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Verbatim Report

[VERBATIM REPORT]

STANDING COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS & DEFENCE

ANNUAL REPORT

2011-2013 Annual Reports

INSTITUTION: Biosecurity Authority of Fiji (BAF)

VENUE: Big Committee Room (East Wing)

DATE: Monday, 13th January, 2025

VERBATIM REPORT OF THE MEETING OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND DEFENCE HELD AT THE COMMITTEE ROOM (EAST/WEST WING), PARLIAMENT PRECINCTS, GOVERNMENT BUILDINGS, ON MONDAY, 13TH JANUARY, 2025, AT 9.08 A.M.

Interviewee/Submittee: Biosecurity Authority of Fiji

In Attendance:

1. Mr. Surend Pratap - Acting Chief Executive Officer
2. Mr. Uraia Waibuta - Chairman, Executive Board
3. Mr. Panapasa Meke - Manager Finance
4. Ms. Mereani Vakadromusiga - Manager Human Resources

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- Honourable Members, we do not have the members of the media here but, as I have said, this is going live, so I want to greet and welcome the viewers who are watching.

I also want to say thank you very much to you who have joined us from the Biosecurity Authority of Fiji (BAF). A very good morning, and it is a pleasure to welcome you to Parliament this morning.

At the outset, and this is for information purposes, pursuant to Standing Order 111 (2) of Parliament, all Committee meetings are to be open to the public. Therefore, this meeting is open to the public and to members of the media who may come in and out.

However, any sensitive information concerning this submission that cannot be disclosed in public, can be provided to the Committee either in private or in writing. We ask you to note that this will only be allowed in a few specific circumstances which include matters of:

1. national security;
2. third party confidential information;
3. personnel or human resources matters; and
4. Committee deliberation and development of Committee's recommendation and report.

I wish to remind honourable Members and our invited submittee that all comments and questions that are to be asked are to be addressed through the Chair. For viewers watching this live on *Facebook*, questions can also be asked via comments, and only relevant questions will be considered by the Committee.

This is a parliamentary meeting, and all information gathered is covered under the Parliamentary Powers and Privileges Act and the Standing Orders of Parliament. Please, bear in mind that we do not condone any slander or libel of any sort, and information brought before this Committee should be based only on facts.

In terms of other protocols of this Committee meeting, please, be advised that movement within the meeting room will be restricted and we ask that you minimise the use of mobile phones and if you would not mind, may be switching your mobile phones on silent mode.

Now, I would like to introduce the Committee members you have already met.

(Introduction of Committee Members by Deputy Chairperson)

Today, the Committee will be hearing a submission from BAF on its 2011-2013 Annual Reports. I now take this time to invite our guests to introduce themselves, for the benefit of other cameras, before we continue with the submission. Please, note that questions from the Members of the Committee, they may interject, or we will wait to hear the end of your submission to ask our questions.

(Introduction of BAF Officials)

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you very much Acting CEO, Executive Chairman and the two Managers. This is really just an informal chat. We understand that perhaps, none of you or some of you were in BAF when these reports came out. I understand that the Acting CEO and the Executive Chairman were not. What about yourselves, Manager Finance and Manager HR?

MR. P. MEKE.- Yes, we were also not part of the management during that time.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- *Sa donu vinaka*. I understand that you have a submission, and we will give you the floor now.

MR. U. WAIBUTA.- Madam Deputy Chairperson and honourable Members, before I request the Acting CEO to provide an update on the 2011-2013 Annual Reports summary as submitted, I thought of just taking us back into history because BAF had taken certain path that was not easy at that point in time, and had faced a lot of challenges which caused some technical delays in the actual implementation of certain programmes.

Madam Deputy Chairperson and honourable Members, in 2008, the Biosecurity Act or Promulgation was endorsed for its implementation for BAF to move out from the Ministry of Agriculture and to be established as a statutory body.

The Act clearly states that but that only came to materialise up until 2015. There was a lot of ins and outs, even Finance is still being controlled by the Ministry of Agriculture, some decisions were still not being finalised within Government to be moved across to BAF, so those were some of the basic challenges, despite the Act had clearly stated on what was supposed to be done. However, the delay in its implementation took us right up to 2015 whereby BAF was then able to stand on its own and them reporting directly to the Ministry of Public Enterprises and carrying out its standing role.

However, in terms of its core role, BAF continues to carry out the key responsibility it has been delegated to do so under the promulgation. We have only about three or four key roles that we do which is boarder control. It may sound easy but there is a lot of issues involved, ensuring to try and control the movements and also the coming in of pests and diseases in and out of Fiji.

The second role that we play is to facilitate market access and to facilitate trade. Although it is being called an Authority, but we want to ensure that we are there to facilitate and to collaborate with stakeholders and with partners to see how we can expand and improve some of the basic systems and processes within BAF in order to expand market access and improve trade facilitation way back then. Also, basic monitoring and surveillance was a basic role that we need to carry out as part of any statutory organisation which continues to be implemented by BAF.

The Board which I chair was appointed three years back. We walked into a little of a mess that we tried to clean up and that took us about two years in just trying to rectify some of the basic processes and systems that need to be straightened up that continues to exist. So, what we did, we looked at policies, we improved, we reviewed, and we revised all policies regarding administration, finance and management in order to allow the process to flow and for the technical people to carry out their role effectively and efficiently. That had been done by the Board.

Also, the delegation of authority by the Board to the CEO to allow him to lead his own team and for us as Board of Directors just to be at the strategic level and continue to supervise the strategic role of BAF. That had been done and is happening already, and we will continue to follow that path as we progress.

However, as I have said, there were few difficulties that the Board faced which the team continued to be bogged down with which was the submission of Annual Reports. We have managed to update the Annual Reports from 2014 to 2018, so that was something that we had done last year, fortunately, but the 2019 Annual Report is now with the Office of the Auditor-General and the 2020 Annual Report is with our accounting firm - KPMG. Definitely, this will, hopefully, take up towards February or even March next year, to get it updated to 2023, hopefully, 2024.

However, that is the current situation that BAF was taken through, but we are fortunate that we were guided by people who allowed us to carry out our roles effectively and efficiently. New people came in, with different ideas, but the technical people had no option but to follow suit and, again, somewhat to the advantage of BAF and some to the disadvantage, so people continue to start from scratch as when changes happen. A

You may be fully aware, Madam Deputy Chairperson and honourable Members, that we are also going through a reorganization plan right now, hence the paper will be submitted to Cabinet for BAF to be reorganized and to go back into a Ministry, whichever Ministry that will be, that has not really been determined but, hopefully, back to the Ministry of Agriculture. So, I just came in as Executive Chairman, just to see through the reorganization of BAF.

Although this has not started yet, but this is something that is happening at this point in time since 2008 and up until now, I thought of just highlighting that for the honourable Members' information on what BAF went through and some of the challenges and difficulties that were faced, despite trying to meet its core objectives of being efficient in its border control, market access and trade facilitation.

I thought of just highlighting some of the key activities being undertaken by the technical people on market access and also trade facilitation. For the New Zealand market, we have about 52 commodities that had been approved to be exported to New Zealand, and to attain market access into any country is not an easy exercise. Sometimes, it takes us two years and some even 10 years, so Fiji has to meet certain criteria and standards before any export can happen.

We have 52 commodities already approved for the New Zealand market, but it is just unfortunate that only 22 commodities is being exported at this point in time. When we want to talk about trade facilitation, when we want to talk about market access, the challenge is within Fiji on how it can produce whatever commodities that is required by our consumers that are out there in the export market.

Honourable Members, BAF definitely is not in the position to compromise its role because of the important role of its border and also market access. So, I thought of just highlighting that as

part of an introductory remark, Madam Deputy Chairperson and honourable Members, in regard to what has been happening over time with regards to the implementation of the different programmes within BAF from 2008 to up until now.

I will now request if CEO might want to add some of the issues in regard to the summaries that have been stated.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you very much, Mr. Waibuta. That was very very concise and clear, and we take our hat off to you and the team for the big battle that you have in front of you, and I am sure that when you bring us your Annual Report for 2024-2025, we will see a lot of improvements.

MR. S PRATAP.- Madam Chairperson, with your permission just to add to the presentation made by the Board Chairman, perhaps we look at the vision. The vision of the organisation is to be respected as the most effective and efficient authority in the region. Our mission is to protect Fiji's unique biodiversity and facilitate international trade to and from Fiji. So, connecting to this and based on the presentation made by the Board Chairman, we understand he has already covered the history aspect.

Before, we were known as a statutory authority, Biosecurity Authority, we were with the Ministry as the Fiji Quarantine Inspection Division. At the time when these activities were carried out, the 2011-2013 report coverage, our reporting line was with Ministry of Agriculture. From 2015 onwards, then we started reporting to the Ministry of Public Enterprises. So, the financials and other things were through Ministry of Primary Industry at that time.

If you look at the overview of the 2011-2013 Report, Madam Chairperson, you will note that there are some issues that have been highlighted. We understand that during this time, we were trying to establish the Authority and any organisation that is trying to establish an authority on a new organisation, there will be a fair bit of challenges that will be faced, so that is exactly what happened to BAF when we moved out from the Ministry to become a statutory authority on our own.

In 2011, we managed to get our fees and charges gazetted, so that was the 2011 Biosecurity Fees and Charges Regulation in place. That was one of the achievements that we made in 2011. Other achievements that are reported in the 2011-2013 Report includes our investment into strengthening our border security where we purchased the x-ray machine for Nadi Airport and also deployed an x-ray machines to Nausori Airport. So, these x-ray machines are detection tools that are used by BAF, Customs or Border Agencies to screen passenger baggage that is coming in and to identify if they are carrying any biosecurity risk items or any customs or any security issues that maybe related to that baggage. So, we continue to strengthen our border security, our trade facilitation, as we move on to establish the Authority on its own.

Other achievements that we have made during that period was trying to strengthen our coordination with other border agencies in coming up with Memorandums of Understanding (MOU) and Memorandums of Agreement (MOAs) so that we can have a better working relationship and sharing of resources. You will note in the Report that we had signed an MOU with Maritime Safety Authority of Fiji (MSAF), Vuda Mariner, Airports Fiji Limited (AFL) and Fiji Revenue and Customs Service (FRCS) during that period, in trying to strengthen, working together with other agencies and also international bodies to carry out the mandate of the organisation.

We continue to detect exotic or regulated pests and diseases at the border, despite having those detection tools. Through those detection tools, we detected passengers carrying unregulated

items which they are not declaring it, more like, smuggling it. So, when we introduced the x-ray machine, we managed to know that the declaration form that they have filled are sometimes not true.

Through this 2011 Fees and Charges that was introduced in the Schedule 5 of the Biosecurity Act, we started implementing fixed penalty as a deterrent, to avoid people bringing in items that may harbour pests and diseases and introduce them to our Fiji Islands. So, those were the things that we implemented during that period.

Also, through this detection tool, through this cooperation and working together with other border agencies, if we identify anything that we feel is of interest to other border agencies, for example, FRCS or Ministry of Health, we always make reference to that. So, you may note in the Report, there were some drugs, some currencies, et cetera, that may have been detected through these machines and referred to the relevant agencies. That is what we try to strengthen, our coordination co-operation. Likewise, if they identify or detect anything through their inspection process, they will always refer to us for necessary action.

In 2011, *Operation Kadivuka* came to an end. This operation, also known as Asian Subterranean Termite (AST), was detected within the Lautoka district at that time, so there was a whole of Government approach in trying to contain, control and eradicate. Unfortunately, we realized that this pest got established and we need a bit more long term management practice. So, *Operation Kadivuka* came to an end and this role was observed by BAF. So, we continued with the containment, control and eradication programme for "*Operation Kadivuka*".

Moving on to gender desegregation, Madam Chairperson and honourable Members, if you look at the gender desegregation, in 2011, we had only 15 percent female which improved in 2013. But if you compare this data now on what we have done and the improvement that has been done, from this 15 percent in 2011, as I speak for 2024-2025, we have 51 percent female and only 49 percent male. There is huge improvement and also, in managerial positions now, they occupy almost 37 percent, compared to what it was before. So, there is huge improvement in this area over a period of time.

Moving to the financial trend analysis for 2011 to 2013, Madam Chairperson and honourable Members, if you can see, after the enactment of the Biosecurity Regulation 2011, we started collecting fees for the services that we are providing and when we continued to strengthen our operation, recruitment of human resources, et cetera, we were required to ensure that we cover all the areas.

You will note that there was an increase in the fees that were eventually received or collected. This figure that is presented also includes Government grant that was also given. We were very much dependent on our Government grant at that time, so the government grant was \$2,000, \$2.7 million, \$3 million or whatever and it went up to \$7 million. Now, we are slowly becoming more self-sufficient moving towards that, so the Government grant has been reduced from the past two years to \$1 million to now \$500,000 or so. We are hoping that we will review our fees and charges which have been there from 2011 till now and not being reviewed. We will realign and then we will become a commercial statutory authority, self-sustaining on our own.

That is on the financial trends. On the balance sheet, you can see that cash flow also shows the same direction - improvements and Manager Finance will be able to give you the exact figure on our 2024 revenue which is over \$11 million or so.

The other part that was requested through your letter, Madam Chairperson, was relevance to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). So, No Poverty, as we have stated in our presentation, one of our core roles is to prevent Fiji from the introduction of any pest or diseases or regulate pests or diseases that can have detrimental impact on plants, animal, food security, human being or biodiversity. By doing that, we are able to provide people with more sustainable agriculture, promoting agricultural growth. That also helps us in reducing the zero-hunger aspect.

On good health and well-being, if we are able to prevent any pest or disease coming into the country, controlling with the use of chemicals, there will be less use of chemicals which means we will be eating more healthier products, like vegetables.

One of the core roles, as Madam Chairperson has said, is just not plant and animal but also the human being aspect. Food safety aspect so that zoonotic diseases that affect animals can also affect human beings, so we are regulating, controlling and preventing these types of diseases coming into the country. That means we are connecting and helping the Ministry of Health with some of those pest disease concerns.

On gender equality, I think I have covered that well. On decent work and economic growth, we have introduced policies, over a period of time, that provides safe working environment and equal opportunity for everyone. As you know, now, if you look at the gender balance, we have more female than male in our organisation.

On climate action, in terms of us being stringent at the border in preventing any introduction of pests or diseases into the country, that means we are promoting agricultural growth. If we are promoting agriculture growth, that means food security for everyone, so that is how it is connecting to the climate action.

Partnership for the goal, BAF is instrumental in meeting the international standards and we are a member of World Trade Organisation (WTO), International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC), Office International des Epizooties/World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) and SPS, so we are adopting internal standards and using it as our national standard here, not directly but internal standards are used as a guide to develop our national standards.

The current challenges, Madam Deputy Chairperson, that we face, at the moment, is on staff retention. Even though we have improved in terms of implementing policies and procedures for equal employment and providing them that growth, we are still facing some challenges in terms of staff retention. I would just give a recent example.

Just last year in November, there were more than 12 technical BAF Officers who resigned to join other organisations that is offering a better salary and other benefits. This is where I have mentioned that there is a need for us to review our fees and charges to relook at some of the staff welfare aspect as well, and improve on those areas, Madam Chairperson.

On fees and charges regulation, I have captured that well. On maintaining pest and disease status, this is also a huge challenge to the Authority. There are a number of pests and diseases outbreak within the countries that we are regularly trading with. There is African Swine Fever (ASF), Giant African Snail (GAS), for example, to name a few. So, these are the challenges at the border, so we need to continuously upgrade our technical expertise, our diagnostic capabilities, our equipment and detection tools, et cetera, to ensure that we continue to prevent entry of these exotic pests and diseases and maintain the pest and disease status of the country.

One challenge that I may mention here is emergency declarations. Emergency declarations are for the pests and diseases that are already present in the country and are found in only specific areas, not spread to all parts of Fiji. Through this emergency declaration, we are able to contain, control and restrict the movement of this host material or the pest or disease out of those areas, just like termite, taro beetle and fruit-fly from Rotuma - the species that is only present in Rotuma. This is the declaration that is required but we face some challenges in terms of getting these declarations renewed on a timely manner. The other challenge that we face, as the Board Chairperson has alluded to, is our financials are not on par. We are trying our level best to ensure that our financials are to be on par by early next year.

On the future outlook for the organisation, technological and process advancement in Biosecurity and this is the area that we are looking at - bringing in efficiency, accuracy and responsiveness in managing biosecurity risks. For example, upgrading our x-ray machine, so this year we are buying an x-ray machine to replace the existing one, so this is a technology upgrade, to ensure that we are able to detect. Those that we have at the border sometimes get obsolete. We do not get parts, or the detection capability is not there because people have started to find new ways of smuggling things. So, we, at the border, have to ensure that we also upgrade our equipment and technology diagnostic capabilities, Madam Deputy Chairperson.

In future, we are looking at probably establishing a Canine Unit. If you go to other countries, you may see they have Canine Units, but BAF currently does not have one. This is an area that we can work on, but all this depends on the funds. Hopefully, our fees and charges will be supported, and we will be able to achieve some of these.

Also, the implementation of Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP), where we want to streamline this instead of doing all the paperwork manually. We want to do a little bit of electronic and move to electronic version, streamline, less cost and also at the same time, everything is captured. For example, the documents are there, there is no issue of missing documents, process and procedures, and that helps everyone.

We have discussed the financials - the fees and charges. I have covered that as well, the need for the review of Fees and Charge Regulation 2011. Madam Deputy Chairperson and honourable Members, we need to provide the service that is required by the public. From 2011, we have not been able to increase or review our fees and charges until to-date.

Madam Deputy Chairperson and honourable Members that is a brief summary of our presentation and we are happy to take any questions or clarifications on the presentation.

MADAM DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you very much, Mr. Pratap. Thank you for your very clear and concise explanation and update on BAF. I will now give the floor to the honourable Members if they have any questions.

I also want to acknowledge the members of the media who are here with us today. Thank you for your interest in this meeting today. *Vinaka*.

HON. RATU I. TUIWAILEVU.- Through you, Madam Deputy Chairperson, is there any online contact where we can contact the Authority regarding the breach of law at the border?

MR. S. PRATAP.- Thank you, honourable Member. With regards to communication with BAF, we have general information on biosecurity.com.fj that is available and we also we a Whistle

Blower Policy. If there are issues, anyone can directly raise it with the Authority. So, yes, we have *Facebook* and other websites.

MADAM DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- Mr. Pratap, just for the benefit of members of the media that are here today, we are discussing the Annual Reports from 2011 to 2013. But they were not here before when Acting CEO and the Executive Chairman were talking about their own work in BAF and none of them were at BAF during the time of this reporting period. But we are finding it very, very interesting, hearing about your ongoing plans.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- We do understand that this Question and Answer is just for public information, awareness and advocacy. My question is with regard to the termite issues that we have.

Fiji is a more price driven market. Wherever I get a cheaper price, I am going to purchase it from them, so I have a few follow-up questions to that.

- (1) Does BAF inspect manufacturers, suppliers, distributors and retailers for timber, particularly, when people sell untreated timber at the price of treated timber?
- (2) With Government assistance for termite, someone who gets \$3,000, for example, go to a certain supply, he/she hears the cost and says, "Alright, I want something cheaper." So, let us just say they get something cheaper. So, at the end of the day, even the assistance given by the Government is used to buy untreated timber and that person is going to have the termite issue in years to come.
- (3) Can you explain more about the baiting system? Is there any biological control that BAF has looked into? Can you confirm that termite has invaded agricultural products, likes kava, sugarcane and *dalo*?

MR. S. PRATAP.- Thank you, honourable Member. With regards to the termite infestation and also the use of untreated timber, we totally agree with you, but we always create awareness to the general public in terms of using treated timber. If you use treated timber, then it is secured. If you do not use treated timber, then there is highly likely there will be reinfestation or infestation of termite. That is something that we are working with the Ministry of Forestry who are regulating the treatment of timber at sawmill outlets, et cetera.

However, in terms of us, we always create that awareness. We tell and inform the public, "If you are building a house, please, use treated timber." So, where they are buying from, sometimes it is beyond our control. We cannot regulate that at this stage but, yes, we totally agree with your statement, honourable Member.

With regards to the baiting system, currently, there are two to three types of treatment of baiting system that we are using. The chemical that is more effective to the termite control is termidor and we are using that for termite control. We are also carrying out a survey to identify area spread. As we receive complaints or calls from the public that they suspect that there is termite in their house, property or anywhere, we attend to that. So, we attend to those requests. We inspect and if we find there is a termite, we will provide the treatment for free on behalf of Government because Government assistance is also provided to us to carry out those treatments.

Also, in terms of baiting, there are few baiting systems that is available and recommended at the moment. Firstly, we do baiting that is in the ground. When we do baiting in the ground, that means we are placing bait inside the ground within the area where we suspect termites are present.

So, if these baits get infested, that means and we know that that there are terminate activities around that area. So, we will detect that before they affect a structure or building. So, that is a good way of detecting and preventing in from affecting a building.

The other one is when the population increased, the infrastructure also increased and they already in your building so what we do is we go and treat your building, either we use dust termidor chemical or what the taskforce is currently doing which is using the baiting system in the infested facility or houses. If they see there is a track which indicates that the termite has been moving on, they will place the bait there so that these termites get in contact with the bait, the termites will carry this bait to their nest and the nest will be destroyed. So, those are a few baiting systems that are currently being deployed by the termite team.

MR. U. WAIBUTA.- Madam Deputy Chairperson, just to add on to the biological control question, there is no biological control for termite. So, all that is being used are all chemical in nature.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Madam Deputy Chairperson, one more question on that, if you can confirm whether termites have infested sugarcane and products, like kava?

MR. S. PRATAP.- My apologies, Madam Deputy Chairperson and honourable Members, yes, there was a report which we also verified, there were few cases where we found termite in sugarcane. That was after they cut the sugarcane and the termites were found. So, a few were seen in Lautoka and one in Labasa, I believe, but recently we do not have any active sugarcane farm that is infested by termites and is being reported to us.

With regard to agriculture, they do affect plants. We have found them on mango trees and coconut trees, in one or two cases in cassava, but there is none severely affecting the agricultural production at the moment.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- I have a question, when you were doing the presentation, you spoke about the 52 commodities approved for export to the New Zealand market but only 22 commodities are exported at the moment. Why is that, what is happening to the other 30 commodities approved?

Madam Deputy Chairperson and honourable Members, as alluded to earlier, one of the core roles of BAF is to facilitate trade. They look at opportunities that exist. If there are certain commodities that people might want to move into and to export, so BAF needs to work in advance in trying to get it 'market-access approved' before even any exporter move into that particular commodity because of the time it takes to follow that process and get it approved within both parties because we rely on the importing countries for us to meet those criteria. So, it is a lengthy process, but as I have said, we identify the key commodities, then it is given out to the exporters that have the interest. So whoever wants to export this particular commodity, market access is already available.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you, Mr. Waibuta, that is very clear.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- I have one more question, in case of a new disease or pest being detected, what is the procedure that BAF takes, and this is in terms of time and in terms of cost? Is it that you have the right facilities, or do we need to upgrade our facilities? The first thing that comes to mind is the safety of our people as well when dealing with these new pests and diseases. Is it done locally or do you get help from the region or internationally other borders when trying to detect these species and the solution to either end them or prevent them from spreading?

MR. S. PRATAP.- Through you, Madam Chairperson, with regards to the introduction or incursion of any pest or disease into the country, we have emergency response plans in place and we call it Animal Emergency Response Plan and Plant and Industry Emergency Plan that have been developed in consultation with all the key stakeholders. So, if there is any incursion or suspicion, as our Executive Chairman has said, one of our core roles is we carry out monitoring and surveillance.

What we are doing is we have placed traps, we lay baits at strategic locations, especially at ports of entry, BAF approved premises and even in the outer islands where resorts are, et cetera, and we regularly go and clear those traps. We take it to our laboratory where we do diagnostics to check whether these species are present in Fiji or not. So, this is an early warning system that we have. If there is any detection of exotic pest or disease, we will immediately implement the emergency response plan.

Before we implement the emergency response plan, we have our diagnostic capabilities. We now have a laboratory based at Koronivia Research Station and we also have a laboratory in the West where all these diagnostics are done. We have upgraded and trained our people, and we have worked with our counterparts in New Zealand to ensure that the diagnostic capabilities are on par with our people, so that if there is anything detected, they are able to diagnose, ...

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... immediately advise and we take action to try and contain within the area and control to eradicate it before it spreads.

In terms of safety, as we very much promote Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and safe way of working, it will all depend on the type of pest or disease. So, if this disease is zoonotic, then we will have a different type of response to avoid spreading it from one person to another or animal to human. Otherwise, basic protective equipment is provided to all the staff to wear when they are executing their roles.

HON. I. TUIWAILEVU.- Through you, Madam Deputy Chairperson, Acting CEO, I have a question on drugs. What measures are in place to detect drugs at ports of entry?

MR. S. PRATAP.- As I have said in my earlier presentation, we work in coordination with other border agencies. Maybe drug is not one of our core role or activity, but it does not mean that if we see someone who is dealing with drugs, we ignore. Through our inspection process, all the imports that are coming in that we mark for inspection when we are conducting inspection, when we suspect any drug, we refer it to Customs and Customs will do their due diligence and if they need to refer it to the Police, they will do so.

Likewise, at the border, this detection equipment or x-ray machine that we have is being operated by BAF. As soon as our operators detect anything or suspect that there is a drug, they will refer it to Customs and Customs will take charge from there onwards. So, we work in partnership in terms of preventing drugs.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Madam Deputy Chairperson, one last question, I will give you a real time scenario. Let us say a container is to be cleared and it gets fumigated. Fumigation is basically a process to kill toxic or whatever is there. Now, has any research being done where the residue of fumigation is, sort of, looked into? What happens is, fumigation is done with the PPEs being fully covered and protected but when a labourer or any Fijian would come in because what I have seen is, when they open the container after fumigation, they say, "Leave it open for a while, do not go in."

But then, I see people going in, getting things or cargo unloaded because due to the timeframe that they have with their truck drivers or with the days of the container that can be there, else they will be charged a penalty, so I see people with no mask, no protection, getting these goods on their bare hands and on their back. So, if it is not done, if it can be looked into, because I am a farmer as well. The chemicals we use on the farms do cause cancer because they are synthetic so if you can elaborate on that.

MR. S. PRATAP.- Through you, Madam Deputy Chairperson, with regards to the fumigation of imports, we only fumigate if there is a quarantine pest found or for quarantine reasons. So, if there is any quarantine pest found that needs to be fumigated to eliminate any biosecurity risk associated with that import commodity or container, then fumigation will take place.

For fumigation, we are using the Australian Fumigation Accredited Standards (AFAS) which is also being adopted by other member countries. So, this standard strictly has requirements that need to be followed whereby those who are conducting fumigation need to be accredited by BAF as well.

We have inhouse trainers who have been trained by Australian counterparts to ensure that these are the processes and procedures that need to be followed before fumigation is conducted by fumigation companies. So, where they are conducting the fumigation is also important, so we are also regulating those fumigation yards as biosecurity approved premises. We do not allow fumigation to be conducted anywhere, and also, any time.

So, all fumigation approved

FIRST WORDS FOR NEXT TURN: ... premises when fumigation is carried out, majority of them will be carried out after 5pm when no one is around.

Stint 10

... So, for all fumigation approved premises when fumigation is carried out, majority of them will be carried out after 5.00 p.m. when no one is around. The gas blowing will be done with strict compliance to the PPE, and also in supervision and monitoring by BAF. Our officers will be present to ensure they follow the processes that are required, they calculate the correct dosage so that they do not overdose it, et cetera, because if we are using Methyl Bromide, then we are also worried about the ozone depletion. We are also looking at alternative treatments for that because of Methyl Bromide being one of the fumigants that will fade away over a period of time because of its impact on the ozone layer.

Proper PPE is required during gas in time, so only those with proper PPE will be allowed. The area will be covered, there will be a signage, "No movement within that area", when we conduct fumigation. After the fumigation period has completed at the gas out time, only the fumigation company and BAF will be present with their proper PPE. They will gas out the fumigation and they will remain within the vicinity until the proper gas out has been done and it is safe for other people to have access to those commodities.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you Mr. Pratap, very clear.

HON. I. TUIWAILEVU.- Madam Deputy Chairperson, one last question; is there any alternative solution to consider in case of the breakdown of the x-ray machine at the border? One thing I had noticed in Taveuni, there is no x-ray machine at the airport and there are no sniffer dogs too. People are taking across plants and food, that is why I am concerned.

MR. S. PRATAP.- Through you, Madam Deputy Chairperson, with regards to the alternative x-ray machine, at the moment, we do not have. That is why we have four x-ray machines. If one is down, at least, three are running. If two are down, two are running while we try to fix the other two.

We also have x-ray machines at Container Freight Stations (CFS), the bonded areas. If the need arises, then we can always bring in these machines as replacements, in the interim, until we fix those that are not working at the border. If there is no other option in terms of replacement, then we will have to do 100 percent manual inspection of all baggage that is coming in. We cannot take chances because through our record, it is very much evident that people continue to fail to declare and they are subject to even spot fines, so we cannot take the risk by allowing them through profiling but we need to ensure that 100 percent inspection is carried out.

Honourable Members, Taveuni is an area where there is *dalo* production. Currently, there is no taro beetle present in Taveuni which is present in the mainland here in Viti Levu. If you go and buy taro, you will see the small holes in the taro. These are the taro beetle impact, but it is not present in the main production area in Taveuni.

We have our office based in Taveuni and the officers are inspecting all the vessels that are coming in and all the planting material, host material coming in. If the vessel originates from Natovi, then our officers from Natovi will give clearance. Anyone who wants to take host material, they have to get clearance from BAF. We will inspect, we will treat, before we will allow those commodities to go to Taveuni or any other island where these pests are not present. But we do not have an x-ray machine as you have said, honourable Member.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- I have a couple of questions ranging from human resource to inspection, in particular, inspection of host material going to the outer islands, for example, if there is wedding in Kadavu where I was just last week and the *tevutevu* material was brought from Suva, like the *kato kau*, bedding equipment or bedding gear, what inspection is there before the vessel leaves, say, Suva Port?

MR. S. PRATAP.- That is one of the challenges that we face at this stage. We create awareness, we say that this pest or disease is present in Fiji, but it is just localised to certain areas. We are working with other Ministries and relevant authorities in trying to contain and control within the area and try to eradicate.

Anyone moving any host material from those areas, need to obtain clearance from BAF. Sometimes people try their best and they might try to smuggle, but the procedure is that they must come to BAF, let us know and we will guide them. If there is a need to be treated, we will treat and provide clearance certificate for them to take it but if they smuggle, that is something beyond our control sometimes. We have an office at maritime in Natovi, Mua-i-Walu Wharf here in Suva, Nabouwalu, Savusavu, Taveuni, Levuka and Rotuma. All these strategic locations do have an office and officers present who are monitoring these movements.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- Again, just to ask you, Mr. Pratap, about the shipping vessels and airline crew. Are they updated regularly? If I was to bring a bed to the Mua-i-Walu Wharf to take it to Kadavu, would the crew tell me, "Hang on a minute, that has not been treated and where is the sticker from BAF?" Would that happen?

MR. S. PRATAP.- Madam Deputy Chairperson, we do not have any formal training programme for crew but on *ad hoc* basis, they are being advised, and this is something that we can take note of. Probably, you can include that as one of the activities for airline crew. When they are

recruited, they go through the orientation programme, and we are making our presentation to all airline crew. They are aware of what is required, what is not required and what are the biosecurity requirements so that when a passenger in an aircraft asks them to clarify, they will let the passenger know that, "Alright, this needs to be ticked, you need to declare this to BAF". Also, we have an inflight video for international flights.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- I was actually asking that question in relation to Rotuma to Viti Levu flights, flights from Viti Levu to Vunisea, flights from Viti Levu to Taveuni, Savusavu and Labasa. We know we do not have to sign any declaration form to go domestically. So, I could take mangoes from Kadavu to here and who knows what is in them. So, these are just some of the questions that I have to ask and I do not need the answers right now.

I want to ask the Manager HR, how short are you on staff? What is your ideal number of headcount and where are you lacking?

MS. M. VAKADROMUSIGA.- Madam Deputy Chairperson, in terms of the number of staff currently at BAF, we have more than 290 staff. In terms of operational staff on the ground who are at the borders, we are on more than 90 percent capacity.

Even though we have a total number of exit staff, for 2024, it was 37, whereas our intake for the year was more than 50. We are understaffed in some areas, however, we are working towards that but currently, we have 90 percent staff on the ground, in terms of operation, who are at the borders.

MR. U. WAIBUTA.- Madam Deputy Chairperson, I thought of just adding onto that; we have just done a review for the whole organisation structure, so this is something that had been done and endorsed by the Board, in rightsizing BAF. So, for all those vacant positions that had been vacant for a certain period of time, we have questioned the technical people, why is it so? Is it needed or not? So, this exercise was undertaken. It has to be filled if it is needed.

We have done that and now, like we have said, we want to right-size, and we have reached that point but, again, on the other hand is the retention component of things, to hold our people back. We do not really have the money to, at least, provide the incentives but we are relying on fees and charges. So, once the fees and charges increase, hopefully, we will be able to implement our retention plan and get some incentives to try and hold staff back. Otherwise, we are losing staff in huge numbers every year. They get out and join other organisations.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- Mr. Waibuta, what kind of organisations would your staff be joining after leaving you?

MR. U. WAIBUTA.- Madam Deputy Chairperson, 30 have left for FRCS. We have trained them, and FRCS took them. Now, it is like we are the training ground for other organisations but, as I have said, the incentive (offer) that side is far much better, so we are just trying to see how we can retain staff. It will come at a cost to us, if we want to compete and retain them.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- Hence, the mention of the fees and charges?

MR. U. WAIBUTA.- Yes.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Madam Deputy Chairperson, there is one more question. I see that between 2011 and 2013, there was a total sum of \$7 million in grants, but my question would be for

the year ahead. Would any increase in grants be required for the next budget? My understanding of these grants is they are budgetary allocations. If there is any request of that sort in terms of retaining staff, improving your structure and innovative mechanisms to be incorporated, of course, it comes at a financial cost. So, please, let us know if any new interventions are there, we will have to take it up to Parliament. Thank you.

MR. P. MEKE.- Madam Deputy Chairperson and honourable Members, when we look at the 2011 to 2013 grants that were submitted to BAF, we had around \$2.4 million, \$2.9 million and \$1.7 million. Currently, the grant that we have been issued with for 2024-2025, we have just received \$1 million to assist BAF in its operations. As you can see, there is a big decrease in the grants that was allocated to us.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- An increase would be good?

MR. P. MEKE.- An increase would really help us.

MR. S. PRATAP.- Perhaps, to add to that, Madam Deputy Chairperson, with regards to the grant, BAF was reorganised as a statutory authority and now under the Public Enterprises Act, we are one of the Commercial Statutory Authorities.

The Government grant has declined while we have maximised our revenue more from fees and charges. That is why a review of fees and charges is required so that we can become a standalone entity of Government and do not rely on Government funding in future.

MR. U. WAIBUTA.- Madam Deputy Chairperson and honourable Members, just add on to that, we totally rely on the fees and charges. We did the review on the fees and charges, it is on its way to Cabinet, again, it is with the Ministry of Public Enterprises at this point in time but we were mindful of the review.

Previously, what used to happen was just 10 percent across the board on that particular increase but in this particular review, we did it line by line and item by item. So, there were 100 plus lines that we needed to look at.

In order to be mindful, although we need an increase in income, however, it should not come at a cost with other key stakeholders also. We should be there to facilitate trade, we do not want to put in a certain fee that will affect trade and market access, so I thought we just highlight that.

There are certain key areas where we had requested a substantive increase, in some areas there was no increase and a few, just a reduction, taking into account the whole core of BAF in allowing trade to continue to happen and also the other key stakeholders not to be affected around this area.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you, Mr. Waibuta. Honourable Members, since we do not have any other questions, that leads me to say 'thank you very much' to each of you for your very clear update for the honourable Members and the Secretariat. And if we can be of any assistance to you because we will be putting our report together to present in Parliament and we will probably come back to you and ask you if there is anything else that you wanted to add.

So, thank you very much for making yourselves available this morning and thank you for your time. I hope that if we need you to come back, that you will make yourselves available. I also want to thank the members of the media for your interest in this Standing Committee meeting.

Vinaka vakalevu, honourable Members, on that note, I declare this meeting closed.

The Committee adjourned at 10.05 a.m.

Written Responses

10 January 2025

By email first: elesi.wainivalu@legislature.gov.fj

Hon. Viliame Naupoto
Chairman
Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence
PO Box 2352
Government Buildings
SUVA

Dear Hon. Naupoto

RE: 2011 - 2013 Annual Report

1. Greeting from Biosecurity Authority of Fiji. ("BAF")
2. We refer to your letter (PARL 6/15) dated 6th January 2025 regarding 2011 - 2013 BAF annual report summary to be submitted to the standing Committee.
3. Enclosed find summary of report as requested.
4. The Current management and board were not serving during the specified period. Therefore, the summary attached is compiled from internal records and annual report that was submitted to the Ministry.
5. For further clarification, please do contact BAF via email on spratap@baf.com.fj and mhazelman@baf.com.fj.

Yours faithfully



Surend Pratap
A/ Chief Executive Officer

Cc: *Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Public Enterprises;
Board Chairman, Biosecurity Authority of Fiji*

Enc: Summary of 2011 -2013 annual report - BAF

All correspondences to be addressed to The Chief Executive Officer for Biosecurity Authority of Fiji



2011 – 2013 Annual Report Summary

Significant turnaround of key management and board members has taken place since 2013 therefore the annual report summary prepared has been compiled from internal records for the period in question.

A. History of Biosecurity Authority of Fiji (BAF)

The Biosecurity Authority of Fiji ("the Authority") was formerly known as the Quarantine and Inspection Department ("QID") under the Ministry of Agriculture ("MOA").

The QID was reorganized pursuant to the Public Enterprise Act 1996 (now repealed) into the Authority that it is today having being established pursuant to the Biosecurity Act 2008.

The reporting line was the Ministry of Primary Industries (Department of Agriculture) for the period 2008 – 2014.

In 2015, the Authority's line Ministry changed from the Ministry of Primary Industries to the Ministry of Public Enterprises.

Thus all the budgetary requisitions of the Authority were managed by MOA until it was officially changed to the Ministry of Public Enterprise in 2015.

B. Overview

The period 2011, 2012 and 2013, have been critical as well as challenging for the Biosecurity Authority of Fiji ("the Authority"). Over these years the Authority worked towards establishing itself in the Fijian market and execute its functions as per Biosecurity Promulgation of 2008.

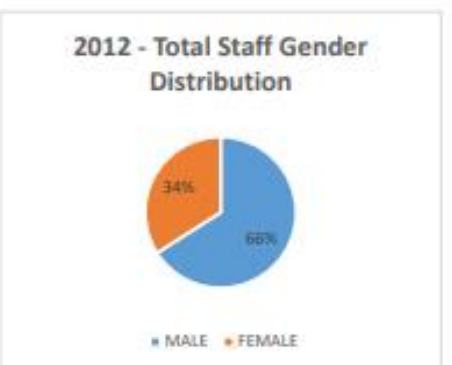
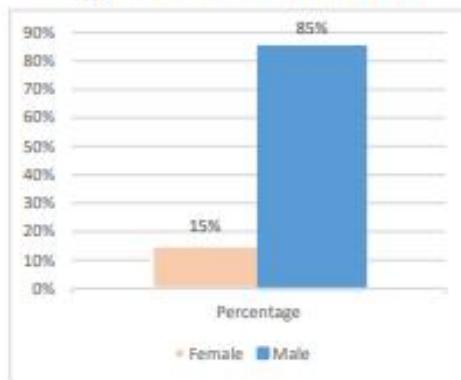
These years were the early stages period of the Authority operating as a Statutory Body governed by the Biosecurity Promulgation of 2008. Therefore, like most organizations in its infancy stages, the Authority did encounter their fair share of issues in efforts to work towards being recognized as an established organization. It also faced challenges in terms of its financial reporting.

C. Major Achievements

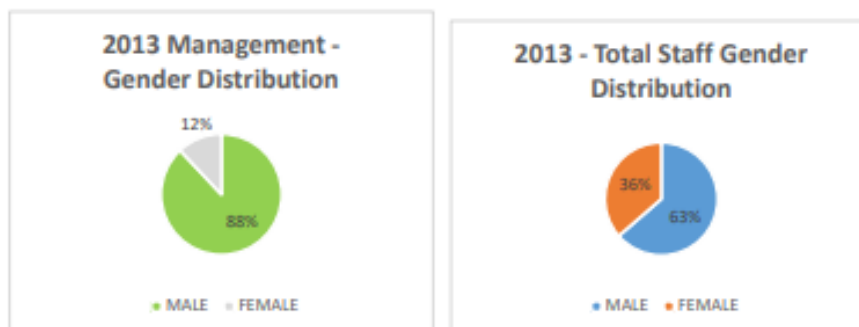
1. BAF Fees and Charges was gazetted in 2011 allowing BAF to start collecting revenue as per the regulation. Following implementation of the fees and charges for its services, the annual revenue for the Authority in 2011 was approximately \$2.7 million, \$5.4 million in 2012 and \$5.5 million in 2013
2. The Authority also invested in the purchase of 2 inbound baggage x-ray machines for the Nadi International Airport in 2013 and purchase of operational vehicles to assist with service delivery.
3. Installation of the x-ray machine in Nausori – the installation was done at the Nausori Airport in 2013
4. Strengthening border security to prevent introduction of exotic pest and disease. These activities cannot be achieved single handedly hence BAF embarked on working together in collaboration with other relevant bodies/agencies through the signing of Memorandums of Understanding (MOU)
 - BAF/Maritime Safety Authority of Fiji (MSAF)
 - BAF/Vuda Marina
 - BAF/AFL/FRCA on the installation and operation of the new L3 X-Ray machines

5. Detection of pest and diseases in imported cargo and vessels and successfully implementing mitigation measures to eliminate risk thus nil incursion of exotic pest and disease during the period.
6. In 2013 BAF officers alerted FRCA regarding one of the baggage screened which resulted in the interception of illegal currency of approximately FJD \$42,000.
7. Drug Interception - in 2013, BAF officers at Nadi Airport detected powder-like substance which resulted in a major drug interception with a total street value of approximately \$9.7million.
8. Termite Operations - with the end of "Operation Kadivuka" in mid-2011 BAF took on the responsibility of containing, controlling and treating AST through government assistance.

**D. Staff Gender Segregation
Management Gender Distribution 2011**



Total Number of Staff employed in 2012 was 122, from which 7 were temporary staff and 3 were Attachés and 112 were permanent staff.



Total number staff employed in 2013 was 133 from which 123 were permanent employees, 6 were temporary staffs and 4 were Attache's.

E. Financial Trend Analysis

1. Income Statement

The financial performance of a company is a crucial indicator of its overall health and growth trajectory. Analysing the revenue, expenditure, and resulting profit or loss over multiple years provides valuable insights into the business's financial stability and operational efficiency.

	2011	2012	2013
Revenue	5,186,341.00	8,382,975.00	7,326,448.00
Expenditure	5,622,654.00	5,965,805.00	5,664,771.00
Loss/ profit	-436,313.00	2,417,170.00	1,661,677.00
	-12%	66%	46%

The company's financial results from 2011 to 2013 reflect a significant shift.

In 2011, it experienced a loss of \$436,313. However, in 2012, the company turned around with a profit of \$2,417,170, and maintained profitability in 2013 with a further gain of \$1,661,677.

This trend indicates a strong recovery and positive financial performance over the three years. Between 2011 and 2013, BAF received a total of \$7 million in grants, with annual amounts of \$2.4 million in 2011, \$2.9 million in 2012, and \$1.7 million in 2013.

The company's revenue and expenditure trends from 2011 to 2013 show notable changes.

In 2011, revenue was \$5,186,341, while expenditure was slightly higher at \$5,622,654.

In 2012, revenue surged to \$8,382,975, with expenditure rising to \$5,965,805.

However, in 2013, revenue declined to \$7,326,448, while expenditure decreased to \$5,664,771.

Despite the drop in revenue in 2013, the company maintained a more stable expenditure level compared to the previous year.

2. Balance Sheet

A balance sheet is a fundamental financial statement that provides a snapshot of a company's financial position at a specific point in time. It outlines the company's assets, liabilities, and shareholders' equity.

Balance Sheet	2011	2012	2013
Assets	5,600,301.00	7,909,165.00	9,663,870.00
Liabilities	1,741,243.00	1,632,937.00	1,722,965.00
Net Asset	3,859,058.00	6,276,228.00	7,940,905.00
Capital and Reserves	3,859,058.00	6,276,228.00	7,940,905.00

The balance sheet data from 2011 to 2013 indicates a consistent growth in the company's total assets, which increased from \$5,600,301 in 2011 to \$9,663,870 in 2013. This upward trend reflects in assets may also indicate successful operational performance and possibly enhanced market presence

On the liabilities side, the company experienced a slight fluctuation. Liabilities decreased from \$1,741,243 in 2011 to \$1,632,937 in 2012 but then rose again to \$1,722,965 by 2013.

The capital and reserves section shows a healthy increase from \$3,859,058 in 2011 to \$7,940,905 in 2013. This growth signifies not only retained earnings but also an increase in shareholder equity.

3. Cash Flow

Cash Flow	2011	2012	2013
Cash flows from operating activities			
Receipts from government and for services provided	4,900,833.00	8,140,663.00	7,555,556.00
Payments to suppliers and employees	-3,938,037.00	- 5,709,551.00	- 5,244,451.00
Net Cash flow from operating Activities	962,796.00	2,431,112.00	2,311,105.00
Cash flows from investing activities			
Purchase of property, plant and equipment	-891,484.00	- 362,642.00	- 354,226.00
Net Cash flow from Investing Activities	-891,484.00	-362,642.00	-354,226.00
Net increase in Cash	71,312.00	2,068,470.00	1,956,879.00
Cash and cash equivalent beginning of the year	585,971.00	657,283.00	2,725,753.00
Cash and cash equivalent End of the year	657,283.00	2,725,753.00	4,682,632.00

Overall, the company has consistently generated positive cash flow from its operating activities and has invested in property and equipment over the years. Despite higher investments in the earlier years, the company experienced significant growth in its cash reserves, ending 2013 with a healthy cash balance.

F. Relevance to Sustainable Development Goals

SDG 1 - No Poverty

Biosecurity is integral to maintaining stable trade and protecting key economic sectors, including agriculture, forestry, and fisheries, from pests and diseases. By ensuring a biosecure environment, BAF helps sustain trade confidence and contributes to economic stability by preventing costly outbreaks that can affect agriculture sector and disrupt key industries. BAF continues to strengthen biosecurity surveillance and monitoring systems to prevent incursions of exotic pests and diseases that could affect Fiji's economic stability and promote confidence with international trade partners.

SDG 2 - Zero Hunger

One of the core function of Biosecurity is to protect Fiji from incursion of pest and disease that can affect agriculture sector and food security. Biosecurity facilitates trade of agricultural products to and from Fiji.

SDG 3 - Good Health and Well-being

Biosecurity protects introduction and spread of Zoonotic diseases which can affects both Animal and Human Being. By controlling spread of pest and disease into and within Fiji promotes less usage of pesticides by farmers.

SDG 5 - Gender Equality

In 2011 gender balance in BAF was 85% male to 15% female however currently we have 51% female and only 49% male staff.

SDG 8 - Decent work and Economic growth

Provides safe working environment and equal opportunities for everyone.

SDG 13 - Climate Action

Extreme weather events will affect food security, the adoptability and survival/dispersal of pest disease will immensely affect biodiversity.

SDG 17 - Partnerships for the Goals

BAF is instrumental in meeting international biosecurity standards, directly supporting Fiji's trade agreements and relationships. By collaborating with regional and international bodies, facilitates market access for Fijian agricultural produce. BAF continues to strengthen partnerships with international organizations such as the World Trade Organization (WTO) , Food and Agriculture Organization(FAO), International Plant Protection Conventions (IPPC) and regional bodies like the Pacific Plant Protection Organization (PPPO) to ensure compliance with global and regional biosecurity standards, thereby fostering international and regional cooperation.

G. Current Challenges

1. Staff Retention – staff members are resigning and joining other organization for better pay and benefits.
2. Fees and Charges regulations not reviewed since its inception in 2011. Cost of operation has increased but our fees & charges remained same.
3. Maintaining pest and disease status with current resources is challenging as emerging pest and diseases are present in country we are regularly trading with.
4. Emergency Declarations approvals from the Government is mostly delayed which can result in spread of regulated pest and diseases.
5. Trying to compile years of Financials and getting it Audited

H. Future Outlook

1. Technological and Process advancement in BAF.

Technological advancements are critical for enhancing efficiency, accuracy, and responsiveness in managing biosecurity risks. Example upgrading x ray machines, establishment of K9 units,

Implementation of Enterprise resource planning (ERP) - use to manage day-to-day business activities such as accounting, procurement, project management, risk management and compliance, and supply chain operations

2. Financials to be current.

The Biosecurity Authority of Fiji is actively working towards updating its financial records for all prior years and transitioning them to the current financial period. This process aims to ensure that all past financial transactions are accurately reflected and aligned with the present fiscal year, enabling more effective financial management, transparency, and accountability.

2014 to 2018 audits are completed and submitted to line Ministry while OAG is finalizing 2019 report. KPMG is engaged to prepare 2020 to 2024 financials and as soon as we receive financials from KPMG this will be submitted to OAG. If we continue at current trend we are looking at first quarter 2026 for all financials to be current.

3. Review of Fees and Charges

The review of revenue and charges is crucial, particularly as some services are not currently reflected in the fees and charges structure. By conducting this review, the Biosecurity Authority of Fiji (BAF) can ensure that all services provided are appropriately charges to reflect their value and the costs associated with them. This review will help cater for the increasing demands on BAF operations, ensuring sufficient funding to support growing responsibilities, improve service delivery, enhance biosecurity measures and to conduct job evaluation exercise. Additionally, updating the revenue and charges framework will enable BAF to remain sustainable and responsive to emerging biosecurity threads and become sustainable as commercial statutory authority.

Additional Information



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CLARIFICATION TO THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND DEFENCE

If underground baitings are used during fumigation by FLICK and was FLICK Pests chosen through tender process? What is the relationship between the Termite Taskforce and BAF? What are some of the challenges encountered with the Taskforce spearheading the operations? What is recommended by BAF, we understand that during our Lautoka visit, the Committee was briefed that such operations should be spearheaded by BAF (if we can be provided with some context, please).

BAF as the mandated authority under the Biosecurity Act of 2008 to manage pests and diseases that threaten agricultural production, biodiversity, and the economy. This includes controlling the AST and objectives for the program include:

1. Reduce the long-term spread and impact of termites.
2. Protect key economic sectors such as agriculture and forestry.

Termite Taskforce

The Termites Taskforce is a multi-stakeholder committee consisting of the Government, private sector entities including BAF and stakeholders that focuses on:

1. Immediate containment of termite outbreaks to minimize their economic impacts and reduce damage to households.
2. Assist affected homeowners through provision of subsidies and grants.

BAF has been engaged with the Termite Taskforce, providing updates on termite distribution, infestation severity, and population data.

Under the Termite Control Assistance Program (TCAP), BAF has received 4,077 applications, all of which undergo verification to confirm AST infestations. To date, 775 verified applicants have received grants and have undergone baiting treatment by Flick Hygiene.

Analysis of Baiting Methodologies

Termite baits are used as both curative and preventative measures against subterranean termites and have been shown to eliminate colonies. The active ingredients of most termite baits are **Insect Growth Inhibitors (IGR)** which cause mortality in the workers when they return to the nest to molt and spreads through the colony through trophallaxis. Over time, the colony collapses and is presumed eliminated.

	BAF Baiting	Taskforce baiting
Aspect	In-Ground Termite Bait	Above-Ground Termite Bait
	BAF (Trelona and Sentricon)	Termites Taskforce (Chlorfluazuron - Exterminex)
Placement	Installed below ground level, typically around the structure or property.	Placed directly on active termite galleries or infested surfaces.
Target Area	Effective for intercepting subterranean termites traveling through soil.	Targets termites already active in a specific area above ground.

Installation	Requires digging and placement in soil, often along a perimeter.	Directly attached to areas with visible termite activity.
Effectiveness	Proactive, intercepting termites before they reach the structure.	Reactive, directly impacting known infestations.
Time to Impact	May take longer to attract termites as it relies on foraging behaviour.	Immediate exposure to termites present in the infestation zone.
Usage Environment	Suitable for areas with high termite foraging activity in the soil.	Ideal for indoor or above-ground infestations in accessible locations.
Durability	Can withstand environmental conditions like moisture and heat for longer periods.	More prone to environmental factors like heat, humidity, and physical damage.
Application Objective	Preventative and long-term management.	Curative, targeting immediate infestations.

Both the strategies complement each other well, with BAF providing long-term, preventive control and Termites Taskforce offering rapid intervention for active infestations.

Funding

Taskforce

During the national budget announcement, the Termite Taskforce was allocated a \$3 million grant for the 2023–2024 financial year. This funding was initially targeted for homeowner rehabilitation grants, offering \$2,000 to households with a combined income of \$30,000–\$50,000 and \$5,000 to those earning less than \$30,000 annually. However, recognizing the necessity for a more comprehensive approach, the budget was later adjusted to include funding for awareness campaigns and baiting.

During the 2024–2025 financial year, the Termite Taskforce was allocated an additional \$2 million grant to further support the homeowner assistance program. This funding aimed to build on the progress made in baiting and rehabilitation.

BAF

\$300,000 was allocated in the 2023–2024 financial year, supplemented by \$361,918 for the Termite Control Assistance Program (TCAP) and an additional \$345,000.00 in the 2024–25 financial year. Funds have been used to procure baits, recruit personnel, and cover operational costs.

WAY FORWARD

a) Baiting

The most effective termite management strategy may involve a combination of both approaches, utilizing in-ground baiting for broader, more sustainable control and above-ground baiting for immediate containment in infested areas. Additionally, BAF to be provided with funding to continue with;

Tree injection or flooding that involves injecting or pouring large volumes of liquid insecticide into pre-drilled tree trunks, effectively targeting termites in the nest, including the reproductive and brood. This method provides a rapid solution, potentially eliminating the colony within days.

Trap-and-treat baiting that relies on bait stations filled with insecticide-laced cellulose materials. Termites consume the bait and transfer it to the colony

b) Long Term Management and containment.

Conduct surveys to determine areas of spread and addressing Asian Subterranean Termites (AST) by setting bait stations along the outer boundaries (alert and buffer zones) and gradually moving inward. This technique will drive the termites toward the central infestation area, thereby reducing their spread to wider regions.

Selection of Flick Pest Hygiene by Taskforce

Flick Hygiene was selected by the taskforce through the tender process.

The Committee was informed that there are Emergency Declarations for Asian Subterranean Termites, American Iguana, Taro Beetle, and Fruit Flies. Mr. Pratap had mentioned that given those applications for renewal of Emergency Declarations get delayed with the government (with 6 months restrictions and subject to renewal), if consideration be given for such infested areas be declared under "Infested Biosecurity Control Areas" as there is no indefinite timeframe given - this is in accordance with the Biosecurity Promulgation 2008 section 70, if we can also be provided with some context, please.

Emergency Declaration

Emergency Declaration is used to prevent spread of pest and disease from infested area to non-infested areas as per section 77 of Biosecurity Act 2008.

BAF uses emergency declarations in order to reduce the spread of animal and plant pest /diseases such as AST, Brucellosis, Tuberculosis, Fruit flies, and American Foulbrood etc. The Emergency Declarations limits the movement of these pest and host materials from infested area to non-infested areas. The validity of Emergency Declarations is for a period of 6 months after which it requires for further extension for another 6 months.

Infested Biosecurity Controlled Areas

Infested Biosecurity Controlled Areas are regulated by Section 70 and 71 of the Biosecurity Act 2008.

Infested Biosecurity Controlled Areas will be used for long term management and containment efforts compared to Biosecurity Emergency Declarations which is only effective for a period of 6 months.

Using Infested Biosecurity Controlled Areas Orders, movement controls will be in place until the same is revoked. Thus, the risk of movement occurring during a lapse in the Biosecurity Emergency Declarations will not be an issue.

BAF has realized that AST only present in certain parts of west and Labasa, Fruitfly (Kiriki) – present in Rotuma) and Taro Beetle (present in mainland Viti Lavu, Koro Islands should be moved to long term management as eradication is not possible thus have submitted request through SGs office for consideration.

Request for declaration has been made to SG's office waiting for declaration. We continued to follow up and recently was informed that the Orders were left at that last stage of the drafting when the Officer in Charge left the SG's office for further studies. The Drafts were then delegated to another staff member who is in the process of finalizing orders before sent for publishing.

The Committee was informed that there is no legislation requiring vessels entering Fiji Waters to activate their Automatic Identification System (AIS), which display real time ship positions and details and proposing that the Biosecurity Promulgation 2008 be amended to address the issue - also provide some context to this, please.

Automatic Identification System" or "AIS" means an automatic tracking system used on ships for identifying and locating ships by electronically exchanging data with other nearby ships, land based AIS base stations, and satellites as a primary means for collision avoidance and assist in situational awareness;

The International Maritime Organization and other management bodies require large ships, including many commercial fishing vessels and small crafts, to broadcast their position with AIS.

Fiji Navy and Maritime Safety Authority of Fiji (MSAF) have land based AIS device to track movement of international vessel if vessel AIS system is on.

The national legislation to enforce this requirement is currently in draft form and responsible agency in Fiji is MSAF. *Maritime (Automatic Identification System for Ships) Regulations 2017* is still in draft form and MSAF is in the process of finalizing and submitting for enactment.

While in Fiji waters when vessels switch off AIS their whereabouts and movement cannot be tracked. AIS regulations in Fiji will enforce and ensure vessels do not switch off AIS without any valid reasons or approvals.

BAF is a member of Maritime Safety Committee which provides a mechanism for cooperation between maritime agencies to identify and combat domestic, national and international illegal activities within Fiji's EEZ by taking advantage and acknowledging each agency's strengths, and objectives.

That there be a clear separation of authorities on the core roles of BAF, as a regulator, under the Ministry of Agriculture. The Committee proposes that BAF be allowed to carry out its operations without any interference from the Ministry of Agriculture—please provide justification.

The Biosecurity Authority of Fiji (BAF) was established under the Biosecurity Act of December 2008. It is a Commercial Statutory Authority under the Public Enterprise Act 2019.

In January 2025, the Fiji Cabinet approved the reorganization of the Biosecurity Authority of Fiji (BAF).

a) endorsed the delisting of the Biosecurity Authority of Fiji as a Public Enterprise from the Public Enterprises Act 2019; and

b) agreed that the Biosecurity Authority of Fiji be reassigned as a statutory body reporting to the Minister responsible for Agriculture.

While BAF management was not consulted prior to reorganization the reason given for re-organization is to improve efficiency, intended to improve resource use, stakeholder collaboration, and outbreak response.

BAF to remain as statutory body in current form and only change in Minister responsible is fine provided it continues to execute its functions independently. Stringent measures implemented by BAF has managed to maintain countries freedom from many exotic pest and disease present in our neighboring countries and countries we are regularly trading with.


The Ministry of Agriculture often promotes agricultural development, while BAF acts as a regulator. This dual role could present a conflict of interest when both the regulatory (biosecurity) and promotional (agricultural development) roles are managed by the same Ministry. Keeping a distinct independence by the decision makers in the Ministry will allow the biosecurity decisions to be impartial and not influenced by agricultural production priorities.


The Ministry of Agriculture has an essential role in promoting agriculture and maximizing output. However, these priorities may at times conflict with the stringent regulations and enforcement actions required for biosecurity. For example, promoting agricultural exports might be at odds with strict quarantine measures that protect against pest invasions.

Maintaining BAF as a semi-autonomous entity ensures that biosecurity decisions are made without conflict of interest, balancing Fiji's economic growth with the imperative of protecting Fiji's unique biodiversity and facilitating trade to and from Fiji.

RE: Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence Request for Clarification - AIS Legislation

😊 Reply ↩️ Reply All

 Iliseva Raibe Karusi <ikarusi@msaf.com.fj>
To: Susana Korovou
Cc: Legal; Elesi Waiwalu; Isqereqeretabua@gmail.com; MSAF CEO; Repeka Varasikete; Tui Kilakila

 Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence Request for Clarification - AIS Legislation.pdf
233 KB

Dear Mrs Korovou,

With reference to the above subject and your email received on Tuesday 4th March, please find attached MSAFs response to your email as per the email thread below.

Respectfully submitted.

kind regards

Iliseva R Karusi [Ms] | PA - CEO

Maritime Safety Authority of Fiji
P O Box 326 | Suva | Fiji Islands.
414 Victoria Parade | Level 4, Kadavu House | Suva | Republic of Fiji.

P: (679) 3315266 Mobile: (679) 7706 332



From: Susana Korovou <susana_korovou@legislature.gov.fj>
Sent: Tuesday, 4 March 2025 4:29 pm
To: MSAF CEO <ceo@msaf.com.fj>
Cc: Iliseva Raibe Karusi <ikarusi@msaf.com.fj>; Legal <Legal@msaf.com.fj>; Elesi Waiwalu <elesi.waiwalu@legislature.gov.fj>; Isqereqeretabua@gmail.com
Subject: Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence Request for Clarification - AIS Legislation

Bula Vinaka Mr. Cawaki,

I hope this email finds you well.

The Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence is currently reviewing the Biosecurity Authority of Fiji 2011-2013 Annual Report for tabling next week during the Sitting of Parliament. During its review process, the Committee was informed that the national legislation to enforce this requirement is currently in draft form with MSAF.

To ensure that we provide fact-based information to Parliament, an update from MSAF on the above issue would be appreciated. Additionally, please provide information on the relevance of AIS, the current arrangements in place, the challenges faced, and what Parliament could do to improve this service.

I look forward to your response and the requested update from MSAF. Your timely input will be greatly appreciated as we prepare to table the report in Parliament next week.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Kind regards,



6th March 2025.

MS 02/13/25

(By email: susana.korovou@legislature.gov.fj)

Mrs Susana J. Korovou,
Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence
Legislative Services Division
Parliament of Republic of Fiji
SUVA.

Dear Madam,

RE: STANDING COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND DEFENCE REQUEST FOR CLARIFICATIONS – AIS LEGISLATION

Reference is made to the above and to your email dated 4th March 2025.

Pursuant to your queries, kindly note the following:

1. The current maritime laws (Maritime Transport Act 2013 and Ship Registration Act 2013) do not expressly address Automated Identification System (AIS) and or require its activation on ships
2. The Maritime (Fiji Maritime Code) Regulations 2014 briefly addresses AIS but not as a full framework
3. There is a draft AIS Regulation and its framework that Maritime Safety Authority of Fiji (MSAF) had submitted to our line Ministry of Public Works, Meteorological Services and Transport in 2022 for onward process to the Solicitor General's office and Cabinet eventually
4. MSAF has continually followed up with the line Ministry on the progress and push through for the draft AIS Regulations.

In terms of assistance on improvement of the service, MSAF kindly recommends and request for the improvement in the efficiency of legislative processes currently in place for implementation and amendments of our laws. This facilitation will greatly assistance in seeing crucial legislation such as the AIS be implemented.

Should you have any queries, do not hesitate to contact the undersigned on mobile number 7706335 or on email address ceo@msaf.com or Mr. Tui Kilakila on email address tkilakila@msaf.com.fj.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Joweli Cawaki', is written over a dotted line.

CMDR. JOWELI CAWAKI
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

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Images Taken During the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs Site Visit to the Biosecurity Authority of Fiji from Monday, February 10th – Friday, February 14th, 2025.

Day 1 – Monday 10 February 2025

As part of its review of the Biosecurity Authority of Fiji's 2011–2013 Annual Report, the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence commenced its site visits. These visits allowed the Committee to observe the operations of the Biosecurity Authority of Fiji firsthand, including a briefing at the Headquarters and a tour of the Suva Wharf (Port of Entry).

BAF – Headquarters



Suva Wharf (Port of Entry)



Day 2 – Tuesday 11 February 2025

The Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence continued its site visits in Nadi, beginning at the Biosecurity Authority of Fiji – Nadi International Airport, followed by a visit to Port Denarau.

Nadi International Airport



Port Denarau



Day 3 – Wednesday 12 February 2025

The Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence continued its site visits to the Legalega Jack's Farm, Vuda Marina, Lautoka Port of Entry and also Tavakubu where they visited a household infested with termites.

Legalega Jack's Farm



Vuda Marina



Lautoka Port of Entry



Day 4 – Thursday 13 February 2025

The Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence continued its site visits with a brief meeting with officials from the Biosecurity Authority of Fiji at the Copra Shed in Savusavu. The day wrapped up with a visit to the Nawi Island Marina, where the Committee was briefed on the Marina's operations.

Copra Shed, Savusavu



Nawi Island Marina, Savusavu



Day 5 – Friday 14 February 2025 (Last Day of Site Visit)

The Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence continued its site visit in Qamea, Taveuni to assess the critical situation concerning the Giant Invasive Iguana (GII). The Committee was briefed on the operations of the Biosecurity Authority of Fiji (BAF) particularly in the controlling and managing of the GII population in Taveuni.

The day ended with a Talanoa Session with Farmers and Exporters regarding challenges encountered and how these challenges can be addressed to enhance market trade.

Qamea, Taveuni



This island, referred to as "New York City" by Biosecurity Officials, is where the Giant Invasive Iguanas currently roam.



The **Giant Invasive Iguana (GII)** is an Invasive Alien Species (IAS) in Fiji. They are generally herbivores and if the numbers are left unchecked, food sustainability in Fijian villages will be at risk in the near future. The Biosecurity Authority of Fiji (BAF) has been quick to recognize the possible effects of this invasion and making it illegal and punishable by large fines to transport the GII between the islands across Fiji. In order to stop the spread of GII, our Government is committed to eradicating it.



Talanoa Session with Farmers and Exporters regarding challenges encountered and how these challenges can be addressed to enhance market trade

