



STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL AFFAIRS

Review of the National Fire Authority 2015 Annual Report



PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI
Parliamentary Paper No. 35 of 2022

May 2022

Published and printed by the Department of Legislature, Parliament House, Government Buildings, SUVA

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COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP



Chairperson

Hon. Viam Pillay MP

Government Member



Deputy Chairperson

Hon. George Vagnathan MP

Government Member



Member

Hon. Alipate Nagata MP

Government Member



Member

Hon. Salote Radrodoro MP

Opposition Member



Member

Hon. Dr Ratu Atonio Lalabalavu MP

Opposition Member

CHAIRPERSON'S FOREWORD

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 Reports, 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 include:

- Total income for 2015 was recorded at \$12.5 million compared to \$14.3 million recorded for the year 2014 (Restated).
- The number of incidents attended to by NFA during the year totalled 6,846. This 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 an 11% 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, Mr. Puamau Sowane, and his staff for their timely assistance in this review process. I also extend my gratitude to my Committee colleagues namely: Hon. George Vegnathan (Deputy Chairperson), Hon. Alipate Nagata, Hon. Salote Radrodoro and Hon. 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 members of this august House to take note of the Report.

..........
Hon. Viam Pillay
Chairperson

RECOMMENDATION:

The Standing Committee on Social Affairs has conducted the annual review of the National Fire Authority for 2015 and recommends that the House take note of its report.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The 2015 Annual Report of the National Fire Authority was tabled in the February 2022 Parliament and referred to the Standing Committee on Social Affairs for its scrutiny.

Standing Orders 109(2)(b) allows Standing Committee on Social Affairs to examine matters related to health, education, social services, labour, culture and media.

Furthermore, Standing Orders 110(1)(c) authorises the Standing Committee to “*scrutinise the government departments with responsibility within the committee's subject area, including by investigating, inquiring into, and making recommendations relating to any aspect of such a department's administration, legislation or proposed legislative program, budget, rationalisation, restructuring, functioning, organisation, structure and policy formulation.*”

1.1 Committee Procedure

We first met in April to deliberate on and formulate questions pertaining to the 2015 Annual Report of NFA, which were sent to NFA for its response.

Upon receipt of all relevant information on the committee's queries, we compiled our findings on the Annual Reports and subsequently endorsed it in the early part of this month.

We received written and supplementary responses from the National Fire Authority for this annual review. It is available on the Parliament website, at the following link: <http://www.parliament.gov.fj/committees/standing-committee-on-social-affairs/>

2.0 ABOUT THE NATIONAL FIRE AUTHORITY

The National Fire Authority was established by Government to take effect from 1st February 1995 when it assumed responsibility to provide a national fire service. NFA took over the fire service, which was then operated by the Board of Fire Commissioners of Suva and the Municipal Councils.

NFA has since evolved over the years from its informal beginnings to a nation-wide emergency service organization, providing a diverse range of risk reduction and fire suppression services to minimize the impact of fires and other life threatening emergencies in the community.

NFA is wholly committed to prevention, preparedness, response and recovery phases of emergency situations.

In exercising its powers under the National Fire Service Act, the NFA's responsibilities include:

- The corporate governance of the NFA including the establishment of sub-committees
- Administration and operations of the national fire services
- Establishing strategies and objectives
- Monitoring the performance of management
- Ensuring effective and efficient communication with all stakeholders
- Appointment of officers of the NFA except for the CEO who is appointed by the Minister
- Ensuring an effective human resources program for the NFA
- Overseeing the development strategies for senior and high performance officers

In order to streamline communications and better administer the organisation, the Authority established three (3) fire divisions namely: Central/Eastern, Northern and Western Fire Divisions, and appointed Divisional Fire Officers to head these three divisions. Today, there are 21 fire stations around Fiji serving of which eight were commissioned in the past five years.

3.0 COMMITTEE'S OBSERVATIONS

- 3.1 We enquired NFA on whether there were any alternate arrangements made with the Water of Authority of Fiji (WAF) due to the frequent intermittent water shortage, in terms of ensuring sufficient supply of water during fires. We were informed that meetings with the Chief Operations Officer WAF and National Fire Authority were held to discuss a way forward to solve the frequent intermittent water shortage in case of emergency. The WAF team is finalizing the list of these areas before submitting it to NFA. These areas identified will also be plotted in the Computer Aided Dispatch System at NFA Command Centre for ease of reference.

Also, WAF has provided a list of contact persons who will be liaising and working closely with NFA within the respective divisions. These include on-duty technicians who can divert and boost the water pressure in the water pipelines to these intermittent areas should the need arise during any emergency. NFA has established a mutual working relationship with the WAF team who has offered to assist NFA in emergency situations. In addition, WAF will also provide GIS access and also information on water mains and pipelines as well as hydrant locations and information.

- 3.2 With the increased construction of high-rise buildings in the country, we enquired NFA on how equipped it was to cater to emergencies in such buildings. NFA informed us that it has three aerial ladder trucks to assist in attending to high-rise building fires and emergencies. These appliances can reach a maximum working height of 22m to 28m or reach up to levels 7 to 9 of a high-rise building.

However, this does limit NFA's capabilities in attending to fires and other emergencies on a higher level. Strict measures and requirements are specified for the construction of buildings to meet NFA's approval as per the National Building Code of Fiji.

- 3.3 The auditor issued a qualified audit opinion on the 2015 accounts of NFA based on the four grounds provided below:

1. *The auditor did not perform any physical verification to test existence of Property, Plant and Equipment recorded at a cost of \$15,348,244. In addition, payment vouchers for certain fixed asset addition were not provided.*

NFA informed the committee that PPE verification would be an issue until 2018. From 2019 onwards, this will not be a qualification issue because the OAG has since been engaged to oversee the annual stock verification exercise.

2. *The Authority's accounting policy for deferred revenue classified as non-current liability consists of deferred government grants related to acquisition of property, plant and equipment, which will be amortised over its useful life. The auditor noted that the Authority has recorded the capital grants as income instead of being*

recorded as deferred revenue. Moreover, it has not maintained proper records of fixed assets acquired through capital grants in prior years.

NFA informed us that this was adjusted in the 2016 accounts and should not be a recurring issue.

3. *The Authority was unable to provide proper schedule and reconciliation for long service leave to support the long service leave liability balance of \$42,600 recorded in the statement of financial position as at 31 December 2015.*

NFA informed us that the long service leave was rectified and adjusted in 2016 and should not be a recurring issue.

4. *The auditor did not attend and observe annual inventory physical counting and verification by management at the end of the financial year. Audit was not satisfied by alternative audit procedures concerning the inventory quantities held as at 31 December 2015. Further, stock take reports were not made available for audit review.*

NFA informed us that annual inventory stock take is usually undertaken with the Board of Survey. From 2019 onwards, this will not be a qualification issue since from then OAG has been engaged to oversee the annual stock verification exercise.

- 3.4 *Emphasis of Matter* – The auditor drew attention to Note 19 of the financial statements, which notes the World Health Organisation’s declaration of the outbreak of COVID-19 as a global pandemic subsequent to 31 December 2015 and how this has been considered by the Members of the Authority in the preparation of the financial statements. As set out in Note 19, no adjustments were made to the financial statements as at 31 December 2015 for the impacts of COVID-19.

We note that audit opinion was not modified in respect of this matter.

We enquired NFA on this issue and it did not see any material impact of the Covid-19 on the balances and on the estimates. However, based on audit recommendation, the same has been recorded in the 2016 Financial Statements and the ensuing years.

- 3.5 Other Matters were raised by the auditor in relation to NFA’s 2015 accounts as follows:

1. *The Authority has not been exercising section 32(e) of the National Fire Service Act 1994 whereby the owner of the property that is not insured is liable to pay to the Authority reasonable costs and expenses incurred by the Authority in providing firefighting services.*

NFA informed us that a total of \$60,000 had been billed which is part of the outstanding debtors at date.

2. *The Authority has not conducted any assessments of individual debtors' recoverability prior to accounting for provision for doubtful debts totalling \$136,304.*

NFA informed us that as of 2016, the Provision for doubtful debts had been resolved to \$17,000 only after careful considerations of continuity and existence of the debtor.

3. *Water levy receivable of \$74,833 recorded as trade receivables being overstated by \$18,652 as at 31 December 2015.*

NFA informed the committee that the water levy was adjusted in 2016. The adjustment was carefully inspected and referenced to the realities in the accrued amounts.

4.0 COMMITTEE SITE VISITS

- 4.1 The committee conducted site visits to the Savusavu and Labasa fire stations to witness their operations and identify challenges faced in the fulfilment of their mandates. We noted that the two fire stations encountered similar challenges. A major problem was the issuance of speeding infringement notices to the Authority by LTA while its trucks were attending to emergencies. There is also the issue of inadequate water supply on hilly or elevated areas and in high-rise buildings, which poses a hindrance to firefighters. To this end, ladders used to access high-rise buildings are both in short supply at the fire stations and can only reach up to levels 7 to 9 of a high-rise building. We also found that there is a need for strict adherence to the National Building Code when constructing buildings such as, the installation of wet and dry risers with booster pumps, and water sprinkler system in high-rise buildings.

5.0 COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the Community Fire Warden Framework be implemented in all communities to raise the level of awareness on fire prevention and mitigation.
2. We recognise the importance of taking NFA services to rural communities and recommend that future planned establishments be prioritised and implemented.
3. We recommend that NFA stringently pursue the implementation of its 2021 - 2026 Strategic Plan in particular, the following priorities:

- Review the fire and emergency safety operation plans;
 - Enhance the fire and emergency safety promotion program; and
 - Draft a plan for recovery, including relevant contingency plans and considerations and standby arrangements for administrative action and financing in the event of the fire and emergencies.
4. That the NFA continue to invest in upgrading its vehicle fleet which are conducive to all road conditions and comply with international standards.
 5. That NFA strengthen its partnership with the Water Authority of Fiji to ensure that there is consistent water supply at all times and identify reliable and alternative water sources.
 6. That NFA explore opportunities to up skill and build capacity of its personnel to enhance its fire service delivery in partnership with international counterparts.
 7. That NFA strengthen its partnership with other local and overseas emergency service providers to adopt new strategies and technologies to improve its service delivery.
 8. That NFA expedite discussions with other agencies and create a guideline on the standards for importation of electrical appliances and components into the country.

6.0 CONCLUSION

The committee has fulfilled its mandate to review the 2015 Annual Report of the National Fire Authority. As part of its review process, the committee received written and supplementary responses from the NFA.

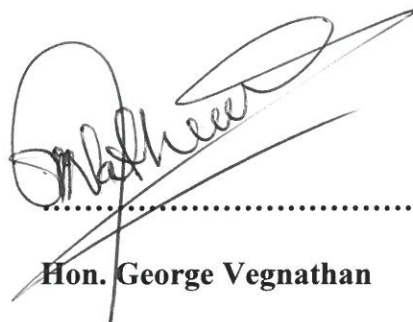
In this review report, the committee has highlighted its findings of the Authority's financial and operational performance for 2015.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS' SIGNATURE


We, the Members of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, hereby agree with the contents of this report:


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Hon. Viam Pillay
(Chairperson)


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Hon. George Vegnathan
(Deputy Chairperson)


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Hon. Salote Radrodro
(Member)


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Hon. Alipate Nagata
(Member)


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Hon. Dr. Ratu Atonio Lalabalavu
(Member)

APPENDIX

Published written evidence

Written evidence was received from the National Fire Authority and can be viewed on the Parliament website at the following link: <http://www.parliament.gov.fj/committees/standing-committee-on-social-affairs/>