

PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI



PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DAILY HANSARD

THURSDAY, 23RD SEPTEMBER, 2021

[CORRECTED COPY]

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THURSDAY, 23RD SEPTEMBER, 2021

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

HONOURABLE SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

PRESENT

All Honourable Members were present, except the Honourable Lt. Col. P. Tikoduadua.

MINUTES

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

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Wednesday, 22nd September, 2021, as previously circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I beg to second the motion.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

COMMUNICATION FROM THE CHAIR

Welcome

HON. SPEAKER.- I welcome all Honourable Members to this sitting of Parliament, including those who are joining us virtually. I also welcome all those who are watching the live broadcast and the live streaming of today's proceedings from the comfort of their homes, offices and electronic devices. Thank you all for your continued interest in the workings of your Parliament.

PRESENTATION OF PAPERS AND CERTAIN DOCUMENTS

The following Reports were tabled by the Ministers responsible in accordance with Standing Order 38(1), and referred to the relevant Standing Committee for deliberation, in accordance with Standing Order 38(2):

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

- (1) Report of the Auditor-General of the Republic of Fiji – 2019-2020 Audit Report on Public Enterprises and Other Entities (*P/Paper No. 92 of 2021*)
- (2) Fourth Quarter Appropriation Statement – Actual Expenditure from 1 May 2021 – 31 July 2021 (*for information only*)

Standing Committee on Social Affairs

- (1) Ba Town Council – Annual Report for the Year 2011 (*P/Paper No. 222 of 2020*)
- (2) Ba Town Council – Annual Report for the Year 2012 (*P/Paper No. 223 of 2020*)
- (3) Ba Town Council – Annual Report for the Year 2013 (*P/Paper No. 224 of 2020*)
- (4) Ba Town Council – Annual Report for the Year 2014 (*P/Paper No. 225 of 2020*)

- (5) Ba Town Council – Annual Report for the Year 2015 (*P/Paper No. 226 of 2020*)
- (6) Ba Town Council – Annual Report for the Year 2016 (*P/Paper No. 227 of 2020*)
- (7) Ba Town Council – Annual Report for the Year 2017 (*P/Paper No. 228 of 2020*)
- (8) Ba Town Council – Annual Report for the Year 2018 (*P/Paper No. 229 of 2020*)
- (9) Labasa Town Council – Annual Report 2004 (*P/Paper No. 104 of 2020*)
- (10) Labasa Town Council – Annual Report 2006 (*P/Paper No. 106 of 2020*)
- (11) Labasa Town Council – Annual Report 2007 (*P/Paper No. 107 of 2020*)
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- (20) Lami Town Council – Annual Report for the Year 2004 (*P/Paper No. 157 of 2020*)
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- (23) Lami Town Council – Annual Report for the Year 2007 (*P/Paper No. 111 of 2020*)
- (24) Lami Town Council – Annual Report for the Year 2008 (*P/Paper No. 112 of 2020*)
- (25) Lami Town Council – Annual Report for the Year 2009 (*P/Paper No. 113 of 2020*)
- (26) Lami Town Council – Annual Report for the Year 2010 (*P/Paper No. 114 of 2020*)
- (27) Lami Town Council – Annual Report for the Year 2011 (*P/Paper No. 218 of 2020*)
- (28) Lami Town Council – Annual Report for the Year 2012 (*P/Paper No. 219 of 2020*)
- (29) Lami Town Council – Annual Report for the Year 2013 (*P/Paper No. 220 of 2020*)
- (30) Lami Town Council – Annual Report for the Year 2014 (*P/Paper No. 221 of 2020*)
- (31) Suva City Council – Annual Report 2011 (*P/Paper No. 196 of 2020*)
- (32) Suva City Council – Annual Report 2012 (*P/Paper No. 197 of 2020*)
- (33) Suva City Council – Annual Report 2013 (*P/Paper No. 198 of 2020*)
- (34) Suva City Council – Annual Report 2014 (*P/Paper No. 199 of 2020*)
- (35) Suva City Council – Annual Report 2015 (*P/Paper No. 200 of 2020*)
- (36) Tavua Town Council – Annual Report for the Year Ended 2011 (*P/Paper No. 239 of 2020*)
- (37) Tavua Town Council – Annual Report for the Year Ended 2012 (*P/Paper No. 240 of 2020*)
- (38) Tavua Town Council – Annual Report for the Year Ended 2013 (*P/Paper No. 241 of 2020*)
- (39) Tavua Town Council – Annual Report for the Year Ended 2014 (*P/Paper No. 242 of 2020*)
- (40) Levuka Town Council – Annual Report for the Year 2005 (*P/Paper No. 138 of 2020*)
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- (45) Levuka Town Council – Annual Report for the Year 2010 (*P/Paper No. 143 of 2020*)
- (46) Lautoka City Council – Annual Report for the Year Ended December 31, 2011
(*P/Paper No. 201 of 2020*)
- (47) Lautoka City Council – Annual Report 2012 (*P/Paper No. 202 of 2020*)
- (48) Lautoka City Council – Annual Report 2013 (*P/Paper No. 203 of 2020*)
- (49) Lautoka City Council – Annual Report 2014 (*P/Paper No. 204 of 2020*)
- (50) Nasinu Town Council – Annual Report for the Year 2009 (*P/Paper No. 89 of 2020*)
- (51) Nasinu Town Council – Annual Report for the Year 2010 (*P/Paper No. 90 of 2020*)

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

HON. SPEAKER.- The Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service, Communications, Housing and Community Development has given notice to make a Ministerial Statement under Standing Order 40.

The Honourable Attorney-General may speak for up to 20 minutes, after that, I will then invite the Honourable 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 Honourable Leader of the National Federation Party or his designate, to also speak for five minutes. There will be no other debate.

I now call upon the Honourable Attorney-General. You have the floor, Sir.

Priorities for Fiji at COP 26

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I rise to inform Parliament about Fiji's National Priorities for the 26th Session of the Conference of Parties (COP 26) under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

The COP 26 will be held in Glasgow, Scotland, in person from 1st November to 12th November, 2021, under the Presidency of the Government of the United Kingdom. This COP will be the most important since COP 21 in 2015, when the Paris Agreement was adopted by 196 countries. The most important task for COP 26, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is to finalise the Paris Agreement Rule Book, which guides the implementation of the Agreement, and 20,000 people from around the world are expected to be there.

Mr. Speaker, I will speak a bit fast because I have a bit to cover. Before I get into the details of Fiji's National Priorities for COP26, please, let me remind everyone of what is at stake for Fiji, the Pacific and the planet.

The Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) released in August this year shows that our planet is on course for virtual self-destruction before the end of the century, due to uncontrolled climate change.

The IPCC Report states that global carbon dioxide concentrations are the highest in, at least, 2 million years, and humans are to blame. We have emitted around 2.4 trillion tonnes of carbon dioxide since the late 1800s and we continue to emit more and much more each year. It is simply suicidal to continue such fossil fuel driven production and consumption.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the global average temperature is now 1.1 degrees Celsius higher than pre-industrial levels, and we are already seeing devastating impacts across the world. Heat domes are surging temperatures to record levels in the Americas, unprecedented cyclones and massive floods are occurring in Europe and three major tropical cyclones have devastated Fiji in the span of a year.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, current emissions reduction targets set by countries are expected to increase the average global temperature to over 2.7 degrees Celsius before the end of this century. That is a far cry from the 1.5 degrees Celsius target that Fiji and other Small Islands Developing States (SIDS) fought hard to incorporate in the Paris Agreement.

Keeping global average temperature well below 1.5 degrees Celsius is not just some arbitrary desire of SIDS, it is a matter of survival. Even a 0.4 increase in the global average temperature now will mean absolute catastrophe for us. Our Pacific atoll neighbours will see their countries taken by the sea, and low-lying coastal communities across the Pacific will suffer the same fate. Economies will be

brought to their knees as catastrophic cyclones will become more frequent and erratic weather patterns will cripple food security.

Even the famously somnambulant Members of the Opposition have managed to understand this through their sleepy haze. Unfortunately, not even that knowledge has dampened their cynicism in attacking Government's earnest and valuable work on the international climate stage. These armchair critics and Members of the Opposition continue to belittle the Fijian Government's steadfast commitment to address climate change, saying that COVID-19 is a more immediate priority. But Government cannot entertain the folly that we can ignore a very real threat to our long term survival while we manage a very serious immediate threat. We cannot. It would be irresponsible and reckless not to do both simultaneously. These challenges are interconnected as our health and our planet's health are inextricably intertwined. Climate change is a pandemic enabler, a pandemic accelerant and a multi pathway crisis that is the single greatest threat to the development of SIDS.

Prior to COVID-19, there were mountains of scientific data, papers and research that showed that it was only a matter of time before a flu-like pandemic would spread like wildfire. Yet, the world did little collectively and proactively to combat this threat. The current circumstances around climate change are no different. We simply cannot be passive in the face of the existential threats posed by climate change, otherwise the devastation caused by COVID-19 is a mere glimpse of what climate change has in store for us.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are in a climate emergency, and the Climate Change Bill 2021 being debated today has been carefully developed to address the different aspects of this emergency. It is already guiding Fiji's National Priorities going into COP 26, and its enactment will give us a strong legal mandate and framework to advance our National Priorities at the negotiating table, to demand greater climate action from the global north.

With the leadership of our Honourable Prime Minister, Fiji is held in the highest regard as a global climate champion. We have been vocal, we have been strategic and we have been bold in continuously holding high-emitting countries accountable for the havoc they are inflicting on the planet through unchecked carbon emissions, but there is more to be done.

We took on the COP 23 Presidency and excelled at it. We, as Chair of the Pacific Islands Forum, the Pacific has placed its faith in Fiji to elevate the Pacific as a powerhouse of climate ambition. Through an official Forum decision, the region has collectively nominated Fiji to be the Pacific's high-level champion to COP 26 on climate finance and oceans.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, going into COP 26, the Fijian Government does not only represent its people, it now represents the 2.3 million Pacific Islanders spread across the largest patch of ocean in the world with, of course, taking out Papua New Guinea. In this regard, we have set ourselves four broad priorities for COP 26 and, indeed, beyond.

Mr. Speaker, the first priority is lobbying for greater climate ambition. We are seeking far greater decarbonisation commitments by large greenhouse-gas-emitting countries, establishing a deadline for these commitments to result in emissions peak, and committing to achieve net-zero carbon emissions by 2050.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, only 40 percent of the countries that ratified the Paris Agreement have actually submitted updated Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) to the UNFCCC. Sir, NDCs are produced by Parties to the Paris Agreement, outlining national plans and commitments to reduce carbon emissions. They need to be updated, at least, every five years to show increased national commitment to

reduce carbon emissions. Only a handful of countries – 33, in fact, have officially submitted their long-term commitments to transition towards net-zero emissions by 2050, and Fiji is among them.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji will not meekly pay the price for the world's inaction. Instead we will wield every ounce of our moral authority at COP 26 to demand greater decarbonisation commitments by G20 countries, and we will do so from a position of strength. Fiji is one of a few countries to engrain climate adaptation, ocean conservation, nature-based solutions and net-zero commitments into its NDC.

In doing so, we intend to reduce national carbon emissions by 30 percent by 2030 from a baseline year of 2013. We have also developed a low-emissions development strategy that serves as a roadmap for transitioning the Fijian economy towards net-zero by 2050.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji's climate leadership is not limited to policy-based interventions. Despite contributing only 0.006 percent to Global Greenhouse Gas Emissions, we are exemplifying the level of climate action with demand from the rest of the world through innovative projects, including an agrophotovoltaic 4 megawatt solar power plant in Bureta, Ovalau, and potentially four other sites in Fiji, which we are currently exploring.

Sir, Energy Fiji Limited (EFL), in close co-operation with its new partner, the Japanese consortium - Sevens Pacific Pte Limited, is also working towards increasing its renewable energy generation mix by investing in solar energy solutions with four large scale solar projects that are expected to help EFL generate, at least, 90 percent of its energy from renewable sources by 2030.

Fiji is also implementing off-grid solar and hydro renewable energy solutions to rural communities through the Department of Energy and the Fiji Rural Electrification Fund. This is expected to assist the remaining 4 percent of the Fijian population that do not have access to electricity.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, a growing economy and, indeed, one that is recovering from the pandemic needs greater access to energy, be it to keep manufacturing plants running, businesses electrified and vehicles moving. But we must realise that Fiji's third highest import is fossil fuel. Our dependency on non-renewable energy must be reversed through economy-wide investments in low carbon technologies. Greater climate mitigation now will reduce the need for greater climate adaptation in the future.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, our goals for climate ambition in Glasgow are to:

- (1) Finalise the Paris Rule Book at COP 26, which means agreeing to outstanding matters related to carbon markets, common timeframes for NDCs and mechanisms for enhanced transparency under the Paris Agreement.
- (2) Secure additional commitments towards much stronger NDC targets by 2030, and all countries to commit to net-zero emissions by 2050, in line with 1.5 degree Celsius pathway.
- (3) Increase access to affordable financing for developing countries that have included adaptation commitments in their NDCs.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, those sub-priorities are expected to be mutually reinforced through Parts 3, 7, 8, 9 and 10 of the Climate Change Bill 2021

The second priority area, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is increased resource mobilisation for adaptation and loss and damage. The latest climate finance assessment by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) shows that only 21 percent of global climate finance is mobilised for climate adaptation, whilst 70 percent goes to climate mitigation and the remaining 9 percent goes to cross-cutting

projects. Despite being among the most climate vulnerable regions in the world, the Pacific is receiving less than one percent of global finance, which is further split between mitigation and adaptation. It is unfair and, indeed, unsustainable, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Article 9, paragraph 4 of the Paris Agreement, clearly states the need to aim for a resource mobilisation balance between climate mitigation and climate adaptation. This is not happening and must be urgently corrected.

Fiji will press for affordable climate finance to be made more accessible to developing countries and, more importantly, to raise additional climate finance for adaptation. We seek to provide strong guidance to bilateral and multilateral sources of climate finance to prioritise financing for adaptation projects, and we will be putting pressure on these funding sources to better support countries that have developed their national adaptation plan.

The reasoning, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is simple, due to the damage already done to the climate, we will have to spend billions on adaptation. Fiji has already developed a robust National Adaptation Plan with over 160 action items that now need financial support to implement them.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji is also placing strong emphasis on nature-based solutions to support adaptation actions. Such solutions take an integrated approach to climate adaptation without causing damage to natural biodiversity. A dozen low-lying communities are already benefiting from this innovative solution, while another 19 priority communities have been identified for assistance in the 2021-2022 financial year. In order to be replicated in other parts of Fiji, such transformative solutions deserve far more financial support from climate finance sources, a case in point, seawalls that we are talking about in Namatakula.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, climate adaptation is about protecting against future climate impacts but SIDS are already experiencing irreversible harm. This is known as loss and damage in the international climate arena, and it entails mobilising resources to retroactively address climate impacts.

It was a hard-fought victory for SIDS and for the cause of climate justice to include loss and damage under Article 8 of the Paris Agreement in 2015. Nevertheless, Mr. Speaker, Sir, developed countries have continued to put off the question of financing for loss and damage.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the subject of loss and damage is personal for Pacific Islanders, as we have already suffered irreversible harm from climate change. Since 2011, the Fijian Government has helped relocate six communities, entailing 78 households at a cost of FJ\$3.6 million. There are over 40 rural communities that need urgent relocation due to slow and sudden onsets of climate change.

To address this future human mobility needs, the Fijian Government has established the Climate Relocation of Community Trust Fund which has received an initial grant commitment of FJ\$2.5 million from the Government of New Zealand. We are now working and facilitating the relocation of communities in Vanua Levu that have been severely impacted by multiple cyclones, saltwater intrusion and land degradation.

At COP 26, Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji will be pushing for the rapid mobilisation of collaborative networks on loss and damage to create more financing opportunities. The specific sub-priorities for Fiji under the overall priority of Increased Resource Mobilisation for Adaptation and Loss and Damage are as follows:

- (a) Dedicated financing for loss and damage that goes beyond insurance based solutions;
- (b) Progress work programme for Warsaw International Mechanism on Loss and Damage; and

- (c) Increase support for Santiago Network of technical experts on loss and damage and dedicated assistance through the Network to Pacific SIDS.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, these sub-priorities are expected to be mutually reinforced through Part 11 and Part 12 of the Climate Change Bill.

The third priority area is Creating Permanence of Oceans in the UNFCCC Agenda and Promoting the Ocean-Climate Nexus. The Ocean sequesters approximately 31 percent of global carbon emissions and contains 16 times more carbon than the terrestrial biosphere, making it a powerful buffer between humanity and climate catastrophe.

Some may not know that Fiji is the 26th largest nation when it comes to the size of our Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). No one should view us as a small sets of dots on the world map, but a large ocean State with significant potential for a vibrant blue economy.

In recognition of the obvious linkage between the ocean and the climate, Fiji created and led the initiative to engrain an ocean pathway into the UNFCCC process, as part of its COP 23 Presidency. We have come a long way in this pursuit, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and create a strong support within the alliance of Small Island States and the G77 and China Group to have a dedicated permanent home for Oceans in the UNFCCC process.

At COP 26, Fiji will be pushing for a decision text on oceans that engrain ocean issues within the UNFCCC and ensures due diligence of formal processes for the ocean climate nexus to gain a permanent mandate in the UNFCCC.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji continues to engage in pioneer climate initiatives that set it apart from the rest of the world. We are one of the first SIDS to have developed a National Ocean Policy that provides a roadmap for sustainable ocean action, based on two fundamental targets:

- (1) 30 percent of Fiji's EEZ to be designated as Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) by 2030; and
- (2) 100 percent of Fiji's EEZ be sustainably managed by 2030.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are walking the talk by operationalising the National Ocean Policy through innovative financing mechanisms. Based on Fiji's successful issuance of a Green Bond in 2017 which is listed on the stock exchange, the Fijian Government is working with the Government of the United Kingdom and the United Nations Capital Development Fund to issue a Blue Bond by the middle of 2022, which is next year. The Blue Bond will finance sustainable commercial aquaculture to combat structural unemployment after COVID-19. It will finance hybrid electric inter-island shipping to bridge the rural-urban divide and improve access to markets and, of course, people mobility, and it will finance coastal protection using integrated nature-based solutions expected to generate revenue for coastal communities. All of those, Mr. Speaker, Sir, supports a Post-COVID recovery while addressing the need for climate-sensitized development.

Fiji plans to promote this innovative integrated approach to the ocean climate finance at COP 26 to augur grant-based co-financing from bilateral development partners and equity-based financing from the private sector.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, our goals for the ocean at COP 26 are:

- (1) Generate support for ocean work programme and agenda in the UNFCCC processes in line with the oceans pathway;
- (2) Push for blue components of NDCs to be promoted and tracked;

- (3) Generate support for further research and capacity building to enhance developing country's understanding of the Ocean-Climate nexus;
- (4) Enhance financing for oceans and fisheries-related adaptation activities; and
- (5) Discuss options for implementing the recommendations of the 2020 Ocean Climate Dialogue Report Recommendations co-chaired by Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, these sub-priorities and are expected to be mutually reinforced through Part 13 of the Climate Change Bill 2021.

The last priority, Mr. Speaker, Sir, which is the fourth priority is to improve access to affordable climate finance which directly impacts the achievability of all of our objectives.

Access to affordable climate finance is lagging behind in the Pacific. We access less than 1 percent of global climate finance, even more disturbing, 74 percent of overall climate finance mobilised was in the form of loans, while only 20 percent were grants, and the remaining 6 percent were in the form of equity-based investments.

Why do SIDS have to access finance for their development at punishing rates when countries of the global north with greater debt exposure can access these funds at net-zero interest? Why can recovery from climate catastrophes not be funded through grants? Why must we be forced to take more loans to rebuild from climate catastrophes that are caused by others?

We will be demanding answers to those hard questions at COP 26, both in open forums and at the negotiating table. Fiji has been successful in negotiating access to highly concessional IDA funding for climate vulnerable countries, while Chair of the World Bank Small States Forum. We intend to replicate that leadership as Chair of the Pacific Forum and lobby for mobilisation of greater concessional climate finance from financial mechanisms under the UNFCCC, such as the Green Climate Fund, Adaptation Fund, Global Environment Facility and Climate Technology Centre and Network. In doing so, we will also intend to put pressure on multilateral development banks, such as the ADB, to start providing concessional financing under a climate vulnerability access window and, indeed, our talks with the UK is that, the UK as shareholder of the ADB, is now agreeable to this proposition and they will use their influence with the other European shareholders.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji needs approximately FJ\$9.3 billion over a 10-year period to adapt the Fijian economy. An additional FJ\$6 billion is needed by 2030 to help Fiji achieve its NDC targets. Some critics question the legitimacy of Fiji's climate action against the enormity of these financing needs. They failed to realise that the first half of the equation to mobilise effective climate finance is the ability to clearly quantify your financing needs, while the second half is actually receiving and effectively managing the financing. Most climate-vulnerable countries fail with the first half of the equation, but by proactively costing its climate finance needs, Fiji was able to mobilise approximately FJ\$1.09 billion in development finance from external partners between 2016 and 2019 alone.

The world, Mr. Speaker, Sir, has taken note of Fiji's proactive approach to quantifying its climate finance needs and its innovative financing solutions. In fact, Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji's co-chairing the influential Taskforce on Access to Climate Finance with the UK COP 26 Presidency to develop a set of innovative principles and recommendations for improving direct access to affordable climate finance.

These principles and recommendations will then be piloted in five climate-vulnerable developing countries, and Fiji is already a frontrunner to be one of the five pilot countries. This new and innovative approach will be heavily marketed at COP 26 and Fiji stands to benefit significantly from it. However, the size, scope and speed of climate finance needed still far outweighs what is actually being mobilised.

To remedy this failing, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we will be pursuing the following at COP 26:

- Delivery of the US\$100 billion per year climate finance goal (this is globally).
- The start of the negotiations on a new climate finance quantitative target prior to 2025 from a flow of US\$100 billion per year, a sum of US\$750 billion per year is being proposed in particular by climate-vulnerable countries.
- An increase in climate financing for SIDS to up to 10 percent of global climate flows.
- An increased climate finance allocation for adaptation to, at least, 60 percent of overall global climate finance flow.
- The securement of long term private sector investment in adaptation.
- An increase in grant-based and long-term concessional climate funding from public sources for SIDS.
- Simplified access to processes and reporting templates for global climate funds.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, these sub-priorities are expected to be mutually reinforced through Parts 14 and 15 of the Climate Change Bill 2021.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think I am now within my time and as a matter of conclusion, Fiji's participation in COP 26 led by the Honourable Prime Minister is critical to ensure that Pacific voices, perspectives and solutions continue to inspire the global momentum on climate action. We simply cannot sit on the sidelines and wait for some multilateral miracle to save the climate. It is up to countries like Fiji to drive the climate agenda which, indeed, we are. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Attorney-General for his Ministerial Statement. Honourable Members, I now call on the Leader of the Opposition.

HON. RATU N.T. LALABALAVU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I rise to make our response to the Ministerial Statement which has just been made by the Honourable Attorney-General on COP 23 and the climatic change.

Sir, from the outset, I would like to thank the Honourable Attorney-General for his eloquent and well-articulated deliberation on the upcoming COP 26 that will be held in Glasgow, and our team led by the Honourable Prime Minister in meeting of the parties to the United Nations Climate Change Convention. From the Honourable Attorney-General, we have also learnt that the meeting which certainly will be quite a big one, will attract about 21,000 people and the impact it hopes to achieve by way of the various headings that have been articulated by the Honourable Attorney-General on resource mobilisation, especially for the adaptation of loss and damage. Sir, I would like to dwell wholly on this adaptation to the loss and damage and also the last ambit of this, to improve accessible and affordable climate finance.

Sir, the statement made by the Honourable Attorney-General is certainly just being designed and intended as a precursor to the debate so as to set the scene on the Bill that follow again in today's agenda. From the outset, we all agree that there is a need to participate in such very sensitive and far-reaching topics, such as climatic change. But at the same time, we, on this side of the House, would like to urge the Government of the day, if only the steps that we are going to be taking need not be hurriedly done so as to forget the very reason why we are here, which is representing the people that voted us into this august House, Sir. I say this because when people talk about loss and damage (I raised this several times), during Public Accounts Committee Meetings, even the workshop that was held at Natadola where the staff of the Ministry of Economy attended, and even in this august House.

To the laymen on the road, loss and damage, since it is quite prevalent now to see the disaster that befalls the nation soon after an act of God like cyclone, et cetera, is the damage and the loss that people

suffer through climatic change. That is the definition and the meaning that we want, Sir. All that has been brought to us is the Government is working on some kind of formula.

Sir, secondly is the risk that is involved. Local insurance companies would not like to take the risk of taking insurance cover for the loss and damage. But we have just heard from the Honourable Attorney-General that island countries representing about 1 percent of the world that is being affected by this climatic change suffers the most from rise in sea level, flooding and the never ending cyclones. As such, Sir, for us we would like to have a clear and better understanding of this loss and damage.

We have heard from the Honourable Attorney-General that they are going to be pushing again, and the last time that we discussed about this important topic of loss and damage in this House, we were informed by the champion of climate change, the Honourable Minister for Defence, National Security and Policing, Rural and Maritime Development that they were still working on something that would certainly be able to address loss and damage. And then we were informed by the Ministry's Officials at Natadola, that no insurance company wants to take the risk.

Sir, we have heard several times in this august House that 91 percent of the total land in Fiji belongs to the native Fijians. This legislation, having 40 other legislations, will probably be overriding the Native Land Trust Act, et cetera, it empowers under Clauses 19 and 20. The Minister and the relevant Director to ensure that whatever they push forward should not be, in any way, delay or to a certain extent, obstruct the targets and goals of this particular legislation, Sir.

As such I wish to remind the honourable House of how it affects the *vanua*. The definition of *vanua*, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is a bundle of rights. That definition was made by Professor Broby, a Ghanaian scholar who helped establish the land management course at the University of the South Pacific. He was invited and brought here by the Government of the United Kingdom. The definition of the *vanua* which is spelt out for us (because we do not have any definition), same as this Climatic Change Bill that is now before us there is no definition of carbon. We would like to understand what carbon is, is it something that is attached to the tree or what?

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. RATU N.T. LALABALAVU.- No, no, you listen, Dr. Reddy.

As such when we say *vanua*, in the vernacular it means *noqu vanua, na kequ vanua, na mequ vanua, na noqu i yau, o cei o au*. And I hope someone can translate that, Sir. It has deep rooted meaning there, Sir, and that is the *vanua*. What are we going to get out of this? That is the first question that we would like to ask.

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Traits.

HON. RATU N.T. LALABALAVU.- Traits, as mentioned by Honourable Minister for Women, thank you. To the landowners, what do they get? They have to go through a lease again.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. RATU N.T. LALABALAVU.- Sorry, I did not hear you correctly.

But again, Mr. Speaker, Sir, all that I was trying to highlight is, what is in this for the landowners? All that we are trying to do, it does not have a corresponding reflection of the ownership, percentage of land, together with what they will get.

With mining, you have surface rights and when you want to go into mining on a particular land, you have to ensure that your mining licence covers the right to enter the surface area, whether it is Native land or it belongs to the State or it belongs to a freeholder. Similar to this, it is silent. All it says, NLTB, people will have to apply, foreign companies will have to apply to cover a large tract of land to ensure that whatever investment they put in there for carbon trading will be forthcoming or is available to investors. What about the landowners? What about the resource owners? What is going to accrue to them? What is going to go down to them? That is so important, and we need to be clear on that right from the outset, Sir.

A paragraph right at the end, Sir, that is interesting as well, the accessibility to affordable climate finance. Certainly that is great, Sir. If we are going to be accessible to climatic affordable finance, that comes down to the Government. What it entails right down to the locals, we do not know. We have resettlement projects that are being undertaken by the Government to resettle villagers, even that is not fairly clear.

As to the new site they are going to be moving these people to, is it covered under Native reserve? What about their old village reserve, is it still going to be under Native reserve or that comes under some kind of a new land tenureship? Those are the questions that we would like to raise and we will be participating heavily in the debate on the Bill that is coming before this august House. I thank you, Sir, for the opportunity to participate.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his contribution to the debate. I now call upon the designated speaker of the Leader of the National Federation Party, the Honourable Qereqeretabua. You have the floor, Madam.

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the Honourable Minister for his Statement. I must also thank him for his very swift footwork in attempting to use Parliament to sandwich himself both pre-emptively and at the back to talk on climate change today. But God knows, the Government needs a major change in narrative - what with all the cruel and unjust purges beginning with the former Minister, and then experienced bureaucrats and professionals that they leave in their wake over the last few weeks, Mr. Speaker. It would not be surprising if this is going to be their new norm.

Mr. Speaker, nothing that has been elaborately detailed just now by the Honourable Minister is, in the least bit, convincing, where the Government's climate change intentions are, because we have seen the Committee's Report on the Climate Change Bill 2021, Bill No. 31/2021 that will be debated later today. Do the Minister's words echo the text of the Bill or was it simply an "Oh! By the way ..." kind of exercise because too much is already detailed in the Report but he has not told Parliament properly? Hopefully, Mr. Speaker, that type of retrospective ticking of boxes does not foreshadow what the proposed carbon budget exercise would be like.

One recurring thing for the Honourable Minister though is that, it is all about the money they do not have but are shamelessly begging for in the name of climate change. We have had promises. Accessing climate change funds, Mr. Speaker, we all know is not easy. We have had promises in the past, and actually getting it is a complicated exercise, even as the Honourable Minister said it is available globally.

Mitigation is where the bulk of the finance is, as he rightly pointed out. But we need money for adaptation and I am glad to hear the Honourable Minister say that their focus in Glasgow will be on adaptation finance. But as I have said earlier, it is not going to be easy to access international finance. Therefore, we have to look at our own resources to deal with climate emergency impacts and we will have more to say during the debate proper.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member for her contribution to the debate.

Honourable Members, on that note, we will suspend proceedings for tea break and we will resume in half an hour.

The Parliament adjourned at 10.32 a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 11.06 a.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I call upon the Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service, Communications, Housing and Community Development to move his motion. You have the floor, Sir.

CLIMATE CHANGE BILL 2021

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, pursuant to the resolution of Parliament on Thursday, 19th August, 2021, I move:

That the Climate Change Bill 2021, Bill No. 31/2021, be debated, voted upon and be passed.

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

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I remind you that pursuant to the resolution of Parliament, debate will be limited to one hour. I now call on the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service, Communications, Housing and Community Development to speak on his motion.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to make a statement on the Climate Change Bill 2021 which was tabled, as highlighted, in August. We understand that extensive consultations was conducted on the Bill by the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights, as to the Report tabled yesterday by the Committee Chairperson.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, while this Parliament has debated and considered Bills, motions, and various issues of public concern, the challenge we face as a result of global climate change may be the most complex and, indeed, most insidious. It is our sincere belief that the Climate Change Bill 2021 we have before us is unique in its potential to drive forward a holistic response to this challenge.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Bill has been designed to protect the overarching interests and rights of all Fijians and future generations of Fijians which is very important as, indeed, provided for under the Constitution. It does so by creating legally enforceable requirements designed to increase responsibility and accountability in relation to the management of current and future climate risks. It also provides a highly credible platform for progressing more transformative programming and financing arrangements with development partners.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in my Ministerial Statement on National Priorities at COP 26, we highlighted the recent assessment report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and the implications of its findings. The Report was a result of thousands of hours spent by hundreds of scientists to evaluate over 1,400 scientific publications related to climate change.

Over 30 years, the IPCC has compiled global knowledge and science on the current global impacts and projected impacts of climate change. While the IPCC Report released in 2014 was the scientific basis for the Paris Agreement in 2015 as mentioned, the science in 2021 is disturbingly indicative of failing ambition and risking climate risks.

We know without question, Sir, that global warming will continue under any and all future scenarios. We must be prepared for hotter days and more extreme temperatures. Ocean acidification is increasing because our oceans are warming. This is bad news for reefs and marine ecosystems that support our food security and, indeed, affect tourism.

When the oceans warm, we get stronger cyclones and face more and more extreme and, indeed, erratic weather patterns, including rainfall events. We cannot consider *TC Winston* as a one in a hundred year event anymore - sea level is rising faster in our corner of the Pacific and in many parts of the world. If the emissions continue anywhere near to current levels, this rise will be catastrophic in the long term.

Even with emissions minimised, the sea level rise that is already locked in from decades of rising emissions will severely impact our infrastructure, economy and our way of life, if we do not invest strategically and continuously to build resilience. Coastal inundations, storm surges, saltwater intrusion and the gradual retreat of our shorelines are realities that the Government, communities and private sector must specifically prepare for and pre-emptively take action to reduce.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the climate emergency that the Bill describes in Part 2 is constantly evolving and as such, continues to require a proportional response. Over the last four years, Government has built up the policy basis and intention that has culminated in the Climate Change Bill 2021 we have before us.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Bill has not been developed overnight. Through various drafts, three rounds of public consultations, small working group debates, consultations on specific policies and modalities it creates and draws on, and analysis of the particular threat that we as a nation face, this draft legislation has been built up to the robust and innovative framework it is today.

Since the Paris Agreement 2015, Mr. Speaker, Sir, this Government has continued to press forward with a range of policies and initiatives that are further formalised and inter-related by this proposed legislation. From mandating the role of the National Adaptation Plan to operationalising Relocation Guidelines, net zero 2050 target and climate financing objectives, this Bill captures and creates the necessary governance, arrangements and processes to build our collective accountability for addressing climate risks.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the IPCC has warned the global community time and time again that our ocean and arctic regions are facing changes that are becoming irreversible and the window for limiting global warming to below 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels, is closing rapidly. Here in the Pacific, we do not have the luxury of time, and appropriately this legislation addresses both, our vulnerability to rising risks, as well as our potential to limit our contribution to climate changing ways that are advantageous for our economy and the livelihoods it is comprised of.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we face an emergency at a scale our governance systems and societies have never experienced before. We must comprehend the nature of this emergency, it is not a short term or a sudden event that requires temporary changes and adjustments to how we operate and do business, it is a long term, protracted and unprecedented emergency that is not going away any time soon. Therefore, the Emergency Declaration in Part 2 of the Bill is an important framing for this legislation. Sir, to be clear, this is not a short or simple piece of legislation because it is a defence mechanism against the threat which is neither simple, nor quick to overcome.

The reality, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is that, we cannot tackle the climate crisis with projects and pilot initiatives alone. We need a system-wide approach, if we want to be successful. We cannot address this threat without investing in adaptation. We cannot call for a global phase-out of harmful fossil fuels, if we are dependent upon them in the long-term.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, consultations on this Bill has been extensive as it must be, to deliver and develop legislation of this calibre and scope. As I have mentioned earlier, before the Bill was even drafted, we had detailed information on public opinion in relation to many of the issues the Bill addresses. From the detailed consultation process and working groups set up to develop the National Adaptation Plan in Part 11, to the 2017 town hall meetings and the review of the first National Climate Change Policy, and the

later development of the 2018 Climate Policy which has supported the overall framing, principles and objectives set out in the Bill, to the sectorial consultations and technical analysis created to inform the development with the low emission development strategy which has shaped Parts 7, Parts 8 and Part 9 and ongoing efforts on the ground to develop guidelines and procedures, Mr. Speaker, Sir, for plan relocation in connection with Part 12. The connectivity and relationships between these policies are clear.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this Bill helps to map out key principles and objectives of these priorities, while creating new processes and mechanisms to advance them. The earlier version of the Bill was considered by the public in 2018 in tandem with Government's own internal review of the draft. Feedback was accepted online or in writing from 23rd September, 2018 to 31st December, 2019, which is about 18 months, Sir. This feedback, as well as submissions invited from regional partners and experts, help to shape the second draft of the Bill, which was published online in November 2020.

Key amendments to the Bill were announced on 20th November, 2020, via a press conference. Unfortunately, town hall style consultations that were planned for Nadi, Labasa and Suva were disrupted, first, by *TC Yasa* in December 2020, *TC Ana* in February and then by COVID-19. Mr. Speaker, Sir, it was, indeed, ironic to have consultations on the legislation affected by the very issues and challenges it aims to help us manage, outline, and online consultations were, therefore, extended from November 2020 until August 2021 as a response.

The current third iteration tabled in Parliament and referred to the Standing Committee and published online in August was, in part, informed by 350 written submissions from the public submitted via online over the consultation period. In addition to this, Mr. Speaker, Sir, submissions and extensive formal written reviews of the Bill have been received from ministries, international partners, local NGOs, development banks and academic institutions. Legal reviews have been commissioned from prominent law firms and legal experts.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the internal Government coordination to develop this Bill has been robust and indicative of the type of deepened collaboration this legislation seeks to instil. On 9th September, 2020, the Permanent Secretary for Economy sent a memo to all Permanent Secretaries requesting the opportunity for officials from the Climate Change International Cooperation Division of the Ministry of Economy, to provide in person briefings on the Bill.

Officials from the Division then developed and delivered presentations tailored to the interest of the line Ministries to help clarify the implications of the Bill on their respective portfolios. Since then, various recent policy documents, donor fund programming and the update of the existing legislation, such as the draft Forestry Bill, have all been informed by the intention of the draft provisions, demonstrating the need to understand these provisions and, indeed, develop the early appetite for these provisions.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have also sought advice from various sectors via various lenses, for example, Reserve Bank of Fiji (RBF) has been kept close to a trace on this process has conveyed its support for the Bill while identifying varying synergies with existing strategies and their development. The Bill has also been used as a case study example and discussion point during the RBF's hosting of a peer to peer learning event, with over 80 central banks facilitated by the Alliance for Financial Inclusion (AFI). The Ministry of Economy continues to work closely with RBF, recognising the need for it to champion the Bill through its engagement with the financial institutions.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to personally thank the Fijian Youth Groups that were involved. Over 400 individuals participated in a variety consultations sessions during the first Youth Climate Action Summit held here in Suva, in the course of three days in March of 2021. Those individuals who have written feedback, video blogs and verbal contributions during group consultations have been invaluable for the evolution of this important legislation, and you should feel proud of your engagement with this

important process. I would like to thank them, in fact, we had an opportunity of meeting some of them where they had a debate. Also, that was facilitated at the Ministry of Economy between the various groups.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to also thank the Ministry of Youth and Sports, UNICEF, Oxfam and other UN agencies and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), that helped made that unique platform possible. We also mentioned that the Bill was the centrepiece of the outcome statement endorsed at the end of the Summit, helping to provide an official record for the youth of tomorrow because the youth of today had their back.

These activities and others, such as consultations with the relevant Committees and groupings including the newly established National Ocean Policy Steering Committee to inform specific Parts and Clauses of the Bill, have continued to build awareness and support for the Bill. Feedback received has been meticulously tracked through various spreadsheets shared virtually between three legal teams, various advisors and officials.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, having submissions directly through this process, we can say with great certainty, Sir, that the edits and evolution of this Bill has been a shared endeavour, which has been directly influenced by an impressive array of stakeholders and perspectives, including our youth. From zoom consultations to *Facebook* forms, in person group consultations, formal letters and *Twitter* posts, this is a consultation process that has been truly influenced by both, the challenges and the opportunities that define our times.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Standing Committee has also conducted significant consultations on the Bill, as mentioned by the Chairperson. We also understand that the two political parties also made their submissions.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, given the scale of the climate risk that Fiji faces, it is vital to institutionalise climate change commitments through law and the reform of institutional arrangements and decision-making processes. To this end, this legislation places further requirements upon the Fijian Government, to ensure all Ministries and State entities are well appraised of climate risks and take steps to strategically adverse those risks.

Parts 4 and 5 of the Bill create the dedicated coordination mechanisms and reporting requirements needed, to ensure that the Fijian Government can better address climate risks that affect and crosscut multiple portfolios and sectors, requiring increased collaboration and burden-sharing to be adequately addressed.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will start by just going to the key points which I can then address if any issues are raised. While the Bill also creates a clear legal requirement of Ministries and State entities to consider and account for climate risks, it does so with the understanding that this Government is already taking on these responsibilities.

Mr. Speaker, furthermore, just to cut down my contribution and we do not mind, Sir, if we go slightly overtime because there is obviously some matters that others may want to address, the enactment of the Bill is also already cited as a key national commitment and means to support implementation within Fiji's enhanced Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) and the Paris Agreement which was submitted to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in December 2021.

Parts 7, 8, and 9 of the Bill provide the legal basis for our commitment to reducing the marginal contribution to climate change. We must bear in mind that reducing our dependence on fossil fuel is not

only important for the climate, but it is also in the interest of our economy as we have access to vast renewable energy resources that remain largely untapped.

While the cap to scale up access to the infrastructure required to utilise resources is significantly dependant on international support, we require and have noted in our NDC that we must also use this legislation to create a strong signal to our private sector, recognising not only the future of global energy technology but the changing preferences that will shape the tourism industry post-COVID-19.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think all the areas have been covered and are fairly straightforward. I would like to go into the provision and it would appear from the Honourable Leader of the Opposition's statement earlier on, they seem to focus predominantly on the carbon markets and about the rights of landowners, in particular the *iTaukei* landowners.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Part 10 of the Bill creates one of the first legal frameworks for engagement with the emerging carbon markets in our region and carbon dioxide is actually defined in the Bill itself, Honourable Lalabalavu. This Part is intended to support both, our climate mitigation and climate adaptation objectives. The concepts within this Part may be new to many as they relate to a new way of valuing environmental integrity and are relevant to activities that are already underway in Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, earlier this year, Fiji signed on to an Emission Reduction Payment Agreement with the World Bank. This legislation will help support that Agreement and future agreements designed to enhance our environment and increase the amount of carbon sequestered by forests, soils and, indeed, mangroves.

Alongside actions to limit emissions and transition of our energy sources, this Part helps to recognise the importance of natural services that sequester, store and remove carbon from our atmosphere. Our environment in Fiji is one of our greatest assets and the costs and risks associated with extractive activities must be better understood, and in some cases, offset by incentives to keep our land and habitats intact.

It is crucial, Mr. Speaker, Sir, for us to understand how exactly these arrangements work. To be clear, carbon markets will not pay us simply because we have forests and mangroves. The premise of this Agreement is that, activities are undertaken that create additional carbon sequestration potential - reforestation, for example, by planting trees, restoring mangroves, reducing logging and changing forest management practices, are the sort of activities that can be registered and used to create offset units.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, when a carbon credit is transferred offshore, there is no physical transfer of ownership made. The ultimate outcome is a change to accounting. Carbon sequestered in Fiji is accounted as an offset in another country, or for the benefit of a particular company. So, Qantas may come along, for example, ask for carbon offsets. The landowner is simply required to ensure there is no detriment to the land for the agreed period, and the Government must ensure that the carbon offset is not also accounted for elsewhere, called double accounting. Then following this permanence period, new activities can be undertaken and further transactions agreed on the same piece of land.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, participation in these arrangements and access to the benefit from these arrangements are dependent on the landowners or the lessees with the consent of the landowners. Government cannot, and I repeat, Government cannot progress these transactions without the consent of the landowners or iTLTB generally speaking, which leases the land, or through the Land Use Bank.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, again, this is reinforced by the fact that the Constitution protects communal land ownership rights. It is in the Constitution. You cannot have a law that will override the Constitution.

You cannot have arbitrary alienation of land as the Constitution also provides. You cannot arbitrarily take away land.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in fact, landowners have a multi-layered protection guaranteed under the Fijian law. To put it simply, as I explained to the Honourable Leader of the Opposition during tea break that currently in Fiji, neither the iTLTB nor the Lands Department has issued any lease for carbon trading to anyone (privately), none done whatsoever. If, for example, iTLTB has given someone, at the moment, a logging lease to do logging, that is the purpose of the lease. If the person whose got the logging lease decides tomorrow to look at this and say, “Oh, I can actually make money, I do not have much capital to buy trucks and all that, I will go and do carbon trading”, the moment he/she decides as lessee, the purpose of the lease changes as allowed for under the iTaukei Lands Trust Act, the applicable regulations 14 (1)(c), (2)(b) and Paragraph 5 in the Land Use Act. They have to come back to the lessor and say, “Look, you gave me a forestry lease or logging lease, I now want to do carbon trading.” You have to get the consent of iTLTB, you cannot change the purpose of the lease. The law applies for that.

In the same way, if I go to iTLTB tomorrow and I lease some land for residential purposes, if I want to start having commercial activities, the purpose of the lease changes and Honourable Nawaikula knows this, so you have to get the consent of the landowner.

(Honourable Opposition Member interjects)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Bill No. 17 does not touch consent, and that is the point which you do not understand. Bill No. 17 is only in relation to mortgages and connecting electricity.

(Honourable Opposition Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Honourable Gavoka, do not shake your head. I am explaining this to you.

If you look at the provision of Bill No. 17, it still gives iTLTB and the landowners the right to actually have a say, whether the lease is going to be a sublease or sublet and the actual purpose of the lease is going to be changed, they still have a say.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- Old rubbish!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- What do you mean “old rubbish”? You do not understand. What an idiotic comment! You are acting like a buffoon actually.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- Watch your mouth!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- I will watch my mouth, you watch your mouth.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is the kind of intellectual contribution you get from these people. The law, at the moment, and again like I had highlighted, they have set a narrative. Even though the facts are staring at their face, they will not change from the narrative because for them, they see political mileage.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the law quite specifically says, and my example is, if I have a logging lease, at the moment, from iTLTB and I want to do carbon trading, I cannot do carbon trading because the law states that the purpose of the lease has changed. So, I have to go to iTLTB and say, "I want to do carbon trading." Then iTLTB can go to the landowners and say, "Hey, do you want to lease this land to this guy - instead of logging, he is opting for carbon trading?" They can say, "No, he will not get a lease. If he wants to give up his logging lease, then he give up his logging lease." If he says, "Alright, I will do logging in which you gave consent", he will continue with that. If he says, "No, you cannot get a lease," he cannot do carbon trading.

If you look at the provisions under Clauses 45 and 46, for example, even if iTLTB and the landowners agree, "Yes, you can have a carbon trading lease for the purpose you can lease the land for carbon trading purposes", when he goes to register that right for carbon trading with the Registrar of Titles, there is another requirement. The Registrar of Titles will say, "Yes, I can see your lease but go back to the landowners and get 60 percent of them to agree that you want to do carbon trading", a two-layered system that ensures that everyone has given their consent.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is how the law has been drafted and I cannot understand the kind of ruckus that they are making. We saw comments made by the Deputy Leader of SODELPA before the Committee and, unfortunately, Honourable Ratu Lalabalavu, please, I urge you to look at the law properly. I think you are being misled by people around you.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the reality of the matter is, as he highlighted, 91 percent of all the land in Fiji is *iTaukei* owned. Of course, not all the land has got forest on it. Namosi has got vast areas, Naitasiri has got vast areas, probably pockets of Ba and Cakaudrove, a wonderful opportunity for the landowners, and most of these land are actually under reserve, or are not being leased out. It is a wonderful opportunity for them to gain directly from it and it is all protected.

Honourable Lalabalavu said to me that the Minister has got the authority. We cannot go and takeover any land. Property rights are protected. How more plain can we get? That seems to be the only objection to it.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have highlighted the second layer of protection which is in Clauses 45 and 46. We have done this legislation simply to create the legal framework for recognising these rights - the process for registering projects, and the process for creating and transferring tradeable units. Creating a new set of rights and new tradeable unit of value means that Fiji can benefit from emerging carbon markets. However, the degree to which we will do so is still dependent on the way these markets evolve.

The final version of Part 10 gives us the legal basis and flexibility to engage with both, voluntary and more formally internationally regulated carbon markets, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Part 10 creates a new potential source of income for communities. It also creates incentives for activities that are beyond the creation of income.

Some people also have a simple understanding that it means, you just do not cut down the forest anymore. If you actually have a plan, you can cut it down in a managed manner that is acceptable. You may cut certain trees, you may plant underneath it, all of that will bring about better management of our forest and all of that will also bring additional revenue, with the trees still in the ground.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have, sort of, highlighted all of that, but as I have said, their rights guaranteed under Sections 28, 29 and 30 of the Constitution are also protected in this particular Bill.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in the interest of time, I will stop there and respond to any other queries that may be raised. Thank you, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Attorney-General. Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate. I give the floor to the Honourable Professor Prasad. You have the floor.

HON. PROFESSOR B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I understand we only have five minutes each to contribute on this Bill. What I want to do, Mr. Speaker, is to inform this House that the Joint Opposition Caucus (SODELPA and NFP) met on 13th September and we discussed and deliberated on the Bill in its current form. It was unanimously agreed that there were many grey areas in need for further extensive and meaningful consultations to ensure that the new law is relevant in the Fiji context.

Whilst we appreciate the Government's initiative to ensure that we have a law in place prior to the 26th Conference of Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), we also felt that we must ensure that it is practical and relevant in the Fiji context. Securing climate finance is important, but the legislation must be robust and acceptable to our people.

Mr. Speaker, we always say this in Parliament that when we make a law (and this is a very comprehensive piece of legislation), I have always said that we must not rush into making laws. Sometimes, it is better not to have a law than to have a bad law that is not understood by the people, and that cannot be implemented in an effective and efficient manner because laws have to be efficient and also practical in its implementation.

I just want to read some of the pertinent issues that we raised with the Chairman of the Committee and I want to read that. First, we said that we should not rush into passing a Bill which has far-reaching impacts and goes across all facets of social and economic development of our nation. Therefore, more time is needed for consultation to ensure clarity, simplicity, acceptability and most of all, the need for collective ownership which will facilitate effective implementation of the new law.

Secondly, we said that the new law will have an impact on, at least, 40 other existing laws. Therefore, it is imperative that proper analysis be undertaken, Mr. Speaker, to ensure that there is better synergy and harmonisation between the Bill and this prior existing legislative framework, further effective and meaningful consultations are necessary to address overlapping and to ensure consistency.

Thirdly, the proposed Bill provides a wide range of powers to the responsible Minister and the Director which need clarity. The Honourable Minister has power to issue guidelines to Ministers giving Ministerial response under the consultation for the 40 existing laws and to issue regulations as empowered in Clauses 9, 20, 43, 48, 84 and 111 of Bill No. 31 of 2021.

We also said that there is need for clarity on the definition of 'carbon' and the requisite formulas. We said the importance of the proposed legislation to the price of energy, as we depend on fossil fuel for transport and production.

The implication of proposed legislation to our resource owners which we had some discussion already, ensuring a fair share of existing legislation relating to the rights of resource owners need to be addressed. When you talk about carbon sequestration, it could include freehold land and other land such as State land.

In that letter, Mr. Speaker, to the Chairman of the Committee, we requested more time and we said that whenever a country determines its laws and regulations for its people to future proof and provide buffers from the devastation and tragedy of climate change and its impact, the noblest endeavour that Parliament, as the legislative arm of the State, must undertake is to consult as widely as possible with as many people as possible who will be affected by the new law.

Mr. Speaker, our collective view in that workshop was, the Bill cannot be supported in its present form and while at that time we did not wish to pre-empt the good work of the Standing Committee, it was our view that we could not support the draft Bill in its current form.

Now, Mr. Speaker, we have looked at this Report, we have looked at the amendments and we still believe that the discussions we had, and we had some very good expert advice from Environmental Lawyers, organisations and all of them agreed on the position and the issues that were raised by the joint caucus.

Mr. Speaker, on that note, I wish to say that the amendments that have been made are very cosmetic, minor, it does not take into account the expressed view of the Members of the caucus in terms of the way in which the Bill is drafted, and its implementation is going to be complicated. We believe that in this present form and without clarity, without people understanding the law, it may not be possible for us to achieve the objectives that we are to achieve.

Let me end with the statement, Mr. Speaker, and I am sure Honourable Members of the Opposition will expound on each of the issues that we raised that we are not opposed to Fiji having a climate change law. But the law, in its present form that has been presented in Parliament with minor amendments cannot be supported and we must not rush into making this law.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Professor Prasad. You have the floor, Honourable Nawaikula.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Mr. Speaker, before I begin, can I just get clarification on the time. Are we still limited to the one hour time?

HON. SPEAKER.- You have the floor.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Thank you. Mr. Speaker, let me say, at the outset, there is no doubt that we all recognise the urgent need and the importance of putting into place all necessary measures to cushion the impact of climate change on our small, vulnerable nation. Our generation have experienced the impact of climate change in our daily lives. The intensity and regular occurrence of natural disasters we are experiencing today is a testimony of climate change. Therefore, we must all work together to mitigate the impact of climate change and put into place realistic, practical and relevant measures to ensure our mitigation and resilient efforts are sustainable for our future generations.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there are many ways to skin the cat, but we must take a well-targeted approach that is robust, practical and relevant to our need rather than just adopting law that is foreign to us and not applicable to our current need and our future generation. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we must first take stock of what we are and what we have through genuine consultation with all stakeholders, to ensure that we are part of the solution and take ownership of the most practical approach that we can all embrace.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is against this backdrop that I will base this side of the House's contribution to the debate of our important piece of this far-reaching legislation. Sir, we all agree that the issue of climate change is a cross-cutting issue since it goes across all facets of socio-economic development of our nation. Therefore, it is more important to ensure that a robust consultation mechanism and awareness programme must be undertaken before considering such a deal which is cross-cutting in nature, and it will have far-reaching implications.

The Bill in front of us today, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that we are debating is intended to create a legal framework for a National Response to Climate Change, and as I said earlier, the intention maybe considered noble but the approach adopted by the Government in fast trading is not acceptable.

Through the passing of this Bill, it will show our commitment to the Paris Agreement, it will fall far short, since there are still many grey issues that need to be addressed, particularly at macro and international level, that need to be clarified, and these include, firstly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that different sets of rules apply to each country, and we must bear that in mind. This simply means that small polluters are asked to take drastic measures, whilst countries such as India and China, who are the greatest contributors to greenhouse gas, are not requested to reduce their emissions.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the impact on investment and employment particularly, for small development countries. Our investment level as a percentage to gross domestic product is very low, as well as our ranking in the ease of doing business continue on a declining trend. We need investment to generate employment opportunities, therefore, we should carry out a detailed analysis before considering on such far-reaching legal framework.

Thirdly, at this point in time, we do not know how much carbon we need to cut to produce the required result, more so how to cut and where to cut. We must be certain before we put into legislation and it is not just for show.

Fourthly, as we depend on fossil fuel, we need to know the impact and the price of energy in the medium term. We very much depend on fossil fuel for production and our transport sector. How do we strike the balance?

Fifthly, there is a need for a very clear standard, specific reporting procedure, to ensure there is no double cutting or claims. We are to consider our capacity and should take an active approach as we move forward.

Those, Mr. Speaker, Sir, are fundamental issues that need to be considered through dialogue and consultation before we put into place a framework that will work, taking into account the fundamentals highlighted above. I understand that the Government had endorsed a Green Growth Framework in 2015 which had undergone extensive consultation nationwide, including a dedicated national summit.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we need to know the lessons learnt from the existing Framework, or is it just another document gathering dust in the shelf for show? I have here a copy of that, very extensively provided for by the Planning Office and it is titled, "A Green Growth Framework for Fiji 2014", which I am referring to. I took some time to look at this review – Restoring the Balance in Development, such as what I am holding here in my hand. The main reason why I reviewed the document was to determine the consistency of this Framework with the legal framework we are now debating today.

The Framework identified and prioritised ten key thematic areas covered in the three pillars, pillar of socio-economic development which include the environmental pillar, social pillar and economic pillar. All these pillars are cost cutting in nature. The document identified key challenges proposed forward which are time bound for each of the 10 thematic areas identified. These documents also reviewed existing policies, legislations and initiatives and also include the implementation and monitoring arrangements.

In the Honourable Prime Minister's own words referring to this document, when he launched the framework he said it is a living document and will guide Fiji's commitment and effort in restoring a balance in development. It is important Mr. Speaker, Sir, that the proposed legal framework does not reflect nor take into account the well-established framework already adopted by the Government. In my view, the Honourable Attorney-General decided, by doing this, to re-invent the wheel through a legal framework that will not work and just consolidate its power base which I will touch on later in looking at the Bill.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me now address the contents of the Bill. My initial reaction is that the legal framework has a lot of flaws trying to cover many areas without proper targeting, taking into account our capacity and our need earlier, most importantly, the need for clarity on the basic fundamentals that I have raised above. Again Mr. Speaker, Sir, take into account the cost cutting nature of the Bill, more consultation is necessary. Most importantly, this legal framework will also impinge on the latest 40 other legislations. Majority of these legislations will have an impact on resource owners particularly land that are owned communally by the *iTaukei*. We have to be mindful of the requirement of United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP) and ILO Convention 169 whereby the consent of the indigenous people is critical for such undertaking. We must also recognise their human rights.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in its current form, the Bill gives too much power to the responsible Minister and Director particularly, in making the regulation that may have far reaching impact on our citizens that may impose on their human rights. The biggest challenge is the implementation, enforcement and the associated costs. We should at least learn from the development in Malolo Island in the Western Division and the Nawi Island in Savusavu. Despite the fact that we have in place, the Environment Management Act (EMA) we did not follow it because of nepotism and the intentions of a few. Our experience in the relocation of people has not worked well and there are lessons to learn including the resettlement of our citizens.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in conclusion while we support the need for a legal framework to adjust climate change, we must ensure that it is relevant, practical and we must take ownership of it. We can only receive these through dialogue and genuine consultation with all stakeholders, private sector, Civil Society Organisation (CSO), religious bodies, Provincial Councils and the Advisory Councils and other members of the public.

It seems to me Mr. Speaker, Sir, Government is just trying to put into place a framework to show the world (COP26) that we have a framework just to have access to Climate Change Funding without any clear guideline in place. Whilst the majority of developing countries are taking a cautious approach, today I believe only five development countries have passed legislation frameworks to respond to climate change based on the Paris Agreement. We should not be rushing this which is a hallmark of the FijiFirst Government which led to regular amendments in a very short period of time.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me conclude by addressing the impact of this legislation to the resource owners. We know that 91 percent of the land as confirmed by the Honourable Attorney-General is owned by the indigenous, and the greatest impact of this legislation will be upon them. But my view, Mr. Speaker, after having looked at the legislation is that, it will facilitate the exploitation of their resource. This will facilitate it and if you allow me to explain.

I had expected, looking at the legislation and we had made submissions to the Committee, that iTLTB must be empowered to reserve carbon areas, as opposed to what the legislation is doing. The legislation is saying, yes, they can do it, but you have to come in line and apply to put a title on that area. That, to me, will result in a disaster.

The Honourable Attorney-General asked, how can you do that because we need to go back to their consent? But in these many years of history of the iTLTB, consent has not worked to protect their interest. And as a result of that, they have lost all arable land, and the only areas that are left to them are their forests. So, I am saying that this legislation has not gone far enough, it should have empowered iTLTB.

I have looked at the submission from iTLTB, but it was not enough. The Government is saying, they can go and follow the line and apply to have their areas for carbon trading, but I am saying that is not enough. The iTLTB should be empowered. So, against that, I am pleading to the *iTaukei* landowners

out there, this legislation will exploit you, people from outside will come in, anxious to take titles of their forests.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- They cannot.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- No, they cannot do that.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- I know they cannot. They should follow the process but my point is that, that process has not worked in these many years. So, the best thing for them is to go now to iTLTB and reserve their forests so that they can benefit from carbon trading. If you will be sitting down in your villages, they will come and take all your forests.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member. I give the floor to the Honourable Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise before this Honourable House to support the Climate Change Bill, Bill No. 31 of 2021, and thank the Minister responsible for Climate Change for tabling the Bill before this House. The comprehensive document before us is a timely intervention to reflect the ever-growing action on climate emergency. Anthropogenic interferences have caused several alterations to the environment that needs immediate rectification for a mitigated today and sustainable tomorrow.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, climate change is a critically significant issue in Fiji as the country is particularly exposed to rising sea levels, coastline erosion, flooding, salt water intrusion and erratic weather patterns causing frequently intense cyclones. These climate-induced adversities combined with rising global average temperatures is beginning to displace over communities and disrupt the national economy. Tourism, agriculture, fisheries which accounts for a bulk of our national gross domestic product will be severely impacted because of climate change further increasing poverty, biodiversity loss and food and security. All of these issues which all of us are talking about and wanting to protect going forward.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as the world rapidly moves towards a decarbonised future, Fiji must do the same. We cannot afford to be left behind in the global green revolution and we cannot miss the opportunity to leverage our climate ambitions to access greater knowledge and technology transfer. Almost every Fijian regardless of political affiliation, financial position, age or gender, are directly or indirectly affected by climate change and they are expected to look to this Parliament for any signal or promise; a promise of a steadfast political leadership approach to addressing this challenge.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, apart from communicating with an ambitious and updated Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) in 2020, Fiji has developed a robust plan to transition towards a net zero future by 2050, following through decarbonisation pathways outlined in the Fiji Low Emissions Development Strategy (LEDS) 2018 to 2050. As a signatory to both, the Paris Climate Agreement and Kyoto Protocol, national policies and legislation such as LEDS and the proposed Climate Change Bill 2021 creates an enabling environment to accelerate domestic climate action.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this Bill offers a response to domestic issues linked to climate change. To deal with today's pressing environmental problems, ecological changes brought on by human activity must be quickly fixed with remedial steps taken now to prevent these changes from causing even further damage tomorrow.

The Climate Change Bill 2021 establishes a framework for implementing the Paris Agreement. Our country's ability to respond to global warming concerns and ocean health is further assisted. Additionally, an essential part of the turnover is developing a legislative mechanism to safeguard the

Fijian community now and into the future, as well as take advantage of the opportunities out there from developed countries in terms of carbon trading.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in principle, I must state that the Bill is remarkable in the breadth of things that it attempts to do particularly, because it aims to declare a climate emergency, establish new governmental organisations to fulfil emission goals and establish new criminal offences. It continues to pave the way for frequent policy reviews of current policies and create some new policies to mitigate the effects of climate change, adjust of consequences of global climatic threats. It also attempts to organise a whole of Government approach to take ownership of the issue of climate change, even to the extent of individual ministries requiring to have a climate budget.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Bill has wide-ranging implications which are of particular interest to the Ministries that I preside over - Agriculture, Waterways and Environment. During conversations about the changing climate, we preferred to mainly concentrate on carbon dioxide as the major green-house gas generated by burning of fossils, industrial output and changes to land use practices. Additional green-house gases, like methane, nitrous oxide and trace gases like chlorinated gases have contributed significantly to global warming to date, apart from carbon dioxide. Through the Bill, corporations and state-owned enterprises must disclose the climate risk and climate related investment they made to mitigate those risks. Additional climate action initiatives and conserving power in the Bill, including legal recourse, adaptation and the construction of strong lines as well as incorporating prior plastic and marine protection policies.

Mr. Speaker, to elaborate further on the issue of plastic and marine pollution, I bring to your attention while speaking at the 30th SPREP Environmental Ministers High Level Talanoa Meeting on 10th September, 2021, I emphasised that our oceans play a critical and imperative role in combating climate change, reserving biodiversity and supporting sustainable development. We note that tourism and fisheries are vital sectors for Fiji's economy and ocean reliant activities are linked to our health, wealth, history and culture, as a region.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, microplastics account for 8 percent of the total mass of the Great Pacific Garbage Patch (GPGP), which equals an enormous direct 4 per cent of the total 1.8 trillion pieces of plastic floating in the GPGP. More than 80 percent of the marine plastics pollution is land-based, thus any effective policy to reduce them must target land-based plastic pollution and this proposed Bill is a step in the right direction, if you ask me.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I further reiterated five days ago whilst commemorating the World Oceans Day on 16th September, the importance of ozone layer and human survival, as well as the survival of our ecosystem. Most of the sun's damaging UV light is shielded from Earth by this stratospheric layer or the ozone layer. A layer of the ozone in the stratosphere helps protect the Earth from harmful solar radiation, yet without this, life as we know will not be possible, including the flora and fauna.

This Bill further solidifies our commitment to protect the environment by eliminating and regulating the use of ozone depleting substances. Companies and corporations are on progressive steps to continuously produce innovative, modern technologies that eliminate harmful gases. Later today, during the question and answer session, I will be talking about the progress that we have made with regards to eliminating ozone depleting substances. So while on one hand, we are adopting technologies to substitute the use of ozone depleting gases, we must also seize this opportunity to adapt laws and regulations that help us check and protect our environment.

We cannot merely use moral suasion to continuously ask for compliance, we need to back ourselves up, back our ministries, back our departments and statutory bodies to undertake the planning,

the strategic plans and the budgets, et cetera, to ensure that all of sync in, share a common vision of protecting our country, building resilience with regard to climate change.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, specifically, the Bill calls for measures to be supported by commitments through gender equality, social inclusion and human rights and to ensure that these governance mechanisms are inclusive as recommended, these commitments to be further developed, a societal approach to addressing climate change needed involving roles for governments, civil society and the business sector and this Bill proposes to achieve that.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I take this opportunity again to thank the Honourable Minister for Climate Change for tabling this Bill, and I implore on Honourable Members on the other side to support the Bill.

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

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With your permission, Mr. Speaker, let me just take this time to pay tribute and extend our condolences to a true son of Fiji, Josefa Tuamoto, who passed away two days ago. Joe is a true son of the *Vanua, Turaga na Tui Namuka*, who is one of us here in Parliament. He was very prominent in tourism, he was our Director of Marketing when I was CEO at the Fiji Visitors Bureau then. He looked after our offices in Los Angeles and Sydney and became CEO on my departure. He played a huge role in the marketing of Fiji, he was the one who was behind the branding *Fiji Me* which ran in Fiji for quite some time. So, SODELPA, and I am sure Honourable Members of this House, would like to pay our condolences to his wife, Una, and his four children, and the *Vanua* of Namuka.

Mr. Speaker, on the Climate Change Bill 2021, when I look at this, I remember the work of the President of COP23, who was very active in the last Parliament and I say, "Okay, this is now the culmination of all the work that had occurred during that period." We all agree that climate change is an immediate danger to this planet, and that steps need to be taken to mitigate its effect on humanity. But it is also a very controversial issue.

There are the naysayers, people who do not believe in this and we know that when the Paris Agreement was reached, President Obama was all for it. But then came President Trump, he was against it, but now we have President Joe Biden, who is back supporting the Paris Agreement and this Climate Change Bill.

It affected the journey here today when President Trump decided not to support this. As you know, when America sneezes, the world catches cold. When I look at this, I say that it is something we had to do, given the times we live under. We cannot ignore the danger that is there and this Parliament would do well to debate this and come to an agreement to set this in place for Fiji. Imagine, if the whole world, all the countries in the world do this and what the effect will be.

A couple of weeks ago, we were told a part of the North Pole, ice had melted because of the heat in the world today, which is the size of Greenland. I mean, that is a threat to humanity on climate change. But we just wish, Mr. Speaker, that this matter could have been taken to the people in a more inclusive way.

Our President of COP23 and we remember those days. It looks in those days as if the whole Cabinet was there in Bonn or wherever the meeting was held. They were there, not for a few days but for weeks, I believe in a month, they were there. Some of us asked, "Hey, who's running the show?" I mean, everyone here was up there in Europe. We saw our Prime Minister with Arnold Schwarzenegger and all those superstars in the world. So, it has come to this that we have this Bill.

However, we are concerned that not everyone, including this side of the House, fully understand the implications of this. Hence, the need to have more dialogue on this matter. I mean, it does not even have a definition of carbon. Does it have a definition of carbon in this thing? There is no definition of a carbon here. Have you considered mapping out and surveying all these areas? The cost involved, have you considered that? Is it factored here?

On the proceeds that come in, what is the sharing formula on who is going to get it? We talk about the resource owners. How much of this will they get? Where is the economics of carbon trading? I mean, the vast majority of the people in the country do not understand this thing.

So, Mr. Speaker, again, it is a tragedy with FijiFirst, the way they run roughshod over the people of Fiji. And it appears that there is a conference in Scotland next month and the Champion of COP23 will say, "I am one of the five to six countries who have passed the Climate Change Bill." That appears to be the motivation here, that our Honourable Prime Minister will go to Scotland and we will be one of the only six countries in the world to say, "I have passed the Climate Change Bill".

(Honourable Government Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker, I will be proud of the Honourable Prime Minister if he follows dialogue in this country. Remember, we saw this on television, the *talanoa* he took to Bonn, Mr. Speaker, in the past. Can you start a *talanoa* in Fiji first, please? Let us have the *talanoa* here before you go and *talanoa* there.

(Honourable Government Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. V.R. GAVOJKA.- Mr. Speaker, when some people are set in their ways, they might be talking to the wall but luckily and fortunately, only down the next couple of months, the people of Fiji will say, "We want a change".

(Honourable Government Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- The people would be running this country very soon and the people will say, "Let us have some of the people who really understand what *talanoa* is." It is not only to showcase a part of Fiji and get all the credit with the superstar, the rich and famous in the world, it has to be done, it will start here in Fiji, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

We have expressed our concern in the letter which was copied to you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that it is still too vague. We still do not understand a lot of this, more needs to be done and that we would just wish that we can take this back to the people and have proper consultation. Just look at the template we did when we did the Qoliqoli Bill, try and read that and follow that example on how inclusive it was. Do not come here and do it the way you do it. We do not even understand how much it will cost to run all this. No one has talked about the cost of this.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is tragic that we approach the FijiFirst this way but I believe the whole country is saying that we want to understand this. We want to know this, bring it to us and let us have dialogue. That is why we have our reservations but knowing the way it is, it will pass today.

The Honourable Prime Minister will go to Scotland, flying the Fiji flag. I do not know if he is going to take a cultural group, like he did in Bonn. Remember he took a cultural group to Bonn.

(Honourable Members interject)

(Laughter)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- But Honourable Minister, please, do not overdo it this time, do not trick the whole team. Someone has to be around the shop.

(Honourable Government Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- You are having problem, at least, the way you mess things up but make sure that some people stay behind to run the show.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we do not support this Bill. We know the challenges in the world today, we know that we need to do it but it is far-reaching, and 40 other laws are subservient to this Bill.

(Honourable Government Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, maybe, they do not read the Bill but the Honourable Minister for Fisheries, please, on page 82, there are 40 laws there that will be subservient to this and most of those laws are laws that affect the itaukei - the resource owners. So, it is another typical FijiFirst initiative and you know what they are like, short-sighted and we know that in no time, there will be amendments coming to this House. But if you do it properly, we do not have to go through all the pain we go through that we have to quickly change.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have made my point. This is a good initiative but as always badly executed by FijiFirst. We are against it, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I 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. The best *talanoa* that Honourable Gavoka can have could be at home, with his son-in-law.

(Laughter)

He would be very well informed, Sir, or the other side would be best informed.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to support the Climate Change Bill 2021. This Bill seeks to legislate net zero greenhouse gas emission by 2050, Sir. It actually provides, Sir, a clear approach to addressing and mitigating impacts and it is actually with the whole of Government approach. This is why it is very important for all of us on both sides of the House to ensure that we read it carefully instead of just picking on little bits of it.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this Bill will solidify Fiji's approach to climate change targets and I am going to deal particularly with respect to trade and investment, tourism and transport and micro, small and medium enterprises development, building construction and standards.

Through the number of initiatives, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Bill will allow all government ministries to align our programmes to ensure the realisation and the objectives of the Bill. This includes inter alia harnessing trade agreements, our incentivising appropriate investment mechanisms and ensuring a greener recovery, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Commerce, Trade, Tourism and Transport is leading negotiations on the first ever trade agreement that has sustainability at its core and the Agreement on Climate Change, Trade and Sustainability (ACCTS) is progressively negotiated by a current party which include Costa Rica, Fiji, Iceland, New Zealand, Norway and Switzerland. The aim of the negotiation is to generate momentum towards globally agreed solutions to environmental challenges.

The ACCTS, Mr. Speaker, Sir, will put in place disciplines for trade in environmental goods and trade in environmental services, fossil fuel subsidies and ECAL levy, so as you can see, Sir, it is all encompassing and the Bill will therefore provide a legal framework to give confidence to trading partners on Fiji's commitment to adaptation and mitigation measures and this further supports investment, development and uptake of green technologies in products that utilise renewable energy sources.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, when it comes to investments, Fiji's focus is on green technology and green manufacturing and other environment-related investments. This has been strengthened under the ambit of the investment policy statement which sets the overall vision of the Fijian Government in terms of foreign, direct and domestic investments. In addition, with respect to Fijian Tourism 2021 and its success of framework, it has specific focus on greening the tourism sector by encouraging investments in renewable energy and other environment initiatives.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, one of the most important features of the Bill is the opportunities that it actually brings, the opportunity to harness new technologies, opportunity to implement green recovery principles and opportunity to shift to policy and business practices that better balance environmental, social and economic impacts of tourism. In this regard, the Bill advocates for public-private partnership to strengthen mechanisms for a green recovery, Sir.

The Ministry is also working with the Ministry of Economy and the Global Green Growth Institute on the Low Emissions Climate Resilient Development Programme specifically on updating of vehicle standards to align with upgraded fuel standards particularly for vehicle engine efficiency.

In addition, the Bill paves the way for the investment and development of climate resilient infrastructure and specifically through the amendments of the National Building Code and the code was established over 30 years ago and lacks the adaptability to climate change and catastrophic natural disasters that we all know too familiarly well, Sir. Therefore, the ongoing review and updating of the provisions and standards within the National Building Code will enable new buildings to be climate resilient and also environmentally-friendly.

Under Part 2, Mr. Speaker, Sir, Clause 71 of the Bill, it has been stressed that prior to making any decisions on infrastructure and building proposals, the relevant approval agencies also must ensure that a Climate Risk and Resilience Assessment has been conducted. This is the key consideration that will need to be implemented in approving agencies and existing laws and policies.

As you can see, Sir, all of these works that have been done towards this Bill, have actually been done very forensically. It is not just FijiFirst that has decided to do this and slap bang - here, it is on the

table, contrary to what the Opposition may believe, Sir. Climate change is bringing about shifts not only to global temperatures but it is also in our weather patterns and these changes pose an emerging risk on the structural integrity of our buildings. And the way our architects and engineers design in building our towns and cities, it will certainly prompt the need to adopt modern technologies, it will allow the design of very energy efficient buildings and introduction discussion and implementation of practical concepts such as rooftop gardens to improve air quality and cityscape and greener buildings, Sir.

When it comes to the transport sector, Mr Speaker, Sir, the Bill provides significant provisions that will help the Fijian Government in making meaningful changes towards reaching our goal of decarbonisation of that sector. In collaboration with the Ministry of Economy, the Ministry will lead the Transport Decarbonisation Implementation Strategy to decarbonise the transport sector by 2050, and this is specifically stated in Clause 44 of the Bill.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in addition to compiling information on fuel sales, the Ministry will also be responsible for estimating and compiling an emission reduction data in relation to the transport sector. It will also further support the objectives of the Pacific Blue Shipping Partnership (PBSP) in implementing decarbonisation of Fiji's shipping industry and through this partnership, Fiji and the Republic of Marshall Islands are leading the Pacific commitment to net zero carbon emissions from shipping industry by 2050. We are also working through the PBSP and the World Bank, including other partners, on a multi-country assessment of the maritime connectivity and options for governance reform with the aim to decarbonise the maritime sector.

Just in short, Sir, in conclusion, it will also enhance the proper collection of sector-based data and information needed for emissions. In addition, it will implement regulations, et cetera, measures and actions with the purposes of limiting or reducing Fiji's greenhouse gas emissions that will basically just mean a cleaner and greener means in terms of our transport sector. It will be beneficial to us in building climate resilience in the transport sector like positive impacts including resource efficiency, economic security, sustainability of the ecosystem and increased economic dynamism.

With those few words, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I fully and wholeheartedly support the Climate Change Bill 2021, and I thank you for the opportunity, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister. I now give the floor to the Honourable Rasova. You have the floor.

HON. S.R. RASOVA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I rise to make a short contribution to the Bill before the House. At the outset, Sir, I confirm my support to the Opposition, articulated by the Honourable Leader of the Opposition and my colleagues from this side of your loyal Opposition, that these are collective views that this Bill cannot be supported in its current form.

The removal of the reference of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) of 2007 underscores the unfortunate lack of consultation with landowners, both Native landowners, who collectively own 91 percent of land in Fiji and also the freehold landowners crown leases and native leases, many of whom cover the most fertile land in Fiji. It is a principle of good governance that Government will consult the Government, simply claiming the election's mandate does not mean the people have ceded all their rights to the Government. Government must still govern with the consent of the people.

In this regard, UNDRIP requires the free prior and informed consent of the indigenous people or the first peoples of this land before any laws, programmes or initiatives which affect their wellbeing are being implemented. The removal of UNDRIP removes that component to guide the implementations of the super law on the super Minister.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Part 13 of the Act specifically deals with the oceans and climate change, and includes the framework for oceans and decision-making that is in line with Fiji's international oceans commitments.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, with such commitment, it is the recognitions of Fiji's maritime boundaries and maritime zones created in accordance with the United Nations Conventions on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) 1982, regardless of the effects of climate change.

The other international commitment is to ensure that all the maritime zones is to be 100 percent sustainably and effectively managed, and to designate 30 percent of its maritime zones and Marine Protected Areas (MPAs).

In terms of the implementation of this ocean commitment, section 81(3) says that the Minister responsible for climate change retains the decision making responsibility and he is required to make all reasonable efforts to implement these aims in accordance with the National Ocean Policy.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, further in section 84, the Minister is provided with powers to implement further regulations, policies, measures and actions with the purpose of conservation and restoration of all Fiji's maritime areas and coastal environments.

Consultation with the Minister responsible for environment and fisheries is a must as regulations, policies, measures and actions need to have a science-based and data driven approach for effective implementations to ensure that people in the coastal communities are less affected.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, too much power invested in one man to make decisions regarding the livelihood of the Fijian people who reside in coastal communities and who are also custodians of their *qoliqoli*. The commitment to designate 70 percent of maritime zones will impinge on the source of livelihood of these coastal dwellers, especially that they are entirely dependent on the sea for subsistence consumption.

Given the current pandemic, those who have lost their jobs have returned to their villages and made a living through fishing. The designations of MPAs is to accommodate Fiji's 30 percent and the 100 percent commitment of effectively and sustainably managing maritime zones, will definitely have an impact on those people who depend on the sea and the maritime resources for their livelihood.

Lastly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to remind Honourable Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum of his comments against me yesterday, to quote: "Shut up, you do not know anything." And again this morning, I hope you did not say, 'baboon', but I thought I heard 'buffoon' for which I replied, "mind your mouth, do not be naughty" and he said 'you too, watch your mouth'.

Mr. Speaker, I am part of your loyal Opposition and there is no smooth sailing in your legislative Chamber, not only if Bill No. 31 is fully consented thoroughly and 100 percent completed. I trust that Honourable Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum is healthy and all right before his 55th birthday tomorrow. With that being said, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I join my colleagues in not supporting this Bill.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member. I now give the floor to the Honourable Minister for Employment, Productivity, Industrial Relations and Youth and Sports. You have the floor.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I am delighted to speak in support of the proposed Climate Change Bill 2021.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is unfortunate that the Opposition has again come up with the cheap gimmick of calling for public consultation. In fact, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Opposition and the false news makers

have missed the mark whenever the issue of climate change is discussed, when we all know (the whole world knows) that climate change is real. And I hope, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that this will get through to our Opposition, at least from this point in time for the sake of our beloved nation and for our future generations.

I am also told, Mr, Speaker, Sir, that the Opposition until yesterday afternoon was in support of this Bill. And it was only this morning, in their joint caucus meeting, they have changed their mind.

(Honourable Opposition Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. PROFESSOR B.C. PRASAD.- A point of order, Mr. Speaker. I just wish to remind the Honourable Minister not to lie in Parliament. We did not have a joint caucus. I said in my contribution very clearly that we had a workshop on 13th September, 2021, so do not lie.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- That is not a point of order. What is your point of order?

HON. PROFESSOR B.C. PRASAD.- Do not lie.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, there was no point in that order and Honourable Prasad should not waste the time of this honourable House. We were told this morning by Honourable Prasad that because they had some legal advice from some environment lawyers, they had changed their mind. So that is a fact, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and it is on record.

HON. PROFESSOR B.C. PRASAD.- That is what I am saying, do not lie.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji under the leadership of the Honourable Prime Minister and through an all of Government approach, has become a flag bearer on climate change not only in the region, but globally. The leadership of the Honourable Prime Minister on Climate Change and Fiji's achievements under his guardian on climate change makes the Climate Change Bill 2021 a timely legislation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji's first National Climate Change Policy was launched in 2012, so that was in the public space. The problem with the Opposition is that they do not hear, they do not see, they do not read, but they will come here and complain about the time factor. This has been their habit and we are very much aware of their behaviour. That policy, Mr. Speaker, Sir, was to strengthen the legal mandate for driving national activities relevant to the management of climate change. The Climate Change Bill 2021 addresses this legislative option in today's climate change framework.

The United Nations Inter-Governmental Panel on Climate Change declared a code red for humanity in a report released on Monday, 9th August, 2021. The report, Sir, released in the middle of the current COVID-19 pandemic gave a very bleak outlook into the world's future and underlying the fact that while COVID may be a problem of today, the climate change issue is a problem of today and tomorrow.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji's response on climate change aligns greatly with the report statement on climate change being human caused and we, as humans, have to fix the problem. The Climate Change Bill 2021 builds on a number of policy developments notably that of a new National Climate Change Policy 2018 to 2030. Mr. Speaker, Sir, consultations and structured process through which the Climate Change Bill 2021 has been arrived at, shows that Government is not only committed to the ideals of climate related changes but is committed with a visionary plan in hand for these changes.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as is evident from this statement on the Climate Change Bill 2021, it is important to take both long and short term approaches to climate change. This means that our youths will have a multi-generation input into and be impacted upon most in the climate change timeline. Mr. Speaker, Sir, youths in Fiji have been at the forefront of the climate change initiatives over the past one and a half decades. Their involvement has been encouraged and given definite pathways by this Government and moreso than anyone else, by the Honourable Prime Minister. This was displayed by the involvement of youths in the lead up to and during the COP 23 in 2017 chaired by our Honourable Prime Minister.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am pleased to report to this august House that youths have continued to be at the forefront on climate change related programmes since then. The Youth Climate Summit in September 2019 convened, I heard, of the UN Secretary-General's Climate Change Action Summit aimed to give young people the opportunity to voice their demands for climate action.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji was represented at this Summit that brought together Youth Climate Champions from more than 140 countries. These youth leaders delivered a message to all leaders on the urgency of acting now to tackle climate change. Fiji was also represented at the opening session that featured the UN Secretary-General serving as a keynote listener to a panel of young climate leaders.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Youth has increased its focus on climate related programmes and activities in its yearly calendar. This was highlighted by the hosting of Fiji's first ever National Youth Summit on Climate Change.

The Climate Change and International Co-operation Division of the Ministry of Economy provided valuable input for Ministry of Youth and Sports as it hosted Fiji's first Youth Climate Action Summit which was launched by the Honourable Prime Minister. Amongst its objectives, was to provide youth feedback on the Climate Change Bill 2021. This resulted in a large scale consultation with youth representatives from all areas of Fiji, urban, peri-urban, rural, maritime and those youth delegates represented around 3,000 membership of the youth clubs around the country.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Climate Change Bill 2021 addresses many of the youth concerns which in turn, are concerns of all Fijians on the effect and impact of Climate Change of current and future generations. In fact, this Bill strengthens and supports the youth in their climate change programme such as Youth Coast Care Club, Waste Care Management, Coral Restoration, Mangrove Planting and so forth. I am pleased to note that the Bill also addresses the impact of COVID-19 on Public Health, Employment, Economic and National Resilience.

As the Climate Change Bill 2021 notes this creates further justification, Mr. Speaker, Sir, for the intention of the legislation. We know that COVID-19, like climate change, is a global challenge and threat that cuts across all borders and boundaries. As such, it is important that we continue to build on our fight and resilience to both COVID-19 pandemic and on climate change threats.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, a sustainable Fiji will need to continue work on climate change threats, long after we have overcome COVID-19. In support of the Climate Change Bill 2021, I noted that the policy includes many mechanisms and structural entities to provide the basis for sustainable means of meeting the challenges ahead of climate change.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in supporting this Bill I am supporting the clear set of traffic lights outlined in this legislation that means we have a clear pathway into a sustainable future for Fiji. In support of the Bill, I note that legislation creates new source of sustainable financing, supports the development of Fiji's workforce, improves the systems required to better understand, and prepares future risks. This includes the pathway of mainstream climate action and risk informed planning of national development.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it also safeguards on the national economy and its state resources towards Fiji that sustains climate resilience through a small and manageable carbon footprint frame with sustainable development objectives. The Climate Change Bill 2021 also provides Fiji with the tool kits of institutional arrangements and decision making process to build our climate resilience and adaptation measures.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it provides us the means and the roadmaps towards this and as such is the visionary and broad reading piece of legislation. I support the Climate Change Bill 2021 and endorse it as the way forward to ensure Fiji's future as it continues to be at a forefront of small island nations against the climate related challenges ahead of us..

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister. I give the floor to the Honourable Saukuru.

HON. J. SAUKURU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I wish to contribute to the debate on the Bill that was presented by the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service, Communications and Minister responsible for Climate Change. My contribution will be very short and brief.

From the outset, Sir, we simply cannot support this Bill at this current state. Sir, when a government is not listening to the people, they are playing God and that is very dangerous because you are inviting more disasters upon the land.

I am rather sad that in here, we have a Government that is introducing this Bill for the purpose of acquiring funding and in their pursuit, have deviated far from the very foundation of their own 2013 Constitution as stipulated under its Preamble, and I quote:

“RECOGNISING the indigenous people or the *iTaukei*, their ownership of *iTaukei* lands, their unique culture, customs, traditions and language;
RECOGNISING the indigenous people or the Rotuman from the Island of Rotuma, their ownership of Rotuman lands, their unique culture, customs, traditions and language.”

Secularists have faith in the scientific method, the theory of naturalistic evolution and materialism. They also believe in their own human capacities. Allow me to state some real facts here, Sir. Firstly, our participation in the global arena on climate change does not guarantee our safety as a vulnerable Small Island State to natural disasters, such as *TC Winston*. Those are acts of God.

Secondly, human Coronaviruses are capable of causing illnesses ranging from the common cold to more severe diseases, which has brought many economies including ours, on their knees. Again, this is another act of God.

Thirdly, carbon trade, Sir, is just another good example where this Government is playing God and is going to sell oxygen. May I ask this august House, since when have you been paying the air that you breathe? The concept of protecting the environment is good, but the idea to sell air, to me, is rather dangerous.

I have been here for only 652 months; 2,742 weeks; 19,264 days; 462,347 hours; and 27,740,871 minutes; and sooner or later, I will be returning to my Maker. Never in my lifetime here, Sir, has my Maker demanded any price for the air that I breathe.

Fourthly, there was no proper consultation done on the Bill before the House and it would be unfair for our resource owners if we deny them their right to be part of this legislative process. Why do

we have to show-off to the global community that we have passed this Bill when we have denied the rights of those who will make this happen on the ground? I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

I now give the floor to Honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services. You have the floor.

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- I thank you Mr. Speaker, Sir, and I thank you for this opportunity to contribute to this debate and I support the motion before the House.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, from a health perspective it is very important that we support the Bill before the House. Sir, WHO, in discussing about climate change a few years back, said that there are five key areas that needs to be understood. Firstly, climate change affects the social and environmental determinants of health, clean air, safe drinking water, sufficient food and secured shelter. There are countries around the world now that we all know of, that have air pollution of surprisingly high levels and there are times in the year that is ill advisable to visit certain cities because of air pollution.

We also know that in our discussions that I have with other Ministers of Health from around the Pacific, specifically our neighbours who are greatly affected with climate change and the rising sea levels that is affecting their ability to be able to help places that can be utilised by their citizens for exercise for example, because of the rising sea levels and the impact that it is having on their ability for infrastructure and for making provisions for their citizens to be able to have exercise such as we are doing here in Fiji. We are more fortunate that it has not impacted us as much as it has impacted them.

Secondly, between 2030 and 2050, climate change is expected to cause approximately 250,000 additional deaths from malnutrition, climate sensitive diseases such as malaria, diarrhoea and stress.

Thirdly, the direct damage to health, excluding cost, in health determining sectors, such as agriculture, water and sanitation is estimated to be about \$2 billion to \$4 billion every year, compounding. The areas with weak infrastructure mostly in developing countries will be the least able to cope without assistance to prepare and respond. We all know if this august House, that there are facilities of the Ministry of Health that are struggling because they have been built quite a while back in places that are now been affected by the rising sea levels because of climate change.

Lastly, reducing emissions of greenhouse gases through better transport, food resources can result in improved health in particular, through reduced air pollution. The impact of climate change and climate disasters, as I have alluded to earlier are impacting food sources, disease vector habitats and our health infrastructure. The economic impact is natural disasters, they are significant on these areas and over the last five years, we have seen, the significant impact of the major cyclones that have come through. They bring with them the challenges of climate sensitive diseases.

I have talked about the impact of Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) also and the impact on Communicable Diseases. Since 2016, Fiji has established successive climate change and have strategic plan to try and address this basic challenge. There is one thing for certain, we cannot change our coordinates of the map, we can only plan and implement the measures and the responses to mitigate the impact. Under the Honourable Prime Minister's leadership of COP23, he launched the special initiative of climate change and health in Small Island Developing States in Bonn, which was well received. Also the Honourable Prime Minister proposed a development and presentation of a special report on climate change and health at COP24 meeting. Member States have been encouraged to advocate for healthcare benefits for climate mitigation measures and actions that are proposed now and for the future.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in this Bill on Part 11, it talks about the climate change adaptation and resilient development and about the rights and one of them that can be affected and is affected by climate change is the right to health. In 67 of Part 11, it talks about the National Adaptation Plan and the Steering Committee and recognising that health and public health infrastructure is a very important perspective of it. The Ministry of Health earlier this year, we launched our climate resilient health facility guideline and we have done that in alignment with what WHO has also brought out in that space so that moving forward, we can be contemporary in ensuring that our facilities are able to resist the effects of Climate Change.

On that note, Mr. Speaker, it just again reaffirms the need for us in this august House to support the motion before the House and I fully support this Bill.

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

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just want to say, Happy International Day of Sign Languages to all the Honourable Members and also to the interpreters here at the Parliament Complex, and to the wider deaf community in Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, I rise to offer some remarks on the Report of the Committee and its recommendations on the Climate Change Bill 2021, Bill No. 31 of 2021. I would also like to, at this time, say ‘thank you’ to the Honourable Prime Minister for his comment to me yesterday about bitterness and for once, I actually agree with him. He is absolutely right because the truth is always a bitter pill to swallow.

Once again, Mr. Speaker, another Bill is before us, asking for our consent to entrench the most powerful man in Fiji as the “one ring to rule them all”, to quote the *Lord of the Rings* movie. Of course, all this has the fullest backing of the Honourable Prime Minister.

However, what does the rest of the Cabinet think? How do they feel about being disrespected again, at more of their authority getting yanked from under their feet, thanks to Schedule 1 of the Bill? Schedule 1, Mr. Speaker, lists 40 other laws under other ministerial portfolios, that now allows the self-proclaimed guru-of-everything, to wade into their turf. How pitiful!

As much as we empathise with the silent 25, that is, the Government Members who are not the Prime Minister or Attorney-General, their stunts, their loud retorts, their table thumping and posturing in this House - can gather them no sympathy at all in the final analysis. After all, they did choose that lot in life every day.

Mr. Speaker, the Report makes a weak attempt at justifying this mission creep of control by one man on Page 33, with a weak assurance that this law is a “whole of government collaboration”, and I would just like to bluntly say, “Do not bluff! We know and the people know too.”

Mr. Speaker, for such an extensive Bill, with over 100 pages, we get back a 40-page Report, thick with repetitions, justifications, and obviously, written by an expatriate. Is the author from a United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Annex 1 high emitter of greenhouse gas nation? Does the Committee endorse that an Annex 1 nation authoring this Report is right and proper, and not an abdication of their parliamentary duty to do what is right by Fiji and for Fiji? Those are legacy issues for them to reflect deeply on, Mr. Speaker, because nature does not bargain with anyone!

To top it off, Mr. Speaker, the Committee could only come up with three cosmetic amendments to the Bill. The first proposed change to the text of Bill No. 31 as detailed on Page 34, is to force the

Minister to appoint a Director with a 'must' instead of a 'may'. Wow! Truly earth-shattering for the upholding of climate security for Fiji, I am sure.

The second proposed change to the text of the Bill, also on Page 34, is to tinker around the edges, while the world burns from global warming and fix up Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and performance stuff for civil servants. I mean, really!

The final suggested change to the text of the Bill on Page 37, is to remove the reference to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and replace it with reference to three sections of the Constitution. Why should it be removed? They can all be referenced together as mutual reinforcements of Fiji's commitment to the Paris Agreement as referenced throughout the decision preamble text of the Agreement as well as in Paragraph 135, also in Article 5 - Paragraph 2 and in Article 7 - Paragraph 5.

Mr. Speaker, it is astonishing that the Committee did a desktop impact assessment on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the national development plans but did no overall impact assessment of the Bill in totality. Instead, the Committee passes this off on Page 5 as, 'ok, once we start implementing then we can make corrections as we move along' type of excuse. Hello! Do we have a comprehension lacuna with the latest scientific reports by the IPCC and the Bill's own "climate emergency" warning?

Mr. Speaker, on Page 33, the issue of blue carbon sequestration rights as written, is trying to pull the wool over our eyes. The mechanism for registration cannot be lumped together as mainstream carbon rights for land because there are two distinct and separate entities in charge. But, of course, the Committee agrees, because deals have already been made. And there we go, by the Committees own hand on Page 29, they contradict themselves and proudly show-off a new sovereign blue bond initiative with the United Kingdom and other multilateral institutions.

Mr. Speaker, was the main author of this Committee's report, not a UNDP consultant from the UK, and most impressively a former legislative drafter from the House of Commons?

Then on Page 27, we are hand-in-hand with Australia, another Annex 1 coal fire powered economy.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, point of order.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Member is lying to this Parliament stating that the author of this particular report is someone from the UK. This is the Committee report, we have deliberated on this Report, even your office know very well, Sir.

On Monday and Tuesday we have been in Parliament until late 11.30 p.m. to 12.00 in the morning compiling this report. It is a total lie that someone from the UK has compiled this Report, on behalf of the Committee.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Member, you have the floor, and take note of that point of order.

HON. L.S QEREQERETABUA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have taken up half of the question.

Mr. Speaker, then on Page 27, we are hand-in-hand with Australia, another Annex 1 coal fire powered economy in some still unknown "Indo-Pacific Carbon Offset Scheme". No doubt the former head of our COP23 Secretariat, Mr. John Connor, could have been central to this arrangement, and we hope there were appropriate firewalls in place during these discussions.

But this is the heart of the problem, Mr. Speaker. This Bill is all about one individual monetizing and incentivizing our climate vulnerability, with the very nations who have high greenhouse gas emissions as Annex 1 States. There is no way that the NFP can support this Bill in its current form. We do not consent to this Bill as it is currently drafted, nor do we consent with the proposed amendments. I thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member. I give the floor to the Honourable Maharaj, you have the floor.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Thank you, Mr Speaker, for allowing me this time. Mr. Speaker, it is very sad to see someone who advocates climate change that does not actually drinks water from her plastic bottle, has rejected the Climate Change Bill. Sad day, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, forest contains some of the world's most and important biodiversity and ecosystem provided livelihood for our communities and support our communities and cultures. The emission reduction project and programmes I had alluded to under the Climate Change Bill for forestry sector have the opportunity to elevate the importance of the trees and forest as a natural resource in sustaining life by designating forest as a theme for capturing and storing greenhouse gases.

Mr. Speaker, this will help motivate behavioral changes in attitude and positive steps towards the good agriculture practice and the better management of the forest and the land resources and help address the drivers of the deforestation and forest degradation. We are aware that our rural communities are heavily dependent on trees and forest resource for subsistence and income generating projects. Promoting carbon trading through the REDD+ mechanism thus also means ensuring that we are addressing the alternative livelihood options for our communities and resource owners.

Mr. Speaker, activities underpinning REDD plus for example, tree planting and forest conservation will increase opportunities for the forest basic economic activities including economically empowered youths and women to the establishment and management of community nurseries.

Mr. Speaker, we understand under that under the current emission reduction programme, participant who have successfully implemented the REDD plus activities to the prescribed standard will receive incentive in the form of result-based payments. These activities include; undertaking afforestation, reforestation and sustainable management of natural forest, climate smart agriculture system and protection of native forest.

This simply means, Mr. Speaker, Sir, any resource owner or lessee of degraded forest land area, natural forest area, barren land or even farmers intending to incorporate trees in the traditional agriculture and silvo-pastoral farming system can register their land as an emission reduction projects under the programme.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Climate Change Bill establishes the legal provision and domestic safeguard for participation under such programme recognising carbon sequestration property rights as tradeable commodity. This legal certainty is fundamental for then transferring these units internationally.

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, the Bill recognises the carbon sequestration rights on indigenous land under the iTaukei Land Trust Board which provides the platform for ensuring equitable benefit sharing between the lessee and the landowner.

As under the other Emission Reduction Programme on REDD+ there is benefit sharing mechanism and a plan developed jointly by the iTLTB and in consultation with Landowning Unit which are designed to ensure the proceeds are shared fairly.

Additionally, Mr. Speaker, the programme also has environment and social safeguard mechanisms as well as grievance mechanism to ensure robust and just governance of the programme and protection of all participants.

The current year programme will help to establish a reputable carbon trading mechanism with field tested processes and system supported through this proposed Climate Change Bill. This will help build Fiji's experience in carbon trading and better position for Fiji for future carbon trading inventories. This means unlocking the potential for communities and resource owners to participate in other Emission Reduction Programme to REDD+ which is a globally recognised mechanism and popular for its value in reducing emission.

To conclude, Mr. Speaker, we look forward to this new venture in carbon trading and to create cleaner environment and healthier forest leading to the reduction in emission of greenhouse gases helping in our fight against climate change.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Maharaj for his contribution to the debate. I give the floor to the Honourable Bulanauca.

HON. M. BULANAUCA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. We need to have such law but we need more clarification and consultations.

Honourable Bala mentioned that this was launched in 2012, fine. It took nine years to table it here, under Standing Order 51, why rush it? Why do you not do it earlier in 2014 or 2015 and do a proper clarification and consultation. So it is important to do things at the right time. In 2012 and then in 2021, it took nine years, very slow, should have brought it here earlier so that a better clarification and consultation to the landowners during good times.

Also a letter that was written to the Chairperson to request the Committee to seek more time to work around current COVID-19 movement restrictions and await the imminent opening of domestic containment borders in order that we may conduct genuine face to face *talanoa* session, that is very important, Mr. Speaker, Sir. They should be given time for more consultation and clarification.

We need to have this law but we need a proper consultation and clarification, particularly on carbon the definition of carbon that have already been mentioned, and the formula, the landowners need to understand, not necessarily the details but the need to understand the formula, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Also on carbon lease, terms and conditions, whether these areas will be held under iTLTB or other trusts of *tikina* or Land Owning Units, *mataqali* or *tokatoka* trust or whatever, these are things that need to be clarified to the landowners. The distribution of the benefits, compensation of these carbon trading will be distributed according to these existing positions, so on and so forth. But it is important that these are properly clarified and landowners are properly consulted to understand before we formulate it in the law.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there are certain level of activities that need to be carried out on the land in order to qualify for forest for carbon trading. Those are the very things that I am talking about. Those activities need to be clarified to the landowners because the perception raised during submissions is that any piece of land consisting of forest can be reserved for carbon trading is incorrect.

The landowners have an incorrect understanding of this, so it is important that we need time to properly clarify, explain or consult to the landowners. This is from the Committee. It was noted that unless and until those activities that need to be clarified are carried out to improve the carbon sink of that particular forest that this would qualify the forest for such an initiative.

What this means is that for the lessee (for a leased land) or a landlord wanting to reserve their forest for carbon trading needs to do the following activities. Firstly, on afforestation, the figures here show 7,970 hectares of 100,000 tonnes. They mean, the re-establishment of forests, tree planting on barren, degraded land, including the riparian along the major rivers, coastal and waterways that would include mangroves as well or plantations at the foreshore for mangroves.

These need to be clarified to the fishing rights owners who have the right to fish on those fishing rights. This needs to be clarified properly to them and how this compensation will filter down to them: from the government as owners of the fishing rights to the fishing rights owners themselves?

Secondly, reforestation - 7,532 hectares; how did those hectares come about, whether this requirement is only for a particular landowning unit or a composition of landowning unit which totals about 600,000 tonnes. These reforestations mostly refer to the pine and mahogany plantations (which is good).

However, the question that needs to be clarified, now we have pine leases and mahogany leases and on top of that perhaps you can have another carbon lease and another extra compensation for the landowners. How those compensation is filtered down to not only Fiji Pine Commission or Fiji Pine Limited, and not only to Fiji Hardwood Corporation but down to the various landowners and various stations throughout Fiji whether you are talking about pine or talking about mahogany. So, it is important to clarify all those, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. M. BULANAUCA.- Establishment and Retention of forest on areas deemed uneconomical within their respective lease holding: this is within the pine leases and the mahogany leases because there have been some decisions by Fiji Hardwood Corporation and Fiji Pine Limited to return all these uneconomical areas, unplanted by pine and mahogany back to the landowners. That will need to be clarified, whether it will not be returned to the landowners, now we will have carbon lease over it - all those needs to be clarified.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. M. BULANAUCA.- It is here!

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. M. BULANAUCA.- It is here in the Committee Report on page 36. You read it.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. M. BULANAUCA.- I read it again.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. M. BULANAUCA.- On reforestation, 7,532 hectares because 600,000 tonnes, through the support and contribution of the government-owned plantations comprises of the Fiji Pine Limited (FPL) and Fiji Hardwood Corporation Limited (FHCL) and the establishment and retention of forest on areas deemed uneconomical within their respective lease holding. That needs clarification and proper consultation with the landowners.

Thirdly, on sustainable management natural forest, Mr. Speaker, Sir, for 8,500 hectares or 90,000 tonnes based on the cyclic removal of prescribed volume of selected trees that ensures the regrowth of the residual trees for future harvesting. This is all right, Mr. Speaker, Sir, particularly for native forests, we have selective logging that goes on there.

Fourthly, climate smart agricultural system: We need to have this but only 3,780 hectares to 170,000 tonnes. A lot of areas in Fiji are covered under agriculture, whether you lease it or not (lease under agriculture). How do you invest in that, these need to be clarified and consultation with the landowners for the incorporation of the trees in the traditional, agricultural and silvo-pasture farming system; either it is agro-forestry system or firebreaks and various generating ventures to support the daily needs and welfare of the forest dwelling communities as an alternative forest harvesting and natural resource utilisation.

We need to know an alternative agricultural lease that you have to convert it into forest to qualify as a carbon trader and the protection of native forest (9,500 hectares) which is 1.444 million tonnes per person conserving the forest biodiversity and its eco-system. It is good, it can have certain areas of native land. You can have carbon leases on certain areas where you can have forest protection or forest reserve for good. It is important that these are clarified to the landowners, how they will filter it right down to the landowners themselves. It is important, Mr. Speaker, Sir, to give time, particularly we have hills and mountainous areas that you need to bring under this also.

Also, we need Fiji to be an organic nation. Where is the Organic Act, Honourable Reddy? We need this to support this climate change law. We need to put that as quickly as possible so that we can increase our immune system through organic. Living here in Fiji, we do not need vaccines, untested vaccines, it is important to have our organic law to support this climate change law.

With those words, even though it is a good law, but we need more clarification and consultation.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member. The last speaker from this side of the House, I give the floor to Honourable Tabuya. You have the floor.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I rise to oppose the Bill before the House. This Bill is just another tick in the box so the Honourable Prime Minister can go to Glasgow and get climate finance. Let us just call a spade a spade. In the meantime, the multi-million dollar failed carbon trading project of Nabou sits on the highway; a ghost town of unfulfilled promises by this Government in the name of climate change.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- I also speak on behalf of the youth of SODELPA, I thank Pita Waqavonovono and Ben Daveta, whose submissions to the Standing Committee I have included here and I agree wholeheartedly with the appeal of the youth for our present and future generations.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the real question is, how exactly does this Bill buying Fijians to a shared future as we have been hearing them saying? We need binding mechanisms that communicate a political wheel of the Fijian people that goes beyond paper, beyond this Bill. The Bill declares a climate emergency but the actions in the law do not show the real emergency.

Honourable Bala went on and on about consulting the youths all over Fiji as a result of the climate change youth workshop, there was the creation of youth clubs, coral restoration programmes, mangrove planting, et cetera. Is that the best his Ministry can come up with regarding our youth? Hobbies, past times, what about careers, what about jobs? Where is the real commitment? Honourable Maharaj talked about profit sharing. Where is that in the Bill?

The fact that there are no careers in climate adaptation, mitigation and adaptation is the real emergency. The fact that we have an economy that is not going green is the emergency. This Bill fails to build on creating a green economy filled with green jobs. The biggest tragedy that this Government has brought in the name of climate change and I have mentioned it, yes, is the

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Mr. Speaker, I will repeat that. The biggest tragedy that this Government has brought in the name of climate change is the failed Green Energy Project of Nabou. Why did it fail?

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Do they even know why it failed? It is because this Government did not have local workers with the expertise in green energy to run the project. That is why.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- They will not come here and admit it; they will not. So, should this Bill pass, Mr. Speaker?

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Do we have workers to sufficiently carry out carbon sequestration projects, carbon trading businesses? They are laughing because they know what they have done wrong.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Every year, Fijians leave universities with qualifications in marine biology, science, forestry and green engineering, only to find, Mr. Speaker, that they are forced to compete for jobs in a very narrow and constricted market. Where are the careers in agriculture, forestry, efficient land management or farming and aquaculture?

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Where are the careers in energy and carbon capture and storage and jobs related to capturing and storing energy and carbon emissions, as well as technologies related to power plants using the Integrated Gasification Combined Cycle (IGCC) like Nabou? Where are the careers related to increasing energy efficiency making energy demand responses more effective, constructing smart grids, et cetera? Where are the careers in energy trading including careers related to buying and selling energy as an economic commodity as well as carbon trading projects? Where are the careers to assist in environment protection with just wages for people that work in environmental rehabilitation, mitigation, climate change adaptation and ensuring or enhancing air quality? Where are the careers in governmental and regulatory, administrative policy support for the green economy including careers by public and private organisations associated with conservation and pollution prevention, regulation enforcement and policy analysis and advocacy? Where are the careers in green construction and the jobs related to constructing new green buildings, retrofitting residential and commercial buildings and installing other green construction technology? Where are the careers in manufacturing, industrial manufacturing of green technology as well as energy efficient manufacturing processes? Where are the careers in recycling and waste reduction, solid waste and waste water management, treatment reduction as well as processing recyclables materials? Where are the careers in renewable energy generation, developing and using energy sources such as solar, wind, geothermal and biomass? Where are the careers for green transportation, increasing efficiency and reducing environment impact on various modes of transport?

The way forward for Fiji is providing green jobs, allowing our youths to study and graduate with green qualifications for free and building a green economy, Mr. Speaker, ready to absorb the jobs of the future. So just stop the lip service, Honourable Minister for Youth and Employment. Fiji needs to look beyond the victim mentality to a present on the climate action scene. We need to build a future we want to see in the Pacific here in Fiji, invest in our young people and graduates and deliver a realistic platform. Unless this is realised, again I reiterate, this Bill is just lip service and we will see more failed projects like Nabou, more failed sequestration projects because no one is there to work them. The Government needs to show real commitment rather than just bringing this law, to tick the box in time for COP26, to get climate finance to fund their election campaign. I oppose the Bill before the House.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I give the floor to the last speaker on this side. Honourable Prime Minister, you have the floor.

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of this Climate Change Bill 2021. I just want to apologise to Honourable Tabuya about the ruckus coming from this side of the House, I could not stop them. I just want to tell her that Nabou is not a carbon trading as she stated, it is a different thing.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- To all those landowners listening in when Honourable Nawaikula made his statement, Mr. Speaker, I just want to tell everyone that he is misinforming Parliament when he says, “consent does not work.”

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- It does not work.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Nothing original from this Honourable Member, Mr. Speaker, same old, same old. I want to inform everyone that consent of the landowners is pivotal in the leasing of any land in Fiji, I do not know where he is coming from. This is supposedly someone who used to work at iTLTB some years ago. No wonder iTLTB nearly collapsed or collapsed during and after his term.

The Head of the United Nations, Mr. Speaker, referred to the most recent report of the IPCC as a code red for the planet from devastating floods to dangerous wildfires and one thing is clear, that climate crisis is already here. Failure to act now jeopardises the livelihoods of future generations, something the other side of the House do not seem to understand.

Climate challenge, Mr. Speaker, is a challenge of our life time and whether we accept it or not, it will fundamentally change Fiji. How, is up to us. Either we will be destroyed by strongest storms and swallowed by the rising seas, or we will change ourselves to be more resilient and become a model that the world can follow to stave off the worst of climate change. Today, Mr. Speaker, we choose the latter.

When the world looks for champions for the climate and for the security of coming generations, they look to our islands. They look to Fijians. We have contributed to the fight for solutions through our global leadership.

As President of COP 23, we sought to enlist Governments, civil societies and the private sector towards a goal of net-zero carbon emissions. Just this week, Mr. Speaker, I met with the Leaders from China, Russia, USA, Pakistan, United Kingdom, India, Japan and dozens of others to convey the urgency of cutting emissions and funding climate resilient development. These Leaders listen to Fiji because we are a credible country. They listen because we ask nothing from them that we are not prepared to do ourselves. We have no hidden agenda. Our intention is pure, we are working to save our people and save the planet. We should never forget the weight or the mantle of responsibility on our shoulders.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- Tell them!

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- For Fiji, maybe a small country, but we are not a nation that imitates. We are a nation to be emulated, and we will continue to introduce and promote perspectives and objectives that the world can follow, to ensure our future against the threat of runaway climate change.

Through our advocacy and our actions, our message to the world is clear, Mr. Speaker. We, the planet’s smallest emitters are prepared to eliminate our negligible carbon footprint and we are calling on large industrialised nations to do the same.

Mr. Speaker, that is a dynamic that this Bill supports. It is our promise enshrined in law to be the change we seek to bring about at a global scale. It supports the promise we have made to our most vulnerable communities - a promise we have made to those whose homes, livelihoods and loved ones

have faced the increasing intensity of climate change-fuelled super= storms, a promise we have made to our future generations, and it is a promise we will deliver.

This Bill is our blueprint for a climate resilient and carbon neutral Fiji and a Fijian society that exists in harmony with the natural world around us. While not every solution and technology we need is available to us, the means to bring out the solutions, collaborations and innovations we require is embedded in this legislation.

The message we are building on today is that we are taking the necessary steps. We are walking the talk and moving towards becoming the net zero society we aspire to become by 2050. That is a promise we had made to the world.

We have no excuse but to adopt the best solutions available and advance our efforts today not tomorrow. And with this legislation we are sending the signal to markets, to the private sector and to innovators that Fiji needs support to advance across the cutting edge of the following issues:

- This Bill enshrines our commitment to the 100 percent sustainable management of our ocean, with 30 percent declared as Marine Protected Areas. The Bill sets out our intention to retain our sovereign right over our existing maritime boundaries, irrespective of the future impacts to those boundaries due to sea level rise.
- It commits Fiji to moving decisively to achieve net zero emissions by 2050.
- It supports the advancement of nature-based solutions that both, reduce emissions and help us to adapt to climate impacts.
- It takes a realistic approach to climate change risks, legally recognising planned relocations as legitimate and State-supported form of climate adaptation.

Mr. Speaker, to understand the spirit this Bill, we have to remember where this journey had its start. It began amid the rubble super-storm *TC Winston* in 2016. That was our alarm bell and it has rung with the arrival of every new storm, every flood, and every inch of sea level rise. We knew then we had to build back better, and we knew that the root cause of these crisis, unchecked carbon emissions, had to be addressed at a global scale.

As the Honourable Attorney-General has said, Fiji did not cause the climate crisis, nor can we solve it on our own. For that, Mr. Speaker, we need the entire world alongside us but we will not hide behind the excuse that Fiji is too small to help address and mitigate this crisis. No nation is too small to make a difference, not Fiji, not any other SIDS, not Australia, not New Zealand, nor any of the major industrialised nations. We all have to commit to the target of net zero emissions by 2050 at the absolute latest, preferably much sooner.

This Bill, Sir, has been drafted with technical inputs and support from a remarkable team of national and international experts. It underwent at least 18 months of extensive public consultations with ordinary people, technical and policy teams, private sector and the civil society. Unfortunately, Sir, no Member of the Opposition provided zero input on the Bill in that period (not in the 18 months), although they had opportunities to comment on the first, second and third drafts. In case they were confused, I should tell them that the term net zero only applies to levels of carbon emissions, not their levels of contribution.

Rather than make a meaningful contribution through the years it has taken to formulate this Bill, as so many climate conscious Fijians have done, they and their cronies sniped at the Bill in the media and then waited until the very last moment to speak on the Bill in the Standing Committee. So, they have no right to come here and lecture us about consultation now. No right at all. To do so is to disrespect the thousands of Fijians, whose voices and perspectives have helped shaped this Bill. Instead, they should

look in the mirror and ask themselves; why every one of them was missing in action while my Government wrote our blueprint to confront the greatest threat we have ever faced. If there is any issue we all agree on, it should be this.

We should all be proud to support this Bill, Mr. Speaker, Sir. If the Opposition cared about anything other than their hatred for the Government, they would. Instead, they sat on their hands, seemingly content to throw our fate to the winds of intensifying super-storms, and made their strongest ever case that they cannot be trusted with the security of this country. We, Mr. Speaker, can be - plain and simple.

Neither is this Bill some lofty intellectual exercise. Yes, it is a complex exercise. This is a complex challenge, Mr. Speaker, Sir, but the Bill is rooted in economic reality and it will yield benefits and tangible opportunities for ordinary Fijians. That is what net zero is – it is the opportunity that will shape this country as an opportunity for our economy, for our communities and for the well-being of our people. The nations that seize this chance now will be the nations that steer the future. These societies will create labour markets for good green and blue jobs - jobs in renewable energy, jobs in sustainable ocean management, jobs in tree planting, mangrove reforestation and jobs that advance and develop the nature-based solutions we require. These societies, Mr. Speaker, Sir, will have cleaner air, better food and pristine waters. We want all of that for Fiji. Who would not? And just as important, Mr. Speaker, Sir, urgent climate action is morally right.

I believe the planet is among the Almighty's greatest gifts to humanity. It is our home and it is our duty to care for that God-given endowment. This Bill furthers our work to build carbon markets in Fiji. That will bestow the greatest benefit on the members of communally-held landowning units - the owners of 91 percent of all land in Fiji. Under our Constitution, this land is theirs for all time, and carbon markets will help them earn income by simply keeping trees rooted to the ground and mangroves anchored to the coastline and better forest management practices.

This Bill, Sir, will support the increased resilience of communities across our islands. It will lead to jobs of the future. It will lead to a better relationship between our people and nature. It will protect biodiversity. It will help keep our reefs and oceans pristine. It will help make Fiji a compass that points towards a greener, bluer, more sustainable and more resilient future. With collective efforts, a drive for change, and passion to succeed, it can be the first chapter of a new narrative. And through this new narrative we will no longer be the helpless victims on the leading edge of a crisis that we did not cause.

Frankly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am tired of telling that story. I am tired of applauding our people's resilience in the wake of super-storms, floods and the rising seas. Fijians deserve more than a pat on the back for withstanding the worst of climate change. Our job today is to set open the chapter of a new story; the story of a people bound by a resilient spirit, who also have the resources to create the change, the need to facilitate safety, strengthen their infrastructure, shift their priorities, work with and not against the environment, and empower home-grown solutions.

I just want to state, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that the Barefoot College is Government's initiative to create career opportunities and skilled rural women to use alternative energy sources like solar. This is about the story of a society that does exactly what it demands of the world by showing what carbon neutral, people-first and future-forward approach can achieve.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on behalf of my children, my grandchildren and every climate-vulnerable person on this planet, born and unborn, I wholeheartedly endorse the Climate Change Bill 2021. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Prime Minister. I now give the floor to the Honourable Attorney-General to speak in reply.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Before I talk about the Bill, I did not realise that Honourable Rasova (unfortunately he is not here), had such a weak constitution and he would come running to you like a little boy. We know he is quite loquacious but, of course, he does not necessarily engage his cerebellum before he actually speaks. Probably the same could be said by other people on the other side.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wanted to highlight very quickly about some of the key points that actually have been raised by the other side. The contributions from Honourable Saukuru is very interesting which, sort of, went off on a different tangent. I pulled out this newspaper article that goes back to 12th September, 2017, when the Leader of Opposition then (Honourable Kepa) said, "Rewa would show practical support to Prime Minister Voreqe Bainimarama's Presidency of COP23." However, MP and lawyer, Semesa Karavaki said climate change was a hoax using biblical text to back his claim. He said climate change was in God's power. Honourable Gavoka said climate change is real and I quote: "it is happening right before our eyes, but perhaps the President Donald Trump knows his bible and knows that the effects of climate change are irreversible". The Honourable Leader of Opposition then, Ro Teimumu, who was also Roko Tui Dreketi, a paramount chief of Rewa said, her province would host a bilibili bamboo race in Rewa River in November to highlight climate change.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the reason I am reading this out is because it actually goes to show the discrepancies in the comments that have been made. They said that they blamed climate change later on because of the leadership of this Government, and similar, desperate contributions have been made by the other side. One in particular, I would like to refer to is, that they have said that this Bill makes subservient these 40 other laws, but they have misled Parliament seriously.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in fact a frustrated staff just sent me this. He said, "Sir the laws in Schedule 1 are not subservient. Under Clause 19, the purpose of the list is to provide that when decisions are made under those laws, the decision maker must ensure that the decision or action promotes, so he is consistent with the objectives and principles of the Climate Change Bill. Mitigation, adaptation guidelines issued by the Minister and Fiji's national security sovereignty. These are factors for the decision maker to seek, promote or achieve.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it goes on to say, which they did not read out. Honourable Gavoka, Honourable Qereqeretabua, obviously whose speech is written for her by other people, who is really into sarcasm which is actually the lowest form of wit.

Clause 19(5) says, "the requirements of this Section apply in addition to and without limiting the power or duty of a person making a decision referred to in (1)" What does (1) say? It says that, "the person under these laws must have reference to the objectives and principles of this Act". What are the objectives and principles of this Act? That is compliance with the Paris Agreement which is a Convention that we as a country, have ratified. What are the objectives?

To set up institutional and government structures for the implementation of the Act, enhance Government transparency, enable informed private and civil sector decision making and risk management through the establishment of data management systems. There is a whole list of things - safeguard Fiji's national security sovereignty, including Fiji's sovereignty over its maritime zones such as internal waters, archipelagic waters, territorial seas, contiguous Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) within the meaning of United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). Honourable Radrodro is going away, unfortunately, she would not get to know about all these things.

The other point, Mr. Speaker, Sir, under the principles, it says the Act must be implemented in accordance with the following principles. One of them, it says recognising indigenous people or the *iTaukei* and the Rotumans from the island of Rotuma, their respective ownership of *iTaukei* lands and Rotuman lands and the unique cultures, customs, traditions and language. Honourable Saukuru - you should read and comprehend. It is saying that all these 40 laws, all of these Acts must adhere to these principles.

Honourable Rasova, unfortunately, you were not here when I was talking about you earlier on. Again, he went on about UNDRIP and asked why it was replaced. UNDRIP is not a convention, it is a mere declaration, so therefore it is not justiciable. You cannot enforce UNDRIP and it has been replaced by the provisions in the Constitution which protects the rights of *iTaukei* and Rotuman landowners and their customs, traditions and culture and communal ownership of land. It is justiciable. In other words, if you breach it, you can be taken to court of law. UNDRIP, you cannot be taken to court of law. You see it is very basic. You have three or four lawyers on your side. They should explain this to you. Your Deputy Leader is a lawyer. They should explain this to you. That is the reason why it has been done and we have this frustrated staff, Sir, writing in.

Again, Honourable Rasova talked about the Marine Protected Areas (MPAs). He said, Sir, this is not true. Clause 81 of the Bill in relation to ocean sustainability targets provides for the sustainable and effective management of Fiji's waters. That does not mean that these areas will become a strict No-Take Zone which is different, where communities cannot fish at all. The MPAs will incorporate sustainable fisheries mechanisms such as temporary taboos, seasonal species ban if necessary or as the Minister and his team are working, providing young babies, beach-de-mer, prawns, fish whatever it is and you can then let them grow in your own lagoon and let it grow so you are not taking from the wild. The same things like forests, you do not want to go and cut down virgin indigenous forests, you want to plant it and that is what you cut down.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is not intended under any circumstances to designate these MPAs to ban fishing and affect the livelihood of those communities. Of course not. So, again they are incorrect about that. Honourable Gavoka, unfortunately, is not here too, said that there should be mapping done. It is a technical matter. It is already part of the VanuaGIS. Ministry of Lands is the VanuaGIS platform that has mapped Fiji's forests reference level, the work we have been doing with the World Bank. All of these have been addressed, Mr. Speaker, Sir. That has taken care of UNDRIP, it has taken care of the section about Schedule 1. Absolutely no truth in that.

Honourable Qereqeretabua (I think) or someone, mentioned about blue carbon or some kind of flowering of this Bill, actually it is a real issue and it is not only about mangroves. Seagrasses too, there are seagrass fields in Fiji. In fact, New Caledonia has very large seagrass fields. There is also potential in terms of sequestering.

I think the Honourable Saukuru has really missed the point. I mean, he thinks we will be selling oxygen. We are not selling oxygen and this is where Honourable Tabuya misses the point too. They do not understand. They asked, where are the carbon sequestering staff? Actually, the carbon sequestering staff are the trees. They are ones that actually suck in the carbon from the air and that carbon is then measured, so if an airline in Australia or some company that wants to carbon trade, then they will do the offsets. That is how you actually make money.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, you do not need workers to do the sucking of the carbon. It is the trees, the natural trees that do the sucking of the carbon. Humans do not suck this carbon, it is the trees, it is the mangroves, the seagrasses and it is the forest management system that does it. In the same way, she got it completely incorrect, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that Nabou is not a carbon trading enterprise.

(Honourable Opposition Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Nabou, as the Honourable Minister responsible for electrification will tell you, Nabou was about using renewable energy sources to run the furnace to produce energy to sell to EFL. It is not carbon trading. So, she says “what is wrong with it?” This is a separate issue, you see it is used as a carbon trading issue.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the other issues that were raised about why are there no jobs, et cetera, in the Budget, we announced a \$5 million budgetary allocation for what we call “jobs for nature”. This actually fits in well with this Bill and all the other provisions we have made regarding the Green Growth Framework, et cetera. So we will be of course, very soon making detail announcement as to how people will be hired planting of mangroves, et cetera.

When you have such a piece of legislations, Sir, when it provides legal requirements then there will be expertise. If they look at the Toppers Scholarship we have been given, Sir, we have in fact, have a huge proclivity in the Toppers Scheme in terms of the scholarships we offer towards things like forest management, forestry, marine science because we lack people in those areas. In the same way, for example, we do not have expertise in counselling but this is the area where we are creating jobs. So you need the legal framework to create the demand for those kind of positions and therefore, you will then get the jobs.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the other point I want to make very quickly so I can address all these, Honourable Nawaikula said, “Consent does not work”. I mean, the Honourable Prime Minister addressed this. Of course, consent is critically important, when renewal of leases come along he knows he was out with Qarikau in Vanua Levu which we saw 50 percent of cane production halved because the landowners did not consent to renewing the lease. In the same way, so he is now debunking when I stood up earlier on and said for you to be able to lease your land, they need their consent if you are a landowner to lease the land. He said “Oh, consent system does not work”. And his logic was all the arable land has been given away. But by whose consent?

Most of the land, Mr. Speaker, Sir, where you have sugarcane farming which is generally referring to that was done during the colonial times, CSR (those CSR days) and the land is passed on of course, Schedules A, B and C. Some of it has already returned to the landowners, he knows that too. But consent is required, I reiterate, Mr. Speaker, Sir, please this is critically important because he is lying to the public and he is lying in particular, to the landowners.

In the same way, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to address the landowners directly in that sense, they came to Parliament, they produce videos before the 2014 Elections saying “if you support this Government, if you support FijiFirst, this Constitution you will all live in reserves like the American Indians (see the videos is there in the vernacular). Honourable Nawaikula and Honourable Bulitavu did it too.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, they said that. Then they said that Bill No. 17 will take away your land, nothing has happened. The Constitution came along, the 2014 Elections came along nothing happened. They said yesterday, by getting a single source of identity, you will lose your right, nothing has happened and nothing will happen. Today, they are saying that consent does not work, what are we doing here? Why

are they such a grouse, negligent lying to the *itaukei* landowners because they are creating fear, Mr. Speaker, Sir. When there is nothing to fear in fact, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the spreading of lies is tied extremely closely to their political fortunes (extremely closely) because they have not as I have said continuously

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Point of order!

HON. SPEAKER.- You have the floor.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- The Honourable Attorney-General has said that I lied by saying that “consent does not work”. Let me say again, consent has not worked and I leave it at that, it has not worked over the years.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Attorney-General, you have the floor.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Sir, the law has always allowed for consent, the law has not changed. If the landowner’s land is to be leased, 60 percent of the members of the landowning unit have to agree to lease the land. They have to agree for what purpose the land will be leased and they also have to agree to the premium and the yearly rental. Only then can iTLTB proceed with that. He worked with iTLTB he knows that, that was known as NLTB then. So, consent is there. If consent was not required, 50 percent of the land leases in Vanua Levu would not have been consented too for renewal, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. J. SAUKURU.- A point of order, Sir. I just want to correct the Honourable Attorney-General. What happened to the Tui Vitogo’s land, the 700 acres that was never consented? He is misleading Parliament.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would then, again, reiterate to the landowners that what has been told to you is a whole of lies. In fact, what this Bill does, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it creates enormous economic opportunities to the landowners in Fiji.

There is a lot of land, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that is currently lying idle in the deep areas of Naitasiri, whatever it may be the landowners can now go and participate in the carbon trading space. All the monies gain from that, and they have proprietary rights over the carbon trading space. They can go to the Registrar of Titles once they form their entity and they can then go and trade in carbon trading. All the money not a single cent will in fact, Mr. Speaker, go to anyone else other than the landowners. Not a single cent and they have the opportunity to participate in the international market with those companies.

It will also, Mr. Speaker, Sir, so many landowners as a source of revenue when they have large forest, they believe and to date, they only believe that they can gain money from that by exploiting those forest and they have been given logging licence to other people because that is how they get money. Now, they do not have to do it. They can in fact, have mixed development in those lands too.

As I mentioned to the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, you can actually have trees. You can have certain areas where you do a bit of clearing. You can do other forestation. You can do other types of agriculture.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, please, I urge all landowners that we will be having reach out programmes with them in the next few months. We will be going there, telling them how it works and we are hoping very soon, Mr. Speaker, Sir, already two landowner groups have already agree to participate in this space with more information and we hope to actually, get them a source of revenue if currently they have not had any access too.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the other point that I also want to make that Honourable Nawaikula mentioned now the islands, no, the islands have nothing to do with this. They will be given a tourism development lease. There has been matters that were with the Environment Management Act that has been resolved in terms of planting various mangroves to the equivalent of that.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, overall, I would like to make one point that Honourable Tabuya made saying we should stop playing the victim. Actually, we are the victims, we are not playing it. We and dozens of other countries around the world are at immediate risk.

Tuvalu and Kiribati will sink. The highest point in Tuvalu and Kiribati either one of them is 12 feet above sea level. We have already six locations in Fiji to higher ground. We have identified another 40. This is the reality and apart from that, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we believe it is our responsibility to highlight this to the rest of the world. Countries outside this space - China, India, Americas and various other carbon emitting countries need to sit up about this. They need to be warned about it. Countries like Bangladesh with the current sea level rises will lose 17 percent of their total landmass. Low-lying areas in the Americas wherever they are will lose that. African countries that do not have river systems, have drought for years, we will all suffer. So, we have to highlight that.

We then, of course, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am asking for climate justice under loss and damage because you have actually made this happen please pay for it. One of the most contentious issue which I highlighted in my speech earlier on today. We are then, Mr. Speaker, Sir, rather than saying this is happen to us, give us climate justice, we are saying, alright, we ourselves will actually take a responsibility even though we contribute 0.006 percent of carbon emissions, we will still reduce our carbon. By doing so, as the Honourable Prime Minister has said and that is why he has been called to all these meetings because we have the morale authority to do so because we are putting our talking into action too.

We not only relying on adaptation, we are also carrying out mitigation measures ourselves. So, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have done that. We have set ourselves target. I remember targets, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I remember a few years ago because of this climate prism, we used to talk about how our rivers do not have the ability to carry the volume of the water that comes down. During one of the recent cyclones, we had in 24 hours the same amount of rain that London gets in a year.

The same amount of rain, London is not a dry place so the capacity of the rivers are not there. Considering all of that, we started a new Ministry called the Ministry of Waterways and everyone had a good giggle. One politician said he should be called Minister for Drains, today one of the highest most sought out Ministry. Honourable Kuridrani was talking to me yesterday about Namatakula seawalls, someone else talked about that seawall and rivers. Honourable Matanitobua from Namosi talked about the seawall near his house, all of these have to be done. Why; because of the foresight of the FijiFirst Government and its leadership.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- Hear, hear!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, they said, we are only doing this to get money. No. Yes, we want the money but we are not only doing this for the money. Of course, we want the money, I will be stupid to say that we do not want the money. If the sea levels are rising, if villages have to be moved to higher ground, 40 communities, you need money in particular from people who have caused it to happen in the first place.

What is wrong with that? That is nothing to be ashamed about. But Mr. Speaker, Sir, as I have said we have taken a very conscious effort in respect of ensuring of the good agenda. We went to the World Bank, we said please do the costing for us. What will it cost us to build resilience when there is a rain water surges, when the sea water surges, rainfall, et cetera. Look at Ovalau, from the airport to the

town, the entire road system is next to the sea and the mountain face, every time it gets washed away, inundation of water, half the road is gone. What is the solution? We have to build roads, we have to build seawalls, all of these costs money. This was not a problem 50 years ago. It was not even a problem 30 years ago. It is a problem now and it will get worse.

So, that is what we talked about “building resilience”. We have to put electricity cables now underground, because if we have three cyclones every year, all of it will blow down. Putting cables underground costs money. We want to build resilience so, if there is a cyclone there is nothing to blow down, our factories, our shops, our schools get up very quickly, they start operating, you increase your productivity.

Absolutely, no shame in getting money for that, none whatsoever. If you have costed it properly, if you know it requires that, we will get the money and God willing, we will get more money but the fact of the matter is not just about money. It is also about creating a sustainable economy that creates jobs also; create jobs in carbon trading, create jobs in the green environment. Australia is a country that believes that jobs will be lost, if they get into the green space but many people are advocating with them to say, look you can create more jobs if you adopt more green technology. Countries are now saying do not depend on coal mining because it is not sustainable, you can create more jobs.

So, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the reality of the matter is that, this law is critically important not just for us to showcase at COP26, critically important for our future, that is why the youths actually participate in it. They actually appreciated it and we have had consultations.

The last point I would like to make, the Opposition Party actually think that when we have public consultations, even before it gets to the Committee, they cannot contribute. In most countries jurisdictions, when the government puts out a policy framework and they start to draft laws, when the first to second drafts, political parties and everyone contributes, everyone contributes but they think they are above that process, they think they are above the public. Let the public go and do theirs and only then, they will come to Parliament, and that is what they think. It is a very elitist attitude.

They talk about representing the people but their actions are actually elitism. We had previously, Mr. Speaker, Sir, political parties used to contribute in that type of process, they do not want to contribute. So, when it comes to the Committee stage, they said, “Oh, we only have one month, we only have a few weeks.” The reason, Mr. Speaker, Sir, why we, amongst other things said, it can actually take one month is because of the 18 months consultation. In fact, even before that, Honourable Bulanauca talked about this green go strategy of course, that was before COP23. All of these are building blocks towards that.

So, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would please urge all members and we have great phase because the youth in Fiji actually quite understood this and we have actually got a repository of context and information where they all want to participate in, some will hopefully be going through the various institutions to COP26 also and we are trying to facilitate that. We are trying to give them accreditation so they can carry the Fijian badge and they will participate in that space. The youths from all over the Pacific, hopefully they will also participate because these people are the future, this is what we are doing for them.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, with those comments, I would, please, urge Honourable Members of Parliament to support this Bill. Thank you very much, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Attorney-General for his Right of Reply.

Honourable Members, Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

Motion agreed.

[Climate Change Bill 2021 (Bill No. 31 of 2021) passed and enacted by the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji. (Act No. of 2021)]

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, on that note, we will suspend proceedings for lunch and we will resume at 3.30 p.m. I am giving you enough time for lunch.

The Parliament adjourned at 2.03 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 3.40 p.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, before we go into the next agenda item, for the purposes of complying with Standing Orders with respect to Sitting times, I now call upon the Leader of the Government in Parliament to move the suspension motion.

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDERS

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

That under Standing Order 6 that so much of Standing Order 23(1) is suspended so as to allow the House to sit beyond 4.30 p.m. today, to complete the remaining items listed on today's Order Paper.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I beg to second the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- I call upon the Leader of the Government in Parliament to speak on his motion.

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. We have Schedule 2 on Questions to complete and thus the request to sit beyond 4.30 p.m. Thank you, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the floor is open for debate on this motion. Is there anyone wishing to take the floor?

As no one wishes to take the floor, Honourable Leader of the Government in Parliament, do you have anything further to add?

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- No, thank you, Sir.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

QUESTIONS

Oral Questions

Community-Based Restoration & Sustainable Management of Mangrove Forests (Question No. 220/2021)

HON. R.R. SHARMA asked the Government upon notice:

Can the Honourable Prime Minister and Minister for iTaukei Affairs, Sugar Industry, Foreign Affairs and Forestry update Parliament on the community-based restoration and sustainable management of mangrove forests in the Rewa Delta which was funded by the International Tropical Timber Organisation Project (ITTO)?

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA (Prime Minister and Minister for iTaukei Affairs, Sugar Industry, Foreign Affairs and Forestry).- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I stand to answer question by Honourable Sharma.

Mr. Speaker, my Government is pleased to have implemented the ITTO funded project on community restoration and sustainable management of mangrove forests in the Rewa Delta because of the many benefits it brings to the local communities and to our nation, from the perspective of economic development, food security and environmental stewardship.

Mr. Speaker, research indicates that Fiji has the third largest mangrove forest area in the Pacific, with an estimation of about 47,246 hectares, most of which are on Viti Levu and Vanua Levu. The Rewa Delta, Mr. Speaker, has the largest stands of complex mangroves ecosystems in Fiji, but it is under constant pressure because our coastal communities are still heavily dependent on mangrove forest for a wide range of subsistence and, of course, commercial forestry and fisheries products.

The ITTO funded project was implemented in the six villages of Waicoka, Naivakacau, Nasilai, Natila, Narocake and Muana-i-Ra in Rewa from October 2015. This work will conclude in December 2021.

Mr. Speaker, to ease the pressure on the mangrove forest ecosystem, the project provides alternative livelihoods to the six villages. These include brackish water stream ponds at Waicoka Village, Naivakacau Village, Natila Village and Narocake Village including the piggery at Nasilai Village and Beekeeping at Muana-i-Ra Village in Rewa.

Also important, Mr. Speaker, the project has extended its mangrove planting initiative outside the six project sites to include planting at Nasese and Lami foreshores. The total number of mangrove seedlings planted under this project is 457,250 covering 137.25 hectares. The seedlings that were planted in the villages in Rewa, Suva and Lami foreshores from January 2019 are part of Fiji's 30 million trees in 15 years of tree planting campaign.

Mr. Speaker, as I have mentioned in the last Parliamentary session Fiji has planted more than 7.6 million trees and mangroves. The Ministry continues to update the tree planting dashboard which now records 7.1 million trees covering 6,415 hectares. The Ministry will update this figure to add the remaining half million trees and any others that have been planted since August 2021 once it has validated these figures. Right now the record shows 7.1 million trees covering 6,415 hectares. Unfortunately, if Honourable Professor Prasad and Honourable Qereqeretabua still doubt these figures they should join the National Tree Planting Effort not only to see for themselves but also to appreciate the efforts of the staff who are coordinating the programme and the many Fijians who are contributing their fair share to greening Fiji.

Sir, the conservation of mangrove forest will provide natural barriers to strong winds, waves and the risk associated with climate change and sea level rise, as well as other important ecological, social and cultural benefits. In fact, Mr. Speaker, mangrove forests are a major part of Fiji's commitment to use nature-based solutions to address the impacts of climate change. Mangrove restoration is inherently valuable as a means to preserve the natural environment but it has also improved the livelihoods of local communities who have observed an increase in the availability of fish and other marine life in the mangrove forests and the adjacent coral reefs.

Currently, Mr. Speaker, 241 households from the six ITTO Project Villages benefit from the fish, crabs and lobsters caught for consumption or sale in the local market. As part of this project, Mr. Speaker, the Ministry has developed the Mangrove Management Guideline to support the communities in better managing their mangrove forest. The Management Guideline is aligned to the 2007 National Forest Policy which aims to introduce an effective Mangrove Management Framework for the Rewa Delta with the specific objective of establishing demonstration sites to showcase community-based management activities for biodiversity conservation and to provide alternative livelihoods.

Mr. Speaker, the ITTO funded project on Community-Based Restoration and Sustainable Management of mangrove forest in the Rewa Delta will conclude in December this year. It is one of the many projects Government has implemented for the benefit of our communities and environment.

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

HON. A. JALE.- I see mangrove timber still being sold in few spots around the Nasinu area. Is your Ministry, Honourable Prime Minister still issuing licences to people to harvest mangrove?

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

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- No, Sir, it is illegal to harvest mangrove.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Kepa?

HON. RO T.V. KEPÄ.- Sir, that is a big issue in Rewa especially in the mangrove areas, Honourable Prime Minister, harvesting mangroves. From the Honourable Prime Minister's response to this question, he is saying that the project ends in December this year. Six villages three of which are in Rewa. My question to the Honourable Prime Minister is does the organisation plan to also incorporate this project in other villages?

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Not in Rewa.

HON. RO T.V. KEPÄ.- Not in Tailevu, Mr. Speaker, in Rewa.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Prime Minister, you will be the best to answer that question.

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Not at this stage, Mr. Speaker, but I think the Ministry is on to it.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Sharma, your supplementary question.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to ask the Honourable Prime Minister to inform the House of any other potential benefits of mangroves.

HON. SPEAKER.- Did you get that, Honourable Prime Minister?

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mangroves are a natural part of the coastline ecosystem and, of course, they play a crucial role in containing tidal surges and providing an environment for important animal species. If we respect and manage them properly, they will, of course, provide socio-economic benefits as most of us know to coastal communities and give us opportunities to explore options in the carbon market.

I would like to add on, Mr. Speaker, that mangroves are among the most carbon rich ecosystems on earth capable of storing up to 10 times more carbon than tropical trees.

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

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Those still illegally harvesting mangroves, can the Honourable Prime Minister update the House on what efforts are being done to take them to task?

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Oh! It is very easy. Mr. Speaker, if anyone does any illegal activities in Fiji, they are taken to task. They are reported to the Police and have them charged, very

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Oh! It is very easy. Mr. Speaker, if anyone does any illegal activities in Fiji, they are taken to task. They are reported to the Police and have them charged, very simple.

HON. SPEAKER.- We have our absent friend, he is online, looking very youthful and very fresh. I will give him the floor on this occasion to ask his question. You have the floor.

Incidence & Severity of COVID-19 Infections
(Question No. 219/2021)

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

Can the Honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services update Parliament on the incident and severity of COVID-19 infections in children under 18 years of age since the beginning of the second wave?

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, during this outbreak, we have recorded 8,345 children with COVID-19 from zero to 19 years. We also had seven deaths in children from zero to 19 years in this age group and from the doctors' perspective and also the Ministry of Health, they continue to find why the mechanisms in which there is a significant transmission between children. We know some of them, some of them are the fact that we actually have bigger families, the fact that we actually have communal living, the fact that we have had upsurge of the infection in communities with which we have had the density of many of us living together and those are some of the reasons. Therefore, again it brings to the fore the importance of why we had the vaccination programme that is currently happening for our older children. As the Honourable Prime Minister has alluded to, the vaccination programme for those below 15 years.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, what is important to note is that the whole landscape that we have seen in adults also happen in children. We had those who were asymptomatic and a lot of the children were asymptomatic, they were picked up because an adult was positive in the family, they tested everyone and found that a child was positive. We have also had asymptomatic children and we had those who were very unwell and needed hospitalisation, they needed critical care support in some instances.

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

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Thank you Mr. Speaker, Sir. I thank the Honourable Minister for his answer. Just a question on herd immunity, now that children are being vaccinated. The 80 percent that we are targeting, does that not change the number now that children are being included in the vaccination numbers? Right now the 80 percent herd immunity or 80 percent is only referring to adults (18 years and over) now that children are being vaccinated. Does that not change the amount of 80 percent herd immunity we need, then we will consider opening borders and the like.

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, first and foremost, herd immunity is not 80 percent, herd immunity is 95 percent or more. Secondly, the data that we have for adults is different from the data that we have for children. We know that in this vaccination rollout, for the 15 years to 17 year-olds, we are targeting more than 45,000 children. I must congratulate the parents and the children who came forward. In the first two days alone, we vaccinated more than 7,000 children contrary to what the Honourable Qereqeretabua had said that there was lack of advocacy, lack of planning, lack of awareness; 7,000 of our children fronted up to be vaccinated in the first two days of the 45,000.

So, that shows that there is a lot of awareness, there is a lot of advocacy and our children are working and discussing with their parents how they can be vaccinated to be safe. I think it is important to understand also that you are talking about how herd immunity can protect children. This is how we can protect children. All of us who are eligible to be vaccinated, we need to be vaccinated. That is how we protect our children. We parents must be vaccinated. The one driving the school bus must be vaccinated, the teachers must be vaccinated, the handyman must be vaccinated, the canteen staff/workers must be vaccinated, every one of us that are eligible to be vaccinated including our children who become eligible to be vaccinated. The more children that are eligible to be vaccinated that we vaccinate, the more adults that we vaccinate, it will protect the younger children who are not yet able to be vaccinated.

HON. SPEAKER.- I will give the floor to the Honourable Dr. Lalabalavu.

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Just a supplementary question to the Honourable Minister for Health, for the children under 18 years who have succumbed to COVID-19, are there some cases with underlying medical conditions?

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the exact details of the pathologist and the comorbidities in those seven children, I do not have. Maybe the Honourable Member can ask that in the next parliamentary sitting or as a written question, but certainly as I have said before, we know that the vulnerable children are vulnerable to COVID-19 and the effects of hospitalisation and they can be hospitalised and become very sick.

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

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Sir, 8,000 children under 15 years infected is a big number. Could the Honourable Minister give a comparison to other jurisdictions in other countries in terms of population? Are we better off or are we worse off, or was that to be expected?

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the only data that is available at the moment around us is the one in Australia and New Zealand. Certainly, the incidents per a 100,000 is lesser but we also have to understand that there are many countries around the world that have not reported as detailed as we have done and those that actually have the same socio-economic levels that we are. It is important to be able to measure us against them.

HON. SPEAKER.- We will move on to the third Oral Question for today. I give the floor to the Honourable Jale to ask his question. You have the floor.

Plan to Increase Seaweed Farming – Maritime Provinces
(Question No. 221/2021)

HON. A. JALE asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Fisheries update Parliament on the plan to increase seaweed farming in maritime provinces, and how farmers will be assisted in transporting dried seaweed to markets?

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU (Minister for Fisheries).- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and I thank the Honourable Jale for the question. Just at the outset, may I remind the Honourable Member that seaweed plays a huge role on climate change which the Opposition did not support, as seagrass is considered as one of the highest carbon sink.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, seaweed farming is an environmentally sustainably livelihood option for coastal communities, especially those living in the maritime provinces. It provides an alternative source of income for our coastal communities who mainly depend on fishing for food security and livelihoods. The development of such income generating activity is critical for poverty alleviation and in improving well-being and livelihood of coastal communities who are becoming increasingly vulnerable to climate change and decline in fish stocks.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the provision of a budgetary allocation of \$150,000 in this fiscal year (2021-2022) for the seaweed programme is a symbolic indication of Government's commitment to continually tap on the potential of the seaweed industry. Through this budget, our farmers in the maritime areas will be assisted with start-up material, seeds, nursery development and technical advice to enable them to achieve the required levels of production. Moreover this budget will enable us to secure a steady market for our farmers which in turn will offer incentive for continued planting and production of seaweed.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, for seaweed diversification, there had been value-adding activities that are now engaged in the sector over the past years. This is in addition to interest from private companies on purchase of raw seaweed for organic fertilizer production and other cosmetics. We have two established companies in Fiji, namely; Soluk Fiji Ltd and Redox Organics. These two companies complement each other. While Soluk buys dried seaweed for export purposes, Redox Organics on the other hand purchases raw seaweed to process into fertilizer and other value-added product which now includes seaweed-based sanitizers. Additionally, Mr. Speaker, Sir, Redox Organics has invested in setting up a manufacturing facility for value-added seaweed product which is the future for seaweed as this will ensure a steady market and steady farm gate price for our farmers.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to address the need for transportation, the Ministry of Fisheries will facilitate the transportation of seaweed from the farms to the market. The Ministry through our fisheries extension officers is doing this for the central and western regions, and hopes to expand to the northern and eastern regions. This is in addition to liaising with the franchise and government shipping services to align our planting and harvest times with their schedule so that the seaweed can be transported on a regular basis to the market.

Mr. Speaker, with the established links with the private sector, some of these farmers are able to sell their products to the main markets based on the establishment of partnership agreements between farmers and buyers. This is all aimed at ensuring that we continue to grow this important segment of fisheries sector. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

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

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Can the Honourable Minister update this House on the status of the seaweed industry from the time it started in Fiji and whether it is moving forward or going backwards or standing still in terms of production and export?

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

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker and I thank the Honourable Member for this supplementary question. The challenge is climatic. During cyclones there is a lot of damage to this as they are basically planted along the very shallow coastal areas. We have been encouraging the replanting of seaweeds and we have increased the production, especially in Vanua Levu and around the coastal areas of Viti Levu, especially in Tailevu.

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

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. A supplementary question to the Honourable Minister in terms of the reduction in the budget of \$150,000 for the Seaweed Development Programme. What is the Ministry doing in terms of improving seaweed farming because of the reduction in the last budget?

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Minister.

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Mr. Speaker, I thank the Honourable Member for the question. We are working with other government agencies to assist us. The main issue is for us to have the products available especially for replanting and we are asking other government ministries to assist us in the transportation and use of human resources to assist in replanting.

HON. SPEAKER. Thank you. We will move on to the fourth Oral Question for today.

Progress on Ozone Depleting Substances
(Question No. 222/2021)

HON. A.T. NAGATA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment update Parliament on the progress made with regards to reducing Ozone Depleting Substances (ODS)?

HON. DR. M. REDDY (Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment).- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to thank the Honourable Nagata for raising this question on Ozone Depleting Substances (ODS). It is very timely as last week we celebrated the day dedicated to reduce the utilisation of substances which depletes the ozone layer.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji acceded to the Vienna Convention for the protection of the ozone layer and the Montreal Protocol on substances that depleted the ozone layer. I think this morning I spoke about the importance of the ozone layer in terms of screening the harmful UV rays. Basically, it is important that we do not damage or have holes in the ozone layer because it will affect humans as well as ecosystems, agriculture sector in particular and therefore again have direct impact on human beings.

So, since Fiji signing the Montreal Protocol in 1989, the Montreal Protocol has undergone five amendments. Fiji has ratified all these amendments including the most recent one known as the Kigali Amendment to phase down hydrofluorocarbons. The Montreal Protocol on the substances that depleted the ozone layer regulates the production and consumption of ozone depleting substances which are chemicals that damage the ozone layer as I alluded to earlier on.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Environment is the focal point for the Vienna Convention and the Montreal Protocol implements national policies and legislations to ensure that Fiji's obligation is met. Fiji has successfully phased out the chlorofluorocarbons in 2003, seven years earlier than the required Montreal Protocol. Again this was achieved through the rigorous enforcement of the ODS Act 1998 and by empowering border enforcement agencies and training of refrigeration and air-condition's technicians. It was two ways – at the Customs border control - we worked with the Ministry of Industry and Trade to ensure that it was not imported; and we worked with technicians to ensure that the existing ones were not being used and that it was shelved and disposed.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, following the successful phase out of the CFCs in 2003, the Ministry is now working towards a complete phase out of the hydrofluorocarbons by 2030. The hydrofluorocarbons are utilised in the refrigeration in large ships, particularly. Why we are saying 2030 is because these are

massive investments, it is not about a small freezer that cost \$1,000 or \$2,000 or \$20,000, these are quarter million dollars' worth of refrigerators. You cannot just say that it be burnt immediately and basically bring that massive millions of dollars investment to a standstill. We are taking a phased approach and we have got time until 2030.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, with regards to the hydrofluorocarbons that are being utilised by the fishing industries and large companies, the target was to reduce 10 percent by 2015 and 35 percent by 2020. Fiji has met both these reduction targets and the HFC's consumption is well below the compliance limit. So Fiji's hydrofluorocarbons consumption was 17.35 metric tonnes in 2015 and 38.13 metric tonne in 2020. Fiji is on track and has plans to achieve 67.5 percent reduction target by 2025, well in time and before the deadline of 2030 and a complete phase out by 2030. We are working with the industry, we have got some funding to also assist them. Last year, we were with the fishing industry on the Ozone Day, to check out the system and work with them. We are also looking at funding outside with donors to assist them to replace it, particularly in the fishing industry.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, HFC's consumption in Fiji is mainly in the servicing sector and we are mindful that we do not want to rush into and affect the business modality and we want to ensure that we also meet our targets.

Mr. Speaker, Ministry of Environment also controls the use of methyl bromide which has phased out, except for quarantine purposes. That is something we are allowing, basically on a licensed basis. Without that, we will not be able to export our fresh produce so, that is the only place where methyl bromide is used. We are looking at continuously researching and looking at technologies which could provide a substitute for methyl bromide, so until such time, we will have to use methyl bromide to treat our fresh produce that have been exported to neighbouring markets particularly Australia, New Zealand and United States of America as well.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, having said that, I must say that we are well before target time and we are doing well in respect to controlling and eliminating the use of Ozone Depleting Substances. Thank you.

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

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Mr. Speaker, a follow up question to the Honourable Minister, congratulations for those targets on Ozone Depleting Substances.

My question to the Honourable Minister is could you give us an indication on if or when the Department of Environment plans to target school buses waiting for students at schools. As we all know there is a lot of heavy metals, a lot of carbon monoxide and various carcinogens that are being expelled by the buses. Also on that note, maybe we could start with low hanging fruit of stopping the idling of Government vehicles with air-conditioning running, and if you go down Constitution Avenue I am sure you will catch a few.

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

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, carbon monoxide is not part of Ozone Depleting Substances. It is part of environmental pollution that is being dealt with by the Land Transport Authority (LTA) jointly with the Ministry of Environment but it is not part of this of Ozone Depleting Substance.

HON. SPEAKER.- We will move on to the next question for today.

Prospects of Fish Exports - 2021-2022
(Question No. 223/2021)

HON. S.R. RASOVA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Fisheries update Parliament on the prospects of fish exports in this financial year (2021-2022)?

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU (Minister for Fisheries).- Thank you, Mr .Speaker, Sir. I would like to thank the Honourable Rasova for the question but again, I would like to remind him that the Opposition should have supported the Climate Change Bill which has a huge impact on ocean resources.

Mr. Speaker, fish markets have been affected due to the disruptions posed by COVID-19. This includes access to fishing grounds, constant supply of raw materials, operations within processing facilities, transport and logistical support and the need to comply with COVID-19 restrictions. Additionally, there have been adjustments made to crew movement, transportation, mandatory quarantine periods and the need for entry and exist swabs. All this has shifted the fishing sector's ability to access fish, process it and transport the finished products to the export markets.

On the other hand, Mr. Speaker, over the past eight months fish exports have been able to adjust and meet export market demands due to the stock pile of raw materials that were secured prior to the four and a half months of strict COVID-19 lockdown. Exporters had been able to utilise the two weekly flights to Los Angeles to send fresh tuna shipments, whilst frozen products are sent via sea freight to the European Union market.

Based on five years of historical data projection and the implications of COVID-19, the following key areas need to be met in order to stimulate fish exports in the coming months and for the year 2022. Firstly, Mr. Speaker, overcoming the second wave of COVID-19 is the most critical step in the process of boosting these exports. Once this is addressed, fishers can freely access fishing grounds and slowly build a stock needed to meet processing and export demands. Additionally, once COVID-19 restriction eases, Fiji would attract foreign fleets which now tranship their catch in the high seas back to our shores to provide the needed raw materials for our processing facilities. This further addresses logistical needs or shortage in shipment containers, cargo lines and the needs for frequent flights to our fresh sashimi markets.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on the other hand, the fisheries sector welcomes government's initiatives aimed at boosting economic activity. This includes the removal of certain operational cost for coastal fishes and for offshore fishes, such as the bunkering and provisioning fees, concessionary loans for the renewal of fishing vessels, extensions of what used to be a three year offshore fishing licence to 20years provided that the owner or operator is a Fiji citizen or a person ordinarily resident in Fiji and the removal of some processes that used to be a deterrence to fish accesses for exports.

For our coastal fisheries products, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the focus now is meeting our domestic demand while companies are still exporting to maintain the current market with the hope that things would get better once restriction eases.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, while fisheries data projects constant figure around 30,000 metric tonnes of export for 2021 to 2022, it is critical to understand that this is subject to how we overcome the limitations brought in on the nation by COVID-19. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

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

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the Honourable Minister for his reply. For the fish exports, what segment in terms of the type of fish is most in demand for export? Tuna, Mahimahi, which one is the most exportable in terms of demand?

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and I thank the Honourable Member for the supplementary question, about 99 percent of export is tuna.

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

HON. S. RASOVA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the Honourable Minister for his Ministerial Statement. I would like to say here that the forecast export for 2021-2022 is \$65.1 million. That is the forecast at this moment but anyway 2018-2019, the export from \$100.8 million it went down to \$95.2 million. We do not have the export figures for 2019-2020. By way of public interest, what was the actual? At this moment, we have a provisional and revised budget for 2019-2020 at \$70.1 million.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, you are supposed to be asking a supplementary question, not giving details of the answer.

HON. S.R. RASOVA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, by way of interest what was the actual figure from 2019-2020?

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

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the Honourable Rasova for the supplementary question. I do not have the figures with me now but I can provide that to him later.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Nawaikula?

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Can the Honourable Minister update the House as to how many locals or local companies are being issued with the fishing licences to participate in this industry?

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and I thank the Honourable Nawaikula for the supplementary question. There are 60 licences issued by the Fiji government and all 60 are local companies.

HON. SPEAKER.- We move on to the sixth Oral Question for today. I give the floor to the Honourable Vegnathan to ask his question.

Upgrade of Labasa's Golden Age Home – Progress of
(Question No. 224/2021)

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

Can the Honourable Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation update Parliament on the status of the upgrade of the Golden Age Home in Labasa?

HON. R.S. AKBAR (Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation).- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and I thank the Honourable Member for asking this question.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me first begin with the International Day of Sign Language that is celebrated across the world today. I would like to acknowledge our interpreters here who provide parliamentary services, as well as all those intervention centres and services that are provided to ensure that we are able to bridge the communication gap which our hearing impaired Fijians are faced with.

To give some statistics, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have close to 3,818 members in our population that have hearing impairment. Of course, I cannot give an ethnicity figure but I can give you a male and female figure. We have 225 males that suffer from hearing impediments and we have 1,673 females. Thank you and we will be talking about this more tomorrow, as there is an end of week statement on Rights of the Disabled in our communities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, coming back to the question about the update on the status of the upgrade of the Golden Age Home in Labasa. This relates to the older persons who have been neglected or pushed out from their families into the streets and into Government's residential homes. Apart from the three Government Residential homes for older persons, we have NGOs and other church-based organisations, which look after our elderly who do not have the home or who have the home, but unfortunately, their families do not want them for reasons and this is a very sad state of affairs because I believe a society should be judged by how it feeds its vulnerable people. Here we have an example of 182 people who are living in the three Government Residential homes and 62 people who are living in the other NGO provided services.

I strongly believe that the older persons have exactly the same rights as any of us here and particularly, even if they are in a nursing or caregiving home, they equally deserve to be treated the same. They must be allowed to age with respect and dignity and that is what this government is all about.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform this august House that Government is committed to the safety and well-being of our elders or older persons in this beloved country. The proportion of older Fijians aged plus 60, I would use it comprises of 10.6 percent of Fiji's total population. Out of that, as I mentioned, I stand to be corrected here, 118 in our state homes and 64 in other homes.

The recent profiling that we did for our beggars in the Central Division, Mr. Speaker, Sir, have close to 50 people who live on our streets. The latest profiling we did, we had 5 out of them who were quite old and I must thank the police for their efforts in assisting us, and of course, the Social Welfare officers and the beggars unit, we placed five of them back with their families.

Sadly, after staying with their families and getting medical attention for a small period of time, they switched back to the streets. Any of us who are travelling across that street and see them sleeping on cardboards and make shifts home is enough to melt our hearts. My request and my plea has always been, these seniors deserve to be with their families. When we sit and talk to them, not only do we come into tears, but hearing their stories and seeing them cry, how they missed their families, some of them are sick, some of them are mentally unstable. Some of them have lost their ability to earn a living and that is where the Government's social welfare pension scheme kicks in.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we look after three state homes for the elderly, one is in Samabula and the other one is in Natabua and then in Labasa. Now we are calling them Golden Age Home, as we believe these seniors need to age in facilities that give them comfort and provide them with all their needs. It is for this reason that the Government has embarked to upgrade and renovate all the three State homes and we started off with Labasa.

To address the question again, this is a \$4 million project – the Golden Age Home in Labasa is a \$4 million project committed by the government and this is to build a new Golden Age Home and of course, upgrade the Home in Labasa. The project is on the verge of completion. Should borders open as

planned, we will be able to officially open the new Home in two months' time and while the new Home has been in progress, the elderlies there are still taken care of in the other buildings that is provided there. This budget gives us \$1.7 million towards the completion of construction work and \$.2 million is being allocated to furniture, fittings and equipment for the Golden Age Home in Labasa.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Fijian Government administers three state-administered age care homes and these homes are built for comfort and convenience and it will take me another 10 minutes to say what all it has but I can assure you that these homes are built, cyclone-certified and in full comfort and convenience states.

I would also like to acknowledge our frontline workers and management in all state care facilities in Suva. Thank you for the sacrifice to ensure the prevention, response and recovery measures are maintained at all times. Our age care sector has been fortunate that despite having COVID-19 active cases in some of our homes, we have not lost any of our elderly citizens to death and that is because of the COVID-19 protocols that was strictly monitored in these homes. We have 100 percent recoveries and we are appreciative of the overwhelming support to the age care sector during this pandemic by our board of visitors.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the recent development, the Ministry wishes to relay its gratitude to the Government of Australia via the Vuvale Partnership, for its timely assistance to provide \$.3 million to our three age care homes in Fiji and of course, we have other homes as I mentioned, so six homes will benefit by having additional human resources through this Vuvale Partnership. On site, that includes more caregivers, housekeepers, laundry heads, cooks and this is in agreement with the Ministry, the Australian Government and the Then India Sanmarga Ikya (TISI) Sangam as recruiting agencies. Approximately, 112 qualified and vaccinated staff are due to be mobilised to all these homes soon.

I can assure the House that the government since 2013 has created a game changer to bridge the gap in relation to establishing a specific social protection programme for older persons in Fiji. Currently, we have a budget of \$55.3 million and this is administered as a monthly allowance of \$100 to 43,134 older persons above the age of 65. This is those who live in community and family setting and this is the allowance that we pay to them on a monthly basis.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I also like to acknowledge the countless private sector associations, families and individuals who despite this hard time, continue to freely give support to my Ministry, to the vulnerable sections of this society.

Before I take my seat, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I urge all the Members of Parliament here, all the ministries that it is our responsibility to advocate for elderlies to remain in their home setting and it would be very encouraging as we go back to our villages, our settlements and when we have our *talanoa* sessions. There is a lot of talk about *talanoa* sessions and one of the *talanoa* sessions, I would like you to have with your communities, with your advisory counsellors, is to see that there is no abuse for the elderly within the homes. Any abuse should be reported to us and of course, the social welfare services then takes it in.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister. We will move on to the next Oral Question for today and I call on the Honourable Kepa to ask her question.

Proper Maintenance of the Engineers Project Trust Fund
(Question No. 225/2021)

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

Can the Honourable Minister for Defence, National Security and Policing, Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management update Parliament on the measures taken by the Republic of Fiji Military Forces to ensure proper maintenance of the Engineers Project Trust Fund in accordance with accounting standards and the Financial Management Act 2004?

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, and I wish to thank the Honourable Member for the question.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as we are all aware perhaps in this august House that the RFMF Engineers are involved in rural development projects and they used to operate two accounts for such purposes - the Plant Unit - TMA and the Trust Fund as referred to by the Honourable Member.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me again assure this august House that the RFMF is committed to ensure proper maintenance of their account, also have taken the necessary measures, as well to improve and ensure the proper maintenance of the Engineers Project Trust Fund in accordance with the Accounting Standards and the Financial Management Act of 2004. I did clarify with the Honourable Member, prior to the session after lunch, Mr. Speaker, Sir, as to how long ago was the Report that probably raised this issue because the Account has been shifted to the Headquarters, RFMF, it is no longer now with the Engineers Unit, simply because of the reasons that were raised previously.

Why has it been shifted to Headquarters, RFMF? One of the reasons is I think where they had a lot of difficulties in the past. Back in Nabuni where the RFMF Engineers are based, most of the transactions and paper works are done manually. So now when it is with Headquarters, RFMF it is with Financial Management Information System (FMIS), Mr. Speaker, Sir. Therefore, as I have stated in the past, monitoring was manually done but now it is recorded in the FMIS at the Headquarters, RFMF. As I have stated, this account has been transferred to Headquarters RFMF since 2016.

Additional to that previously when it was in Nabuni, all projects were lumped together into the account. But what has been done now at Headquarters, RFMF is, they have separate allocations for the different projects. Additionally, Mr. Speaker, Sir, they are also doing reconciliations which are prepared monthly and that reconciliation is also forwarded to the Ministry of Economy. Of course, acquittals are also compiled by the Accounts team which is then submitted to the project owners or funders of the project and, of course, it is also remitted to the agencies as well because it is not only about Government projects but, of course, there are some organisations that also preferred the services provided by the RFMF Engineers.

Lastly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, again as I have alluded to under the FMIS, all payments are processed through the Electronic Fund Transfer (EFT) compared to the manual system of payment done through cheques in the past. Those are some of the messages taken by Headquarters RFMF and the RFMF Engineers to sort out the issues that were raised probably in a report previously. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Minister. We will move on to the next oral question for today. I now call on the Honourable Adimaitoga to ask her question. You have the floor, Madam.

Managing NCDs During COVID-19 Outbreak
(Question No. 226/2021)

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

Can the Honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services inform Parliament how Non-Communicable Diseases have been managed during this COVID-19 outbreak?

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, a Non Communicable Disease (NCD) during this outbreak continues and therefore we need to be able to look after all Fijians who had an NCD. Initially in the outbreaks when the Health Centres and hospitals were closed certainly during that time there were challenges because the Specialist Outpatient Department Clinics were also closed. What we did though was actually asked the Clinical Services Networks, the Command Centres and also the facilities to come up with the plan and they did and we heard a little bit about it in the Ministerial Statement on Monday in which one of the things that was actually utilised very well was the used of virtual platforms and also the Tally Health Line which is 165.

The 165 if you need a retrieval you then press No.1, then Line No. 3 was for those who had acute medical conditions and cardiac conditions and diabetes care. Line No.4 was for mental health support and those who had children who need specialist clinics by the Paediatricians, they will then link on to Line No. 5. Those who need a Specialist Surgical Clinics Line No. 6 and Line No. 4 are women and mothers needing Obstetrics and Gynaecological Care Line No. 7, Cancer and Cancer Support Services, Line No. 8 and for those who needed Specialist Eye Care then were able to link on to Line No. 9 from 165. This was done in addition to the fact that the Specialist themselves and the doctors took it upon themselves to being contact with the patients, get their list and actually liaise with the patients on how best to be able to do a clinic for them.

In some instances it was through phone calls, zoom, *viber* platforms, it was using and all those virtual platforms that are available. Also, as I have alluded to in the Ministerial Statement then the prescription was then generated that they could pick it up from an identified health facility. For example, in the midst of the COVID-19 and, therefore, it was difficult to be able to come to CWM. The Specialist were doing their clinics using the virtual platforms from either their homes or at CWM but they were able to pick up the prescription for our patients at the nearest facility that was identified near to where they are.

You will also see that the majority of the people that were been looked after in the Lami-Nausori corridor *per se* were predominantly in the Nasinu area, Valelevu, Makoi and Nakasi Health Centres Pharmacists were effectively used.

I have also said that in some instances in the Ministerial Statement there were patients that actually Fiji Pharmaceutical and Biomedical Services (FPBS) used their assets to actually deliver the prescriptions to them.

It was challenging but they have been able to come up with their own processes on how they are going to do it and I am very grateful to the many forms and the many ways in which our health professionals also working with our partners are able to go forward and looked after the NCD needs of our people, thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister. Honourable Members, that brings to an end the Oral Questions for today. We now move on to the first Written Question. I do not know whether the Honourable Member and her offsider are trying to confuse me here. Yesterday he asked the question on her behalf, now she is asking the question of his behalf. You have the floor, Madam.

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I did not mean to confuse you, Sir. I had to leave early yesterday because it was Mum's 80th birthday, so we had a little bit of a party at home for her. Thank you.

Written Questions

Boarded Drone Hardware
(Question No. 227/2021)

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA asked the Government upon notice:

Can the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service, Communications, Housing and Community Development inform Parliament about the boarded drone hardware for whole of Government from 2018 to date?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM (Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service, Communications, Housing and Community Development).- Thank you, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will provide a response under the Standing Orders at a later date.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. For the second Written Question for today, I call on the Honourable Leawere to ask his question. You have the floor.

Rural Roads Programme Budgetary Allocation
(Question No. 228/2021)

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

Can the Honourable Minister for Infrastructure, Meteorological Services, Lands and Mineral Resources update Parliament on the utilisation of the Rural Roads Programme's budgetary allocation, in particular:

- (a) the number of rural roads upgraded annually since the 2018-2019 financial year to date; and
- (b) a list by Division of rural communities where roads have been upgraded annually since the 2018-2019 financial year to date.

HON. J. USAMATE (Minister for Infrastructure, Meteorological Services, Lands and Mineral Resources).- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will table my response at a later date as allowed by Standing Order 45(3).

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Members, that brings us to the end of today's Sitting. We have had a busy day. We will now adjourn until tomorrow morning at 9.30.

The Parliament adjourned at 4.46 p.m.