

PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI



PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DAILY HANSARD

WEDNESDAY, 10TH FEBRUARY, 2021

[CORRECTED COPY]

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WEDNESDAY, 10TH FEBRUARY, 2021

The Parliament met at 9.44 a.m. pursuant to adjournment.

HONOURABLE SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

PRESENT

All Members were present, except the Honourable Assistant Minister for Employment, Productivity, Industrial Relations, Youth and Sports and the Honourable I. Kuridrani.

MINUTES

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

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Tuesday, 9th February, 2021, as previously circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I beg to second the motion.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE CHAIR

I welcome all Honourable Members to today's sitting of Parliament. I also welcome all those watching the live broadcast and the live-streaming of today's proceedings from the comfort of their home, offices and electronic devices. Thank you for continuing to keep an interest in the workings of your Parliament. Thank you Honourable Members and we will move on.

PRESENTATION OF PAPERS AND CERTAIN DOCUMENTS

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call upon the Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications to table his Reports.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. In accordance with Standing Order 38, I present the following reports to Parliament:

- (1) Office of the Auditor-General – SAI Performance Measurement Framework (*Parliamentary Paper No. 07/2021*); and
- (2) First Quarter Appropriation Statement on Actual Expenditure from 1st August, 2020 to 31st October, 2020.

HON. SPEAKER.- Please, hand the reports to the Secretary-General.

(Reports handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. SPEAKER.- Under Standing Order 38(2), I refer the following reports to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts :

- (1) Office of the Auditor-General - SAI Performance Measurement Framework (*Parliamentary Paper No. 07/2021*); and
- (2) First Quarter Appropriation Statement on Actual Expenditure from 1st August, 2020 to 31st October, 2020.

Honourable Members, I now call upon the Honourable Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts to table her report.

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, in accordance with Standing Order 38, I present to Parliament the Fiji Higher Education Commission August 2016 to July 2017 Annual Report (*Parliamentary Paper No. 18/2020*).

HON. SPEAKER.- Please, hand the report to the Secretary-General.

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. SPEAKER.- Under Standing Order 38(2), I refer the Fiji Higher Education Commission August 2016 to July 2017 Annual Report (*Parliamentary Paper No. 18/2021*) to the Standing Committee on Social Affairs.

Thank you, Honourable Members, we will now proceed to the next item on the agenda.

I now call on the Deputy Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, the Honourable Nand to table his report.

PRESENTATION OF REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

Review Report on the 2017 Audit Report on the Economic Services Sector – Standing Committee on Public Accounts

HON. J.N. NAND.- Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present the Committee's review report on the 2017 Audit Report on the Economic Services Sector.

The Economic Services Sector included the Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Fisheries and Forests, Ministry of Lands and Mineral Resources, Ministry of Industry, Trade and Tourism, Ministry of Sugar Industry, Ministry of Public Enterprises and Government Printing and Ministry of Local Government, Town and Country Planning and Environment.

The Auditor-General had issued three unmodified audit opinion and four modified audit opinion to the various Ministries and Departments' financial statements that were audited under this sector. It is important to note that Ministries and Departments that were scrutinised by the Committee were not invited for interview because of the COVID-19 restrictions that were in place at that time, but were requested instead to provide written responses on audit issues that were raised in the audit report.

The Committee noted that some of the Ministries had addressed some of the audit issues raised in the audit report while some were working towards resolving these internal control issues. The Committee strongly recommends that immediate action is required by the respective heads of these Ministries and Department in order to improve financial accountability within each Ministry.

I sincerely thank all the Honourable Members of the Committee for their valuable contribution in the successful compilation of this bipartisan report, namely Honourable Alvick

Maharaj (Chairperson), Honourable Vijendra Prakash (former Member), Honourable Aseri Radrodro and Honourable Ro Teimumu Kepa. I also extend my gratitude to Honourable Mikaele Leawere who stood in as an Alternate Member.

With those few words, I commend this report to Parliament.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Please, hand the report to the Secretary-General.

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. J.N. NAND.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, pursuant to Standing Order 121(5), I hereby move a motion without notice:

That a debate on the content of the report is initiated at a future sitting.

HON. RO T.V. KEPAL.- I beg to second the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call on the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Natural Resources, the Honourable Kirpal, to table his Report. You have the floor, Sir.

Review Report on the Water Authority of Fiji 2016 Annual Report –
Standing Committee on Natural Resources

HON. S.S. KIRPAL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am pleased to present the Committee's Review Report on the Water Authority of Fiji 2016 Annual Report.

The Water Authority of Fiji (WAF) is a Commercial Statutory Authority that was formed by the Government of Fiji under the WAF Promulgation 2007, in order to provide environmentally sound, sustainable, efficient and effective water and wastewater services. The Committee noted that in 2016, the WAF revised its vision and mission statements and logo line to include sanitation.

The Committee, in its initial deliberations, focussed on the overall operations of the Authority, including the Authority's functions and strategic objectives for 2016. It was noted that in 2016, WAF marked some major highlights and achievements, even through challenges such as the impact of *TC Winston*, which left a path of destruction. However, the Authority's concern was to keep clean, fresh water supplied to as many people as possible.

The Government's 20 year National Development Plan, (NDP 2017- 2036) clearly defines WAF's alignment to the national targets and, that is, to ensure that "Every Fijian has a right to clean and safe water in adequate quantities." For the urban areas, 100 percent access to clean and safe water will be realised by 2021 and for the rural and maritime areas by 2030. It was noted that although the impact of the disastrous event continued to echo throughout the year, the Authority had to return to normal to carry out the planned projects assigned for 2016.

The Committee wishes to commend the Authority on its Geographic Information System (GIS). The Unit was set up in 2012 and is responsible for capturing all WAF assets as a reference

point. The Unit has recently developed into new heights in capturing all WAF assets in the three Divisions, respective to its water systems. Likewise, with the increasing demands of water around the country, especially in Western Division where resorts and hotels are being constructed exponentially, technologies such as SCADA automation must be adopted to properly manage this system.

Customer demand has also shifted whereby expectations to faster turnaround times, instant replacements and quick solutions are needed. To create a quicker response time, WAF had some technologically advanced systems in place to help guide the staff for faster reaction. The Standing Committee on Natural Resources has conducted the review of the Water Authority of Fiji 2016 Annual Report and recommends that Parliament takes note of the recommendations highlighted in the Committee's Report.

Last but not the least, I wish to extend my appreciation to all the Honourable Members of the Committee who were part of the successful compilation of this bipartisan report, namely; Honourable Jale Sigarara, Honourable Alexander O'Connor, Honourable Mitieli Bulanauca, Honourable Peceli Vosanibola and Honourable Jese Saukuru (Opposition Alternate Member).

With those few words, I hereby commend this Report to Parliament.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Please, hand the Report to the Secretary-General.

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. S.S. KIRPAL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, pursuant to Standing Order 121(5), I hereby move a motion, without notice:

That a debate on the content of the report is initiated at a future sitting.

HON. J. SIGARARA.- Mr Speaker, I second the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I give the floor to the Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications, as he has given notice to make a Ministerial Statement under Standing Order 40.

The Minister may speak for up to 20 minutes. After the Minister, I will then invite the Leader of the Opposition or his designate to speak on the Statement for no more than five minutes. There will also be a response from the Leader of the National Federation Party (NFP) or his designate to also speak for five minutes. There will be no other debate.

I now call on the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications to deliver his Ministerial Statement. You have the floor, Sir.

Fiji's Emissions Reduction Payment Agreement

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I rise to inform Parliament about Fiji's Emissions Reduction Payment Agreement between the Fijian Government and Forest Carbon Partnership Facility or ERPA as we call it. The concept of an ERPA is fairly novel, not just for Fiji but for the world, so at the outset, please allow me to provide context.

In order to achieve a net zero global economy and keep global temperatures well below 1.5 Degree Celsius, 189 countries that are party to the Paris Agreement are required to reduce their Greenhouse Gas Emissions or GHGs through emission reduction initiatives.

Emission reduction commitments of each country are articulated in their Nationally Determined Contributions or NDCs, which are periodically reported to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). In mapping out the paths to a low carbon future, high GHG emitting countries are running into a dilemma. They are unable to create enough natural carbon sinks to negate their national GHG emissions and achieve their NDC commitment.

To address this shortfall, these countries have the option to purchase emission credits from countries like Fiji that are small global emitters with surplus natural carbon sink stocks, such as forests, grasslands, mangroves and sea grasses. Moreover, both high and low GHG emitting countries also have the option to establish domestic trading schemes to entice resource owners within their borders to preserve and protect natural carbon sinks in exchange for payments according to a predefined carbon price.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, these forms of international and domestic carbon emission trading are broadly defined as what we call carbon markets. The practice of carbon trading is widely regarded as a crucial component for addressing the global climate crisis. It helps put a price on GHG emissions and entices government and non-government stakeholders to create a business case for GHG abatement, as well as the potential to support nature-based solutions in climate vulnerable countries.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as a Small Island Developing State (SIDS) that contributes only 0.006 percent to global GHG emissions, while being lush with an expensive ecosystem that is well-suited for offsetting carbon emissions, Fiji has incredible potential to create far more natural carbon sinks than what we will need to accelerate towards a net zero carbon neutral future. That leaves us with the prospect for great untapped potential to both help the planet and bolster our economy here at home.

The market opportunity, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is great. Carbon markets are continuing to experience steady growth, despite the global economic contraction caused by COVID-19. Right now, their carbon pricing mechanisms in more than 90 national and subnational jurisdictions around the world (Nationally, these include New Zealand, China, Europe, South Korea, South Africa, Thailand, Japan and Canada, and Sub-nationally, the United States), we are glad to see them back into the Paris Agreement family. This creates an opportunity for Fiji to participate in carbon markets to convert our already strong focus on environmental preservation into financial gains that can be used to fund new and additional climate actions.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think we can all agree that our comparative advantage of being both, a low-emitting and nature-rich country, creates a strong socio-economic rationale for Fiji to sign the ERPA with the Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF).

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the ERPA was signed on Wednesday, 27th January, 2021 (this year) as a five-year carbon trade contract between the Fijian Government on behalf of all Fijians and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) as trustee of the carbon fund owned

by the FCPF. Fiji is one of 19 countries only in the world, accepted for funding under the Carbon Fund portfolio and this is the first and only Pacific Island Country to enter into the carbon trade under this framework.

While we are just getting started with carbon trading, the hard work that went in behind the scenes, to make this possible, had been going on for some time and I think it is only appropriate, apart from the Honourable Minister for Forests and the Permanent Secretary for Fisheries and Forests, the Permanent Secretary for Economy and the Head of Climate Change, to mention the four individuals specifically who were involved in the technical work – the Conservator of Forests, Ms. Sanjana Lal; Mr. Ilai Tulele, Programme Team Leader REDD+; and Jeannette Mani and Deepitika Chand, the Mitigation Officers in the Climate Change Office. Those were the core technical people.

The ERPA is a culmination of over a decade of work that begun in 2009, and over the years with funding and technical support of the Forest Carbon Partnership Facility managed by the World Bank, the preparatory work ensued in readiness to the implementation of the ERPA.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, humanity has long exploited natural resources at the expense of development and released GHG emissions to a level that has suffocated the earth's fragile biosphere. The ERPA elevates the importance of trees and forests as a natural resource in sustaining lives and offers a tangible solution through designating forests as sinks for sequestration GHGs and provide the system for verifying quantifiable measures of the reducing level of GHG emissions over the next five years.

The ERPA has identified an area of 37,282 hectares within 20 Districts, spread over the three islands of Viti Levu, Vanua Levu and Taveuni, in which the emission reduction activities will be conducted. Those activities include the:

- establishment of forests on degraded land;
- sustainable management of designated timber production forests;
- total protection of intact existing natural forests;
- incorporation of trees into farming and agricultural systems;
- promotion of forest-based livelihood ventures as an alternative to forest attraction, such as ecotourism, beekeeping, agroforestry; and
- establishment of nurseries for high-valued native species of forests.

Corporate bodies, such as the Fiji Pine Group of Companies and the Fiji Hardwood Corporation Limited, are already supporting the ERPA. They have pledged to contribute to the establishment of forests as designated carbon sinks within their respective programmes and as their corporate social responsibility to reduce emissions and help Fiji combat climate change.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the contracted volume of carbon dioxide emissions that Fiji is expected to sequester from those forest activities over the next five years is 2.5 million tonnes, which upon verification will yield a result-based payment of US\$12.5 million over the span of five years, divided into three trenches, which are as follows:

- (1) 11th July, 2019 to 31st December, 2020 - 300,000 units;
- (2) 1st January, 2021 to 31st December, 2022 – 1 million units; and
- (3) 1st January, 2023 to 31st December, 2024 – 1.2 million units.

The total cost of commitments under the ERPA is US\$31.2 million, of which the Fijian Government's contribution over the five years is US\$13.5 million, and will be absorbed into the usual annual work programme in the Ministry of Forestry and the Ministry of Agriculture. A further

US\$8.82 million of the remaining amount is associated to costs for corporate bodies involved in forest establishments and the cost of adopting sustainable harvesting regimes. The balance of US\$8.89 million will be sourced externally from multilateral climate funds, such as the Green Climate Fund (GCF), Adaptation Fund (AF) and the Global Environment Facility (GEF).

By leveraging Fiji's usual expenditure in the forestry and agriculture sector to unlock additional funding of US\$12.5 million, ERPA encourages integration and coordination throughout the various Government structures and tiers of decision-making, promotes inclusivity and the empowerment of resource owners and often marginalised communities through livelihood ventures and employment opportunities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is important to note that the US\$12.5 million that will be generated from this initiative will be passed down to resource owners as incentive payments through a benefit-sharing plan developed by the Fijian Government in collaboration with the World Bank. Moreover, the rights of property owners will be protected under the feedback grievance mechanism, the safeguard information system and a robust monitoring, reporting and verification system, which will be jointly administered by the Ministry of Forestry, iTaukei Lands Trust Board, the Provincial Councils, Ministry of Agriculture and Ministry of Economy.

From a policy perspective, Mr. Speaker, Sir, ERPA further supports Fiji's commitment to various Agreements, Treaties and Conventions, particularly the commitment to reduce Fiji's GHG emissions by 30 percent by 2030 and the planting of 30 million trees in the next 10 years. At the end of the five-year ERPA Programme, Sir, Fiji will establish a reputable monitoring, reporting and verification system that will vigorously be tested in preparation for future carbon trade and competitive carbon markets, allowing us to build on our momentum and continue to tap into new carbon trading opportunities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Fijian Government is cognisant of the fact that carbon markets require robust enabling environment, to ensure market forces, namely; the supply and demand of carbon credits. They must interact seamlessly. In this regard, we are currently conducting, as we all know, a national consultation on the Draft Climate Change Bill which will create the legislative framework for creating carbon markets in Fiji, enabling local resource owners to access foreign carbon markets through the Fijian Government's trading setup.

Sir, in particular, the Draft Climate Change Bill establishes carbon sequestration property rights and defines it as exclusive and distinctly legal right to carbon sequestration and carbon stocks. The draft Bill sets out the perimeters for the assignment of such property rights by defining them, if they have exclusive and distinctly legal right to carbon sequestration and carbon stocks. The carbon sequestration property rights shall be attached to an eligible land until its term is concluded or renewed.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are pleased to highlight that once a resource owner registers and is assigned carbon sequestration property rights by the Registrar of Titles, it is recognised as an official instrument of title that is recognised under the Personal Property Securities Act. Essentially, it gives additional asset value to the land it is assigned for, even people who may lease it can actually have those properties assigned to them. Such legal recognition creates the foundation for trading carbon sequestration property rights in the carbon markets.

In summary, the Draft Climate Change Bill will enable the Fijian Government to work with resource owners to assign carbon sequestration property rights and transfer them to the Forest Carbon Partnership Facility for a period of five years, in exchange for emission reduction results payments. The Forest Bill 2020, which is the revised improved version of the Forest Bill 2016, is currently

under consultation. We will also supplement and support the Draft Climate Change Bill provided in the Framework to facilitate the implementation of ERPA.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as nations in the world work towards creating a carbon neutral future by 2050 which Fiji has already given a commitment to carbon markets are one of the many tools that will be leveraged to tackle global climate emergency which science tells us is a direct result of increased GHGs in the atmosphere. Fiji, through the support of the World Bank and the FCPF, now has the opportunity to participate in international carbon markets which goes beyond the existing National REDD+ initiative.

It is important to note, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that at the end of the five year ERPA, Fiji will have the option to have 95 percent of its 2.5 million tonnes of emission reduction units transferred back by the FCPF. This, again, can be used by Fiji towards our NDC, to achieve our 2050 net zero carbon reduction targets and, indeed, we can trade on it again.

While the carbon credits are currently only be quantified for the Forestry Sector, this is just a start. Through this prestigious programme, Fiji will gain global recognition as FCPF is playing a catalysing role in connecting countries with private sector investments which could potentially unlock opportunities for other sectors, as well as, for example, the blue carbon ecosystems, something that obviously has great potential for big ocean State like ours.

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji has the unique opportunity of capacity building for monitoring, reporting and verification access to the central registry housed at the World Bank. Certification of the carbon credits by the FCPF and more importantly, leveraging much bigger future financing incentives in the voluntary markets around the world.

If Fiji successfully implements the emission reduction programme and obtains payments, its carbon crediting system will demonstrate world leading field tested processes and systems to support future carbon trading. Mr. Speaker, Sir, we cannot underestimate, nor overstate the potential here.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as all countries are now required to reduce emissions as much as possible under the Paris Agreement, carbon markets will evolve towards financing climate projects that truly drive the zero carbon emission and the transition to it.

The Draft Climate Change Bill thus creates an enabling environment for carbon market initiatives in Fiji by defining carbon sequestration and property rights, encouraging the formulation of robust REDD+ and blue carbon policies, mandating the development of emission reduction methodologies, as well as providing guidance on voluntary and compliance-based market mechanisms. The signing of the ERPA could help garner financial support to operationalise these aspects of the Climate Change Bill, once it is enacted by Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Fijian Government has laid the ground work and we are excited to see where this innovative new initiative takes us in the months and years ahead. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications for his Ministerial Statement. I now give the floor to the Leader of the Opposition. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. RATU N.T. LALABALAVU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I rise in response to the Ministerial Statement as presented just a while ago by the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications.

From the outset, the Ministerial Statement being made is fully endorsed and fully agreed upon, but at the same time this side of the House will not take things lightly as to how the downstream effect of this Agreement is going to be felt by the very people who are involved, especially with the resource owners. When I say resource owners, it also means landowners, native landowners, including freeholders who own big chunks of land that are covered with forest as well. A few will disagree that to achieve the climate goals of limiting global warming from 1.5 to 2.0, there is a massive amount of work to be done, one of which is to fundamentally transform the fossil fuel based global energy system.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Paris Agreement is made through country arrangements to share this burden - their contributions being determined voluntarily at the national level. Most agree that the contributions put forward to-date are grossly inadequate to the task. In short, we have a long list of difficult essential actions and a short time to do them.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, if we look back at what we have, especially to do with our resources, past colonial governments of Fiji have made very important decisions as to how we conserve our forests. Now, through modern science and technology, we have come up with this kind of policies that relate, or are connected in one way or another to the Paris Agreement. But, Sir, we usually have forest reserves that are agreed upon by the landowners or it was Government's initiative at that time. I am specifically talking about the big forest reserve in the Nadarivatu area and in Taveuni.

At one point, they were being paid annual sums to ensure that there is monetary benefit going down to the resource owners because they were to forego all potential incomes that were going to go to them, if they were to access their natural forest resources. As such, with this development to do with carbon mission, Sir, we on this side of the House support that but then again, the only question that we beg to raise with the Government is, what happens to the resource owners?

Now, we have just heard from the Honourable Minister for Economy that they are still doing studies and these were the very things that were indicated in this House when we raised questions to the Honourable Minister for Forestry as to how resources were going to be shared or how returns from those investments were going to reach down to the landowners.

Our contribution is part of our resources, Sir, but then again I can only state here that we hope that with the REDD+ and all those new policies that are coming, that a proper awareness programme be undertaken with the landowners so as to enable them to properly understand what this is all about. Otherwise, it is just Government trading discussions so we can conform to the Paris Agreement, et cetera, but the poor landowners are completely at a loss as to how they would be able to benefit.

(Honourable Prime Minister interjects)

HON. RATU N.T. LALABALAVU.- The benefits are clear, Honourable Prime Minister. We will have threats, air to breathe and we will protect our natural resources, et cetera, but the poor landowners are the ones who are going to suffer. I beg you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Leader of the Opposition for his statement. I now give the floor to the Leader of the National Federation Party. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. PROFESSOR B.C PRASAD.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Carbon emissions trading schemes are known to be fission schemes, private sector-led but I think some of the points that the Honourable Leader of the Opposition raised are important. There are important issues with respect to the Agreement. We need to understand what the details of the Agreement are and I know that the

Honourable Attorney-General alluded to the Climate Change Bill because that Bill will actually embed the domestic laws that will determine how the Agreement is put into effect.

We must also understand that the World Bank, Mr. Speaker, does not always have a very good record. I remember in 2015, there was the whole scandal about how communities were dispossessed with respect to how the Agreements were put in place. So, while we want to use all the tools to achieve the NDC commitment, we have to ensure that those who were going to provide the resources have the Agreement which is properly in place so that they are not dispossessed, or that they do not lose out because there have been cases around the world that the World Bank is not always the best guide to actually do that.

Anyway, Mr. Speaker, that is all I have to say on that but while I have time, I just want to respond to the Honourable Attorney-General because he could not help responding to what I said yesterday and I think basic understanding of economics, Mr. Speaker, will tell the Honourable Minister for Economy that when I talked about creating demand, it was not just talking about consumption. I can understand the idea behind reducing tariffs in the last Budget but, Mr. Speaker, when people do not have the money, when they do not have the income, when they have lost their jobs, when they are earning less than what they should be earning, reduction in tariff is not going to help.

In fact, the Honourable Minister for Agriculture, Waterway and Environment should give an economic lesson to people on the other side.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. PROFESSOR B.C. PRASAD.- The point I was making is that, when we have a crisis of this nature, Mr. Speaker, Sir, where demand is a big issue, you ought to look at health, education and look at income support for those who do not have income. Let me give you an example.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, if you look at the tourism industry, for example, 80 percent of the employment generation....

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Leader of the National Federation Party, you should speak to the topic.

HON. PROFESSOR B.C. PRASAD.- It is related to that, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. PROFESSOR B.C. PRASAD.- I have my time and I want to respond to it because it is important to them.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

Honourable Member, that is probably related to that but you are taking quite a while coming around to it. So, please, get on with it.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. PROFESSOR B.C. PRASAD.- That is unparliamentary language.

HON. SPEAKER.- You have the floor.

HON. PROFESSOR B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, as I have said, basic understanding of economics will tell the Honourable Minister for Economy that if you are trying to help the communities, they have to be supported through income support. In addition, I mentioned the three pillars on which our policy is going to help us recover from these crises which are education, health and income support.

We can bring this Bill, we can bring this Agreement to say, “Alright, we are doing things on the side to help people to get income support through carbon emission trading.” That is fine, but right now, we need to hear from the Honourable Minister for Economy a recovery plan to ensure that we are dealing with the crisis in an efficient and effective manner.

So, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Attorney-General should not play politics. Politics is not always about Elections. Politics is not always about winning an argument. Politics must also be used to do good for our people. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Leader of the National Federation Party for his contribution. We will move on.

Honourable Members, I have been advised that there are no Bills for consideration today. So, on that note, we will now suspend proceedings for refreshments and this will be served at the usual place. We adjourn for refreshments.

The Parliament adjourned at 10.28 a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 11.01 a.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I now call upon the Deputy Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights, the Honourable Sharma, to move his motion

REVIEW REPORT - FIJIAN ELECTORAL COMMISSION 2014 ANNUAL REPORT

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Mr, Speaker, Sir, I move:

That Parliament debates the 2014 Review Report of the Fijian Electoral Commission, which was tabled on 14th May, 2019.

HON. DR. S.R. GOVIND.- I beg to second the motion, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now invite the Deputy Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights to speak on his motion.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I take this opportunity, as the Member moving the motion, to make a brief contribution on the Committee's Report on the Fijian Electoral Commission 2014 Annual Report.

By way of a brief background, the Fijian Electoral Commission 2014 Annual Report was referred to the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights in the last term of Parliament and then reinstated in this new Parliament and referred to the current Committee. The current Committee of which I am the Deputy Chairperson, took this as an opportunity to complete the commendable work carried out by our predecessors.

Just as the previous Committee, the current Committee was mandated by Parliament to review the Annual Report and report back to Parliament on its findings. The Committee took note of and deliberated on the previous Committee's extensive deliberation and reviewed the Report and noted its content.

The Committee took note of all the evidences received from various submissions, so as to ensure that all possible points or views and suggestions that were received were given relevant consideration. In its pursuit to form an independent view and stance, the previous Committee addressed all the issues noted in the Annual Report and came up with its own recommendations to some of the main issues noted.

My Committee also shares the view of the previous Committee, in that some of their suggestions are either impractical or already been addressed in some way or the other since the initial tabling of the Annual Report in Parliament in 2016. For example, the suggestion for a ballot paper to have pictures of candidates, party symbols and names would be impractical, as this would see a ballot paper the size of a workstation desk. Such an issue has been dealt with in a more practical way, and so have most of the issues noted in the 2014 Report.

Some of the other main areas of discussions addressed by the Committee are as follows:

- The realisation of the independence of the Fijian Electoral Commission by having and controlling its own budget, being able to utilise independent legal services and having clear demarcation on the governance structure of the Fiji's electoral management body.

- The realisation of the aforementioned independence by considering proposed amendments to the electoral laws (2013 Constitution of the Republic of Fiji, Electoral Act 2014 and the Political Parties (Registration, Conduct, Funding and Disclosures) Act 2013.
- There was also a comparative analysis of various foreign jurisdictions conducted, to see the electoral practices of their electoral management bodies. In that regard, I wish to advise of a Caveat which is the result of the comparative analysis where there is no perfect model or right practice for electoral management bodies. The result was used as a mere guidance for the Committee, in making its own independent view of what it thought best for Fiji's circumstance.

From the jurisdiction research, the Committee noted that there is no such thing as a perfect model for electoral management bodies. The above statement should be the basis for understanding the main purpose for the Committee's analysis of other jurisdictions. The Committee sought to see if the issues that were raised in the Annual Report are also present in other jurisdictions. There are various forms of practices across jurisdictions, however, one vital aspect noted was that the fundamental principles behind the election processes remained the same – that an election should be impartial, independent, free and fair.

At the conclusion of the review, the Committee established that the response provided by the Fijian Electoral Commission on the issues raised on the Report were satisfactory and had provided the needed clarification. The Committee provided a few recommendations, which it believes would be a good starting point for any electoral system review.

The Committee also notes that progress has been made with regards to addressing many of the concerns raised in the Annual Report, yet every system has room for improvement. After the 2018 General Elections, two election cycles have been completed under our new electoral system and this gives us a fuller understanding of the challenges of this new system and an opportunity to gather and consider lessons learned.

With those few words, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I urge Honourable Members of this august House to take note of the contents of the Committee's Report and to show support for the motion before the House.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Deputy Chairperson for his Report. Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate on the motion. Honourable Prime Minister, you have the floor.

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to speak on the motion by Honourable Sharma. The Fijian Electoral Commission is mandated under the 2013 Constitution as an independent non-partisan authority responsible for the registration of voters and the conduct of free and fair elections in accordance with written laws governing elections in Fiji. In this respect, Mr. Speaker, Sir, both sides of this august Parliament need to acknowledge the work that has been conducted by the Fiji Electoral Commission.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is because of this very important work that Members of both sides of Parliament are seated here during the tenure of our Parliamentary term. The Commission, through the Fijian Elections Office, conducts a very significant and important role through regular revisions and assessments of the National Register of Voters and Fiji's population which will ascertain the number of representations in Parliament. As we all know, Mr. Speaker, this is unique to Fiji and the 2013 Constitution allows for that. The 2013 Constitution allows for fair representation in Parliament, according to the number of population we have in Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, that is also the mandate of Government, ensuring that our Fijian citizens are served proportionately, equally and equitably unlike the past, our Parliament always had a fixed number of seats. The Electoral Commission, as mandated under the 2013 Constitution ensured that this is changed. Prior to the 2014 General Elections, the total number of population and voters registered then determined the total number of seats in Parliament to be 50. Similarly, prior to the 2018 General Elections, the Commission determined the total number of seats in Parliament to be 51, an increase by one seat which also signifies the increase in our voter registration and population as a whole.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it should now be in our best interest to support the role of the Commission. I, therefore, commend the collaborative work of the Commission and the Supervisor of Elections to effectively manage the electoral system in Fiji on a daily basis.

Based on those remarks, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I, therefore, support the motion. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Prime Minister for his contribution to the debate. Honourable Adi Litia Qionibaravi, you have the floor.

HON. ADI L. QIONIBARAVI.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to contribute to the motion before the House, and I would like to thank the Chairperson of the Committee of Justice, Law and Human Rights for their review report which is their second review that has been carried out on the Annual Reports of the Electoral Commission, including references made to the report on the Multinational Observer Group Report on the 2014 Elections.

We note that the Annual Report of the Electoral Commission was tabled in the House in 2016. It is now 2021, and it has been over four years since the report was tabled in the House and two separate Committees of the Justice, Law and Human Rights have both reviewed the report. The Annual Report of the Electoral Commission and its recommendations, Mr. Speaker, Sir, have a large bearing on how Fiji can be truly governed democratically, as it is the relevant provision of the Constitution, the electoral laws and regulations that determines who wins the general elections in Fiji.

We have had two general elections and it is unfortunate that this side of the House hold strong views that both elections were rigged.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. ADI L. QIONIBARAVI.- All Opposition parties that made submissions to the Justice, Law and Human Rights Committee, as well as the Electoral Commission on a number of occasions, our efforts, Mr. Speaker, Sir, to the Court of Disputed Returns with eight witnesses to provide evidence of the rigging of the election had to be withdrawn because six key witnesses were declared to be persons of interest.

On that ground, Sir, we ask, who is not a person of interest in a general election? Who is not a person of interest in the general election? Every member of the public who missed the requirement to be a registered voter is a person of interest, as each voter has a preference on who to vote for, and the collective results of the voters who cast their votes less the invalid votes results in the decision on which party will govern the nation.

While the 2013 Constitution of the Republic of Fiji further mandates that the Court of Disputed Returns decision cannot be further challenged in another Court of law, so that was the end of our strenuous efforts to seek justice with the Court of Disputed Returns, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

The political parties that made various submissions to the Electoral Commission, over 120 recommendations from 2017 to 2018, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Out of the 120 recommendations, less than 10 recommendations have been approved. In our view, that shows the ingenuous of the Government to enter into dialogue with this side of the House - the Opposition parties, and listen to what we are saying.

We speak on behalf of thousands of voters who voted us into Parliament that their needs to be substantive changes to the electoral laws in this country, as well as the 2013 Constitution of the Republic of Fiji. We wholeheartedly share the intent of the two reports and anticipate serious and sincere dialogue and active cooperation with the FijiFirst Government, the Fiji Electoral Commission and the Elections Office in the implementation of these recommendations.

The changes required in Fiji, Mr. Speaker, Sir, can only be achieved through genuine dialogue and trust between stakeholders in a process that includes the people of Fiji, the civil society, the Fiji media and all those who can assist the elections process in Fiji. The obligations or challenges to initiate necessary changes rests on the Electoral Commission.

The Electoral Commission Chairman had assured the Opposition political parties initially that it will do its best to bring about changes needed to ensure free and fair elections under the law. However, those words were watered down that the Electoral Commission will only implement the laws as it is and not the law as it ought to be. This is the thrust of our submission, Sir. The Opposition parties would like to enter into dialogue with Government to consider the review of the electoral laws so that the election can be held in this country and considered free and fair, Sir.

The Electoral Commission 2014 Report, Sir, the changes it recommended should have been, with the assistance of donor partners completed by mid-2016. However, the 2014 elections terms have lapsed and new commissioners were appointed in early 2017. To date, we still have not seen changes, approval, consideration or dialogue on the 120 recommendations that were made by the political parties to the Electoral Commission, Sir.

As Fiji moves forward, it is the prayer of the Opposition parties that the country and all its citizens will find a workable electoral process that will ensure the genuine will of the people, and that it will give them a group of citizens to rule the affairs of their nation with sincerity, honesty and compassion, Sir.

Section 23 of the 2013 Constitution provides that every citizen has the right to free, fair and regular elections. The Electoral Commission is mandated under Section 75(2) and I quote:

“The Commission has the responsibility for the registration of voters and the conduct of free and fair elections in accordance with the written law governing elections and any other relevant law.”

Those words, Mr. Speaker, Sir, “in accordance with the written law governing elections” has largely prevented the Electoral Commission from taking up recommendations that they have received to Government, so that Government through Cabinet can consider the changes that we are recommending and the changes are made to the electoral laws of this country.

What I am saying, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is that the 2013 Constitution literally restricts the Electoral Commission even though we are telling the Electoral Commission, “you have the right, you have the responsibility to ensure free and fair elections, and you can make submissions for the changes in the law”, but they will not make a submission because they are saying that they will only hold elections on what the written law is. So that, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is a big dilemma. Who is going

to make the recommendations to allow Government to consider what we are voicing today? We have said a lot of things to the Electoral Commission. Our reports, our submission to the Committees have been documented by them, it will be pointless for me to continue to say this unless Government has the goodwill to listen to the opposition parties and review the electoral laws in this country so that Fiji can hold a truly free and fair elections in this country.

We support, Sir, the recommendations in the two reports – the Multinational Observer Group and the first Electoral Commission that was appointed before the first elections in 2013. Thank you, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Adi Litia Qionibaravi. Before we move on, Honourable Whips and Acting Whips, make a list of those who are going to speak and get the list to me. I do not want a repetition of yesterday, I am fishing around for speakers. Do your job, I will do mine.

I give the floor to Honourable Professor Prasad.

HON. PROFESSOR B.C. PRASAD.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Before I speak on the report, I just saw a front page picture of you and mine in the Government propaganda newspaper. It is fake news, Mr. Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, how come I am looking old and you are still looking young?

HON. PROFESSOR B.C. PRASAD.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this report has come after the die was cast, so to speak. As the report points out, two General Elections have already been held and there has been very little

(Honourable Dr. Waqainabete interjects)

HON. PROFESSOR B.C. PRASAD.- You worry about Panadol, Honourable Minister.

Mr. Speaker, there has been little or no heed paid to the recommendations of the 2014 Annual Report of the Electoral Commission and, indeed, the Multinational Observer Group (MOG) findings into the 2014 General Elections. However, Mr. Speaker, it is better late than never.

As the Committee states, it is important that a special parliamentary committee is established to review the entire electoral process and time is of the essence, Mr. Speaker, Sir. We are less than 17 months away from when elections can be held at the earliest in 2022, which is July next year. This has been confirmed by the Electoral Commission during its recent meeting with the political parties.

Might I add, we have even lesser time, if the issuance of writs and nomination period is taken into account, Mr. Speaker, but instead, what we see is this Government actually forging ahead and blatantly ignoring what was recommended after the 2014 and 2018 General Elections. It only made cosmetic and not real changes, as recommended by the Commission and MOG after the nation went to the polls in 2018.

Government seemingly has no intention, Mr. Speaker, of adopting major recommendations from the Reports in 2014 and again in 2018. Basically, the Government is turning a blind eye to substantive changes. It has decided to make some changes that it thinks are suitable, as seen in the

Electoral (Amendment) Bill 2020 and the Political Parties (Registration, Conduct, Funding and Disclosures) (Amendment) Bill 2020 as tabled in December 2020.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I do, however, wish to thank the Committee under the Chairmanship of the Honourable Assistant Minister for Employment, Productivity, Industrial Relations who is not here, for the bold recommendations. In fact, I think the Committee has done a really good job in scrutinising the report and making some very useful recommendations.

In fact, the Honourable Assistant Minister and his Committee, Mr. Speaker, if I may just add, have done justice to the role and functions of a Parliamentary Standing Committee, in my view, fearlessly performing the role of scrutinising the merits and demerits of the report which was referred to the Committee by your goodself, Mr. Speaker. I think this is the first time that I also see that there was no regard to political consequences. The Committee did not stray from the truth and have made recommendations that, if adopted, will uphold unblemished electoral credibility and integrity. So I really want to thank the Committee for doing their job.

An example of this is the Committee's agreement with the Electoral Commission, the recommendation that it must have its own budget and be free to seek independent legal advice. If you look at the Commission's Report, it notes that its requests to the Minister for Elections on this issue was basically ignored and we wonder why, Mr. Speaker. Absolute independence of independent institutions is totally necessary for transparency.

The Executive Summary on page 4 of the Commission's Report which states, and I quote:

“... The EC's work was affected by not having the services of an independent legal advisor. Repeated requests for an independent legal consultant to the Minister of Elections remain unanswered.”

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it does raise serious questions as to why the Commission's requests were repeatedly ignored especially when the Minister for Elections happens to be the Honourable Attorney-General, as well as his also the General Secretary of the FijiFirst Party, he is the registered officer of the FijiFirst Party. But that was 2014 – you fast forward that to 2021 and yes the status quo remains the same - the FijiFirst General Secretary is still the Honourable Attorney-General, still the registered officer and still the Minister for Elections.

The Honourable Minister, I heard him say once, in the previous administration, the Honourable Prime Minister was responsible for the Elections. But, Mr. Speaker, Sir, they did not deal with the Elections Office in their political capacities. Besides, we did not have this Political Parties Act or Electoral Act. They did not have to operate under that and obviously they did not have a say in the appointment of the Supervisor of Elections. So the Electoral Commission, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is very, very important.

The Electoral Commission's recommendation for the position of Supervisor of Elections to be re-advertised again was ignored. I mean, if there was a requirement, Mr. Speaker, Sir, in the advertisement in the first place, then that should have been followed. That is all history but what I would say to the Government, “history should not repeat itself” and that is why the Standing Committee, in my view, has rightfully recommended a thorough parliamentary review of the electoral process.

I think it is absolutely important, Mr. Speaker, Sir, if you look at the recommendations in the 2014 Elections Report, the Multinational Observer Group (MOG) and, indeed, the 2018 Election Observer Group, there are a number of issues that were highlighted by MOG, even though the terms

of reference was very, very narrow. I mean, ideally, we should be inviting the Commonwealth Observer Group or the European Union Observer Group. These are credible observer groups that observe elections around the world. I remember, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Commonwealth Secretariat had actually written to the Government offering a Commonwealth Observer Group to observe the elections in 2018.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this Parliament did not deal with reports of the 2014 Elections. We had four years. We are looking at this report after six years, Mr. Speaker, Sir, when we should have, as a Parliament, as leaders, we should have looked at the 2014 Election Commission's Report, the Multinational Observer Group and done the right thing. Any talk of genuine democracy anywhere, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and in any country rests on the integrity of the electoral process. If there is any perception that the election process or election conduct has any doubts, it does not lead to a genuine democracy.

Many countries around the world, Mr. Speaker, Sir, have elections. Elections is just one part of achieving genuine democracy. It is a very important part and we need to ensure that we accept the recommendations of this Committee. In fact the Committee is saying, the Committee points out that two elections were held and it is time to review. I think they are right. The Honourable Members in that Committee are absolutely right, and they ought to be commended for coming up with this recommendation.

Surely, Mr. Speaker, if we in this Parliament, believe in transparency, accountability and good governance but more importantly, absolutely independence of institutions because Parliament is the supreme oversight body. Every institution in this country, including the executives, some newspaper so-called "analyst" they do not understand this issue of separation of powers. Parliament is the supreme oversight institution. Every institution is accountable to Parliament, including the executives.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- You do not understand that!

HON. PROFESSOR B.C. PRASAD.- Executive is accountable to this Parliament.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. PROFESSOR B.C. PRASAD.- They are accountable to this Parliament. It is very important, Mr. Speaker, for us to understand that and this is why the two Bills before the Committee are premature. We need to go by the recommendations of this Committee, let us set up a Parliamentary Committee and deal with the recommendations and I am sure the 2018 Elections Report has been considered by the Committee right now. Let us wait for that report and let us set up a Parliamentary Committee.

As I have said, Mr. Speaker, politics is not just about winning elections. Politics is about doing the right things by the country, by the people. So, let us do that. Let us accept for once, this Parliamentary Committee's recommendation and let us set up a Parliamentary Committee, we still have time. We have 17 months. Let us do that and come as a Parliament and deal with those recommendations so that when we go into the elections in 2022, we are all happy and sure that the processes surrounding elections, the conduct of the elections, the role of the Electoral Commission are all properly accounted for.

If we do not do that, Mr. Speaker, the perception of bias, perception of rigging, perception of vote buying, perception of not having a free, fair and a credible election will remain and we will remain a democracy struggling.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Leader of the NFP. I have four other speakers. I now give the floor, first, to Honourable Gavoka, then the Honourable Minister for Fisheries, Honourable Bulitavu and then the Honourable Attorney-General. That is the order of speakers. Honourable Gavoka, you have the floor.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I must say that I am pleased that the Committee has finalised its report and has highlighted certain areas that have been of concern to me over the years.

Mr. Speaker, much has been said by my colleagues earlier on, on the mark. I would like to touch on one area and that is the number of people who did not vote in 2014 and 2018. To me, that is the true measure of success of an election.

As we know, Mr. Speaker, about 90,000 registered voters did not vote in 2014 and about 171,000 did not vote in 2018. I was part of Parliament in 2014 and was very concerned about the huge number that did not vote in 2014 and I was hoping that it would have improved by 2018, but it virtually doubled.

As a former business executive, I always measure success by the output, by the participation of groups into a project or into an event. There is no reason why a small country like Fiji would have 90,000 of its registered voters not turning out to vote, let alone 171,000 four years later. Our Secretary of the Electoral Office continues to speak in glowing terms about the success of the 2014 and 2018 Elections, but I beg to differ when I look at the number of people who did not vote.

To me, that is the real measure of success, and I am happy, Mr. Speaker, that I see some recommendations here by the Electoral Commission in 2014. I am referring here to what I would normally term as “confidence-building measures”. Over here, the Electoral Commission is saying that you must allow people to take a piece of paper into the voting booth with the number of the person they want to vote for, to help them vote for the person they want. We do not allow that in Fiji. We do not allow any paper, we do not even allow any images or anything to help our voters to vote for who they want.

Mr. Speaker, when I think about all the work that the Electoral Commission carries out in the four years, it is all leading to one moment of truth - all the television, radio, print media advertisements, everything they do leads to that one moment of truth is when a Fijian goes into the booth to decide who is to be in the Government; that is the moment of truth - to get them into that booth. Whatever you said, whatever campaign you carry out in the country, the moment of truth is that time when they get into the booth, and that should be the driving factor, the driving force in whatever you do to build up towards an election. That is why, Mr. Speaker, I am talking about here, about “confidence-building measures”. You must give confidence to our people to enable them to go and vote.

Right now, Mr. Speaker, it is very intimidating. We must make it easy for them to go and vote because they are the ones who decide who is going to run the Government. They are the ones who are going to decide who is going to run the Government, so let us look at confidence building measures, Mr. Speaker. Why can we not have signs in the ballot paper, signages (like in the past), the symbols on the ballot paper, we do not have that? Why can they not take a piece of paper into the booth? Why can they not be taken to the voting booth by their political parties?

These are all steps we can take to give them the confidence to go and vote. If you leave them the way they are, they will just say, “No, this is too complicated”, “I’m afraid”, I’m intimidated by the atmosphere, by the environment”, “I will stay home”. This is true, Mr. Speaker, so what we would like to see, from this side, is to put in more confidence building measures, relax some of the rules.

As I said, Mr. Speaker, no matter what we say, however we put it, we must look to that moment of truth when a citizen of this country goes into that booth every four years to make his choice on who is to be in this government. That, Mr. Speaker, is the most important criteria, the most important objective for the Electoral Commission and for all of us.

I know that some will be impeded by other factors but maybe in other jurisdictions, we can benchmark, it is simply less than 5 percent of those who do not turn up to vote, Mr. Speaker. In Fiji, this is way too high so, I would ask that going forward, the Electoral Commission must work towards making sure, look at all the factors, making sure that every citizen in this country gets into that booth. That is the true measure of success for any election in a democracy, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

I hope what I am saying here, Mr. Speaker, Sir, on confidence building will be heeded and taken into account. There is so much confusion. I know in the Malolo's, people voted in one booth in 2014 and in 2018, they were told to go and vote down at another venue. We have had voting since 1970, our people know, "if I vote in Malolo Sewa in 2014, I will vote here again in 2018." It did not happen. It is not unique to that area, it happened all over Fiji.

I know in Sigatoka, someone voted in Conua in 2014 and was taken to Naduri in 2018. That is the kind of confusion, Mr. Speaker, that we will need to factor into the whole equation. I hope that that is going to be taken into consideration and we want in 2022, the participation to be much higher and we want everyone to be given the opportunity to make that choice that is due to them, as part of our democracy. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank Honourable Gavoka for his contribution to the debate. Honourable Minister for Fisheries, you have the floor.

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I rise to respond in support of the motion being debated in this august House. I would like to thank the Chairperson and the Committee for a substantive review of the 2014 Fiji Electoral Commission Annual Report.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to acknowledge the Committee's intensive work in identifying the three issues and recommendations from the report. These are areas where the Committee suggested to be looked into, in ensuring productive outputs. Additionally, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like also to recognise the work conducted by the Committee in undertaking the comparative analysis of electoral management bodies in other jurisdictions more importantly, their ability to reflect that there is not a perfect model or right practice for electoral management bodies all over the world. However, models are used on what best fits Fiji's circumstances.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is also worthwhile to note that the disqualification of candidacy due to conviction and to public office holders is a nog within the jurisdiction analysed.

Therefore, Fiji is not alone in this respect and we should support the work conducted by the Fiji Election Commission in this regard.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Committee highlighted four findings which include the emphasis on the issues that they have been able to identify. Under recommendation two, they have highlighted the resources to ensure the independence of the structure.

I am sure that the eight recommendations that have been stated in the report and over time, I am certain that after seven years since 2014, issues that have been highlighted have been considered and implemented.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to just comment on a few comments coming from the Opposition. I think it is quite unfair to be sitting in this House and suggesting the issues that have been highlighted in the National Election Report and yet on two previous elections, they have gone to elections, they have been elected and they are sitting here in this august House and they continue to sit here.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- If we do not agree to any suggestion or regulation that stand to any situation, all over the world candidates have not stood for elections because they do not agree to the document or to the conditions that have been given and yet, for the last six years, under these documents, they continue to come here and sit. Look at them! This is dishonourable and when the honourable Speaker says something and they do not agree, they walk out. When you walk out, do not come back, please, stay out.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the international observers who came to observe the elections in Fiji stated that the election was fair and free. In fact, they certified the election. So if there is an independent body from overseas, an international body that comes here and reviews the election and says that it is fair and free, then who else do we have to accept? Do we accept the Opposition who have lost the elections twice in two previous elections? No! Of course, they would complain. It is the very same Constitution....

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Point of Order, Mr. Speaker, Sir. That was factually wrong, all they said was that it was credible, which is totally different from free and fair. Get your facts right!

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order! You have the floor, Sir.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Come with the facts.

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is the same Constitution that dictates the conditions for the election of the Leader of the Opposition, within their own constitution which they did not even abide by. Now we still have a question of who is going to be the Leader of the Opposition today. They come here and say so many things, but they are not even looking at themselves in the mirror.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Point of Order, Mr. Speaker, Sir, relevance, please. Can he be relevant to the topic? There is a lot of hot air coming out. Relevance, please, Standing Order 60.

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

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, they degrade the Constitution, the same Constitution which signifies the rules they will abide by in selecting their own Opposition Leader and today, we are in a diabolic situation because they cannot even make up their minds. They cannot even follow the constitution within their own Party, let alone

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order! Honourable Minister, we are not talking about their elections, we are talking about the General Elections.

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am just highlighting because they talked about the Constitution and the Electoral Commission.

HON. SPEAKER.- You have the floor.

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- The Opposition do not agree with the electoral process. If they did not agree they should not have stood for the elections, especially after we have gone through two general elections. Unfortunately, they have stated so many negative things and stood for elections, and at the same time sit here, squander and lie. The elections and the Constitution is very clear, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and if they continue to stand up, they are just basically squandering and wasting the time of this august House. They should reflect on what they have gone through in the last two elections and come back here with constructive arguments to put to the floor.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister. Honourable Bulitavu, you have the floor.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to give a few comments with regards to the motion that is before the House, that is the Fiji Electoral Commission Annual Report 2014. I speak from the Committee's perspective as a member of the Committee.

First of all, Sir, I would like to thank the Office of the Speaker and the Secretary-General for the assistance given to the Committee in our public consultation and deliberation as we moved around the country receiving submissions from members of the public, giving their views on the report. The current report that we have is the old report (2014) but there is still progressive work being done. The 2018 Electoral Commission Report, the 2018 Supervisor of Elections Office Report, the Joint Report and also the Report on the 2018 General Elections Report are also with the Committee.

I think it is public knowledge and the Committee has advertised its public consultation, calling on people to come and make written submissions and also oral submissions and all their views have been shared this morning.

I will just tell a story, given there is plenty argument on the ballot paper and whether the symbol and the names should be on the ballot paper. In one of the submissions that we had received in Sigatoka where we were with the police officers who had been providing security during the two previous elections. They relayed to us their experience with the past electoral system where they had to conduct elections in the upper hills of Navosa.

In the upper hills of Navosa, at the end of the day, one of the elders wanted to vote too so the Presiding Officer allowed that ballot paper to be taken to the home of the elderly who could not make it to the polling station. When the Presiding Officer came, the old lady asked, "What do you have there?" He said, "We have the dove here, we have the coconut tree, we have the mango tree." And the lady said, "I will have mango tree because it is sweet." That is how people make choices. So coming back to the idea of having numbers in our ballot paper and as I have said, we have received submissions and also taken into account most of the things that we have been arguing about this morning, the Committee is yet to deliberate on the things that we will look into.

On the Multinational Observer Group (MOG) Report which is also with us, I think their recommendations are also with the Committee and we are trying to synchronise it together with the various reports with us already. Just to urge Honourable Members, there are also three Bills with the Committee – the Electoral (Registration of Voters) (Amendment) Bill 2020, the Political Parties (Registration, Conduct, Funding and Disclosures) (Amendment) Bill 2020 and Electoral (Amendment) Bill 2020. Some of the changes that the amendment Bill proposes, probably the

Supervisor of Elections has also made an announcement recently where our voter registration card will be upgraded.

Now, if you have your voter card, you will have your EVR number but this particular upgraded one will also specify not only your address but also your polling station - that has been a problem where people did not confirm or clarify where they needed to vote and they ended up in the wrong polling station. Those are some of the things that I wanted to say that it is all progressive work and we thank the Members of the Committee and also the drafters at the Solicitor-General's Office who are currently working with us on the three Bills that are with us and also trying to bring in the opinion of the public and all that had made their submissions, and sitting down with the drafters and also looking into how we will best bring back those three Bills into the House.

But a big *vinaka vakalevu* to you, Sir, and also the Secretariat staff, our secretary; Ira and Jackson and also our IT officer, Mr. Miti Uculoa, and also the Hansard staff who have been working with us all around even during Christmas and New Year. Probably next week, we will be calling for submissions in Suva for those who want to present their views, these are very big documents and I suggest that we read them and also participate.

As Honourable Members, I call upon everyone to assist in bringing people into these venues so that they are well informed on the things that needs to be done. These are very informative sessions, where first the Committee tries to inform the submittees on what we are bringing to allow them to make submissions and to give their views on the Bills that we take around.

Those are some of the things that I would like to commend, contribute and also report on the current work that is there. This is progressive work, we still have other works that is in the Committee and we look forward when we bring that, and we will come and discuss in a very constructive manner. *Vinaka vakalevu*, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Bulitavu for his contribution to the debate. I give the floor to the Honourable Attorney-General. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you Mr. Speaker, Sir. I would like to thank the Committee for its work. Of course, they have looked at a number of areas in the law, I do not necessarily agree with all their recommendations or alternatively, a number of the recommendations that have already been made have been incorporated in the three Bills as Honourable Bulitavu who together with the Honourable Minister for Fisheries seem to be making the most constructive contributions in this particular debate. But a lot of those issues that have been highlighted by MOG and the other Observer Groups, Mr. Speaker, Sir, in fact have been incorporated in those three Bills that are before Parliament. I think some of the issues that have been raised obviously have become redundant because they have already been raised.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I want to highlight a number of issues. I seriously cannot understand why the Leader of NFP cannot understand, as an academic, the separation of powers doctrine. Mr. Speaker, Sir, all common law countries have the separation of powers. The word itself "separation" means there is separation. I cannot get any simpler than that.

What it essentially means, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is when the Judiciary, which is one of the arms of the State is carrying out its work, it is not answerable to this Parliament (the Legislature), nor is it answerable to the Executive. When this Legislature is doing its work Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is not answerable to the Judiciary, nor is it answerable to the Executive.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- When this Legislature makes laws - this arm of the State has the power to make laws - it does not mean it has the power to administer that law. It does not mean it has the power to interpret the law but it goes before the Judiciary. That is why there is a separation, so if the Parliament says, "Tomorrow, it is illegal to have people wearing rings." The Executive will actually enforce that law, the then Judiciary, if the person is charged will then actually interpret the law and apply the law. That is how separation of powers functions. Just because we have the power to make laws, it does not mean we have the power to interfere with the other arms of the State in the day to day operations. It is very simple.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the other point that I wanted to obviously make and, again, he is so obsequious in his analysis. The reality of the matter is, I do not really want to talk about it but he has opened up the door. I do not like talking about people who have passed away, Mr. Speaker, Sir, but, the Minister responsible for elections was the Prime Minister under the previous Constitution and it was the leader of SDL. How more political can you get? In this particular instance, it was the leader of SDL, who is the Minister responsible.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in the appointment of the Supervisor of Elections then, under the previous Constitution, the Constitutional Officers Commission (COC) had to consult the Minister. In this particular instance, the COC does not consult the Minister but consults the Electoral Commission. There is a huge difference, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and the position of the Supervisor of Elections was actually advertised.

Now, Mr. Speaker, Sir, again, there is a lot of misunderstanding about the difference in the various measures of elections. The Constitution actually talks about that the Electoral Commission has a responsibility for the registration of voters and the conduct of free and fair elections, in accordance with the written law governing elections. If you look at international benchmarks, in the early 1990s, the standards used then about free and fair but later on, the international community said that the standards of measure should be changed to what they call "credible elections", so they looked at the entire process. They did not only look at the elections day itself, but they looked at the processes prior to that. How were people registered? Were they allowed the opportunity to register or not? How were the ballot papers given out? Not the actual voting day itself. That is why the scope has been enlarged.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, none of the Multinational Observer Groups have said that the Fijian elections were not credible. They were credible, Mr. Speaker, and I had on the floor of this Parliament previously, as a matter of benchmark, raised this issue about the elections under the previous legal framework.

The EU Report which we have given out so many times, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and for the 2006 Elections said that the legislative elections were reasonably conducted. Why, Mr. Speaker, Sir? It is because there are so many anomalies in those elections, so many glaring anomalies and I do not want to sort of list all of them but the fact of the matter is, those sorts of shenanigans do not actually happen anymore and I would like to highlight some of them, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

The current five-member Electoral Commission ...

HON. ADI L. QIONIBARAVI.- A Point of Order! Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would just like to correct...

HON. J. USAMATE.- What is the Point of Order?

HON. ADI L. QIONIBARAVI.- The Point of Order is misleading the House, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I would like to state in particular the MOG Report. What it stated was, it deemed this a credible election, however, they also stated, they noted the restrictions in the electoral environment. They identified the compressed timeframe and the restriction, especially the extremely severe penalty provisions, the legal framework of governing decrees which the parties content that render the 2014 electoral environment unfree and unfair. Thank you, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- You have the floor.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Member has just shot herself in the foot. The elections were deemed to be credible, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and let me get back to the point I was making. It says about the Electoral Commission then, although it has the power to issue regulations, the Commission lacked the funding and staff as well as the initiative to become more involved in the 2006 Elections. Crucial regulations, the duration of the campaign period, campaign finance, women's representation and a code of conduct for political parties were not introduced. And, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it goes onto say, the lack of institutional knowledge due to the downsizing of the Office of the Supervisor of Elections during the inter-elections period, as well as the overly autonomous position of the four ROs (Returning Officers) led to partly incoherent and so implementation of procedures.

No guidelines were issued by the Office of the Supervisor of Elections on the recruitment criteria for polling staff. The number of women recruited as Assistant Returning Officers and Presiding Officers were very limited and reflected the lack of policy guidelines. In breach of the 1998 Electoral Act, the Register of Voters was not updated annually for the past five years, instead a new Register of Voters was compiled in 2005.

The new Register of Voters suffered from several shortcomings. These included the:

- misspelling of voters' names, wrong constituency allocations and the failure to register a greater number of voters.
- the Office of the Supervisor of Elections was not been able to meet the legally required time schedule to display the main voters' roll in time for public scrutiny.
- political parties discovered serious deficiencies on the roll and complained to the Office of the Supervisor of Elections and the Electoral Commission.
- the Office of the Supervisor of Elections had undertaken 15,000 to 20,000 corrections, among them 3,000 raised by political parties.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the list goes on. The ballot papers printed had several deficiencies:

- The OSE contrary to the constitutional requirement, provided only ballot papers in English to the voters, thereby placing disadvantaged voters who were not literate in the vernacular, as it was required then.
- The quality of the paper used was so poor that the official stamp on the back of the paper was visible on the front side, thereby obscuring some party symbols.
- The OSE used old traditional wooden ballot boxes in three different sizes. Although white plastic numbered tags were used to seal the lids, political parties complained that most ballot

boxes still had sufficient gaps underneath the lids to allow a ballot paper to be inserted, even after it is locked.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the list of preferences which had to be displayed was published one hour before postal voting day. I just wanted to highlight these because a number of these have been addressed.

There are so many to highlight, but I wanted to highlight one particular one, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Furthermore, the polling stations inquiry desks did not have copies of the main Register of Voters which contained information on all constituencies, but only voters' registered for the constituencies for which the polling station issued ballot papers.

In cases there were too many or too few ballot papers in ballot boxes, officials decided in all observed cases to accept the differences, even when there were as many as 100 ballot papers unaccounted for. Furthermore, in one case, one automatic recount in Laucala Open Constituency where the final difference was only 11 votes, the invalid ballot papers were not re-verified since the ARO considered this step out of the counting manual as not being part of the automatic recount. Unfortunately, the OSE only realised at the eleventh hour that its original planned practice, as detailed in the counting manual was in breach of the law.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is beautiful, the OSE did not provide an official explanation for a voter turnout of 101 percent in Cakaudrove East Constituency. The Official Register of Votes, as the OSE stated, 7,639 registered voters in the constituency. However, the Returning Officer (RO) of the Northern Division said that the total number of registered voters was 9,012. Mr. Speaker, Sir, due to the late arrival of ballot papers and registers, voting in person started only one day late. It goes on, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

The last point that I would like to make is, Honourable Gavoka talked about the voter turnout. There was a study and he was at that political party meeting, and I would like to talk about that later on which, I think, all of you need to read this because the Supervisor of Elections actually conducted a survey of voters and asked them why they did not vote and those who did not vote, what were the reasons for it and where was the source of information, but invalid votes is also important.

In the 2006 Elections, the European Union observed the alarming high number of 74,855 invalid ballot papers or 9 percent of the total vote was mainly due to the strict Fijian electoral law which does not take the voter's intention into consideration.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in the 2014 and 2018 Elections, the invalid number of votes in 2014 was 0.75 percent, in 2018, the number of invalid votes was 0.92 percent.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the issue about party symbols that Honourable Bulitavu raised, that is an amendment to the Bill that we are talking about. Party symbols will appear as proposed in the Bill on the Voter Instruction Booklet after the law is approved by Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the other point that I also wanted to make, 23 out of the 28 recommendations of MOG have already been implemented. The Electoral Commission has its own budget. It has hired its own legal counsel for representation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, all of these changes are already taking place. I think the reality of the matter is and I echo the sentiments by the Honourable Minister for Fisheries that these matters were discussed when recently, NFP (I understand) was only represented by the secretariat as their leader

was not there. All the other parties were represented very well, SODELPA came in full force and the other parties were there also.

These types of meetings were never held before and it was to hear from the respective individual political parties about some of the issues that they felt needed to be addressed. They were actually raised, Mr. Speaker, Sir. So, I think it would be most appropriate that when the three Bills come back to Parliament after the Committee have had their submissions, for us to be able to debate those proposals in respect of the amendments.

The reality of the matter, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is that, the observer groups have said the elections were credible, the international communities has accepted them, there had been numerous changes being made. Honourable Bulitavu highlighted some very critical issues, now the ballot box, if required, is taken to the voter not the voter taken to the ballot box; there is a huge difference.

Now, we have specific provisions regarding disabled people, specific provisions regarding people who need to vote beforehand and in the law, Mr. Speaker, Sir. So we need to take account of the fact that enormous strides have been made.

The reality of the matter is, as I think, which was put very aptly by the Leader of Hope Party at that last meeting. She said that if you want to participate in the Elections, it is your job as a political party to not actually whinge about it but support the laws that will make sure if people as you come and vote. It is in your interest to do that. It is not in your interest for the three and half years, condemn the system, condemn the law that you have come under and then go out and try and seek the vote and then complain in the same breathe, “oh, not enough people are voting.”

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- It is a paradox. It is actually an oxymoron.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, so it is in our interest to ensure and everyone wants that. Elections are conducted fair and square, every electoral system in the world wants to improve their system. The Americans have a voter turnout of 51 percent sometimes, 64 percent sometimes. Honourable Gavoka said that, that is the benchmark,. In other words, the Americans had not had a proper elections. Are we going to say that? This is the point. You cannot come here and pontificate about issues without actually taking a nuance approach to it. We have to understand the laws that are operating, the specifics of the country and how we can improve it; that is in our interest. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Attorney-General for his contribution to the debate.

Honourable Members, I now call on the Deputy Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights to speak in reply. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I would like to thank the Honourable Members for their contributions. I do not have any further comment. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call upon the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs, the Honourable Nath, to move his motion. You have the floor, Sir.

REVIEW REPORT - FIJI MEAT INDUSTRY BOARD 2014 ANNUAL REPORT

HON. V. NATH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I move:

That Parliament debates the Review of Fiji Meat Industry Board 2014 Annual Report which was tabled on 14th May, 2019.

HON. V. K. BHATNAGAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I second the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now invite the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs to speak on his motion. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. V. NATH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Fiji Meat Industry Board (FMIB) was mandated to protect and preserve the meat industry in Fiji with the core function to construct and operate public slaughtering facilities so that people in Fiji get safe and hygienic meat for consumption.

During deliberation on the report, the Committee invited stakeholders of FMIB to present on the Annual Report. During the submission the challenges faced by FMIB came to light which included but were not limited to poor supply of livestock which was listed as a major contributing factor towards its struggles. The Committee was made aware that between 2000 and 2018 (the total number included Suva and Vuda) it declined from 10,779 cattle being slaughtered per year to 8,798.

The Committee was concerned with the poor financial performance of the industry as well as the deteriorating conditions of the abattoirs and concurred with the previous Committee's recommendation from the 2013 Annual Report, to divest and privatise FMIB which could result on more efficient and sustainable abattoirs operating throughout the country.

Further to the above, the Committee also agreed that Fiji has the potential to develop specialty beef under its own brand (Fijian Grown and *Fijian Made*) and recommended for similar initiatives to be undertaken as was done for the Tilivalevu Beef Scheme.

During its submission, the Chief Executive Officer of FMIB also put forward policies and Action Plans that would strengthen FMIB's position. This included plans of upgrading both abattoirs to be HACCP certified to enable them to supply to hotels. The Committee looks forward to recent year reports from FMIB to be able to determine the progress on the proposed policies since its last report.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, with those few comments to enlighten the House as a Member moving the motion, I thank you for the opportunity.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Chairperson for his motion. Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate but what I will do is, we will break for lunch and after lunch, I have a list of speakers here. There are already five speakers; the Honourable Gavoka will be the first off and then we will play it from there.

Honourable Members, we adjourn for lunch.

The Parliament adjourned at 12.18 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 2.32 p.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we will continue from where we left off before lunch.

There is a slight change in the batting order and I will give the floor to the Honourable Prime Minister first then followed by Honourable Gavoka, Honourable Minister Reddy, Honourable Niko Nawaikula, Honourable Minister Koya, Honourable Qionibaravi, Honourable Minister Seruiratu, Honourable Tikoduadua and the Honourable Attorney-General - that is the batting order so you have an indication of when you are going to speak.

Honourable Prime Minister, you have the floor.

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak on the motion by the Honourable Vijay Nath.

Mr. Speaker, the livestock industry remains a crucial industry as Government continues its efforts to reduce import bill and promote local production to boost local consumption as well as for the export markets. The livestock industry has an important role in contributing to Fiji's economy despite the challenges the industry continues to face over the many years. Now only two registered slaughter houses in Fiji, Mr. Speaker, which have the capacity to process cattle, sheep, goats and pigs. Both are run by Fiji Meat Industry Board (FMIB). Limiting the operations of FMIB may result in the increase of illegal slaughter houses and place huge risk to the health of ordinary Fijians.

Tuberculosis and brucellosis have been threats to the Fijian dairy industry and FMIB facilities have been instrumental in taking care of infected animals as well as processing the compensation. Despite the challenges, Mr. Speaker, it is noted that in the reported period, Government provided new initiatives in its annual budgetary allocation. It is in this interest that Government emphasises collaboration, participation from all actors in the supply chain of any industry. Government will continue to support the livestock industry but the Government also needs everyone's concerted effort.

Based on those remarks, Mr. Speaker, I therefore support the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Prime Minister. I now give the floor to the Honourable Gavoka. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Thank you Mr. Speaker, Sir. I rise to speak on the motion before the floor from the Economic Affairs Committee. I was part of this Committee and I am no longer there but I do miss the wonderful people that I worked with in the Committee over the last couple of years. I was part of this Committee when we carried out this review of the Annual Report of the Board. The consultation was quite broad, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

I was touched by the lack of recognition by the Government in the potential for beef in this country. Quite simply, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the abattoir at Nasinu was only operating three days a week because of the lack of supplies. There is a dwindling number of livestock in this country and I found that to be quite sad, Mr. Speaker, Sir, given the potential in this country to raise this industry to a level that would meet the local consumption and also exports.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I was a hotelier and as a hotelier, we only use local beef for curry. The quality was not there for steak and all the other stuff, which had to be imported, this was always a challenge since tourism began in this country. That is why when we talk about tourism we always talk about the high leakage factor.

Leakage factor, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is the dollar that comes in, the amount of that dollar that goes out of the country to service the industry and it is quite high in tourism, and that is one of the questions about tourism and the challenge for us is to reduce that leakage and a huge part of this leakage is the importation of beef; not only beef but other meat products.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there is also the potential for brand beef (special beef), and as we know, Vanuatu exports beef to Japan. You will know, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Japanese are very discerning consumers. They do not buy anything below standard. We know about kobe beef, one of the best in the world and we understand that the Vanuatu beef is as good as kobe beef hence the export market to Japan.

When we ask the agricultural people who came to us, they said, “The climatic conditions in Taveuni is similar to Vanuatu.” So, Taveuni and other parts of Vanua Levu can grow the kind of beef. I spoke with the Honourable Tui Cakau about this, Mr. Speaker, Sir, because I also used to manage two Estates in Taveuni when I was in Shangri-La; Ura and Salialevu and Salialevu was huge with beef production.

I am just wondering if my colleague the Honourable Minister of Agriculture could refocus the effort of the Ministry towards more and better beef production. The potential is huge, we should not have the kind of numbers that we have today. It is very low and it must improve. There are many ways we can look it, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

When I look at the cane farmers, how many do we have in this country, 12,000 or 13,000? If each of those farmers can also grow beef, that is already one each, it is about 13,000 heads of livestock. These are the types of things that we need to do but certainly Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is something that the Ministry of Agriculture should focus on.

In my province, we had a number of schemes in there but most of them had kind of fallen by the wayside and indeed when I speak with my people up in Navosa, they say that you do not drink milk in Navosa if you are lazy. There are so many cows in there that can produce milk and likewise when they go up there, beef is on the table everyday, when you go in for functions, et cetera. I have just wondered if Navosa has been factored into the equation when the Ministry of Agriculture is looking into the numbers of cattle, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I must share something with the House today: in my District Cuvu in Nadroga, we know that the beef there is amongst the best. One day about a year ago, I was driving past and I saw these cattle (about 10 or 12 of them), emerged from the bush. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I was surprised when I saw them and I said “This kind of cattle breed here is the ‘picture-postcard’ kind of beef, they were so healthy, and I remembered once when I spoke with Dan Costello about a kind of *vaivai* in our area and he said, “That *vaivai* has 30 percent more proteins than in any other cattle feed in the country.” Dan Costello was a Fiji Meats’ person. Here are the opportunities, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that we call it “*tania*” in the Nadroga dialect. But this is what we have and I just wish that the Agriculture Department would look into these things in a targeted manner and see if they grow more beef, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

It was quite sad reading this Report, Mr. Speaker, Sir, but while we are talking about the difficulties we are facing, we also know the huge potential that is there. I would wish this House to prevail the Government to grab those opportunities and grow our beef industry. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Gavoka. I now give the floor to the Honourable Minister for Agriculture, you have the floor, Sir.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Member said and he should be ashamed because he should go back and ask previous Party leaders “Why did they abandon Yalavou?” Yalavou Station had electricity, water, but they abandoned live animals there, as well as brand new wood quarters, street lights and they had abandoned the entire Yalavou Scheme of about 3000 acres with about 500 acres of core government land and then you had adjoining farms which they have abandoned and that is why today, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we do not have an adequate amount of beef cattle coming to the abattoir. The abattoir, rightly said, is closed three days a week because you do not have enough animals, and they have abandoned the station and the largest beef cattle farm.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Yaqara is now supplying beef cattle every week to the abattoir because it was restructured and reformed by the Ministry of Economy. We want the abattoir to run full time. I note from the Report that they are talking about the abattoir not financially running well. It is not running well because you do not have enough animals. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Member should know that we have been culling animals because they are infected with tuberculosis and brucellosis. He knows it very well and he is saying that the number of animals coming to the abattoir is low, just because we have been culling animals.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have got 10 senepol breeder bulls ready to give out to beef cattle farms free with tuberculosis and brucellosis. Guess what, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I cannot get 10 farms which are free from brucellosis and tuberculosis, I cannot get tuberculosis in particular. If I give these breeder bulls to these farms, again they will be infected with tuberculosis.

Over the years, Mr. Speaker, Sir, what had happened is that, we did not constantly replace the breeder bulls and because of that, we now see our animals getting smaller and smaller because they have lost their original generic attribute. Who is responsible for that? He has the audacity to come here and say that this Government is not doing enough to increase beef cattle production.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, last year, I went and spoke to the Honourable Minister for Economy to get some money to upgrade the rendering plant at the abattoir in Nasinu, so that they can get some additional income.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are importing protein to make feed for chicken. As you know, we are 100 percent self-sufficient in chicken. In fact, we are supplying to other countries in the region.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we had encouraged the abattoir to diversify because they get some of the offcuts and some of the left-over animal parts which can be dried and grinded to get meat and bone which is being utilised for poultry feed manufacturing. We said that a lot of companies out here have also got offcut fish parts which can be used to develop fish meal. From the COVID Budget, we were able to get some money and we gave \$150,000 to the abattoir and they were able to produce 202 tonnes of fish and meat meal last year after fixing their rendering plant with a value of \$304,773; they were so excited. They have got another plant that they need to repair and we can substitute this and stop inputting fish meal to make poultry feed and use our own protein products that we are wasting.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, if we had everything ready, we would have utilised all the animals that died in *TC Yasa* to convert them into fish meat protein. We were not able to do that because we were really not ready with all the plant and equipment in the Northern Division, we want abattoir. They are talking about abattoir throughout Fiji, we want it, but where are the animals for the abattoir to slaughter? It will happen progressively because now we are reviving the beef cattle farm. You go and talk to abattoirs and they will tell you, from last year they started to get monthly beef cattle from Tilivalevu Farm because we have revived the Tilivalevu Farm. They are getting beef cattle on a

weekly basis from Yaqara. It is the largest beef cattle farm in the Pacific, do not talk about about Vanuatu, talk about Yaqara.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Yaqara beef is now well-known amongst the hotels and they are buying quality beef that is being produced out of the abattoir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we want all our animals to go through the formal slaughter house and abattoir for various reasons:

- (1) All those meat as they are processed, we do not want to put public health at risk, we want it to go through the proper meat inspection, proper abattoir and then it ends up for commercial sale. We do not want backyard operators to cut and sell. At the moment we have got two abattoirs, we have allowed for slaughter houses based on having meat inspectors, but it will take time.
- (2) There is a lot of environmental hazard arising out of people slaughtering and throwing the remainder of the carcass into the drains, waterways, around the environment which could also cause health risk.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are now reviving the Yalavou Scheme and if we did not have *TC Yasa* and *TC Ana*, et cetera, we could have done the major launch during middle of this year, but we have got about 300 acres pasture double-fencing because we will be keeping the animals. We do not want any outside animals to come in and infect them. We are now developing the pasture and very soon, we will be moving cattles there. We were able to get the old cattles (close to two dozen) back to the paddock which we are removing so that we can get totally pure genetic material there.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, never again will this happen, what happened to Yalavou. We are making sure that for all livestock, regularly we will provide farmers with new breeder stock whether it is chicken, duck, sheep, goat, beef cattle or dairy cattle. Regularly, we will ask them to replace and we will supply them with beef cattle breeder so that genetic material is not lost. They will continue to maintain their pure genetic attributes.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have plans, we have a vision and we are targeting that vision. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister Reddy for his contribution to the debate. I now give the floor to the Honourable Niko Nawaikula. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Yesterday, I called for the removal and replacement of the Honourable Minister for Economy and I had a person in mind from the other side of the House, Dr. Reddy, he is an economist. But after listening to him now, he cannot even resolve the problem of livestock in Fiji. All he can say, “We have a plan and a vision”. We do not want that. What is your plan? What is your vision? He is grunting about Yalavou. But but you have been in Government for 14 years, my friend, and a lot of what he is saying is rightly directed at his predecessor, who is right here. Ask him, but that is the problem. I will come back to that, Mr. Speaker.

Let me now look at the 2014 Report. The first problem with this is that it is seven years old now and going through it, if I can just note some of the concerns that are written here and mind you, Mr. Speaker, the Fiji Meat Industry Board was established in 1976. Again, that was the time when the late Ratu Mara was here. Sorry, I have been talking a lot about Ratu Mara because I fan him. I think he is a father of this nation. He has foresight, he has everything which we are now destroying.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Honourable Kepa will know that and I hope she supports me on this. But, this again was one of his child and he was hoping that we will build on it and we have not been doing that to everything that he has done. We have sold most of it and we have broken the other things down. But 1976 and then coming to the Chairman's Report, it is noteworthy.

The Chairman at that time, Mr. Timothy Brown, this is what he said in relation to the challenges for the FMIB and I seek to read this:

“The continued decline in cattle, sheep, pigs and goat numbers is beyond the control of FMIB but directly affecting FMIB's income. FMIB is not in the business of production. The production of cattle is looked after by the Ministry of Agriculture. FMIB slaughters for only three days a week as a result of above operating under capacity.”

And he was then talking in 2014 which was seven years ago now, so the Honourable Minister should have told us what they have done then that we are achieving now. He blames TB or that kind of problem but what about Vanua Levu? Vanua Levu is quarantined. I hope that one day he will come to Savusavu, catch the bus like I do.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Well, he was there and I met him there, but he was in the business of giving out aids to the farmers, not from the Government but from other countries. One country gave a tractor here, so he goes there delivering all these but if the Honourable Minister manages, you catch the bus, leave your flashy car down, catch the 2 o'clock bus and there is a bus at 10 o'clock, there is another bus at 2 o'clock or you can catch the 4 o'clock bus. Go down the Hibiscus Highway and there you will see all the estates - Maravu.

Maravu is a very successful beef farming area. Have you been there? Does he know it? And then go further - Vunilagi, Qiloi and then Tuvamila. All these used to be very successful in beef farming then.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Who mucked it up?

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- But not now. That is the question. Who mucked it up?

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- You.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- What happened?

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- You mucked it up.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Then.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Go to Natuvu, catch the ferry and go to Taveuni. Take a drive, catch the bus, leave your car behind. Catch the bus from Matei to Salialevu and you will see all the estates there are overgrown but they were not like that before. Before, they were very successful beef farming areas, so the problem is not the land. You say, "leases." No, it is not the land. The problem is not the land. Ask yourself, what happened to Yaqara? What happened to Yalavou? You have

been in Government for 15 years, ask yourself. You should have come up with the problems there and then.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- I will tell you what happened in Yaqara

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- The problem is that you changed the batting order around. I was hoping that he will speak after me to tell us the solution. All that he told us were the problems, problems, problems, problems and it is not only limited to cattle. What about piggery? What are you doing on piggery? It is not limited to piggery even. Goat farming. What is happening to goat farming? What is happening to sheep farming? All these come under the jurisdiction of the FMIB. It is not only cattle, it is not only brucellosis or whatever that is. It is also piggery and all these other things. The failure falls upon the Minister - Minister, this is your problem.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- You have to wait.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Well, we cannot wait. We only have two more years before elections. We are out of time now. The only thing that we can ask you is to move out so that we can have a new initiative, new minds who will listen to the experts, not like you. That is the problem. The problem is the Ministry of Agriculture.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Nawaikula. I now give the floor to the Honourable Minister for Commerce, Trade, Tourism and Transport. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would firstly like to acknowledge the findings and the recommendations by the Committee in the Report in supporting the Fiji Meat Industry Board and its immense potential which can contribute significantly to the meat industry in Fiji, and I think everyone will acknowledge that.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is a well-known fact that the outbreak of tuberculosis and brucellosis was actually compounded by the growing natural disasters that actually continues to have a detrimental effect and impacts on Fiji's livestock sector. That is not something that is just a statement - I think everyone in this room needs to realise that.

The issue with brucellosis and tuberculosis has been an ongoing issue which Honourable Minister for Agriculture has been talking about it, and previous to him was Honourable Seruiratu who was the Minister for Agriculture – they explained this to the House time and time again. There is no quick fix on this but it is something that affects the industry. And this, Mr. Speaker, Sir, ultimately contributes to the significant decline in livestock numbers that are slaughtered at FMIB.

I urge the Honourable Members on the other side to please get the facts correct and tell the people of Fiji the truth. You just do not come up with something and pluck it out of thin air and start making statements about it and start telling people that they should leave this House and leave the job and someone else can actually come and do it. That is the best person for the job.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, just on Monday this week Honourable Dr. Reddy informed this august House that the loss of livestock amounted to 5.4 percent of the total loss from agriculture resulting from *TC Yasa* and *TC Ana*. This basically amounts close to about \$8 million and despite this setback, I wish to commend the Ministry of Agriculture and his team, Sir, for their tireless efforts in working with the livestock farmers. I know he gave us a very small brief today but maybe they

should take the time to actually sit down with him and find out exactly what is going on instead of asking him silly questions.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to provide my particular comments on the recommendations of the Standing Committee specifically with respect to No. 3 and No. 5. Recommendation No. 3 mentions that “the FMIB closely work with the Ministry of Agriculture and relevant stakeholders to improve livestock production”.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Fijian Government continues to provide enormous assistance to our livestock farmers and under my Ministry, Sir, we have financial assistance that is actually provided through various programmes which is the Northern Development Programme (NDP), Integrated Human Resource Development Programme (IHRDP) and the most recent, the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) concession loan which amounted to about \$2.3 million.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry through MSME Fiji and cooperative businesses also provide training to livestock farmers on better understanding their costing, pricing and ways of doing business. In this way with the right of business advisory and monitoring, small holder farmers can actually become commercial farmers. We all know, Sir, when the times are good we have a tourism industry which is worth close to about \$3 billion to Fiji and that is a huge market for our farmers if we do it right. We are getting it right and we will do it right, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Recommendation No. 4 states that Fiji has the potential to develop special beef under its own brand. I do not disagree with Honourable Gavoka, yes, Vanuatu has got it right they do export, they did have help from the Israelis (from what I understand) to establish their industry.

We have issues. We will deal with it and I am sure that we can develop our industry to turn it into another huge industry for Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Recommendation No.4, basically says that Fiji has the potential to develop its own special key brand under its own brand of Fijian grown and Fijian made, and for FMIB to work closely with the Fiji Development Bank (FDB) and the relevant agencies to actually increase cattle production.

I agree, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and I support this recommendation. My Ministry oversees the “Fijian made - buy Fijian made” campaign and I encourage small holder farmers also to visit any of our offices in Suva, Sigatoka, Labasa and Savusavu and apply for the Fijian grown emblem which is free of charge through the MSMEs. We also encourage FMIB itself to apply for the Fijian product emblem. This supports Government’s policy, Mr. Speaker, Sir, aimed at promoting and raising the profile of Fijian products and services in the domestic, regional and also the international markets.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is noted that there are seven operational livestock cooperatives in the Central, Western and Northern Division who are in the business of cattle rearing and dairy breeding. Since cooperatives are actually made up of members, it is expected that these particular farms will grow in the future with the assistance of my Ministry and also the Ministry of Agriculture.

With the COVID-19 pandemic, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we as Fijians have to look within and strengthen our position also as a regional hub and the meat industry is no different. We also need to look at diversification and instead of having such a huge reliance on the tourism industry.

The FMIB, Mr. Speaker, Sir, will play a critical role in improving the quality of our local beef with the correct infrastructure and consistent supply and Fiji can meet the demand from local and

international markets. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the report highlights also in Recommendation No.5, the importance of having professional expertise at board level and developing a strategic plan to revamp the meat industry.

Again, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I support this recommendation. It is noted that the current Board of FMIB is made up of experts from Agriculture who have animal, finance and legal background with years of experience in the commercial arena. I am sure that the Board will help shaping and carrying FMIB in the larger industry.

To assist in the revitalisation of the meat industry the Ministry can also work closely with the small holder farmers, FMIB and relevant agencies to address the potential supply chain issues. This may include a creative and more conducive environment for the small holder farmers to actually thrive in. The Ministry is actually very happy to work with FMIB and I am confident that the Board at FMIB will take the entity to greater heights and expand its business functions in protecting, preserving and growing the meat industry in Fiji. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister Koya for his contribution to the debate. I now give the floor to the Honourable Adi Litia Qionibaravi. You have the floor, Madam.

HON. ADI L. QIONIBARAVI.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I would also like to contribute to the motion before the House and thank the Chairperson and the Members of the Committee for their report. The recommendations are worthy to be actioned. We learnt from the 2014 Report that the earlier report in 2013 had also made similar recommendations - eight years down the line. Whilst we appreciate the confirmation from the Honourable Minister today for the actions that he has taken, we would plead with him to also look very closely into the FMIB.

I note on Page No. 1 of the Appendix to the report, Sir, in very small print it says, September 2005 the Fiji Meats Industry was designated as a commercial statutory authority 2005 under the SDL Government, the Prime Minister, Qarase. Yesterday, in this House I mentioned Mr, Qarase's name and thanked him for his vision and foresight in enabling the reform of the Public Trustees Office from a government department to an incorporated body.

The Government has benefited. The last 11 years they have received \$5 million in dividend. Again, I refer to this September 2005 decision of the SDL Government - the designated the Fiji Meats Board as a Commercial Statutory Authority. That would mean Mr. Speaker, Sir, that they had intended to commercialise the activities of the Fiji Meat Industry Board.

From the 2013-2014 Report we know that it has not been performing well - financial performance has been poor. Had the SDL Government continued, we would have seen a different picture today? The government would also had continued to receive dividend if that commercial designated authority was also incorporated similar to what happened to the Public Trustee's Office. That is my first point Sir.

A lot has been said about the report and I am not going to repeat that. I would just like to mention, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the major issues of concern. The continued decline in cattle, sheep, pigs and goat numbers which is beyond the control of FMIB but directly affecting FMIB's income. I would like to also mention that during the SDL Government's rule in 2005 they had also intended to revive the beef industry including the Uluisavou Corporation, Yalavou Beef Scheme and the Verata Beef Scheme, clear intention to improve the breed and the supply of beef in the country and looking forward to produce quality beef to enable Fiji to export, just as Vanuatu is exporting to Japan.

Just a little story that the Honourable Dr. Mahendra Reddy might want to consider. Red Bull the owner of Laucala Island had imported this special bull which cost 40,000 euros to land in Taveuni. This special bull was given special treatment - he drank beer (ale), music was played to enable the bull to relax in order to produce more cross breed cattle and better quality beef - molasses and salt. You might want to consider the effort that was done by Mr. Red Bull in Laucala Island that which has allowed Laucala Island to produce their own quality beef and also increase the quality of cattle that is produced.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, something else that I need to say. Mr. Simon Cole, President of the Fiji Pig Farmers Association had made his concerns known about importing pork from Australia at a price that is lower than what is sold in Australia. This has drastically affected the pig industry in Fiji. Mr. Cole is now saying that it is an additional threat to the previously robust but now fragile industry.

So, I would ask the Honourable Dr. Reddy if he can also consider this importation of pork from Australia, it is affecting the local industry. We need the pig industry to also thrive in this country.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. ADI L. QIONIBARAVI.- What I am saying is the Fiji Meat Industry Board looks after livestock, which includes pigs.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. ADI L. QIONIBARAVI.- I am just airing to the House the concerns of the President of the Fiji Pig Farmers Association. . I was just trying to impress upon the Honourable Dr. Reddy that he might want to consider what happened in Taveuni - the special diet and the relaxation given to this special breed of cattle that was introduced in Laucala Island and also consider the threat of the pig farmers in Fiji, given the import of the Australian pigs. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Qionibaravi for her contribution to the debate. I am very interested in this beer being fed to the bull. That is an extraordinary bull. Honourable Members, I now give the floor to the Honourable Seruiratu. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am worried, I think Fiji is not ready to give beer to the bull because the farmers will take the beer not the bull.

Let us get serious, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I would like to contribute to the motion as well. Let me go back to 2004, I was flying back from Sydney, Australia after attending a course. I flew back into the country with Major Filipe Alifereti, he was CEO of FMIB then. During our conversation he asked me about Verata Beef Scheme that the Honourable Adi Litia Qionibaravi had already mentioned. “What is happening to the Verata Beef Scheme?” We started the conversation from there.

During Ratu Mara’s days, when they established FMIB, it was slaughtering around 20,000 animals in a year. When it came to 2004, when we had this conversation, it came as low as about 8,000 animals per year. They also had the facility to process leather in which we fermented the hide and then sent it across to Australia for further processing, but that has been closed as well in 2004.

So, the drop had started way, way back then, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I totally agree with Honourable Gavoka and the other Honourable Members that we have a lot of potential. But I want to focus on the submission made by FMIB on how can we increase, because their business entirely

depends on the number that they are able to slaughter because they are a processing entity, just like Rewa Rice and FSC. What they process is dependent on what is being produced and that is where I want to focus my contribution on, on this motion, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

I wish to say and I would urge all Honourable Members in the House today, if we can help in getting this message across to our people. The Honourable Leader of SODELPA, always refers a lot to the elephant in the room. Development is partnership and that development must not take away the element of self-reliance. Unfortunately, I would say and argue that Government's efforts have not been matched by the level of commitment from our farmers. I will say that gain, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that Government's efforts unfortunately is not matched by a level of commitment from some of our farmers. If we are to take this industry forward, if we are to increase production, if we have to have this strong partnership, then we must also have commitment from all the stakeholders. That is the way forward for Fiji. Land must be available, first and foremost, then the breeding. The Government, as alluded to by the Honourable Minister, droughtmaster is already here, senepol and wagyu; these are the three main breeds additional to what we already have in existence. We have the boer goat, we have the new sheep breed that are already here. The breed, the nutrition, we have brought in legumes like *mulato* and a few others and the testing has been done.

I remember the testing that we had with one of the farmers, Mrs Khan of Emuri at Shangri-La. The chef was a specialist in meat testing. He even took the meat raw and he said, this is first grade meat, so it can be done. We have the right quality, we have the right breed, we also have the environment, but it is that commitment that is lacking and that is unfortunate. If we want to improve the output and the production and of course, addressing, we can go without the imports, definitely, Mr. Speaker, Sir, but we have to take that level of commitment seriously. Yalavou Beef Scheme, Verata Beef Scheme, Uluisavou Beef Scheme, now we have revived Tilivalevu and hopefully, if we can re-visit this and talk to the farmers. That is our collective responsibility.

The Ministry of Agriculture is more than willing, we have now new technologies. We started with artificial insemination. Now, we have gone into new technology on embryo transfer. Technology is already here and we have proven it successful. He is waiting to distribute these new breeds, but the level of commitment, and I would urge all Honourable Members of this House, when we go back, let us take this seriously because this is good for the country and this is good for our people. It is good for everyone, so that we can take the industry forward. Therefore, I would ask all of us to give the Ministry of Agriculture all the support that they need and ensure that we share the same message so that we can improve on the performance of FMIB.

The potential is there, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and let us make it a reality and let us raise production for the good and betterment of our farmers, our economy and of course, our food and nutrition security policy. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister for Defence and National Security for his contribution to the debate. I now give the floor to the Honourable Pio Tikoduadua. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think it is time to make a short contribution to the debate that we have on the report of the Fiji Meat Industry Board. I have been sitting here listening to the interventions made by both sides of the House and I believe that one of the more critical issues that we have at the moment is the critical lack of supply of livestock meat in all regards.

I am a smallholder cattle farmer myself and we have worked hard to get my farm brucellosis and tuberculosis free. I would like to thank the effort of the Ministry of Agriculture and the Extension Officers that have done a lot of work, as stated by the former Minister of Agriculture to try and eradicate this rather nasty condition that is really hanging around the neck of farmers like a big rock, so to speak. Unfortunately, there is not a short term solution at hand because farmers agree that diseases like tuberculosis and brucellosis are associated with particular areas where it is already in existence.

The initiative is that, to start livestock farming in places where the diseases have not been discovered. But at the end of the day, I believe there still is a whole lot more that can be done. I remember at one time, I raised the question, I believe it was last year to the Honourable Minister for Agriculture and asked him, how long will it take to try and eradicate TB and of course, brucellosis from our farms?

I think he did not give a very specific period, except to say that in Australia it took them about 40 years to eradicate it. I think that is 40 years to wait around for that is a very long time and I do not think it will give any comfort, particularly those who already have brucellosis and TB, that they will have a solution to this problem with their own livestock at the moment. The Honourable Seruiratu also talked about these new developments in livestock - beef, goat, pigs for that matter that we can all exploit.

Sir, of course, it starts with this House and it is something that we can all do but I believe a whole lot more commitment, Government has been in power for a while now and I think people continue to look up to the Government, especially to the Ministry of Agriculture, to come up with a great initiative, a greater allocation to agriculture for livestock. Sometimes we talk so much about trying to get so much done or produce so much meat but little is being put into it.

Agriculture has been a very neglected part of our national budget and livestock for that matter and for the processing factory or the abattoir in nine miles to be operating only for two or three days in a week because of lack of supply, I think we cannot continue to go on. We are saying that we have this problem. I have had the chance to look at it, there are places that have been identified in the West, in particular, where we could raise cattle where TB and brucellosis is not in existent and these are options that we could use but I think time is of the essence and the demand at the moment is to put more into agriculture.

We can go and talk to the people to raise cattle but we need to be able to support it as well. I recognise the point that has been made by the Honourable Seruiratu that Government is doing its part, but I think it needs to do more. It needs to do more than what it is currently doing. Obviously, with a lack of supply, a lot more can still be done. We are talking about Yalavou and many of these beef schemes. I know in Kumi, Verata where one used to be, this can all still be revived. I am not sure whether Verata is actually under brucellosis or TB but I am sure that much can still be done but I think with the commitment as a nation for us to come together and try and alleviate this problem.

For once, I will say, let us get behind Honourable Dr. Reddy, so that he can do his work. I am sure at the end of the day, we can all come here and call him into question if he is not going to do anything in 12 months because I do not think we have 20 years or 40 years to wait around and produce enough livestock to feed our own people and feed our own market. So, there you are, Honourable Dr. Reddy, I think you were asking for it, you need the chance and I am sure we are all well-committed to make sure that we all grow enough. I am sure you have some solution for goats. Many people are farming goats and sheep, and I plead with those that are doing that now that at least, they could do a little bit more than what Government is doing to help these farmers out, especially goats.

I would just like to raise, just sort of as a concluding remark and part of the reason why I stood up actually to make this intervention. The FMIB abattoir and the processing plant in 9 miles is a bit of an issue for the local residents there because of the smell. I know this has been around for quite a while and it is a growing area - Davuilevu Housing at the back there, Waila is a growing area where people are now probably going to come and live. But it is the stench that is coming from the factory that is causing a lot of concern. Where the farm used to be, now we have the construction of the new Police Station, we have the Nasinu Health Centre, the Fire Brigade and I think it is fast growing to become a bigger commercial centre. I think the FMIB abattoir (processing plant) actually does not belong in that area. It is an area developing into a residential area. So I would like to ask the Honourable Minister concerned

(Hon. Dr. M. Reddy interjects)

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- But the stench is still there, Honourable Minister! That is what I am talking about. It is the stench.

I am sure they can identify a place where that could go and on top of that, Mr. Speaker, Sir, not enough is being done to contain the cattle that they keep there for processing. So every once in a while these cattle wander into the road and they take a visit up to Davuilevu Housing, they come visiting next to my house ...

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Maybe there under the influence of alcohol.

But the point I am trying to make, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is that if they are going to keep it there, at least they can contain the cattle. I almost ran into one, one morning just trying to get to work. Please, if Government could consider relocating the factory because I am sure it is a concern for people who live up around Davuilevu Housing, Waila and of course the other side of Nakasi of the stench that is coming out or that is being produced by the abattoir and processing factory when it is in use.

So once again, Mr. Speaker, Sir, to conclude, yes, we have a livestock problem, we do not have enough meat to feed our own people nor do we have the right quantity and quality that we have to feed our own tourism market. We identify the need, we need to get up there as a nation and as a people and support our farmers. I am sure a lot more can be done. I am a very big advocate and I am sure and I know the Honourable Minister for Defence, his a big advocate of medium farms.

The Honourable Leader of the Opposition is an advocator of medium farms; small commercial easy to operate and that people can easily operate or look after. This is the way to go, involve the nation, involve the people but like I said, today is one of those special days I am standing behind the initiative that the Honourable Minister is saying today that he is going to lead the charge on getting proper numbers for livestock in Fiji. I hope that the Government is going to give him enough resources for him to be able to achieve those things that we would really like to have and produce for Fiji the livestock that it deserves for our people and for our markets. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Tikoduadua for his contribution to the debate. I now give the floor to the Honourable Attorney-General. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will be brief and would like to talk directly in respect of the recommendations by the Committee itself.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in respect of the first recommendation, the actual Committee was recommending the divestment and they also meant to say the privatisation of Fiji Meat Industry Board. In fact, in 2010 and 2016, we actually called for expressions of interest from the private sector to participate in the restructure and divestment of FMIB.

However, unlike what Honourable Nawaikula always seems to simplify divestment, when we actually divest we want to look for strategic partners and of course the whole purpose of divesting would be to increase the capacity and the potential of whoever is going to actually buy the shares. It does not have to be completely privatised. You can actually partially divest your shares. And also as has been highlighted by the Honourable Minister for Agriculture and the Honourable Minister for Defence (former Minister for Agriculture) and others that you actually need the supply chain.

As we found, for example, Mr. Speaker, Sir, with the Rewa Dairy now Fiji Dairy, the company that actually bought the bulk of the shares in fact has its own farm also. That was part of the deal that they will also set up their own dairy farm so they have a constant supply of milk. In the same way, if we want someone to buy the abattoir, they need to also themselves set up a beef farm so they can actually supply to the abattoir and of course the idea is to have food security.

However, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we did not get very good expressions of interest. Many of them the ones that wanted to come in, wanted to firstly raise the slaughter fees, they wanted all sorts of assistance in acquiring land for breeding and they wanted the current legislation to be amended. Some of it, of course, was reasonable, they wanted exclusivity, did not want anyone else to operate as an abattoir for the next 30 years and they of course wanted various other protections.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, a lot of them actually wanted to buy FMIB primarily the reason what Honourable Tikoduadua was saying just to buy the land because the land in Davuilevu at the moment is very, very much sought after. It is prime land now. It has now become a city in its own right of township, in its own right, it has got a nursing station, fire station, police station, new market is going to come across the road, probably the bus interchange somewhere there very soon. The land value has gone up. So, many of the companies that wanted to simply buy it just for the land so they could develop it but we are looking to someone strategic. That did not eventuate and we obviously are not going to sell the place just for the land because otherwise we will lose the abattoir services.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the other point that I also wanted to make was that whilst Honourable Qionibaravi talked about how, there was all these foresight et cetera and Honourable Nawaikula talked about the Alliance government days, yes, a lot of these organisations were set up then but the question that needs to be asked is how was it subsequently run; the sustainability and the management of it? We can be very good at opening up a new building but the trick of maintaining a new building is the need to be able to set aside enough money to maintain it, to do regular painting, et cetera, and in the same way companies need that. I mean I can go into numerous examples of what happened in AFL when they used to call for tenders and there used to be a lot of political interference. That is why it never made that much money. The returns were only like \$1 million or \$2 million a year in dividends.

Recently, prior to COVID-19 we are receiving \$30 million to \$40 million in dividends. Unfortunately, FMIB as the Honourable Minister for Defence has highlighted, a lot of the investments, for example, the tannery machine. A lot of it was bought, some of it was bought but never used and in fact we could not even sell it because no one in Fiji wanted it. Along with acquisitions and the management was also in question, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Just very quickly, in respect the Committee noted the FMIB Annual Report for option of privatisation and the need to separate regulatory function from the slaughter house and related

operations. Yes, that is true. In fact, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we had in fact already engaged a consultant to look at the Meat Act of 1969 and FMIB, like for example what was known as “FEA” apart from actually providing the service was also the regulator in that particular industry. So, you have to do the separation. So, now the regulatory part of it is looked after by FCCC and the actual provision of services is looked after by EFL.

We had engaged a consultant, unfortunately he passed away, I think everyone knows Mr. Julian Moti had passed away in December. He was a consultant. He was engaged to look at some of the laws that we wanted reviewed. We are going to now have that work completed and then of course we can then bring that particular Bill to Parliament.

Again, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the third recommendation, the Committee recommends that FMIB coordinate with the Ministry of Agriculture and other relevant stakeholders to improve livestock production.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, yes, of course, but as the Honourable Minister for Agriculture and others have highlighted, when you talk about increasing livestock, there is a whole series of determinants that actually has an impact on your ability to increase the livestock. Like with the sugarcane industry, I mean, apart from if you do not have land available, of course, you cannot plant sugarcane. The other point is whether people are actually interested in that particular sector. The average age of sugarcane farmers is over 55 years old now, many young people do not want to get into this sector. So, whether many young people actually want to get into livestock farming, that is another issue.

I think Honourable Nawaikula gave us a geographical visit of Vanua Levu but the point of the matter is why are they not doing well is because probably those families who used to do that, are their descendants are no longer interested? So, all of these factors actually have an impact.

The other most critical impact, of course has, is your ability to access finance. The most valuable asset any farmer has is actually the land that they lease. If you are going to have a 30-year lease for agricultural purposes, no commercial bank lends money for 30 years - period. And that is why you do not see any commercial banks actually participate in the agricultural sector unless the land in question is freehold or is for 99 years.

Laws have been amended to now for iTLTB and the Lands Department to be able to lease lands up to 99 years for agricultural purposes. Once you have that as collateral, you can then go and participate in the mainstream financial services to be able to get the capital, to be able to then plough back into your business because these sectors need to be run like businesses. We cannot just have five cows running around here, it does not make sense.

Also for FMIB, to be able to get that regular supply of animals, they need that large-scale investment by the private sector. As the Honourable Minister for Defence highlighted, Government can only do so much. There needs to be the appetite for those people in that industry to take that up apart from having the right approach to it, they also need access for finance, and the land will be the collateral. So, Mr. Speaker, Sir, again, FDB et cetera can participate in that.

The Minister for Commerce, Trade, Tourism and Transport has also highlighted about the Fijian Brand, of course, we can do that once we are able to get the supply. The last point about the professional expertise, they have obviously access to consultants, et cetera.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would just like to very quickly also state that there is a number of these public enterprises that some of them are not doing well as the others. A lot of it is to do with, for

example, the supply chain's access to finance, et cetera. We need to be able to have a particular focus on them to be able to provide them the right level of expertise.

I would like to acknowledge the assistance by those members who have actually been appointed to the Board of FMIB. We are here to, of course, support them. There is a desperate need to relocate FMIB from where it is. It is right in the middle of a residential area, a commercial area and I agree with Honourable Tikoduadua. The stench can be quite overwhelming. We need to be able to address that and we need to find a sound relocated site for that and those are some of the challenges and issues that the Board has to deal with and we will work with them.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Attorney-General for his contribution to the debate. I now give the floor to the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs to speak in reply. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. V. NATH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank all the Honourable Members for their contributions and I do not have any further comments. Thank you, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Members, the Parliament will now vote to note the content of the report.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we will move on to the next agenda item. We will take the second question first. I call on the Honourable O'Connor to ask his question. You have the floor, Sir.

QUESTIONS

Oral Questions

Market Price Gouging
(Question No. 21/2021)

HON. A.D. O'CONNOR asked the Government, upon notice:

Given that price gouging is a market occurrence during times of disaster and crisis, can the Honourable Minister for Commerce, Trade, Tourism and Transport inform Parliament on the prevalence of the issue of price gouging pre and post *TC Yasa* and *TC Ana* and the steps that were undertaken to minimise it?

HON. F.S. KOYA (Minister for Commerce, Trade, Tourism and Transport).- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I thank the Honourable Member for the question.

The past one year has been one of the most very difficult for our country and the economic devastation that has been caused by COVID-19 pandemic and has affectively crippled our highest income earner, the tourism sector. Thousands of Fijians have lost their jobs and thousands are put on reduced working hours. Whilst the Government was gearing towards rebuilding the economy and the new normal, Mr. Speaker, Sir, mother nature wreaked yet another havoc on our nation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, *TC Yasa* and *TC Ana* have actually destroyed critical infrastructure and damaged households, risked our children's education and displaced many. To make it worse, these two cyclones were actually hit almost a month after each other.

One of the very first things that actually comes to mind, Mr. Speaker, Sir, post and often pre disaster is actually the price gouging, rightfully so, because families who would have lost their belongings and they worry about the availability of and price of essential commodities such as gas and basic food items.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as a responsible Government, we have actually invested in and empowered agencies such as the Consumer Council of Fiji (CCoF) and the Fijian Competition and Commerce Commission (FCCC). As such, due to policy actions by the Government and diligent action by our consumer protection agencies, the actual number of gouging cases reported to CCoF pre and post *TC Yasa* was six, out of which the Council has actually resolved five other cases, all with favourable outcomes.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the FCCC actually received complaints of price gouging in the Northern Division, which were acted on immediately and there were some retailers increasing the price of specific items such as food, batteries, torches, battery-operated live bulbs and solar operating items, even generators. This is mainly common for unregulated items, Mr. Speaker, Sir. For example, the solar battery-operated light would cost around \$10 to \$15 in normal circumstances, but post *TC Yasa*, this price increased to up to about \$29 for the same product, and in some instances there was no price marking at all on the goods.

As I pointed out earlier, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the price gouging is actually prevalent in most countries around the world during times of disaster and for us we have been able to keep these types of conduct under close watch and control and this is a testament of the effectiveness of our collaborative actions. Mr. Speaker, Sir, this actually demonstrates the effectiveness of the Consumer Council of Fiji and FCCC which actually ensures that the interest of the Fijian consumers are always put first and promotes effective competition and informed markets. I hope that answers the question. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister. You have the floor.

HON. S.S. KIRPAL.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. A supplementary question to the Honourable Minister. Can the Honourable Minister inform this august House, are there any plans to merge Consumer Council of Fiji and the Fijian Competition and Consumer Commission as their roles are similar and complementary?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the role of CCoF and FCCC slightly differ in the sense that Consumer Council is more of an awareness and advocacy agency of the Government, whereas FCCC has an enforcement role. However, Sir, as correctly pointed out, the roles of the two agencies actually complement each other, but the initial assessments are underway on how best the two agencies can actually work together.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister. Honourable Members, I now give the floor to the Honourable Tikoduadua to ask his question. You have the floor, Sir.

Chicken Coops in Rural Non-Municipal Towns
(Question No. 20/2021)

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Mr. Speaker, I thank you for the indulgence and I apologise for not being here. I had to attend a very urgent call that really had to be attended to.

Can the Honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services inform Parliament what action will be taken against residents building chicken coops next to dwelling homes for chicks provided by the Ministry of Agriculture in the rural non-municipal towns, like Korovou, which is in contravention of rural local authority or health bylaws?

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE (Minister for Health and Medical Services).- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and I thank the Honourable Member for that question.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to bring some background into answering this question. The Fijian Government as part of the rehabilitation programme has given farmers day old chicks and distributed it as part of the rehabilitation programme and also as part of food security for farmers. Obviously, there is a difference between commercial farming and household farming to meet their needs. These birds are very useful, as you know, we are going through unprecedented times, so it is an ability for the farmers as a good source of protein and especially being able to again being another source of food readily available at home.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the fundamental basis of building a chicken coop is obviously to ensure that the chickens are protected and also coming back to the letter of the law is because of the Public Health Act, there should not be a nuisance. Nuisance in terms of the noise and also the smell. That is where the Public Health Act comes in to play.

As I have said, these nuisance can be a health hazard and under the Public Health Act, where the complaint is actually brought forward to the Health Inspectors, whether they be at the Rural Local Authority or they are our Health Inspectors, then what happens is, the Health Inspectors and the Zone Nurse then goes across and discusses this with the family and tells them, "Look, this is the issue at hand." Then they are given a time to be able to deal with it, whether it be the smell or the noise or whatever it may be, before actually enforcing the legislative process.

What we have also done is that, in this unprecedented times, we have actually realized that we have to be able to look at the spirit of the law rather than the letter of the law. There have been occasions where our people have actually had to go and give warnings several times before we actually go across with the regulations and say, "Look, we are now going to actually go through the process of the law" - understanding them.

Just as a side note, you might have noticed that recently, we have just assigned a legal notice for tobacco farmers and their registration extending it by another one or two months and trying to get people to understand that to be able to continue to meet the needs, that they have to be able to tick these boxes to be able to do so. If they do not meet that, then certainly, we will obviously issue them with the notices and then actually take them to court. Having said that, in the intervening period between the end of last year till now, we have taken 17 to court for a variety of reasons, including nuisance and other things.

As I have said earlier, we are more interested in them understanding the spirit of the law before enforcing the letter of the law, understanding the difficult challenges that we are going through at this time. *Vinaka*.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Minister. We will move on to the third oral question for today, and I now call on the Honourable Leawere to ask his question.

FNPF Members with Zero Balance
(Question No. 22/2021)

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

Can the Honourable Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications inform Parliament of Government's plans with respect to the 60,000 Fiji National Provident Fund members with zero balance in their accounts?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM (Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications).- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I would like to thank the Honourable Member for his question.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the issue of zero balance is not something new, of course, and this relates to members whose accounts are active. Sir, in 2002, the FNPF reported that 56,028 members had zero balances. This figure is a total sum of those with zero balances inherited over the years since the Fund began operations in 1966. This also not only unique to FNPF, it is a common problem seen across many superannuation funds around the world and indeed the region. Mr. Speaker, Sir, of course, commercial banks deal with this too.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the number of members with zero balance currently stands at 59,751, 6.6 percent more than what was reported in 2002. To put this into context, Mr. Speaker, Sir, there are generally two main reasons behind the zero balance and we are talking about people who are actively working.

Firstly, the bulk or 76 percent of these accounts are due to inconsistent contributions where members make perhaps, only one or few contributions then leave the formal workforce. Sometimes, the employers would ask them to get an FNPF number, they may work for them for one year and then they leave. Again, Mr. Speaker, Sir, all members of FNPF are covered for the special death benefit where \$35 is deducted annually for a \$8,500 death benefit cover. Over time, of course, if someone has only made contributions of say a \$100 or \$200, with the deduction of that then the amount will get depleted.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the second reason, the balance of the 24 percent of those with zero balance accounts of members that registered and have made absolutely no contributions towards their accounts. So, for example, you have sometimes voluntary members, someone may come along as a volunteer and may say, "I want to open up an account", they start up with say, \$50 and then they do not come back again and we have seen that happen.

In terms of the age, 40 percent of 23,136 with zero balance accounts are over 55 years old. Also, Mr. Speaker, Sir, about 18,000 members of the 59,571 members have had no transactions in their accounts for over 10 years or more.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there is a high probability that some members are no longer in employment and may have migrated or some could have potentially died and the records have not been kept up-to-date.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is also important to note that the FNPF only closes a member's account when he or she comes forward to fully withdraw from the Fund. In light of this, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the

FNPF Board is currently looking at related policy intervention to address the issue of zero balance and will explore options that will allow the Fund to –

- (1) Terminate membership of those aged 55 years and have zero balance accounts as there is a high probability that these members are no longer in employment.
- (2) Terminate membership for those with no transaction over 10 years for those below 55 years.
- (3) Deactivate accounts for those with no transactions for more than five years, cancel membership of no contributions received after a lapse of 12 months from the membership startup date.
- (4) To review minimum deposit amount to those wishing to open a new FNPF account and members who have registered and have not made any contributions will be contacted, advised on the importance of contributing to their accounts and encouraged to make regular contributions even if it is a few dollars. It will also add to their savings and earn interest.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister. Honourable Leawere, you have the floor.

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- Thank you, Honourable Minister, for the response. Just a question to the Honourable Minister, are there plans to invest internationally in order to boost these members' contributions? Are there any plans with the Fund to boost the members' contributions or offshore investment?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- So, the question is, if the FNPF is investing offshore.

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- Yes, Sir.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Yes, they have some accounts offshore already at the moment.

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- To assist the members.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Sorry.

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- In order to assist the members, Mr. Speaker, Sir?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Sorry, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think the question is those members who are offshore and have zero balances.

HON. SPEAKER.- Could you repeat your question so we can be all clear?

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the question is, are there plans in place by the FNPF to assist those members with their contributions by investing internationally like offshore to boost their contributions.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- FNPF does invest offshore.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Aseri Radrodro, you have the floor.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, just a supplementary question. I think the Honourable Member's first question was to enquire whether the Government will explore options to boost or increase the balances of those that are currently with zero balances.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- To increase the...

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Probably that is the line of question that has been asked.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- I did not get it.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Whether the Government will explore options to increase the balances of those that are currently with zero balances?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, just ask your supplementary question, forget him.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. A supplementary question to the Honourable Minister, you have mentioned about the existence of these zero balances, are you looking at any timeline on when and you will attend to sort of clean up the system in terms of accounts (ghost membership)?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, we would like to exorcise the ghosts from FNPF completely and this is part of the process. As I have highlighted, the management at FNPF is looking at cleaning up the system, in particular, those people, they see this general trend, a lot of people open up accounts, a lot of people, for example, who go into their own business. So in the beginning they think it is a good idea, I will set aside my 8 percent or 10 percent and I will contribute as my savings, but as they start their business, they think, "well, I better not do it, I can still save it on the side"; so a lot of people do, do that. They start up their accounts and yet they do not continue. So those accounts have actually continued and FNPF obviously needs to clean that up in particular to also ensure that the books are truly reflective of the active members.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. We will move on to the fourth Oral Question for today. I call on the Honourable George Vegnathan to ask his question. You have the floor, Sir.

Reinstatement of Water Supply
(Question No. 23/2021)

HON. G. VEGNATHAN asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Infrastructure, Meteorological Services, Lands and Mineral Resources inform Parliament on the status of reinstating water supply to affected areas during the course of *TC Yasa* and *TC Ana*?

HON. J. USAMATE (Minister for Infrastructure, Meteorological Services, Lands and Mineral Resources).- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the Honourable Member for his question.

During *TC Yasa* and *TC Ana* there was a total of 21 water systems and over 80 rural water schemes that were affected nationwide. The problems were due to major landslides, flooding that caused blockage of inlets at our catchment areas and blockages of water pumps which reduced raw water supply to our treatment plants. These resulted in the breakages of critical of all the pipelines

supplying raw water to water treatment plants and because of the continuous heavy rains, flooding and high turbidity levels cause excessive sludge at our water treatment plants.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, *TC Yasa* significantly damaged many rural water schemes in the Northern Division especially in the severely affected areas of Bua Province. However, *TC Ana* also caused a lot of damage to our water systems and rural schemes combined throughout the country with continuous heavy rain, major flooding and major landslides.

Post-*TC Yasa*, the WAF team that was deployed managed to repair over 80 villages rural schemes benefiting over 11,000 people in the eight *tikina* of the Bua Province. They restored 96 percent of the affected areas within two weeks post-*TC Yasa* with the main repair works at the Galoa Island which involved installing 6 kilometers of submarine pipeline. As I informed the House, Sir, yesterday I visited Galoa on Saturday last week and I found that their pipeline is not working again so now Water Authority is looking to reconnect that pipeline.

To-date, 98.5 percent of water is restored to the rural water schemes affected during *TC Yasa*. After the destructions caused by *TC Ana*, water supply within the Central, Eastern and Maritime Divisions is fully restored except for the Navua Water Supply and Nayagi borehole system at 70 percent. The WAF team is currently running all four borehole pumps to fill the reservoirs in which services are to be fully restored as soon as possible. Water carting trucks have been deployed to service affected areas.

The Western Division Water Systems have been fully restored except for the Sigatoka Water System which currently is at 75 percent completion. This was due to the blockages on all six main raw water pumps which affected the Matovo Water Treatment Plant in Sigatoka. The WAF team has been working around the clock to clear the blocked pumps and to desilt the water treatment plant clarifier. WAF deployed water carting trucks to ensure continuous supply to affected areas.

The Northern Division Systems are fully restored except for the main system in Labasa which is at 40 percent completion. Continuous heavy rains have caused major landslides in the Nasealevu area resulting in the washing away and rupture of the major bulk pipelines supplying raw water to the Benau Water Treatment Plant. Initially 250 metres of this major pipeline was washed away and later on another 80 metres was washed away and these have yet to be replaced. This has also delayed the systems repair and restoration works.

WAF team of 25 workmen have been camping on the site and we will continue to be engaged as human resources to do works that machines cannot perform. With the current production, the water supply has been normalised to the main business areas of Labasa and their valve operation schedule will be submitted for the remaining areas - it will allow water to be rationed to other affected areas as the pressure normalises and as the reservoirs fill up.

The WAF team should be able to finalise the additional resources required such as extra tanks at strategic locations and water carting trucks engagement over the next few days to ensure that affected customers are provided water for their basic needs during this time. As at Monday, 8th February, 2021 the repair works have been completed and we are anticipating full 100 percent restoration as soon as possible. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister for his contribution. I now give the floor to the Honourable Ro Teimumu Kepa to ask Question 24/2021 which is the fifth Oral Question for today. You have the floor, Madam.

Online Learning Platforms
(Question No. 24/2021)

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

Can the Honourable Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts Minister inform Parliament what plans are in place for online learning platforms and other emergency teaching procedures for students in the event of natural disasters or another COVID-19 lockdown?

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- (Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts).- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to answer the question under my name by the Honourable Kepa and I thank the Honourable Member for the question.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are all aware that natural disasters are not a common occurrence to Fiji and the Pacific. For a long time education has been affected by tropical cyclones and other natural disasters. Last year we were affected by a new disaster, I would say, and that was COVID-19. I think by now we have gotten used to the disruptions that natural disasters and other hazards bring. While many at times we extend holidays or school days are disrupted, we expect parents to use this extra time to have meaningful engagement with their children and that is an opportunity that is presented to communities and societies.

But in case of the question, 19th March, 2020, we announced our first positive COVID-19 case and as an immediate control measure, we brought forward our Term One holidays to 23rd March, 2020 and we closed our schools and extended it to 15th June, 2020. Of course this was a new issue and a challenge for the Ministry. We acted within what we had. During this time we developed a number of activities to support remote learning and home-based learning for our students.

We started off with worksheets, study guides and study notes for all levels and this was mostly for revision. We developed 750 videos for secondary school students with lessons which was placed on our educational channel through *Walesi*. We also engaged our teachers to do home visitation for students with special needs, of course this was on voluntary basis. Programmes were also aired on FBC radio, which focused on literacy and numeracy. A lot of teachers and the Ministry used our *Facebook* page and other social media platforms, mobile apps such as *Viber* and *WhatsApp* to further engage with the students. Of course, all of these were supplementary curriculum content.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, globally the education sector moved very quickly to remote learning which is a developed online resource, this was for the lockdown. We are mindful that creating learning resources is very costly so it is critical that we create affordable and equitable, flexible delivery options for our student should we go into another COVID-19 lockdown, which I think we all should pray that it does not happen. We can use this in times of disruptions to normal delivery of education.

Overall experience of our staff and students during the lockdown has shown that because of limited internet access, lack of staff knowledge in harnessing online resources and limited internet availability at homes and communities made the online option less feasible. Worksheets, study guides and study notes prepared by teachers were more readily accepted by our students and parents.

In addition to all this, we have access to the Pacific Regional Channel. This is created by the Commonwealth of Learning. This has videos-on-demand lessons in practical sciences, chemistry, biology and physics and of course mathematics for secondary schools. These can be watched online or downloaded on mobile phones and watched offline as well.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, going forward, the Ministry is determined to create more online resources for both primary and secondary school students and our teachers and staff from the Curriculum Advisory Services are continually engaged in producing more recorded resources. This will help provide the access support to our students throughout the year and will be used in times of disasters.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in order for us to use more current technology-based learning resources for our students, we need to invest further in providing equitable internet access to schools and training teachers to use e-Learning tools effectively. Several schools still do not have internet access mostly due to lack of connectivity in these areas. To date we have 33 schools, apart from the 1,000 plus schools we have, 33 have intermittent internet access while 115 are still without internet access.

We are working with *Walesi* in trialling the provision of internet services in two schools right now using what we call Very Small Aperture Terminal (VSAT). These schools are in Noikoro District School in Navosa and Beqa Secondary School. If the trials go well and depending on the cost progressively such technologies will be engaged to enable more remote schools to have internet access and connectivity.

A modern knowledge-based society, Mr. Speaker, Sir, thrives on the ability of its people to be ICT literate. The Ministry is mindful though that learning resources particularly those brought from external sources put significant financial burden and do not necessarily provide effective learning. This is why learning resources need to be created that are contextualised, cost effective and sustainable and we have the local capacity to do that.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to conclude by saying if the Honourable Kepa, during her time had done some base work for the Ministry, then it would have definitely assisted us in this century to take online learning to another level. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister. The Honourable Ro Teimumu Kepa you have the floor.

HON. RO T.V. KEPa.- A supplementary question Mr. Speaker, Sir. I thank the Minister for her response and also thank the Minister for Health in having us COVID-19 contained in our country. However, Mr. Speaker, Sir, should there be another COVID-19 lockdown because of the variants that are there in overseas countries - my question is especially for those disadvantaged students who are in the rural, remote and maritime schools who are not able to access online. If you cannot answer right now, you can give me a response later as to how those students will be addressed in terms of their disadvantaged situation. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. The Honourable Minister.

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Thank you Mr. Speaker, Sir. In response to that question, I will go back to what we did when we were under lockdown for three months. Like I said, it was a very new and challenging experience for us but because most of these remote schools were located in the communities and were easily accessed by parents and students, we used the village and the settlement communities, the advisory councillors and the *turaga ni koro* where resources were developed in the school and those parents who could not come and collect the resources from the school, we had the *turaga ni koro* and community members assisting us to deliver those materials to individual students. Of course, as our teachers are also based in these communities, they were of great help to us in ensuring that they went from house to house delivering those materials, and when the child had finished the required activities, they were given the supplementary activities within the three weeks the school was under lockdown.

So, if we have to go under another lockdown for God's sake, then that is what we will repeat, because this is the only way right now we can reach our rural students. I can assure you no child, no school and no community was disadvantaged when we were under lockdown for three weeks.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Minister. We will move on to the sixth Oral Question for today. I now call on the Honourable Pillay to ask his question.

Counselling Support Provided to Teachers and Students
(Question No. 25/2021)

HON. V. PILLAY asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts inform Parliament, what counselling support will be provided to the teachers and students affected by *TC Yasa* and *TC Ana*?

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- (Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts).- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I rise to answer the question put to me through Honourable Pillay. The question is asking, which support will be provided, but we have already started with our psychosocial support well before the school year commenced for this year.

When we talk about psychosocial support, this normally is expected after disasters and traumatic events and for us in the North, at the ground level when we went out and spoke to people, they said this is the first time for families in the North to experience a cyclone of such a nature and that is what *TC Yasa* triggered us to activate our psychosocial support.

In terms of providing psychosocial support, the reason why we do that is to bring about a sense of normalcy, a sense of safety for our people, calming our people down, creating that social connectors that is needed and of course, hope. While I am talking of hope, I tried to *Google* the colour for hope and the colour for hope is yellow. I would have expected us to unite by wearing colour yellow when *TC Yasa* and *TC Ana* were affecting our people, but today when I looked around, I see red, I thought valentine's is today, then I realised valentine's is on Sunday. So, if I can urge our people in times of disasters and traumatic events, let us all unite and wear yellow so that our people know we are there to care for them, the whole nation expected us to unite. I am really disappointed that we did not unite to assist when our nation needed our help and here we are uniting for one course, but then that is the choice people make.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, when we provide psychosocial support, we help change our people become active survivors rather than passive victims. So *TC Yasa* was, like I said, the first experience for our people in the North and it did not just take away the homes of the people, it took away livelihoods. While the families tried to put their lives back together, we, the Ministry concentrated on the traumatic impact that had on the children which probably would have gone unnoticed. As a Government, we coordinated with the NDMO, Commissioner's Office and a lot of NGOs and individuals to assist families with food and rebuilding. As a Ministry, it was our responsibility to ensure that our children got the support in dealing with the trauma so they had some normalcy in lives and their learning was not seriously hampered.

Sir, small things like, on my way to Lekutu, I stopped over at one school in Nasarawaqa because our students were in the learning spaces, I walked into the classroom and the kids were all happy, so I started talking to them. But when I looked around there was a small boy sitting in a corner, this was like a Year 7 boy. The first thing I noticed was that, he was in civilian clothes that

is one thing that we did, we allowed children to come back. So, I took the teacher aside and asked, what is the issue here?

I was told that his family lost everything and when I looked at the kid closely, he was so sad. I did not want to pick on him, so we took him outside and asked; “what do you need?” He said, “we need shoes and there are four other siblings.” Simple things like that and we told the teachers to be mindful, to pick up the signs of those children who would not be willing to be in school but probably forced to come to school through parents, et cetera. Sir, small help like that was given, not only by the Ministry, but a lot of NGOs.

But well before school started, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we engaged our Substance Abuse and Advisory Council, Medical Service Pacific and Empower Pacific, the correctional service and our seven recently trained full counsellors in the North to conduct counselling support programme in the Northern Division from 18th to 29th January this year, and this was for teachers and students.

There were various methods used by this organisation and we found out that the children were very quick to respond to the counselling tactics, while the teachers were probably still down with the trauma of losing their homes, their quarters and the rest of their stuff. The programme was conducted in 22 northern schools which included 16 primary schools, 5 secondary schools and 1 special school. Our counsellors attended to about 1,938 students and 207 teachers in the *TC Yasa* affected area.

The Ministry, for the first time, has collaborated with the Australian Government and provided 35 teachers from the Central, Western and Northern Divisions an opportunity to undertake a Diploma in Counselling delivered by the Australian Pacific Training Coalition (APTC). All these 35 teachers had graduated with a Diploma on 11th January, 2021.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we understand that the two recent cyclones have emotionally and financially impacted the lives of our families, teachers and students. That is why the first week of re-opening our schools was to allow our teachers and students to settle into their classroom environment. We are currently working with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) to run a pilot programme in the Northern Division as soon as the North opens. With our recently graduated counsellors and trained psychologists based at DFAT, DFAT has helped us prepare a counselling kit which includes materials such as toys, counselling aid, postures for our students that will be distributed to selected schools as part of the Student Support Service Pilot Programme.

Counselling will need to continue for some time and we intend to put our seven trained counsellors in clusters and reduce the teaching loads, so they can attend to students and teachers from the schools in their cluster. A total of 350 heads of schools have also undergone training in counselling and we expect them to take a lead role in providing support to their students and teachers. We also plan to conduct further trainings for all our heads of schools.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are looking at holding discussions with our teacher training institutions to request that they include counselling as part of the teachers training programmes. In this way, we will systematically train all our teachers who graduate in the future to be able to provide the ongoing support to our students.

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

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- When these counsellors were conducting their counselling, were they fully trained, or not?

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Because they graduated in January. That is after the cyclone, were they fully trained at that time, or not?

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- No. Then how come they graduated in January?

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, counselling is very important. It requires qualified people, not just any Tom, Dick and Harry.

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

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- What about Mary? You forgot about Mary.

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is very interesting, yes. All 35 teachers graduated with a Diploma on 11th January, 2021.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, courses completed well before graduation and seven of these counsellors were from the North. The school was supposed to start on 20th January, we started our counselling from 18th January, well after they had graduated.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Salote Radrodro?

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and the Honourable Minister for Education. I find it very hard to believe what she had mentioned because I, for one, have visited communities after *TC Yasa* and if the Honourable Minister can enlighten us which particular organisation specialises in counselling undertook this psychosocial counselling because I never met any of the Ministry of Education officials during that time, after *TC Yasa*?

Can the Honourable Minister enlighten us, which particular organisation that specialises in counselling knowing that all the counsellors in schools have been withdrawn had undertaken this, or are you still planning for them and the children have not gone to school yet? At that point in time, they were home.

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

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think they do not listen to media and probably read the wrong media reports. School started on 20th January and I have said it. It was a record attendance. We had 95 percent students attending school in the first week and I did say we have completed 22 schools. I did not say we completed all the schools. The North has close to 10,000-plus students, so we have completed 22 schools. Let me be more ...

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- I cannot give you the names of the schools but Mr. Speaker, Sir ...

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- ... the programme was conducted in 22 Northern schools, 16 primary schools, five secondary schools and one special school. I can give you the names probably in the

next session. We attended to 1,938 students and 207 teachers within these areas. Not the whole of the North was affected, maybe the communities, Honourable Radrodro visited, we will still do it.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Organisations?

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Empower Pacific, Medical Services Pacific and of course, our trained, seven trained counsellors that graduated from APTC – an Australian-accredited institution.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. We will move on.

Role of NDMO - Raising Awareness and Educating People
(Question No. 26/2021)

HON. J. SAUKURU asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Defence, National Security and Policing, Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management inform Parliament on the role of NDMO in raising awareness and educating our people on how to prepare for natural disasters?

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU (Minister for Defence, National Security and Policing, Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management).- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I thank the Honourable Member for the question.

Very quickly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the work of NDMO, again, I refer back to the Disaster Act of 1998 and particularly, Section 81 and of course, Section 6 of the Disaster Management Plan of 1995 that guides the work of NDMO, particularly when it comes to awareness and educating our people on how to prepare for natural disasters.

In terms of raising awareness and educating our people, Mr. Speaker, Sir, specifically Section 41 (2) of the Act also states that the NDMO shall be responsible for implementing, organising and coordinating public awareness activities. Sir, in addition to this, the Act also stipulates that there be an annual National Disaster Awareness Week conducted prior to the beginning of the cyclone season.

That, usually is launched in October of every year. But, very quickly on awareness, Mr. Speaker, Sir – one, there are activities organised by NDMO. I will briefly touch on those. But there are also three main committees under the National Disaster Council:

- (1) Emergency Committee that sits often post-disaster to look at the emergency operations and the response;
- (2) Preparedness Committee; and
- (3) Mitigation and Awareness Committee.

I have stated about the work of NDMO but basically in these committees, Mr. Speaker, Sir, all Permanent Secretaries are divided amongst these three committees; the Emergency Committee, Preparedness Committee and the Mitigation and Prevention Committee. It was there for a basic purpose, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that through their stakeholders these messages from the Disaster Council will trickle down to the communities that they work with. For example agriculture, the Permanent Secretary has a responsibility to ensure that preparedness messages also go down to the farmers and likewise for all other ministries.

But not only that, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we also have in the Council the Fiji Red Cross Society and the Fiji Council of Social Services. These are our two key partners when it comes to the

involvement of Civil Society Organisations, faith-based organisations and Non-Government Organisations as well. We have the shared responsibility of having this awareness.

Some of the strategies. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the media is a very effective tool of disseminating this information through the various platforms; TV. In fact last year, Mr. Speaker Sir, late September before the launching of the National Disaster Awareness week in Ba which I will come to later, I launched the Media Awareness Campaign together with UNDP here in Suva and after the launching officials, the Permanent Secretary, the four Divisional Commissioners, the Director NDMO had turns on our TV, on our radio station programmes in the dissemination of information so that our people can prepare. Also in the print media, we also paid for a special advertisement, if I may say, on the preparedness that need to be given to the general public as well.

Not only that, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we also have pamphlets and flyers that are also paid for and distributed whenever we visit the rural communities. I remember when we went to Vatoa and Moala in Lau, we gave it to the school children and also to the parents. A lot of these posters, if you go to the villages you will see how to, for example, prepare homes, in what needs to be in the home and even things like construction, how to do simple things like strapping, screws or nails on every grove. These are all the awareness messages that are also printed through flyers and booklets that we also distribute.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, social media is very, very important. This is an area that we are engaged quite a lot particularly with the younger generation and also this year for the first time, we had a special arrangement with *Facebook* to enhance and boost awareness on disaster preparedness. I would say that this is a huge achievement and through this network, *Facebook*, Mr. Speaker, Sir, donated to us free coupons worth US\$1,000 for boosting adverts and contents for disaster awareness on NDMO's *Facebook* platform.

That is one of the strategies, Mr. Speaker, Sir, particularly the media apart from the committees and then we have the National Disaster Awareness Week. As I have stated, it is usually a one-week programme. In 2018, it was held here in Suva, in 2019 it was held in Vanua Levu in Taveuni and lately in 2020 it was held in Ba. Of course, we work in partnership with the Fiji Red Cross Society, Live and Learn, the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR), World Food Programme (WFP), the World Food Programme, UN Women to name a few.

These are all the stakeholders, Mr. Speaker, Sir and part of that REACH programme we also visit the communities in the local area together with some demonstration on water rescue and a few other activities. But let me also say here, Sir, that also we make very good use of the Government structure that is already in place as well particularly with the use of our *mata ni tikina*, *turaga ni koro*, advisory councillors, the office of the *Roko Tui*, provincial councils and of course the Commissioners and other key stakeholders in the rural area.

We need to acknowledge Live and Learn, not only that, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we also conduct training every year. For 2020 we conducted about 400 trainings throughout Fiji. The name of the programme is Community Based Disaster Risk Reduction (CBDR) and it was funded by Live and Learn and this is also a good opportunity for us to continue to advocate and raise awareness to our people because with this new norm, the level of information and preparedness is very, very critical if we are to minimise the losses and of course address some of the risks.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Minister. Honourable Jese Saukuru on a supplementary question.

HON. J. SAUKURU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the Honourable Minister for his explanation regarding the role of NDMO. My supplementary question is, he has been touring the Northern Division. How effective was their programme in communities they have conducted awareness and training in during *TC Yasa* and *TC Ana*?

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

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, we really appreciate that we have taken this initiative to conduct training in the communities. Even before *TC Yasa* we received even images from the villagers where the committee have already shifted the communities to safe places or to evacuation centres. Even some have gone to the extent of having vests, hailer to assist them in performing this role. I would say very effective and we need to do more because it has really worked in the areas that we have already conducted in this training in.

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

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. May I ask the Honourable Minister the process they follow to determine the precautions we need to take such as curfews. Two weeks ago with a weather system threatening the country, we were told that curfew would be from Saturday until Monday which caused a lot of angst within our people and then it was changed to the normal curfew hours. Can you explain how you go through the process to determine this precaution?

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Minister.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. First, our sincere apologies for the inconvenience caused because of the confusion and the implication of the decision that was based.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in terms of curfew or other control measures like control movements, it is done in the interest of safety, that is first and foremost, apart from law and order and other concerns. We have a process and we take full responsibility too, the Office of the NDMO for that decision that was taken.

We base decisions, Mr. Speaker, Sir, on the forecasts that we are given. Forecasts can be very accurate but forecasts also can be different from real life scenarios. If we, for those that follow the weather forecasts, right at the centre there will always be the projected path but there will be on both sides of that path (on the extreme right and extreme left as well) the likelihood of the path (on the extreme right and extreme left as well), the likelihood of the path to sway according to the pressure and the environmental factors. If we recall *TC Yasa*, Mr. Speaker, Sir, initially it was to make landfall on Viti Levu but what was interesting in *TC Yasa*, every six hours when there is an update from the Meteorological Office it continued to shift east, it continued to shift east. So, it is working within the parameters that the forecasters have come up with.

So, the decision on the curfew that was taken, Mr. Speaker, Sir, was based on the initial assessment that it will make landfall on Viti Levu and we know the situation in Viti Levu, particularly the informal settlements, squatters. Based on the path and the timing, we worked out the timing from when it was going to make landfall and we know, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that people will be in the towns and cities for markets and all the very reasons that we can come up with. And working back from that, that was how the Police made the recommendations and of course we checked that together with

the forecast and we agreed on that initially. But that changed the morning after, when the next forecast came in again. It had shifted and of course the timing as well. So, it is was from God as you know, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and if it was from man, man can control it but it was from God, no one can do much about it but we take responsibility, we apologise for that but it is done in the interest of safety.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. We will move on to the eighth Oral Question for today and I call on Honourable Kirpal to ask his question. You have the floor, Sir.

Fiji Police Force Response - *TC Yasa*
(Question No. 27/2021)

HON. S.S. KIRPAL asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Defence, National Security and Policing, Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management inform Parliament on the response by the Fiji Police Force during *TC Yasa* in ensuring that the mandate of national security and the rule of law is upheld?

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU (Minister for Defence, National Security and Policing, Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management).- Mr. Speaker, Sir again the Police is one of the key stakeholders when it comes to our response during emergency operations and, of course, *TC Yasa* and *TC Ana* and the rest is not an exemption. Again, we are guided, Mr. Speaker, Sir, by the Police Act Cap. 81 – the key responsibility is the maintenance of law and order and protect life and property. I take this opportunity to acknowledge the Fiji Police Force, Royal Fiji Military Forces and the National Fire Authority for their commitment during *TC Yasa* and of course *TC Ana* as well.

How do they provide assistance not only in terms of maintaining law and order but also to protect life and property? As mandated, every agency of government has to have liaison officers at the national level, at NDMO, and even District level as well, what we call DSLOs (Disaster Liaison Officers) in the respective EOCs.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is the maintaining of cordons. They provide cordons in towns or cities or they control movement through the establishment of checkpoints, not only that but they do the normal patrols in the towns and the cities as well and of course in the rural areas.

One thing that we appreciate, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is the establishment of Community Police Posts apart from the major Police Stations throughout Fiji. These Community Police Posts and Police Stations allow easy access by the community to the Fiji Police Force so that they can respond to the situation, not only in terms of law and order issues, but of course for the protection of life and property as well.

I recall the incident, Mr. Speaker, Sir, in Salababa Road in Waila where the police had to sacrifice their lives to rescue the family that perhaps made the decision very late to vacate their home. And that is not the only case, there are so many of these throughout Fiji. Not only that, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Fiji Police Force also assists by providing resources, not only manpower, but their vehicles, boats, they also provide escorts and the manning of check points as I have already alluded to. The normal investigative work continues and of course all the other normal police work, whether it be prosecution or administrative work so that law and order, and of course protect life and property.

I also use this opportunity, Mr. Speaker, Sir, to acknowledge the Government of Japan. As we speak, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Government of Japan has assisted the Fiji Police Force in terms of capability, probably something that we will see (God forbid) come the next one, we will see a lot of assets, particularly on water rescue. We have new boats currently unloaded at the Fiji Police Force in Nasinu (former Mobile Base), and that is something that we will see online, God forbid, come the next one. So we continue to commit to the improvement of the capability so that they can maintain effectiveness and efficiency in performing their roles. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister. Honourable Tabuya, you have the floor.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, before I ask my question, I wish to join the Honourable Minister in thanking the Fiji Police Force for their help during the cyclone, especially for *TC Ana*. We have family that live in Salababa Road, especially my *tauvu* from Ra, who a lot of their families were saved by the Police, so thank you.

My supplementary question, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is based on the Constitution, the freedom of movement of our people which is a fundamental right. My question to the Honourable Minister is, how do they continue to justify the national curfew when there is no scientific evidence and neither has it been proven that it prevents crime? Why do they continue to impose it, it has been almost 12 months now, and people need to know why do they continue to justify the imposition of this curfew?

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

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. There is a thin line between health and safety in the interest of safety and of course the other issues that the Honourable Member has raised. But there is a proviso in the Constitution relating to not only national security, but of course health as well. The curfew that we have in place is not only something that we pulled out during *TC Yasa* and *TC Ana*, but it was there from day one when we wanted to have a COVID-free Fiji. Mr. Speaker, Sir, everyone in Fiji appreciates the fact, the Honourable Ro Kupa has just expressed her gratitude that we are COVID-free and let us not rush into changing what we have in place because life is more important, Mr. Speaker, Sir, than anything else.

The right to life is more important than the economy. The right to life is more important than anything else, so let us stick the course and let us suffer together as a country for the good and betterment of every Fijian.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

Honourable Members, we will now move on to the Written Question today and I give the floor to the Honourable Navurelevu to ask his question. You have the floor, Sir.

Written Question

Schools Damaged by *TC Harold*
(Question No. 28/2021)

HON. RATU T. NAVURELEVU asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts inform Parliament of the list of schools damaged by *TC Harold*, status of rehabilitation and the associated costs?

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- (Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts).- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will table my response at a later sitting date as permitted under Standing Order 45(3).

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister.

Honourable Members, the Question time is now over. That brings us to the end of the sitting for today. Thank you for your contributions and co-operation.

We now adjourn till tomorrow morning at 9.30.

The Parliament adjourned at 4.46 p.m.