



STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL AFFAIRS

Consolidated Review Report of the Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport 2017-2018 and 2018-2019 Annual Report



PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI
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CHAIRPERSON’S FOREWORD

I am pleased to present the Standing Committee on Social Affairs report on *the Consolidated Review of the Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport Annual Report 2017-2018 and 2018-2019*.

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

The Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport is responsible for policy formulation, planning, design, regulatory, coordination and implementation of programs, projects for Infrastructural Work in Energy, Works, Water and Sewerage, Building & Government Architects, the Divisional Engineers and Fiji Meteorological Services. The Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport also provide policy and legislative oversight for the Fiji Roads Authority, Water Authority of Fiji, Energy Fiji Limited and Maritime Safety Authority of Fiji.

The vision of the Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport is achieved through policy & regulation, strategic insight, research, information management, project design and implementation in the field of infrastructure (water, sanitation, energy, buildings, roads) and meteorological services.

The Committee in its deliberations highlighted some major concerns within the departments of the Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport, and accomplishments. The Committee commends the Ministry on the different sector plans that are in line with the National Development Plan.

I sincerely thank Mr Paula Baleilevuka, the Permanent Secretary – for Ministry of Public Works, Transport and Meteorological Services and staff for their valuable contributions to this review process.

Finally, I thank the Hon. Members of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, Hon. Ratu Rakuita Vakalalabure, Hon. Alipate Tuicolo, Hon. Viam Pillay and Hon Praveen Bala. for their invaluable input and support. I also would like to thank Hon. Jone Usamate for the assistance rendered on several occasions as an alternate member.

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



.....
Hon. Iliesa Vanawalu
Chairperson

ACRONYM

PWD	Public Works Department
EFL	Energy Fiji Limited
MSAF	Maritime Safety Authority Fiji
NDP	National Development plan
WAF	Water Authority of Fiji
DWS	Department of Water and Sewerage
FRA	Fiji Roads Authority
OMRS	Open Merit Recruitment System
GCSA	Government Commercial Statutory Authority
FMS	Fiji Meteorological Services

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

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

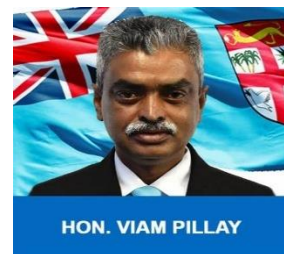
The Members of Committee are:



Chairperson
Government Member



Deputy Chairperson
Government Member



Member
Opposition Member



Member
Government Member



Member
Opposition Member

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport Annual Reports 2017-2018 and 2018-2019 was tabled in Parliament on 15th March 2024, and referred to the Standing Committee on Social Affairs pursuant to Standing Order 109 (2) (b).

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

1.1. Committee Procedures

Deliberations on the Consolidated Reports commenced in March 2025. The Committee read the reports, prepared questions and seek clarifications on key issues of interest, from the Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport.

The Committee held a Public Submission with the Ministry of Public Works, Transport and Meteorological Services on 10th April 2025. The Committee held further consultation with Energy Fiji Ltd on 18th June 2025 and Maritime Safety Authority of Fiji on 24th June 2025.

Upon receipt of all pertinent information pertaining to the Committee's queries, which was subsequently endorsed on 26th June 2025.

The Committee received responses from the Ministry of Public Works, Transport and Meteorological Services, which can be viewed at the following link <https://www.parliament.gov.fj/committees/standing-committee-on-social-affairs/>

2.0 COMMITTEE DELIBERATION AND ANALYSIS

2.1 Introduction

The Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport is committed to optimising national infrastructure and ensuring that infrastructure investments deliver inclusive benefits for all the people of Fiji. Whether it is building new infrastructure or making key investments to upgrade Fiji's schools, hospital, roads, bridges, and transit, Fiji needs to make strategic investments efficiently across government by prioritizing infrastructure activities and unlocking existing opportunities.

The Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport, together with its various departments and statutory authorities, work to manage the network of Fijian Infrastructure, which has vastly expanded over the past decade. This network of roads, bridges, ports, jetties, and service infrastructure is critical to the well-being of the Fijian people and for the nation's economic development, and the Fijian Government is committed to ensuring reasonable access to reliable infrastructure and essential services for every citizen.

In supporting Fiji's long term development agenda, the Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport in its strategic planning and policy aspect of infrastructure development and transport management, where a particular focus is placed on ensuring equitable access to service and infrastructure for Fijians in rural and maritime regions.

The following departments of the Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport provides the mandated services:

➤ Department of Finance and Administration

The Department is responsible for the Human Resources administration, capacity development and training for staffs, Strategic Planning, policy administration and monitoring Health and Safety assurance. During the period civil service reforms initiatives were introduced which include guidelines providing a holistic approach of service delivery.

➤ Department of Transport

The Department of Infrastructure, Transport & Policy, provides advisory role in strengthening of capabilities of Government to better co-ordinate transport planning and monitor policy and developments in the transport sector. DITP is mandated to advice on strategic planning issues and foster co-ordination as guided by the inputs from the external reference group comprising of key representatives in the transport sector.

➤ **Department of Buildings and Government Architect**

The Department of Buildings & Government Architect is responsible for the provision of professional advice through consulting services, conceptual designing, quality architectural and structural drawings, project planning and management, costing and scheduling through quantity surveying, programming and monitoring from project inception, administrative of tenders and contracts for capital works.

➤ **Department of Energy**

The main objective of the Department of Energy is to have a resource-efficient, cost effective and environmentally sustainable energy sector in Fiji, DOE intends to achieve this through providing an enabling environment that will facilitate the provision of sustainable energy sector and ensure access to affordable, reliable, modern & resilient energy services to all Fijians.

➤ **Department of Water and Sewerage**

The Department of Water and sewerage is responsible for providing professional advice on policies and strategies for water and sanitation, development of policy framework for technical and economic regulations for water supply, sanitation and water services in rural areas and coordination of water sector activities and policies with other sectors of the economy and international bodies. The Water Authority of Fiji is the statutory body that works in consultation with the Department in terms of water supply and sanitation management in urban and rural areas.

➤ **Department of Works**

The Department comprises of the three main Divisional Offices – Divisional Engineer Works Central/Eastern (DEWCE), Western (DEWW) and Northern (DEWN). The Divisional offices are responsible for the construction, maintenance and operation related to public buildings, mechanical engineering and electrical services throughout Fiji.

➤ **Fiji Metrological Services**

- 1 Fiji Meteorological Service continues to expand its services and capabilities, especially in response to the increasing frequency and severity of extreme weather events, such as tropical cyclones, flooding, droughts, heavy rainfall and coastal inundation. Some key responsibilities undertaken are as follows
 - Weather Forecasting and Warnings sections provides daily weather updates and warnings on cyclones, floods, and other severe weather events. These forecasts are essential for public safety, tourism sector, aviation safety, agriculture, and shipping and many more.
 - Fiji Metrological Services works closely with other Pacific nations to coordinate disaster response and share meteorological data, as regional

coordination which is part of the regional climate and meteorological network.

- Fiji Meteorological Services through its public education program and social media platform ensures that the entire population is informed about weather threats, especially regarding tropical cyclones and extreme weather events.

The Social Affairs Committee made the site visits to the following organisation

Date	Organisation	Location
7.05.2025	Fiji Meteorological Services HQ	Nadi
14.05.2025	Vaturekuka Maintenance Work (Ministry of Infrastructure & Transport)	Labasa
	Vatunibale Maintenance Work (Ministry of Infrastructure & Transport)	Labasa
16.05.2025	Lea Upgrade Road Navatu, Cakaudrove (Ministry of Infrastructure & Transport)	Savusavu

3.0 KEY FINDINGS

3.1 Department of Transport

- 3.11 Sea Route Licencing consultation is still in progress.
- 3.12 The Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport was unable to replace all Government shipping vessels damaged during Tropical Cyclone Winston due to Budget constraints.
- 3.13 The National Transport Consultative Forum and National Transport Sector Plan are providing a better approach to address the congestion issues around main cities especially in Lami - Suva - Nausori corridor.
- 3.14 Some temporary houses have been built on areas that is earmarked for future Development Routes to ease congestion and open access.
- 3.15 That overloading of vehicles has led to a lot of the damage on roads around Fiji. The Committee has noted that the LTA has been enforcing penalties on overloaded vehicles.
- 3.16 A Singaporean consultant was engaged by the Government of Fiji, to prepare Master plan for road upgrade between Lami - Suva - Nausori corridor.
- 3.17 Fiji Roads Authority is not aware of any Singaporean Consultant engaged by the Government to prepare Master Plan.

3.2 Department of Buildings and Government Architect

- 3.21 There is lack of proper supervision by qualified personnel overseeing the maintenance and building undertaken by private contractors. This is reflected in the poor workmanship and quality of work undertaken in many government projects.
- 3.22 There is lack of experienced and qualified locals to undertake building projects. Furthermore, it is further hampered by the system of short-term contracts used to secure project workers.

3.3 Department of Finance & Administration

- 3.31 The Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport believes that it will be able to perform its functions better if the fiscal year reverts back to the calendar year as the “Wet Season” generally runs from November to April.
- 3.32 The 2018-2019 fiscal year was a challenge for the Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport due to the two natural disasters namely Tropical Cyclone Keni and Tropical Cyclone Sarai.

- 3.33 The Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport had an unqualified financial report for 2018-2019 after having had a qualified report for the 2017-2018 fiscal year.

3.4 Department of Energy

- 3.41 Energy Fiji Ltd encounters challenges, including skilled worker migration, supply chain issues, land acquisition and a shortage of electrical contractors.

3.5 Department of Water and Sanitation

- 3.51 The new Integrated Water Resources Management Implementation Plan is aligned with the National Development Plan 2024–2029. This Plan presents a well-defined approach to managing the water sector, cutting across three different Ministries.

3.6 Fiji Meteorological Services

- 3.61 The Committee noted that the Fiji Meteorological Services has Human Resources issues that are affecting its performance. This includes non-payment of housing
- 3.62 There is a need to maintain the access to and upkeep of hydrometric stations around Fiji. This is particularly critical given that most damage in Fiji arises out of floods.
- 3.63 The Committee noted with appreciation the commencement of the construction of the new Regional Training Centre and Regional Instrument Centre in Nadi, which will provide services to all regional countries. Such services are currently provided only in Australia, New Zealand, USA and some Asian countries.

4.0 RECOMMENDATION

The Committee recommends the following:

Department of Transport

- 4.1 The Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport must prioritise and complete the Sea Route licencing consultation to improve effective services in the maritime zone.
- 4.2 The Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport should invest in new ships to improve service in Maritime zone and provide increase funding to repair damaged vessel during Tropical cyclone Winston.
- 4.3 The Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport to work closely with private ship owners and provide incentives to upgrade and buy new vessel.
- 4.4 The Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport to conduct National Transport Consultative Forum where stakeholders should assist in developing a new National Transport Sector Plan within its given timeline.
- 4.5 The Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport to work closely with all stakeholders, to relocate those residents who resides in the subject area which is earmarked for road development.
- 4.6 The Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport should ensure that LTA, to have more weighbridges at strategic location across the country to address the overloading issues.
- 4.7 Fiji Roads Authority should not duplicate the work being carried out by the Singaporean Consultant.

Department of Building and Government Architect

- 4.8 The Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport, through its newly established Public Works Department, must monitor and supervise all the maintenance and building projects undertaken by private contractors.
- 4.9 That the Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport should enhance its Apprenticeship program and liaise with tertiary institutions in Fiji to upskill and upgrade the knowledge of our locals.

Department of Finance & Administration

- 4.10 That the Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport should consult with Ministry of Finance, on their difficulties in carrying out their work, under the current financial year, in terms of unfavourable weather.
- 4.11 That the Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport must align its strategic plan towards effective use of its facilities and human resources, to overcome the effects of natural disasters.
- 4.12 That the Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport must improve and rectify all its financial issues that were raised by the Auditor General in the 2017-2018 financial report.

Department of Energy

- 4.13 That the Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport ensures that Energy Fiji Ltd must adopt a holistic approach by addressing its HR Issues, where skilled worker migration could be retained, while the procurement unit should be more proactive in managing the supply chain.

Department of Water and Sanitation

- 4.14 That the Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport should aligns all its water related policies with the National Development Plan 2024–2029.

Fiji Meteorological Services

- 4.15 That the Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport must increase its budget allocation to accommodate the Human Resources issues affecting the Fiji Meteorological Service.
- 4.16 That the Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport must provide Fiji Meteorological Services with adequate transport to run their operation effectively.
- 4.17 That the Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport must invest in hydrometric stations around Fiji with more technological advancements.
- 4.18 That the Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport must work closely with key development partners namely JICA to complete the Regional Training Centre which will become the regional hub.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS AND GENDER ANALYSIS:

Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport SDG

SDG	KEY CONTRIBUTION	Details
SDG 6 - Clean Water and Sanitation	Rural Water Supply Programme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue Monitoring the Grants provided to Water Authorities for managing access of clean water and sanitation to urban and rural communities. Expanded access to safe and clean water in rural and maritime communities. Over 150 rural water schemes maintained and improved since 2023. Partnerships with donor agencies (e.g., EU, DFAT, UNDP) to upgrade reticulation systems and increase household water connections.
	Sewerage and Sanitation Upgrades	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improvement of septic systems and sewage reticulation in peri-urban areas. Ongoing scoping and design for future wastewater treatment solutions The 2050 Water Strategy has provided a clear direction on where the Government through the Ministry will move Water Sector forward.
	National Rural Water and Sanitation Management Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This policy is currently being developed by the Department of Water in consultation with relevant agencies to map out the management of rural water and sanitation.
SDG 7 - Affordable and clean energy	National Rural Electrification Programme (NREP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expanded solar home systems and mini-grid electrification projects. Over 3,500 households newly connected since 2022. Installation of hybrid systems in maritime zones to reduce diesel reliance
	Supply and Installation of Solar Home Systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This project is being implemented yearly and will enhance energy access for households in some of our most remote areas, promoting safer, cleaner, and more reliable lighting for homes

		and small businesses. Over 10,000 families have been assisted through this programme.
	EFL Grid Extension Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Progress has also been made under the Rural Electrification Grid Extension Program whereby the Department of Energy work closely with Energy Fiji Limited (EFL) to extend the grid network to rural communities and settlements.
SDG 8 - Sustainable cities and communities	Reestablishment of Public Works Department (PWD)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Government, through the Ministry of Public Works, Meteorological Services and Transport, aims to re-establish the Public Works Department (PWD) to effectively manage and deliver rural infrastructure services. These services include the construction and maintenance of rural roads, water and sanitation systems, energy infrastructure and government buildings and quarters in particularly those under the management of the Public Service Commission, both in rural areas and urban centres.
	Infrastructure for Public Services:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ongoing construction and maintenance of government buildings, health facilities, schools, and quarters across urban and rural areas. Design emphasis on accessibility, resilience, and efficient land use.
SDG 13 - Climate Action	Meteorological and Climate Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continued enhancement of weather forecasting, early warning systems, and disaster risk reduction tools. Real-time hydrological and meteorological monitoring installed in high-risk zones.
	Hydrology and Flood Management:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recruitment of hydrologists and technical staff to improve catchment modelling and flood early warning.






		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expansion of rainfall and river monitoring networks.
	Energy Sector Climate Adaptation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shift toward decentralized, renewable energy solutions to improve climate resilience in isolated communities. • Promotes reduced emissions and enhanced energy security

6.0 CONCLUSION

The Committee after having reviewed the Consolidated Reports of Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport 2017 – 2019 and is of the opinion that the directions and plans set by the Ministry is on track to achieve its intended goals.

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. Alipate Tuicolo Member	
Hon. Viam Pillay Member	
Hon. Parveen Bala Member	
Date: 26 th June, 2025	

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/>

[VERBATIM REPORT]

STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL AFFAIRS

ANNUAL REPORTS

SUBMISSION: Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport 2017-2018 and
2018-2019 Annual Reports

VENUE: Big Committee Room, Government Buildings, Suva

DATE: Thursday, 10th April, 2025

VERBATIM REPORT OF THE MEETING OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL AFFAIRS HELD IN THE BIG COMMITTEE ROOM ON THURSDAY, 10th APRIL, 2025 AT 9.57 A.M.

Interviewee/Submittee: **Ministry of Public Works, Transport and Meteorological Services 2017-2018 and 2018-2019 Annual Reports**

In Attendance:

(1) Mr. Paula Baleilevuka	-	Permanent Secretary
(2) Mr. George Tavo	-	Deputy Secretary
(3) Mr. Nemani Waqanivalu	-	Director Water and Sewerage Sector
(4) Mr. Samuela Tamani	-	Accountant
(5) Mr. Andrew Pene	-	Director for Department of Building and Government Architect
(6) Mr. Alipate Mataivilia	-	Manager Policy, Project Management
(7) Mr. Waisale Vulagi	-	Department of Energy
(8) Mr. Jeke Pai	-	Department of Energy
(9) Mr. Joji Wata	-	Department of Energy
(10) Mr Kitione Rokosuka	-	Divisional Engineer Western
(11) Ms. Marica Ratuki	-	Divisional Engineer Central

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable members, secretariat, a very good morning to you all and it is a pleasure to welcome everyone to this public hearing session. At the outset for information purposes pursuant to Standing Order 111 of the Standing Order of Parliament. All committee meetings are to be open to the public. Therefore, please note that this submission is open to the public and the media and will be aired live via the Parliament channel and the *Walesi* platform and will be streamlined live on Parliament Facebook.

For any sensitive information concerning the matter before us this morning that cannot be disclosed in public, this can be provided to the committee either in private or in writing. However, please be advised that pursuant to Standing Order 111 there are only a few specific circumstances that allow for non-disclosure and this includes

- national security matters,
- third party confidential information,
- personnel of human resources,
- and matters, and committee deliberations and developments of committee's recommendations, likewise as our reports.

This is a parliamentary meeting, and all information gathered is covered under the Parliamentary Power and Privilege Act. However, please bear in mind that we do not condone slander or libel of any sort, and any information brought before this committee should be based on facts. In terms of protocol of this committee meeting, please minimise the usage of mobile phone and all mobile phones to be on silent mode while the meeting is in progress. I wish to also remind honourable members and our guests that were here this morning that all questions asked are to be addressed through the chair. Please note that two of our committee members are not present for today's submission and I now give the floor to the members to introduce themselves.

(Committee members introduction)

MR CHAIRMAN. - Today the committee will be hearing submission from the Ministry of Public Works, Meteorological Service and Transport. This is in relation to the ministry's annual reports for year 2017-2018 and 2018-2019. Please also note that if there are any questions from the members of the committee, we may interject, or we will wait till the end of your presentation to ask our questions.

(Introduction of representatives from the Ministry of Public Works, Transport and Meteorological Services)

MR. BALEILEVUKA.- As you can see, we are a very big team. I just want to say, sir, that we appreciate the conversation this morning. We apologise for the delay in the response from the ministry. I think most of us in this team were not actually in the ministry during this period - 2017, 2018, 2018, 2019. However, we are pleased to see honourable Praveen Bala, who is here. I believe he is probably in a better position to respond to some of the questions that are raised in the report. The events that have taken place during this period, we are trying to address them now. So, our response is probably what is going to be happening now to address some of the challenges that were. Most of the answers to the questions are actually in the report themselves. So, if there are further clarifications that honourable members would like for clarity, we are here to clarify those based on what we are planning to do now to improve. The performance of the ministry.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- PS and the team, it will be better that we go through the question in terms of this. We have gone through the response that is with us. It is a normal procedure that we have to go through again for the betterment of the public that are watching us here. You may commence, PS? Very brief on each subject area when you talk about the response that comes in.

MR. BALEILEVUKA.-

Question No. 1

Performance and Achievements

- a) What were the major achievements of the Ministry during these periods?
- b) How did these achievements impact infrastructure and transport services?

MR. TAVO.- Thank you, Mr Chairman. We start first with the Department of Transport. One of the major programs of this is the Suez Sea Route Licensing. That is one of the programs that the Department of Transport through the government shipping services to assist in terms of providing sea transport to our rural maritime islands. That is an ongoing program. The National Transport Consultative Forum. I believe we are looking at having another one towards maybe the later part of this year. This is to get all the stakeholders together to sit and discuss some of the pressing issues that is affecting the transport sector. The other one is the government shipping franchise, as I mentioned earlier.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Mr Chairman, through you, I have a question in regard to major achievements and the impact in regard to the number of vessels that sustained damages. I believe this is after Cyclone Winston. We are talking about government vessels here. We are also mentioning those that will be replaced. What is the current status of these government vessels and whether any replacement has been done?

MR. TAVO.- Thank you, Mr Chairman. In regard to that question, we have 12 vessels with the government shipping services. Of which we have about four that have been earmarked for boarding. With the rest of the vessels, there are some minor repairs and routine servicing that needs to be done. We have also factored in requests for vessel replacement. Unfortunately, Mr Chairman, we did not get the funding to support that. Nevertheless, we will continue to push for vessel replenishment in our government fleet.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The second question is on the National Transport Consultative Forum. You have mentioned about the technical working group. I believe this forum is very important and should be ongoing in regard to the issues you mentioned on the other side. Like the traffic congestion, status of the road, infrastructure and that. We also understand currently there is a review by LTA on the Act. These issues which you have mentioned in your responses are very important. Your ministry is also in consultation with LTA making submissions in regard to the number of issues you have mentioned. And how best you will be able to address these issues.

MR. BALEILEVUKA.- Concerning the National Transport Consultative Forum, as the honourable Member has correctly indicated, this is something that was happening in the past where stakeholders' views were received. We try to respond to those views. Right now, the main problem is the congestion between the cities, the main cities around Fiji. We used to have provisions for, like in the Suva-Nausori Corridor, we had the Suva-Nausori Regional Transition Route. Unfortunately, some of those provisions have been accommodated by people. I will not say squatters, but they have been using some of these roads themselves. There are still provisions in that corridor that can be improved to connect back to the existing road. We tried to relieve some traffic.

There are also options available, like the Suva-Nausori Coastal Route. They are discussed on the table now. To look at maybe the coastal route, whether in terms of monorail or just the highway, through a PPP approach, build, operate and transfer, these are some of the options that are available to try and relieve. But in the immediate future, nothing has happened to address the flow of new vehicles coming in. While we have no improvement to the existing

infrastructure, we continue to receive new vehicles. I believe we have about 500 vehicles a month coming in. We have a growth rate of between 3 to 5 percent in that area. So, these are some things that we also need to address.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr Chairman, through you, we cannot stop people buying cars. Maybe we will have to find ways and means how we can address this issue. When we talk about National Transport Consultative Forum, if my memory serves me right, the major issue during that time which was discussed was about loading. We hear that that policy has been removed. Is it true?

MR. BALEILEVUKA.- Are you talking about the number of people in the vehicle?

HON. P.K. BALA.- No, no, no. Loading, loading.

MR. BALEILEVUKA.- Traffic loading? Heavy loads?

HON. P.K. BALA.- Yeah, heavy loads.

MR. BALEILEVUKA.- No, still there? Still there. LTA is still enforcing the heavy loads, putting penalties on heavy loads of vehicles, yes.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Good, because that policy was brought in because of roads. They used to overload and these damage the roads so that policy was brought in. It is good that you have confirmed, but we were told that some of the companies have been exempted from that. But that is not the truth, right?

MR. BALEILEVUKA.- There were some exemptions carried out for the sugarcane trucks. They were allowed to carry loads overhanging on the side of the trucks. It was considered because sugarcane is one of our major economy contributors. That was some time back. I am not sure if that is still available now. Going back to the transportation issue, we used to have what we call the National Transport Sector Plan. Under that plan, they reformed the transport sector, including the formation of the Land Transport Authority, formation of the MSAF, Maritime Safety Authority of Fiji, and then the Fiji Road Authority. They were all formed under the National Transport Sector Plan. We also had the National Road Safety Council, which was subsumed by the Land Transport Authority.

Now we do not have clear information coming in from accidents. They are only recording fatalities. They are not recording all the accidents. They are only recording accidents that involve people dying. But the whole process was designed under the Fiji Road Upgrading Project. So, because when there is an accident, they call the police, they do not call PWD. So, what PWD did that time, they designed the form to try and identify what sort of accidents that was involved, whether it was a head-on collision, a vehicle with animal, a vehicle with a pedestrian. If it is a pedestrian, then we address the pedestrian issues.

That is why the driver goes through the defensive driving course. It was introduced to try and improve the driving behaviour. So, if it was a driving issue, we try to tackle that. If it is a vehicle issue, we try to tackle the vehicle issue. But unfortunately, they removed the transport

authority, the National Road Safety Council. The intention now is to bring that back, because it adds an overview of the operation that LTA is conducting here.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Thank you. Just one on the plans that you have just spoken about and the way forward. Maybe this is the right time if I can put it to you. Government have also engaged a Singaporean company to do a master plan. You have spoken about this corridor. Were you part of that consultation with this consultant that was engaged by Government? Why I am saying this, because, we have been hearing other committees as well here, and we have found out that there is a disconnect. Some of the key stakeholders are not invited to be part of that consultation, because at the end of the day, that is the master plan that is going to supersede all the plans that we have, including roads, footpaths, creating areas for certain things. So, I just want to know if you were part of that.

MR. BALEILEVUKA.- I know there was a transport study for the Lami-Suva-Nausori corridor. Is that the same report that you are referring to, sir?

HON. P. K. BALA.- We just want to know, we just want the confirmation. That is, it. So, when we meet the other committees, we can raise this.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you very much honourable members for the questions. We will give you some ample time to go back and report back to us on that subject area, so that we align ourselves to our five standing committees, which we always sit down here and discuss the issue, and we talk about national development plan at a higher level. I hope we can be given some confirmation on that question, PS and the team.

MR. BALEILEVUKA.- Yes, this is concerning the report carried out by the consultant from Singapore.

HON. P. K. BALA.- Yes.

MR. BALEILEVUKA.- Yes, we will come back to you on that, Mr Chairman. Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you, PS and the team. You may continue.

MR. BALEILEVUKA.- We will ask the Director of Building Architects to respond to the question. Same question.

MR. PENE.- On the masterplan discussions, Mr Chairman. Yes, I think the ministry was represented and we did bring up the update for better connectivity for the population along the corridor and we request that they update us on their proposals on how they might view to connect the whole population along the Lami-Suva-Nausori.

MR. BALEILEVUKA.- DBGA, we are talking about the achievements during that year, and here we are responding that there was about 1,043 buildings that were built during that period. Are we looking at the same report that was submitted? Is that the same one as this?

MR. CHAIRMAN.- I may, if you guys can come closer to the mic, because everything is recorded in our Hansard.

MR. PENE.- Just a little bit down from that part of the overhead presentation, the document tabulated will read, the ministry was able to attend to 1,043 urgent building maintenance, compile 40 building estimates, and attend 100 urgent electrical maintenance works during that period.

MR. BALEILEVUKA.- We will continue with the Department of Energy.

HON. P.K. BALA.- While we have a rep from Building and Government Architects, before there was the Construction Implement Unit, and that has been disbanded, right? So, the whole operation is with your ministry, or it still exists with the Ministry of Energy?

MR. PENE.- The work that used to be handled by CIU has now been directed to our department, and the department is still housed with the ministry on Level 2 of Nasilivata House.

MR. BALEILEVUKA.- Which work is the work with Public Service?

MR. PENE.- The only work that is remaining with Public Service will be the office accommodation and maintenance of selected government properties. CIU was in charge of outsourcing of new works.

HON. P.K. BALA.- So, Mr Chairman, what we have achieved, I mean, if it still exists there, I am just asking this because of these public statements and all these things. That unit has been disbanded, but what I hear from you, your good self, is that it still exists there. They have not moved or have not relocated.

MR. BALEILEVUKA.- It was originally with the Ministry of Housing, Sir. Now it has been moved to Public Service. And Mr Chairman, that is a very good question. When they disbanded Public Works, what used to be done by Public Works is scattered all over the place. In May last year, Cabinet approved for all this to be amalgamated back to Public Works. The concern coming from some quarters is what happens to the contractors that are already operating their businesses? Will it affect them? Our response to that was that they will continue, but in bringing it back to PWD, it allows supervision to be done properly. Because there is a lot of concern about the quality of the work that is done by the private sector with no proper supervision. We want that to change.

We can continue with improving the private sector participation, but it needs to be properly supervised. We are discussing that. Right now, the Public Service Commission has advertised for maintenance of government facilities in the outer islands. Regional Development has recently awarded contracts for maintenance of government buildings in the Northern Division. So, they are all over the place. There are no limits at the moment. We are trying to bring it back slowly. Recently, the Cabinet approved the establishment of PWD and the number of people to come back. This is one of the problems that we are facing right now, the lack of experienced people. Qualification is not so important as the experience in terms of building maintenance or home maintenance. We want people who actually can do the work, not, knowing what to do, but they do not know what to do on the ground. Right now, we have a lot

of problems. Most of these people are already over 60. So, the current system, if we want to re-engage them, it has to come back to the Prime Minister to approve. These are some of the challenges that the Ministry is facing.

I do not know, honourable member (honourable Bala) in your time, the financial system that we currently have, I believe the word forced to employ is a big challenge for us. Because one, it is the financial year. We have changed the financial year from calendar year, now we are operating from July to August or something like that. If the peak period is during the rainy season, we cannot do much. So, the effect of that is that our budget is not spent. Because when we are supposed to be spending money, it is in the wet season. Now the dry season has started. So, we have now end of April, May, June and July. Only three months to effectively implement projects. But the Ministry of Finance will close the LPO, maybe in July, June! They closed the LPO in June. So, the implementation is a big challenge when we are forced to follow the financial system. The financial system should be supporting the implementation. It is not the other way around.

HON. P. K. BALA.- Thank you, Mr Chairman, through you. I mean it is good that we are told that Cabinet has endorsed last year that all has to come under one roof. What is the time frame that you think that you can bring all the entities under one roof?

MR. BALEILEVUKA.- Mr Chairman, we started with the rural roads and rural water. When this thing was coming out, we thought that it is best that rural water remains with the Water Authority of Fiji. And rural roads remain with the Fiji Roads Authority. Until we can beef up the PWD, then we bring them in. Now we have got Cabinet to approve the 700 new positions to PWD. What we can do now, once we have the equipment which we are in the process of acquiring, and then allocate the equipment to the depots, we bring the people from FRA to look after the depots in the outer island. They are already there.

So, it is just a matter of converting them from FRA books back to PWD. There is a challenge there, Mr Chairman, because they are doing a little bit more in terms of perks and salary. As they come back to PWD, they will have to accept a reduced salary. They have a contract, but the benefit to them is longer term. They are there until they are 60. Right now, they have a three-year contract. At the end of the three years, they have to renegotiate their contract again. Some of those details we are still working on, Mr Chairman.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr Chairman, just the last one. So are you saying, PS, that FRA will also be disbanded?

MR. BALEILEVUKA.- No. We are looking at strengthening FRA to be the asset manager. They manage the existing assets. PWD, once it is established, if we build roads, we build it up to the standard that FRA will accept, we give it to FRA. They look after it. So, we will go into the rural area, construct roads, come up with a policy. I think the policies should remain with the government. The implementation should go out to institutions like FRA, Water Authority. But policies should be retained in government. So that is what PWD will do. We will construct roads up to FRA standard. We give it to them to maintain. So, what we want to do is to strengthen FRA to be the asset manager.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Mr Chairman, through you, just in regard to the 143-agent building maintenance, my question is that these buildings were damaged during Cyclone Winston and this repair and maintenance work was done. And whether all the buildings were maintained, and all the required repair and maintenance was done?

MR. PENE.- During the repair of works for damages by Winston, the CIU unit at that time took a majority of the properties, government properties that were damaged, and organised them to be tendered out. What they could not tender out or was not attractive to the private sector came to us to attend to, and that would have been included inside the 1,043. And to add to that, still today there is still works that were tendered out by the CIU that is still not yet been delivered. Most probably it will come back to us.

MR. BALEILEVUKA.- Thank you, May I ask the Department of Energy to report on the next issue.

MR. VULAGI.- Mr. Chairman, sir, thank you. With regards to the wind monitoring sites, stations, these were monitoring stations that were damaged during TC Winston. During this period, we have managed to rehabilitate those eight sites during this period from 2018 to 2019. As of now, we have managed to gather data from these wind monitoring sites. This is just to check the feasibility of wind behaviour profile on those various stations, most probably in the Coral Coast area. So, we have managed to complete the rehabilitation of those wind monitoring sites, and at the moment we are doing the data analysis for these eight sites.

Going on to the implementation of the rural electrification program, Mr. Chairman, this is an ongoing project by the department in terms of how it works. Next is the grid extension projects, and so is solar home system. We managed to achieve around 60 to 70 percent on average in this period. As for the solar home system, we managed to, in the 2018-2019 period we managed to install around 2,546 solar home systems around Fiji. These are mainly for the maritime areas and also the people that are living in the rural areas, mainly in the upper highlands of Ba, Navosa. Lastly, another project that has been done by the department, during this period, we managed to install three solar-diesel hybrid systems, one in Nakoro in Navosa, another one in Yasawa Secondary School, and one in Namara in Kadavu. So those were the achievements during this period in terms of rural electrification program.

HON. P.K.BALA.- Mr Chairman, through you, you have mentioned that you have installed around 2,000-plus solar home systems. Is this the one that was damaged during Cyclone Winston, or is it an ongoing program, especially in the maritime areas? And if it is, then how many more houses need to be installed with solar system?

MR. VULAGI.- Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for the question. For the 2,546 that I mentioned, that was the one that was newly installed system, not part of the rehabilitation works. The rehabilitation works was done in 2017-2018 budget year, but I was mentioning the 2,546. This is an additional new system to the maritime, majority are in the maritime areas.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- If I may, when you talk about EFL grid extensions to the rural areas, I believe when you look at the report, some of those who already approved, they are still waiting for the grid extensions, even though the budget was already allocated. What I am

concerned about is, are there any updates when you talk about rural, in terms of the vision of the update of these extensions of grids? Because some of the areas that we went to and visited, they went to the extent of buying their own solar. And we asked them, where the grid has already reached to, they were promised that it will bypass their village right up to about an extra 5 kilometres from where they are. So, for the information of the public who are listening live to us on this area, can there be some update from the Department of Energy? Thank you.

MR. VULAGI.- Mr. Chairman, yes, you are right that right now the numbers of grid extension projects that we have paid EFL, most of those works are ongoing at the moment. Even for some, those are at different stages. Majority are at 80 percent. So that is in the stage where we are adjusting it. Most of those 80 percent works are in terms of interconnecting the poles to poles. So, we have quite a big number. Yesterday, as far as the data I was looking at yesterday, around 19 million worth of projects that we already paid, the works have not been completed. Those are the challenges that we are having because the works is done by EFL, and we are just monitoring the updates on how they have moved on with the construction. Because the grid extension work is done by EFL, the house wiring works is done by the Department. So, during this period, there was a meeting that we have done with EFL to do the works concurrently.

However, sometimes we did the house wiring works, but the grid has not reached the site. And so, these are some of the sites that we are dealing with now. And it is also a bit of an issue for us because we have to hold the contacts for the house wiring works to complete the connection until the grid arrives. So those are some of the issues that we are facing in terms of trying to energise these communities. And some of these communities too, those that are in the middle of the grid, sometimes they are just new settlements, people that came and sit on their own land. But when the plan was drawn, they were not there before. So, we have to pull the grid right to the villages. In order for us to connect it, because the lines are high voltage lines, which we cannot connect to the house, and so in the next budget year that follows, then we are requested if we can, EFL, to pull low voltage lines. So, it all depends also on the request that you make to the Ministry of Finance, if they approve the list that we provided to them. So right now, we are just attending those that they approve. The list is big, but the budget provided to us is just limited in the criteria that they have provided. Most of the time if the cost of the grid is on average for one household is around \$5,000 or \$10,000, those are the ones that we currently meet with the Ministry of Finance, the ones that they are committed in terms of providing the fund for it.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr Chairman, through you, there is some talks around when we visit people, they say that when they inquire with Department of Energy, with the Ministry of Infrastructure, they have been told that you have done your part in terms of paying to EFL for the grid extension, but they have not done their part. So how many projects are there that you have paid to EFL, but they have not carried out the grid extension? I mean there is no point doing a house wiring when the grid extension is not done. That is number one.

Number two, you have said that the house wiring has been done by the department. Is that you engage private contractors or your own people? Three, the last one, just a few weeks

ago, there was an article saying that electricity will be disconnected in the informal settlement. If you can highlight that. If not, then PS may highlight that.

MR. VULAGI.- Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Just on the answer for the questions, what was the first question?

HON. P.K. BALA.- Number one was, how many projects have been done to EFL, but the work has not been carried out, this grid extension?

MR. BALEILEVUKA.- Can I respond to that one first?

HON. P.K. BALA.- Yes.

MR. BALEILEVUKA.- It is about \$16 million worth of projects. What happens now is you receive money from the Ministry of Finance, and that money is allocated to EFL. You have raised a very important point. This is something that we are disappointed about. We hardly receive any feedback from EFL on what we have allocated to them. It is something that we are trying to strengthen in the Department of Energy to get detailed feedback. We are stopping any allocation to EFL until we get the clarity on what is happening with the money that is already with them. That is the answer to your first question.

HON. V. PILLAY.- And the third one? The most important one.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr Chairman, through you, can I repeat? A few weeks ago, there was an article that some of the landowners are saying that they will disconnect the electricity and water. Maybe there is some dispute, dispute in the sense that tenants are not paying them the rent or whatever, but is the Ministry aware of that?

MR. VULAGI.- Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I think it is just from maybe one of the sites, one of the informal settlements, because we hardly have received a report of a complaint like that. The only complaint that we receive in terms of informal settlement is why sometimes we cannot electrify them, because the transformer size that is available within the area is not big enough to supply to them. And also, the servicemen, the black wire that comes from the pole to the houses, sometimes informal settlements are always a threat because it is always overcrowded, and it is always a risk to those communities. And mostly before the request we always clarify with EFL whether the transformer size that is available is enough to cater for additional houses.

And most of the time that is the challenge that we face now. The poles that are servicing those areas are always overloaded, and they cannot electrify additional houses. But in terms of the question that was asked, I think that those are a few areas that we, now we have been hearing a few complaints coming because I think they resell the land, they sold the land twice. You know, someone came and asked for land, they give the land, they provide the consent to reconnect, and after that someone comes in, the previous guy has not built the house, and they resell the land twice. Those are some of the issues. But even when the consent comes to us for electricity, we will see the same person signing for both. And most of the time they paid around \$50 to \$100 just to get a land consent. Those are the issues that we face for informal settlement.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Through you, as PS has mentioned about the \$16 million payment that has been already made to EFL, and the required work has not been done so far, can the PS inform our committee, is this \$16 million paid over the last few years, or it has been paid in this financial year, and what sort of the scope of work and the area of work and the required information, I believe we need to have written information on this on the board, so that on our end, from our committee side, we can also make a recommendation to it.

MR. BALEILEVUKA.- I accept the statement from the honourable Member. For the \$16 million, it is allocated over a number of years. Some of the project is actually in progress. What we are disappointed about is that we are not getting feedback on what is actually implemented, how far those projects have progressed, what is left to be implemented. That is what I am saying. We need to strengthen the Department of Energy to be able to obtain that information from EFL. Unfortunately, right now, EFL is cut off from the Ministry. EFL used to be under the Ministry for Transport. Now they are no longer with us. Even though the regulator, the Director of Energy, is still with the Ministry. But maybe because of that, it is not easy for us to obtain information. They report directly to the Ministry of Finance, I believe, at the moment. But we will give a written response on the details of money that is already allocated and where these projects are allocated at the moment.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Vinaka PS, you may continue.

MR. BALEILEVUKA.- Can I ask the Director of Water.

MR. WAQANIVALU.- Thank you, Mr Chairman. For the Department of Water and Sewage, the Department was able to approve 74 water supply management plans during the reporting period. Water management plans are documents that are required to be submitted by all implementing agencies for rural water supply and sanitation projects, which include the Water Authority of Fiji. There is two or three NGOs and development partners that are interested to implement water and sanitation projects around the country.

So, these documents are required to be submitted and approved by the Department of Water and Sewerage before any construction work or implementation work commences. The Department was also able, through collaboration with the Water Authority of Fiji, to complete and commission 105 rural water supply projects and 71 ecological purification systems, which are filters that were introduced by the Department back in 2012, which provides filtration to water supply systems in our rural community. At the moment, the department, working in collaboration with the Water Authority of Fiji, has installed a total number of about 170 ecological purification systems around the country.

Those were the achievements for the department in regard to the rural water supply sector. For the urban water and sewerage sanitation sector, the Department was able to carry out 56 inspections of water treatment plants. These are water treatment plants around the country that are currently being operated by the Water Authority of Fiji. This is part of the responsibility of the Department to monitor the operations of the Water Authority of Fiji and to carry out inspections and regulatory compliance to ensure that the water treatment plants and wastewater treatment plants that are being operated by the Water Authority of Fiji are following

industry standards that are required of them to meet as stipulated by the Environmental Management Act and the Fiji National Drinking Water Standards for Water Supply and the Environmental Management Act for wastewater treatment plants. The Department was also able to carry out 36 inspections of sewerage treatment plants and 240 sewerage pump stations around the country. This is also part of the requirements for the regulatory and monitoring compliance role of the Department inspecting wastewater treatment plants and the wastewater pumping stations which are all part of the sewage network that are being maintained and operated by the Water Authority of Fiji.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr Chairman, through you, I mean this is an old report and this was during that year. Can PS or the team update us on this Viria water project?

MR. BALEILEVUKA.- Honourable Chairman, Viria is a Water Authority of Fiji project. It is now in operation. There are a few issues that needed to be sorted out first. And I have to apologize. I am not at liberty to discuss these issues during this meeting, sir.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Mr Chairman, through you. I have a question in regard to the Balevuto water project in Ba. We had some issues earlier on. It has been addressed. And we have a very good treatment plant now. All the infrastructure developments were done. It was a matter of just connections which has been done recently. And now people are receiving treated water in Balevuto. And there are also some areas that has been connected to the same area now before the water was only supplied to Toge, Balevuto, Nukuruwa, Nukuruwa back road, part of Moto, Vatusui, and Naruku. Now there is an extension to Kumkum, Chinakoti, and on the other side of the new Moto Bridge. But still, we see water disruptions. What are the challenges now and how this can be addressed?

MR. BALEILEVUKA.- Again, Mr. Chairman, the question raised is related to the Water Authority of Fiji. There is a lot of disruption recently with the high level of turbidity, Tamavua, as well as the other sources. We are trying to address that. For the Balevuto, I will have to come back to you in writing on the status of Balevuto. I do not have that in detail with me at the moment. There is a program for the Water Authority of Fiji which is called the 2050 plan of action. I will see if Balevuto is included to be addressed in there as well. But I will raise this and no doubt for the Water Authority of Fiji to respond to those questions in writing. For the information of Mr Chairman, I am also the chair for the Water Authority Board, so we will get you that information.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Vinaka PS. You may continue.

MR. BALEILEVUKA.- Can I ask Divisional Engineer Works.

MS. RATUKI.- Thank you, Mr Chairman, and to the Honourable members. In terms of the works that we have done for the Divisional Engineer Works, we received our projects. You will see that we have not got some figures on the feedback that we have given, but the details of them are on page 30 to page 37 of the annual report of 2017 and 2018. It is broken down into three different divisions because we each operate our own areas. Our projects are split into group, special, and water and sewer relining projects for government. Due to the limited funding, we had, we were only focusing on very urgent needs, including Lami Police Station,

Nausori Police Station, the QVS, and RKS water and sewer relining at that time. This water and sewer relining was to upgrade from ceramic to the PV systems that we have now.

There are certain areas that still need to be done. So, for example, for this current year, we are addressing the Flagstaff police quarters that was raised in the past years. Other works that we did carry out in construction services included maintenance works for PM's office at Carnarvon Street, the minor maintenance works for the Police Forensics Building, Navua X-ray Room, the Koronivia Molecule Lab, the Muanikoso footpath, the construction of the plinths here at Government Buildings, some minor works here at Parliament for Judicial, and also for Cabinet Office. The scope of our works in 2017 and 2018 were more minor as compared to previous years due to our budget allocation. This was for Central, West and Northern. I would like to go through, but it is quite detailed. It is all in that annual report from page 30 to 37.

MR. BALEILEVUKA.- Mr Chairman, further to that, other achievements during that period is highlighted in page 14 and 15 of the 2018-2019 annual reports, as well as pages 30 to 37 of the 2017-2018 annual report.

With your approval, Mr. Chairman, may I go to the next question?

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you very much, PS and the team. Just a concern from us, we just finished one question. It is almost one hour now. I believe that will be okay with us because there is a lot for us to know to understand the report itself as a second reader. Because when we talk about this report, the author knows in and out how to read the report from his angle. Bear with us with a lot of questions that we are trying to ask that will give us an in-depth understanding of the report itself. So, on that note, P.S, we will continue with question two.

MR. BALEILEVUKA.-

Question No. 2

Policy Implementation

a) What new policies were introduced, and how effective were they?

May I ask the Director Water and Sewerage to respond, concerning water, please?

MR. WAQANIVALU.- Thank you, Mr Chairman. The National Water and Wastewater Policy was developed or drafted in 2018. But the policy was later merged with the new, or back then, there was plans, talks underway following a WASH summit workshop in Nadi in 2018. Not to proceed with the drafting and enactment of this National Water and Sanitation Policy, but to merge or embed this policy with the National Water Resources Management and Sanitation Policy, which is currently being drafted and is nearing completion of the drafting. And will hopefully be submitted to Cabinet for approval during the year. The other achievement by the Department of Water Insurance during the reporting period was the review of the National Rural Water and Sanitation Policy, which was adopted and approved by Parliament back in 2012. So, the review was carried out after six years in 2018, and there was

another review that was carried out in 2021. We are currently using the 2021 revised edition of the policy, which will also be reviewed in the coming year, in 2026.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Chairman, through you, we have found out in some ministries or statutory organisations that policies that they have, policies are under review. Some are re-looked at, but recently the National Development Plan, the new National Development Plan has been introduced. So, what we need to know, because this is what we have found out in other ministries, whether your ministry, the policy that you are talking about right now, is in line with the new National Development Plan?

MR. WAQANIVALU.- Mr. Chairman, if I may respond to the question by the honourable Member. Yes, the policies that we are working on or developing through the Department of Water and Sewerage are all aligned with the National Development Plan and there are also mentioned or included in the National Development Plan's policies and strategies, which we are currently reporting on in the preparation of our implementation book. These policies include the current National Rural Water and Sanitation Policy and the new National Water Resource Management and Sanitation Policy, which also includes an implementation plan called the Integrated Water Resource Management Plan.

These are currently being finalised through the Department of Water and Sewerage, and we are hoping to have this policy, the plan and an accompanying National Water and Sewerage Services Bill. These two, the National Water Resource and Sanitation Policy, the Integrated Water Resource Management Plan and the Water and Sewerage Services Bill are all related policies and Act which will be implemented through the timelines and the recommendations in the Integrated Water Resource Management Implementation Plan. So, if I may answer the question raised by the Honourable Member, yes, the current policy that we are using at the moment and the new policies and Acts that are being developed are all aligned and are included to be reported in the Ministry's implementation book of the National Development Plan. Thank you.

HON.V. PILLAY.- Mr Chairman, through you, we just request that, yes, you can provide the list of all the policies that you have within the Ministry to the Committee and all the departments and is there any need to review any existing policies that is with the Ministry? That is my other question.

MR. BALEILEVUKA.- Yes, there is a need to review. Already in progress now, the Land Transport Act is currently under review. I believe with the last Parliament sitting there was a component that was actually amended, approved to be amended. Now we are looking at regulations concerning the taxis, operations of the taxis and the other one is the notice, what do you call that, you give a license to drive, and you are given a provisional license for one year. I think they found out that the number of accidents recorded, the highest from the first-year license holder. So, one of the policies now to increase that to instead of one year to two years for provisional licences. The other one is to do with bus operators. If an operator is unable to service a route, LTA can give a temporary licence to an existing operator to run the route until the licence holder can recover to operate again. I think the other one is, there are six

altogether, but I take your point, we will try to list all these. There are also some policies relating to the MSAF, the Maritime Safety Authority of Fiji.

We have got issues concerning the oil spill, we have got policies surrounding that, we have policies covering the hydrographic, trying to make our water safe. Right now, we do not have detailed information on the depth of our waters. So, our captains are just going around with experience instead of information to guide them. So, there are some policies governing this. We will provide that list. But the next item concerning the transport planning database, I think there was a tendency from the commercial statutory authorities to protect the information.

So, this was not readily available. I think this policy was set so that management can access this information from LTA, from FRA, from MSAF to be able to be informed in the decision that they are making. So, it allows the information to be given out. Some of the information is protected by the Act. So, these policies allow information to be accessed to assist in the decision making. But the liquid waste, a lot of waste entering the system, they tend to affect the system in a negative way. It does not help the animals that are actually feeding on the waste. They actually kill them. So this policy allows the industry to treat their waste first, get rid of all the detrimental products first before they can put the rest of the waste into the system. That is the liquid trade waste. Some of the industries are very diligent in making sure that waste are treated before it is given out to the system.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Chair, through you, yes, that is not happening now.

MR. BALEILEVUKA.- It is happening now. The industries are already treating their waste before it enters the waste system.

b) Were there any significant changes in existing policies, and what prompted these changes?

I think once it is recorded that there are no significant changes, I think the biggest change is the change in the financial year. Yes, changing, whether that was, maybe honourable Parveen Bala can confirm whether it was actually in place during this period? Or is something that, because if it was existing that time, it sets a major, major effect, has a major effect on the implementation - the financial system, not the system, the financial year. We are moving from January to December. Now we move from August to July. So, before January to December, we have the school breaks in December. School breaks in December, they have their holiday.

Their parents also take a break from their work, so they also have a holiday. When we have capital projects, they are hired and fired from the job. So normally at the end of December they are all fired. And then they wait for the next budget to come in the next year, they are recruited again, they are taken back. Because of experience acquired over the years, they can easily be taken back. So, in January to, say, March, April, that is the mobilization period. And you are doing that during the wet weather. You take your machines to the project site, during the wet weather. You mobilize equipment. In the dry season, you start the project. The good thing about PWD, there is very little documentation in PWD. There are already standard drawings in place.

We just pick up the drawing, the costs are already there, we take off. The weather is good, the machines are available, we take off, we do the job. But now, we get the budget in August, we might receive funds maybe sometime in July or December. The wet season has already started. We are expecting to implement projects during this period. If you remember recently, I think, the dry season is just kicking in now. Late April, mid-April now. So, you know it is raining heavily, it requires three days of dry time to be able to move the machines.

That is a policy that really is negatively affecting implementation, changing the financial year and we have raised this a number of times. We have raised it in various forums, developed some committees, and then we got up to Cabinet and raised this. That is a policy issue. The only major changes that I believe that affect the ministry is this one.

Question No. 3

Financial Management

a) How did the Ministry manage budget constraints while maintaining key infrastructure projects?

For that, let me start off by saying, we are allocated certain funds. That is not always what we want. We are given what the finance can afford. And it is always less than what is needed on the ground. So, we reprioritize. I am glad that that option is given to the public sector to reprioritize programs. If a budget is not provided for some of the programs, we can reprioritize based on the needs that come from the minister, because the minister represents the people, there are demands coming in, we respond accordingly. So, we can reprioritise our programs. Our program, in terms of roads, we always look at the high volume, whether traffic is more we tend to those ones. These are called main roads. Then we have secondary roads, then rural roads. So, responding to the question, we only work according to what is given to us. If we overspend, there is a penalty for overspending. But before, if we underspend, there is also a penalty for underspending.

Because the government seems to be a service provider. If money is not spent, that means service is not provided. If money is saved, that means the service that was supposed to be provided is not provided. So, there is also a penalty for underspending, which is the same as overspending. Can I ask the accountant to respond to question B?

b) Were there any notable financial challenges or successes?

MR. TAMANI.- Vinaka, through you, Mr Chairman, there were notable financial challenges for most of our infrastructure programs, where most of the budgetary adjustment done affects our project delivery. We do acknowledge that the budget is always provided with the financial year for full implementation. There are more financial successes, where funding will be used to implement and be able to complete most of the budget programs for two financial years. The biggest challenge was to adjust to the financial year, and also big implementation was carried out during the wet season.

c) What steps were taken to enhance staff capacity and technical expertise within the ministry?

This was done through capacity building, such as in-house training, overseas training, through seminars, workshops, and scholarships. Apprentice scheme is one of the initiatives that usually assists the ministry in the technical areas of infrastructure development.

d) What were the major factors contributing to underutilization of the budget in 2018 – 2019?

The ministry had achieved 72 percent of the budget utilisations. It is clearly highlighted in the report that the budget was increased from the previous year with the same resources that the ministry had. The change of the financial year was also an issue with the ministry. As for the 72 percent budget utilization, we have utilized \$117 million. Out of that, 52 percent is the operating budget and 45 percent is the capital budget.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Mr. Chairman, through you have mentioned in regard to the increase of the budget, 23 percent for the financial year and the utilization at 72 percent, and you mentioned some challenges about the resources. Can you elaborate more? Have you already addressed that in this financial year, or has it been addressed to date?

MR. TAMANI.- Through you Mr. Chairman, currently, the ministry has addressed most of the issues that the ministry has faced up until 2019. We have done most of the funding allocations that have been allocated to the ministry. We have completed most of the capital projects that have been allocated during that period of 2019 and up until today, sir.

HON. P.K. BALA.- We have heard that some of the major entities are now given back to your ministry. I am just wondering; to take back the responsibility is not a big deal, if I may say. But the main issue that you will have is the human resources. How are you going to deal with it? Because I know, as we have discussed earlier on, the Department of PWD is given back to you. Construction Implement Unit is given back to your ministry. So, what is the plan to deal with in terms of human resources?

MR. BALEILEVUKA.- Mr Chairman, As I have mentioned earlier the Cabinet decision this year approved the engagement of several new positions in PWD to bring back the department of national roads. You understand, when they dissolved the Department of National Road from the FRA, the responsibilities that were carried out with the Department of National Road were actually shared. Some were given to the Regional Development, some were given to Waterways.

Waterways is constructing the seawalls and other activities that were done by PWD. The Rural Development now is looking at building roads and repairing government buildings. So, in terms of buildings, we do not have any problem there. The buildings, they have their carpenters available. We can get the team recruited very easily. But the system is such that we do not recruit people until we have acquired the material. About 80 percent of the material is purchased before we start engaging people. But as you know, people cannot just wait around like this for us to engage a team. They will look for jobs elsewhere. Some will go overseas. So, one of the challenges that we face is to bring back this experience people. Most of them are already over 60. We want to take them on projects. Most of us are also over 60 as

well. So, we are still functioning. Our minds are still working well. Maybe this will assist the young ones. We are reviving the Apprentice Scheme as well.

We are working with FNU, Fiji National University. We have actually accredited the workshop in Vanua Levu. Now we can work with FNU. We do the physical training. They provide the certificates. As you know, the Apprentice used to go to the Ministry for Employment. They appoint the people. They come for Apprentice to Public Works, either PWD or other ministries. Then we provide them with the facilities after the Apprentice Scheme. They go out with their tools and their knowledge to the markets, to the industries. Some of them were retained with PWD before. We are trying to revive that as well now. So, it is a big challenge to find the people now because the attraction is for people to go overseas. Australia is using what we call the NEC scheme. That is where the attraction is. And it is not only an issue for Fiji. It is affecting the whole of the Pacific, small islands in the Pacific.

HON. P.K. BALA.- So, Mr Chairman, through you, I know it is going to be a difficult task. The 900 or 700 that you have mentioned that the Cabinet has approved, is this for local or overseas as well?

MR. BALEILEVUKA.- Local, sir.

HON. P.K. BALA.- I just want to share one thing. All these private contractors, if they are not going to have foreign workers, they will not be able to complete any of the buildings as of today. You ask any private contractor, 80 percent of their workforce are foreign workers. You have very positively said that it is for local, but getting all those responsibilities now, and if you do not have human resources, then there will be a lot of disconnect. You will not be able to do projects and then, you know, people on the ground. So, I am just wondering, well, if you will be successful in recruiting that number of people, it is good. But whether we have that type of skilled people still around, that is the question.

MR. BALEILEVUKA.- Mr. Chairman, as I have mentioned earlier, right now, rural water and rural roads are still with the Water Authority of Fiji and with the Fiji Roads Authority respectively. Once the set-up in PWD is right, they will be moved. It is the same people. The numbers are already there. They are already working at the FRA and the Water Authority. So, they will just move across to PWD. Some of these people are already in the outer island depots. They are operating in the Outer Island Depots. So, instead of them appearing in the FRA books, they will come into the PWD books. Yeah. So, yes, the challenge is, right now, they are enjoying a better remuneration because they are working in the FRA. The hourly rates for PWD for companies are a bit lower, maybe a dollar or something lower. But the difference is that when they move to PWD, their employment is secured until 60. Whereas in the FRA, they have a three-year contract. So, every three years, they renegotiate their contract. So, what we are offering them is that, look, this is long-term employment. Your rate may be lower, but you have security until you are 60. So, this is some of the, yeah.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Mr Chairman, through you, as PS has mentioned, and we all agree in regard to the challenges on human resource. If this is an issue, are there any plans by PWD

to outsource some of the work or use the contractors who are around to do the work as required under PWD?

MR. BALEILEVUKA.- Yes, Mr Chairman, through you, it is not the intention of forming PWD to get rid of the contractors, no. PWD is formed to strengthen the performance of the local contractors. Right now, the supervision is an issue. So, there is a lot of complaints coming in from people who are residing in quarters. After the contractors left, the building is leaking again, having problems. That is because there is no proper supervision. The re-establishment of PWD is to make sure that those activities are properly supervised. We are experiencing some work now carried out by ICU. I am actually living in a government quarter, and the ICU has asked me to move out so that they can repair my quarters. But a few weeks back, they said, okay, it is okay, you can move into your quarters now.

It is done. But instead, I asked my people to go and do an inspection, check out the scope of work that this contractor was supposed to do, against what is actually done. The team came back with a list of activities that were not done. But that was the place where I was staying. What happened to the others? They were not properly supervised. This is the concern that I am talking about. Actually, the intention of the government is to improve the private sector participation. But they need to be properly supervised, and that is the role of PWD.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- I may ask a question to our finance men, who are still here. Thank you very much. Why are there no proper audit reports, including annual reports of 2017, 2018, 2018, 2019? Can you highlight to the committee why there were no proper audit reports, including annual reports of 2017, 2018, 2019?

MR. S. TAMANI.- Through you, sir, I think that was an omission from the Ministry. But for your information, we have our annual financial statements up to 2022. And from 2021, we have the unqualified report up until this financial year. Mr Chairman, I think the AFS is on page 68 of the report. But so far, for the committee, the Ministry has been... We have been given our annual financial statements by the Office of the Auditor General up to 2024.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you, sir. PS you may continue.

MR. BALEILEVUKA.-

Question No. 4

Infrastructure Projects

a) What key infrastructure projects were completed in 2017–2018 and 2018–2019?

The list is in the report. Projects that are completed.

b) How did these projects benefit the community and economy?

If a road is not properly constructed, the travel time reduces. There is a major cost of the repairs to the vehicles. So that contributes to the, maybe, economic reduction. When you justify the construction of the road, they look at the internal rate of return. If an international organisation wants to finance a project, they look at the internal rate of return for constructing

that road. I think the cut-off is about 12 percent or 11.5 percent internal rate of return. And one of the things that they look at is the travel time. If they construct this road, what would be the effect to the travel time? But when we have congestion like this, what we have, whether the road is good or bad, it does not really affect the travel time. When the congestion is so bad like this. So, what they look at is the repair cost, cost of maintenance to the vehicle.

If the road is good, then less repairs, less spare parts coming in. So, you are looking at how, the question is, how did this project benefit the community and the economy? What if the road is done properly? Do you have access to markets? Do you have access to hospitals? Do you have access to schools? Again, with the water, the water is their supply. You have access to clean water, reduction in the health issues. These are some of the issues. I think it does not really need to be explained. Benefits, whether you improve roads, supply water, improve sanitation. Ensure that we have buildings that are strong enough to withstand the cyclones. We have recently, I think, just about to finalise the building code. So, to assist with the design and construction of buildings as well.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Thank you, Mr. Chairman, through you. I think we all will agree in regard to the road conditions, current road conditions around Fiji. Very poor, very bad. And I see last week when I was returning through the Kings Road, I see some of the contractors filling soil and gravel in the big potholes in the main highway. So, what is the real issue PS? We do not have the material for the workforce looking at the road conditions. Most of the accidents are attributed to the poor road conditions. So how this will be improved, looking at the time frame and the situation of our roads?

MR. BALEILEVUKA.- Actually, it is a major concern. I spoke earlier about the Road Safety Council. There are issues about driving, drivers, issues about vehicle conditions of the vehicle. Issues about the behaviour of the pedestrians. Issues concerning the pedestrians themselves and the animals on the road. These are all contributing to accidents. But there is no proper authority to coordinate all this. When we had the National Road Safety Council before, we made sure that training goes back to the schools, private schools. It was directed out to private schools to be aware of safety issues. I am not sure if that is still happening now. But we are trying to re-establish the National Road Safety Council. But going back to the cost of accidents, most of this are caused by driver behaviour. People drinking, I think that policing is an issue. We need to strengthen that. We established what we called the PADU before, Police Accident Data Unit.

They are the ones who actually record accidents. They tell us what sort of accident was involved. Right now, at this stage, I am not sure how strong that unit is. The project, which was a 3G road upgrading project at that time, established the PADU and purchased vehicles for them. But these vehicles, as soon as the military comes in, they were used to escort people rather than actually supervising the safety on the road. So, these are some of the challenges. When the study came out back in the 1980s, it was costing the economy \$20 million for every accident. A year, for the accidents. Because it involves police, it involves doctors, health, the cost of the loss of breadwinners in the family. So, it is a major, major issue. You ask me for a

question, I cannot give you one answer. It is all over the place. It needs to be coordinated. And I feel the coordinating authority would be the National Road Safety Council.

c) How has the Ministry incorporated climate resilience in new infrastructure projects?

MS. RATUKI.- The response that we have given is climate resilience in new infrastructure is always considered as part of our planning program. It is something that is in-built when we are doing design for our projects. This is done by ensuring that infrastructure plans include strengthening of the design of our buildings, and they are strengthened to ensure that they can resist changes in climate, especially during unfavourable weather. The changes in our building code that we have now, that is currently in draft, was highlighted that we are building towards Cat 5. If you look at Cat 5, Cat 5 is ever-increasing.

It is the largest scale you can put for a cyclone. So, we can build to Cat 5 what we have now. What we have in the future is undefined yet. We can constantly work towards building back better. In terms of our building infrastructure, our roads infrastructure, our water infrastructure, we are constantly addressing climate resilience. That is how we have been working it in our design. Other areas that we are working with is trying to address, include local building products. Our Director of Building and Government Architects is very involved in bringing back bamboo as a material for construction, taking into account countries in Asia that are using it for large-scale development. Here in Fiji, it is a natural resource that is amply available. So, these are areas that we are looking at in terms of climate resilience. Also, in addition to this, is first and foremost addressing disaster resilience and disaster risk. As we address our disaster risk, we are also working towards climate resilience. Thank you.

MR. BALEILEVUKA.-

Question No 5

Public Infrastructure and Buildings

a) How has the Ministry ensured equitable access to infrastructure and services for rural and maritime regions?

May I invite Director of Building and Government Architects to respond to this question, please?

MR. PENE.- The response given to the question is that the submission of PSIP programs is submitted from the divisional offices who have understanding of the needs on the ground. The Ministry ensures that the projects that are considered are well-balanced in terms of prioritising the needs of the country. The remodelling of Public Works Department further strengthens the issue of equitable access to infrastructure and services for rural and maritime regions. This initiative also assists the mobilising of resources to our divisional offices to manage the operations of the delivering of roads, water, public buildings in a strategic manner. And so, if the government decides to look North for development, it is also intended that the works that is submitted for budget does also reflect the need to prioritise works in the North so as to match

with the policies that are given for us to follow. At the moment, I think the North needs more attention.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Chairman, through you, everybody is focusing on the North. You are saying remodelling of Public Works Department will further strengthen, and then you are talking about divisional offices. I just want to know, just take FRA, for instance. Are you saying that they did not have these divisional offices when they were in?

MR. BALEILEVUKA.- They have regional managers, not the same as what was available in the PWD before. Their regional managers cut across divisions. The divisional managers in the PWD time are the same as the divisional boundaries. We have the central, eastern, and western, and the northern. So, central and eastern is combined to form one division. Whereas in FRA, they have regional managers. I think the regional manager in the West has projects that are also in this region. One of the issues that is affecting the quality of delivery is the policy now to engage, according to, not by experience, but by, what do you call it? OMRS. Yeah, what is it? Yeah, what does it mean? Open Merit Recruitment System. It is no longer precisely what the experience of the people, but the qualification. The qualification, when they come in, they have no experience at all. In FRA, we have people with highly qualified, but they have no experience in the supervision of contractors. You know, you have contractors operating in the FRA.

They have contracts that are worth millions. Then they are supervised with these inexperienced people. So, that is a concern that could be affecting the quality of what is actually delivered on the site. Yeah, on the ground. The FRA recently is trying to address that. They have, actually, before, they were staffed with hardly any engineers. In fact, no engineers. One. If I can remember, one engineer. That was for the whole organisation. There was only one engineer. The rest were all lawyers, accountants. I am not trying to run these lawyers and accountants down. But the area is engineering. It needs people with engineering qualifications and experience.

Because when you deal with international contractors, like what is happening in the... These are very, very experienced people. They know how to go around things. They know how to put in low-quality products to get high returns. At the end of the day, for them, it is the bottom line. We are concerned with the quality.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Thank you, PS, for the explanation. I mean, we all can understand the difficulties that your ministry and FRA is going through. The other week, we had FRA. FRA was basically saying the same thing that you are saying. Right? So, my question is, when are we going to get this thing done? People are suffering. If we continue with this admin, management, policies and everything, when are we going to deliver? That is our concern. Thank you.

MR. BALEILEVUKA.- It is already happening within the ministry. With the approval of Cabinet now with PWD. We are looking at strengthening FRA as well. I think they are looking at some system to improve the asset management role.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Yes, you may I continue now?

MR. PENE.-

b) What strategies has the Ministry employed to improve service delivery efficiency?

The Ministry has developed a comprehensive Strategic Plan for the Ministry after reviewing the past performances and provide clear output, strategies and outcome for all departments and CSAs to align their work and ensure that they deliver their services at an expected level. Strengthening Monitoring & Evaluation within the Ministry – This was one of the main strategies that the Ministry has implemented to ensure that the works service of the Ministry are delivered in an effective and efficient manner.

The Review of national rural water and sanitation policy. Strengthening of WAF and FRA as just discussed earlier. The ministry has also introduced some technical innovation changes where the Department for Government Buildings and Architects are now utilising Google sheets for real-time sharing and monitoring of project information. It is also applying for funds in the next financial year to digitise staff work hours and data storage. These two items are essential for staff productivity assessments and also easier access to project monitoring data.

The issue of staff productivity is often manually done in a very tedious task which needs to be digitised for simplicity, ease and immediate connection to the project statuses. It is a long-pending issue that needs to be digitised, and I believe the Ministry of Labor is very much strongly in favour of improving productivity and this digital system allows both to automatically connect. The input is done by each individual staff member as compared to the old days with a manual consolidating by one clerk who goes and who is not so happy with the situation.

MR. BALEILEVUKA.-

c) How does the ministry prioritise maintenance and repair of public buildings and facilities?

d) What were the key challenges in preventing infrastructure damage by tropical cyclones?

To respond to those two questions, I think the re-establishment of public works will respond to this. In terms of responding to damage caused by cyclones, one of the challenges we have is that there are no machines in the rural areas. The contractors are based in the urban centres so when there is a cyclone, they rely on the availability of transport. To transport this equipment back to the island. But when you establish PWD, you will have resources out there in the rural areas. So, when you have a Category 4, Category 5 cyclone, you do not come and talk about the inspection. We know there is going to be damage. So, it is a matter of PWD as it used to be handled before. They just stand up with their machines, they go and do the cleaning. That will address the establishment of PWD.

MR. CHAIRMAN. Yes, let us go straight to question number 6.

MR. BALEILEVUKA.-

Question No. 6

Transport Services

- a) What improvements were made to transport services and systems?**
- b) How did these improvements affect accessibility and efficiency?**
- c) How has the Ministry addressed challenges in sea route transportation to uneconomical areas?**

MR. TAVO.- Thank you, Mr Chairman. I think on the transport services, in terms of the road upgrades, that is actually re-established now, through the Public Works Department. That is something that we are working very closely together with the FRA to ensure that the focus of the Ministry to be very much towards the rural areas which has been sort of like a bit neglected for some time. So that is an area that we would like to strengthen.

We hope that through our budget submissions we can get the machines that we are actually looking for to actually attend to some of these needs. In terms of the maritime transport, we are also looking at...

HON. P.K. BALA.- May I intervene? We have heard from peers in terms of policy. Those bus operators who are not servicing their routes, there will be a policy that another operator can come in and service. The issue is not that. What we have observed, what we have seen, what we have heard is because of the road conditions. That is the real issue. So that is something that I want to bring it here to you before the Ministry. The two people will have to seriously look into that policy. That is fine. But the real issue is the road. That is why people, I mean the bus operators, they are unable to service those roads.

MR. TAVO.- Thank you, Mr Chairman. Thank you honourable for raising that. I think that is a real issue that we would like to strengthen moving forward. In regard to the maritime transport enhancements, we are working in collaboration with our CSAs, the shipping services, the maritime services as well to ensure that in terms of the safety of the travelling public, particularly those that will be at sea, actually upheld at all times. We understand that there is a lot of issues in regard to those safe beacons to guide the vessels in. That is part of the programme as well. And we are coming to assist as well in terms of some of the lighthouses, lighthouse projects. In terms of FRA, the jetty maintenance programme under the FRA, I think that is one of the areas that they have highlighted.

I think they have also identified some of their priority projects for the next few years, and that is something that we will also be monitoring to ensure that they are actually undertaken. The Department of Transport Planning is a lot of work in terms of reviewing some of the policies to ensure that we maintain and uphold our commitments into the safety of the maritime transport sector. In terms of public transport modernisation, there has been some discussions on the introduction of e-transport. Those are some of the things that have been in for a while. One of the areas that we all are aware of is the e-ticketing for the bus companies. That is another area that we can say that still needs a lot of improvement. I believe the team is actually working to finalise the new contracts as the old contracts have expired, so that is something that we will also be working on. Very briefly, in terms of the sustainable transport initiatives, I think there is a lot of discussions as well from our donor partners to come into this space to assist us with our EVs and what other modes of transport that we would like to implement into the near future. Thank you, Mr Chairman.

MR. P. BALEILEVUKA.-

d) How has the implementation of e-ticketing systems improved public transport in Fiji?

I think the improvement is on the collection of revenue rather than to improve the transportation of people from one location to the other. I have raised this concern that the government is being used as a revenue collector for the bus operators in this regard. So, I think there are attempts coming in to reintroduce another e-ticketing provider and the government ministry is looking into that as well. There is a push to go to one supplier, but there is also a push from the same operators to introduce another supplier, so the ministry is looking into that as well. In terms of maritime, looking at this reduction in carbon emissions, it seems these are coming in from international organisations. I am concerned that we are used to trying out some of these and we are just being used as a ticker box, that we are implementing these things. When you look at the contribution of maritime to carbon, it is only 3 percent internationally. But we are putting in a lot of effort in trying to comply with some of the requirements that are put across to us. And it is a challenge of the limited resources that we have.

Question No. 7

Water and Sanitation

a) How has the Ministry improved access to clean water and sanitation in rural communities?

Can I ask the Department of Water to respond to this question, please?

MR. WAQANIVALU.- If you may allow me to read from the notes that I have. The Ministry, through its role, the Department of Water and Sanitation, through its role, is tasked with the following responsibility, which continues to actively engage itself in and strengthen during the two reporting years to enhance access to clean water and sanitation in rural communities through policy and legislation development, technical and policy advisory, compliance monitoring, and regulatory oversight of the operations of the Water Authority of Fiji. The Department is also active in community engagement and education. The Department actively engages with communities to promote awareness about water conservation and the importance of maintaining water and sanitation infrastructure by involving local populations in the planning and implementation of water and wastewater projects around the country, especially in the rural areas.

During the two financial years, the Department has been doing a lot of work in the area of policy and legislation development. As I have already mentioned about the review of the 2012 Rural Water and Sanitation Policy, one of the main reasons or some of the main reasons for the review was to facilitate Section 35 and 36 of the 2000 Constitution on the rights to housing, sanitation, and adequate food and water for all Fijians. The government's decision to totally waive the 10 percent community contribution for rural communities and to meet the targets under the 2017-2021 Fiji's National Development Plan of 100 percent access to clean

and safe water in adequate quantity and 60 percent access to central sewerage systems for rural communities by 2031.

Going back to the previous question, if you may recall, honourable Chairman, on the climate resilience, the incorporation of climate resilience in new infrastructure for water and sanitation. Two of the main reasons for the review of the 2012 Rural Water and Sanitation Policy was the realignment, it was due to the realignment of the Millennium Development Goals, which came to an end in 2015 to the current Sustainable Development Goals to embrace a broader and more inclusive approach to sustainable development. And the introduction of new climate change policies in the country during the reporting years, such as the National Adaptation Plan 2018 and the Fiji National Climate Change Policy.

So those were some of the main works, especially in policy and its regulatory role that the department was involved in to enhance the delivery of safe water and sanitation around the country. Secondly was the review of the practical guidelines for water supply management or WSMP, which is the main mechanism and accompanying working document of the Rural Water and Sanitation Policy and contains all the technical information and requirements for the investigation, planning, design and operation and maintenance of all rural water and sanitation projects, as well as the methodology. This is an area that the policy, the review of the policies and the practical guidelines tried to address was the sustainability of rural water and sanitation projects or assets around the country to improve in the area of the operation, maintenance of these assets in our villages and communities around the country.

Thirdly was the development of the National Water Resource Management and Sanitation Policy. The reasons for the development of the policy current administrative an institutional framework relating to water and sanitation activities are operating separately and need to be more effectively co-ordinated. The absence of an overarching water resources and sanitation policy was made in past attempts in coordination of water and sanitation slow to establish which is a drawback in Fiji's efforts to address water and sanitation systematically at national and district level. The policy provides guidelines for the water and sanitation sector to ensure the current and expected threats to Fiji's water resources, environment, infrastructure and human health are considered in their planning and implementation programs. The policy will also support Fiji in meeting its 5 and 20-year national development plan targets and international commitments to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and Fiji's climate change preparations. The National Water Resource and Sanitation Policy proposes a water sector reform program to improve and sustain the water services of Fiji. When I mention about the water services of Fiji, we are looking at both the services that are provided by the Water Authority of Fiji in the area of water and sanitation in urban and rural sector and also to manage water resources or surface water and groundwater resources more actively. So, the scope of the policy is therefore broad. It will affect the number of ministries and will benefit water users and those who provide and receive water supply and sanitation services.

Fourthly is the development of the integrated water resource management plan. The IWRM plan is a 10-year strategic plan for the development of the public sector and the development of a comprehensive and effective water resource management framework to enable the

administration of government to better manage the water resources of Fiji. The approach previously used to be fragmented in terms of the management of our water resources in Fiji and water services. So, the development of the National Water Resource and Sanitation Policy and the integrated water resource management plan will try to address this issue and bring the concerned ministries or agencies of government that are responsible for implementing projects in the water and sanitation sector and also in the use of our groundwater and surface water resources. So, it mainly involves the Ministry of Public Works, the Mineral Resources Department and the Department of Waterways.

And lastly is the National Water and Sewerage Services Bill which is a Bill that the department is currently finalising which will strengthen the roles of the Department of Water and Sewerage in regulating the operations of the Water Authority of Fiji as a technical regulator for the Water Authority of Fiji. So the objectives of the Act are to regulate the delivery of water and sanitation services to meet approved standards of delivery service in the well-being of all communities in urban and rural areas of Fiji, to set up and confirm institutional arrangements to undertake the review of the water and sewerage sector and to strengthen existing legislation on water services, to set out principles and guidelines for the administration and management of any matters relating to water services and to establish a water services regulator which will be the Department of Water and Sewerage.

b) What impact has the Liquid Trade Waste Policy had on water management systems in Fiji?

The liquid trade waste policy in Fiji aims to regulate and monitor the discharge of liquid trade waste into the wastewater systems. In doing so it answers water management, wastewater management and environmental protection. The key impacts of this policy include firstly permit requirements, all trade waste customers are mandated to obtain permits from the Water Authority of Fiji which ensures that businesses comply with established standards for waste discharge, promoting accountability and adherence to environmental guidelines.

HON. P.K. BALA.- So are you working closely with the municipalities?

MR. WAQANIVALU.- Thank you Mr Chairman, the department is currently working closely with the trade waste unit of the Water Authority of Fiji on the implementation of this policy and also the department was also closely involved working collaboratively with the Water Authority of Fiji during the development of this policy which is currently being adopted and used by the Water Authority of Fiji in regulating businesses that discharge their trade waste into Water Authority of Fiji's sewerage network.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- PS Due to constraint of our time if you can just give us a very brief summary on each subject heading. Thank you for understanding.

MR. BALEILEVUKA.-

Question No. 8

Sustainability Initiatives

- a) What efforts were made to promote environmental sustainability in infrastructure and transport?

In this area there are close collaboration with the Ministry for Environment on the application of implementation of our projects. We have these climate resilient projects that are coming now trying to attract climate funds. One of the requirements is to be heavily reliant on the compliance with the environmental laws.

- b) Were there any specific projects or initiatives highlighted in the reports?

MR. MATAIVILIA.- Thank you to you honourable Chair. Our response to that question is an implementation of a solar based home system project across the country. There were 14,153 households with a total cost of \$39 million has been installed from 2016 to 2019.

MR. BALEILEVUKA.-

Question No. 9

Energy and Sustainability

- a) **What is the Ministry's long-term strategy for achieving 100% renewable energy by 2036?**

MR. PAI.- Thank you Mr Chairman and honourable members. To answer this question, part a, the Ministry has recently endorsed the National Energy Policy 2021 to 2030 which confirms our commitment to realise the vision of resilient, resource efficient, cost effective and accessible, reliable energy sector for all Fijians. We remain committed to our target for everyone, all Fijians to have electricity by 2026 and the other target is to for the...

HON. V. PILLAY.- May I intervene? Just a clarification, is that correct by 2026?

MR. PAI.- Yes, 2026 is correct for energy access to all Fijians. At the moment, from the 2017 census, we have reached 96 percent so at the moment we are around 98 percent. It is also a moving target, Mr. Chairman, but we are working hard to achieve that target by end of next year.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Mr Chairman, through you, PS, if you can re-look at that information, please.

MR. BALEILEVUKA.- We will certainly check that, but for the information of the committee, we have a program called the Fiji Rural Electrification Fund (FREF). The contribution is coming from outside, Australia, Japan, and who else is contributing? We have about \$17 million. There was a study carried out on 75 communities. What is available can finance 20, 22, 23 communities. So, we are still looking for funding to fund the remainder. So, there is fund available there. Whether it will achieve that target by 2026, I will have to go from there.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Mr Chairman, through you, PS, whatever funds you have, but that figure 2026 is not correct.

MR. BALEILEVUKA.- We will check.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- We will move forward. Just give us, please, just a very brief, because we are all reading the same sentence in front.

MR. PAI.-

b) How did the solar home system projects benefit remote households?

Mr. Chairman, the government has been spending around \$4 million every financial year to provide electricity to really isolated households, maybe in the interior of Navosa, Naitasiri, which are a few kilometres away from the grid. So, the only economical way to provide electricity is to give them a solar home system. If you pull the grid, it is going to be very, very expensive. So, every year, we electrify around 1,000. And this year, this financial year, we have \$3.9 million. We are going to assist 900 families.

c) What role does the Ministry play in promoting energy efficiency and conservation across sectors?

Mr Chairman, we have an energy efficiency program in the ministry, which is called MAPSEL. We do awareness to schools and communities regarding energy efficiency to switch off their lights when it is not in use or use more efficient light bulbs. We also have in the MAPSEL program, we regulate the import of inefficient freezers. We already have the approval for televisions to apply these to televisions, but it is yet to be gazetted.

And the other one that we are looking forward to is the AC (air conditioning).

MR. CHAIRMAN.- PS, can we go to question number 10, please?

MR. BALEILEVUKA.-

Question No. 10

Challenges and Solutions

a) What were the main challenges faced by the Ministry during these periods?

MR. PAI.- Well, for electrification, it is the squatter informal settlements. Since government has a target to provide electricity to everyone, this became one of the main challenges. But however, our electrification policy, we have changed the name from rural electrification to electrification, meaning we are going to provide electricity for everyone, provided that your combined salary of the household is less than \$30,000. So squatter settlement, electrification of highly remote households with no roads, some only accessible by horses and footpaths, and outsourcing of work to the private sector, financial constraints. While we have some a bit of a backlog in, for example, solar requests, but every year we are given \$4 million, so we are able to 1,000 families every year. Limited human resources. In the department, we have a limited number of technical officers serving the whole of Fiji. We have two in Northern and three in Northern and around three in Western, so they are looking after the whole region, Western and Northern.

MR. BALEILEVUKA.-

Question No. 11

What percentage of leadership positions within the Ministry are held by women, and how has this changed over the reporting periods?

Question 11 relates to the structure of PWD. During this period, reporting period, it is about 6 percent. Now we have about 25 percent of direct level up to commission. That director level.

Question No. 12

Future Plans

a) What are the Ministry's strategic goals for the upcoming years?

MR. MATAIVILIA.- Thank you. Through you, Mr Chairman, our response is already there on the screen. Just to further clarify on that, currently we are on a preliminary stage of developing a new strategic plan, 2025 to 2029, which will align from the new national development plan that we already have. Our output and strategies are well articulated under Chapter 7 of NDP, which is developing public infrastructure, protecting environment, and addressing climate change.

b) How does the Ministry plan to build on its past achievements?

Yes, the ministry has considered all the past achievements and challenges which, while we were doing a submission to the new development plans, we have tried to address all those challenges and work on our achievements that we have. Some of the challenges that we have are highlighted there, changing the financial year to revive the apprenticeship program, amalgamate all building and maintenance program, resource mobilisation to our divisional offices, the Fiji-MET new regional training centres. This was just signed with the Government of Japan last week, and the new fielding program for GSS, and finally, the re-establishment of PWD where we had a lot of discussion today.

MR. BALEILEVUKA.-

Question No. 13-

How is the Ministry incorporating the Sustainable Development Goals into its policy framework and strategic planning?

MR. MATAIVILIA.- Yes, the Sustainable Development Goals was always considered in every strategic planning document that we have for the ministry. Our cue from SDGs 6, 7, 11, and 13. And it also applies to our corporate statutory authorities of the ministry, which is FRA, WAF, MSAF, and LTA.

Question No. 14

When will the Ministry submit its outstanding Annual Reports?

Yes, we are currently working on the backlog now. We have the 2019 now, and the ministry, through the PS, has advised a task force to work on our annual reports from 2020 to 2024. So, our anticipated timeline is to submit all our pending reports by 31st July, 2025.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you very much, PS, and your team. I believe there is a lot of discussion on the ministry as a whole. Let me reiterate the importance of why we are here today for the betterment of the public that we serve. When you talk about service delivery, it is us who will make it happen. And when you talk about your ministry, it is one of the biggest. It covers a lot of public service, likewise in terms of your corporate entities that are all aligned to your strategic plan. As the guideline from the ministry, we are looking at all this alignment to your corporate entities. Even though they come up to us sometimes, even last week we have FRA with us, that the intercommitted, integrated process has to be very clearly defined. Because when we talk about all this, the public are hearing us. They are not here to say, we do not want to hear all this. But from the presentation done by PS and the team, it gives us a very clear signal where the ministry stands now, how are we moving forward in terms of your strategy and improvement as we move along.

We thank you, PS and the team, for that very holistic approach that has been taken on board. And as I said, we are all learning. For us, we have a timeline to submit this report. That is why we have a lot of back-and-forth discussion on this. And I hope, come next time, that everything will be aligned from what we want, according to the benefit out there, which is the customer that we serve. Here, we are talking about the public.

At this juncture, I wish to sincerely thank you for availing yourself for this public hearing session. Thank you for your time and hope that you will avail yourself for any further queries or clarifications that the committee may have on this annual report. PS, I am very much concerned about that. It is straightforward information. When we need more, please respond back to us on time. With those concluding remarks, I now close this public hearing session. (Meeting closed at 12.13.36pm)