



# **STANDING COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND DEFENCE**

## **Review Report of the Levuka Town Council 2018 Annual Report**



**PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI**  
Parliamentary Paper No. 77 of 2025

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## **Table of Contents**

<b>Acronyms .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Chairperson’s Foreword .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Recommendations .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>1.0 Committee Remit and Composition .....</b>	<b>7</b>
1.1 Committee Secretariat Team.....	8
<b>2.0 Background and Terms of Reference .....</b>	<b>9</b>
2.1 Procedure and Program.....	9
<b>3.0 Committee Deliberation and Analysis .....</b>	<b>10</b>
3.1 Introduction.....	10
3.2 Summary of the 2018 Annual Report .....	11
3.3 Committee Findings.....	14
<b>4.0 Sustainable Development Goals.....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>5.0 Conclusion .....</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>6.0 Committee Members’ Signatures .....</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>7.0 Annexure.....</b>	<b>21</b>

## **Acronyms**

MHMS	- Ministry of Health and Medical Services
SCFAD	- Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence
SDG	- Sustainable Development Goals
SO	- Standing Order

## Chairperson's Foreword

The Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence (the Committee) hereby submits to Parliament its Review Report on the Levuka Town Council 2018 Annual Report.


Established in 1877 as Fiji's first municipality and former capital, the Levuka Town Council holds a distinguished place in the nation's history. It has achieved several national milestones, including hosting Fiji's first hotel and bank. In 2013, Levuka reached a new pinnacle when it was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Town, affirming its global cultural significance. This recognition was further underscored by its inclusion in the Organisation of World Heritage Towns/Cities.

Despite these prestigious accolades, the Council faces the ongoing challenge of balancing its heritage conservation responsibilities with the demands of modern infrastructure and technological development. In 2017, Levuka marked 140 years of municipal governance, a testament to its enduring role in Fiji's urban development. As with other municipal councils, Levuka is expected to align its future with Community Plans and capitalize on local opportunities to ensure its continued relevance and sustainability.

Financial constraints remain a significant challenge. With only 152 ratepayers, the Council's revenue from local rates and businesses is limited, making external funding essential. Consequently, the Council relies heavily on government grants, NGOs, and support from the business sector. In 2021, recognizing Levuka's unique heritage status, the government approved a special funding allocation through a Cabinet paper, initially providing \$500,000. However, this amount has since been reduced. There is cautious optimism that renewed investments, particularly in infrastructure and accommodation, could stimulate heritage tourism and become a sustainable revenue stream. Guided by its vision to promote the health, welfare, and convenience of its residents, the Council remains committed to principles of cleanliness, effective property management, good governance, and environmental sustainability.

As part of its review, the Committee visited Levuka to receive oral submissions and conduct site inspections. Key locations visited included the Peace Garden, the newly constructed Levuka Market, and the University of Fiji campus in Nasova, Levuka. This report outlines key trends observed during the reporting period and presents 10 recommendations for consideration.

I extend my gratitude to the members of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence for their collaborative efforts in producing this bipartisan report, and to the Secretariat for their invaluable support. On behalf of the Committee, I respectfully submit this report to Parliament.

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**Hon. Lenora Qereqeretabua**  
**Chairperson**

## Recommendations

- 1.0 The Committee recommends that the Ministry of Local Government provide dedicated technical assistance and financial support to remote municipal councils like Levuka to improve timely reporting, including capacity-building and digitization initiatives (*reference to point 3.3.1*).
- 2.0 The Committee recommends that the recruitment process for key council positions be accelerated through strategic incentives such as relocation allowances and housing support. In addition, the Ministry should consider targeted outreach in semi-rural towns to attract qualified applicants willing to work in Levuka (*reference to point 3.3.2*). The Committee commends the Special Administrators for voluntarily fulfilling executive roles without additional compensation and for their unwavering commitment to the community.
- 3.0 The Committee recommends that the Government reintroduce or redesign a special financial grant tailored to Levuka's heritage town status to support its operational and infrastructural needs. This should be accompanied by a financial sustainability strategy focused on improving local revenue collection and developing new income streams (*reference to point 3.3.3*).
- 4.0 The Committee recommends that Levuka Town Council strengthen its legal and financial mechanisms for debt recovery, possibly by partnering with the Office of the Attorney General or other relevant agencies. A policy framework should also be introduced for the write-off of irrecoverable debts due to deceased or absconded ratepayers (*reference to point 3.3.4*).
- 5.0 The Committee recommends that clean-up campaigns be institutionalized as part of an annual dengue response plan in partnership with the Ministry of Health. Further, the council should expand its awareness campaigns in schools and villages to support prevention through community action (*reference to point 3.3.5*).
- 6.0 The Committee recommends expanding waste collection infrastructure and awareness campaigns, especially in maritime and rural areas. Additional support should be given by the central government for equipment and training to improve waste segregation and composting efforts (*reference to point 3.3.6*).
- 7.0 The Committee recommends that the Ministry of Education, Heritage, and Arts revisit the implementation of the Heritage Bill with an emphasis on inclusive consultation. A clear roadmap for heritage-based economic development should be developed in partnership with the council and local stakeholders to balance conservation with community prosperity (*reference to point 3.3.7*).
- 8.0 The Committee recommends that the Ministry of Local Government urgently assist the council in rebuilding its internal financial control systems and ensuring full audit compliance. Future audits must be supported with training, system upgrades, and dedicated staff for finance and compliance (*reference to point 3.3.7*).

- 9.0 The Committee recommends that the Water Authority of Fiji prioritize improvements to Levuka's aging water infrastructure and conduct regular testing to ensure safe drinking water. An emergency supply or filtration system should also be established while long-term solutions are pursued (*reference to point 3.3.10*).
- 10.0 The Committee recommends that the Ministry of Tourism and Tourism Fiji collaborate with Levuka Town Council to design a phased tourism revitalization plan. This should include infrastructure upgrades, port safety improvements, and marketing strategies tailored to Levuka's heritage appeal (*reference to point 3.3.11*).

## 1.0 Committee Remit and Composition

Under Standing Order 109(2)(e) the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence is mandated to look into matters related to Fiji's relations with other countries, development aid, foreign direct investment, oversight of the military, and relations with multi-lateral organizations. The members of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence are as follows:



**Hon. Lenora Qereqeretabua**  
**Chairperson**

*Deputy Speaker of Parliament*  
*Assistant Minister for Foreign Affairs*



**Hon. Rinesh Sharma**  
**Deputy Chairperson**



**Hon. Ratu Isikeli Tuiwailevu**  
**Member**

*Assistant Minister for iTaukei Affairs, Heritage and Arts*



**Hon. Penioni Ravunawa**  
**Member**

*Assistant Minister for Health and Medical Services*



**Hon. Virendra Lal**  
**Member**

## **1.1 Committee Secretariat Team**

Supporting the Committee in its work is a group of dedicated Parliament Officers serving as the Committee Secretariat. These officers are appointed and delegated by the Secretary-General to Parliament by Standing Order 15(3)(i). The Secretariat officers are as follows:

- Mrs. Susana Korovou – Senior Committee Clerk
- Mrs. Elesi Tabuyaqona – Deputy Committee Clerk



## **2.0 Background and Terms of Reference**

The Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence (the Committee), was referred the Levuka Town Council 2018 Annual Report on 14 March 2025. The referral of the Annual Report was done in accordance with SO 38(2), whereby the Committee was assigned to investigate the contents of the report and provide a report to Parliament at a future Sitting. This report is outside the usual mandate of the Committee, but the referral was made to help ease the workload of the other Standing Committees.

## **2.1 Procedure and Program**

### Oral or Written Evidence Received

Pursuant to Standing Order 112(1)(c), the Committee visited the Levuka Town Council to conduct an oral submission and simultaneously carried out site visits to the Peace Garden, the newly constructed Levuka Market, and the University of Fiji campus in Nasova, Levuka.

A summary of the submission is provided in a later part of this report, under the heading ‘Committee’s Deliberation and Analysis’. Copies of the written submission and the verbatim from the meeting can be obtained from the online Appendices of this report, which can be accessed from the Parliament website: [www.parliament.gov.fj](http://www.parliament.gov.fj).

## **3.0 Committee Deliberation and Analysis**

### **3.1 Introduction**

The Municipal Councils in Fiji are legislated under the Local Government Act 1972. The Municipal Councils provide overall policy direction to maintain and improve the quality of services and facilities for their ratepayers. The Special Administrator, Chairs and Teams for each Municipal Council have been tasked with reforming their Council administrations into forward thinking and agile organisations focused on customer service.

The Levuka Town Council, established in 1877 as Fiji's first municipality and capital, holds a rich historical legacy, having pioneered several national firsts such as the country's first hotel and bank. A significant milestone came in 2013 when Levuka was declared a UNESCO Heritage Town, affirming its global cultural importance and further highlighted by its membership in the Organisation of World Heritage Towns/Cities. Despite these accolades, the Council faces the ongoing challenge of balancing the preservation of its heritage status with the evolving demands of modern infrastructure and technology. In 2017, Levuka celebrated 140 years of municipal governance, reinforcing its longstanding role in Fiji's urban development narrative. Over time, Councils like Levuka are expected to be guided by Community Plans and local opportunities to maintain relevance and sustainability.

However, funding remains a persistent hurdle. With 152 ratepayers, Levuka's revenue from rates and local businesses is limited, making external support crucial. The Council heavily relies on assistance from government grants, NGOs, and the business community. In 2021, recognizing Levuka's unique heritage status, the government approved a special funding allocation through a Cabinet paper, initially granting \$500,000, though this has since declined. There is hope that renewed investment, particularly in infrastructure and accommodation, could help boost heritage tourism as a sustainable revenue source. Guided by a vision to promote the health, welfare, and convenience of its residents, the Council's mission emphasizes cleanliness, property management, good governance, and environmental consciousness. Its values are honesty, leadership, customer care, and transparency which serve as foundational principles in achieving these goals.

## **3.2 Summary of the 2018 Annual Report**

### **3.2.1 Health Department**

#### **3.2.1.1 Environmental Health Planning and Management**

Under the Environmental Health Planning and Management section, a total of 13 building inspection applications were received and carried out across various categories; residential (2), commercial (2), civic (4), and others (5). Total fees of \$4,852.66 were received. These inspections are part of the Council's routine oversight to ensure compliance with health and safety regulations before any construction or development proceeds. The applications were reviewed for approval, refusal, or renewal, supporting the department's commitment to maintaining a safe and planned urban environment.

#### **3.2.1.2 Solid Waste Disposal Operations**

Under solid waste disposal operations, the Health Department managed two public open dump sites, where regular spraying for odour control was conducted to minimize environmental impact. Additionally, 10AMS spraying and disinfection efforts were carried out throughout the year as part of ongoing insect and pest control measures. These activities were crucial in maintaining hygiene standards and reducing the spread of vector-borne diseases. The department also oversaw the operation of incinerators, ensuring waste was disposed of in a safe and controlled manner, further supporting public health and sanitation efforts within the municipality.

#### **3.2.1.3 Larval and Diseases**

The Health Department recorded a total of six suspected dengue cases across various localities, including the Baba Area, Nasova, and several schools such as Marist Convent, Levuka Public Primary, and Delana High School. All six cases were investigated, with confirmed diagnoses made in each instance. These findings highlight the ongoing presence of dengue in the community and underscore the importance of consistent disease monitoring and public health interventions.

In response to potential mosquito breeding, larval surveillance was conducted across key areas. A total of 400 premises were inspected during the year, resulting in 12 larval samples being collected. The inspections were carried out in high-risk zones such as the Baba Area, Delana, Mission Hill, Church Street, and nearby settlements. No inspections were conducted from October to December, but the earlier efforts reflect a proactive approach to vector control and disease prevention.

#### **3.2.1.4 Legal and Enforcement Program**

Under the Legal and Enforcement Program, a total of 70 inspections were carried out during the year to ensure compliance with health, safety, and development regulations. These included 13 site inspections for new buildings and subdivisions, 13 progressive building inspections, 3 subdivision compliance checks, and 23 investigations in response

to public complaints. Additional inspections covered food premises and licensing (6), as well as sanitation facilities and drainage systems (12), contributing to overall public health monitoring.

In terms of enforcement, several notices were issued to address various infractions. Two anti-litter notices and one mosquito control notice were served and fully complied with. One notice for illegal development was issued but remained unaddressed. Furthermore, three abatement of nuisance notices were served, all of which were complied with. No prohibition or closing orders were issued during the period.

### **3.2.1.5 Nature of Complaints**

A total of 23 public health complaints were received and fully investigated during the reporting period, with all cases resolved through voluntary compliance, requiring no legal proceedings. Complaints ranged across various categories, including food premises (1), illegal developments (2), wastewater and sewerage (1), solid waste and litter prevention (3), nuisances (6), and other public health-related issues (10).

### **3.2.1.6 Food Control**

Food control in Levuka is managed through joint inspections conducted by the Levuka Town Council and the Lomaiviti Sub-Division Health Office under the Ministry of Health. These inspections are carried out regularly to ensure food safety standards are upheld across all types of food establishments. A total of 55 food outlets were recorded in town, with 52 inspections conducted during the period. Of these, 10 compliance issues were identified and successfully addressed.

The food outlets inspected included 6 restaurants and eateries, 16 retail shops, 3 supermarkets, 1 processing plant, 5 hotels, 23 hawkers, and 1 butcher. Notably, restaurants, supermarkets, and the processing plant showed positive compliance rates, with 10 cases overall resolved through corrective actions.

### **3.2.2 Environment and Works Department**

The Environment & Works Department, staffed by a small but dedicated team including an Environment Officer, Work Supervisor, mechanics, drivers, a cleaner, and seven field workers, plays a crucial role in maintaining cleanliness and environmental health in Levuka. Key initiatives under solid waste management included the Clean School Program, where Levuka Primary School was declared a No-Burning Zone and began recycling paper and bottles, with waste sent to Pacific Recyclers and Coca-Cola Ltd, respectively. The Home Composting Program was also expanded, with 100 compost bins made available at a subsidized rate. Litter enforcement was actively managed by two officers, resulting in seven offenders being fined, all of whom paid within the deadline. The Ucuinaceva

Dumpsite, leased from the Mataqali Batikadi of Natokalau Village, operates at an annual cost of \$9,000 and is maintained through monthly dump pushing.

Community engagement remains strong through quarterly clean-up campaigns involving schools, NGOs, and youth groups, with ratepayers making the most of free white goods and green waste collection. The Beautification Project, funded by a New Zealand grant since 2017, continues with support from a Suva-based landscaper and has led to the setup of a nursery at the Lodge and the ongoing development of flower beds around town. In terms of municipal works, tasks such as street sweeping, drain cleaning, grass cutting, and verge clearing are managed internally and follow a scheduled program. Waste collection services are also well-organized, with kitchen refuse collected twice weekly, PAFCO waste on Fridays and Saturdays, and green waste picked up monthly on the 15th.

### **3.2.3 Projects**

The Levuka Town Council has overseen several key infrastructure and beautification projects, supported by various donors and internal funding sources, aimed at enhancing public spaces, improving accessibility, and promoting climate resilience. A significant initiative was the construction of the *Lisi Seawall*, funded by the Challenge Fund, which serves as a protective barrier against coastal erosion. Additionally, the Council funded the construction of a new taxi stand and the ongoing development of a *Climate Change Heritage Park*, both of which contribute to urban functionality and environmental awareness.

Beautification efforts, supported by the New Zealand Embassy, included the creation of flower beds, a nursery at the Masonic Lodge, installation of public benches, and the painting of the bridge in front of the town hall—transforming key areas of Levuka with visual appeal and community value. Other notable projects include the *Upgrading of the Footpath and Access Strip* to the Baba Informal Settlements (supported by the Department of Housing), the *Construction of a new bus stop* at Naqele, Ovalau, and the *Desilting of Totogo Creek*, undertaken by the Ministry of Waterways.

### **3.3 Committee Findings**

#### **3.3.1 Delay in Report Presentation**

The 2018 report was delayed due to severe financial constraints and limited manpower within the Levuka Town Council. Being an island municipality, geographic isolation and marginalization further impacted the council's ability to meet reporting timelines. Despite these challenges, the council is currently ahead of many other better-resourced councils in terms of reporting progress.

#### **3.3.2 Staffing Challenges**

As of 2025, the council still lacks a permanent CEO and operates with minimal staff. The Special Administrators, including Mr. Ben Naidu, are voluntarily filling key roles without compensation. While efforts have been made to recruit, qualified candidates are scarce, and the remoteness of Levuka makes it hard to attract suitable applicants. There is potential to recruit from semi-rural towns like Labasa or Sigatoka, where candidates may be more open to relocating and adjusting to Levuka's environment.

#### **3.3.3 Budget Utilization and Financial Standing**

With limited income and a \$30,000 annual deficit, the council focuses on essential services while relying on government grants for capital projects. In 2012, Cabinet approved a \$500,000 grant for Levuka in recognition of its UNESCO heritage status. However, that funding has steadily decreased and eventually ceased, leaving the council to operate with limited financial resources and placing greater strain on local revenue generation.

#### **3.3.4 Debt Recovery Issues**

The number of registered ratepayers in Levuka has decreased over the years, reducing the council's primary revenue stream. This trend reflects broader socio-economic challenges, including youth migration and business closures, which affect the council's ability to fund local services and maintain heritage infrastructure. The council faces challenges in debt collection, particularly for accounts linked to deceased individuals or those who have left the country. Legal processes are ongoing, including possible asset liquidation, but progress is slow and complicated.

#### **3.3.5 Health and Dengue Response**

In response to recent confirmed dengue cases, the council has collaborated with the Ministry of Health and Medical Services to conduct regular clean-up campaigns in hotspot

areas. Clean-ups are scheduled quarterly and involve community participation to reduce mosquito breeding grounds.

### **3.3.6 Waste Management Efforts**

Levuka Town Council manages waste for both the town and surrounding islands, including nine villages in the Lomaiviti and Lau groups. Initiatives include awareness campaigns, composting systems, and the establishment of communal waste collection points in accessible villages. The council continues to promote sustainable waste disposal and recycling across communities.

### **3.3.7 Lack of Strategic Heritage Collaboration**

The Heritage Bill was passed with minimal consultation with the Levuka Town Council. Although heritage recognition was initially seen as beneficial, it has since become a financial and regulatory burden with little tangible support from the central government. Strict heritage regulations have stifled local business growth, contributing to migration and making it difficult to attract or retain residents and investors. There is no clear implementation plan or sufficient funding to manage Levuka's heritage obligations effectively.

### **3.3.8 Audit and Financial Accountability**

A recent audit report raised serious concerns about the Town Council's past financial management, citing missing documentation such as subsidiary ledgers, fixed asset registers, and salary reconciliation statements. While these issues reflect weak internal controls, current administrators have since worked to stabilize and correct accounting practices.

### **3.3.9 Waste Collection in Villages**

Levuka Town Council extends its waste collection services to nine surrounding villages for a nominal fee of \$3 per household per month. The program includes regular collection and transportation of household waste to the main dump site and is part of the council's broader goal of improving sanitation and public health in rural areas.

### **3.3.10 Water Quality Issues**

Water quality in Levuka has deteriorated, with frequent reports of muddy and undrinkable tap water. Residents rely heavily on bottled water for safe consumption. This long-standing

issue is linked to aging water infrastructure, which remains unaddressed due to limited council jurisdiction and insufficient government intervention.

### **3.3.11 Tourism Development Constraints**

Despite its UNESCO heritage status, Levuka lacks the infrastructure and public amenities to support a thriving tourism industry. Town leaders believe it would be premature and even embarrassing to promote tourism until the roads, port facilities, and safety standards are significantly improved. The absence of formal collaboration with Tourism Fiji further limits development potential.



## **4.0 Sustainable Development Goals**

### **SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities**

The Levuka Town Council plays a pivotal role in promoting sustainable urban living by maintaining public infrastructure, providing essential services, and protecting the town's unique heritage as Fiji's first municipality and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Efforts such as infrastructure upgrades, beautification projects, and community-driven clean-up campaigns demonstrate the Council's commitment to building inclusive, safe, and resilient communities. However, challenges such as aging infrastructure, lack of tourism amenities, and limited local revenue hinder the town's capacity to meet modern urban demands while preserving its historic character.

### **SDG 6: Clean Water and Sanitation**

Ensuring access to clean water and proper sanitation remains a major concern in Levuka. The Council supports sanitation through solid waste disposal systems, pest control operations, and public hygiene enforcement. However, the community faces ongoing water quality issues due to deteriorating infrastructure, forcing many residents to rely on bottled water. Despite these limitations, the Council continues to promote environmental health through drainage cleaning, public toilet maintenance, and coordinated disease control efforts.

### **SDG 3: Good Health and Well-Being**

The Council's public health initiatives directly contribute to the well-being of Levuka's residents. These include vector control programs, food premises inspections, dengue surveillance, and environmental health monitoring. With collaboration from the Ministry of Health, the Council has effectively managed suspected dengue outbreaks, investigated health complaints, and conducted regular larval surveillance. Solid waste management and the operation of incinerators also play a crucial role in preventing disease and promoting a healthier living environment.

### **SDG 16: Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions**

The Council prioritizes governance, transparency, and legal enforcement as part of its mission to serve the people of Levuka. Through programs such as the Legal and Enforcement Unit, the Council addresses illegal developments, sanitation violations, and public nuisances. Recent efforts to improve audit compliance and rectify missing financial records highlight ongoing reforms to strengthen institutional capacity, despite staffing shortages and operational challenges.

### **SDG 13: Climate Action**

Levuka Town Council has taken proactive steps to address climate-related risks through projects aimed at environmental resilience. The construction of the Lisi Seawall helps protect coastal areas from erosion, while the development of the Climate Change Heritage Park demonstrates a forward-thinking approach to education and climate awareness. Drainage improvement projects and community engagement in disaster risk reduction further contribute to building local climate resilience.

## **5.0 Conclusion**

The Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence has conducted a thorough review of the Levuka Town Council 2018 Annual Report. The Committee report is bi-partisan and has 10 recommendations for consideration.

## 6.0 Committee Members' Signatures




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Hon. Lenora Qereqeretabua  
**Chairperson**



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Hon. Rinesh Sharma  
**Deputy Chairperson**



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Hon. Ratu Isikeli Tuiwailevu  
**Member**



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Hon. Penioni Ravunawa  
**Member**



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Hon. Virendra Lal  
**Member**

## **7.0 Annexure**

### **Published evidence**

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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-foreign-affairs-and-defence/>