

PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI



PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DAILY HANSARD

WEDNESDAY, 11TH MAY, 2022

[CORRECTED COPY]

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WEDNESDAY, 11TH MAY, 2022

The Parliament met at 9.34 a.m. pursuant to adjournment.

MR. SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

PRESENT

All Members were present, except the honourable Ro T.V. Kupa, honourable Ratu S. Matanitobua and honourable Adi L. Qionibaravi.

MINUTES

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

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Tuesday, 10th May, 2022 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.

COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE SPEAKER

Welcome

I welcome all honourable Members to today's sitting of Parliament. I also welcome those joining us in the public gallery, and those watching the live broadcast of the proceedings.

USP – PL100 Government and Politics Students

Honourable Members, I also welcome the third group of PL100 - Government and Politics students from the University of the South Pacific. You are most welcome to Parliament, and similarly, with the previous groups who were here in the last two days, I hope that you enjoy today's proceedings. Thank you for your continued interest in the workings of your Parliament.

PRESENTATION OF REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

Review Report - National Fire Authority 2015 Annual Report

HON. V. PILLAY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am pleased to present the Report of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs on the annual review of the National Fire Authority (NFA) for 2015.

This review was undertaken in accordance with Standing Order 109(2)(b) which mandates the Committee to look into issues related to health, education, social services, labour, culture and media.

The Committee first met to deliberate in April of this year and formulated questions pertaining to the Annual Report, which were sent to NFA for its response. Upon receipt of all

relevant information on the Committee's queries, the Committee compiled its findings and subsequently endorsed its Report in May.

Some of the pertinent findings emanating from the scrutiny of NFA's Annual Report included the following:

- Total income for 2015 was recorded at \$12.5 million, compared to \$14.3 million recorded for the year 2014.
- The number of incidents attended to by NFA during the year totalled 6,846 which includes, attending to 127 property fires; 1,714 grass/bush/cane/rubbish fires; 162 special services/malicious/others; 80 vehicle fires; 2 ship and boat fires; 135 road accident rescue; 899 private fire alarms; 2 Swift Water Rescue and 3,725 emergency ambulance service.
- There was a decrease in the total number of fires that the Authority responded to during the year from 143 in 2014 to 127 in 2015. The main cause of fires continues to be electrical related and whilst there was 11 percent reduction in the total structural fires, there is a still much need for a change in public perspective and attitude towards fire safety.

At this juncture, I wish to thank the Chief Executive Officer of the National Fire Authority and his staff for their timely assistance in this review process. I also extend my gratitude to my Committee colleagues, namely; honourable George Vegnathan (Deputy Chairperson), honourable Alipate Nagata, honourable Salote Radrodro and honourable Dr. Ratu Atonio Lalabalavu, for their contributions during the Committee's deliberations.

On behalf of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, I commend this Report to Parliament and request all honourable Members of this august Parliament to take note of the Report.

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. V. PILLAY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, pursuant to Standing Order 121(5), I hereby move:

A motion without notice that a debate on the content of the Report is initiated at a future sitting.

HON. G. VEGNATHAN.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I second the motion.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

Consolidated Review Report - Reserve Bank of Fiji Insurance Annual Reports 2019 and 2020

HON. V. NATH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs is pleased to submit to Parliament, the Consolidated Review Report of the Reserve Bank of Fiji Insurance Annual Reports for the years 2019 and 2020.

Insurance is an essential risk mitigation and investment tool, therefore, one must endeavour to safeguard themselves from possible risks and uncertainties. Vehicle accidents, house fires or even workplace injuries are just some of the many instances where unexpected hardships can occur and

insurance has continued to play an important role in mitigating losses of this nature at household, business, national and global level.

The Reserve Bank of Fiji (RBF) plays a pivotal supervisory role in the insurance industry under its financial stability mandate as they ensure that insurance companies remain safe and sound while also delivering quality customer service. The Committee, while deliberating on the 2019 and 2020 Annual Reports agreed that insurance underwriters needed to work with relevant stakeholders to launch collaborative awareness programmes so that insurance covers are seen as risk mitigation factors rather than additional expenses.

The Committee was made aware that certain insurance companies have made access to their services easier by adapting to digital technology, including but not limited to applications, online payments, and possibly claim submissions. Given the lessons that COVID-19 has taught us, initiatives such as these are welcomed and encouraged.

Submissions from the Governor of RBF and his team reinforced the Committee's view that climate change was another area that was expected to persist with its own set of challenges and efforts were being made to increase coverage for disaster risk and mitigation.

Based on the success of the Micro Bundled Insurance, the Committee has encouraged the consortium of insurance underwriters to come up with various packages that is affordable to all Fijians. The Committee also believes that further avenues could be explored to include other agricultural producers such as *yaqona*, *dalo* and other subsistence farmers, co-operatives and market vendors in Fiji Care's Micro Bundle Insurance.

I would like to take this opportunity to extend our appreciation to the Governor of the RBF and his team members, as well as representatives from the Insurance Association of Fiji and Licensed Brokers Association for making time to present before the Committee.

Finally, I thank our Committee Members who were part of the team that produced this Report: the Deputy Chairperson - honourable Veena Bhatnagar, honourable Sachida Nand, honourable Inosi Kuridrani, honourable Ro Filipe Tuisawau, and I also would like to thank honourable George Vegnathan for his input. I also take this opportunity to acknowledge and thank the Parliamentary staff who have given us invaluable support.

On behalf of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs, I commend the Review of the Reserve Bank of Fiji Insurance Annual Report 2019-2020 to Parliament.

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. V. NATH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, pursuant to Standing Order 121(5), I hereby move:

A motion without notice that a debate on the content of the Report is initiated at a future sitting.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

Consolidated Review Report - Municipal Councils 2004-2019 Annual Reports

HON. V. PILLAY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am pleased to present the Report of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs on the annual review of the following Municipal Councils' Annual Reports:

1. Suva City Council 2006-2015 Annual Reports;
2. Ba Town Council 2006-2018 Annual Reports;
3. Nadi Town Council 2004-2015 Annual Reports;
4. Tavua Town Council 2006-2014 Annual Reports;
5. Nausori Town Council 2005-2014 Annual Reports;
6. Rakiraki Town Council 2011-2018 Annual Reports;
7. Lautoka City Council 2006-2014 Annual Reports;
8. Sigatoka Town Council 2005-2019 Annual Reports;
9. Savusavu Town Council 2005-2010 Annual Reports;
10. Lami Town Council 2004-2014 Annual Reports;
11. Levuka Town Council 2005-2011 Annual Reports;
12. Nasinu Town Council 2009-2010 Annual Reports; and
13. Labasa Town Council 2004-2017 Annual Reports.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this constitutes 126 Annual Reports which the Committee has assiduously examined. The Committee was referred these Annual Reports over multiple Parliamentary sessions. Our plan was to read the more recent reports and formulate pressing questions to be sent to Municipalities for their responses. However, equal attention was also paid to the more dated Annual Reports and the operational and financial anomalies they contained.

During the scrutiny of the Annual Reports extensive communication was made with the Town and City Councils, either in person through the undertaking of site visits, or via emails and correspondences. Upon receipt of all relevant information on the Committee's queries, the Committee compiled its findings and subsequently endorsed its Report in May.

This Review Report highlights the challenges faced by our Municipalities and proposed recommendations to address them. In particular, we observed the colossal financial impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the operations of the Councils, some of whom were facing financial difficulties even before its onset.

Consequently, Councils have had to delay the construction of some of their capital projects due to the diversion of funds to other urgent activities at the time. The pandemic has also resulted in many ratepayers defaulting on their payments due to financial constraints. This has resulted in further accumulation of rate and rental arrears for Municipalities, which is highlighted in this Report.

At this juncture, I wish to thank the Chief Executive Officers of the respective Municipalities and their staff for availing themselves to assist in this review process.

I also extend my gratitude to my Committee colleagues, namely, honourable George Vegnathan (Deputy Chairperson), honourable Alipate Nagata, honourable Salote Radrodoro and honourable Dr. Ratu Atonio Lalabalavu for their contributions during the Committee's deliberations.

On behalf of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, I commend this Report to Parliament and request all honourable Members of this august Parliament to take note of the Report.

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. V. PILLAY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, pursuant to Standing Order 121(5), I hereby move:

A motion without notice that a debate on the content of the Report is initiated at a future sitting.

HON. G. VEGNATHAN.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I beg to second the motion.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

Consolidated Review Report - Ministry of Forestry 2016-2019 Annual Reports

HON. S.S. KIRPAL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am pleased to present the Consolidated Review Report on the Ministry of Forestry Annual Report for 2016-2017, 2017-2018, and 2018-2019 which was tabled in Parliament on 7th June, 2021 and 2nd December, 2021 respectively during the Parliament Sitting and referred to the Standing Committee on Natural Resources for scrutiny.

The Committee's oversight function is to scrutinise Government Departments with responsibility within the Committee's mandate and make recommendations relating to any aspect of functioning, administration, legislation or proposed legislative programme, budget, rationalisation, restructuring and policy formulation as legislated under the Parliament's Standing Orders.

First and foremost, I wish to commend the work done by the former Minister for Forestry, the late Honourable Osea Naiqamu, for his leadership and guidance.

In the deliberations stage, the Committee focused on the overall operations of the Ministry, including its roles and responsibilities and strategic objectives for the years under review.

The highlights for the year 2016-2017 was the Department of Forestry's transition into a single Ministry through Government's decision to separate the Department of Fisheries from Forests. This was necessary for the Ministry to focus more on opportunities available in each of the two resource-based agencies to be able to contribute to the nation's economic and social development.

The forestry sector is an integral primary sector in Fiji and apart from contributing to economic growth, it ensures the conservation, sustainable utilisation and management of forest resources. It plays a vital role in Fiji's economic, social and environmental wellbeing, and contributes to the country's GDP.

However this does not take into account the other activities that the Department of Forestry is involved with, especially in the value-adding and manufacturing sector. Forestry is a viable sector which has contributed and supported the growth of a few other sectors and industries. It is also a vital source of energy, employment, livelihood and ecological integrity.

The Ministry of Forestry's Silviculture, Research and Development Programme includes plantation forestry and sustainable management of native forests, including mangrove ecosystem which is another way forward for our forestry industry. Silviculture is the practice of controlling

the growth composition structure and quality of forests to meet values and needs, especially in timber production.

One of the major achievements in 2019 has been the tree planting initiative which started in January 2019. In the fight against climate change and protecting our environment and rich biodiversity, the Fijian Government is embarking on the four million trees in the four years initiative as it recognises the important service that forest resources provide in terms of environmental and ecological services, conservation of biodiversity and sustaining livelihoods. However, in September 2019, the Government noted that the initiative had resulted in the planting of almost one million trees in nine months. The honourable Prime Minister then announced the new target of 30 million trees in 15 years, whilst attending the United Nations General Assembly in New York in September 2019.

The Committee noted the major achievements of the Ministry of Forestry during the periods under review even during challenging times. The Committee commended the Ministry of Forestry for the periods under review that is endeavoured to ensuring equal participation of employment and capacity building for women particularly in forestry, technical training for both, local and overseas. There was also an increase in women participation in both, employment and training. Moving forward, the Committee recommends for the Ministry to consider the Committee's recommendations as highlighted in the Report and that the Ministry to continue to work towards the commitments and ensuring that all the objectives and key targeted outputs are achieved in an effective and efficient manner.

The Committee wishes to commend the Permanent Secretary, Mr. Pene Baleinabuli, and the staff of the Ministry of Forestry for their contribution towards the final compilation of the Committee's Report to Parliament. I wish to take this time to also acknowledge the Commissioner Northern, the Officials from the Provincial Office in Bua and the stakeholders who assisted the Committee in every way during their three-day site visit to the North.

Last but not the least, I wish to extend my appreciation to all the honourable Members of the Committee, namely; honourable Jale Sigarara, honourable Alexander O' Connor, honourable Mitieli Bulanauca and honourable Jese Saukuru, and the secretariat staff for their successful compilation of this bipartisan Report.

(Report handed to the Secretary-General to Parliament)

HON. S.S. KIRPAL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, pursuant to Standing Order 121(5), I hereby move:

A motion without notice that a debate on the contents of the Report is initiated at a future sitting.

HON. M. BULANAUCA.- I second the motion, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

Review Report - Fiji Roads Authority 2016-2017 and 2017-2018 Annual Reports

HON. V. PILLAY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am pleased to present the Report of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs on the annual review of the Fiji Roads Authority (FRA) for 2016 to

2017 and 2017 to 2018. This review was undertaken in accordance with Standing Order 109(2)(b) which mandates the Committee to look into issues related to health, education, social service, labour, culture and media.

The Committee first met to deliberate in April of this year and formulated questions pertaining to the Annual Reports which were sent to FRA for its response. Upon receipt of all relevant information on the Committee's queries, the Committee compiled its findings and subsequently endorsed its Report in May.

Some of the pertinent findings emanating from the scrutiny of FRA's Annual Reports are as follows:

- The focus for the 2017-2018 year was the restructure of FRA to bring in processes and procedures to enable it to make decisions that are based on sound governance.
- During the 2017-2018 year, FRA was able to carry out maintenance work to the value of \$121 million on the road and structure, and a further \$38 million was spent on emergency services.
- The new capital works project focussed on the delivery of much needed new assets in support of public safety and accessibility with a major push on providing safe pedestrian access and streetlight. The 2017-2018 saw the completion of FRA's first solar streetlights and network. The total new capital spent for the year was \$275 million.
- The 2017-2018 also marked major expenditure in the new capital access sector which consists of rural roads around the country with a spending of \$38 million. As part of the programme to improve access throughout the country, FRA's asset renewal projects recorded a spending of \$143 million on roads, bridges and jetties renewal.
- The Authority also made a major investment in road safety for communities, which included new footpaths, improving access for people with disabilities, construction of new bus shelters and waiting facilities at the jetties. The FRA spent \$18 million in this sector in the 2017-2018 financial year.

At this juncture, I wish to thank the Chief Executive Officer of the FRA, Mr. Kamal Prasad, and his staff for their timely assistance in this review process. I also extend my gratitude to my Committee colleagues, namely; honourable George Vegnathan (Deputy Chairperson), honourable Alipate Nagata, honourable Salote Radrodro and honourable Dr. Ratu Atonio Lalabalavu, for their contributions during the Committee's deliberations.

On behalf of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, I commend this Report to Parliament and request all honourable Members of this august Parliament to take note of the Report.

(Report handed to Secretary-General to Parliament)

HON. V. PILLAY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, pursuant to Standing Order 121(5), I hereby move:

A motion without notice that a debate on the content of the Report is initiated at a future sitting.

HON. G. VEGNATHAN.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I second the motion.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

MR. SPEAKER.- The honourable Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment has given notice to make a Ministerial Statement under Standing Order 40.

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

Impact of Ministry of Agriculture's Direct Initiatives to Farmers

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Prime Minister, the honourable Leader of the Opposition and honourable Members, thank you for the opportunity to share with this august Parliament an update on the impact of direct initiatives implemented by the Ministry of Agriculture.

Over the years, the Ministry through its capital programmes have implemented direct assistance for farmers through various incentives that ensures food and nutrition security, improved livelihood by employment creation, sustainable income generation and increased export income through enhanced production and consistent supply of agriculture produce.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, guided by the 5-Year Ministry of Agriculture Strategic Plan aligned to the 20-Year National Development Plan, the Ministry has implemented a series of programmes that will ensure creation of surplus to be distributed to all those who participated in this process of surplus creation by providing the various factors of production such as the landowners, farmers, labourers, households, financial sector and other input suppliers.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, our staff in the Ministry of Agriculture have worked extremely hard with farmers to expand agriculture, improve efficiency and productivity, build resilience and raised output and export earnings to prioritise in certain activities such as land clearing, land preparation, provision of planting material, fencing material, supply of improved variety of seeds, supply of improved breeds of livestock to farmers and establishment of critical based infrastructure such as establishment of farm roads or agricultural infrastructure.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, for this financial year, the Ministry has implemented another eight initiatives to scale up ongoing programmes. These initiatives include support to women in agriculture, establishment of hydroponic systems, protected agriculture, irrigation kits, Orchard Development Programme, Small Farming Equipment Programme, Land Clearing Farming Programme and provision of fencing kits to livestock farmers.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry also includes in this financial year, for the first time, a Commercial Farmers Equity Package (CFEP) to boost commercial agriculture development. This initiative and with collaboration of Fiji Development Bank for the first time, any farmers who want to take loan from FDB, let us say to construct a warehouse or to buy a tractor or an excavator, the Ministry will contribute 20 percent of equity to the grant of that loan. For example, if the farmer wants to take \$100,000 loan from FDB, the Ministry will provide \$20,000 as an equity contribution and farmers does not have to pay upfront that particular deposit as a grant.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as of today, seven commercial farmers have received their loan equity and they have drawn down money from FDB to establish their commercial venture. For example, a farmer in Lautoka who have established a manufacturing plant to produce cassava flour and took out a loan of close to quarter million dollars from FDB and we have provided 20 percent as an equity contribution.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, for the above initiatives, to ensure transparency and accountability on the selection of recipients considered, we considered that online process in order to select the appropriate beneficiaries in order to get them to apply. The benefit of the online portal ensures that:

- everyone gets the opportunity to apply, no matter where they are, whether they are in Kadavu, Cicia, et cetera, as long as they have access to internet connection.
- the process of update is you enter the data on the online portal, the data immediately on real time is received at the Headquarters.
- application data is transferred without any delays. Previously, Mr. Speaker, Sir, you fill up an application form, you leave it with the Agriculture Extension Office then it goes to the Regional office and from there, it comes to the Head of that particular section, from there it goes to the Policy and Research Committee who will then set up the Committee. So in the process, applications were lost, et cetera, all these complaints have now been removed with this online system.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, of course, all these systems when the new technologies were introduced, there are certain issues and we dealt with them. For example, some farmers that do not access to internet, we ensured that our officers take the tablet down, get them to apply online or there are some officers who said that they do not know how to fill the application so they come to the nearest Agriculture Extension Office where they sat down and our officers will enter the data in the tablet and then it is submitted. Sir, all this have been done to ensure efficiency and service delivery.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this year, as outlined above, we rolled out a number of programmes to meet the strategic objectives of the Ministry:

1. to ensure food and nutritional security for households;
2. to expand commercial agriculture; and
3. to bring in more and more export in tonne, and take advantage of the brand image of our products in the export market.

In response to the ongoing natural disaster and the COVID-19 pandemic, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we had accumulated a programme where we would provide and support the provisions of this input to farmers at a very minimal cost. First of all, to deal with the pandemic and the fear of food insecurity, we provided seed packages to 238,599 households. These packages consisted of five individual seeds, the basic vegetables, such as, eggplant, tomatoes, cabbages and beans, so different packages will have different combination of five seeds pack. On an average, 9,000 households per year benefitted from 2019.

In addition to that, we had provided, in the farm response package, the planting materials to farmers to boost the production, whether they require for one acre, two acres or three acres. The previous ones that I mentioned, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the target group was households mostly in the urban areas who would want to do gardening behind or around their homes. So, in that way, we were able to deal with lots of household members who lost their jobs and their food security was under threat. So, we really mobilised the entire urban households in Fiji and got them to start planting vegetables for their households.

Simultaneously, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we mobilised the farmers to expand production so that in their own interest in the interest of raising additional income and to boost exports. We were able to, in this period, over the last three years, raise vegetable production at an average rate of 19.8 percent, that is, the impact we are talking about.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, simultaneously, in the same period, we were able to reduce vegetable importation by 2.6 percent in volume and 3.2 percent in value. While we were expanding production for export, which I am going to come to in a second, we also simultaneously reduced importation of vegetables substantially and 3.2 percent in value.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me now talk about substantive crops that we are targeting. Mushroom production - we have noted that we have a niche market in mushroom production, there is a growing demand for mushroom by upper income households, tourism sector as well as export market. We have to-date, trained 2,000 interested farmers in mushroom production, and we have established five commercial farmers in mushroom production. I just launched one commercial mushroom production outlet in Votualevu, Nadi, and I must say, that we are quite pleased with the outcome in terms of production. Over the last three years, mushroom production have increased by 39.5 percent, with the total volume at the moment of 20 metric tonnes. Simultaneously, by doing that, we have reduced importation from 46 metric tonnes in 2020 to 32 metric tonnes in 2021, with the value of \$325,000 in 2020 down to \$299,000 in 2021.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, copra remains one of the most traded commodities in the country. Fiji has around 10 million coconut trees scattered in areas of approximately 65,000 hectares. Our challenge is to replace some of those senile trees. So, currently, 25,000 farmers, with the support of the Ministry, are replanting and replacing the existing senile trees. We are distributing planting materials also through the support of Fiji Copra Millers Limited to replace these senile trees.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, copra prices have gone down substantially because of the competition. We are also expanding the establishment of coconut farms in the Western Division. At the moment, when we talk about coconut farms or plantations, you will only see it in Cakaudrove in Taveuni. We want to establish coconut farms in the Western Division and take advantage of the increasing copra price in the export market. We have got two dedicated research stations, the Mua Research Station and the Dobuilevu Research Station where we are establishing coconut seed nuts for distribution to farmers.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as we speak, we are doing extremely well from 2019 to 2021. Fiji exported to New Zealand, Australia, Malaysia and other Pacific Island Countries fresh coconuts and coconut products worth \$14.8 million, which is supported by 9 percent growth in the coconut industry.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the other very important crop is rice, not for export purpose, but to reduce importation, increase our self-sufficiency and ensure that we are in control of our key staple food produce. Rice has now become a staple diet in every Fijian household, unlike 30 or 40 years ago. Under our 'We Rice Up' Programme, we have supported farmers in the sugar industry by asking them to plant at least one acre of rice.

We are expanding production in the Western Division, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I must say that from 2019, we have made substantial inroads in increasing production. We have raised our self-sufficiency from 15 percent in 2019 to 17.5 percent in 2021, and for the volume of production this year, I have a feeling we would reach 22 percent of self-sufficiency by the end of this year, Sir. At the same time, we are reducing the rice importation bill.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to other key important crops, there is an increase in kava production. From all the activities that we are undertaking, not only from the last three years but from previous years. Kava production increased from 12,000 tonnes in 2019 to 14,000 tonnes in 2021. Last year, our export of kava was \$42 million, the highest ever.

Dalo production increased from 51,000 tonnes in 2019 to 54,000 tonnes in 2021, with last year's export being the highest ever of \$30 million.

The fourth largest export crop – turmeric production, increased from 367 tonnes – very little but within three years, the production has gone up to 3,000 tonnes. This year, export earnings from turmeric, a new crop on the block, is \$22.9 million, Mr. Speaker, Sir. There is massive demand for turmeric in the US market and everyone is asking for Fijian turmeric.

Ginger production increased from 9,000 tonnes in 2019 to 14,000 tonnes in 2021, Mr. Speaker, Sir. The export earnings of ginger is \$14 million. Everyone in the Australian market is asking for the Fijian ginger. We need to maintain that brand image, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, those are the four top crops that we are exporting in large amounts and production has substantially increased over the last three years, given our public infrastructure development, et cetera, that we have undertaken, and the support and leverage that we are giving to the farmers.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, from the livestock sector, we are also working to ensure that we take control of the importation of livestock products. The key industry that we have made substantial investment in and we have done extremely well, is poultry. At the moment, we are pretty much close to 100 percent self-sufficiency.

Of course, to get there, we have made substantial investment over the last three years of close to \$1 million. We have invested three-quarter million dollars (\$750,000) in this industry, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and we are 89 percent self-sufficient.

Our production have increased substantially, given that we are nearly at the plateau of production, increase will be at lower number. From 2020, we went up by 1.4 percent in terms of broiler production, and we have reduced our importation by 1.2 percent.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are also increasing support to our piggery industry, given its economic and traditional importance. We are supporting our piggery farmers. We have reduced our imports from 47.1 percent in 2019 to 45.8 percent in 2021. We have now taken over 80 percent of the local market in terms of self-sufficiency.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, a sector that bothers us is sheep. We are importing close to 99 percent of lamb meat and we are putting in measures on the ground. This year, we have provided a large number of farmers with fencing material, and we have an annual growth rate of 10.3 percent of sheep meat production locally in 2019.

However, there is a lot to do on that. There is a close substitute which is goat, Mr. Speaker, Sir. We are also supporting goat farmers and we have also seen goat production rising substantially. From 2020, we have increased by 16.25 percent in terms of goat meat production.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are also supporting the beef sector. We are importing close to \$11 million worth of beef meat, and we want to ensure that given that we have a strategic advantage in raising and producing beef cattle within Fiji, we need to take over this market.

We have got about 6,498 farmers engaged in beef cattle farming and we have assisted them in providing of fencing material. We see this as a binding constraint. If we want to transit, migrate the small holder subsistence farmers into medium or large holder farms, we need to provide them with fencing material and later on the successful farmers we want to provide them with the stock yard. So this year, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we provided 260 farmers with fencing materials and we said that out of this 260, all those who were successful, progressively from next year, we will construct a stock yard on their farms. In this way, we will be able to reduce the importation of beef meat and in fact we can export beef meat in the region.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, dairy sector is an issue. Even though we have done substantial amount of work in terms of eradication of Tuberculosis (TB) and Brucellosis, Australia spent a substantial amount of money and it took them 40 years to eradicate TB. We have just started about a decade ago and we can see the results of improvement in dairy production. The number of dairy cattle recorded increased by 2.8 percent in the last three years while annual meat production also grew by 3.5 percent.

We are also supporting the beef and dairy cattle through the provision of improved breed. We will be giving all the TB free farms the improved sample breed which can give them much higher milk production. At the moment our milk production is about 6 litres to 7 litres per day. And the improved breed that we want to give them, it could yield up to 20 litres per day. There could be a substantial increase in milk production but only when we are able to eradicate TB and Brucellosis from these farms. Brucellosis is pretty much under control but TB is because of the nature of the disease and the migration that is happening, is taking time.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, a leader of a political party kind of attacked us saying that we are giving horses, et cetera. What the Ministry needs to give to the farmers is tractors. This is the problem when they do not look at all the activities we are undertaking.

(Honourable Members interject)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, mechanisation is high on the agenda of the Ministry and we have provided tractors, rice harvesters, livestock feed shredders, shaft cutters, biogas digesters and honey extractors. We have 90,000 farmers but we cannot give 90,000 tractors to each of these farmers. This is the kind of people we have.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are also ensuring that we address all the points of the supply chain and one of the aspects is, farm road. At the moment on our books, we have to construct 170 kilometres of farm road. We have now acquired increased machinery and progressively we will construct all these farm roads.

(Honourable Members interject)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the agriculture sector is continuously subjected to shocks. Just last year, the floods affected our agriculture sector. We had assisted 12,000 farmers with \$250 cash. Mr. Speaker, Sir, all these have resulted in a major increase in production. We are supporting 70,900 farming households.

Our non-sugar cane agricultural GDP grew at a compound annual growth rate of 4.9 percent.

This increased from a FJ\$686.8 million in 2018 to FJ\$756 million in 2020. The 2020 crop sector alone achieved a total value of \$1.7 billion with nominal GDP.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in terms of the return on investment, for every dollar that we spent from the Ministry of Agriculture, we got 9.2 percent worth of output. For the first time ever in 2020, we crossed the export of non-sugar agriculture over \$100 million-\$106 million, and for 2023 our exports should be \$121 million.

(Honourable Members interject)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, with increase in output, increase in export income, more money is transferred to the farmers. In 2019, AMA alone transferred \$1.5 million. In 2021 AMA alone transferred \$5.8 million to the farmers.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are supporting 70,000 farm households and about 10,000 vendors directly to the agricultural growth. The money that we have in the Budget for Agriculture we do not treat it as an expenditure, we treat it as an investment. Thank you for the time. *Vinaka*.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- Thank you Mr. Speaker, Sir, before I respond to the Ministerial Statement, I again express my concern and disappointment in the timing of this Ministerial Statement as we are not given enough time to analyse the agriculture reports or agriculture strategic plan so that we can provide a better response for the people who are listening in Fiji.

MR. SPEAKER.- You have got five minutes!

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- I thank the Minister for this Ministerial Statement but how can we agree to what he is saying? How can we measure the success of his story when he himself and his ministry have not been able to provide Annual Reports since 2017?

(Laughter)

He is telling us all the achievements but how can we say that he is telling the truth here? Because he has not been able to provide the Annual Reports since 2017.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Point of Order.

MR. SPEAKER.- Point of Order.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Member is lying!

Mr. Speaker, Sir, up to 2020 the Annual Reports are with Parliament.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- Sir, have those reports been presented in Parliament?

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Yes.

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- We have not seen the Report. Anyway Sir,

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- He has been telling us about all the programmes and achievements, but according to the agriculture sector GDP growth the agriculture's contribution to GDP growth has continued to decline from 2014 until 2021. So, what is he talking about?

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- Mr. Speaker. Sir, I believe that the ministry has not done enough to revitalise our economy to improve the standard of living, put food on the table for the poor and the underprivileged and the pensioners. They are not doing enough. This is reflected in the amount of money that has been allocated to the Ministry of Agriculture, it has continued to reduce.

We have been telling them in this Parliament that this is a most important ministry that Fiji needs to rely on to improve our economy, improve the standard of living and yet this Government continued to reduce its budget. Look at the Revised Budget that we just have last five months ago. It was reduced.

Sir, yesterday the honourable Prime Minister just mentioned that 40 percent of cane farmers are producing less than a hundred tons. What has the ministry done about that?

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- In one of his statements he said and I quote, "we will be providing rice seeds up to 30 kilogrammes for one acre of farm to every sugarcane farmer. We will assist them to mill their rice for home consumption by providing small portable rice mills down to the area where a rice paddy is ready for milling".

Have they done that? How many sugarcane farmers have been supplied with that?

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order! There is a Point of Order. Take your seat.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I just read out in my Ministerial Statement for...

(Honourable Member interjects)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- He misled Parliament. Let me correct him that for sugarcane farmers we have allocated 30 kilogrammes of rice seeds equivalent to one acre of rice planting (we went and gave to them); he mentioned about portable rice mills, Mr. Speaker, I am saying to the Honourable Member now to show me any cluster group of 10 rice farmers, we are ready to give a portable rice mill today. We have given out 88 portable rice mills.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, ask him not to mislead Parliament.

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- According to the Ministry's Strategic Plan 2019-2023 there needs to be some improvements on Quarters and Research Stations of the Ministry of Agriculture. Have they done that? You go to Nacocolevu Research Station, I believe, Sir, all those quarters right now across the country are not OHS compliant. They are in rundown conditions.

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- They also mentioned that the Yalavou Beef Scheme will be revived. Today, Yalavou is still lying idle and nothing has been done.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- Shame!

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- Road is very poor.

MR. SPEAKER.- Is this another Point of Order?

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Yes, Sir. He has again misled Parliament by saying that the Yalavou Beef Scheme is lying idle. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have said in this Parliament that we are doing a major renovation of the Yalavou Beef Scheme. We will be opening it again, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- That is the problem when you join PAP Party.

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- Sir, also disappointing to note that the Ministry especially the honourable Minister giving over-worked stray horses to farmers. I also deplore, Sir, about the five initiatives that they did during COVID-19. For farmers to apply for all these initiatives they need to apply online. What about the farmers that are living in the highlands of Naitasiri and Navosa? What is the use of field officers that are serving them, why can they not just approve that on the spot? This is a crisis stage so they need urgent attention and you will see again application online - it is ridiculous. Thank you, Sir.

MR. SPEAKER.- I now give the floor to the Leader of the National Federation Party.

HON. PROF B.C. PRASAD.- In fact, this Ministerial Statement is really a very good example of a juvenile attempt to pre-empt the motion that we have tomorrow where we were going to discuss the effectiveness of some of the assistance that we have seen that the Ministry of Agriculture is providing to the farmers. What the honourable Minister has initially done, in a very juvenile way, again, is to put out what the Ministry has been saying all throughout in his opening speeches and distribution so we know what the Ministry is trying to do. I would have thought, Mr. Speaker, that he would have taken just like the juvenile attempt by some of the backbenchers to ask questions, you know what I call "Dorothy Dixier" questions and the ministers instead of giving a genuine Ministerial Statement, you know take 10 to 15 to 20 minutes to answer questions without

giving us an opportunity to respond to substantive issues. So these are all like misuse of parliamentary system, Mr. Speaker.

But what I thought, Mr. Speaker, he should have done was to perhaps look at this IFC Report which just came out in May 2022 and it actually talks about the challenges in the agriculture sector and this is a May Report, Mr. Speaker, and I want to just highlight some of the issues. I mean he talked about \$100 million worth of exports but he did not say that we are importing \$100 million worth of just beef and sheep meat, apart from all the other imports amounting to about \$700 million.

He also talked about the rise in production of some of the crops in the last two years. We all know Mr. Speaker, that 150,000 people who lost jobs, had no income, who actually moved to farming so there has been a natural increase in production, in *dalo*, in ginger and also the legacy effect on kava production, so I mean those are not things that suddenly has come about as a result of the initiatives that the Ministry of Agriculture has put out but this Report is very interesting, Mr. Speaker.

You know it talks about the challenges. It talks about for example, what is the state of the farming situation in the country, it talks about farming households - 71,000, it talks about subsistence, semi-subsistence, commercial farmers and it talks about overreliance on a few markets and few export crops like kava, taro, turmeric, ginger and a mixture of spices. This increase in the production of some of these crops can be purely seen as more people actually entering the agriculture sector in the last two or three years. Then Mr. Speaker, it talks about productivity and competitiveness in the sector which says is continued mutant I know for many reasons.

It talks about access to land, lack of risk insurance financing, poor infrastructure, low proximity to storage and processing facilities. All these have negative impact on the competitiveness. Then it talks about Mr. Speaker, key contributor to competitiveness of the agriculture sector is a well-functioning agri-logistics sector which has critical gaps. It talks about weak domestic inter-island logistics, high maintenance cost, fuel cost, and uncertainty due to delays et cetera tracking information gaps – a whole lot of things that this Report talks about.

It also talks about poor road and transportation infrastructure and maintenance. You know it talks about the cost that those who are transporting agricultural produce, retrofitting et cetera, you know it is a taking a lot of time. It talks about absence of critical post-harvest heat removing (pre-cooling) infrastructure, absent across Fiji. It is estimated that 33 percent, Mr. Speaker, 33 percent of agricultural produce is wasted due to lack of required warehousing and storage infrastructure. These near farm facilities are important to reduce food loss and extend shelf life.

Then it talks about Mr. Speaker, deficiencies in storage and warehousing in specific locations. It talks about the fact that you know we might have some of those in Viti Levu but is almost non-existent in Vanua Levu and I know, I met farmers in Vanua Levu. One farmer said to me that he had six tonnes of cassava but the Agriculture Officers were telling them that the AMA did not have any storage facility so they could not take his cassava. A lack of substantial perishable cargo services at the international airport, you know like Nadi Airport. It talks about high ...

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- You are not the Speaker.

(Laughter)

... port cost and shipping rates relative to competitive countries, Mr. Speaker. I will give you an example. It says storage charges at Fiji ports are expensive and exceed the rates charged in other ports by an average of 200 to 215 percent for the storage of a full 20 to 40-foot container.

Wharfage charges, Mr. Speaker, are estimated to be higher by an average of close to 200 percent. These are the things that the Ministry of Agriculture should be doing. I know what they are doing, they are all around the country, the honourable Minister himself is running around, photogets, opportunities, staff instead of planning and addressing some of these fundamental issues, gaps in the regulatory environment, for example, many commercial farmers....

MR. SPEAKER.- Your time is up.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Many commercial farmers have complained about regulatory environment.

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, you should tell them that they are not the Speaker. The final two points in this Report which are very important - limited data availability and lack of access of information and this is what he should know. It says, 'while the Minister of Agriculture collects annual data, there are concerns about his accuracy' and we all know that.

Last one, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it says, 'lack of systematic dialogue with the private sector and the impact of a dominant role of the Agriculture Marketing Authority (AMA). Here is our honourable Minister, first of all he uses his juvenile technique - he wants to have a one-upmanship just because the motion is tomorrow, pre-empting what he wants to say. He had all the opportunity to come tomorrow and talk about or even get all of them who are dancing over there, yelling, who could speak.

MR. SPEAKER.- You have had your time.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, we will have an opportunity tomorrow to say a little bit more, but these are really juvenile attempts to pre-empt what we should have discussed tomorrow, but that was good because it gave me an opportunity to say a little bit more than what I would have been able to say tomorrow.

MR. SPEAKER.- I thank the Leader of the National Federation Party for his contribution, but do not go out of the agreement that was done. We made the agreement in the Business Committee that there would be that motion tomorrow, but that there would be a Ministerial Statement. I went out of my way to do that, so I accommodated that, and that is the privilege of the Speaker. Follow that, I do not do that lightly.

Honourable Members, take note of the following. We will take the next agenda item listed in today's Order Paper after Questions, so there is a change in the Order. Questions will come next and we will take the next item on the agenda paper after Questions, so those of you who are going to be asking questions today, be prepared after morning tea. I am telling you now so you are prepared. Honourable Members, on that note, we will take an adjournment for half an hour for morning tea.

The Parliament adjourned at 10.43 a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 11.21 a.m.

QUESTIONS

Oral Questions

Improvements/Renovations – Ovalau Historical Sites (Question No. 113/2022)

HON. LS. QEREQERETABUA asked the Government upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts, and Local Government inform Parliament when will the historical sites in Ovalau undergo improvement and renovation?

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- I thank the honourable Member for her question.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Levuka is of great significance to Fiji, Levuka is the first historical port town, first capital and the first UNESCO World Heritage Site for Fiji. There are many historical key elements in Levuka which includes the former Totogo and Nasau Village sites, the former Cakobau Parliament House which is now known as the European Memorial, Morris Hedstrom Bond Store, the Baba Indentured Labourer Settlement, the Henning's Residence, Capital Robbie's Bungalow, Sacred Heart Cathedral, the Royal Hotel, Deed of Cession site, former Government House, Post and Customs buildings together with their remnant tram tracks to the wharf, Methodist Church, Levuka Public School, Town Hall, Masonic Lodge, Ovalau Club, Bowling Club, Workers Cottage and the Shell Button Factory site and many more. All of which contributed to the listing of Levuka in 2013 as UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Government has been supporting the improvement and renovation of the historical sites in Ovalau since 2013 after the listing of Levuka as World Heritage Site. The improvements have been ongoing for a number of years, we have to understand that these historical sites comes under the Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts, Levuka Town Council, other Government Departments, Statutory Bodies, the private owners as well and private companies.

Since 2013, the Levuka Town Council has been working on a number of historical sites, for example, repairing and painting of the picket fencing at Nasova Deed of Cession Heritage Park, maintenance work at the Nasau Pavilion, renovation and repainting of the Levuka Town Hall that was the mammoth task because the consultants have to be brought in to scratch and get the right colour which used to exist hundred years ago. So that work is completed, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in this financial year, the Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts and Levuka Town Council are working together on the following heritage sites:

- Upgrade of the Deed of Cession site;
- Restoration of the Pigeon Foundation; and
- Improvement of the UNESCO World Heritage Site Commemoration Plaque in Levuka Town and upgrading of the European War Memorial Site.

There are two iconic buildings being restored or rebuilt to maintain the heritage façade, these are the:

- Governor's house which is the former resident of the first Governor of Fiji, Sir Arthur Gordon; and
- Construction of the Levuka Market, which is anticipated to cost around \$2.4 million.

The repair works for the Governor's house is already underway, the Levuka Town Council has engaged a contractor and the contractor is carrying out all the renovation works. Once the Governor's house is complete, Levuka Town Council intends to lease it out as a gallery and as a coffee shop.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in addition, the famous Levuka Market, which was more than 100 years old, was blown away by *TC Winston* in 2016. A new and modern municipal market is being built by the Government for the people of Levuka and nearby islands. The construction work is going on very well and we expect the construction to be completed by the end of this year.

Unfortunately, *TC Winston* in 2016, damaged majority of the buildings, including the sea wall and the historical sites in Levuka. The collapse of the sea wall resulted in the huge waves crushing into the Town. The Government instantly invested \$300,000 to rebuild the sea wall to ensure that our only heritage Town does not get further damage and lose its essence.

Government also injected funds to rehabilitate the heritage schools after being damaged by *TC Winston*. About \$2.3 million was invested into five heritage schools; Levuka Public School, Marist Convent School, Saint James Anglican School, Delana Methodist Primary School and Delana Methodist Secondary School.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Department of Heritage, with the help of Construction Implementation Unit (CIU), undertook a rapid damage assessment of heritage structures in Levuka after *TC Winston*. The Levuka Heritage Register of Building was used as baseline for this assessment. There was a need to engage the services of a lead consultant to assist in identifying and assessing each heritage listed building. A report was compiled, recommending way forward for each building in accordance with the heritage by-laws. The first phase of the project was mainly to assess structural and heritage significance of the 76 buildings which were identified by the Department of Heritage.

The Ministry of Education, along with National Trust of Fiji and Levuka Town Council, met with the CIU and they used the report to put in place a restoration plan for Levuka using the Building Back Better strategy. Mr. Speaker, Sir, preliminary report on all 76 buildings were received and assessed by the Ministry of Education and CIU to strategically identify buildings to upgrade. Again, they had to use the report itself to work out which building will be rehabilitated first. So, there was a prioritisation of these buildings.

They selected two of the buildings to restore first and that are Levuka Community Hall and St. John Church in Cawaci. A lead consultant, Shri Singh & Associate was engaged on 22nd July, 2019 for phase II which involves full detailed design documentation, tender and construction supervision for the two buildings. Tender for construction was advertised in April, 2022, and the tender was closed and the bids are currently being evaluated. The restoration and strengthening works will commence by July 2022.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, my Ministry has engaged a heritage architect, Mr. Setoki Tuiteci from Ethos Edge, to assist in putting a plan for the foreshore area in Levuka Town, stretching from the Governor's house to the War Memorial Monument. The architect will manage the project to ensure that heritage guidelines are complied with and heritage look of Levuka is maintained.

The Levuka Town Council and the Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts have also collaborated to expedite the capital works at Levuka Town through an MOU. This will help in pooling resources together and working in a strategic manner, rather than each institution doing their own thing.

Despite the setback caused by several cyclones and the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts, together with Levuka Town Council are working together to improve and restore historical buildings, sites and monuments to maintain Levuka on UNESCO World Heritage List. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. S.R. RASOVA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank the honourable Minister for the update on the heritage site in Levuka. My question is, is your ministerial statement probably, in line with the survey that was done by the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights? I think last year, they have been touring Levuka and they made a statement there. Is it in collaboration with your statement?

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- I am not aware of that statement, Mr. Speaker, Sir, so I cannot comment, unless and until you clearly tell me which statement was that. Are you referring to the Standing Committee?

HON. S.R. RASOVA.- Yes.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- If you are referring to the Standing Committee, the report they were mentioning was to do with the Heritage Bill 2021.

Fiji Police Force's Foreign Peacekeeping Programme
(Question No. 114/2022)

HON. H.R. POLITINI 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 Fiji Police Force's foreign peacekeeping programme?

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to acknowledge and thank the honourable Member for the question raised regarding the Fiji Police Force's participation in peacekeeping Missions.

Before doing so, let me acknowledge Government for a continued assistance it provides to the Fiji Police Force (FPF) to enable it to deploy and, of course, be supported as well in the Mission areas and, of course, to their families as well. I wish to also acknowledge our men and women who are in Peacekeeping Missions, whether it be the Republic of Fiji Military Forces (RFMF) or the FPF. I wish to acknowledge all of them today and their families as well for their support.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the FPF's participation in UN Peacekeeping has been ongoing since 1987 and Fiji remains committed as one of the 90 countries contributing to UN Peacekeeping Missions.

The critical mandate in the Mission areas, particularly for our Police Officers include; providing support to the host State Police, protecting civilians, UN Staff and facilities, whilst assisting with capacity building and training. In exceptional circumstances, they are also given the responsibility of upholding and enforcing the law, while rebuilding the host State's Police institutions.

I did mention yesterday, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that the first international course run at Blackrock was just completed on Tuesday last week and I had the opportunity to do the official closing. It was two separate courses, both run online and classroom-based as well. The two courses were on the protection of children and protection of civilians during conflicts and, of course, in humanitarian work as well. I am thankful that places were allocated to the FPF as well.

We had two female officers participating and two from the Fiji Corrections Service apart from the two Australian officers and the Fijian officers and Senior NCOs who were part of the course. Currently, a total of 29 officers are serving in the following Mission areas:

- United Nations Mission in Sudan (UNMISS) – 21;
- United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA) – 1; and
- United Nations Integrated Transition Assistance Mission Sudan (UNITAMS) – 1.

We also have Police serving alongside their military comrades:

- Multinational Force Observer (MFO) Sinai – 1;
- United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF), Golan Heights, Syria – 3; and
- United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) – 2.

I also wish to mention, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that the FPF is in the process of preparing for another United Nations Selection Assistance and Assessment Team (UNSAAT) awareness to all officers eligible for UN Peacekeeping Missions. In order to fulfil the quota of having at least 25 percent females in each contingent, the FPF in its awareness sessions will be encouraging the participation of more women officers in order to qualify for deployment in mission areas in the future as well.

I must mention, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that the FPF is proud to inform this august Parliament that Fiji has been meeting and acceding the requirements for female officers' participation, particularly for the last three years. At the same time, I wish to again congratulate, particularly our women, the standard has been set by Commissioner Vuniwaqa who has moved on in her career. She is now with the United Nations as Assistant Secretary-General for Safety and Security and we hope that more of our women, both in the military and the FPF will be given opportunities in the senior ranks and of course, move on to the United Nations Headquarters in New York.

If I may just summarise again, I have talked about the 29 deployments:

- UNMISS - 14 males and 7 females (total of 21 in Sudan);
- Libya – 1;
- MFO Sinai – 1;
- Golan Heights – 3; and
- Iraq – 2 (one male and one female).

In total, Mr. Speaker, Sir, of the 29, we have 21 males and 8 females.

Again, I wish to acknowledge the FPF, the Commissioner and the team for the excellent work in preparing our men and women in the ranks for peacekeeping missions and of course, I acknowledge their families. It is not easy to be separated for a year and I wish to acknowledge all their families for their support as well.

Public Convenience Facilities - Jetties and Wharves
(Question No. 115/2022)

HON. A.M. RADRODRO asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Infrastructure, Meteorological Services, Land and Mineral Resources inform Parliament on the conditions and availability of public convenience facilities at jetties and wharves around the country?

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Aseri Radrodoro for his question. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Government through the Fiji Roads Authority currently manages jetties around the country, which accommodate our roll-on and roll-off vessels nationwide. We have around 10 in the Eastern Division, three in the Northern Division and one in the Central Division. And the provision of proper public convenience and waiting facilities for all these jetties is part of the Fiji Roads Authority Forward Works Programme.

Some of these jetties operate on a daily basis, some twice a week while some have ships coming to them once or twice a month and also for all of these jetties, the number of passengers and volume of cargo and volume of vehicles varies quite considerably. Those jetties that operate on a daily basis like Natovi and Nabouwalu obviously have more passengers passing through than the others on a weekly basis.

The two in Natovi and Nabouwalu accommodate roll-on and roll-off vessels on a daily basis whilst six Savusavu, Taveuni, Vunisea, Kavala, Qarani and Koro accommodate roll-on and roll-off vessels once or twice a week. All of these eight jetties have public conveniences and waiting facilities given the number of passengers passing through. For the remaining six jetties, one has a public convenience while the rest are programmed under the FRA Forward Works Programme. That is the current status Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, who maintains the standard of these conveniences to ensure that they subscribe to hygiene regulations that we have set and the enforcement?

HON. J. USAMATE.- Thank you Mr. Speaker, Sir. In some of the jetties for instance in Nabouwalu, we have been working together with the Savusavu Local Town Council that looks after Nabouwalu also to help keep that clean. In other places where we do not have local councils, it is kept clean by the tenants by those that sell food in that area. There is a problem sometimes with vandalism for instance in the new Kadavu jetty, the Vunisea 2 not the old one, the one that is currently being used as soon as it was fixed up, one of the plumbing got ripped out, things disappeared from there so we do have that particular issue.

I think the kind of discussions we had with places like Nabouwalu to work together with Savusavu Town Council is a model that we hope to replicate. Nabouwalu is also a growing area, so we are also working with the Director of Town and Country Planning because Nabouwalu is one of the three jetties that we are targeting to replace - Nabouwalu, Natovi and Savusavu. And as part of that to develop that whole facility to improve the convenience that we have for people that use them. That is the focus and it is going to take some time.

Some of the programmes that we have here for the nine major jetties that we are looking to upgrade namely, Nabouwalu, Savusavu, Natovi, Moala, Lomaloma, Koro, Vunisea 2, Makogai and Nabukeru all of these are now under investigation and the planned improvement will also include essential public convenience facilities such as parking, waiting shelter with rest rooms and stakeholder offices. But the physical construction will probably commence in two years' time and

last for the next five years. So, they are programming but we hope to be able to establish and put them in place gradually over time.

HON. S.R. RASOVA.- Thank you Mr. Speaker, Sir. I thank the Minister for the brief explanation in regard to all these jetties and wharves all over Fiji but my concern is in 2020, I asked the Minister with regards to Vunisea and Naleca, Kavala Bay. I think honourable Faiyaz Koya is giving the MSMEs in these jetties, they have businesses over there selling food and they have been given the licence.

The conditions at Vunisea and Kavala has been deplorable and the toilets and place for them to visit is out of place. I think *TC Harold* damaged it and two years later nothing has been done about it. In Kavala, the resting place for passengers, there is a.....

MR. SPEAKER.- What is your supplementary question?

HON. S.R. RASOVA.- *Wawa! Wawa!* See that is the problem with you people when we try to give you positive criticism, constructive criticism, Mr. Speaker, Sir, they are against it.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, supplementary question - perhaps you might like to enlighten Parliament on what happened in Vunisea.

HON. S.R. RASOVA.- When are you going to fix the Vunisea and Naleca Jetty because it has been two years now.

MR. SPEAKER.- I thought the honourable Minister had already answered that but I will give him the floor.

HON. J. USAMATE.- The Vunisea Jetty has a waiting shed and it has a public convenience. As I mentioned before we went there late last year that place had just been fixed up but then it got vandalised, the lights disappeared. You know the Vunisea Jetty is away from the main area so that is an issue that we have. We had some discussions with the people in Namalata or Namuana - some of the people there sell food in that area so we want to have an arrangement where they also look after that facility.

So, the plans to upgrade Vunisea is for the year 2023/2024. For Naleca Jetty in Kavala you know that we have a public convenience there, a waiting shed and water supply. We know that the solar lights were damaged during *TC Harold*. We also have plans to upgrade it in the financial year 2023/2024.

MR. SPEAKER.- Last supplementary question.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- A supplementary question to the honourable Minister, can you assure this Parliament that the future plans for upgrade will also accommodate the needs of travellers with disabilities?

HON. J. USAMATE.- I think this Government has a record of looking after people that are physically challenged. We brought the legislation into this Parliament. We were the one that introduced the allowances under Social Welfare for the Disabled and if there is one Government that will always look after all the people in this country, physically challenged or not, it is this Government. We will definitely make sure that we do that.

Development of Fiji's Turmeric Industry
(Question No. 116/2022)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment update Parliament on plans to develop Fiji's turmeric industry considering its favourable performance in the export market?

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- I thank the honourable Member for asking this question, Mr. Speaker, Sir, but before that, I just want to respond to a comment made by honourable Professor Prasad, that we are juvenile. It is a condescending remark and it does not befit a person who wants to become a deputy Prime Minister or Prime Minister.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, turmeric is now a very important commodity for Fiji in terms of the agricultural export sector. It is globally used for medicinal purposes and it is widely used in Fiji as well for herbal medicine. It has a distinctive taste and aroma on food. It has high curcumin content which has been clinically proven to fight against some of the ailments. This important characteristic of turmeric contributes to its ever increasing demand in the international market.

In Fiji, turmeric at the moment grows wildly, Mr. Speaker, in the highlands of Tailevu, Navosa, Nadi and the Northern Division. So all the turmeric at the moment that is being harvested and exported is wildy-grown turmeric. Now, noting the importance of turmeric and the growing share in the export market where we exported last year \$22.9 million worth of turmeric. We now want to expand turmeric production but maintain the brand image that it is organically-grown turmeric, meaning we do not want to utilise any fertiliser or chemical.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this turmeric that we exported in 2021 where we exported 2300 tonnes, it grew from 74 tonnes in 2013 so we can see how the turmeric market sent a signal and resulted in harvesting and supply, so we now want to ensure that we maintain that production base, in fact expand the production base so that we can expand and get more export income into the country.

For turmeric, our main export destinations are U.S., New Zealand, Australia and Canada but most of it goes to the U.S. market. So, Mr. Speaker, Sir, what we are doing is, we have now allocated for the first time ever in this financial year's budget a specific allocation under 'spices' of \$100,000 to expand turmeric production. So as of today we have got 27.4 acres of planted turmeric on the ground. We supported with planting material, land preparation and organic agro inputs to the farmers and clearly articulated to them that they need to ensure that it is organic turmeric so that we can maintain the brand image.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are looking at expanding turmeric in Kadavu as well. There has been interest from Kadavu. There has been interest from Koro Island as well.

In the Central Division too, we have seen new farmers coming forward asking to grow turmeric and we are expanding this and we want to raise the export earnings from the current \$22 million. We are targeting turmeric progressively alongside kava possibly as well.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there is a lot of interest and we are taking advantage of the interest from the farmers and we have got exporters who are operating from the Western Division and they are basically saying that we are not getting the full demand that we want to from the export market.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker, I thank the Minister for his brief on turmeric. In the

highlands of Navosa, turmeric is in plentiful supply and I believe it is rated very highly. Also, in Navosa is the Vatumali Centre, which has a collection centre. Would the Government, the Minister consider using one of those centres to be a processing area to generate employment to the people of that area for their turmeric? They already have a collection centre, Mr. Speaker, so I just wonder if Government can consider setting up processing in those centres where turmeric is in plentiful supply.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, at the moment the exporters are going and collecting the turmeric from the farmers at Keiyasi in the interior. So it is totally private sector-driven. We are a facilitator and we assist the farmers and the farmers only. So if exporters want to come and establish a processing centre closer to the farmers then we are happy to facilitate that.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. A supplementary question to the honourable Minister; can the honourable Minister advise this Parliament what form of assistance can the Ministry of Agriculture give to those who intend to commence turmeric farming or those new turmeric farmers?

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thought I mentioned that in my earlier response. The amount of \$100,000 has been allocated to support farmers in terms of land preparation, in terms of provision of planting material and agro inputs.

HON. S.R. RASOVA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank the honourable Minister. You have mentioned that the Eastern Division – Kadavu, Lomaiviti, Lau and Rotuma are interested in planting turmeric and this morning in your Ministerial Statement, you talked about the ginger. In this interest, can you give us a date when you will be implementing that in the Eastern Division, especially Kadavu, Lomaiviti, Lau and Rotuma?

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have advertised our assistance in August after the new financial year started and we have some interest recently from Koro. Our officers on the ground in Kadavu have said that there are some interest and we are rolling out the programme. We are getting close to this financial year so I think the next lot of assistance for turmeric would come from August when the new budget kicks in.

Assistance to the Rehabilitation of Pine Access Roads
(Question No. 117/2022)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Defence, National Security and Policing, Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management inform Parliament of any assistance it provides towards the rehabilitation of pine access roads in the rural and maritime areas?

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Member for the question and, of course, I wish to thank you as well, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me to answer this question as discussed during the Business Committee meeting because it involves our communities in the rural and maritime areas and we are particularly under the Integrated Rural Development Framework, we do a lot of coordination on behalf of the communities with the agencies responsible and 'road' is high in that agenda.

On pine access roads specifically, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have the Ministry of Forests, we have Fiji Pine Limited and Fiji Pine Trust. I leave that to what the Ministry of Rural Development does and what the Fiji Roads Authority does as well particularly when communities who live in the

pine leases, so to speak or are adjacent or live within the area and have assistance through the various machineries available.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in the code of logging practice given to contractors, probably I will start here roading is part of that. While the licence is valid, it is their responsibility to cut the access roads and to maintain that during the activities that they undertake in the area and that is how some of the communities involved have roads.

The Fiji Pine Trust is given \$0.7 million annually to assist all pine areas under the 49 Pine Schemes and this includes those in the maritime areas. These Pine Schemes are managed by the Fiji Pine Trust to support growing and replanting of pine within the Schemes, as well as the associated administrative cost.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, while they are replanting as part of the administrative costs, the roading is covered under that as well and that is how we have come to have existing roads particularly under the schemes with the Fiji Pine Trust. Of course, we have Fiji Pine Limited and most of the land are under the Fiji Pine Limited and this is perhaps the more sensitive one out of the three because of the leases involved, particularly from the Ministry of Rural Development and Communities do need that assistance on roads that pass through Fiji Pine Limited leases we do the facilitation on behalf of the communities to Fiji Pine Limited.

This morning, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I just spoke to the Operations Manager at Lololo because of a request from Nalotawa in the interior of Ba about their roads (the one coming from Lololo to Nalotawa) because most of these pass through the leases owned by Fiji Pine Limited. Therefore, in some instances, when Fiji Pine is not in a position to assist as before, they used to have a roading unit initially but now they no longer have the roading unit but they still look after some of the roads and the costing mechanism that they use is about \$1.50 per tonne.

You can see that it is very minimal given the cost of infrastructure maintenance that we see these days. That is how they work out the costs and sometimes when it is beyond them, they seek the assistance of other agencies and that is where the Ministry of Rural Development plays an important role in facilitating the request from the community, with Fiji Pine and when Fiji Pine Limited is not in a position to assist, then we will ask Fiji Roads Authority (FRA).

The FRA has an annual allocation of about \$50 million dollars particularly for rural areas but that has its priority list as well that we agreed together every year. The four Divisional Commissioners, through the Ministry of Rural Development, but sometimes we have to reprioritise based on the needs and that is where requests particularly for roads that pass through Fiji Pine Leases are facilitated and prioritised. That is how roads are maintained in the rural and maritime Pine Schemes.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, again, from the Ministry of Rural Development and FRA, because some of the roadings that exists in rural Fiji were constructed when we had projects under these programmes - the Cocoa project, Dairy project, Pine project, Mahogany project, that is how most of the rural roads came into existence and in the clarification of roads, it is still existing today. We have pine access roads, mahogany access roads, sugarcane access roads, non-sugarcane access roads and then we have rural access roads. Then we have, what we used to call as PWD standards and the national roads which are all under FRA's jurisdiction.

Very briefly, the allocation for farm roads particularly non-cane access is given to the Ministry of Agriculture, the cane-access roads is given to the Ministry of Sugar and we have about \$2 million allocation under what we call the cuff project, community access, rural roads and

footbridges and footpaths. That is how we deal with some and \$50 million is with FRA on rural roads so that is the process and that is how the roads in the maritime pine schemes are facilitated.

Update and Preventative Measures – Lymphatic Filariasis
(Question No. 118/2022)

HON. J.N. NAND asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services update Parliament on Lymphatic Filariasis and what preventative measures have been taken to eliminate it?

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- I thank the honourable Member for that question.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Lymphatic Filariasis or sometimes called the Elephantiasis is caused by nematodes and globally there is about more than 860 million people in 47 countries worldwide that are threatened by Lymphatic Filariasis. They require medicines to prevent it or preventative chemotherapy or chemoprevention.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is labelled as a neglected tropical disease and more than 8 billion cumulative treatments have been delivered to stop the spread of infection since 2000. In Fiji, the Lymphatic Filariasis Programme has been around for 21 years. It has been based on the collaboration that we have with WHO to achieve the global target of elimination which was set at less than 1 percent prevalence in the population by 2020, however, WHO has reset its target to 2030 and there are many countries that have not met it.

In Fiji, we have noted there is a particular province only which has more than 1 percent prevalence. Fiji as a member of the 22 Pacific Island countries under the Pacific Elimination Lymphatic Filariasis umbrella continues all its journey to combat Filariasis and here towards meeting the elimination goal. As we all know, with this problem it can cause disability, disabling and disfiguration also. Mass Drug Administration is one of the Programmes main strategic pillars and in interruption of Lymphatic Filariasis transmission from 2002 to 2007.

We have actively implemented Mass Drug Administration grounds, followed by surveys to check our prevalence. Our aim is to decrease our national prevalence rate and this was widely reflected in the drop of its prevalence rate from 16 percent in 2002 to 9 percent by 2007. In 2010, a divisional specific strategy was implemented, targeting specific issues within the four divisions.

The Central Division underwent eight rounds of multi drug administration. Based on the second transmission assessment survey in the year 2017, the prevalence rate remains in the Central Division less than 1 percent with only a hotspot in Serua. The Central Division is scheduled for a third transmission assessment survey in the coming months. This will determine whether we need to do a MDA in the Central Division next year or not.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Western Division has passed three of their transmission assessment surveys and has maintained the less than 1 percent prevalence except for Malolo. The Eastern Division have to start with their first transmission assessment survey, to do the high prevalence rate. The division must schedule for two rounds of MDA between 2020 and 2021. This was due to 2019 Central survey results of about 7 percent prevalence. The first round was implemented in 2020, second round was in 2021, however, the COVID-19 restrictions put in place in the second outbreak has pushed the second round to August, 2022.

The Northern Division has implemented three rounds of the transmission assessment survey. The first two rounds of the survey maintained the threshold of below 1 percent which was in 2013 and 2015, whereas the third round in 2018 showed up a prevalence rate of more than 1 percent in the Northern Division. This indicates that Northern Division has not achieved its objective of reducing the level of microfilaria in the endemic population to an extent where transmission is likely to reoccur in the Northern Division.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, Sir, two rounds of MDA for Lymphatic Filariasis were required in the Northern Division in 2019 to 2020. The first round which was done in collaboration with the Scabies Project also to eliminate scabies called the Big SHIFT Project on the research going on with it, was implemented in July to August 2019 with the good MDA coverage of more than 80 percent in Vanua Levu. The second round of MDA was scheduled to take place in July to August 2020 but due to the pandemic it has been postponed and we are hoping to do it within the next few weeks.

Dredging Plan – Waidamu River
(Question No. 119/2022)

HON. I. KURIDRANI asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment update Parliament on its dredging plan at the Waidamu River in the district of Bau?

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, Waidamu River, along with another 109 rivers and creeks, were advertised to be desilted or dredged a number of times. We were successful in getting under the PPP model, where the Ministry will undertake the scoping, the drawing of extraction and develop the environmental management plan for the extraction at our cost, and will work with the land owners to get the fishing rights waiver, and awarded to a contractor who would extract that material, pay the royalty and then take the material and sell it and keep the profits.

Out of these 110 rivers and creeks, for 31 rivers and creeks, we were able to successfully get contractors to undertake the desilting work on a PPP model. The Waidamu River is a long river of 9.6 kilometres and has a total volume silt of 127,518 which needs to be removed, it is a massive amount of silt that needs to be removed and the river mouth as well to be cleared, so it is entire 9.6 kilometres that needs to be cleared.

We advertised four times, just to update Parliament. Normally, the interest from contractors come if there are lots of gravel and sand materials. No one is after the silt, which they cannot sell and get money. Waidamu River has very little gravel and sand but more silt.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, fourth time, we were able to get a company, that company took us for a ride for about six months, even went and commissioned et cetera, but they we were not able to get the dredger and do the dredging. So, we cancelled the agreement and then we advertised again, and we were able to get another company called Hardrock Dredging Company, just before COVID-19. They got their brand new dredger, went there and started the dredging work, and there were some issues with the community, there were some physical scuffle and some of their staffs got hurt, they stopped it and then COVID-19 came. So, we went and settled the issue and they were about to resume when COVID-19 came and their workers went back.

When COVID-19 started to ease out, we were expecting their workers to come back. That is where we are now, we are not able to get the company to start the dredging works. In the meantime, we are looking at other contractors to give out parts of the river so that we can fast track while we wait for this particular contractor.

I want to assure Parliament that Waidamu River is right on the top of our agenda in terms of dredging, and we are mindful of the spill over effect of Waidamu River on the nearby communities. The worse scenario is, we are expecting our own dredger to come at the end of the year, donated by the Government of Japan, thanks to the Government of Japan, and then we can get the dredger there.

We also have some emergency rivers in the Northern Division but we are not able to find any dredging company. So we need to engage our dredgers in areas or rivers where we do not get interest from the private sector. But we have good news that as we speak, we have got dredging in Ba River which is a bit slow, dredging is happening in the Nasivi River in Tavua, so we are making good progress with the private sector model, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. S.R. RASOVA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank the honourable Minister for his response. All those 32 river dredging, do they have credible EIAs?

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have just explained that EIA needs to be undertaken when you are interfering with the natural course of the river waterway. When you are restoring the river or creek to its original state, then we undertake an Environmental Management Plan (EMP) where we guide the contractor on how they need to undertake the extraction work, how many metres from the left riverbank, how many metres from the right riverbank, the exact amount of silt that needs to be removed, so they cannot remove anything more than that. Those are captured when our engineers go and do the actual survey of the river, do the drawings, and then an Environmental Officer develops the EMP.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, that is done by the Ministry of Waterways. The EMP is then submitted to the Ministry of Environment, so they are two different Ministries. Once the Ministry of Environment clears, then that entire thing is taken to the Ministry of Lands and it is the Ministry of Lands that gives the licence for extraction, not the Ministry of Waterways or the Ministry of Environment.

FNU-Monash University Joint Pacific Island Countries Climate Change Research Centre
(Question No. 120/2022)

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

Can the honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service, Communications, Housing and Community Development update Parliament on the Fiji National University-Monash University Joint Pacific Island Countries Climate Change Research Centre?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank the honourable Member for his question.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, just by way of background, the combination of environmental, technological and political threats that we face today is, indeed, unprecedented. We know through excerpts of the reports by reputable organisations, such as the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), that average global temperature rise of a staggering 3.1 Degree Celsius is just around the corner.

If global emissions are not reduced by 43 percent in the next eight years, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the 1.5 Degree Celsius threshold that Pacific Island Countries have been pushing for, which is

imperative for securing the possibility of a safe future for Pacific Islands will become an impossible aspiration because we know that countries like Tuvalu, their highest pitch above sea level is 12 feet.

A rise in the global average temperature of over 3.0 Degrees Celsius will mean unprecedented sea level rise, and the rise in temperatures across the Pacific equatorial regions of the Earth of a magnitude that would make life untenable for many and most island nations. Already in Fiji, we have identified 43 Villages that need to be moved to higher ground.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in order to mitigate both, the staggering risks and prepare for the impacts that will actually occur, irrespective of the scale of global emission reduction achieved over the next decade, we need to develop solutions. We need to participate actively in the science, research, innovation, the legal issues and inquiry that will help define solutions that suit our context and, indeed, our needs, Sir. The basis of policies we create plan and put in place must be shaped by the evidence and the depth of analysis that helps to ensure we create answers to the right questions.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as highlighted by the honourable Member, we made significant strides against the evidence-based approach of our National Climate Change Policy through the launch of the MOU between Monash University, one of the top universities not just in Australia but in the world, and the Fiji National University.

The MOU which was signed last week sets out the basis for progressive and joint Monash and FNU Pacific Island Countries (PICs) Climate Change Research Centre (CCRC). This is a partnership which will further complement the efforts of the existing research pursuits and institutions in the region while helping to advance the knowledge and information we need to better confront the evolving climate crisis.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, what this partnership does is that it will be led by a group of experts and experience from the Pacific Islands ensuring this work is grounded in the context and challenges we seek to address. We are also very glad that Professor Paresh Narayan who originally is from Navua and who is a gold medallist from Monash University in one of the top 500 cited econometrics in Australia and indeed globally is the one who in fact brought this proposal to FNU. We are very glad that someone of his ilk is actually leading this particular charge and the Monash University obviously has a lot of confidence in him and therefore we are able to set up this Centre.

There will be a Director that will be funded by the Monash University who will be based at FNU. Once the Director is appointed, he or she will be tasked with developing a five-year strategy. Membership of other Pacific Island countries will be pursued and a business plan for the implementation of the Centre will be developed which will strive to create a competitive research programme equipped with the network and resources needed to both retain local experts by also attracting international research partnerships.

Indeed, as we mentioned, I suppose one of the positive things out of being at the cold phase of climate change is that many people would like to be based in a country that is at the cold phase of climate change to be able to carry out that research. The two universities have already undertaken a mapping of the internal capabilities on 22nd April, 2022 this year, five Monash University Professors and the 10 FNU Academics attended a research boot camp at FNU Nasinu Campus. At the boot camp, three collaborative seed projects aligned to climate change mitigation were put in place and mental health, forestry and energy were identified - FNU and Monash University will fund these projects using internal research funding mechanisms. They intend to use this pilot work in the pursuit of future donors sponsor funding in the field.

As highlighted, the world's leading expertise provided by Monash University and its renowned role in progressing climate change research and education, the Pacific will have a greater access to tuition and knowledge needed to train and create the next generation of researchers and climate change risk management specialists needed to support regional adaptation efforts, Sir.

Last but not the least, this partnership also is closely aligned with the objectives and requirements set out by our own Fijian, recently approved by Parliament, Climate Change Act. The Act requires national education programmes and curriculums to include knowledge transfer on climate change to advance learning that helps us to create the skill-sets and workforce that will help define Fiji's future. As highlighted yesterday, even many of the Members, in particular on the other side, do not feature or factor climate change in their discourse or discussions or perhaps, hopefully, they will include in their manifestos that climate change is critically important to be able to have that taken into account, even when developing very simple policies.

The Climate Change Act (which I hope they will look at) is also a framework and signal for new economic approach in which the protection and preservation of nature is actually valid. The Act sets out the legal basis for ensuring that the stewardship of and protection of the environment can be translated into jobs and careers. It calls for national energy sector built and maintained by solar engineers and a sustainable tourism sector that is inter-woven with our environment's best interests, things like, for example, the solar institute that has been setup in Vanua Levu where we are bringing in women, grandmothers and mothers from all over Fiji, providing hostel accommodation and they actually become trained engineers in maintaining solar systems that will be put up – the Barefoot College.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are very excited about this MOU and we are very excited about the fact that we have an internationally recognised university that is collaborating with our national university.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members that brings an end to Question time. The hour being late at this time, I just want to remind the Commonwealth Women's Parliamentary Fiji Group of their meeting in the Small Committee Room during the lunch break.

On that note, we will adjourn for lunch and resume at 2.30 p.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 12.25 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 3.04 p.m.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members please be seated. I now call upon the honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service, Communication, Housing and Community Development to move his motion.

STATE LANDS (AMENDMENT) BILL 2022

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, before I move the motion, I would like to thank you for your indulgence in accommodating the presentation of this particular Bill to Parliament after lunch. Thank you, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 51, I move:

That the –

- (a) State Land (Amendment) Bill 2022 be considered by Parliament without delay;
- (b) Bill must pass through one stage at a single sitting of Parliament;
- (c) Bill must not be referred to a Standing Committee or other Committee of Parliament;
- (d) Bill must be debated and voted upon by Parliament on Thursday, 12th May, 2022 and
- (e) one hour be given to debate the Bill, with the right of reply given to me as the Member moving this motion.

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

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, without going into too much detail, just by way of introduction to this particular amendment Bill, this Bill is all about State lands and has nothing to do with iTaukei land or freehold land.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it says under Section 16 that once a person makes an application for State land lease they must essentially, in simple terms, come to the Director for Lands with clean hands. You should not be making an application for lease if you are going to immediately transfer the lease to someone else or you have some form of arrangement.

Also, Mr. Speaker, Sir, most State leases have a condition in that if, for example, I obtain a state lease, and if I am going to subdivide the land, sell the land or sell part of the land, I need to get the consent of the Director for Lands. Sir, over a number of decades in Fiji this has actually not happened nor has the Lands Department, as the honourable Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu knows and also honourable Bulanauca (who I understand was also a Minister for Lands), that this has not been strictly enforced.

In particular after 1987, Sir, a lot of people who were dispossessed of their land, the leases that they had or whose leases were not renewed, essentially became refugees in their own country in terms of displaced people, so a lot of farmers or people who owned State land made arrangements with them. They said “you give me \$1,000 and you can put up your house in that corner of the land.”

You will find a lot of them, Mr. Speaker, Sir, in the Nadi area and there are other parts of Fiji too where we have had public consultations. In particular, I was there about six or eight weeks ago, for example, in the Malolo Transmitter Road area where a person owned a vast tract of Crown land and he then subsequently sold portions of it. Some people, in some instances, may have a bit

of Crown land and then gives it to his brothers' son who does not have any lands to build a house in the corner and share the lease payments with him.

In many of these instances, Sir, because this happened 30 to 40 years ago, some of the people who actually owned the lease have died off or have actually migrated. So the Director of Lands, under the current arrangements under the law, has to give notice to the person who has the lease in terms of them breaching it. The notice either cannot be served because the person is nowhere to be found or it has to be passed on.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, obviously it would be extremely unjust if you have an entire generation or a generation and half of people who have been living on the State lands for them to be booted out overnight if we were to strictly follow the requirements under the existing law. What this amendment seeks to do, for example, is to give the Director of Lands the ability to cancel the head lease or the lease itself, and be able to issue separate leases for those people who have been living there *bona fide* since the land was given to them.

There is a particular system that has been put in place in the amendment that there is going to be a Committee chaired by the Permanent Secretary for Housing and Community Development, and consists of the Permanent Secretary for Lands, Solicitor-General and anyone else they wish to for example to include into that Committee, for example, Town and Country Planning Director, et cetera. Once they have actually, for example, established that in this particular area so and so had actually sold off their land to these people, albeit illegally under the law technically speaking, and they have been occupying this land now for the past 30 to 40 years, then they will be able to then cancel the original lease and be able to then issue them with the leases and the Director of Lands can actually do that.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, that is essentially what this provides for. Obviously, we cannot cancel lease if there is encumbrance on the lease. If for example, there is a mortgage on the lease or if there is a caveat on the lease. Those legal issues need to be taken care of before any such new leases are issued. So, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the areas for example, you have in Nadi – Naidovi, Navo, Nasau, Solovi, Malolo Transmitter Road (vast areas) and also there are other places around Fiji where there are similar situations so the idea is to regularise this.

Mr. Speaker, if we do not, these people essentially are living there without any title. They do not build permanent homes because they think that they may be booted out at any time so they do not actually go to the banks to build a nice concrete home. When there is a cyclone, we have to go and help them because they do not have a nice concrete home with a proper roof so in this way we will be able to address, for example, remove the uncertainty, be able to get revenue for the State because then they can start paying proper lease monies to the State. We will be able to get proper subdivisions done and Mr. Speaker, Sir, of course these people will get certainty. They can then go to banks, mortgage their leases and build concrete homes and of course that creates a lot more economic activity, so that is what this Act seeks to do.

We have been having a lot of consultations with many of these groups in the past few number of months where they have made various submissions. Some of them are extremely frustrated. They have been there for decades without any proper title being issued to them. The Director of Lands, her hands are tied. She cannot move on it because the current law does not allow her to do so. A lot of the people who actually sold them the land, they are nowhere to be found or they have passed on. Some of them in fact actually live on the land themselves but they have allowed these people to build all these homes around them.

So, Mr. Speaker, Sir, to bring about the certainty to carry out proper subdivision, to get proper drainage because a lot of these areas do flood because the town and country planning does not want to give the zoning or does not want to do the boundaries because no one knows where the boundaries are but this will get it all pegged out and that creates of course, Mr. Speaker, a lot more certainty and of course in terms of the State land, it increases the value of the State land. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

MR. SPEAKER.- I thank the Attorney-General. Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate on the motion. At the end of the debate we will have the right of reply from the mover. Anyone wishing to take the floor.

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to contribute to the motion at hand. As we have stated in the past, we have always been consistent in terms of Standing Order 51 and again in this case, this is a substantial bill which has quite far-reaching effects and honourable Minister for Economy, the Attorney-General has mentioned that consultations have been going on but with whom, that is the question and whether all stakeholders have been consulted.

There is also concern that these lands are not clearly identified given the various interest at hand and stakeholders including iTLTB, landowners, those who might have interest and that is very important that consultations are done and by going through Standing Order 51, this will not be done so again we express our concern that this is coming through that and then tomorrow we will discuss or debate on the Bill itself.

So, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are of the view that this should go to a standing committee of Parliament in order to thoroughly discuss it. I mean there are various issues there, for example, they mentioned there the subdivision of land and there is a committee to be chaired by the permanent secretary. These are issues which you know involve good governance and transparency, not only regarding stakeholders I have mentioned, but there might be people or other stakeholders or original landowners who have claims to this so there are no details on which parcels of land are involved here. Going to a Committee will enable us to thoroughly discuss it, consult all the stakeholders and go through the details that this Bill relates to that are in the parcels of land.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I support the motion. Anyone who has served in the Ministry of Lands & Mineral Resources knows the problems that happens for this particular sort of issue which is happening all the time, so I support this because it will address the ongoing issue in relation to State land.

HON. RATU N.T. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to contribute on a few issues that have been raised in the introduction of the motion by the learned Attorney-General, and that is to do with this particular Bill in trying to amend and provide probably areas of redress for people that are already there or to check out how they have come upon that piece of land, if it is a State land and in particular for the State land or State freehold land that has been mentioned by the learned Attorney-General, the Malolo areas, Navakai - these are areas that were part of the impact of the Agricultural Landlord and Tenants Act (ALTA) legislation on this type of agricultural use.

Most of the land as you approach before reaching the Qeleloa Bridge in Nadi to the right that is known as Malolo, the area that is mentioned by the learned Attorney-General is occupied by people who have cane land at the bottom that is their marginal lot for housing, on top of that they are given a marginal lot for planting rice. It all comes under ALTA and that involves Navakai as well which has become renowned squatter area as well.

But again, Mr. Speaker, Sir, these marginal lot owners are the ones who have been doing all this business of letting off some of their parcels of land to other users to come and build upon that and in the process, these people are protected under ALTA, because ALTA lease recognises the occupation as such. If the predominant use is agricultural or which is the cane farm at the bottom - their marginal lot for cane farming, that covers them, that makes them be the kind of landlord even though they have not been issued proper ALTA leases.

Under ALTA they are allowed another 20 years extension, but again this Committee that has been set up under this Bill will certainly find their task a bit of 'wrinkle' so to speak, because it will be charged, the lawyers out there in this particular area Sir right down to Ba, they are well-renowned for protecting the interests and the rights of the people that own the marginal lot. But again, it has been subdivided and that is the very crux of this Bill to try and address that, to try and put a stop to that.

The first thing that the Committee has to do as noticed in this agreement is to confirm or ascertain whether a breach of whatever rise that they are trying to claim over those parcels of land need to be ascertained and they could be taken to task according to what they would come up with.

But it is in the Standing Order and I also agree with the honourable Minister for Lands in saying that when one goes to occupy the office, he is always confronted with this kind of land issues and it has become a good playing ground for lawyers as well to fight cases saying that there is a case. But in going in this particular direction, I hope that it would be of full effect in trying to address these problems and it has to be an outstanding problem for quite some.

MR. SPEAKER.- I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his contribution. Honourable Mitieli Bulanauca, you have the floor.

HON. M. BULANAUCA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Sir, as far as I am concerned, it is good to give us time to properly go into the proposal year before we debate it. While we would like to encourage and ensure that people have security of tenure rather than just being a part of the family on that list and employment staying on that lease or whatever, to provide them with the security of tenure.

It is important that we have a good look at the status of that Crown land before we make certain such decisions, particularly giving that power to the Director of Lands to cancel the lease, and ready for sub-division and issue more direct leases to whoever is occupied. Maybe also we need to offer some of the pieces of land to others not related to the tenant relations. What I am just trying to say is that we need more time to properly delve into this proposal before the debate. Thank you, Mr, Speaker, Sir.

MR. SPEAKER.- I thank the honourable Member for his contribution to the debate. There being nobody else wishing to take the floor, I give the floor to the honourable Attorney General for his right of reply.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am glad that honourable Lalabalavu has actually agreed that it is actually an issue. I think some of the issues that he did raise regarding ALTA, not all the leases actually were granted under ALTA, some of them were given not under ALTA. But if I can also read the provision under ALTA that is clause 37(1):

“A landlord may terminate his contract of tenancy and may recover possession of an agricultural holding-

- a) without notice where the tenant deserts such holding and leaves it uncultivated and unoccupied for a period of not less than twelve months and owes rent for a period of twelve months or more;
- b) by one months' written notice to quit -
 - (i) where the tenant sublets, assigns or subdivides such holding without having previously obtained the consent in writing of the landlord which consent shall not be unreasonably withheld; or
 - (ii) where the tenant commits a breach of any term or condition of the tenancy which is not capable of being remedied and the interests of the landlord are materially prejudiced thereby;...

So you can see Mr. Speaker, Sir, a lot of it actually falls squarely within this particular provision but we have made an amendment to the State Lands Act because State Lands Act obviously covers all State lands.

Honorable Tuisawau tried to sneak in again about the *iTaukei* land issues. It has got nothing to do with the *iTaukei* land, and as I said in the introduction that it is clearly only on land - that is clearly State-owned land which falls under the State Lands Act. Again, this is one of the sneaky ways of introducing ethnicity into it.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the other point that I also want to make is, I also highlighted in the introduction that should there be any encumbrance, in other words if somebody is challenging the ownership, if there is a matter before the courts, if there is a matter before the tribunal - it cannot go ahead and I have made it clear right from the beginning. So please, stick to what we have said and stick to the law.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the other point he said 'consultations with whom'? I highlighted also in the introduction that we have had consultations with the people who are actually affected by this and they are the people who are occupying this land.

The other main part in this is the Director for Lands. Is the landlord which is the Director for Lands, Ministry of Lands, the tenants and the lessees so in case they disappeared? They are the main people who we need to consult and they are the main stakeholders in this. So again, he is misleading Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, honourable Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu I think again, is showing his wisdom by saying that the Committee will need to do a lot of investigation. Again, if you look at the amendment, it does say that there will be regulations around this for the Committee. So they need to have those findings, in some case it is quite clear, is quite evident that the person is gone, has died, et cetera.

We have had a number of meetings, a lot of records over the town and country planning, they have not moved, they have it with the subdivision because they are then bound by the law itself to say 'you must get the consent of the landowner to do this'. Now it is used to be in the agricultural lease, now you want to have only residential lease so they are bound by that.

What this does, Mr. Speaker, Sir, if you look at the amendment is very simple actually, you have a number of lawyers on your side, they can tell you about it, it gives the Director the ability to issue them with any other lease. So, those people, for example, this is the parcel land that different people are occupying it.

At the moment, Mr. Speaker, Sir, under the law because the person who owns this parcel of land or owns this lease under the law they have to cancel the lease. So no one can actually occupy the land, they all have to be chased away and then the Director for Lands will have to then issue another lease over that parcel of land or go ahead and subdivide it. For this, he is saying, is that when the Director for Lands actually cancel the lease, Sir, those people will still be protected because it does say in the Bill itself:

“For the avoidance of doubt, any occupant of land referred to under this section including the lessee shall remain on the land subject to any terms and condition of any lease, licence approval notice of lease granted after the enactment of the State land amendment Act.”

In other words, the Director for Lands will make sure that these people do not get booted out but give them separate leases. So that is what is going to do, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, again honourable Bulanauca I think was off the mark. Honourable Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu raised Navakai. There are two types of State land occupation, one is where people have actually simply gone in becomes squatters, there was no lease, Navakai is a classic example, State land, no more sugarcane farming is owned by the State, they have simply gone and built homes and no one have checked on it. For example, Omkar is just squatters. Over here what we are talking about, Sir, is State land that were actually leased out to an individual and that individual went in, subsequently sold the land without the consent of the Director for Lands, that is what we are dealing with.

We are not dealing with State land where we have squatters. It is the same here, for example, if an *itaukei* land where you have people who are squatters and they simply go in and build their houses without anyone’s consent or in some cases, there are ‘*vakavanua*’ arrangement. That is the different matter too if someone is issued a proper lease by iTLTB and then they go and sell the land without the consent of iTLTB. This is a similar situation where we have actual leases being issued by the State by the lessee then they subsequently go and sell those lands without the consent of the Director for Lands. As opposed to Navakai where people are just simply squatters, no one ever checked on them, for example, Omkar. So there are two different issues, we are not talking about the squatters, we are talking about those people who actually have gone and occupied the land because the original lessee allowed them to go there.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I hope that clarifies those issues that have been raised by honourable Members from the other side and we are looking forward to their contribution tomorrow afternoon.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we have had some delays today over the rearrangement of our Agenda items but we have gone through the day and it comes now to that hour where I have to adjourn until tomorrow, so we have an early adjournment.

We adjourn to tomorrow at 9.30 a.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 3.31 p.m.