



STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL AFFAIRS

Review Report of Rakiraki Town Council Annual Report for the Year 2019



PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI
Parliamentary Paper No. 97 of 2024

September 2024

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

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CHAIRPERSON’S FOREWORD

I am pleased to present the report of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs on the review of *Rakiraki Town Council Annual Report for the year 2019*.

As mandated under Standing Orders 109(2) (b), the Committee looks into issues related to health, education, social services, labour, aviation, culture and media.

The former Committee as part of its deliberation conducted a site visit to the New Rakiraki Market Complex and held its Public Submission with the CEO and Public Administrator.

The Council Officials raised concerns with regards to extensive flooding that has occurred in Rakiraki over the years, and they requested that this can be addressed through regular dredging.

It was also highlighted that the Council was moving to digitalizing their services, setting up their new website to keep track of applications, and the introduction of QR payments via Mpaia by customers.

Also discussed with great enthusiasm was the Council’s proposal for a Satellite Town in Waimicia, Nalawa Ra, and the proposed extension of its Town boundaries.

I extend my gratitude and appreciation to the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and the management of Rakiraki Town Council for their contribution in this review process.

Finally, I take this opportunity to thank the former Chairperson of the Committee Hon. Alitia Bainivalu for her leadership and guidance. To the former Committee Members; the Hon. Parveen Bala, alternate members Hon. Ketan Lal and Hon. Penioni Ravunawa for their constructive input and tremendous teamwork, and the Current Committee members for the finalization of this committee report.

On behalf of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, I commend this report to Parliament.



.....
Hon. Iliesa Vanawalu
Chairperson

ACRONYM

Acronym	
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
MP	Member of Parliament
SO	Standing Order

COMMITTEE REMIT AND MEMBERS

The Standing Committee on Social Affairs (**‘Committee’**) is established under Section 70 of the Constitution and SO 109. The Committee’s mandate and functions are provided under SO 109 (2) and 110 (1) (a)-(d) & (f). The Committee consist of the following members:



Chairperson

Government Member



Deputy Chairperson

Government Member



Member

Government Member



Member

Opposition Member



Member

Opposition Member

RECOMMENDATION

The Standing Committee on Social Affairs conducted the review of *Rakiraki Town Council for the year 2019* and recommends that Parliament take note of this report.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Standing Committee on Social Affairs (‘**Committee**’) was referred the *Rakiraki Town Council Annual Report for the Year 2019* on the 14th of July 2023, as pursuant to SO 38 (2). Therefore, the Committee was referred to review the annual report as pursuant to its mandate as stipulated in SO 110 (1) (c).

1.1. Committee Procedure

The former Committee in its deliberation and formulation of questions pertaining to the *Rakiraki Town Council Annual Report for the Year 2019* were undertaken. Following this, the Committee conducted a Site Visit and the New Rakiraki Market and held its Public Submission there with the Rakiraki Town Council officials on 14 May 2024. The executive management presented its responses. Upon receipt of all relevant information, the committee compiled its findings. The current committee finalized the report and endorsed.

The committee received a written response from Rakiraki Town Council for this annual review. It is available on the Parliament website at the following link: <https://www.parliament.gov.fj/committees/standing-committee-on-social-affairs/>

2. Rakiraki Town Council

2.1. Background

The Town Rakiraki was legally declared on Thursday July 1, 2010. The Public Service Commission approved the use of an office space in the government rented complex at Vaileka House where official operations commenced on Monday 6th July 2010.

3. KEY FINDINGS

Below are the key findings that the committee compiled through its deliberation and review of Rakiraki Town Council 2019 annual report:

- 3.1 The Rakiraki Town Council has identified the extension of town boundary towards Tavua.
- 3.2 There is also a proposal for a Satellite Town in Waimicia, Nalawa Ra, discussions with stakeholders are on-going for this project to eventuate.
- 3.3 The issue on Flooding has been a recurring issue, as it affects the economy and the livelihood of the people of Ra.
- 3.4 The Rakiraki Town Council is in the process of identifying an area for the relocation of the dump site.
- 3.5 The vacant space at the new Rakiraki market be utilized for other services bringing in revenue to the council.

4. COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

Upon deliberation and review of the annual report, the committee recommends.

- 4.1. The urgent need to support the regular dredging of rivers to mitigate flooding in Rakiraki.
- 4.2. The Central Government to reconsider providing annual grants to small municipalities like Rakiraki to carry out their service delivery.
- 4.3. And supports the establishment of the proposed Satellite Town in Waimicia, Nalawa Ra and further recommends carrying out all necessary feasibility studies.
- 4.4. The Ministry of Waterways to reinstate the annual grant to maintain the drainage within the municipalities.
- 4.5. The retention of the FSC ground for sports and other recreational purposes for the people of Ra.
- 4.6. To expedite the process of converting the first floor of Rakiraki Market for commercial office spaces and MSMEs operators to generate additional revenue for the council.

- 4.7. The Council to have regular meetings with Fiji Roads Authority (FRA) in terms of regular maintenance of roads and streetlights.
- 4.8. The Council liaises with the Ministry of Tourism and other key stakeholders in promoting tourism in Ra.

5. Sustainable Development Goals

There are 17 SDG Goals formulated for the new millennium that covers 3 important dimensions of sustainable development which were achieved during the year under review:

- i. Economic growth - the construction of the market and drainage system increased the labour force during the period under review.
- ii. Social inclusion – the new market improves the opportunities to market vendors and the public. It is a meeting place for all people and to share experience, knowledge and wisdom.
- iii. Environment protection - The upgrade of the Town drainage system will reduce the effects of storm water around the town area.

6. Committee Public Submission at The New Rakiraki Market Complex



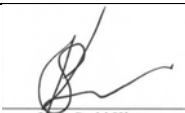

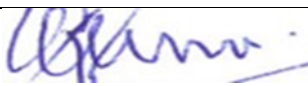


7. CONCLUSION

In this review report, the committee highlighted various areas that needs to be strengthened by the council and relevant recommendations formulated for resolution.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS' SIGNATURE

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

Committee Member	E-Signature
Hon. Iliesa Vanawalu Chairperson	
Hon. Ratu Rakuita Vakalalabure Deputy Chairperson	
Hon. Sashi Kiran	
Hon. Viam Pillay Member	
Hon. Ioane Naivalurua Member	
Date: 2 nd September 2024	

ANNEXURE

Published evidence

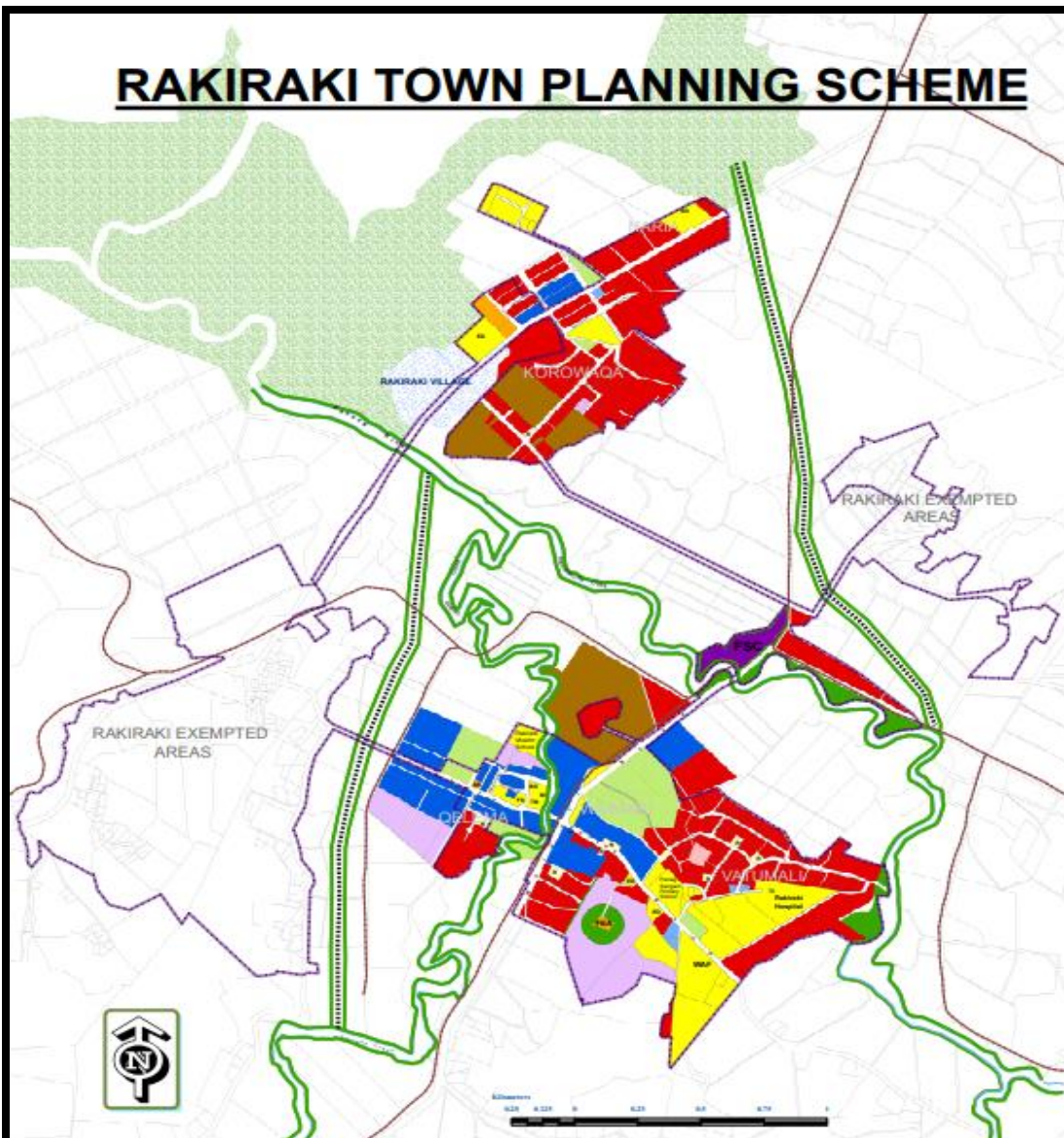
Written evidence, transcripts and supporting documents can be viewed on the Parliament website at the following link:

<https://www.parliament.gov.fj/committees/standing-committee-on-social-affairs/>



SOCIAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

RAKIRAKI TOWN PLANNING SCHEME



LEGEND		
 Civic	 Residential Upgrading	 Kadastal Regions
 Civic (Religious)	 Rural	 Rakiraki Boundary
 Commercial B	 General Industry	 Traminlines
 Commercial C	 Heavy Industry	 Proposed Road
 Reserve	 Special Use	 Proposed Channel
 Public Open Space	 Mangrove Protected Reserve	 Rakiraki Rivers
 Residential	 Rakiraki Village	 5 Meters River Reserve

DATA PROVIDED BY: DEPARTMENT OF LANDS, FOR ISSUES AT THERIFF, MWA, FOR MUSEUM, DEPARTMENT OF TOWN & COUNTRY PLANNING & BARBARA TOWN COUNCIL

RAKIRAKI FACT FILE:

Proclamation Date	01-Jul-2010
Ratepayers	527
Residential Properties	462
Business Houses	214
Area	66.50 Hectares
Informal settlement	3
Solid waste collection	1200 tons/year

Market vendors

Permanent vendors	154
Temporary vendors	96

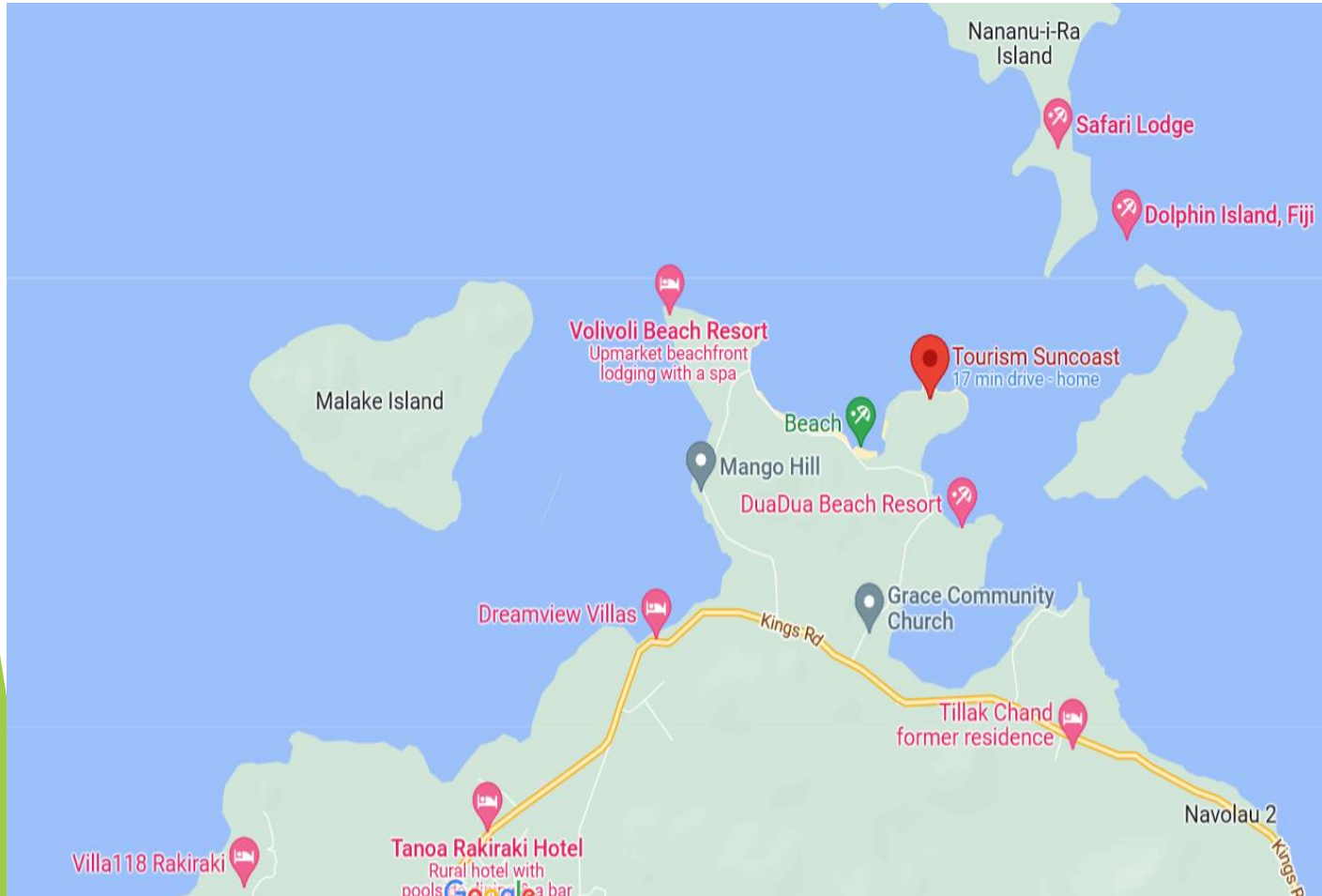
Financial Reporting

Last Audited Annual Accounts	2023
Last Annual Report submitted for	2019

Staff & Workers

27 [9 staffs and 21 Workers]

Economic Activity



- Agriculture is the main economic activity in Ra Province.
- The coastal area of Rakiraki is called Suncoast and nestle a growing tourism industry in the Ra Province.
- Economic benefits
- Job creations
- Infrastructure

CASHFLOW

REVENUE SOURCES

1. Town Rates
2. Market fees and charges
3. Public Convenience fees
4. Car Park
5. Garbage fees
6. Property Rentals
7. Permit fees
8. Taxi/Carrier/Bus/Minibus base

CHALLENGES

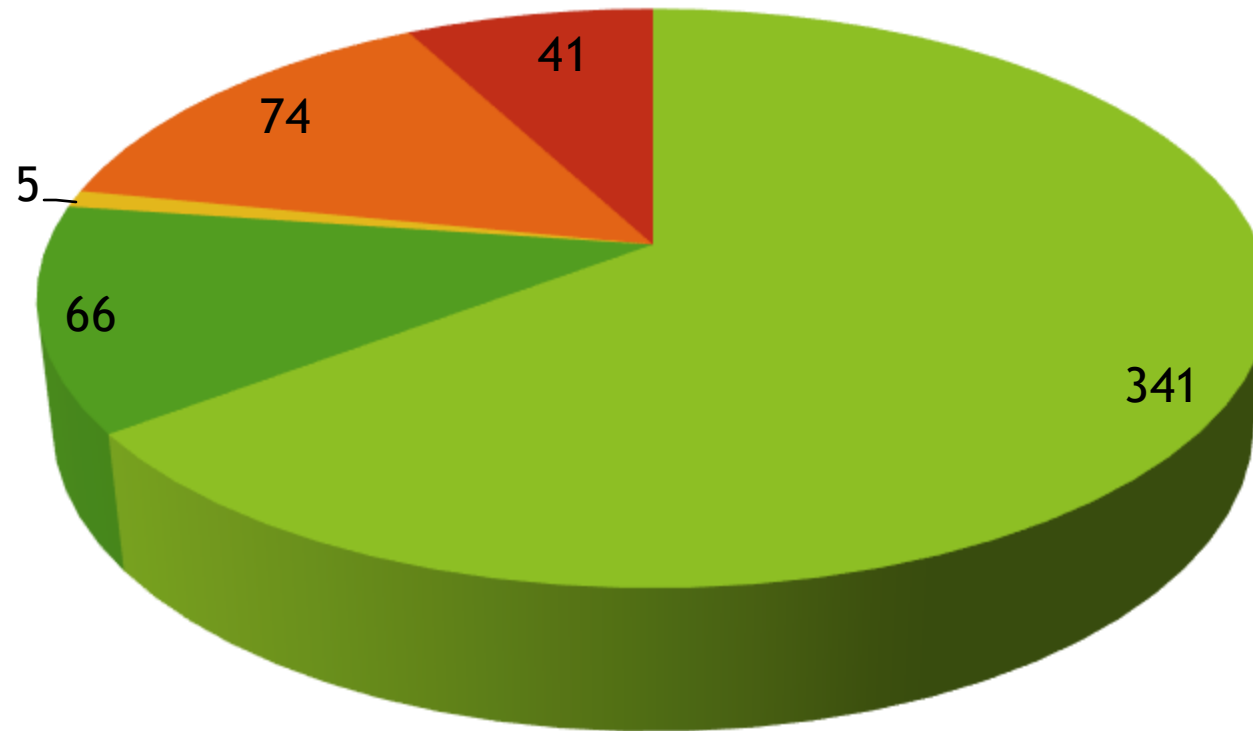
1. Fees and Charges
2. Re-introduction of Business License
3. Salaries and Wages:
 - ▶ Mayor and Councilors
 - ▶ CEO
 - ▶ Health Inspectors
 - ▶ Building Inspectors
 - ▶ Proposed new Minimum Wage Rate

REPORTS

- ▶ **Rakiraki Town Council.**
- ❑ 2022-2023 FS audited
- ❑ AR Narratives 2022-2023.
- ❑ 2020 AR submitted to Parliament.



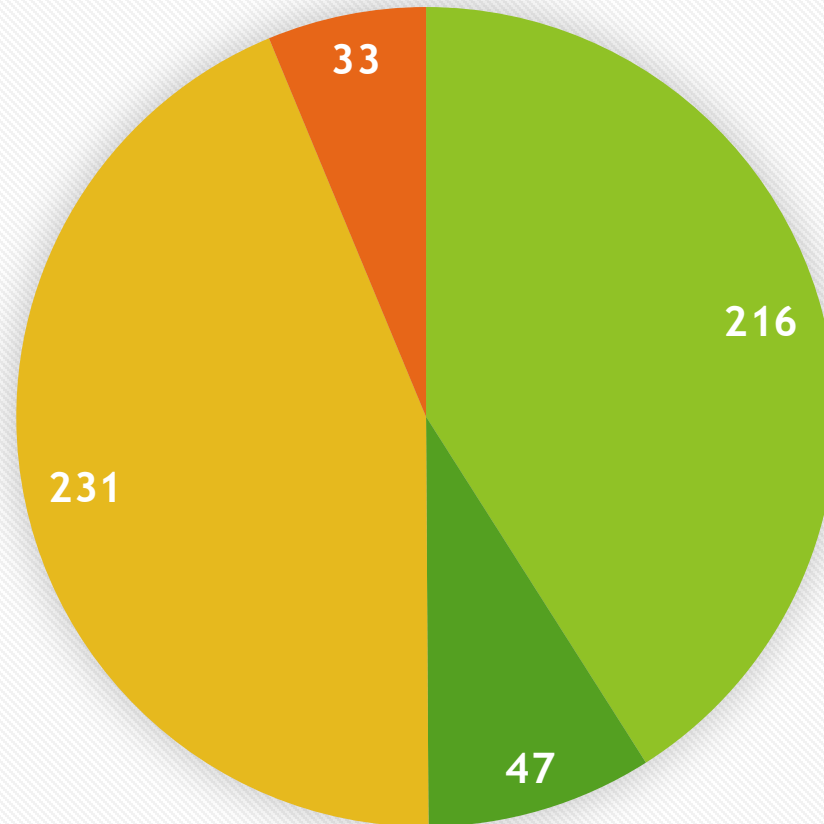
RATEPAYERS



Total: 527 Ratepayers

- RESIDENTIAL
- COMMERCIAL
- INDUSTRIAL
- AGRICULTURE
- CIVIC

RATES COLLECTION



■ Fully settled ■ Installment ■ Default ■ Vacant

Website And Digitalization

► RAKIRAKI TOWN COUNCIL

- RTC is constructing its new website.
- Lautoka City Council assisted RTC through technical expertise.
- The website will have modern features.
<https://rtc.ipasifik.com/>
- Tracked online application forms.
- Website Construction completed.
- Web content uploading 90%.
- Create M-PAISA and QR PAY
- For scan and pay



Extension of Town boundary



Proposal - Nalawa Satellite Town



- Service the Nalawa District, Nakorotubu District, Saivou District and the Wainibuka District.
- Vunikavikaloa Arya School, Nalawa Muslim School and Ra High School.
- Established Police Post.
- Service Station and a proposed Supermarket.
- interest for PSV base such as LC Base, LM base and LT Base.
- Opportunity or growth.

FLOODING



Recorded Situation

Town	Affected Area & Town Roads
Rakiraki	Naqoro Flats, Rakiraki Town, Qelema 1 and Qelema 2, Waimari Rd, FSC Rd and Korotale Rd (part).

Year	No. of floods
2018	4
2019	5
2020	3
2021	5
2022	4
2023	2
2024	4
Average	4

Assessment

- ▶ Public Service Transport
- ▶ Bus services were delayed for a couple of hours and resumed when flood water receded.
- ▶ Business Houses
- ▶ Police controlled movement in Town as all businesses were closed.
- ▶
- ▶ Evacuation Center
- ▶ No Evacuation Center was activated.
- ▶ Economic Loss
- ▶ There was no assessment on economic loss.
- ▶ Approx \$200,000 - \$300,000



DISASTER PREPAREDNESS

- ▶ RTC activates its Disaster Management Operation every November and deactivates in April.
- ▶ Police and NFA are the Town's 1st Respondent. Police ensure security of the Town and NFA provides rescue services.



HEALTH DEPARTMENT

LTD Cases

Year	Leptospirosis	Typhoid	Dengue
2021	0	0	6
2022	0	0	0
2023	2	0	0
2024	0	0	0

Average flooding per year = 4

Town Cleanup

- NFA always assist the Council in the cleanup of the Rakiraki Town



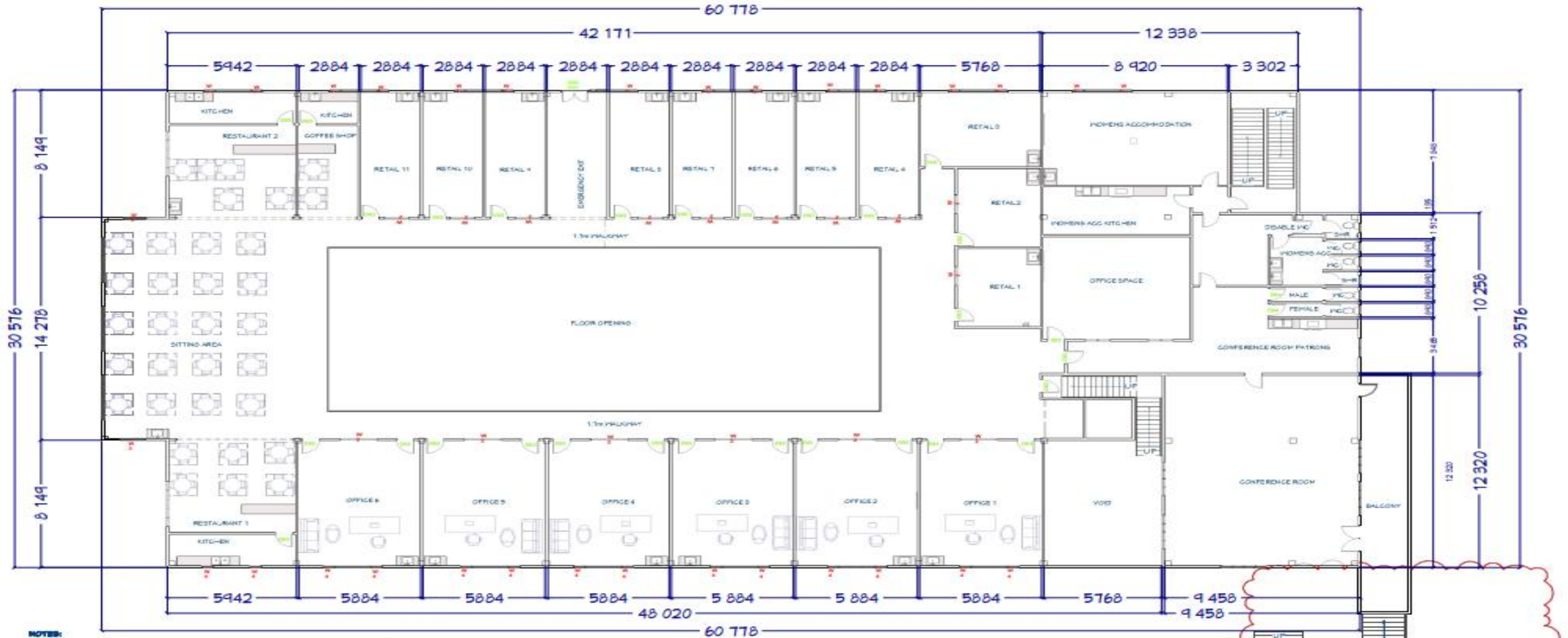
Current Projects

1. Development of the New Market 1st Floor

RAKIRAKI MARKET DEVELOPMENT PROJECT



Upgrade of New Market 1st Floor



NOTES:

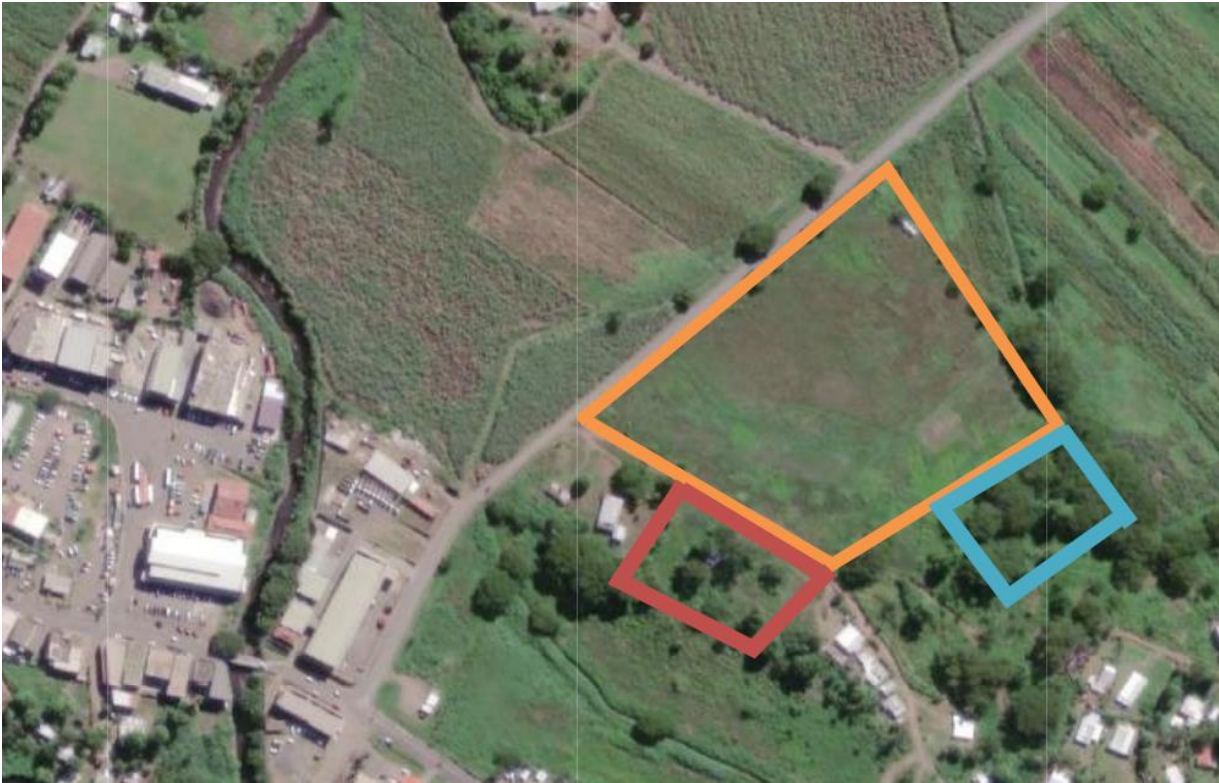
1. THE CONTRACTOR SHALL CHECK ALL DIMENSIONS AND LEVELS ON SITE PRIOR TO FABRICATION, ORDERING AND CONSTRUCTION.
2. WALKWAYS TO HAVE SELECTED 600x600mm NON-SLIP TILE FINISHING TO CLIENT'S SPECIFICATIONS.
3. RETAIL SHOPS AND OFFICE AREA FLOOR TO HAVE SELECTED 600x600mm TILE FINISHING TO CLIENT'S SPECIFICATIONS.
4. ALL CEILING FRAMING AS PER SHEET A-3 TO HAVE SUSPENDED GRID CEILING SYSTEM TO CLIENT'S SPECIFICATIONS.
5. ALL INTERNAL PARTITION WALLS SHALL BE 100mm THICK WITH STEEL FRAMING STUDS @ EVERY 600 CTRD AND 9MM THICK CEMENT BOARD SCREWED AND PAINT FINISHED.
6. ALL EXTERNAL WINDOWS TO BE FITTED WITH MOSQUITO SCREEN ON ALUMINUM FRAME.

NOTES:

1. THE CONTRACTOR SHALL PROVIDE FOR ALL JOINERY WORKS EXCEPT FOR THE FURNITURE IN THE OFFICE AREA. JOINERY WORKS INCLUDE ALL SINK BENCHES, TABLE AND CHAIRS IN THE SITTING AREA, RESTAURANTS AND DOORS.
2. THE CONTRACTOR SHALL PROVIDE TINTED LOUVRE SLATES.
3. THE CONTRACTOR SHALL DARK TINT THE EXISTING FIXED GLASS IN THE OFFICE, RETAIL AREA AND RESTAURANT TO 5% TINT.
4. THE CONTRACTOR SHALL SILVER TINT THE EXISTING FIXED GLASS IN THE SITTING AND COFFEE AREA USING 1% SILVER TINT.
5. ALL TINTING SHALL BE OF QUALITY AND SHALL NOT BECOME LIGHT QUICKLY.

PHASE 2
STAIRS & GROUND
FLOOR TOILET
UPGRADES

FSC Sports Ground



FSC has withdrawn their offer

► Orange FSC Sports Ground

- Pavilion plan
- Fencing plan
- Toilet and shower
- 3 phase power
- Car Park

➤ Maroon Civic

- Community Hall
- Tertiary Education

➤ Blue Civic

- Park
- Garden

CHALLENGES & WAY FORWARD

- ▶ Cashflow
 - ❑ Review of fees and charges
 - ❑ Re-activate Business License
 - ❑ Govt assistance
- ▶ Increase in natural disasters eg floodings
 - ❑ Regular desilting and dredging of Waterways.
- ▶ Lack of technical expertise.
 - ❑ Share resources. Govt assistance
- ▶ Dump site near mangroves
 - ❑ Relocation of dumpsite

Conclusion

- ▶ Rakiraki is a flood prone area and we respectfully request that in your recommendation to support the regular dredging of rivers to mitigate flooding in Rakiraki.
- ▶ There are opportunities for growth in Rakiraki. With right investments in the right places will see burst of developments in Town.

Vinaka

[VERBATIM REPORT]

STANDING COMMITTEE ON **SOCIAL AFFAIRS**

ANNUAL REPORT

Rakiraki Town Council 2019 Annual Report

SUBMISSION: Rakiraki Town Council

**VENUE: Rakiraki Town Council Board Room,
Rakiraki Town**

DATE: Tuesday, 14th May, 2024

VERBATIM REPORT OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL AFFAIRS
PUBLIC CONSULTATION HELD AT THE RAKIRAKI TOWN COUNCIL BOARD ROOM
ON TUESDAY, 14TH MAY, 2024, AT 3.30 P.M.

Interviewee/Submittee: Rakiraki Town Council

In Attendance:

1. Mr. Peni Duaniwai - Special Administrator
 2. Mr. Sailosi Sawana - Chief Executive Officer
-

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Honourable Members, the Parliament Secretariat, ladies and gentlemen; a very good afternoon to you all. It is a pleasure to be here this afternoon and I welcome you all.

For information purpose, pursuant to the Standing Orders of Parliament, specifically Standing Order 111, all Committee meetings are open to the public, except in a few circumstances which includes national security matters, third-party confidential information and personnel or human resource matters and deliberation and development of Committee recommendations and reports.

The public hearing will be open to the public and the media so for any sensitive information containing this inquiry that cannot be disclosed in public, this can be provided to the Committee either in private or in writing.

At the outset, I wish to remind honourable Members and our witnesses that all questions asked are to be addressed through the Chair. This is a parliamentary inquiry and all the information gathered is covered under the Parliamentary Powers and Privileges Act. However, please be reminded that we do not condone libel or slander of any sort.

In terms of the protocol of this Committee hearing, please, be advised that the movement within the meeting room will be restricted, minimise the usage of mobile phones and all mobile phones are to be on silent mode while the meeting is in progress. I will now give the time to the honourable Members of the Committee to introduce themselves.

(Introduction of Committee Members)

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- As clearly outlined in Standing Order 109(2)(b), the Standing Committee on Social Affairs is mandated to look into matters related to health, education, social services, labour, culture and media. The Committee is currently deliberating on the Rakiraki Town Council 2019 Annual Report and the Committee is here to engage and have a fruitful discussion on the issues and achievements on the period of the Report and what are some of the future plans that the Council has in moving forward.

(Introduction of Rakiraki Town Council Officials)

MR. S. SAWANA.- Before we go into our response to the questions that had been forwarded to the Council, we have a small presentation, just to brief you on the update of Rakiraki Town Council.

Madam Chairperson, the proclamation was done on 1st July, 2010. We have got 527 ratepayers. Initially, it was 700 so after the proclamation, those two areas - one at the bottom and

one on the right are areas that were reproclaimed that resulted in the ratepayers being reduced to 527. Residential properties - 462, business houses - 214 and covers an area of 66 hectares. We have three informal settlements and solid waste collection around 1,000 tonnes per year. We have 154 permanent market vendors and 96 temporary vendors.

On our financial reporting, the last audited annual accounts was 2023 and last Annual Report submitted was 2019. We have also submitted 2020. We have 27 staff.

On the economic activity, agriculture is the main economic activity in the Ra Province and Rakiraki Town is an agricultural town. Unfortunately, when *TC Winston* struck Fiji, the Fiji Sugar Corporation (FSC) which was the backbone of business economic activity in Rakiraki was extensively damaged. Fortunately, we have got the coastal area where there is a growth in tourism industry - the Sun Coast. We have noted the economic benefits to the town, job creation and also infrastructure.

Madam Chairperson, right now, total investment is around \$11 million, the total investment that we have expected and received in Sun Coast. One of the hotels is expected to be constructed there has about 100 rooms, more than the total number of rooms in Lautoka.

Madam Chairperson, cashflow is one of our main challenges for the small town of Rakiraki, but we will highlight to you our revenue resources:

- Town rates;
- Market fees - stall fees and charges;
- Public Convenience fees;
- Car park;
- Garbage fees;
- Property Rentals;
- Permit fees; and
- PSV base fee.

Below are our challenges:

- Fees and charges which are due for review. We have submitted our proposal for increase but we are still waiting for approval from the Ministry of Local Government.
- Monitoring of business houses in town is a challenge. We have also submitted our proposal to re-introduce business licence to all the municipalities. One of our recommendations is for businesses that incur a revenue of \$50,000 and less in a year, it is not to be charged with the business licence.
- Salaries and Wages - it is expected that this year, we will have Municipal Elections for all the Municipal Councils, so one of our challenges is wages and salaries for all mayors and councillors, as well as for CEOs, Health Inspectors, Building Inspectors;

The proposed new minimum wage rate that we have heard will be imposed on 4th August, 2023. So, that will be also one of the challenges, especially for small Councils such as Rakiraki.

Madam Chairperson, for the Reports like what we have discussed before - 2022-2023 that is the Financial Statement that was submitted to the Office of the Auditor-General. I am sorry, I was thinking about the threshold for the business licence. That is what we proposed if the Government agrees to introduce the business licence. There should be a threshold, at least, \$50,000 or below, not

to be charged with the business licence because they are the ones struggling. The ones above that can be charged with the business licence.

Madam Chairperson, going back to our presentation narratives, it is up to 2022-2023 Annual Report which was submitted to Parliament is 2020.

On our ratepayers, we have a total number of 527 ratepayers, 341 residential, 66 commercial, 5 industrial, 74 agriculture and 41 civic. On the rate collection, 261 have fully settled, 47 in instalments, 231 defaulters and 33 vacant.

Rakiraki Town, as you are well aware, is an agricultural town and most of the ratepayers are retired civil servant farmers. Some of them are senior citizens. So, we have noted that most of them find it difficult to pay their rates on time. You can see roughly around 50 percent that is still outstanding - 231 default and vacant.

On website and digitalisation, Rakiraki Town Council is constructing its new website. Lautoka City Council is assisting Rakiraki Town Council through technical expertise. We have gone through all the Town Councils websites, and we have decided to construct a more modernised website, so any application can be tracked online. Right now, construction is completed. So, what the Council is doing now is just uploading. So, it is around 95 percent completion. We have created M-PAiSA and QR for payment.

Madam Chairperson, for extension of boundaries, we have also proposed an extension of boundary. Currently, it is on hold, but our proposal has been submitted to the Town Council Committee. If you are travelling towards Tavua, you will be familiar with a place called Wairuku. The reason why we are proposing for the town boundary extension because it has all the amenities, like it is connected to EFL, WAF, it has sealed road and also streetlights. It is a growing residential and economic area. Before, most areas are agricultural areas, but those areas have been rezoned to residential and commercial.

Madam Chairperson, another area we have identified is Waimicia Satellite Town. It will be serving the Nalawa District, Nakorotubu District, Saivou District and even the Wainibuka District. So, there are three schools situated in that area - Vunikavikaloa Arya School, Nalawa Muslim School and Ra High School. It has an established Police Post - Nalawa Police Post, a Service Station recently opened and a proposed supermarket that will be constructed at Waimicia.

The Council has received a lot of interest on PSV base, like carrier base, minibus base and also taxi base. Also, there is an opportunity for growth in that area.

I think last two weeks, we had a discussion with the Department of Town and Country Planning, together with the relevant stakeholders - business people, farmers, et cetera. We have meetings at the Tanoa Hotel where we discussed this proposal for the Waimicia Nalawa Satellite Town. So, we hope by next year, the area can be declared a satellite town.

Madam Chairperson, as you are all aware, Rakiraki is a flood prone area. From the slide, you can note the areas where the flood water enters the town. All the red arrows show areas where water initially flows in. We have noted where the river flows. You can see all the bending just near the town and that is where the water starts to flow. The red one at the bottom is initially the first area.

In the next picture shows the river bends which usually break its banks. So, we have proposed to the Ministry of Waterways and even to the Ministry of Local Government if the river can just be done across so that it can reduce the flood and the water can just flow directly past the town.

We all know that creeks and rivers are also boundaries to properties and sugarcane fields, so during our discussion with the Ministry of Waterways, they gave indicated that that is one of the obstacles for the Ministry of Waterways. What we also proposed to them is regular desilting and dredging of rivers, especially for Rakiraki, the Nakauvadra and Penang River. Madam Chairperson, on the slide, those are the affected areas - Naqoro Flats, Rakiraki Town, Qelema 1, Qelema 2, Waimari Road, FSC Road and Korotale Road.

Now for the record we have got:

Year	Number of Floods
2018	4
2019	5
2020	3
2021	5
2022	4
2023	2
2024	4
Average	4

Madam Chairperson, public service transport was always affected during any flood, so until water recedes, then traffic can flow again.

Business houses, usually the Fiji Police control the town, and they close the main entry and exist to control the movement in town.

On evacuation centre, for this year, no evacuation centre was activated but in the previous years, usually schools were opened as evacuation centres.

Madam Chairperson, on economic loss for this year, we were not able to conduct any assessment on economic loss but previously, it is around \$200,000 to \$300,000 if the town is closed for three days.

On disaster preparedness, Rakiraki Town Council activates its Disaster Management Operation every November and deactivates it in April. Usually, our Fiji Police and the National Fire Authority - our first respondents, ensure the security of the town and NFA provides rescue services.

Madam Chairperson, it is very important that we highlight this to the Committee. These are the Leptospirosis, Typhoid and Dengue Cases that we recorded for Rakiraki Town.

Year	Leptospirosis	Typhoid	Dengue
2021	Nil	Nil	Nil
2022	Nil	Nil	Nil
2023	2	Nil	Nil
2024	Nil	Nil	Nil

For the last four years, we do not have any record on typhoid. The last dengue case was in 2021. Only last year, we had two leptospirosis cases, so that is a good record for a small town.

This is the result of the activities that we usually conduct every year before the cyclone season. All our officers went around houses to houses, as well as to business houses, advising them to destroy all mosquito breeding places and removing areas where they can multiply, et cetera. So, for the town cleanup, NFA had always assisted the town in cleaning up after the flood.

Our current project is the development of the new market first floor. That is the picture of the new market first floor just before and after construction. That is the plan we have for the new market first floor. We have submitted our request for approval from the Ministry of Local Government. We are still awaiting the approval. On the proposal plan, we have six office spaces and retail areas at the bottom. There is a food court, two restaurants and right at the top is the coffee shop and the rest on the other side are SMEs. The Council decided to support the SMEs and we noted that most of the SMEs in Rakiraki Town are operated by women. So, that is why we have also decided to allocate 12 spaces for SMEs.

Challenges and way forward, our cashflow and this goes back to what we have discussed - the review of fees and charges, re-activate business licence and then Government assistance.

We have also noted the increase in natural disasters, so regular desilting and dredging of waterways as way forward.

On lack of technical expertise, right now we are selling our resources. If a new Council comes in, they might want to have their own offices so it is good to have a little assistance from the Government.

Also, our dump site near the mangrove area, we are working towards the relocation of our dumpsite.

Madam Chairperson, in conclusion, you all know that Rakiraki Town is a flood prone area and we respectfully request that in your recommendation, you do support the regular dredging or desilting of rivers to mitigate flooding in Rakiraki. There are also opportunities for growth in Rakiraki so with right investments in the right places will see a burst of development in Rakiraki Town.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Honourable Members, we will proceed with the responses from the Council and then we will have the supplementary questions.

MR. S. SAWANA.- Madam Chairperson, please, allow me to respond to the questions that was sent to the Rakiraki Town Council.

Question No. 1

In terms of the operations of the municipality in regard to the 2019 Annual Report, what was achieved during the year under review? What was not achieved? How could this be improved in the future?

Rakiraki is a new municipal council which was declared on 1st July, 2010. The Council has limited cash flow, as it faced financial constraints with limited revenue resources. The old Rakiraki Market was replaced by the new market after the old market was extensively damaged by *TC Winston* in 2016. The new market was constructed through the partnership between the Fiji Government and the Australian Government through the Markets for Change Project implemented by UN Women. The new market is Category 5 cyclone-resilient and includes a 40-bed accommodation centre for

rural women vendors to stay overnight, improving their personal security and the safety of their produce.

The Town also faced frequent floodings and there is a need to improve the Town's drainage system. Earth drains were upgraded, and proper drains were constructed with a grant from the Ministry of Waterways. In addition, the Council has been able to provide clean and safe environment for community prosperity, even though some of the fees and charges have not been increased since the Town was declared. Improvements in timeliness and the quality of Council services could be achieved if the Council has a healthy cash flow.

Question No. 2

What was the targeted outputs (in terms of services provided) and what was the percentage achieved during the year under review?

The targeted output was to provide a proper facility to the Rakiraki market vendors after the old market was damaged by *TC Winston* and vendors were selling in an open space. The market was officially opened on 2nd June, 2020. In addition, there was a need to upgrade the Town's drainage system whereby the Council received a grant for the Drainage Project. The Vatumami Road and Thompson Road drains were constructed and completed in 2019.

Question No. 3

What were some of the weaknesses and challenges of the Municipality? What were some areas of opportunities?

Weaknesses and challenges noted:

- IT - we currently do not have any website so the Council is creating a new Rakiraki Town Council website for ease of dissemination and accessing of information by our stakeholders and the public.
- Finance is one of our challenges. Cashflow, as we have already discussed. Also a delay in the review of fees and charges.
- Rates - one of our challenges is the rates where we have retiree ratepayers, senior citizens ratepayers, bedridden ratepayers and also the outstanding, we have not conducted any sexennial valuation.
- Business Houses - we also have a challenge in monitoring our business houses. Right now, we do not have any database for all the businesses. What we have also noted is the non-compliance of business houses, non-compliance of OHS and NFA requirements. Therefore, right now, there is no business challenge so we are also proposing if the business licence can be reintroduced.
- Market - Rakiraki Town Council is fortunate to have a new market which was constructed. Unfortunately, we need maintenance in some areas, especially the areas that need to be repaired.
- We have noted that there is an opportunity for an increase in cashflow once we introduce the business licence. Also, there should be a threshold when business licence is introduced.

- Another opportunity for the Town is to construct the upgrade - the second phase development for the market. But one of the threats and we just want to put it on record, is the frequent flooding.

Question No. 4

What is the progress of all capital projects initiated in the years under review?

In 2019, Rakiraki Market completed its final phase . The Market was opened on 2nd June, 2020. The drainage system upgrade at Vatumami Road and Thomson Road were completed in 2019.

Question No. 5

In terms of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), how is it relevant and achieved during the years under review?

There are 17 SDGs formulated for the new millennium that covers three important dimensions of sustainable development which were achieved during the year under review:

1. Economic growth - the construction of the market and drainage system increased the labour force during the period under review.
2. Social inclusion - the new market improved the opportunities for market vendors and the public. It is a meeting place for all people to share their experience, knowledge and wisdom.
3. Environment protection - the upgrade of the Town drainage system reduces the effects of storm water around the Town areas.

Question No. 6

What are some of the strategies put in place to address pending arrears?

Similar to other Councils, collection of outstanding rates is always a challenge. The Rakiraki Town Council has put in place strategies for collection:

1. Encourages payment arrangement to those who are finding it difficult to pay.
2. House to house visitation.
3. Phone calls.
4. Viber message.
5. Small Claims Tribunal.
6. Magistrates Court.

Question No. 7

What is the Town Council doing to ensure that there is a timely collection of town rates on an annual basis and arrears, and at the same time, reducing expenses?

The Council promotes 7 percent rate discount for rate payment within the first month of the financial year. Thereafter, it allows 5 percent discount for all rates received during the second month of the same financial year. The discount allowed promotes timely collection of town rates.

About 40 percent of the current rates were received in the first two months. The Council also conducts meetings of ratepayers where the importance of rates collection is re-emphasized to all ratepayers.

Question No. 8

Can the Council update the Committee on the plans in place to mitigate flooding in your municipality?

The Council had raised its concerns with the Ministry of Local Government and the Ministry of Waterways and had requested for regular dredging of rivers and desilting of creeks and drains.

Question No. 9

What changes, processes and procedures improvement have the Council put in place to correct failures and weaknesses, and prevent any recurrences? How will the Council ensure that these changes, processes and procedures are strictly followed?

- Decision making - the Council appointed committees to look into specific areas like projects, developments, processes, et cetera. Some proposals are implemented immediately while others are submitted for the Special Administrator's approval.
- Finance - the Council has a Finance Manual and SOP which it follows to ensure that the Council's finances are effectively, efficiently and economically utilised.
- HR - the Council has an HR Manual for all HR processes. The Council has adopted the Open Merit Recruitment System to ensure that all engagements are merit-based.

Question No. 10

How has the Council, in consultation with the Ministry of Local Government, streamlined the process of obtaining approvals and what is the timeline for rezoning and subdivision of land?

Rezoning takes three months and two weeks. The Council lodges applications to the Department of Town and Country Planning within two weeks and the Department of Town and Country Planning takes three months to complete the processing. The subdivision of more than five acres is lodged with the Council and less than five acres is directly lodged to the Department of Town and County Planning by the applicant or consultant. Time Frame, six to seven months, within two weeks, the Council lodges application to the Department of Town and County Planning.

Question No. 11

How is the Council dealing with complaints from ratepayers?

The Council has a Complaint Management System whereby complaints are to be resolved within 24 hours. In the event where a complaint is not resolved within 24 hours, it is immediately referred to a senior officer for investigation and possible meeting with the relevant committee for a solution. For other complaints that are not official complaints, that is the responsibility of another agency, but the Council will step in to assist by re-directing the complainant to the relevant agency.

Thank you, Madam Chairperson, those are the responses from the Council.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you. I will give time now for honourable Members to ask questions.

I will begin with a question on the relocation of the dumpsite. What is the current status of the process of relocation of your dumpsite?

MR. S. SAWANA.- We have identified a couple of places. Right now, we have submitted our application to the Department of Environment, as the usual process, and they have advised us to carry out the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA). Unfortunately, the Council do not have enough funds to conduct this EIA. We have submitted our budget request to the Ministry of Local Government, if they can assist in providing funds or grants to have the EIA assessment. In addition, we are still looking for other alternatives because when the EIA was carried out, those two areas that we have identified are not good areas for the dumping site.

We are also looking around Rakiraki and we have found a couple of sites in Tavua. We have also noted that some landowners are reluctant to give their land for the dumpsite because they know the repercussions of having the dumpsite in their area.

HON. P.K. BALA.- I will go on to the presentation first. There are few issues that I would like to raise. Before going on to that, Madam Chairperson, through you, how many Administrators do you have in Rakiraki?

MR. P. DUANIWAI.- To answer that question, Sir, currently there is one but there are supposed to be two others. The Ministry is working on it, and for the time being, there still no feedback on the other two.

HON. P.K. BALA.- So, that will make three?

MR. P. DUANIWAI.- Yes.

HON. P.K. BALA.- On the dumpsite, this has been going on for quite long and I am also aware of this. But the one that you are saying that you people have identified, how far is it from town?

MR. S. SAWANA.- The dumpsite that we have identified is in Rabulu. Initially, one was identified inland but I do not know how far the Department of Environment took that up. They have identified that site but nothing was done. So, the Council itself took the initiative to at least find an alternative site. We found one near Yaqara, Rabulu, there is a freehold land there. The other one is a bit far away. It is near Vatukoula.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Considering Rakiraki as a small municipality but not a new municipality, as stated earlier on, because you have just mentioned that you have asked for funding to carry out the EIA, I think it is also the responsibility of the Ministry of Environment to support you in carrying out the EIA because they have people within the Ministry who can carry that out. So, I strongly suggest that you should ask the Ministry of Environment to assist you.

Now, going back to this presentation, when is the Council election?

MR. S. SAWANA.- A good question, Sir. We actually have no idea as to when is the next election.

HON. P.K. BALA.- No, I am just asking because it was in your presentation. You have also mentioned that there will be challenges in terms of salary and wage for the Mayor and the Councillors. Honestly speaking, I have been a Mayor for 12 years, we were never paid. So, I am just wondering whether there is a new policy that has been given to the Council that when elected Councillors come in, they will be paid. Is that so?

MR. S. SAWANA.- Not yet, Sir. Actually, right now, the Special Administrator is receiving an allowance.

HON. P.K. BALA.- For Special Administrators, it is alright because that is a temporary measure. As you have mentioned in your presentation, I am talking about the Mayor and the Councillors, and the challenge that you have raised is salaries and wages that they will be paid. As far as I know, that there may be some other Councils, allowances or something but you have out that in your challenges. So, I am just asking whether there is any new policy that is coming from the Ministry or the Government that once the election takes place?

MR. S. SAWANA.- No.

HON. P.K. BALA.- The business licence is a very interesting subject. You people are suggesting that those who earn less than \$50,000, there should be no business licence issued. There was some discussion in regards to this business licence. There is a purpose for the business licence. I would suggest that everyone should be charged business licence but those who are in that bracket, business licence can be reduced. For example, those who are earning more than \$50,000, if they are paying \$200 business licence, then those who are earning less than \$50,000 can be charged \$50 or \$60 because business licence is for a purpose. There are two ways of dealing with business licence. One is, you can just get rid of it, exempt it, or you charge but charged on certain brackets.

Madam Chairperson, these all links to election. You have talked about the boundary. So, in Rakiraki, have you got any new extended boundaries that will be for elections or just the current boundary that you have?

MR. S. SAWANA.- Just the current boundary. We do not have any new boundaries.

HON. P.K. BALA.- No new boundaries, alright. The other thing that you have raised in your presentation and also to the response is flooding. This is not a new subject. As you have mentioned, the Ministry of Waterways have suggested that some realignment has to take place. For national development, this is national issue. So, you people can always strongly recommend, on behalf of Rakiraki people, if anyone whose land does come automatically near the development site, it is a national issue, just like what we have been doing for the roads. There were certain owners, at the initial stage they were saying, “no”, that they are not going to give their land. However, when the legislation came in, everyone gave in because it is important.

You have just mentioned four floods in a year, I mean, that is huge. I am considering the town itself, especially those market vendors, when there is a flood, they lose their revenue. As a Committee, we feel that you people should strongly make your submission to Government on getting the land available so that it can be realigned and the water flow is easy.

I have observed two things while we were coming. As, Madam Chairperson has talked about the dumpsite, when we were coming we saw garbage bags at the entrance of the dumpsite. Some people are really playing around with that. The other observation that we have seen is the truck that you people are using for collection is an open truck, if you can look into that because if we do not do our part, then we cannot say to others that you do.

Madam Chairperson, going back to the responses, as I was coming up, I asked one of the staff because I remember when this thing was opened, there were ladies who used to stay overnight here at the accommodation centre. I see that there is no more accommodation now.

MR. S. SAWANA.- This used to be the accommodation before. So, the Council noted that during the weekends, especially Thursday and Friday, that is only when they used the women's accommodation. We have noted that not more than five are using the accommodation, so we shifted the beds. Here, we have got around 40 beds. We have shifted to the other room and they can only accommodate up to 15 beds. So, the rest of the beds is outside. Currently, on average, we are expecting two to three women using the accommodation on a weekly basis, especially on Thursday and Friday.

HON. P.K. BALA.- The reason why I said that, maybe at that time, there was a need but now, women do not want to stay so that is fine. But why can you not utilise this area to have some revenue?

The initial idea when this market was constructed, as you have mentioned in your presentation, those measuring floors was always supposed to what you have said and I hope the Ministry gives funds under the challenge fund so that you can construct those office spaces But this is already done. I mean, there are Government Offices here and there, if you can get them so that it will be income generating for Rakiraki Town Council as well.

Before going on to rates, you have mentioned about the market's second phase development. What do you mean?

MR. S. SAWANA.- Just the upgrade of the first floor.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Alright, measuring floor. You have mentioned about some of the plans that you have in place in regard to the arrears. I also see No. 5, Small Claims Tribunal. How many cases do you have with Small Claims Tribunal?

MR. S. SAWANA.- Madam Chairperson, can we forward our response in writing? Approximately, 10 cases are with the Small Claims Tribunal.

HON. P.K. BALA.- No worries. This is interesting, Question No. 7. You have mentioned about conducting meeting with ratepayers. How many meetings per month or quarterly?

MR. S. SAWANA.- Sir, usually we have two meetings per year. The last meeting we had, I think was last month, with the ratepayers. One of the things that we have noted is when we call the meeting with the ratepayers, less interest was shown, may be around 10 ratepayers usually attend the meeting. That is the only time where we want to re-emphasise to them the importance of rate collection and the cost that has been incurred by the Council.

For the Council usually we are conducting two ratepayers meeting per year. Our Chairman is proposing if we can take out the meeting to the ratepayers, so our next meeting will be at Korowaqa.

MR. P. DUANIWAI.- Madam Chairperson, through you, this is one of the strategies we are planning. We are trying to do more engagement with our ratepayers. We see that it has been neglected from the last Administration - the breakdown of communication between the Council and the ratepayers, and also some of the things that deter them from attending just because of some of the arrears that they have with the Council.

The last ratepayers meeting that we had last month, we have seen that the turnout was not so favourable. So, the next plan of action we are trying to engage and consult in is with the areas like Vatumami and Korowaqa. We are going out instead of centralising. The strategy now is that we are

going out to people, listen to their voices and grievances so that we can address it where we can as soon as possible.

HON. P.K. BALA.- No one will come here, I have had that experience. So, you have to go down to their respective wards and I believe you have four or five wards. You can have face to face meeting with the ratepayers. That can be a starting point for you. If you want to be a successful Chairman and if you want to win back the Council election, you have to go down to the people and may be, launch this programme which is the face to face meeting with the ratepayers.

MR. P. DUANIWAI.- It is not only the ratepayers, but also engagement with the *vanua*. I have been already to the chiefs for their support. It is also inclusive of the *vanua*.

HON. P.K. BALA.- It is very important. Just a last question on the Department of Town and Country Planning. You have given the timeframe. What comes to the Council and what goes directly to the Department of Town and Country Planning? Do you have a Building Engineer?

MR. S. SAWANA.- Yes, we have got a Building Engineer and it is shared between Rakiraki Town Council and Tavua Town Council.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Madam Chairperson, through you, CEO, thank you very much for the presentation. Just in regard to flooding, the river realignment will take a lot of time. So, what is currently happening? Is there any dredging work happening for the river and the creeks currently by the Ministry of Waterways? What are they doing to assist you?

MR. S. SAWANA.- No, Sir. Currently, river dredging is starting from Ba and that is what we have been advised. We have raised this with the Ministry of Local Government. We have had a meeting with Ministry of Waterways like what you have mentioned. The only immediate action that we have taken now is to ensure to clean the drains and the chamber, Sir.

HON. V. PILLAY.- So, you still continue to receive the grant from the Ministry of Waterways to look after the drainage as you were receiving before?

MR. S. SAWANA.- No more, Sir. We used to receive it before but not now.

HON. V. PILLAY.- I understand that grant is very much needed for Rakiraki Town Council and you could have done some of the drainage works because the dredging is also not happening, as you are saying. You have already had four floods. The river realignment will take a lot of time. Thank you very much for the information and we will see what we can do from our end.

HON. RATU R.S.S. VAKALALABURE.- Madam Chairperson, through you, to the CEO and the SA, thank you very much for your welcome and responses. As you can see, with your responses, you have basically answered some of the queries that the Committee has highlighted even in your presentation. Thank you very much for that, that really helps the Committee a lot. With your approval, I could request, Madam Chairperson if we can also have that presentation to take along with us because we can modify, or we can get some very good recommendations from your presentation.

I am just following up on Honourable Bala's question with regards to Question No. 6, the strategies put in place with regards to pending arrears. You have as No. 5 and 6, Small Claims Tribunal and Magistrates Court, which are basically the same. My question is, when you go for the

Tribunal and the Magistrates Court, this basically means you have exhausted all avenues, is that right? How many cases are with the Magistrates Court?

MR. S. SAWANA.- Madam Chairperson, through you, we have got two cases with the Magistrates Court.

HON. RATU R.S.S. VAKALALABURE.- Are they still pending with the Court?

MR. S. SAWANA.- One is pending and one has concluded.

HON. RATU R.S.S. VAKALALABURE.- Madam Chairperson, this is not really a question but probably a comment. As alluded rightly alluded to by honourable Pillay with regards to the grant that used to come to the Council but is no longer now, would it really help in mitigating the flooding? As rightly alluded to by honourable Bala, flooding is not a new issue - it has been an issue throughout all Municipal Councils, especially in the Western Division.

As you can see, the Committee is coming today to make recommendations. I am thankful and I am glad to see that Rakiraki Town Council has a way forward, clearly outlined in your presentation, and I thank you for that, especially your engagement with the communities. It is very important. From me personally, this is a very good work for Rakiraki Town Council. However, there is a lot more to do. We thank you very much gentlemen.

HON. V. PILLAY.- One last observation, we also had a visit to Rakiraki Town Council before - the same Committee. You also highlighted the plan which you have in regard to the space which is here and during that time all the beddings were here. I believe you have a lot of space where you can utilise them through the generation of income in regard to your finances. You may be working closely with the Ministry of Local Government and the Government to make this plan. Whatever you have planned that is really on the ground, you start generating that income to help Rakiraki Town Council. This has been idle for a while. That is one of my observations, as we have already been here before.

MR. S. SAWANA.- May I just add on to the comment by honourable Pillay, it is true that the plan has been around for two years now. What we have noted is the difficulty of the Council to implement any improvement in the Council properties, especially for business to improve revenue base. Comparing with other private businesses, they are easy to make decisions. For the Council, it goes through a lot of approvals. Now, we have noted that our request for increase in revenue is still with the Ministry for over one year now.

Madam Chairperson, in May 2023, we sent our request to the Ministry of Local Government. Just few weeks ago, we received comments from the Ministry of Finance and Ministry of Trade on other information. So, the obstacles and challenges are there for the Council to implement any changes and it is very hard for the Council. What we have noted is that some of the businesses here just started five months ago and have decided to move to a bigger factory. For private businesses, it is easy but for the Council. It is a big challenge for them.

MADAM DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- Once again, I would like to thank the Executives of Rakiraki Town Council for your comprehensive responses and clear presentation on the achievements, challenges and way forward for the Council. Since, there are no other questions from the honourable Members, I thank you once again for your time.

We hope that in future, if we have any further questions or queries, your office is open to accommodate the Committee on any of our inquiries. Thank you again and have a blessed afternoon.

The Committee adjourned at 4.30 p.m.