliament provides Honourable Members with a number of mechanisms to undertake their oversight duties. This section of the report will focus on the work undertaken in the Fiji Parliament chamber with regards to oversight during the 2014-2018 Parliament term with a separate report section dedicated to oversight through Parliament Committees.

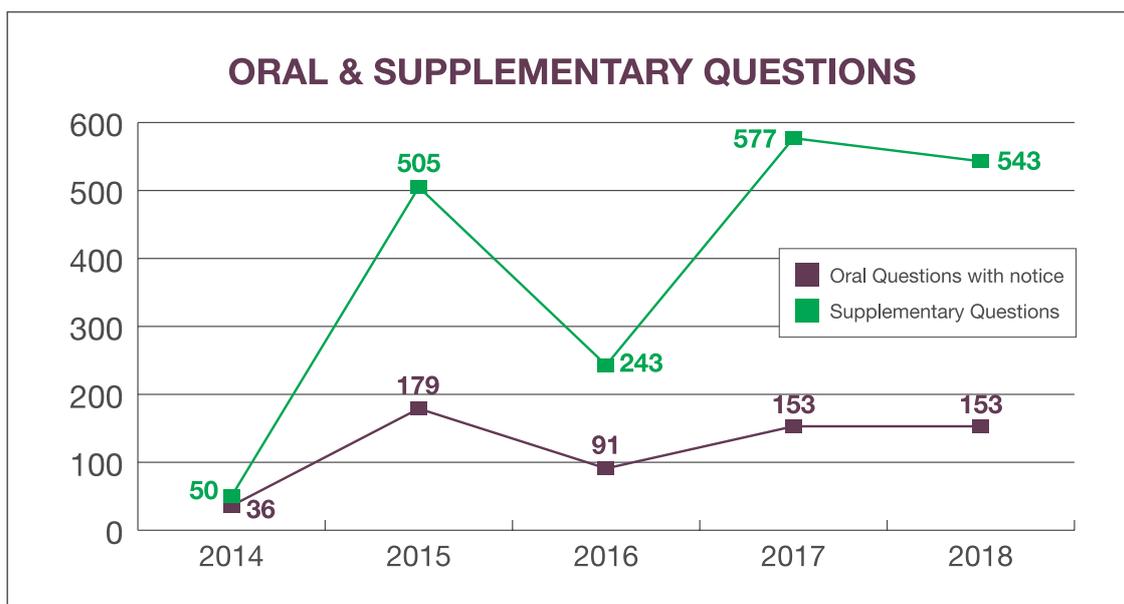
Fiji Parliament Standing Order 41 outlines that Members who are not Ministers may address questions to the Government that relate to public matters for which the Government is officially responsible.

Question time is held every time the Parliament sits unless the Parliament's Business Committee has decided otherwise. Honourable Members must submit their question four days before the question is to be asked in order to allow the Minister time to collect the information required to provide a response to the question. At the beginning of the Parliament term 2014-2018, the Standing Orders allowed for six questions with notice every sitting day although this was amended to eight per sitting day following a review of the Standing Orders in 2015.

In total, over the Parliament term 612 questions with notice were asked by Honourable Members.



Leader of the Opposition, Hon. Ro Teimumu Kepa, asking a question to the Prime Minister. (Photo: Fiji Parliament/Bale Dolokoto)

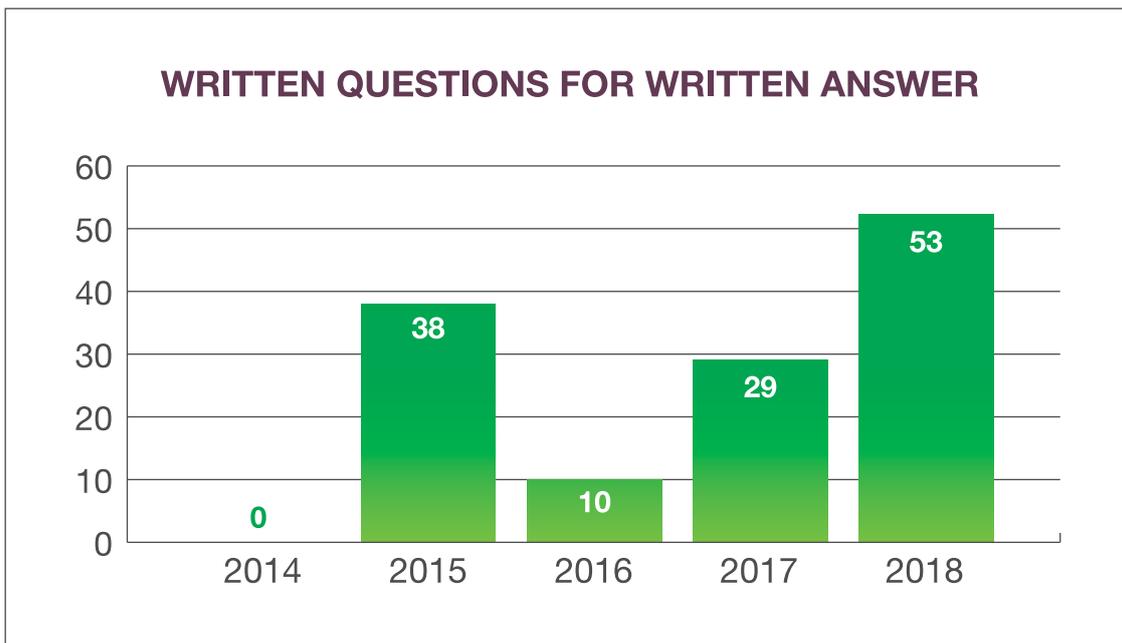


Following a Minister's response, the Standing Orders allow Honourable Members to ask supplementary questions to the Minister on the same subject as the original question. The number of supplementary questions asked is at the discretion of the Speaker. During the Parliament term 2014-2018 a total of 1918 supplementary questions were asked to Ministers.

Honourable Members also have the right to submit written questions for written answer. Usually, written questions are statistical in nature and Ministers should provide a written response that is tabled in Parliament within 7 sitting days of the written question being submitted. In total 131 written questions were submitted during the term 2014-2018. Written responses by the Government were received to all written questions tabled except for some of those tabled at the very end of the Parliament term.



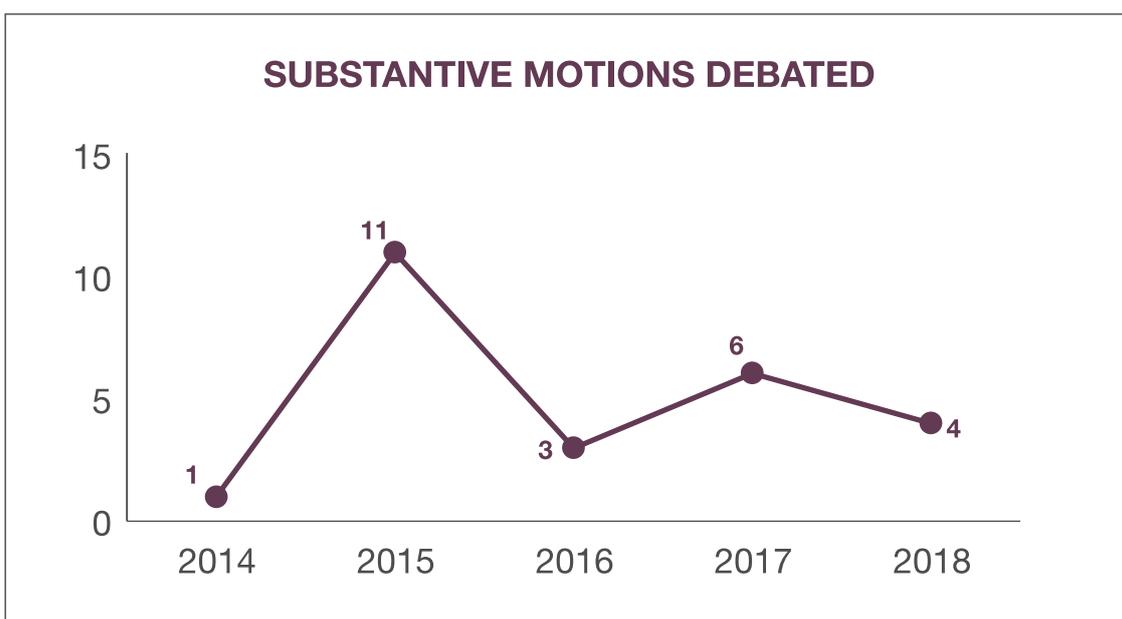
The Honourable Prime Minister, Josaia Voreqe Bainimarama, responds to questions during question time. (Photo: Fiji Parliament/Bale Dolokoto)



MOTIONS

Honourable Members have the right to submit motions that can then be discussed, debated and voted upon. Substantive motions are usually on issues of public interest and allow for discussion on national issues which allow Parliament to provide oversight of the Executive.

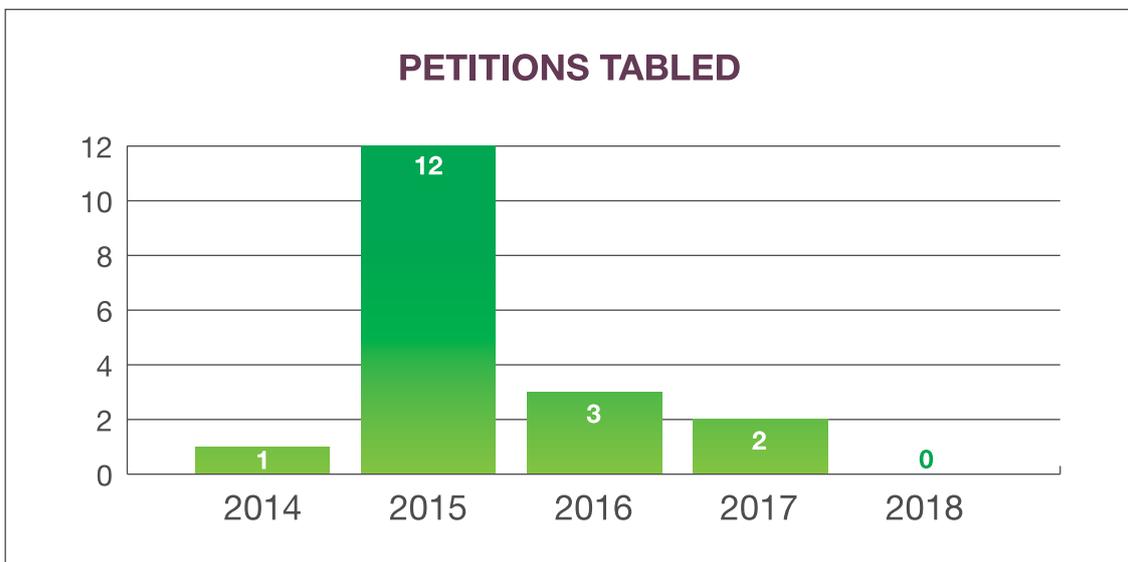
In total, 25 substantive motions (as opposed to procedural motions) were debated during the 2014-2018 Parliament term. All of these were submitted by Opposition MPs and are a mechanism that allow for debates to be held on topics of interest to the Honourable Members submitting the motion. Ministers usually respond on behalf of the Government on the issue being debated.



PETITIONS

Citizens may not directly petition Parliament, but any Member may present a petition to Parliament on behalf of citizens. At the beginning of the Parliament term, rules allowed for petitions to be tabled in Parliament and directly sent to the relevant Standing Committee without any discussion or debate in the chamber. In 2016, the Standing Orders were amended to provide for a brief debate on the petition before the Parliament would vote to decide whether the petition should be referred to a Standing Committee or not.

In total, 18 petitions were tabled in the Fiji Parliament during the 2014-2018 Parliament term. 14 of these were referred to Standing Committees without debate, while, following the 2016 rule changes, four were debated on the floor of Parliament with Honourable Members then voting against their referral to a Standing Committee for further scrutiny.

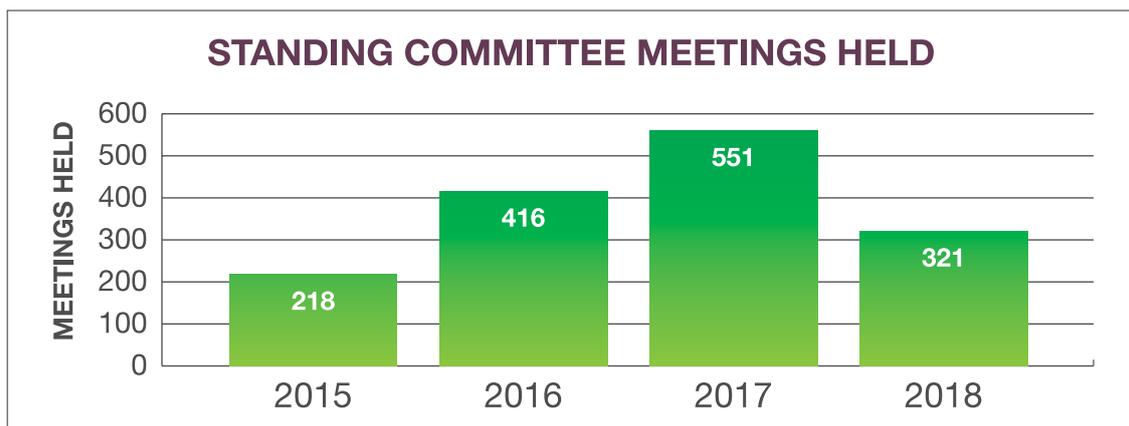


PARLIAMENT STANDING COMMITTEES

MEETING AND REPORTS

A notable feature of the 2014-2018 Parliament term has been the active role that Standing Committees have played both in the legislative process and in oversight of the Government, mostly through scrutiny of annual reports tabled in Parliament and referred to Committees.

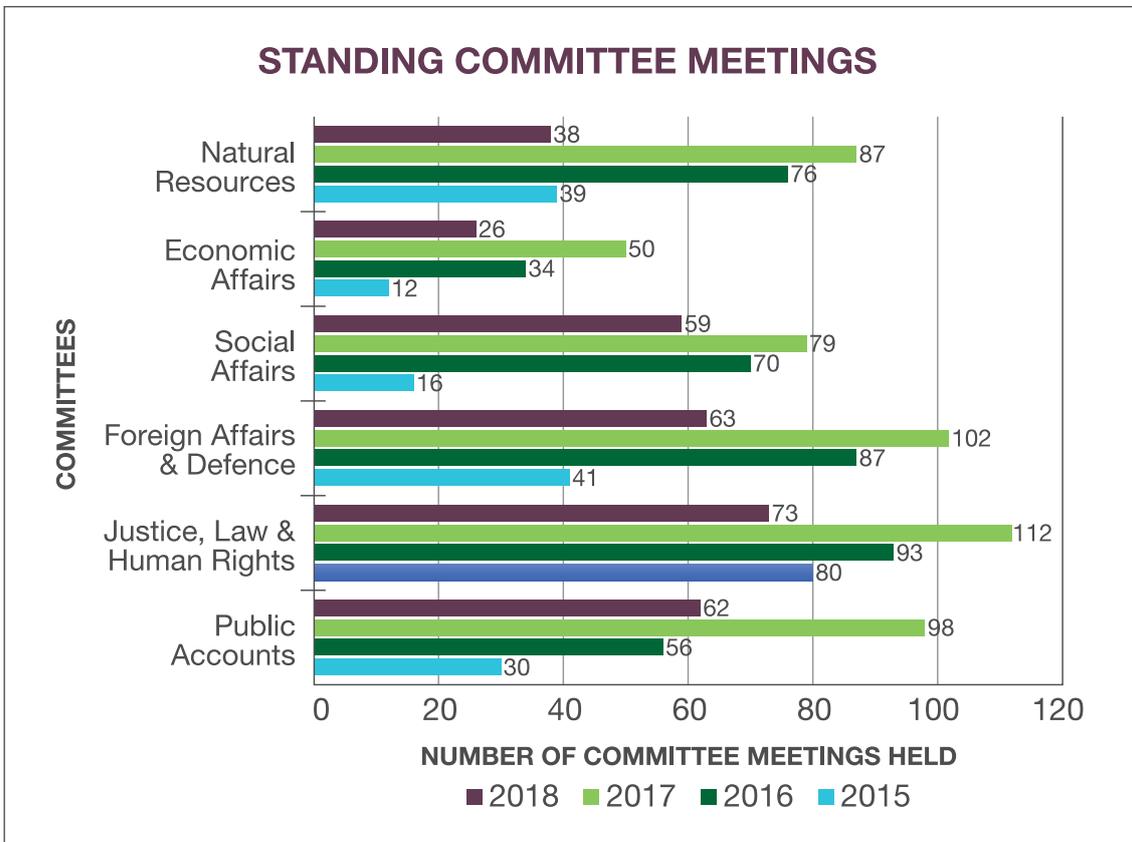
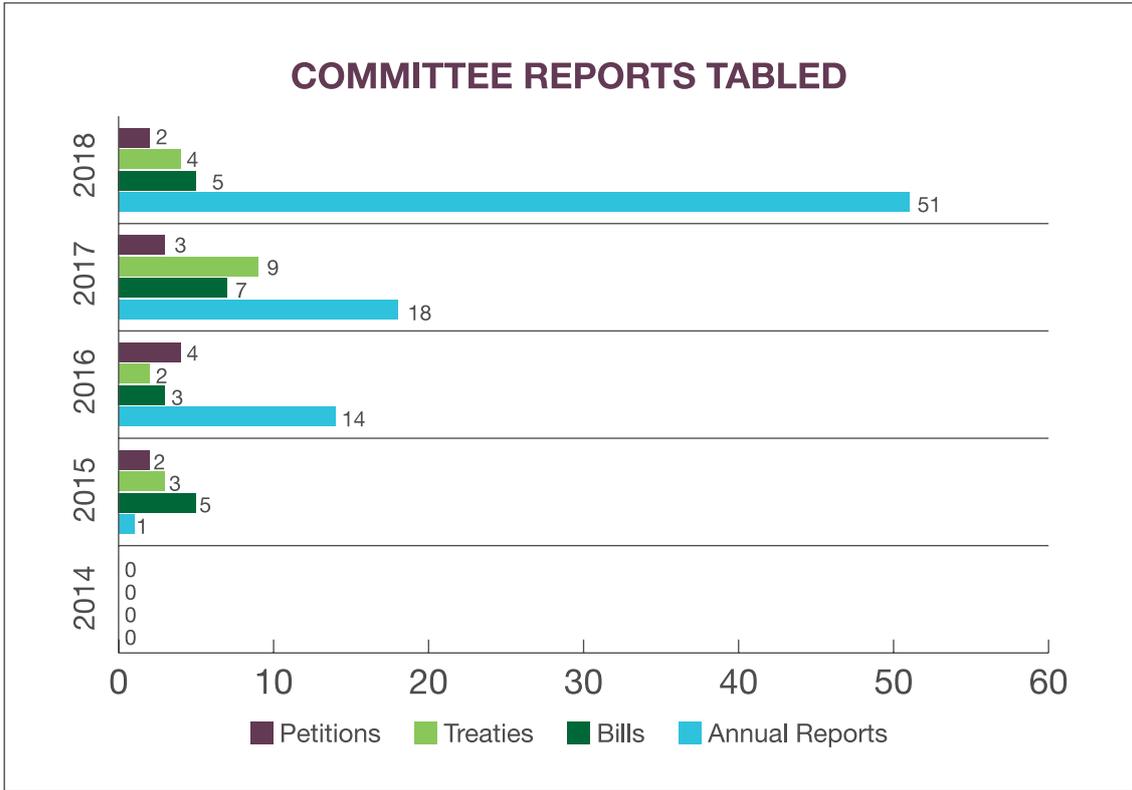
Since the Standing Committees were established by Parliament in early 2015, there have been a total of 1506 committee meetings with 133 reports tabled by Committees in Parliament relating to legislation or scrutiny of International Treaties & Conventions, Petitions or Annual Reports.



The activity rate of Committees is linked to the number of Bills, Annual Reports, Petitions or Treaties referred to Committees. The Standing Committee on Law, Justice and Human Rights has been the most active Committee by holding 358 meetings, followed by the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence that held a total of 293 meetings during the Parliament term.



The Public Accounts Committee Meeting. (Photo: Fiji Parliament/Bale Dolokoto)



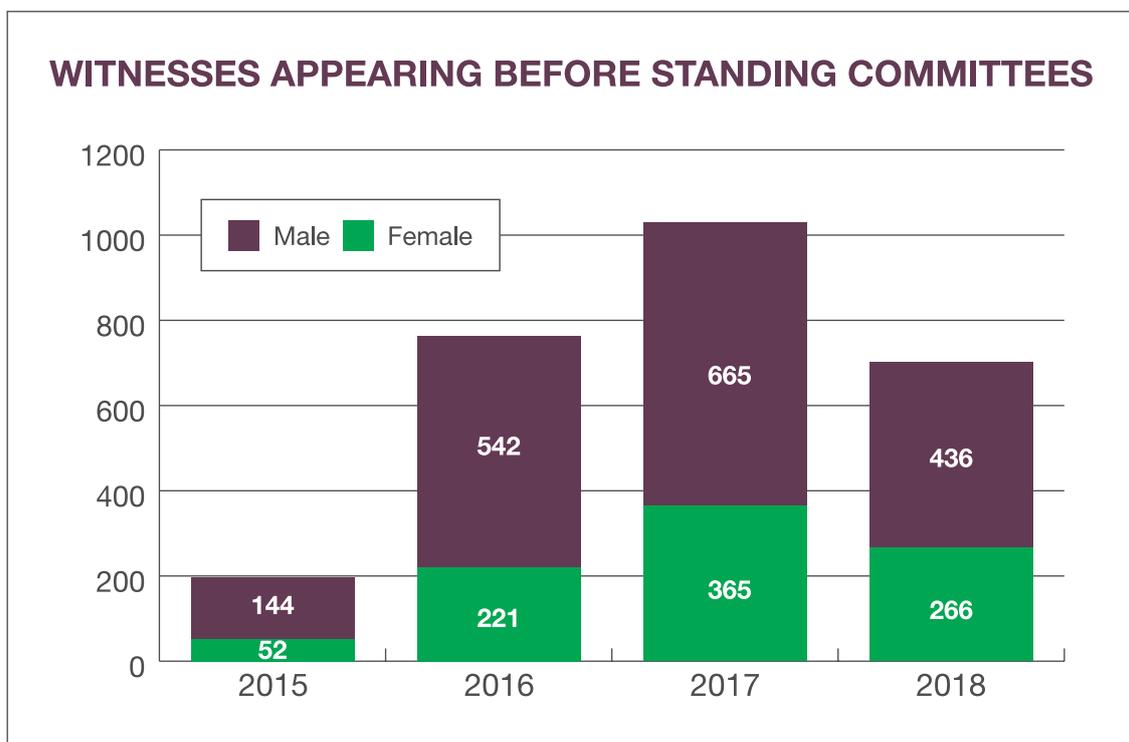
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Another notable feature of the Fiji Parliament Committee system is the transparent and participatory nature of the way in which Committees operate. Standing Order 111 outlines that all Standing Committee meetings must be open to the public and the media except for the limited occasions outlined in SO111(2). In addition, the Standing Orders state that Standing Committees must, unless otherwise directed by Parliament, provide sufficient time, notification and an adequate opportunity for public representations and input into its activities prior to finalising their reports and making recommendations.

In practice, this has meant that the main forum for Parliament interaction with citizens, groups, NGOs, the private sector and academia has been through the work of the Parliament Standing Committees.

During the course of the Parliament term 2014-2018, over 2600 individuals have appeared before the Standing Committees to provide their views on Bills, annual reports, petitions and international treaties and conventions under consideration by Committees. This has included Government Officials, academics, and representatives from NGOs, private sector and faith based organisations, political parties, as well as private citizens.

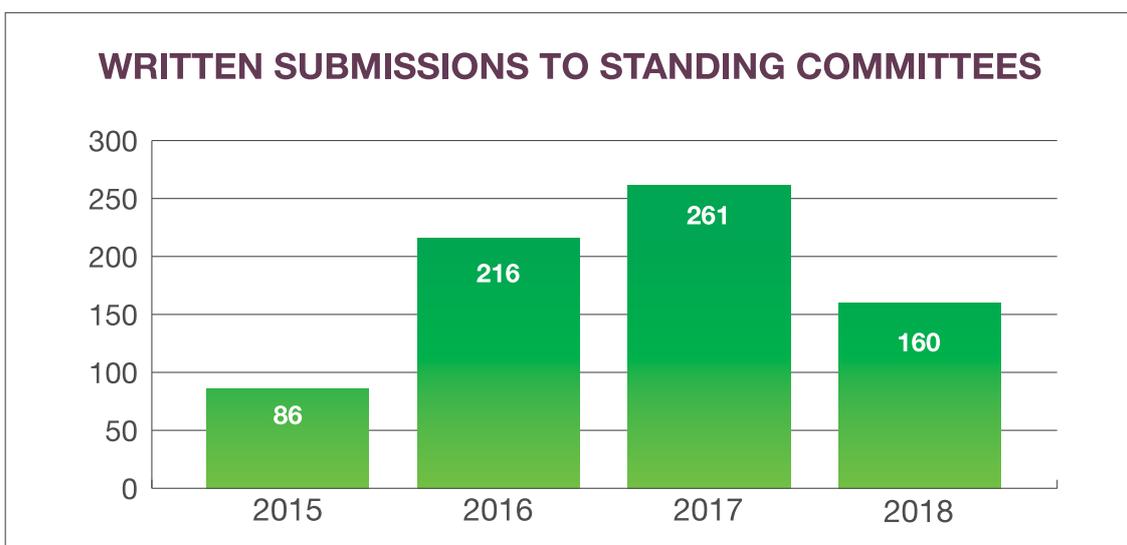
Notably, only around 34% of those who appeared before the Standing Committees were women with further work being required to ensure that public participation in the work of Parliament is gender balanced.





NGO representatives giving evidence to a Parliament Standing Committee. (Photo: Fiji Parliament/Bale Dolokoto)

In addition, the Standing Committees have also provided an opportunity for individuals and groups to engage with the work of Committees by providing written submissions to Parliament Standing Committees on issues under their consideration. These have been in the form of submissions sent to the committee by post, hand-delivered to Parliament or sent to the Committee secretariat by email. Over the Parliament term 2014-2018, a total of 723 written submissions were received by the Parliament Standing Committees.



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the People of Japan



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