

[VERBATIM REPORT]

STANDING COMMITTEE ON JUSTICE, LAW AND HUMAN RIGHTS PUBLIC HEARING

BILLS

Investment Fiji Bill 2022 (Bill No. 05/2022)



**SUBMITTEE: Residents of Nagigi Settlement,
Labasa.**

VENUE: Nagigi Naag Mandir, Labasa.

DATE: Tuesday, 15th February, 2022.

**VERBATIM REPORT OF THE PUBLIC HEARING OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE
ON JUSTICE, LAW AND HUMAN RIGHTS HELD AT NAGIGI NAAG MANDIR,
LABASA, ON TUESDAY, 15TH FEBRUARY, 2022, AT 7.21 P.M.**

Present

1. Hon. A.A. Maharaj - Chairman
2. Hon. R.R. Sharma - Deputy Chairperson
3. Hon. Dr. S.R. Govind - Government Member
4. Hon. Ratu S. Matanitobua - Opposition Member
5. Hon. M.D. Bulitavu - Opposition Member

Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts

1. Mr. Collin Sowani Yabaki - Director Heritage and Arts
2. Mr. Veniki Nalio - Senior Policy and Convention Officer

Interviewee/Submittee: Nagigi Community, Labasa

In Attendance:

1. Mr. Prakash Chand
2. Mr. Janen Prasad
3. Mr. Rajendra Prasad
4. Mr. Din Dayal
5. Mr. Deo Karan
6. Mr. Feroz Ali
7. Mr. Nitendra Nand – President of Nagigi Naag Mandir
8. Mr. Jatish Prasad
9. Mr. Anand Sami
10. Mr. Nilesh Chand
11. Mr. Viliame Davelevu
12. Mr. Raman Lal
13. Mr. Dhiren Chand
14. Mr. Kamal Sewak
15. Mr. Ravi Naidu
16. Mr. Rishi Chand
17. Mr. Vinesh Chand

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Good evening everyone. I shall call the meeting to order now. Before we proceed, may we request honourable Sharma to lead us with a word of prayer.

(Prayer in Hindi - Hon. R.R. Sharma)

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Before us we have the President of Nagigi Naag Madir. I shall now give the time to him to welcome each and every one who is present here this evening. You have the floor, Sir.

MR. N. NAND.- Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I will not take much of your time. On behalf of the Board of Management, the Board of Trustees of Nagigi Naag Mandir, I would like to welcome

the honourable Members of the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights, who are here to discuss the major issues in which Mr. Chairman will highlight to us. I would also like to welcome the members of Nagigi Community, who have taken out their humble time to be here and support our Parliamentary Committee, who have come to take submissions. Thank you all.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you, Sir, for those wonderful words of welcome. On behalf of the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights, we would like to welcome each and every one of you. Before I proceed further and introduce the honourable Members of the Committee, as you all know, our official language in Parliament is English. I, as Chairman, will be speaking in English but then we will get honourable Sharma to translate everything in Hindi for the better understanding of the Nagigi Community. If anyone has any question he or she would like to ask, please feel free to speak either in Hindi or English, and then we will translate for all the viewers who are watching from the comfort of their home.

Please, be mindful that this meeting is recorded, so everything you say here is shown live on the Parliament website as well as the Parliament *Facebook* page. Also, this will be telecasted at a later stage through *Walesi* as well. So if you do look at the Parliament Channel in *Walesi* you might have seen that there are certain Standing Committees that conduct meetings from Parliament premises.

This Committee consists of both, Government and Opposition Members. This time around, whenever Parliament receives a report from Government, it is referred to us. Once it is referred to us, it is our responsibility as an independent Committee to go around and collect submissions from the general public if they have any input. If they would like to change anything in the Bill that is before the Committee, they do their submission and then at a later stage, the Committee sits and deliberates amongst themselves. Some of the submissions, we will take on board and some of the submissions are not relevant to the Bill and some of the changes that are supposed to bring effect to the Bill itself.

Once we agree to that as a Committee, we present a report back to Parliament whereby that Bill is debated and then passed, if majority of the Members vote for that particular Bill and then that Bill becomes an Act. So before the Bill is passed, it is called the Bill but as soon as it is passed, it becomes an Act. The responsible Minister is responsible to get the team and whatever the Bill is saying, I will discuss with you later on in a bit detail on what the Bill is all about and who is going to administer, who is going to implement whatever is said in the Bill. I will ask honourable Sharma to translate that in Hindi then we will proceed from there. Thank you.

(Translation in Hindi by Hon. R.R. Sharma)

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you, honourable Sharma for taking us through.

At this point, I would like to welcome the Director, Department of Heritage, from the Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts who has joined the Committee in this tour.



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MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you, Director, for that clarification. Before we proceed any further, I like to introduce the second Bill that is before us, after which we can then go into the question and answer session.

The second Bill is the Investment Fiji Bill 2022, Bill No. 2 of 2022. As I have stated earlier, this is the formation of the secretariat that is going to see that the Act is implemented, how they are going to promote Fiji abroad as an investment could also be their responsibility. This is a very small Bill with only four Parts. I will try to read the objectives so that it is easier and understood by everyone.

Part 1 – Interpretation and Objectives

The objectives of the Bill are to set out the mandate and functions of Investment Fiji for the implementation of investment and export promotion strategies in close collaboration with the Ministry, which are aimed at increasing domestic and foreign investment in Fiji and increasing exports for Fiji's development. For example, we all know that for any country to increase their GDP, we need to have a high volume of export. Unfortunately, in Fiji, it is almost 80 percent to 90 percent of the things that we utilise are imported.

If we want to develop Fiji into a developing nation, we need to ensure that we start exporting more rather than importing. Our export should be 80 percent and our import should be 20 percent. That is how we are going to get a lot of foreign exchange and investment into the country. A common example would be cars. There is a high usage of cars but we import cars. Although these clothes are made in Fiji, the materials are imported. We cannot just say that even though it is made in Fiji, it is 100 per cent contributing towards the Fiji economy, because majority of things are imported. So, those are some of the reasons and that is why we are having this secretariat set up so that we can start promoting - encourage companies to come and start investing in Fiji. Why can I not make material or fabric in Fiji rather than importing it?

The other thing that will be required is to see that exports increase as well. If we see our garment industry, a lot of clothes are exported to United States of America. For National Rugby League (NRL), we manufacture jerseys for certain NRL clubs. Those are some of the things that we require to promote Fiji as an investment site.

When an investor is interested in investing in Fiji, we need to have an office that looks after them. It should not be an investor coming into Fiji with \$200 million to \$250 million investment, for example, and running to individual offices in trying to get certificates, approvals, et cetera. There needs to be a centralised office, so is important for us to facilitate them because bureaucratic processes sometimes become an obstacle and hindrance in the process, so some investors think that it is better to invest elsewhere rather than investing into Fiji.

There are a lot of things in the Bill that is going to be repealed and we are trying to modernise that. You must have heard that the Ministry of Trade and Tourism now has a portal. If anyone wants to register as a foreign investor, they can just go to that portal and get themselves registered online. If you even want to invest in Fiji and you are trying to register a company, you can do that online as well. You no longer have to go and wait in line to register your company.

Now, we have made it so easy that even if you are registering a limited liability company, the Article of Association and all those things are there already. You just need to go and feed in your

name and details, print it out and load them into the portal to get your company registered. It is becoming so easy unlike before where you had to go a lawyer, spend close to \$2,000 or \$3,000 and get your limited liability company registered. I believe the new fees now is around \$10 whereby you can get registered. So, we are trying to facilitate all those things and that is why we have Investment Fiji as well. Whatever processes we have for investors in Fiji, we are trying to ease that for our overseas investors as well.

Part 2 - Investment Fiji

Part 2 explains the mandate and some of the functions of Investment Fiji and its Board that is going to govern how Investment Fiji is going to promote Fiji. On the mandate and the directive given by the Minister responsible, there will be a CEO, then there will be a sub-committee consisting of staff of Investment Fiji and the limitation of the liability as well.

Part 3- Accounts and Finance

It talks about the funding - finance, report, et cetera.

Part 4 – Miscellaneous

This Part talks about the direction in which the Minister wants Investment Fiji to operate in, to follow the regulations, the repeal of the old Act, et cetera.

We will now open the floor for questions and clarifications but before that, I will give some time to the Director, Department of Heritage, to talk about the heritage site itself. Thank you.

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MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you, Director. Do you have any questions?

(Question asked by Mr. R. Chand in Hindi)

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you very much, Sir, for that suggestion. I believe what you are saying is in line with the Investment Fiji Bill 2022. As I was explaining, one of the mandates and functions of Investment Fiji would be to collaborate with investors not just abroad but local investors as well. If someone is definitely trying to invest and if there are hindrances in the process of obtaining a licence or approvals in order for development to take place, the Committee can come and visit the site or whatever the site is.

However, whatever you are saying has to do with the Executive arm of Government. We can come, have a discussion at your site and whatever the issues are, we will definitely pass them on to the Ministry of Commerce, Trade and Tourism. No harm in doing that. On our way to Lagalaga tomorrow, we hope to see that particular site. Thank you very much.

(Translation in Hindi - Hon. R.R. Sharma)

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MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you very much for your question. I think it was also raised when we were having a discussion with the community in Siberia because this is a common understanding of people that whenever we talk about investment, they ask the kind of support that is going to be provided by Government. When we are looking at capital investment that is something different to the grant offered by Government. If you are coming into Fiji as a foreign investor, we would expect the money to flow into the country from outside. We do not expect a foreign investor to come into Fiji, try to take loan from FDB and then invest in Fiji. That is not actually bringing in money into the system.

That has a negative effect on our economy. We want those investors to come to Fiji with their capital. That is very important. If you are an investor, what we are going to do through Investment Fiji is facilitate all the processes - ease of doing the business in Fiji. If you want to get your company registered, if you want to get the Foreign Investment Certificate and if you want to get registered with FRCS, all those things are going to be facilitated for you. For example, if you need to buy land, iTLTB will come in to propose some of the sites that are available, where they can buy land. If anyone is expecting a foreign investor to come in, he will say, "I am coming in with a \$10 million project into Fiji." Then he comes to Government and asks, "Alright, can you people give me a grant of \$8 million so that I can do such an investment?" No, that is not happening.

We will not be providing grant to the investors, even our local investors as well. If an investor is coming in and going into a commercial business, we cannot be expecting grants from Government. We will facilitate all other things but we will not give grant. Grant is given basically to people who are earning below \$30,000 per year, and given to our own citizens - the small, micro and medium enterprises for them to develop into a bigger business. But if an investor is coming into Fiji, then definitely Government will not give grant to him or her. I hope that clarifies.

MR. D. DAYAL.- Regarding heritage sites, it is good that we have development in the Northern Division but the unemployment rate is very high. I would suggest two places, one is Waiqele hot spring and the other one is Tabia hot spring, if those could be developed for tourist attraction. It would also be good to have those two sites. If the Bill is passed and it becomes an Act, development happens. Tourists come in so that we have more employment and unemployment will reduce. Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you Sir, for that input. There is a difference between Investment Fiji and Tourism Fiji. What you are talking about concerns Tourism Fiji. We need to promote those kind of places as a tourist destination so that tourists can come, but in order for tourists to come and you might have heard about Rosy Tours, we can ask them to start promoting and sending tourists to Labasa. But the problem is accommodation. Can you accommodate them? Do we have that kind of facilities for a person willing to come and spend time in Sheraton, for example, for him or her to come? Do we have those kind of resorts? That is where our honourable Member was saying that he is trying to develop a resort to three or five stars, which is where Investment Fiji comes in.

We need to invest in such places or resorts so that we can start sending in tourists. Definitely, we will take it on board. We will talk with Tourism Fiji to start promoting these places as a tourist destination so that tourists come and visit. I know definitely hot spring in Savusavu is promoted very heavily because we have beds available there. Tourists can come and stay. There are five star hotels, like Namale, Coral Sun and others. People even come from Laucala Island to Savusavu, just to visit those places. That is very important and that is why Investment Fiji is also very important.

We can bring this kind of investment into Macuata as well whereby we can have five star or seven star hotels and resorts which can start accommodating tourists and then we can start promoting those places. Naag Mandir is also very much promoted by Tourism Fiji. If you travel with Fiji Link or Fiji Airways, there are Fiji Times Magazines and Naag Mandir is always there as a tourist destination. Definitely your views are taken on board and we will actually relay to Tourism Fiji to start promoting those sites as well. Thank you.

Please, feel free to ask anything related to the Investment Fiji Bill 2022 or Heritage Bill 2021. We cannot say any questions are very silly or very hard to ask unless and until they are asked and answered. Anything else not relating to these Bills, just to let you know that I will be staying back for a while to meet the community as well. If there are other issues, we will also take them on board and we will pass that to the relevant agencies that need to deal with it.

MR. R. LAL.- Thank you for giving me another chance. With regard to the 5 year and 20 year development plan, I would like to mention here the submission I made regarding our water. I had presented at Labasa Village.

With the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights, I think water is something very important for every human being. We have been fighting for clean drinking water. For our fourth generation, we do not have clean drinking water. We have water but it is not clean - flood comes in, swept it away and there is no water. Drought came six months ago but water was not supplied. We have to call Water Authority of Fiji to supply water but not clean water. We have been fighting for this for so long, like 15 years or 20 years, and there is no response regarding that. May I know, if you can put my request to the right authorities - we want clean drinking and metered water. Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you, Sir. I believe I have been coming to Nagigi Community quite frequently. Unfortunately, we were not able to have this discussion but all those people who have had discussion with me would exactly know the answer that I would give.

With regards to water all the way from Laulau to Qalega, unfortunately, that does not relate to this particular Bill so once we formally close this meeting, I will then explain. I do have an answer for that because Nagigi is one of the places in the whole of Vanua Levu which is the driest place and which we can say there is no water source. So, we cannot look for the source in Nagigi but definitely there are plans. Once we conclude this meeting, then I will let you know. As I have said, that is

something to do with the executive arm of Government, not the legislative. We will come to it. Is there anything else?

MR. V. DAVELEVU.- Thank you, Sir. In the last two years, 20 students from Harvard University in America came and prepared everything. Once I completed the bure in the farm, then I will make a contact. *Vinaka.*

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you, Sir, that is noted as well. Any last question?

Since there are no other questions, I will handover to honourable Bulitavu to thank everyone who have made it here this evening and then we can officially close the session. *Vinaka.*

(Vote of Thanks – Hon. M.D. Bulitavu)

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you, just for the benefit of people who are watching us, tomorrow we are going to be in Lagalaga. We are going to do site visitation to the floating island and from there, we are going to have a meeting at Lagalaga Primary School at 3.00 p.m. On Thursday, we are scheduled to have a public hearing and that will be held at the Ministry of Youth and Sports Conference Room, Level 2, Ro Qomate House. So, if anyone wants to meet and discuss anything with the Committee, they can definitely do so. Thank you.

The Committee adjourned at 8.33 p.m.