

PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI



PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DAILY HANSARD

MONDAY, 4TH AUGUST, 2025

[CORRECTED COPY]

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MONDAY, 4TH AUGUST, 2025

The Parliament met at 10.35 a.m. pursuant to notice.

MR. SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

PRESENT

Hon. Sitiveni Ligamamada Rabuka, Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, Civil Service, Public Enterprises and Information

Hon. Prof. Biman Chand Prasad, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance and Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics

Hon. Manoa Seru Nakausabaria Kamikamica, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade, Co-operatives and Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises and Communications

Hon. Viliame Rogoibulu Gavoka, Deputy Prime Minister and, Minister for Tourism and Civil Aviation

Hon. Siromi Dokonivalu Turaga, Minister for Justice and Acting Attorney-General

Hon. Pio Tikoduadua, Minister for Defence and Veteran Affairs

Hon. Ro Filipe Qaraniqio Tuisawau, Minister for Public Works and Meteorological Services and Transport

Hon. Charan Jeeth Singh, Minister for Multi-Ethnic Affairs and Sugar Industry

Hon. Dr. Ratu Atonio Rabici Lalabalavu, Minister for Health and Medical Services

Hon. Filimoni Wainiqolo Rasokisoki Vosarogo, Minister for Lands and Mineral Resources

Hon. Aseri Masivou Radrodro, Minister for Education

Hon. Sakiasi Raisevu Ditoka, Minister for Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management

Hon. Alitia Vakatai Bavou Cirikiyasawa Bainivalu, Minister for Fisheries and Forestry and Acting Minister for Agriculture and Waterways

Hon. Agni Deo Singh, Minister for Employment, Productivity and Workplace Relations

Hon. Sashi Kiran, Minister for Women, Children and Social Protection

Hon. Ifereimi Vasu, Minister for iTaukei Affairs and Culture, Heritage and Arts

Hon. Maciu Katamotu Nalumisa, Minister for Housing and Local Government

Hon. Viliame Naupoto, Minister for Immigration

Hon. Ioane Naivalurua, Minister for Policing

Hon. Mosese Drecala Bulitavu, Minister for Environment and Climate Change

Hon. Esrom Yosef Immanuel, Assistant Minister for Finance

Hon. Sakiusa Tubuna, Assistant Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister

Hon. Isikeli Tuiwailevu, Assistant Minister for iTaukei Affairs

Hon. Iliesa Sovui Vanawalu, Assistant Minister for Education

Hon. Ratu Rakuita Solesole Sauramaeva Vakalalabure, Assistant Minister for Defence

Hon. Jovesa Rokuta Vocea, Assistant Minister for Rural, Maritime Development and Disaster Management

Hon. Tomasi Niuvotu Tunabuna, Assistant Minister for Agriculture and Waterways

Hon. Aliko Bia, Assistant Minister for Information

Hon. Ratu Josaia Bulavakarua Niudamu, Assistant Minister for Justice

Hon. Naisa Tatau Tuinaceva, Assistant Minister for Transport and Infrastructure

Hon. Penioni Koliniwai Ravunawa, Assistant Minister for Health

Hon. Lynda Diseru Tabuya

Hon. Kalaveti Vodo Ravu

Hon. Alipate Nagata Tuicolo

Hon. Inosi Kuridrani

Hon. Taito Rokomatu Matasawalevu

Hon. Sachida Nand
Hon. Shalen Kumar
Hon. Inia Batikoto Seruiratu
Hon. Jone Usamate
Hon. Premila D. Kumar
Hon. Faiyaz Siddiq Koya
Hon. Parveen Kumar Bala
Hon. Semi Tuleca Koroilavesau
Hon. A.A. Maharaj
Hon. Vijay Nath
Hon. Hem Chand
Hon. Rinesh Ritesh Sharma
Hon. Virendra Lal
Hon. Ketan Kirit Lal

Absent

Hon. Jese Saukuru, Minister for Youth and Sports
Hon. Lenora Salusalu Qereqeretabua, Assistant Minister for Foreign Affairs
Hon. Viam Pillay
Hon. Joseph Nitya Nand
Hon. Sanjay Salend Kirpal

MINUTES

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I move:

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Friday, 18th July, 2025, as previously circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed.

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I beg to second the motion.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE SPEAKER

Welcome

I welcome all honourable Members to today's sitting. To those seated in the gallery and to everyone tuning in via television and online, you are most welcome. Your continued curiosity and engagement with the workings of Parliament bring life to this democratic process, and we are thrilled to have you following along. Thank you for being part of this journey.

Composition of Standing Committees

Honourable Members, please, be advised that in accordance with Standing Order 114(1), the Speaker and the Business Committee have unanimously agreed to revise the composition of the Standing Committees. Each Committee will now consist of six Members - four representing the Government and two representing the Opposition. Kindly note that this approved change will take

effect from Monday, 18th August, 2025.

Furthermore, pursuant to Standing Order 115(4), please, take note of the Government's membership across all six Standing Committees:

Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights

- (1) Hon. Ratu R.S.S. Vakalalabure - Chairperson
- (2) Hon. L.D. Tabuya
- (3) Hon. Ratu J.B. Niudamu
- (4) Hon. S. Nand

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

- (1) Hon. E.Y. Immanuel - Chairperson
- (2) Hon. J.R. Vocea
- (3) Hon. N.T. Tuinaceva
- (4) Hon. S. Nand

Standing Committee on Economic Affairs

- (1) Hon. S. Tubuna - Chairperson
- (2) Hon. A.N. Tuicolo
- (3) Hon. K.V. Ravu
- (4) Hon. L.D. Tabuya

Standing Committee on Social Affairs

- (1) Hon. I.S. Vanawalu - Chairperson
- (2) Hon. Ratu R.S.S. Vakalalabure
- (3) Hon. A.N. Tuicolo
- (4) Hon. A. Bia

Standing Committee on Natural Resources

- (1) Hon. T.N. Tunabuna - Chairperson
- (2) Hon. T.R. Matasawalevu
- (3) Hon. S. Kumar
- (4) Hon. I. Kuridrani

Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence

- (1) Hon. L.S. Qereqeretabua - Chairperson
- (2) Hon. I. Tuiwailevu
- (3) Hon. P.K. Ravunawa
- (4) Hon. S. Kumar

The understanding of the Chair is that representatives from the Opposition remain, unless otherwise advised.

Ruling on Points of Order – Hon. R.R. Sharma

For the information of honourable Members, I can confirm that honourable Rinesh Sharma has complied with the sanction outlined in my ruling, which was appended to the official *Daily Hansard* of 18th July, 2025. That was in respect to the points of order raised by honourable Ro Filipe Tuisawau and honourable Filimoni Vosarogo.

54th Presiding Officers and Clerks Conference Report

Finally, the Back-to-Office Report for the 54th Presiding Officers and Clerks Conference, which was held in Nauru is now available in the Library for your perusal and reference.

PRESENTATION OF PAPERS AND CERTAIN DOCUMENTS

The following Reports were tabled by the Ministers responsible in accordance with Standing Order 38(1), and referred to the relevant Standing Committee for deliberation, in accordance with Standing Order 38(2):

Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence

- (1) Ministry of Civil Service Annual Report 2022-2023 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 1 of 2025*);
- (2) Fiji Broadcasting Corporation Pte Limited Annual Report 2022-2023 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 131 of 2024*);
- (3) Fiji Revenue and Customs Service Annual Report 2022-2023 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 45 of 2025*);
- (4) Ministry of Sugar Industry Annual Report 2020-2021 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 169 of 2024*); and
- (5) Fiji National University Annual Report 2024 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 80 of 2025*).

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

MR. SPEAKER.- The following Ministers have given notice to make Ministerial Statements under Standing Order 40, the:

- (1) Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade, Cooperatives, Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises and Communications;
- (2) Minister for Fisheries and Forestry, and Acting Minister for Agriculture and Waterways; and
- (3) Minister for Education.

The Ministers may speak up to 20 minutes. After the Minister, I will then invite the Leader of the Opposition or his designate to speak on the Statement for no more than five minutes. There will be no other debate.

National Strategy for 5G Spectrum Assignment and Commercial Deployment.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Prime Minister, honourable Deputy Prime Ministers, the honourable Leader of the Opposition, fellow Cabinet Ministers and Assistant Ministers, honourable Members of Parliament and the people of Fiji who may be listening in today; *ni sa yadra vinaka* and a very good morning to you all.

I rise this wonderful morning to update this august House and the people of Fiji of another significant milestone in the ICT space - the rollout of the fifth-generation wireless cellular technology or 5G, one that connects our people, empowers our industries, and a further catalyst for sustained and intelligent innovation and inclusion.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Cabinet recently endorsed our national 5G Spectrum Assignment and Rollout Strategy. Leading up to this, the Ministry has been working very closely with our service providers and Telecommunications Authority of Fiji (TAF), to ensure a flexible investment and regulatory framework

for current and future technological investments.

Our mobile network, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and its operators were issued licences to commence 5G testing from as early as 2023. A robust security framework is in place, which protects the integrity of the supply chain. The Spectrum has been identified and allocated, and we are now finalising commercial licences and go-live dates.

I would like to give a brief recap on the generation which paved the pathway to 5G. Mr. Speaker, Sir, 2G was introduced for digital voice calls and text messaging or SMS. Sir, 3G made mobile internet a real possibility for the first time. This meant browsing websites and sending multimedia messages with pictures. The 4G brought mobile broadband, resulting in smooth video streaming, online gaming and downloads.

Now, 5G offers even faster speeds and significantly lower latency than 4G. Its true potential lies in its ability to attain higher speeds, connect a massive number of devices simultaneously, and support incredibly reliable, near instant communication, while being energy efficient. It is also the fastest growing mobile broadband network generation. To illustrate this digital leap:

- Global System for Mobile Communications Association (GSMA) reports that 5G technology will become embedded in consumer and enterprise applications. It will drive wider economic growth, and that it is projected to contribute around \$900 billion to the global economy by 2030.
- 5G can theoretically deliver up to 100 times faster speed compared to 4G speeds.
- While 4G supports 10,000 devices per square kilometre, 5G can support over a million, enabling connected sensors, smart meters, and real-time data in agriculture, logistics, smart cities, and more.

Mr. Speaker Sir, 5G, when fully harnessed, brings the currently unmatched possibility of intelligent connectivity and potential use cases such as:

- precision agriculture supported by real-time sensors;
- remote medical procedures to secure, low latency telemedicine;
- real-time disaster alerts in cases of climate vulnerable areas;
- enabling MSMEs with real-time digital tools, payments and cloud services; and
- rise of smart industries and digitally empowered communities.

Sir, 5G will be first deployed where it works best, in areas where dense infrastructure, fibre connectivity, and power supply allow high-speed capacity services. However, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to make this very clear - we are equally focused on the rest of Fiji, particularly in our rural and maritime areas, where many communities still operate on basic 2G or 3G coverage.

As I will share in a moment, Fiji's 5G rollout ensures that all connected areas will offer at least 4G services so that no community is excluded from the digital economy. This dual-track strategy ensures that while 5G brings new possibilities, 4G will become the new minimum standard across Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, a lot of work has gone into preparing to maximise the potential of 5G. The Ministry and TAF have worked closely with expert consultants, development partners, operators, regulators and stakeholders. Experts know that the success of any mobile network begins with the right spectrum allocation. We have focused on prioritising effective spectrum management by

implementing transparent and well-coordinated spectrum assignment strategies to meet the rising demand for high-speed and reliable connectivity.

Fiji's 5G strategy focusses on three mid-band frequencies. The 5G Spectrum Management Plan highlights that mid-band frequencies between 2 GigaHertz (GHz) and 4 GHz are where 5G delivers its best performance. They support gigabit-class speeds and ultra-low latency while still covering wide areas, making them ideal to support our cities and our regional towns.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, with new types of technologies, there are obviously always concerns about health. The established science evidence is clear. The World Health Organization (WHO) report states that to date, no adverse health effects have been causally linked to exposure to wireless technologies, including 5G.

Since 2019, over 70 countries have deployed 5G, including our Pacific neighbours Tonga and Samoa, with no reported health impacts when operating within global safety standards. Fiji is undergoing further proactive steps to ensure ongoing safety.

The TAF will implement continuous monitoring using advanced tools and protocols, similar to those employed by regulators in countries like Australia. If new scientific evidence were to show exposure to radio frequency known as EMF at levels that pose health concerns, we will take action to protect our collective health and safety. This commitment ensures that our network operators consistently meet the highest international health and safety standards.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me now share with this august House what every Fijian wants to know, the rollout plan. From day one when we came into office, the instruction was clear – the deployment of 5G should address local pain points and have used cases that benefit the communities and should not be restricted to Suva or Nadi.

I am pleased to inform this august House that 5G will be deployed strategically and responsibly to align with national development goals and infrastructure readiness. Phase one will cover Suva, Nadi, Lautoka, Denarau - our main corridors, ports and medical centres. This ensures that from the outset, Fiji's commercial centres, tourism hubs and emergency services gain immediate access to 5G capacity and begin to feel its benefits.

In Phase 2, from 2025 to 2026, we will expand to Nasinu, Lami, Labasa and Savusavu. This Phase supports balanced growth between Viti Levu and Vanua Levu, as the Coalition Government advances the development of its plans in the North.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, by 2028, Phase 3 will see 5G deployed in Nausori, Sigatoka, Navua, Ba, Tavua, Rakiraki, Korovou, and we have also included Taveuni. The Government recognises the need to work with operators to ensure that infrastructure required is in place for 5G expansion to Taveuni.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, our 5G spectrum pricing strategy is both fair and future looking and noting that there are no established comparative pricing models in our region, as some Pacific Islands countries have had conservative 5G deployment strategies, we have looked at comparable economies in Asia and the Pacific.

The base price of \$2.92 million per 100 MHz block is derived from benchmarks in economies such as Vietnam, Indonesia and Thailand - countries that are way bigger but have similar ambitions in the digital economy.

We are a digital leader in the region, and our approach reflects that. To ensure rapid deployment and investment, all pricing incentives are commitment-based and were agreed to by operators. The incentives include:

- (1) Coverage based discount. Under this model, operators commit to achieving 5G coverage in designated rollout areas between 2025 and 2028, as outlined in the national roadmap. In return, they receive a discount on the principal spectrum fee. This discount is earned through pre-determined coverage delivery, and operators have formerly agreed to the terms.
- (2) Infrastructure modernisation-Based Payment Plan. This incentive offers phased payments and promotes legacy network infrastructure upgrades. It is available only to those who have accepted obligations under the first Incentive. Here, 60 percent of the principal value with applicable discount amount is paid up front. The remaining 40 percent is paid over four-year instalments. A further discount is applied to each annual payment, conditional upon verified progress in upgrading 2G and 3G to, at least, 4G.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the 5G spectrum requires infrastructure. It means, fibre backhaul, three-phase power, modernised core networks, et cetera. Our rollout aligns with incentives and the infrastructure readiness, ensuring that each 5G site delivers on performance expectations.

In areas where 5G is not feasible, we are prioritising infrastructure upgrades through these incentives so that no Fijian is left behind. These incentives are not open-ended, nor optional. They are embedded in licence conditions, agreed to by all operators, and will be monitored closely by the now fully operational TAF and the Ministry.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, all spectrum revenue will be reinvested through a structured, transparent three-way allocation. I am pleased to inform this august House that from the revenue generated, Cabinet has endorsed that -

- (1) 50 percent will go into the Government Consolidated Fund, supporting essential public services and infrastructure;
- (2) 30 percent will be allocated to the Universal Service Obligation Fund, expanding access in remote and maritime regions and I will be delivering a separate Ministerial Statement on this; and
- (3) 20 percent will support the Telecommunications Development Trust Fund, enabling long-term sector development and spectrum planning to ensure Fiji capitalises on digital economic opportunities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to conclude, Fiji's 5G strategy is clear and will set us on a pathway for digital transformation in its truest form:

- deployment of 5G first in areas where infrastructure is available and ready;
- parallel efforts will be made to modernise rural and maritime networks so that no community is left behind; and
- secure monitoring of networks will be done to align to internationally acceptable standards.

May God bless this august House and may God bless Fiji.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Prime Minister, honourable Deputy Prime Ministers, honourable Assistant Ministers, and honourable Members of Parliament; I want to thank the honourable Minister for this morning's Ministerial Statement.

In short, whilst it is very commendable with respect to the rollout of the spectrum and the assignments and the commercial deployment, there are issues that I am sure the honourable Minister is aware of, that will need to be addressed. I only have five minutes, so I will quickly raise them.

There are issues that currently exist because this is still fairly new. It has been actually put out in the market four years or five years ago. I am grateful that the honourable Minister has had a good conversation with our current service providers but there are issues with 5G, which I hope are addressed in the framework and will continue to be addressed. These are the security frameworks that will exist with respect to the actual rollout.

Whilst we all welcome and acknowledge the fact that we will get a faster internet speed in a lot of areas around Fiji, there are three bands. Which band are we actually using - the low band, the mid band or the high band? Is there a global harmonisation? Will there be global compatibility with respect to the rollout of the 5G network? All these questions need to be answered.

It is, of course, a very positive aspect of the outsourcing industry and other parts of the economy, as well as the Ministry of Health, et cetera, that will be involved in all this. It is actually commendable that it will help all of those industries. There is a word of caution with respect to the energy consumption that comes as a part of this particular programme and the security concerns that currently exist about the harvesting of information and hackers, et cetera, that exist.

This particular 5G technology, Mr. Speaker, can be disruptive. It is actually something that needs to be looked at carefully and should we also be looking at ensuring that we put up another serious regulatory body because I am sure the policing of all this is not just for the Ministry to do. I know there were discussions at the Committee stage also on whether the Police should be involved in it because this can be or allow hackers to get into our system very quickly. Because this operates at breakneck speed, Mr. Speaker, it will be a dangerous activity that we are entering into.

I understand also that the end-to-end encryption is not going to be there in terms of the previous capacity that we had. These are issues and that puts us at exposure to hackers, malware and potential breaches. And as I have said, the speed of this software is actually quite phenomenal.

On the infrastructure, I thank the honourable Minister with respect to telling us about how the infrastructure will have to cope. There will be a significant investment. It is quite a change with respect to the cost factor alone to maybe Vodafone and those other players.

It is actually great, Mr. Speaker, because it opens up another area for Fiji with respect to smart factories, smart cities, et cetera. Also, an area where this is actually good, if we are to entice more people to come to Fiji to start App development, et cetera, this is their way to go. But again, the word of caution, as I mentioned, is something that needs to be seriously looked at - how much information actually gets harvested.

One of the issues also is when we are handing out these licences, honourable Minister, is it going to be an auction. This is another revenue stream for Fiji. There are many countries that when engaging in this, they actually went through an auction process, which means that a considerable amount of revenue for the country.

Mr. Speaker, once again, it is very commendable that this is being done, but the word of caution, I know the honourable Minister will be onto it because there are several areas in the actual ICT space that may cause some areas of concern.

I know earlier on when we were in Parliament, I had asked the honourable Minister for Defence with respect to access and how people are being checked out in terms of security. I hope we have sufficient in place, or we are looking at independent measures where we can actually check our people that are actually going to bid for all of these because it is a place where information can be harvested.

All in all, a good venture, Sir, and I think it is commendable that it is actually coming out but, as I have said, the word of caution - I hope the Minister is actually doing something about it as serious measure.

Significant Progress on the Management of South Pacific Albacore

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Speaker, the honourable Prime Minister, honourable Ministers and Assistant Ministers, honourable Leader of the Opposition, ladies sitting in the gallery and all those tuning in live on Parliament's *Facebook* channel; *ni sa yadra vinaka*.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to update the House on a matter of profound national importance - the significance progress on managing South Pacific Albacore. Before I do that, please, allow me to highlight the background of Fiji's fisheries sector.

Mr. Speaker, within the fisheries sector, Fiji's GDP is split between our coastal and offshore resources. Whilst our coastal resources include marine life that are near shore or exist within our coastlines, the offshore sector is home to pelagic species that are highly migratory.

In layman's term, Mr. Speaker, our coastlines are home to fish species that are territorial or stationary which includes groupers, snappers, bivalves and invertebrates, to name a few, whilst the offshore space is home to species such as tuna and tuna like fish that migrate through the vast oceans in search of food.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, our shared tuna stocks are a fundamental pillar of Fiji's economy; a guarantor of thousands of livelihoods and one of the economic drivers of our national fisheries commodities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, due to Fiji's geographical location, the albacore stocks primarily dominate Fiji's tuna catch within our waters. Hence, the management of the albacore species is crucial for the long-term viability of our domestic longline fishery.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, having said that, it gives me great honour to inform this august House of a significant breakthrough in our longstanding effort to secure the future of this resource.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, a historic milestone was achieved at the 24th Regional Forum Fisheries Ministers Meeting, which was held in Niue from 22nd July to 24th July this year. After almost two decades of science-based discussions and negotiations, the Ministers of the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA) reached a consensus and endorsed a proportional allocation for South Pacific albacore for all FFA members.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is a landmark achievement, a powerful demonstration of regional solidarity, cooperation and mutual respect that will anchor the sustainable management of our tuna stocks for generations to come.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to fully grasp the weight of this achievement, we must first appreciate what South Pacific albacore means to Fiji. Fiji's natural resources are a bedrock of our economy, with the offshore fisheries sector proudly standing as a significant contributor. Central to this robust economic

output is our offshore tuna fishery, in which the South Pacific albacore continues to be the cornerstone of Fiji's domestic longline fleet, consistently representing the highest proportion of tuna caught by this segment.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, historically, our industrial fishery, largely sustained by our shared tuna stock, has generated average annual catches in the millions, demonstrating the enduring value and productivity of this crucial resource to our nation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, recognising the significant contribution of our shared stock, the Government has a strategic vision, which is to cultivate a sustainable and profitable tuna industry and to establish Fiji as a regional hub for processing.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are not content to simply export raw materials, we are strategically focused on value-adding, producing high value fresh and chilled tuna for the lucrative *sashimi* markets in Japan and the United States. This approach maximises the economic return from every fish caught, building a more resilient and robust fisheries sector.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is precisely why this Government, in its 2025-2026 Budget, has allocated \$24.9 million for a comprehensive fisheries overhaul to strengthen and improve the sector's contribution. The value of this resource cannot be measured in dollars alone. Across the Pacific, the tuna industry provides essential jobs for tens of thousands of people. Here in Fiji, the South Pacific albacore is integral to our people's economic resilience and well-being. It sustains our local processing industries, providing a crucial source of protein and economic stability.

Fiji's fishing industry has provided formal employment to hundreds of Fijians, a significant number of whom are women working in processing roles. This employment is a catalyst for social development, actively supporting government policies on decentralisation, the empowerment of women and private sector growth.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the shared South Pacific albacore stock is assessed as healthy, not overfished, and is simultaneously experiencing increasing fishing pressure. In the coming months, Fiji is placed to lead and contribute to further negotiations within the broader FFA members. This is critical as there needs to be a holistic engagement between all fishing nations in the lead up to the development of a binding measure for the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in the finalisation of a binding measure, Fiji will implement management procedures that ensure our shared albacore stock within a sovereign jurisdiction is viable and thriving. Our position is unique, and we must defend and stand by it. Compared to other Pacific Island countries, Fiji has developed a fully domesticated longline fleet, extensive shore-based processing capacity, and vertically integrated operations from port to market.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the continued management discussions to set limits on export levels for the harvest of South Pacific albacore will mean that there will be more control over the number of fishing fleets within our region, with limits imposed on total allowable catch. This, in turn, will ensure that the stocks remain healthy and viable throughout our generation and the future.

Mr. Speaker, this is a new dawn for the management of South Pacific albacore stock. The Coalition Government, through its strategic vision, its targeted investments and its determined diplomacy has achieved a historic milestone for Fijians. Through these robust decisions and achievements, the Ministry of Fisheries will ensure that our shared tuna stock will remain a sustainable pillar of our economy and the well-being of all Fijians.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, at the outset, let me thank the honourable Minister of Fisheries and Forestry on the progress of the management of the South Pacific albacore. I also wish to thank the honourable Minister on her brief, highlighting the significant progress on the management of our South Pacific albacore and the outcome of the 24th Regional Forum Fisheries Ministerial Meeting held in Niue. She had also highlighted the importance of the South Pacific albacore to Fiji and the management strategy as the way forward.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, albacore, yellowfin and bigeye form the backbone of Fiji's tuna industry for our longline fleet that operates in our Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ).

Let me highlight for the information of this august Parliament, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that Fiji's albacore tuna longline has become the first in Fiji to receive and achieve the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) certification.

As the honourable Minister has alluded to, albacore dominates the longline industry in Fiji. The proportional distribution of catch among the Pacific Islands is a good move as it will assist the island nations to share these resources.

I also acknowledge the honourable Minister's sentiment on the urgency to value-add South Pacific albacore tuna, so that it can bring the maximum return to Fiji and the industries that deal with albacore.

I wish to highlight that there is a significant concern by Pacific Fishing Company Pte Limited (PAFCO) in Levuka. We had visited the factory about two months ago, and I would urge the honourable Minister to explore ways to increase the stock of albacore that is being given to Levuka.

As we understand it, Mr. Speaker, PAFCO provides the lifeline for the province of Lomaiviti and the island of Ovalau. There are about 800 to 1,000 women who are employed in PAFCO. It is a significant value for the economic activity within Levuka.

I would implore the honourable Minister to explore other sources that will be able to increase the capacity of tuna that is provided to PAFCO in Ovalau. Without PAFCO, Levuka will be dead. Without PAFCO, the employment that is contributed to the people of Lomaiviti, the island of Ovalau and the town of Levuka, will be detrimental to everything that we will try to improve in Levuka.

Pre-Primary Education Full Day Programme

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Prime Minister, honourable Deputy Prime Ministers, Cabinet colleagues and honourable Members of Parliament; I rise today to share important developments in our education sector. I inform this august House that the Full Day Pre-Primary Education Programme for Early Childhood Education (ECE) was implemented with flexibility last Friday, 1st August, 2025, across all 875 Ministry of Education registered Pre-Primary Centres or Kindergartens.

This new initiative is the outcome of collaboration with UNICEF since 2021, beginning with a subsector analysis that guided the changes, now captured in the Pre-Primary Education Policy which I had the honour of launching in April 2025 this year. This policy, Mr. Speaker, Sir, specifically focusses on ensuring quality education programmes during the year immediately preceding entry into primary school, targeting eligible children who are five years old.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I commend the People's Coalition Government for its unwavering commitment to prioritising quality education and for recognising that the foundational years of a child's life are critical

for their overall development. The Government is committed to ensuring that every child has access to quality pre-primary education, regardless of gender, ethnicity and socio-economic background.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am aware that the recent announcement of the full-day programme has generated discussions in the public domain, including concerns raised regarding space constraints, the rollout timeline, and the impact of extended hours on young children. Let me assure this august House, our fellow Fijians and ECE teachers that these concerns are not taken lightly. The Ministry has acted swiftly and responsibly, and as of Friday, implementation was successfully carried out in vast majority of centres with flexibility granted where challenges exist.

Based on the data and reports received from all nine education districts, the Ministry is elated to announce the positive reception that most, if not all, of the pre-primary centres and kindergartens were ready, and flexible implementation commenced last Friday.

The survey conducted by the Ministry shows that out of the 875 centres, only five in the Suva District and two in the Nadi District have space and infrastructural limitations. The heads of schools in these centres have reassured us that they will be working with their school management committees on improvements to accommodate the changes.

The seven schools with space and infrastructure limitations are currently carrying out two sessions. For the information of this House, the seven schools in the Suva District are:

	ECE Centre	Number of Students		Total	Number of ECE Teachers
		Session 1	Session 2		
1	Chauhan Kindergarten	35	33	68	4
2	Jagindra Singh Kindergarten	59	59	118	8
3	Nasinu Gospel Kindergarten	56	46	102	7
4	Nasinu Sangam Kindergarten	43	43	86	5
5	Rishikul Kindergarten	85	82	167	13

For the Nadi District, the schools are:

	ECE Centre	Number of Students		Total	Number of ECE teachers
		Session 1	Session 2		
1	Andrews Kindergarten	63	68	131	8
2	Namaka Public Kindergarten	81	64	145	8

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I also want to clarify that this programme does not impose a 'one-size-fits-all' model. Flexibility in the implementation was clearly outlined in the Ministry of Education Circular No. 77, which was issued to all Divisional Education Officers and District Officers for the attention of their respective heads of schools of the attached and stand-alone Pre-Primary Centres or Kindergartens.

The Circular outlined implementation details, including guidance on programme structure, engagement with parents through Community and Parental Support (CAPS) meetings, newsletters and communications via Viber groups. It also covered important arrangements such as transport, safety and child welfare. For instance, Mr. Speaker, Sir, if parents wish to take their children early, they may do so at around 12.00 p.m or 1.00 p.m at the earliest.

Despite the flexibility of children to adjust to their body clock and leave early at times, it is very crucial that ECE teachers work the full eight hours, now that they are paid. They can now utilise the additional hours to prepare their lessons for the next day. Curriculums for ECE have been developed

to cover a whole day of learning, and this should be used by ECE teachers to prepare teaching visual aids, for instance.

I call on all Heads of School where ECE learning is available to ensure that they provide supervision to ECE teachers and regulate monitoring and compliance to the extended hours of teaching, as ECE teachers will now be expected to account for the extended hours of learning and the increased remuneration now provided by Government.

For stand-alone ECE providers, the Ministry will work in collaboration with school management and the Divisional and District Offices to ensure compliance and accountability to the extended hours of learning.

Our FEMIS system, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is being addressed to capture the learnings and hours of work of all ECE teachers, and it has been reported by the Ministry's IT Department as we speak.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the revision from a half to full day programme allows ECE children and teachers to participate in enjoyable and play-based learning activities that foster creativity, social and emotional development, and motor skills, while reducing passive screen time.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this development also ensures that the 18,325 pre-primary students are able to continue their early learning experience within a safe and structured school environment, rather than spending hours outside school after their morning sessions, waiting for their pick-up with limited supervision.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this initiative stipulates the Ministry's commitment to improving access, equity and continuity in foundational learning as stipulated in Thematic Area 3 of the Denarau Declaration aligned to Target 4.2 of SDG 4.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there are key benefits for a full-day pre-primary programme, which includes:

- (1) Enhanced learning opportunities that allow for more time in structured play and learning. This gives children the space to explore, ask questions and engage with their peers, the critical aspects of their overall development.
- (2) Moreover, this full-day programme supports families. As their children are in school learning, their parents and guardians will be able to have a set pick-up time for all their children, including those attending primary school.
- (3) We have received feedback through photos shared by our pre-primary teachers, showing how much the children enjoyed the afternoon programme. Teachers also shared sentiments from parents and guardians, expressing appreciation for the change. I have been informed that some mothers who used to wait around the ECE centres now have the opportunity to seek paid employment, while others are able to tend to their farms and daily chores. Working parents have also expressed gratitude to the Ministry of Education for this cost-effective and convenient initiative, knowing that children are learning safely under teacher supervision.
- (4) Full-day programmes help bridge the opportunity gap for children from underprivileged backgrounds by providing consistent access to high-quality education and resources. This is a demonstration of equity in access to quality education, as encapsulated in SDG 4.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there is an increasing body of research, supporting the efficacy of full-day pre-primary education in fostering cognitive and social-emotional skills. International evidence, including

New Zealand and Finland, shows that well-designed full-day ECE programmes lead to improved school readiness, stronger social and language skills, and smoother transition into primary schooling.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is the foundational and transitional stage to Year 1 for the 18,325 students enrolled in our pre-primary centres. The full-day programme ensures that the Ministry's vision – empowering Fiji's future and nurturing innovative lifelong learners – is embedded from the start. The programme not only exposes students to pre-literacy, pre-numeracy and science, but also develops vital social skills such as cooperation and empathy from an early age.

With those words, I strongly believe that every child deserves the best start in life. Full day pre-primary programmes are a significant step in that direction, and together we can build a stronger foundation for our children, families and our future.

HON. H. CHAND.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank the honourable Minister for Education for his Ministerial Statement and providing an update on the ECE teachers' salary. I welcome the Government's decision to regularise ECE teachers' appointments, placing them on equal footing with other teaching staff. I have always acknowledged the immensely important role of ECE teachers. Two decades ago, I still remember ECE teachers were paid as low as \$50 a week.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, ECE teachers were paid by school management until 31st July, 2016. The ECE teachers back then were lowly paid. The salary rate for ECE teachers was first confirmed on 1st August, 2016. The salary rate was based on the qualification of the ECE teachers. It was the first time that ECE teachers were absorbed into the Civil Service, and the government started paying the full salaries of all ECE teachers.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the previous government recognised the critical role of the ECE teachers and gave them huge increment after the Job Evaluation Exercise in 2017. Sir, ECE teachers contribute significantly to the broader school environment, and they deserve good pay. ECE students were attending one session per day, that is, four hours per day until last Thursday, but now they will attend class the whole day, and it is very good to hear from the honourable Minister that the students are ready for the whole day class. The Ministry of Education should ensure that there is proper planning and monitoring to ensure ECE students adapt to whole-day teaching and learning.

The other very important area is providing conducive teaching and learning environment to ECE students and the teachers. Classrooms should not be overcrowded. Mr. Speaker, Sir, my question is, and I think the honourable Minister has answered this, are all ECE centres ready? There are some centres which are not ready with the necessary resources for full day classes. I hope the Ministry of Education looks into that urgently and closely monitor all ECE centres, including the standalone ECE centres, to ensure ECE students are provided with a conducive learning environment, and assist centres with resources where there is a need.

The foundation for learning established in early childhood set the stage for all future learnings. We have to ensure that our children receive the best education during the critical time of learning that takes place before they enter primary education.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I think this is an appropriate time for us to suspend proceedings for our morning tea break. Parliament will resume in half an hour.

The Parliament adjourned at 10.35 a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 11.10 a.m.

QUESTIONS

Oral Questions

Review Report of Fiji's Major Universities (Question No. 73/2025)

HON. H. CHAND asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Education update Parliament on the review report of the three major universities in Fiji?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Member for his question. The Higher Education Commission established the External Review Committee, which was tasked to conduct institutional reviews of the three major universities - the Fiji National University (FNU), the University of the South Pacific (USP) and the University of Fiji, to assess the quality of their programmes and operations against the approved quality assurance standards.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the External Review Committee has completed its initial review report, which contained a number of findings. The Commission has raised serious concerns about the report's integrity and citing a number of grey areas, including the lack of clear methodologies in the terms of reference.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- My question to the honourable Minister is related to, as you have mentioned, the integrity of the report. Are you going to hold the Chair of the Commission accountable and whether the Chair has been fully paid?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Member for the question. I think the Higher Education Commission is an autonomous body and the appointment of the Salary Review Committee comes under the provision of the Commission and the Chairperson.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, the honourable Minister did not answer the question. I do understand that the Fiji Higher Commission is an independent body, but my question is related to the Chairperson of that Committee, whether he or she will be held accountable and whether he or she has been paid, because it is the taxpayers' money that went into this review exercise. I understand that you have also voiced your concerns publicly on the quality of the report that was submitted, and even universities have also raised similar concerns.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, despite the concerns that have been raised, the universities have requested that the report be given to them for their comments and this report were provided to the universities who have individually provided their comments on the report that was prepared. If you allow me, Sir, to highlight some of the comments by the universities on the reports. The universities responses are varied.

The FNU seem to reject the report in its entirety, citing a lack of credibility, methodology and inclusion of defamatory statements against its senior leadership. The University of Fiji, while acknowledging minor factual errors, accepted the report in good faith and is now working towards its full implementation. The University's planning committee and the Council are currently considering an implementation roadmap over a 12-month period.

The University of the South Pacific offered a professional rebuttal, asserting that the report was methodologically weak and professionally inadequate. The University further highlighted that the report's conclusion contrasts sharply with the assessment by globally respected accredited agencies and reaffirmed its ongoing international validated reports.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the process is still ongoing. In terms of the question, the Commission will have to continue reviewing this report with its own internal processes, like appointing an independent person to review this report. That is all the process. So, to address and answer your question in terms of whether the action will be taken, this process is still ongoing.

HON. H. CHAND.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the External Review Committee was set up more than 18 months ago. The report should have been out by now. My question to the honourable Minister for Education is, what is causing the delay as far as the release of the report is concerned?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, if the honourable Member had listened to my earlier response on the initial report that has been submitted, I have highlighted that it has been given to the universities for their comments, so it is work-in-progress. Once it is finalised, it will be tabled in Cabinet.

Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Unit
(Question No. 74/2025)

HON. J.R. VOCEA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, Civil Service and Public Enterprises and Information update Parliament on the establishment of the whole of Government Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) Unit?

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, on 3rd June, 2025, Cabinet approved the establishment of a Whole of Government Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) Unit. It is to be established under the Prime Minister's Office. That decision reflects on the growing public demand for accountability and measurable results of what Government does.

The MEL system will be the central key to effective governance, enabling evidence-based decision-making across sectors from infrastructure and healthcare to poverty reduction and community development initiatives. This ensures that the policies deliver real impact and empower the citizens of this country.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the national MEL Framework will operationalise Government priorities and innovations that are stipulated in the National Development Plan 2025-2029 and Vision 2050. The MEL Framework will be a practical tool to help Government track progress, improve service delivery and make better decisions. It aims to ensure transparency, provide resources widely and support key goals, like reducing poverty and improving the lives of ordinary citizens through evidence-based policymaking.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it not only monitors resources allocation, but also the outcomes and impacts, ensuring that every dollar spent delivers public value, from economic growth projects to social programmes that aim to reduce poverty and support everyday citizens.

To strengthen accountability, Mr. Speaker, Sir, all Permanent Secretaries' contracts will be aligned with the achievement of the NDP targets and Ministries will be required to align their strategic plans, their budgets and reports accordingly. A new whole-of-government monitoring system led from

the Prime Minister's Office in coordination with the Ministry of Finance will require regular reporting to inform Cabinet decisions.

To ensure timely oversight at the highest level, the MEL Unit has been established immediately within the Office of the Prime Minister, allowing the Prime Minister and Cabinet to receive real-time updates on the progress of our National Development Plan. The MEL Unit will serve as the nerve center of this new government approach. It will focus on coordination through harmonising monitoring efforts across Ministries to eliminate duplications, while maintaining the National Performance Dashboard for Cabinet oversight.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Office of the Prime Minister is working on finalising administrative issues and will coordinate closely with Ministries for sideways transfers of existing Monitoring and Evaluation Officers from within the Ministries to the MEL Unit to support the implementation of the Framework.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this Framework necessitates our collective support, as it will require support from both sides of this august House. It will work to address inefficiencies and ineffectiveness that have existed over past governments. It is a mammoth task, but we will be resolute in our role because our people have demanded it. This is not about adding bureaucratic layers, but about strengthening checks and balance systems with the aim of making every part of Government more effective in delivering results.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, even though it is early days, the MEL Framework reflects Government's ongoing commitment to track its progress, identify weaknesses, draw lessons and make timely adjustments, ensuring continuous improvement in service delivery and effectively addressing key positions and key priorities, such as what I said before, poverty eradication and uplifting of ordinary citizens.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, let us take this decisive step together and move effectively to the future and be effective and more accountable in governance. The citizens we serve deserve nothing less. The time for talk is over. The era for result-based governance begins today.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish the honourable Prime Minister a lot of success in the new initiative that he wants to roll out. Given that the MEL Unit is intended to coordinate across all Ministries, what authority or mandate will it have to enforce compliance if Ministries fail to submit timely or complete data?

This is the problem every government faces. When they write to a Ministry for information, either the information is incorrect, they will try and elaborate a lot of other things which cannot be verified, or they do not submit information in a timely manner. Thank you, Sir.

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Member who was a former Minister would understand the systems existing in government so it is the enforcement of those systems and measures that are in place. You probably also recall that there was no allocation made in the Budget for this, so we are still in the formulation process.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Honourable Prime Minister, Sir, I understand what you are saying with respect to 'still being in the formulation process'. Just a question, Sir, will there be some kind of independent oversight into this so that when Government receives it, instead of checking it themselves with respect to what is actually transpiring, they can say, "Alright, we have an independent view on this. An independent oversight says that the evaluation says that we must do X, Y or Z". Will there be an independent body conducting some kind of oversight on this entire report?

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, that is correct. It will be an oversight. We will not try and run the various Ministries and Departments from the Office of the Prime Minister. They will be allowed to conduct their business. It will be just an oversight and monitoring, and also for any actions required will also be channelled down so that it is performed by the Ministry or by the Department in accordance with their process.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think the idea by the honourable Prime Minister is a good idea. Monitoring and evaluation is always critical but I notice that when the honourable Prime Minister is mentioning what it is, he is referring back to the National Development Plan. That is obviously a good thing.

One of the weaknesses with the current development plan, if you look at the write-up of certain sections and the indicators that it is supposed to measure, there is a mismatch. So, if you have wrong indicators, then you will be assessing wrongly. That is one of the issues that is there.

On the basis of this, monitoring and evaluation is very important. I am just asking about the capacity of the people to understand, to be able to carry out the level of evaluation and monitoring, especially when looking at impact and outcomes, which are very broad in nature.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, is that a question or a statement you are making?

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is a question.

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, as the head of a training institution in the past, he would know that he would need, in his own office, the ability and the capacity to monitor. He does not go and micromanage. We direct those that should be managing to manage.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me convey to the honourable Prime Minister that this is a good initiative. I know a few years back we had the Strategic Framework for Change and Coordinating Office (SFCCO) in the Office of the Prime Minister, but somehow it was taken away years back. In last year's Budget, I had talked about outcome-based budgeting. This is a step in the right direction.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, may I pay tribute to the late Mr. Parmesh Chand, who contributed a lot to the Civil Service and was a very committed and dedicated senior civil servant. A few years back, honourable Prime Minister, after his return from the China Leadership Academy in Shanghai, Mr. Parmesh Chand also established Government Service Centres in the Divisions. I am just asking the link between your MEL Team and the Government Service Centres that are already in existence in the four Divisions.

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Leader of Opposition would have recalled that in the initial answer to the question, I mentioned that these systems will continue. The fact that this will be monitoring our development plan does not mean that we are overseeing for the Ministry of Finance. The National Development Plan is a whole of cabinet product; we had all participated in that. We just need that extra oversight.

I mentioned in my presentation on my main response to the question that there are people already in the various Departments and Ministries that do this. Some of them will be redeployed, which will probably involve very little or no extra budgetary provisions, but they will continue to do what they do but do it better and centrally co-ordinated.

Controlling the Spread of Dengue Fever
(Question No. 75/2025)

HON. V. LAL asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services inform Parliament whether the spread of dengue fever is now under control?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, may I give some information with regard to dengue fever. Dengue Fever is endemic to Fiji. There are about more than 20 species of mosquitoes that are currently known to have been in Fiji and out of that, there are only a few that are able to transmit the dengue virus. The mosquitoes that do transmit the dengue virus usually do their work early in the morning and just before sundown, as we were briefed in Cabinet by the team from the Center for Disease Control (CDC). That is why spraying is done in the early mornings and before sundown.

To answer your question, yes, there was an outbreak declared in the Western, Central and Northern Divisions and the declaration was done because of the numbers that had escalated within that period and you had rightly mentioned in your question the outbreak - the status as it is.

I will give you the overall numbers. The national accumulative numbers from 1st January to 15th June, 2025, there have been 10,969 accumulative cases. These are: 4,960 in the Western Division; 2,968 in the Central Division; 2,867 in the Northern Division; and 274 in the Eastern Division.

For dengue hospital admissions, overall, nationally, there were 2,334 cases:

- (1) Western Division – 1,164;
- (2) Central Division – 455;
- (3) Northern Division – 655; and
- (4) Eastern Division – 60.

In terms of deaths, from 1st January to 22nd June, 2025, there has been a total of eight deaths:

- (1) Western Division – 5;
- (2) Central - Nil; and
- (3) Northern Division – 3.

In terms of the current trend as it is, we currently have 491 cases:

- (1) Western Division – 147;
- (2) Central Division – 141;
- (3) Northern Division – 198; and
- (4) Eastern Division – 5.

In terms of the data, yes, there was an outbreak mentioned because of the numbers that have gone above the normal. As such, the Ministry took action and even the honourable Prime Minister encouraged a multidisciplinary approach towards the tackling of dengue. Once we, the team at the CDC and within the public health, made a presentation, it was clear that as dengue is endemic to Fiji, the Ministry of Health is well aware of the programmes and initiatives within the Ministry to tackle the outbreak.

As such, judging by the numbers that I have read out on the cumulative numbers of 10,000, there were less than 2,000 admissions and even tragically, we only lost five. Nevertheless, we must sincerely thank the Ministry and the Public Health Department, especially the other sectors that have assisted the Ministry –

- Fiji Sugar Corporation for lending some of its trucks;
- Ministry of Town and Country Planning, through the various stakeholders in the City Councils; and
- iTaukei Affairs Board, that have come on board to assist the Ministry during this time.

I can proudly say that even though it is endemic, we are still not out of the woods. An ongoing awareness has been constantly done throughout, mainly in the Western Division and the Northern Division.

HON. V. LAL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, as I raised in my budget speech that a number of medications were not available in government pharmacies. In regard to dengue fever, in case there are some severe cases, do we have enough medications to treat that?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the data would tell you that for those who have been admitted, there are treatments available. Usually, dengue symptoms and fever is like any other acute viral infection or illness with a headache, body ache and things like that.

As such, the main thing is to ensure that the public are aware of the signs and symptoms and get treatment early. That is why in the several previous outbreaks that we have had, our public health teams have been on their toes and proactive in terms of cleaning the environment and talking to the public on the early warning signs and symptoms, and to present themselves early.

On the data nationally, more than 2,000 people were admitted and eight lost their lives within the Western and Northern Divisions.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Minister for the comprehensive answer and letting us know that dengue is now under control. I would like to raise a concern at this point in time to the honourable Minister for Health. When any private pharmacy opens in Fiji, we are supposed to give an undertaking that under Free Medication Scheme, we will be part of that Government programme.

Recently, we had an announcement from Aspen that they will no longer be distributing medication to the general outpatient. Aspen is a private company, managing a public entity with pharmacies. How can Aspen release the information that they will not be covering any patient who comes for GOPD clinic for free medication scheme. It is mandatory and Aspen is legally binded to provide this service to the patient, Mr. Speaker. So, it is a concern, honourable Minister for Health, and if he can take this on board.

MR. SPEAKER.- I was going to rule on the relevancy of the question because the question that was asked by honourable Lal specifically relates to the number of dengue cases, so this one is a very general question. I will leave it to the Minister whether he wishes to answer that. I see that the Minister is not in a position to answer, so I will disallow him to then.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, a supplementary question; you talked about multi-disciplinary approaches, what has happened to the Leptospirosis, Typhoid, Dengue, and Diarrhea (LTDD) campaigns? It used to work well previously. Who is taking the lead and are there any resources committed to it?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the LTDD campaign is an ongoing campaign. It is factored within the budgetary allocation for the four Divisions as I have said, so within the budgetary allocation, you will see dengue, leptospirosis, typhoid that are all included. However, that is for normal programmes, the ongoing programmes that they do on a weekly or

monthly basis. In terms of emergency such as outbreak, that is where there are also funds available to it which are kept within Headquarters.

To answer your question, the LTDD programmes are ongoing because, as I have stated, dengue is endemic. It is here in Fiji throughout the year and, therefore, we have to have these ongoing programmes that are included in our programmes, especially in the public health perspective side.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- I thank the honorable Minister for his response to that question. Honorable Minister, my question is related to *wolbachia* infected mosquitoes that were released, I think, around 2018 to control dengue and *zika*. My question to you is what is the status of this programme? Is it still ongoing? How effective has this particular programme in controlling them?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Yes, *wolbachia* mosquitoes programme was brought in as a method of controlling dengue in terms of controlling the reproduction of the dengue mosquitoes. The last briefing that I got, I was told that the programme probably have seized, but I will get a much more definite answer, then I can inform you accordingly.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- I have a very simple question for clarity. When you talk about dengue fever being under control and also looking at the treatment aspect of it, I am from Lautoka in the West, if I have dengue fever and I go to the hospital and I am admitted and I need medications, would I have to get a taxi and run to a pharmacy? I just need clarity on that, of what people will go through, or medicines are available at the hospital, or do I need to find a pharmacy that is open 24/7 to recover from dengue fever.

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- If you are admitted, yes, you will be given the treatment that you need.

Update – Groundwater Sources
(Question No. 76/2025)

HON. A. BIA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Lands and Mineral Resources update Parliament on the Ministry's efforts to identify groundwater sources to assist communities that do not have access to clean drinking water?

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Member for raising this question today. By way of background, the Ministry of Lands, in particular the Department of Mineral Resources in Nabua, is tasked with the management and development of groundwater resources throughout Fiji, and they rely heavily on the expertise of their staff who have been developed through formal training, on the job experience and exposure to available technologies to survey our landscape and manage these vital but it is an invisible resource.

Groundwater, as you know, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is one of the world's most valuable natural resource as it provides safe drinking water, supports agriculture and sustains industries such as mineral water bottling. However, Sir, unlike surface water or river water, groundwater is hidden beneath the earth and cannot be directly observed or measured. Therefore, it makes its assessment a very challenging or risky task. The accuracy and efficiency in locating groundwater is crucial as its availability depends on specific geological formations.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to assess potential groundwater sources, the Ministry has employed and has employed in the past Electrical Resistivity Tomography (ERT) as they call it. Sir, ERT is a non-invasive

geophysical technique that measures subsurface resistivity. This method involves injecting an electrical current into the ground through electrodes and then recording the voltage difference, allowing us to generate 2D images of underground structures. These images reveal key features such as purged aquifers, saturated zones, geographical faults and layers which are impenetrable.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, ERT has been instrumental in identifying drilling targets over the many years since our independence. However, the method is labour intensive, and it is time consuming, limiting the number of boreholes we can identify and drill on an annual basis. Additionally, as groundwater is an abstract and hidden resource, no method is without limitations and uncertainties and borehole outcomes remain.

However, this year, the Ministry took a major step forward in adopting airborne geophysical survey technology, and we are grateful to have entered into partnership with Geoscience Australia and supported by the Australian Government through our Vuvale Partnership. This method is conducted using aircraft and allows us to survey large areas more rapidly and efficiently than ground-based ERT methods. The survey, Mr. Speaker, Sir, was launched last month and will cover priority areas on Viti Levu and Vanua Levu that are not being currently serviced by Fiji Water Authority, and where water scarcity is known to be an issue.

Recently, Mr. Speaker, Sir, there is a helicopter with around 30 metre diameter formation, hanging below it that is flying through certain parts of Fiji. That is the technology that I have just explained. The survey areas will include the Sigatoka Valley, Cuvu, Tuva, Malomalo, Wai and Momi, Vitogo Flats to Lololo, coastal corridors from Tavua to Rakiraki, Tokaimalo, Nalawa, Nalaba, Nakuailava and Mataso, Lomaivuna and the Verata to Namara corridor.

In Vanua Levu, Dreketi to Seaqaqa, Sasa and Wailevu in Macuata, including Tabia. Parts of Labasa including Nadogo, Namuka and Dogotuki, Udu Peninsula and the southern parts of Taveuni. This survey, Mr. Speaker, will run until November of this year and it is expected to produce hundreds, potentially thousands of drilling targets by December 2025.

As I previously mentioned, Mr. Speaker, groundwater drilling is the final stage of the survey process while science continues to reduce uncertainties, not all boreholes yield sufficient water. Currently, our Ministry maintains a success rate of 80 percent and with this new technology, we are hoping to raise this to 90 percent.

Mr. Speaker, looking ahead, the integration of airborne geophysics and the engagement of four private drilling companies over the next three years will significantly increase the number of communities that will benefit from groundwater development, the anticipated outcomes would include improved health outcomes, particularly for our children and our elderly, enhance community productivity and livelihood, better economic performance through reliable water access through our schools; and reduce government spending on water carting.

Mr. Speaker, with these advancements, we are confident that more Fijian communities will gain access to a sustainable and secure water supply, contributing to their wellbeing and community resilience.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Mr. Speaker, I thank the honourable Minister for an update on this. Just for an update, on 1st October, 2024, it was announced that 1,700 boreholes are intended to be constructed by the honourable Deputy Prime Minister. This question is, part of what was announced and with your survey, what portion or percentage of these boreholes would be on renewable energy or going solar?

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- Mr. Speaker, the target of 1,700 is going to be helped by this new technology that we have got from Australia. So, we are hoping to get possibly hundreds or thousands of

drilling holes identified through this study; that is a target. It is ambitious, but I think it does represent the need of areas where Water Authority of Fiji does not have network as well.

With the pumps, Mr. Speaker, most of our drilling sites now are operated through renewable energy because some of these areas also do not have electrification through EFL. So, there is a huge push for solarisation to power the pumps. I have since visited a couple with better technology that have come out from Australia. One in Dama is a very classic one which I think is going to be repeated elsewhere when these boreholes are found to be successful.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I congratulate the honourable Minister for moving on to these airborne geophysics approach. I am just wondering, one of the things that we have always had an interest in, is getting to grips with the size of the amount of groundwater that we have, because it is a resource. I am just wondering whether the honourable Minister is also thinking of using this approach to try to get a firm grip on the amount of aquifer and groundwater that we have in this country so that we can then manage it properly.

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- Sir, I have had a good briefing from Geoscience Australia before the equipment was flown into Fiji, and I can tell you and the Members of Parliament that this technology is top edge. It is designed to give you maximum output of information and I think with the colourings, they are also able to define and give you areas where there are plants of resources and areas where there is water, but not enough, so that you do not have to spend on drilling. You could concentrate on areas where they are identified to be sufficient resources that is not just manageable, but also complex.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Aquifers needs to be protected very well, and we have seen in many other countries when boreholes are dug or drilled, if it is not managed well during the extraction process, or at the using stage, the salty water can come up and can destroy the agricultural land. It has happened in many countries. So, my question to you honourable Minister is, to what extent are you working with the Department of Environment in monitoring the boreholes already in operation?

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- Mr. Speaker, there are scientists at MRD and there is constant water quality monitoring that they do. Sometimes it is on schedule, sometimes is when they have a report and that is when they would attend to these boreholes. But it is also important that when we do community education on these projects that we emphasise on the need to have buffer zones around it. In other words, you cannot bring your cattle next to the borehole facility or anywhere near running surface water, because the surface waters will ultimately drip down to the aquifers. There are not many reports around that, but when it does happen, they are attended to by MRD officials as soon as they are able to get the report.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Honourable Minister, thank you for your response. I noted that you mentioned the Verata-Namara corridor. I do declare my interest, but it is exactly what I have also raised with the honourable Minister for Works and the honourable Minister has responded to my email as well, as we discussed. Because both in his address and also of the Deputy Prime Minister, they mentioned about the corridor from Kasavu to Veinuqa, so it falls within the area as well. We are hopeful now that something will be done to *Tikina o Verata* and *Tikina o Namara*.

My simple question honourable Minister is again on water quality. It costs a lot of money to do the boreholes, but then when it comes to the water quality, is there technology available to treat or improve some of this? There is conflicting advices given or this water has faecal coliform; you cannot drink in but can use it for other purposes You are aware of the Lekutu borehole? Is there a technology available to improve on this quality of water?

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- Mr. Speaker, just getting through tests that are done, after every borehole is drilled and ready to be reticulated, there is a yield and sustainability test that is conducted. They will test and estimate the amount of aquifer or water that is contained in that aquifer. It will give us an estimate, but it also will give us an estimate of sustainability.

In the Lekutu borehole, they drilled a borehole that would sustain Lekutu Secondary, as well as Lekutu Village. I personally had visited it when it was being tested. It is a large aquifer, not only able to supply, it was originally supposed to only supply the school, but then they discovered that it was enough to supply the school as well as the village and settlements around that.

After the tests were done, they identified a level of iron in the water that might not be good for health. They are liaising with the scientists from Australia on how that water can be treated. I am given to understand that you could drop pills onto the water tank, and it will water down the amount of iron that is in the water that makes that water safe to consume or drink. But if you are asking about the science around what could be done, I am given to understand that there is sufficient science that can make that water become consumable.

Water Cuts in Tavua
(Question No. 77/2025)

HON. J. USAMATE asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Public Works, Meteorological Services and Transport inform Parliament on the reasons why Tavua residents continuously face water cuts on a regular basis and what is being done to rectify the problem?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- The Tavua water supply service coverage includes several elevated zones that experience intermittent water supply. I can provide those areas under this sketch which have been provided. These areas include Mataniwai Top, Balata Back Road, Korovou Road 1 to 4, Yaladra Top, Malela No. 3. Due to their elevation, these communities rely on supplementary water-carting services provided on a request basis.

These zones are primarily serviced by the Malela Reservoir, which becomes particularly vulnerable during periods when water levels drop to critical thresholds. This decline is typically caused by reduced raw water inflow from the Nasivi Raw Water Pump Station and reduction in water production at the Vatukoula Water Treatment Plant. The inflow reduction is largely driven by extreme weather events impacting the Nasivi intake, the main source of raw water for the treatment facility.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, heavy rainfall and flooding can lead to sedimentation and debris accumulation, causing blockages at the intake structure and raw water pumps. On the other hand, prolonged droughts have significantly reduced the volume of water available for extraction as the same source is used by the Vatukoula Gold Mine for water extraction for mine operations. These climate-related impacts not only hinder raw water intake but also affect the efficiency of the treatment process. Of course, as already mentioned, the industrial activities nearby. Consequently, the volume of treated water available for distribution decreases, directly impacting supply to the dependent elevated communities as I have already identified.

The situation highlights the urgent need for infrastructure upgrades and resilient measures to ensure the continuity and reliability of water services and climate-related disruptions. Sir, to address the ongoing water supply challenges in the affected areas, the Water Authority of Fiji has adopted both immediate and long-term strategies. Immediate measures, household water storage initiative as part of WAF's customer service initiative and its commitment to improving service delivery in Intermittent

Supply Areas (ISA). Sir, WAF will be distributing 1,000 litre water storage tanks to households, the most affected communities. This initiative aims to strengthen household level, water storage capacity and improve resilience against supply disruptions. It reflects our ongoing dedication to a responsive customer focused service and is intended to provide short term relief. Even with this, I do encourage households in order to for self-sufficiency and independence by taking such initiatives themselves for matters such as water security.

Long term measures: WAF has launched a long term infrastructure development project under its Capital Investment Programme, aligned with the Water Sector Strategy 2050 as part of this initiative. The Water Authority of Fiji has engaged a professional engineering consultant to design a new intake structure at Nasivi in Vatukoula. The primary goal is to improve the resilience, reliability and operational efficiency of the raw water pump station. The new intake is being engineered to withstand extreme weather conditions, particularly heavy rainfall and flooding that currently cause blockages at the Nasivi intake and reduce inflow to the Vatukoula Water Treatment Plant.

Reference designed for this pump station has been carried out in the last financial year, 2024-2025, and a fund of \$869,000 has been received under the next financial year to progress the detailed design and construction works. The estimated cost will be approximately \$4 million for the whole project. Once completed, the upgraded intake infrastructure will significantly enhance the reliability of the Tavua water supply scheme and reduce the frequency and severity of water supply disruptions for the communities that we are discussing today.

In addition, WAF is progressing plans to upgrade the existing Vatukoula Water Treatment Plant under its 3-year Development Programme. This upgrade is aimed at meeting and growing water demand driven by population and development growth in the Tavua area. Once completed, the upgraded facility will enhance system redundancy, provide additional capacity and support service expansion. This combined approach – delivering immediate relief while investing in resilient and sustainable infrastructure moving forward – demonstrates the Government's continued strategic commitment to improving water service delivery and building long term resilience in our communities.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, with respect to Tavua, I am fairly close to one of the biggest aquifers that exist. In the plans that you have said in terms of the future, is it just overground water or underground water that is going to be sourced to ensure that these communities, Tavua and Rakiraki are supplied properly?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- What I have mentioned is basically on surface water. The groundwater, of course – as already mentioned by the honourable Minister for Lands – once surveys are completed, that will be coordinated and complemented. So, whatever cannot be accessed through this development, we will look at those areas which can be accessed through boreholes and groundwater.

HON. V. NATH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I understand the honourable Minister has missed one of the most important catchments, the Waikubukubu Catchment. I personally visited the catchment with the WAF workers and had some projects to be done there. We understand that Tavua is a red zone, no doubt, but why have they missed the Waikubukubu Catchment?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I did not get the question. It sort of borders on a breach of the Standing Order.

HON. V. NATH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, Waikubukubu Catchment is on the hills of Monasavu when one goes from the western side. It is a huge catchment, and the WAF (his team) and I visited this site. It can feed at least 50 percent or 60 percent of the population in Tavua. Do you have any plans for this catchment?

MR. SPEAKER.- That is clear enough now.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- I do not have the information on that. Secondly, the question is a breach of Standing Order because it is a totally new question. The question asked is about the specific areas where we have got a problem.

HON. V. NATH.- Waikubukubu is in Tavua, Nadarivatu side, so when you talk about Tavua, in the pipeline. Thank you Minister it is in the pipeline.

MR. SPEAKER.- We will move on through the sixth Oral Question. Sorry, Sir, do you wish to speak?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Yes, my apology. My answer did not mean that I am ignoring that area. Of course, I am taking that into account and as a responsible Government, when we move forward, you know, if I was a multi-billionaire, I would solve all of the water problems within the four years of this Government, because in this work it has to be in your heart. I know, when you were the assistant minister, you did not really help me a lot, even though we were in the same Economic Affairs Committee. You helped me, but not that much.

MR. SPEAKER.- The sixth Oral Question for today has been withdrawn with the approval of the honourable Iliesa Vanawalu.

We will move on to the seventh Oral Question for today and given that honourable Joseph Nand is not here, the question lapses.

(Question Nos. 78/2025 and 79/2025 lapsed)

Great Council of Chiefs Regulations 2024
(Question No. 80/2025)

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for iTaukei Affairs and Culture, Heritage and Arts update Parliament on specific outcomes and deliverables that have been achieved under the Great Council of Chiefs (GCC) Regulations 2024 in advancing iTaukei governance, economic empowerment and cultural preservation since its enactment?

HON. I. VASU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank honourable Tunabuna for the question. Since the enactment of the iTaukei Affairs (Great Council of Chiefs) Regulations 2024, the Ministry through the support of the iTaukei Trust Fund Board and other partners, had made solid progress in re-establishing and operationalising the Great Council of Chiefs (GCC) as a key institution for iTaukei leadership, identity and development.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the GCC has been officially reconstituted with 54 members. There is now active encouragement for female representations promoting inclusive traditional leadership. The GCC has formed four key subcommittees focused on education, governance and law, language and culture, and economic development.

A strategic intent of Government has also been developed to guide its long-term direction. The key partnerships have been secured. An MoU with the Fiji National University to introduce a Diploma in Traditional Vanua Leadership. An MoU with Pacific Specialist Healthcare to improve access to quality medical services for rural communities and an historic MoU with the National Iwi Chairs Forum of

Aotearoa, New Zealand, formalising collaborations on governance, culture, wellbeing and climate resilience. Recruitment is ongoing for the GCC secretariat and the implementation staff with specialist role in education, research, communications and legal advisory to strengthen institutional capacity.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the GCC has been engaging with Provincial Councils to identify land-based economic opportunities particularly in agriculture and eco-tourism. Key outcomes include the development of National Cocoa Industry Revitalization Policy in partnership with the Ministry of Agriculture.

The Poverty Alleviation Project in Rewa supported through cooperation with the Government of China. The ongoing bilateral engagements with development Partners to support *itaukei* economic well-being and the formation of the GCC Economic Subcommittee which is now advising on the community-based enterprise model leveraging traditional land ownership.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the GCC has supported programmes to revive the *iTaukei* language, traditional craft and oral knowledge, working with the Ministry of *iTaukei* Affairs and the Department of Culture, Heritage and Arts. Additionally, the GCC is supporting the integration of the *iTaukei* values and history into the national school curriculum ensuring young Fijians grow up grounded in their heritage.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the implementation of GCC Regulation 2024 has led the real and measurable outcomes. The GCC has been restored as a functional, resourced and forward-looking institution. It is now contributing meaningfully to the *iTaukei* governance, economic participations and cultural revitalisation, all while strengthening intergenerational leadership and community.

MR. SPEAKER.- Are there any supplementary questions?

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- About community-based enterprise development, I will use the Vuma project, for example. What sort of assistance is given to them to expedite the assistance that is coming from the financiers? It seems they are stuck in their project. So, what sort of assistance is offered by the Ministry to the communities to expedite the project rollout?

HON. I. VASU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, in regard to the cocoa revitalisation they are working with the Ministry of Agriculture and the specialists from New Zealand, on how they can revitalise the cocoa. It is a preparatory work that they are doing, and we will be supporting them from the *iTaukei* Trust Fund.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Sir, I was specific on Vuma, honourable Minister. We talked about Ovalau in the Budget Committee of Supplies. The situation that Ovalau is in, particularly when Government is decentralising, with a lot of civil servants going into, and Vuma is stuck with their project. I am sure you are aware, honourable Minister, so what sort of assistance can be given to them to quicken the process?

HON. I. VASU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, in regard to Vuma, there is a programme on Vanua Finance, that is currently with Merchant Finance, and with the FDB, where we work hand-in-hand, also with the Fijian Holdings. If the project amounts to a few millions, they work with Fijian Holdings. They will take the land from Vuma.

The value of that land will be their 40 percent contribution, and Fijian Holdings will take care of the rest and develop it. After 10 years, they will slowly hand it over to the project owners. With Merchant Finance, they will just have to provide a business plan and the security, a well-written paper that they submit to Merchant Finance that can assist.

Dairy Land Leases Renewed Since 2023
(Question No. 81/2025)

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for iTaukei Affairs and Culture, Heritage and Arts update Parliament on how many dairy land leases have been renewed since 2023?

HON. I. VASU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Leader of the Opposition for the question. The iTaukei Land Trust Board currently managed 73 active dairy leases across Fiji. The lease support farmers involved in milk production and play an important role in sustaining rural livelihood and contribute to the national food security.

From 2023 to 2025, a total of 16 dairy leases were formally activated. This included nine lease renewals, where existing farmers had their expired or expiring leases successfully extended, and seven new lease activations, either for new applications or previously inactive leaseholders. The new lease covers a combined land area of over 290 hectares, with annual rent rate agreed between the TLTB and representatives of landowning units.

The Ministry of iTaukei Affairs acknowledges the importance of providing secure land tenure for our dairy farmers. Lease renewals offer not only long-term security policies, but also ensure continued land use, productivity and rental incomes for landowning units.

Update on State Lease Payments and Arrears
(Question No. 82/2025)

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL asked the Government upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Lands and Mineral Resources update Parliament on all State Lease payment and arrears due as of June 2025?

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have some background to the question. I wish to inform this august House that the Ministry manages a total of 21,226 State-land leases. Out of the 21,226, there are 7,066 leases in the Central Eastern Division. In the Western Division, there are 11,872 leases, and the Northern Division comprises 2,288 leases. The Western Division, Mr. Speaker, Sir, comprise 56 percent of the entire State lease stock in the country. They are leases for residential, agricultural, and there is a growing number of commercial leases.

In general, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the lease payments for the past five years have continued to improve, but much more that could be done. In 2020, 2021, just over \$14,650,000 was collected. In 2021, 2022, \$14,140,000. In 2022 to 2023, it went up to \$16,727,000 and above. Last year, 2023 to 2024, \$16,410,000, and thus far, in 2024 to 2025, June, we have managed to collect \$12,220,000 and a bit more. Like everyone else, Sir, who were affected by the global pandemic, our lessees were financially affected. But nevertheless, it was observed that from 2021 to 2023, there had been a huge improvement with a collection of \$2.5 million more, in lease payments.

The Ministry is in a better and improved position now, given that by June 2025, half a year, we already collected around 75 percent of the amount collected in the end of the last financial year. Whilst there has been significant progress in our collection, the Government recognised the financial hardships that are faced by our lessees, our farmers who lease out farmlands. It was for that reason that the Ministry or the Government had introduced the waiver of interest amnesty for a period of 12 months in 2024. The waiver was introduced not as a relief for the principal obligation, but as a compassionate measure to

ensure that leaseholders do regularise their accounts without the added burden of accumulated fees and penalties.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the waiver period is currently underway from 1st September, 2024 and will end this month on 31st August, 2025. Today, the total interest that has interest waived sits at \$1.655.315 million. Although this may seem to be a loss for Government, the Ministry sees that as a need to be reasonable, to be real, to show empathy, and also to perform the role of the State as the *loco parentis*, the parent of all citizens.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in terms of arrears, the total due as of June 2025 sits at just over \$43 million. This is inclusive of the January 2025 rent charges amounting to \$9.6 million plus the 12 percent interest charged in January 2025 for any outstanding balance from the previous years. So, the actual arrears, if we were to exclude the rent charges for January 2025, the total amount would be just below \$33.5 million.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, no one is exempted from the economic challenges of the recent years including the Ministry, yet we remain committed to intensify our effort to collect outstanding arrears by:

- (1) Implement a number of strategies which includes close engagement with our lease holders;
- (2) Waiver of interests that is presently underway;
- (3) Site visits to our lessees to understand their challenges and to see how we can work together to make them meet their side of the contract;
- (4) Carry out awareness in the divisions and in extreme cases, we would issue rental notices;
- (5) Encourage instalment payments through undertakings;
- (6) Media releases and reminder on waiver on our dailies;
- (7) Launch of the MyLeaseInfo app where the lessees can now access their details online and have their own accounts. This will assist them in notifying customers when their payment is due; and
- (8) Introduce an online payment platform that would allow lessees to execute payments conveniently rather than the burden of having to visit one of our offices to do that.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, through these targeted actions, Government anticipates to balance accountability with empathy as the Ministry tries to reduce the arrears by removing the burden of interest for those genuinely affected and improving our systems and processes. We also expect the lessees to be fair and honour their responsibilities and obligations under the lease. Having said that, I wish to encourage all lessees of all State land leases to make full use of the amnesty period before it ends and pay their leases before 31st August, 2025.

MR. SPEAKER.- Before we suspend proceedings for lunch, I would like to revisit my decision on the question to be asked by honourable Joseph Nand. I think it is on my table that he had requested that he be absent because of illness today and given that, all that was required of the Opposition was to request for a substitute to ask the question on his behalf. I did not receive that.

However, I am willing to revisit and allow that question, provided the Opposition gives me a notice before we resume in the afternoon that someone is going to ask the question. On the understanding that question time is for the purpose of general information for the public on any issues of Government, I will revisit that question. Honourable Minister, that means that you will come early at resumption after lunch to answer the question.

HON. J. USAMATE.- I would like to thank the honourable Minister for giving us the rundown. I think there are considerable challenges that are faced there, I am interested particularly in terms of the arrears, as he has pointed out, it has been a big challenge in the Ministry. The arrears are now down to \$33 million. If I remember it correctly, a few years ago it was around \$20 million. We understand the

need to be able to balance the hardships that people face, but at the same time, the need for the Government to be able to collect this revenue. Do we have any specific timelines by which we hope to reduce the \$33 million arrears that Government has to try to collect, given all the measures that you have?

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the reason why the waiver of interest exercise was done was for the reason of encouraging our lessees to pay up their outstanding leases. We are hoping that we will be able to achieve a little bit more than what we have done before this month ends. Beyond that, there is going to be a more stringent approach that could be undertaken. For example, iTLTB has gone to a different wavelength and frequency of going to court, filing for eviction notices and advertising people's names in the *dailies*. We have thought about that, but like I said, our approach is because we are a State, iTLTB is an organisation that has to survive and run on its own.

At the same time, we are looking on the ground, the larger picture is to look at how we can address these sorts of concerns when we are reviewing the State Lands Act. The State Lands Act is a very archaic law of 1945. We have done some revisions in the meantime, but there is a need for a much larger, broader and more consultative State Lands Act, which we hope to introduce before the end of the term.

HON. J. USAMATE.- I thank the honourable Minister for his reply to this question. In terms of the review to the State Lands Act, in particular, for those who own State land in prime commercial property and have owed money over a long period of time? Would there be some specific measures that you have in mind for that particular category of people who lease State land?

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, in the review, I suppose there would be the multi-tier of enforcement that the State could implement. At the moment we have an outdated legislation that we are trying – as much as we can – to work with. It does not have enforcement or when it does, it has a very soft approach to it. I think that was probably by design, but right now, with those kinds of outstanding rentals that needs to be collected by the State, we have to give the State Lands Act a little bit more teeth and power. Whilst we are being empathetic about people's situations that they go through, the State is in need of funding so that the operations of the State will continue. Surely, like I said, when the State Lands Act is going to be consulted, these are things that will have to be considered as well.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, supplementary to the honourable Minister. In my experience as a former commissioner, one of the major issues with State leases is absentee lessees, tenants, farmers, et cetera. I do not know, honourable Minister, do you have a figure or percentage in terms of those owing arrears? How many of them are absentee lessees and what will the Government do? Most of the leases were not regularised when they left, and this is a big dilemma. Maybe the honourable Minister can share some light onto that.

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I do not have the figures and the percentage that the honourable Leader of the Opposition appear to require of me at the moment. If my Ministry has it, we will make that available to the honourable Leader of the Opposition's office. But, those challenges that he had identified when he was in his previous role as commissioner in the north, is an existing and continuous issue. What do we do with those kind of situations, because they are not provided for explicitly in the law? Maybe it would be time – when we do the review to provide for the legislative amendment – is to provide also for situations like that.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, at this point, we will suspend proceedings for lunch . Parliament will resume at 2:30 p.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 12.41 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 2.36 p.m.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members. before we before we start with the Written Questions on item six of our Order Paper, as I had indicated before our lunch break could allow Oral Question 79/2025 standing in the name of honourable Joseph Nand be posed in his absence by another Member of the Opposition, provided I receive a written request to do so. I have now received the request, and I will invite the honourable Jone Usamate to ask Question No. 79/2025 in the Order Paper.

Empty Bullet Shell Casing Investigation
(Question No. 79/2025)

HON. J. USAMATE (on behalf of honourable Joseph Nand) asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Tourism and Civil Aviation update Parliament on the investigation after an empty bullet shell casing was found on a Fiji Airways flight that arrived in Nadi from Sydney early this year?

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I was hoping I would get away with it today. I thank honourable Usamate for the question.

On the evening of 7th April, 2025, a bullet casing was discovered inside overhead locker 38G onboard Fiji Airways flight FJ910 which had just returned from Sydney. This discovery was made by security personnel during a routine pre-departure aircraft search before the aircraft was scheduled to continue its journey to Los Angeles. To provide some context, this aircraft had operated three flight legs that day:

- (1) FJ891 from Dallas to Nadi;
- (2) FJ911 from Fiji to Sydney; and
- (3) FJ910 from Sydney to Fiji.

Immediately after the bullet casing was discovered, Fiji Police were notified and conducted an initial investigation. A full secondary aircraft search was also carried out before any boarding resumed.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Civil Aviation Authority of Fiji assumed leadership of the investigation and officially requested further details from Fiji Airways on 10th April, 2025. Fiji Airways responded promptly and engaged its Station Managers in Dallas and Sydney to gather any possible insights into how the bullet may have ended up on board.

The investigation considered several scenarios, including identifying the passenger seated in seat 38G on the Sydney-Fiji leg. However, as honourable Members would appreciate, overhead compartments are shared and not restricted to the passenger seated directly beneath them. This makes it challenging to definitively identify who may have placed the item there.

A key challenge was the timeliness and completeness of available information, especially given the multi-flight legs and international ports involved. Despite best efforts, the investigation has not yet been able to conclusively determine how the item came to be on board.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, what is reassuring is that the bullet casing was detected during a standard aircraft security search highlighting that protocols in Fiji are being consistently implemented. Though unexplained, the item must be neutralised as a threat the moment it was discovered and removed. In response, Fiji Airways has enhanced its quality control measures across its network, especially

In response, Fiji Airways has enhanced its quality control measures across its network, especially at its international departure points. CAAF continues to work closely with the airline to ensure compliance and vigilance at all levels. Let me reaffirm to this august House and to the travelling public that air travel remains one of the safest modes of transport globally. The Coalition Government in partnership with CAAF and Fiji Airways is fully committed to maintaining the highest standards of aviation security.

While this incident is concerning, it also demonstrates the strength of our systems that such objects are detected before passengers reboard. We are taking this matter seriously and leaving no stone unturned in reviewing procedures to prevent any recurrence. We call on all stakeholders including all our travelling public to remain vigilant and cooperative in our collective responsibility to safeguard our skies.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Honourable Minister, I am not sure if you said it was bullet casing or complete bullet. So can you just verify whether it was casing because I know it is quite harmless. Some people wear a bullet around their neck or even just a casing that they use as a jewellery ornament or whatever. So, was it the casing that was found or was it the bullet itself?

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker, casing.

Written Questions

Free Education (Question No. 83/2025)

HON. T.R. MATASAWALEVU asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Education provide the following to Parliament:

- (a) a detailed breakdown of how the \$66 million allocated for Free Education has been utilised; and
- (b) what measurable impact has it had on classroom resources, teacher-student ratios, and student performance?

¹ HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, according to Standing Order, I will submit the written answers.

Detailed Financial Summary - Tourism Revenue (Question No. 84/2025)

HON. P.K. RAVUNAWA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Tourism and Civil Aviation update Parliament on the detailed financial summary of the estimated tourism revenue generated from each major market (Australia, New Zealand, USA, China and United Kingdom during the period July 2023 to June 2024?

² HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- I thank the honourable Member for the question. I have the reply here.

¹ Editor's Note: Reply to Written Question No. 83/2025 tabled by the honourable Minister for Education under Standing Order 45(3) is appended as Annexure I.

² Reply to Written Question No. 84/2025 tabled by the honourable Minister for Tourism and Civil Aviation under Standing Order 45(3) is appended as Annexure II.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, that is the end of question time. We will now move on to the next item on the Order Paper.

REVIEW REPORT – MINISTRY OF FORESTRY 2022–2023 ANNUAL REPORT

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I move:

That Parliament debates the Review Report on the Ministry of Forestry Annual Report 2022-2023, which was tabled on 13th March, 2025.

HON. K.V. RAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I beg to second the motion.

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Prime Minister, honourable Deputy Prime Ministers, honourable Ministers and the honourable Leader of the Opposition and honourable Members of Parliament; on behalf of honourable Members of the Standing Committee on Natural Resources, I take this opportunity to speak on the motion in regards to the Committee's Review Report on the Ministry of Forestry 2022-2023 Annual Report, which was tabled in Parliament on Thursday, 13th March, 2025. This Committee is mandated under Standing Order 109(2)(c) and 110(1)(c) to oversee the stewardship and sustainable management of our country's natural resources, and it is in the capacity of this, we have carefully examined the Ministry's Annual Report.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Forestry had achieved significant milestones during the 2022-2023 period, most notably, the progress made in the 30 million trees in 15 years - the 30MT15Y Programme. The Ministry successfully planted 4.8 million seedlings during the year, bringing the cumulative total to 19.9 million seedlings planted across 17,200 hectares, whereby exceeding 60 percent of the overall target, well ahead of schedule. Furthermore, the Ministry's budget increased by 28 percent this particular year, which facilitated an expansion of its forestry initiative. This financial boost is reflected to record high export revenues from forest products, the highest the sector has been in over decades, thereby contributing positively to our national economy.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to verify the reported achievements, the committee conducted a site visit on 25th of February, 2025 to key forestry locations, including the Colo-i-Suva, several nurseries, and training centres. This field inspection enabled the Committee to directly observe and confirm the progress outlined in the Ministry's report. Despite these accomplishments, the Committee identified some challenges that required urgent attention. Notably, there were missing pages in the Ministry's financial statements covering August 2022 to July 2023, which hindered a full and comprehensive financial assessment.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, additionally, while the Ministry achieved 72 percent of its planned operational deliverables, there remained a need to improve planning and execution to fully meet or exceed annual targets in the future. The committee also noted that the draft review of the Forest Act 1992 is currently under legal scrutiny by the Solicitor-General's Office, and we emphasise the importance of completing and implementation of this legislative report promptly to ensure modern, effective forest governance. Moreover, we encourage the swift finalisation and parliamentary consideration of the reviewed Forest Act alongside necessary supporting regulations to provide a robust legal framework for sustainable forestry management.

In closing, I commend the Ministry of Forestry for its significant advances in sustainable forestry practises, biodiversity, conservation, climate change mitigation, and its positive economic contribution. We are confident in the Ministry's vision and commitment, and we stress that enhanced accountability and transparency will be critical to ensure the long-term health of our forests and the prosperity of our

communities. I, therefore, commend this Review Report to Parliament for consideration, and thank the Ministry staff and Committee members and all contributors for their continued dedication and hard work.

MR. SPEAKER.- I now open the floor, honourable Members, for debate on the motion. I have a list of speakers with me. Each speaker is accorded 10 minutes each to deliver their contribution. At the end of the debate, I will ask the honourable Tunabuna for his right to reply.

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Prime Minister, honourable Ministers and Assistant Ministers, the honourable Leader of Opposition and honourable Members of Parliament. I rise to deliver my motion's statement on the Ministry of Forestry's Annual Report for the financial year of 2022-2023.

Let me first begin by sincerely acknowledging the efforts of the Standing Committee on Natural Resources for their review and recommendations. I also thank the Committee for providing the Ministry an opportunity to elaborate on the important work carried out during the reporting period. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Forestry continues to perform its duties with integrity, transparency and accountability. I am proud to report that for the fourth consecutive year; the Ministry received an unqualified audit opinion from the Office of the Auditor-General. This reflects our commitment to sound financial management and governance.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, forestry and forests remain central to Fiji's socio-economic development, environmental sustainability and cultural heritage. The responsible management of our forest resources not only supports livelihood through forest-based industries but also preserves biodiversity and contributes significantly to our international climate commitments.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, trees and forests play an indispensable role in our ecosystem. They sequester carbon, protect soil and food security and enhance our resilience to climate change. Forestry and forest-related industries continue to contribute consistently to Fiji's GDP and foreign exchange earnings.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, over the 2022-2023 financial year, the Ministry made significant progress in balancing economic development with environmental stewardship. Allow me to highlight some of the key achievements outlined in the annual report.

Firstly, the National Tree Planting Programme. Now entering its sixth year, this programme continues to make commendable progress towards Fiji's goal of planting 30 million trees over 15 years. With support from diverse stakeholders, including landowning units, youth and women's groups, industries, civil society, faith-based organisations and government agencies, more than 19 million trees and mangroves have been planted across over 16,500 hectares. Notably, Mr. Speaker, Sir, 4.8 million trees were planted during the 2022-2023 period alone.

The forestry and logging industry contributed \$31.1 million in 2022, accounting for 0.3 percent of GDP. However, it is important to note that forestry's full economic value extends beyond log production to include value-added manufacturing and downstream industries, and on this basis, total contribution was estimated at around \$140.4 million, accounting for about 1.4 percent of GDP.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in the area of climate change mitigation and carbon market strategy in May of 2023, the Ministry hosted the inaugural Carbon Market Strategy Consultation, supported by the Australian Government and the Carbon Market Institute, the consultation, which was attended by a wide array of stakeholders, helped chart Fiji's roadmap for carbon trading.

In the REDD+ Programme and advancements following the 2021 Emission Reduction Programme Agreement, the Ministry developed a draft operational menu and completed its natural forest

inventory fieldwork and sample collection. Twenty land use plans were prepared in partnership with the iTaukei Land Trust Board, half of which was in the Northern Division.

The Ministry continued its partnership with FAO to restore dry forest in the Mamanuca and Yasawa islands. Over 500 hectares requiring restoration or allocated by local communities in Malolo and Naviti, and 496 community representatives, received training in forest restoration and alternative livelihoods.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in housing rehabilitation assistance under its Housing Rehabilitation Programme, the Ministry provided 15 housing structures to six villages in Lau and Kadavu, valued over \$400,000. The initiative involved inter-agency collaboration and the deployment of portable sawmills to pine schemes, benefiting affected communities with access to timber and processing equipment.

In revitalising the central wood industry, Mr. Speaker, Sir, consultations were held to establish a Central Wood Growers Association as part of a broader strategy to develop a sustainable sandalwood industry. An inventory was conducted across the Northern and Western Divisions, as well as in Rotuma. Efforts also continued in agroforestry plot development and species-specific research.

On wood and non-wood forest products, the Ministry's Research Division initiated trials on 11 lesser-known species, identified as having the potential to be utilised for timber. In addition, the Ministry is also undertaking research to non-timber forest products such as sandalwood, agarwood and candlenut with a focus on their oil.

At the same time, the Ministry is also researching on non-wood forest products, such as coconut and bamboo, looking at their potential to be utilised into engineered wood products and construction respectively. Progress has also been made on the development of a prototype bamboo *bure* to explore its viability as a sustainable building material through the treatment of bamboo samples.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, through the Forestry Training and Capacity Building, the Ministry's Forestry Training Centre, 909 individuals – a 36 percent increase from the previous year – were trained in skills ranging from chainsaw mechanics and harvesting supervision to nursery management, and timber industry training, with a focus on all aspects of wood processing. This was in line with our commitment to empowering resource owners and strengthening the sector's workforce.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry remains steadfast in its commitment to sustainable forest management. We will continue working hand in hand with the landowners, communities, civil society and our development partners to preserve and enhance the forest of Fiji for the well-being of our people and the prosperity of future generations.

I wish to commend the Ministry's leadership and the staff for their hard work, dedication and collective efforts throughout the year.

HON. V. NATH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the discussion of the Review Report of the Ministry of Forests 2022-2023 Annual Report. As a member of the Standing Committee on Natural Resources, I am proud for the thorough review our committee has conducted for this vital document. I believe it is essential that we reflect on its content with both appreciation and critical eye. Our forests are the livelihood of Fiji, vital for our environment, economy and future generations.

Firstly, let us acknowledge the commendable effort of the Ministry of Forestry – the 30 million trees in 15 years initiative, is a shining example of dedication. To have planted over 19.1 million trees, reaching more than 60 percent of the target, well ahead of schedule, is truly impressive. This programme includes a wide variety of species, from native trees to mangroves and fruit trees, serving the broad vision

of our forest cover. We also note the substantial 28 percent increase in the Ministry's budget, from \$13.8 million to \$17.7 million, with a commendable 84 percent utilisation rate. This indicates increased Government support and efficient use of funds.

Furthermore, the forest sector has achieved its highest export revenue in a decade, contributing \$93 million to Fiji's total domestic export, with woodchip leading the way. To receive an unqualified audit opinion from the Office of the Auditor-General for the fourth consecutive period also speaks volume about the Ministry's financial accountability. We acknowledge the Ministry's efforts towards gender equality, particularly in rural communities, and they are aligning with crucial sustainable development goals like climate action and life on land.

However, Mr. Speaker, while we commend these efforts, as a Member of the Standing Committee, it is our duty to also look closely at areas where our progress faces hurdles. A key concern for us was the low survival rate of newly planted trees. The Report indicates an average survival rate of only 45 percent from the national tree planting incident. This means that while we plant millions, a significant number does not survive due to factors like unsuitable soil conditions, changing weather patterns, and clear lack of research facilities. We must ensure that our efforts lead to thriving forest, not just planting seedlings. As we truly give these young trees the best chance to develop strong roots, perhaps with targeted fertilizer boost or withstand these challenging conditions.

The Committee also noted the delay in legislative reform, the Forest Act 1992. For instance, it is still awaiting finalization and its non-enforcement in mahogany plantation has led to issues like wastage. This legislative gap also impacts our ability to fully engage in carbon trading, a crucial opportunity for Fiji. Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, Sir, our site visit revealed aging infrastructure and significant shortage of essential research equipment. How can we expect cutting edge research to improve free survival if our facilities are outdated and irreplaceable? This directly impact the Ministry's ability to adapt and be innovative.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Nadera Forest Project, a commendable urban initiative showed the lack of progress due to poor co-ordination, insufficient awareness and unclear responsibilities. This highlights a need for better planning and community ownership in such collaborative projects.

A serious issue raised by the Committee is the supply of poor treated timber in the market. There are currently no laws mandated for aging timber or all timber must be treated, and cheap produce product culture often leads to a wide range of infections and significant long term losses for consumers. We recommend, Mr. Speaker, Sir, a policy review, to include fines and penalties and to strengthen monitoring and evaluation programmes to ensure quality standards.

Finally, the Committee observed that the forestry sector's contribution to GDP is calculated solely on low production, excluding value added products like sawn timber and pine chips. This undervalues the sector's true economic impact. We also note the incomplete financial statement and the lack of detailed gender analysis in the report itself. Transparency and comprehensive reporting are fundamental for proper accountability.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, our Committee has put forth several recommendations to address these challenges. We urge the honourable Minister to expedite legislative reform, invest in research and infrastructure, and strengthen monitoring and enforcement, especially for timber quality. We must also ensure that our tree planting initiatives focus on long term survival, and that the true economic value of our forest is fully recognised. The Ministry is planning to increase capital expenditure and focus on high value trees like sandalwood are positive steps, but this must be part of the holistic strategy that addresses the systematic issue identified.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Forestry plays a vital role, and it is incumbent upon us in this august House to ensure it has the proper support needed for it to continue successfully. By acknowledging both, our achievement and our weakness and working together, we can ensure that forestry remains a future of healthy productivity and resilience for generations to come.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the Acting Permanent Secretary (Ms. Sanjana Lal) and the team for their contribution during the meeting.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, honourable Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Ministers, Members of Cabinet in Parliament and also the honourable Leader of the Opposition, I rise to contribute to the Review of the Ministry of Forestry Annual Report of 2022 and 2023.

Firstly, the Report tabled before us is not only the reflection of operational efforts of the Ministry of Forestry but underscores the national progress towards environmental stewardship, economic development and inclusive growth. I also extend my appreciation to the Ministry of Forestry for the timely submission of this Report, allowing Parliament and stakeholders to engage in meaningful reflection and forward planning.

Mr. Speaker, from the Ministry of Trade's perspective, this Report is especially important. It affirms the vital interconnectedness between sustainable forestry, economic empowerment and national productivity. The forestry sector often viewed through an environmental lens is equally a driver of rural livelihoods, community enterprise and microeconomic resilience.

Allow me to first commend the Ministry of Forestry for key achievements during this reporting period, notably the 4.8 million seedlings that were planted pushing the country over 60 percent of completion of the ambitious 30 million trees target in 15 years initiative. This reforestation effort not only contributes to climate action but represents enormous downstream opportunities for MSMEs in agro-forestry, eco-tourism, woodcraft and carbon trading.

The Report also records the highest forestry export revenue in the last decade with woodchip exports alone accounting for \$49 million. This is a significant contribution to our economy with the forestry sector comprising of approximately 6.8 percent of Fiji's total domestic exports in 2022. These statistics are not just encouraging, they are actionable. They invite us as policy makers to examine our trade and co-operative policies and how we can better support and formalise and scale these forestry-linked industries.

Mr. Speaker, let us recognize how forestry-based economic activity intersects with the Trade Ministry's core mandate. In terms of trade expansion with wood products, making up a sizable share of our exports, the Ministry will continue to support value added forestry exports through trade facilitation, quality control and market access strategies such as successful treatment and branding of timber as outlined in the Report positions us to enter niche markets with sustainably certified timber and wood crafts.

Mr. Speaker, on this note, I would like to sort of just share with this august House that the impending Mahogany Bill will be brought forward to this House very soon. It is already being completed in draft and will add certainly great impetus to the export ambitions of the honourable Minister for Forestry, and we look forward to larger numbers in terms of economic contribution certainly over the next 12 to 24 months.

In terms of MSMEs, Mr. Speaker, the cottage industry nurtured by the Ministry of Forestry demonstrate the potential of grassroots economic empowerment. We are particularly pleased by the reported collaboration between Courts Fiji to provide markets for community-made furniture. These

partnerships must be formalized and expanded under the MSME framework to ensure longevity and growth.

In terms of co-operative development, it is also noteworthy that one of the community cottage industries supported by the Ministry has already been registered as a co-operative. This aligns with our national strategy of encouraging rural economic groups to adopt co-operative models for capital pooling, shared infrastructure and improved governance.

Mr. Speaker, in terms of communication and digital engagement, the Ministry of Forestry is commended for its strides in digitisation, particularly through the monitoring of the 30 metric tonnes, the 30 million trees in 15 years programme, and the use of GIS technology. These digital tools are transforming the forestry management, enhancing accuracy, enabling real-time data tracking, and supporting informed decision-making. This forward-thinking approach strengthens transparency, accountability, and sustainability in managing our forest resources.

Mr. Speaker, whilst we acknowledge the commendable progress in the Committee's Report, we also recognise that challenges exist, such as outdated research infrastructure and high mortality rates. As a Government, we remain committed to addressing these gaps by prioritising budgetary support, particularly for capital investment, to boost institutional capacity, research, innovation, and service delivery across the sector.

Furthermore, the Report draws attention to the need for improved co-ordination in projects such as the Nadera Urban Food Forestry. Lessons from this pilot initiative reveal the importance of stakeholder clarity, community ownership and integrated planning. We encourage future cross-sectional initiatives to adopt a whole-of-government approach, aligning our Ministry's ongoing efforts to integrate agriculture, forestry, trade, and ICT into resilient community enterprises.

Mr. Speaker, from our perspective, forward-thinking strategies such as the Mahogany Bill in the forestry sector must be rooted in integrated, inclusive, and sustainable development. The operationalisation of Part 10 of the Climate Change Act represents a high-value opportunity to integrate Fiji into the global carbon market. In line with this, and in collaboration with the Ministry of Forestry and relevant stakeholders, proposals for the development of carbon-leaked MSMEs, like the Drawa Carbon Trading Co-operative in Wailevu, Vanua Levu, that empower landowners and rural communities, ensure that they benefit directly from forestry conservation. To support this, the Government will continue to scale up national training, reskilling programmes in timber treatment and furniture making, and eco-friendly innovation, using our MSME and co-operative networks to establish hubs and green incubation centres.

The forestry report reminds us that forest wealth is not only about hectares planted or cubic meters harvested. It is about lives uplifted, businesses spark, and communities made resilient, and the legacy we leave behind. The Ministry of Trade, Co-operatives, MSMEs and Communications is committed to ensuring that the economic potential of forestry is fully realised equitably, sustainably and innovatively.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to talk on this particular Report. I would like to thank the Committee for the work that it has just done, and also for the Ministry in being able to bring up the 2022 and 2023 Reports. I also congratulate them on their unqualified audit for four years, which is always a challenge in a lot of ministries and something to be recognised.

I would like to pick out a few of the issues that I thought I would mention in the Report. While I was looking at the Report, Mr. Speaker, one of the comments that hit me under the Ministry's report presentation, where the Committee noted that while the Ministry had reported exclusively on its achievements, it failed to provide clear linkages of the progress against the set targets.

I think, Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is something we tend to find a lot in government ministries where there is a lot of talk about activities, but how it directly links to targets, that is lacking. I think this is a very clear statement for us as honourable Members to take. Sometimes if you can get lost in the description of activities, you do not see the direct linkage of that to the target itself and what it is hoping to produce.

If I look further into the Report, Mr. Speaker, Sir, under the budget allocation, it noted that the Ministry had utilised \$114.8 million, which represents 84 percent of its budgetary allocation, it noted that the Ministry had utilised \$114.8 million which represents 84 percent of its budget, but only successfully achieved 72 percent of the deliverables. So, in these two reports, you have two different things. It says there is no clear linkage, but it also says that there are 72 percent deliverables. This is a very critical issue, especially when you are looking at the initiative that has been brought by the honourable Prime Minister today to bring in monitoring, learning and evaluation. These things need to be very clear. I think a lot of times when we review reports, we get carried away with activities, but not the linkage directly to the targets and finding out where the gaps are. That is something that we really need to look at very clearly, Mr. Speaker.

The other thing I have been thinking about, there is a lot of good achievements in the Report. I congratulate the progress towards the 30 million trees over 15 years. The progress has been very good; 19.1 million trees is good. As the honourable Vijay Nath has pointed out, the elephant in the room is the survival rate. The survival rate is 45 percent, that means up to those 19 million trees, only 45 percent is going to succeed. I think for us, maybe we should really look at redefining the target. Maybe the target should be not 30 million trees planted, but 30 million trees within 15 years to survive. If we change the targets around, then we can focus on the target on what we really want to achieve. So, I congratulate the Ministry on what it has done, but one of the big problem is the survival rate. If it is down to 45 percent, that is a clear challenge for us. It might require us to relook at the way we are defining the target, so that there can be a focus and effort on addressing the things that are impacting on the sector.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I was quite impressed with the Report that we have on the Nadera Food Forest Project. A very good project, I can see. It involved a host of stakeholders, the Ministry, Nasinu Town Council, and even Rishikul Primary School, Mareqeti Viti and a few other agencies. We are talking about having in one place, planting a few fruit trees, nut trees, vegetables, medicinal plants, but it becomes a small ecosystem; very similar to what we were doing during COVID time, when everyone was talking about backyard gardening in order for food sustainability. This model, I think, did not happen as well as it should, but I think there are a lot of good lessons to be learned from it, in terms of the reasons why it was not successful, have been itemised in this Report - poor coordination, lack of awareness, unclear demarcation of responsibilities, ownership challenge. It is a good model for the Ministry to look at and invest in further, working in partnership with various kinds of organisations that get involved in such projects.

I will not speak for too long, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I had an opportunity of being a member of this Report earlier on and looking at the importance of research. When you look at the research facilities in the Ministry, they really are sorely lacking. We have a very good and highly qualified people in this Ministry, I notice their qualifications, but the research facilities that they have are sorely lacking. This is an area that hopefully we can put some money into.

Three years ago, I visited Xinfa. They have two sawmills, Mr. Speaker, Sir. What they found that they are running out of raw materials to go into the sawmills. What they are looking for now is to, rather than concentrate on finding materials and planting trees that take 15 to 20 years, they are doing research on trees that they can harvest within 8 to 10 years. I think they are planting eucalyptus or some other tree. A method that they do, I do not know what it is called, tissue culture or something like that. They grow in these little thimbles, but the survival rate is much higher. I think if you want to target at 30

million trees in 15 years, we really need to move towards that. It means we really need to strengthen the research capability, equipment and the resources that is provided to this particular mission, Mr. Speaker. There is a lot of leeway for them.

I was thinking in my mind, as I was reading the Report, most of the money that we get from this comes from the chips. I do not know whether that is the best possible value we can get out of that raw material. I think it is good; you sell it in bulk – you get a certain amount of money. But looking at the percentage of money coming from this sector, percentage of GDP of 1.4 percent, if I listened correctly to the honourable Minister, I think there is a lot of opportunity. I was listening to the what the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade was talking about. All the opportunities. I think this is an area that we need to strengthen and focus on carbon trading, cottage industries, getting more value out of the products that we plant through our trees.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, with those few issues, I commend the report to the House and I look forward to the Ministry of Forestry continuing to grow in leaps and bounds for the benefit of the people of this country.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Thank you, honourable Minister for laying out the vision of the Ministry and what the Ministry has achieved. Just to add to the discussions that have already taken place, I know that the honourable Deputy Prime Minister Kamikamica, talked about export strategy, the Mahogany Bill and how that it is going to add to the contribution of the Forestry sector to our national GDP (Gross Domestic Product).

Responding to honourable Usamate, point taken, but let me just remind him, that the National Development Plan (NDP) as highlighted by the honourable Prime Minister, very clearly, under MEL, the Prime Minister's Office will look at the monitoring, evaluation and implementation with the Ministry of Finance and National Planning Office. I also want to inform the House, that as part of the National Development Plan implementation strategy, we are doing the implementation books for all of the different ministries. I think at this point, with the exception of two ministries, all the others have completed their implementation plan and the policies particularly for the forestry sector is clearly aligned with the vision and objectives set out in the National Development Plan.

Strengthening the capacity and capability of the sector across the value chain, including extension of services, enforcement and forest monitoring and ensuring adequate funding in the sector. So, just on this budget, I know that the honourable Minister did highlight it in her Budget speech, but I just wanted to say that the Government is putting the necessary resources and funding behind all the points that were raised earlier by the speakers, in making sure the forestry sector contributes more. I take the point that, value adding would be very important and honourable Usamate is right that we could do more than just the chips. I know previously when he was in Government there was a plan to manufacture items such as guitars out of mahogany, but I do not know what happened to that.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in terms of the budget allocations, in the last three budgets, a total of \$76 million has been allocated including \$25 million in this budget. Most of the capital projects are ongoing and these are creating social and economic benefits, and I will probably highlight a few of them. The upgrade of the sawmill workshop building, The procurement of the laboratory technical equipment for the timber utilisation division with a total funding \$600,000, The increase in allocation for the maritime pine development and the commercial maritime pine subsidy from \$0.5 million in the 2022 – 2023 budget to \$4.7 million in this 2025-2026 budget.

The commercial maritime pine subsidy initially funded in the 2023 – 2024 budget has greatly benefited the maritime islands, for example, in Muani Village, the payment of \$60 per tonne of logs to landowners, resulting in a total payout of \$0.2 million. In addition, the completion of the jetty has been

able to provide timber to build more than 50 housing structures with an estimated value of \$400,000. There are a number of villages:

- Waiqori, Oneata - 19 houses were built;
- Tubou in Lakeba - 8 houses were built;
- Nasau and Korotolu on Moce Island – 15 houses were built; and
- Mataso in Kadavu – 15 houses.

In the 2023-2024 Budget, Mr. Speaker, Sir, \$150,000 was allocated for the utilisation of waste wood project, and through this funding, Government assisted the Gaunavou Cooperative Limited (GCL) through training and the procurement of value-adding machines. This has resulted in the securing of a market for GCL wooden products with the Vision Group to be marketed and available for purchase from Courts Fiji Limited. These are the examples that the budgetary allocation has helped.

Additionally, from the \$200,000 budget allocated for forest subsidy on value adding machines, the Ministry subsidised the purchase of value-adding machines to eight recipients. Projects and programmes announced in the 2025-2026 Budget, include \$25.6 million in total:

- \$200,000 is allocated for forest subsidy on value adding machines.
- \$1.3 million is allocated for reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation.
- \$2.8 million is allocated for the reforestation of degraded forest with indigenous and other species to support the development of forest plantations through provision of necessary tools, equipment, capacity building for seed collection, seedling production, plantation establishment and forestry restoration. This supports Government's 30 million trees. I take the point that the retention or the survival rate is much lower.
- \$1.5 million is also allocated for maritime pine development. This was an issue that was being talked about in the previous Parliament and talked about it here.
- \$2.5 million allocated for the commercial maritime subsidies to support the development of forest plantations through provision of necessary tools, equipment and capacity building for seed collection, et cetera. In this budget in particular, we have allocated funding for forest restoration in Kadavu, Narocake and Lakeba.
- \$782,600 is allocated for the upgrade and enhancement of Forestry Training Centre. This will cater for the renovation of the Forestry Training Centre at Colo-i- Suva, and it provides a safe and conducive environment for trainings and capacity building for staff and industry stakeholders.

In summary, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the allocations in the budget also mirrors the objective, vision and the activities laid out in the National Development Plan. We are also trying to ensure that as part of the implementation book, the budgetary allocations in the future, would take into account the objectives and where we want to take each Ministry and its contribution in terms of its contribution to the national GDP.

As honourable Usamate pointed out earlier this morning, I think the National Development Plan is very clear about the objectives. It needs the implementation and alignment of what is there, and indicators from the budget in terms of the allocation, because what is allocated in the budget is what the Ministries are required to do and use that funding for. The Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) in the Office of the honourable Prime Minister, and the monitoring that we do at the National Planning Office, will ensure that objective and indicators are aligned.

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to thank all the honourable Members for their contribution to this debate, and express my sincere thanks to the honourable Members of the Committee, honourable Kalaveti Ravu (Deputy Chairperson), honourable Vijay Nath, honourable Joseph Nand and honourable Taito Matasawalevu.

MR. SPEAKER.- We shall now proceed to vote to note the content of the Report.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

**REVIEW REPORT - WATER AUTHORITY OF FIJI
JANUARY TO JULY 2018 AND 2018-2019 ANNUAL REPORTS**

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I move:

That Parliament debates the Consolidated Review Report on the Water Authority of Fiji January to July 2018 and 2018-2019 Annual Report, which was tabled on 19th March, 2025.

HON. K.V. RAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I beg to second the motion.

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Prime Minister, honourable Deputy Prime Ministers, honourable Ministers, honourable Leader of the Opposition and honourable Members of Parliament, on behalf of the honourable Members of the Standing Committee on Natural Resources, I take this opportunity to speak on the motion in regards to the Committee's review report on Water Authority of Fiji Report for the period January to July 2018 and 2018 to 2019 Report, which was tabled in Parliament on Thursday, 13th March, 2025.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, water is a fundamental resource, essential not only to human survival, but also the sustainable development of our nation's economy, environment and public health. The Water Authority of Fiji (WAF) plays a critical role in ensuring the provision of safe, reliable and affordable water services to our communities, and managing our water resources in an efficient and sustainable manner.

The Committee undertook a comprehensive review of WAF's performance during the reporting periods, evaluating operational efficiency, financial management, infrastructure development and service delivery outcomes. The review also encompasses the challenges faced by the Authority, including those posed by climate changes, population growth and the increase in demand for water in both, urban and rural areas.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Committee wishes to highlight the following important observations:

(1) Operational Performance

WAF has made commendable progress in expanding water access, particularly in under-served rural communities aligning with the Government's goal of 'universal access to clean water'. Notable investment in infrastructure rehabilitations and network expansion, have contributed positively to reducing water losses and improving supply reliability.

(2) Financial Management

While the Authority has maintained physical discipline and transparency, the Committee noted areas where cost efficiency can be further enhanced. Strengthening the revenue collection mechanism and optimising operational expenditures, remains priority, to ensure financial sustainability.

(3) Challenges and Risks

The Authority continues to face significant challenges, particularly related to ageing

infrastructure, and the increase in frequency of extreme weather events. These factors have affected service continuity and increased operational costs. The Committee underscores the importance of enhancing climate resilience measures and prioritising infrastructure upgrades.

(3) Customer Service and Public Engagement

WAF has demonstrated commitment to improving customer service in public awareness regarding water conservations. However, ongoing efforts are needed to foster greater community involvement and responsive consumer feedback.

The Committee put together the following recommendations:

- (1) Increased allocation of resources towards infrastructure modernisation and climate adaptation projects;
- (2) Implementation of innovative technology technologies;
- (3) Improved water management efficiencies and reduced losses;
- (4) Strengthening of partnerships with local communities to promote water conservation and safeguard water sources; and
- (5) Enhancing staff capacities through continuous training and development initiatives.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Committee acknowledges the significant strides made by WAF in fulfilling its mandate despite challenges. It feels that the Government and all relevant stakeholders support the authority in addressing the outstanding issues and advancing sustainable water management for the benefit of all Fijians.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I commend the report to this august House for consideration and look forward to a robust and constructive debate.

MR. SPEAKER.- The floor is now open for debate on the motion. I have a list of six speakers, each has eight minutes for delivery.

HON. V. NATH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir and honourable Members, thank you for this opportunity to contribute to the discussion on the Consolidated Review Report of the Water Authority of Fiji Annual Report from January to July 2018 and 2018-2019. As a member of the Standing Committee on Natural Resources, I have been deeply involved in the thorough examination of this document. I believe it is crucial that we consider this content with both recognition for achievement, and a clear understanding of the challenge.

The Water Authority of Fiji is not mainly a service provider. It is fundamental to the health, well-being and the progress of every Fijian, ensuring access to clean water and effective sanitation. First, let us acknowledge the commendable effort of WAF. The report highlights several significant achievements that deserve our recognition. We saw WAF staff demonstrated remarkable resilience in restoring water supply after *TC Josie* and *TC Keni* in April 2018, despite the estimated \$3.5 million in infrastructure damage. This safety response is vital for our nation.

We also commend the progress in infrastructure upgrades such as the Kiuva Water Main pipe replacement which improved supply for 900 residents, and a new 650-meter undersea pipeline to Vio island providing consistent water to 230 residents. A significant operational success was the reduction of Non-Revenue Water (NRW) to a record low of 29.3 percent in quarter 2 in 2018. A substantial drop from over 52 percent in 2013. This efficiency is further highlighted by the resolution of 12,800 leak complaints, and the replacement of 4,155 service pipes.

Furthermore, WAF's efforts in wastewater management are also noteworthy, including securing 331,485 in carbon funding to reduce greenhouse gas emissions at the Kinoya wastewater treatment plant, and actively exploring methane utilisation for energy generation. We also acknowledge the initiative to improve gender balance with the workforce, including new apprenticeship programme aiming for a 50x50 ratio at the entry level.

We noted that WAF faces critical limitation in its legal authority, despite Parliament proving powers to issue fine for liquid waste non-compliance in July 2022, WAF is still awaiting the necessary legislation from the line Ministry to enforce these powers. This means repeat offenders can continue to discharge harmful waste impacting our sewage system and environment.

The permanent issue of aging infrastructure is another major concern. A large portion of WAF pipes network is over 50 years old, leading to inefficient, leakage and frequent service disruption. We also noted a critical shortage of vehicles for delivery operations, with many of these existing fleet being in a vehicle graveyard. This directly impacts WAF's ability to respond to emergency and maintain service across our nation.

Furthermore, while WAF is exploring innovative solutions for methane utilization, it is crucial to note that none of its 11 wastewater treatment plants are currently fully compliant with the Environmental Management Act. They operate under interim permit including a significant backlog in meeting fundamental environmental standards. We also observed that despite an 85 percent bill collection efficiency, WAF still carries a sustainable burden of \$29.15 million in outstanding unpaid bills.

Mr. Speaker, finally, our Committee noted reoccurring project implementation problems particularly concerning landowners disputes and unresolved compensation issues which have delayed critical projects like Saru Water Treatment Plant and Namau Water Catchment Project.

Mr. Speaker, our Committee has put forward several recommendations to address these challenges. We urge the Ministry to expedite the enactment of legislation for fining powers, invest significantly in upgrading aging infrastructure and vehicle fleets and implementing robust data management system for transparent reporting. We must also ensure that all wastewater treatment plants achieve full environmental compliance and that landowners' issues are resolved proactively to prevent project delays.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, Sir, WAF has a vital role for our nation's progress. It is our collective responsibility here in this Parliament to ensure that WAF is equipped with the resources, the legal framework and the operational capacity needed to succeed by acknowledging both the commendable work done and the significant challenge that remains. By working together, we can ensure that water and sanitation services are consistently reliable, fully sustainable and equitable accessible for the generations to come.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to contribute to the motion on the Water Authority of Fiji Annual Report 2018 and 2019. Just to get to the point, Sir, I would like to address the various recommendations regarding financial reporting and transparency as recommended by the Committee for WAF to improve its reporting accuracy and also to update relevant figures. I would just like to mention some updates over the years.

The Water Authority of Fiji has transformed these financial reporting systems to ensure it captures up to-date costing moving to online payments whilst improving its chart of accounts. Sir, WAF has updated the financial statements with up-to-date figures and incorporated the figures in the fixed asset valuation exercise that was completed and approved by the board in December 2024.

In terms of timely audit action on audit recommendations, the Internal Audit Unit with its Annual Audit Plan has incorporated these audit recommendations raised from prior years. It is actively working towards addressing these audits including issues relating to the KPIs for staff responsible and updates quarterly to management.

With respect to property, plant and equipment, WAF has engaged a consultant to carry out the fixed asset valuation. This has now been completed, and the Authority is working on incorporating these changes into the 2024 financials.

The gender issue has been mentioned. Sir, WAF has acted since 2019 to promote gender equality. Its female workforce has grown from 11 percent in 2020 to 18 percent in 2025. There is representation too at the executive management level.

The Committee also stated that WAF should prioritise the upgrading and renewal of ageing infrastructure. Of course, WAF has been replacing its frequently failing assets and aged pipelines based on its replacement programme for 2024-2025. Here, the asset management unit is completing their critical conditions assessment exercise and also finalising the five-year capital investment plan, which is aligned to the Water Sector Strategy 2050, that identifies critical and ageing water and wastewater infrastructure that need urgent replacement and appropriate maintenance programme. Over the past two years, WAF has received around \$300-plus million under its CapEx budget and has been progressively replacing aged pipelines.

The Committee also raised the issue of water scarcity and climate change. In 2021, WAF commissioned various master plans and servicing strategies, focussing on replacing partially treated systems and servicing reticulation gaps in main towns and cities, and this work continues. Example includes the various packaged plants constructed in 2020, 2023 and 2024. These are fully compliant plants and have extended the water network to both rural and urban communities.

Under the Water Sector Strategy, the Authority has identified key climate resilient projects aimed at addressing water scarcity and the impacts of climate change. The projects also focus on ensuring sustainable water supply. Given the limitations of the annual budget, the Authority is actively pursuing access to climate financing to support the implementation of these initiatives, working closely with the climate financing infrastructure advisor in the Minister's office.

The Committee also mentioned the reduction of Non-Revenue Water (NRW), as already mentioned by my colleague, honourable Nath. Significant efforts have been made over the years to reduce Non-Revenue Water levels with the setting up of a Leak Detection Unit. For 2024-25, the Authority is implementing key initiatives, targeting both NRW reduction and enhanced customer service under the ADB-funded performance-based contract, with efforts such as leak detection, pressure management, metre replacement, and targeted infrastructure upgrades are underway in the Suva-Nausori system. And WAF has introduced a metering initiative to accurately measure water production from critical plants, enabling precise calculation of system input volumes and NRW percentages.

These District Metered Areas (DMAs) have been established to improve monitoring, while the newly formed asset management unit is evaluating and prioritising pipeline replacements to address frequent asset failures which have been experienced. This is further supported by the implementation of smart metering, SCADA systems and a computerised maintenance management system to improve asset condition tracking and streamline complaint resolution.

Enhancing customer service on the customer front, improvements to the Gentrack complaints management system and digital tools (WAF Mobile App) have enhanced the handling of complaints and inquiries. The operations team is gradually shifting to a structured scheduling approach, resulting in better

service delivery and improved compliance with WAF's customer charter.

There is also mention in the report in terms of investment in workforce training. Again, the Authority has an annual budget dedicated to training and upskilling technical and non-technical staff. As we all know, there are challenges in terms of the turnover of technical staff, but continued training is very critical. Areas of training are captured from the annual training needs analysis and plan and developed and incorporated into the programme as budgeted.

Addressing staffing gaps, the Authority has re-established the apprenticeship scheme and capacity building programme. This has engaged 86 apprentices from across the region. We have also worked closely with our catchment area landowners to ensure their participation in the apprenticeship scheme. This initiative not only provides relevant skills but also allows them to earn an income. The programme is addressing critical skills shortages in the water sector and moving forward will also address the Water Sector 2050 Strategy as far as human resource needs are concerned.

The protection of water resources is also mentioned. Sir, WAF is approaching this, in association with the Ministry of Environment and other stakeholders, including the Ministry of Agriculture and Ministry of Lands. There is a critical role to be played by these other ministries. For example, gravel extraction needs to be closely monitored and discussed. This is an area which we are currently working closely with the Ministry of Lands in terms of gravel extraction near water catchment areas.

Sustainable practices, again this is another issue raised. The Authority is vigorously pursuing programmes on demand management and water conservation to raise awareness on using water wisely and water savings. These programmes are continuing not only with the customers but our younger generation (students) to inculcate this water conservation attitude in our population.

Sir, in terms of collaborations which have been mentioned, this is ongoing with the various development partners. One example is SUEZ and the European Investment Bank in terms of technologies introduced and the ongoing training, and of course with other entities such as Asian Development Bank (ADB), Green Climate Fund (GCF) and World Bank. We have continuously liaised with them, especially on the implementation of the Water Sector Plan 2050 and the financial strategies in order that we achieve the objectives, or the priorities set out in that plan.

There are other suggestions mentioned, Sir, the honourable Nath mentioned the Namau Water Catchment as an example of issues with the landowners. The update on that is negotiations for the lease offer is currently undertaken. The timeline is within two months after the meeting resolution by *Mataqali Sauturaga*, iTLTB and WAF on 22nd July, 2025, and that will be enabled soon in terms of the lease agreement. Those are some of the updates I thought I would raise.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to make a short contribution to the motion before the House, as it is stated that Water Authority of Fiji plays a crucial role in ensuring Fijians have safe drinking access water. What the Parliament, Government and most importantly, the public needs to understand are some of the ongoing challenges Water Authority faces are climate change, growing population, and most importantly, a population that keeps shifting and we need to adjust and align ourselves accordingly.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to speak on the water disruptions that happen, and it is mostly due to a lot of damaged pipes. As stated in the Report, they have the reduced Non-Revenue Water, and I urge WAF to focus on reducing the Non-Revenue Water by improving leak detection, addressing illegal connections and upgrading metre systems, which the honourable Minister has highlighted. I also urge the public to call and complain to WAF over pipes that have burst, et cetera.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I also call for the city councils, because there is a lot of businesses that are operating in residential areas or areas that should not be operating, and they are using either excess water or they are discharging excess water or chemicals into the nearby drains or even in the sewer lines. I believe in Lautoka last week, WAF was carrying out a smoke test to ensure that this problem can be combated.

In terms of collaboration, we need to strengthen public education on water conservation and community engagement. And here comes the Ministry of Education, where it is important to drive a mindset in our youth and younger generation to strive for greener businesses. This whole manmade economy survives on the surrounded natural resources and environment.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, earlier in our Oral Question and Answer session, the honourable Minister had highlighted a few places in Tavua with water disruptions. I would like to highlight to the House some of the areas that have issues with water disruptions and carting issues. I would send an email to the honourable Minister of these few places:

- (a) Vunivere, Seaqaqa;
- (b) Johnson Road;
- (c) Qilo Road;
- (d) Ragner Place;
- (e) Rifle Range;
- (f) Upper Namadi Heights,
- (g) Sakoca;
- (h) Field 40 (new subdivision);
- (i) Wainadoi – someone said water has not been there for years, so it is an ongoing issue;
- (j) Martintar, Nadi – water shuts off after 8.30 a.m.; and
- (k) some parts of Tailevu – I am not sure which areas.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I may have missed out some areas, but I would have them emailed to the honourable Minister. While the aging infrastructure and climate change issues are there, we need to strengthen our legal frameworks, which is not easy. It will be an ongoing challenge for any government that comes to power, and it is something that we all need to address.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the staff of WAF, especially from what I have heard from the public in the Western Division for being prompt with their responses to the issues. I thank the Committee for their work on this Report, and I support the recommendations before the Committee.

MR. SPEAKER.- There are still more speakers to be heard on this motion, and after that, there is a further motion before the House. Given the time, I would like the Parliament to be suspended but before that, for the purposes of complying with the Standing Orders, with respect to sitting times, I now call upon the honourable Leader of the Government in Parliament to move a suspension motion.

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDERS

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I move:

That Standing Order 6, that so much of Standing Order 23(1) be suspended so as to allow the House to sit beyond 4.30 p.m. today to complete the remaining items listed on today's Order Paper.

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I second the motion.

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, as already mentioned, we have one more motion for debate under Schedule 3 on the Savusavu Town Council and the rest of the contributions for the Water Authority of Fiji Report.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we will now suspend the proceedings for a break. Parliament will resume in half an hour.

The Parliament adjourned at 3.59 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 4.37 p.m.

RESUMPTION OF DEBATE ON THE REVIEW REPORT – WATER AUTHORITY OF FIJI JANUARY TO JULY 2018 AND 2018-2019 ANNUAL REPORTS

HON. J. USAMATE.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, for the opportunity to talk on the reports on Water Authority of Fiji. I had a lot of questions that I wanted to ask, but I think a lot of them have been addressed by the honourable Minister's response and his update and the various things that have been happening. There are just two or three things that I would like to highlight and perhaps question.

Firstly, if you look at the report, it is saying that the non-revenue water in 2013 was at 52.2 percent and then in 2018 it went down to 29.3 percent and now as we know, it is around 47 percent. So, that is an area that is of interest to me whether the assessment was wrong, it will be an interesting thing to try to understand why was there a big dip?

This came out in this report of 29.3 percent in 2018, down from 52.2 percent and now we know that non-revenue water is around 47 percent. As you know, non-revenue water can be stolen water, it can be leakage and so forth and it is showing that the Minister has addressed the various terms, various methodologies that they hope to try to address that, the DMAs and all the work that they are doing with the ADB et cetera. That is one point that is of particular interest to me. Given what he has been talking about.

Secondly, because of this big problem in WAF and even in places like EFL, the issue of skilled workers. I am glad to hear from the Minister that Water Authority of Fiji has now re-established its apprenticeship scheme, which means that there will be people that will be employed at the Water Authority of Fiji, they will be paid a salary, they will attend the training programmes at FNU and then they will also work. Through that way they will get the best possible way of getting skilled workers.

I think that is a very good move, and I would also like to think that one of the things we really need to review is the way in which we fund the money that is available for tradesman training, especially on the job in-house. When someone comes out from an institution, he knows the theoretical of how to do things, but on-the-job know how is missing. That is one of the things we used to have under the old levy scheme, where you pay your NTPC levy and part of that money was used for on-the-job training. If you use that fund for on-the-job training, you could claim some of that back. I know that money has been used elsewhere, but I think schemes like this, especially now when we are really facing severe shortage of skilled workers.

The last thing I would like to mention; one of the big problems that we have with WAF is the cost of water is very low. I know this is a political hot potato for us, but when the cost is very low people do not treat it with a lot of importance. In most countries where this has happened, Israel and Singapore, they move the price of water up, but they made sure that the people at the lowest end of the scale paid minimal for water. I think this is something that we really need to look at. How we can try to address this issue of people wasting water.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Members and honourable Minister for pointing out the number of issues from the Report and what WAF is doing.

I agree with the recommendation by the Standing Committee to address the challenges and the gaps within WAF and enhance its overall operations. I think, Mr. Speaker, Sir, as the honourable Minister pointed out, there is a clear need to sustain where necessary investment has to increase to ensure WAF is equally equipped with the appropriate level of resources.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I want to take this opportunity to thank the Acting CEO, Mr. Seru Soderberg, for being so agile and responsive to some of the challenges from the public that I have experienced myself. He was able to resolve things given the constraints that the WAF has.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have taken a very clear approach as a government to ensure that we provide additional resources and the appropriate budget. In the 2025-2026 financial year, a total sum of \$284.4 million has been allocated to WAF of which \$151.7 million is provided for capital expenditure. The specific areas of works capital investment in the 2025-2026 includes water programme, wastewater programme, asset management programme, digital transformation programme, emergency response, rural water programme and special funded programmes earmarked for implementation during the upcoming financial year.

The honourable Minister pointed out some of the areas where they are focusing at the moment. As I announced in the Budget, there are a number of infrastructural projects, particularly in the Central Division:

- (1) Laying of the 11.7 kilometres of water pipeline from Sawani to Colo-i-Suva and to Khalsa Road Junction, a new pump station and the construction of two megalitres reservoirs. This project will ensure the elevated areas such as Sakoca, Nagatugatu, Tacirua, Dokanaisuva, Colo-i-Suva which faces continuous intermittent water supply will be able to receive 24/7 reliable water supply. Construction of a new 20 megalitres water treatment plant to complement the existing Tamavua Water Treatment Plant. This initiative will benefit 230,000 people living along the Suva to Lami corridors and parts of Nasinu.
- (2) The development of the new water treatment plant in Navua and new Water Supply Scheme in the Wainadoi area. This will have a coverage from Naboro to Nabukavesi with the potential to extend towards Togalevu and Namelimeli in Navua.
- (3) In the Western Division, upgrading of water mains, this will benefit around 80,000 people living within and along the Dreketi Feeder Road, Vuda-Wairabetia, Nadi Airport, Nadi Back Road and Sabeto Road - areas focusing on improved and consistent water supply. These are areas where we get a lot of complaints as well, and rightfully so.
- (4) Water resource improvement works to improve water supply services for Nalawa in Ra, Nasivi Intake in Tavua, and rehabilitation works for Nadrou and Varaciva Pump Stations in Ba.
- (5) In the Northern Division, upgrade of Benau Water Treatment Plant, water mains upgrade to Rara and Volanau in Labasa, improvement works for Naidriva in Savusavu.
- (6) Water Authority of Fiji has begun works for the proposed Wainivasa Water Source in Taveuni.
- (7) 19-kilometre water main extension from Wailevu to Tabia, and along the Cross Island Road will be undertaken with a new water pump station and the construction of a two megaliter reservoir at Vatudova.

Those are some of the examples, Mr. Speaker, Sir, of projects that have been included in the 2025-2026 Budget.

In response to the pressing challenge of wastewater treatment facility, we are partnering with the Asian Development Bank on a \$300 million Healthy Oceans and Water Security Improvement project

spanning five years. This initiative aims to double the capacity of the Kinoya Wastewater Treatment Facility to 36,000 cubic meters per day, significantly reducing the volume of untreated effluent discharge into the sea and safeguarding our marine environment.

Honourable Usamate had talked about training. Yes, we recognise that, we are putting a lot of effort, not only in apprenticeship, but also technical training, short-term training so that people can get into jobs and continue with their apprenticeship. As part of this project, particularly in the Water Sector, the Asian Development Bank is also providing a \$10 million grant to establish a Water Sector Academy. This facility will serve as a regional training centre addressing the critical shortage of skilled professionals in the Water Sector and strengthening capacity for sustainable water management across the region.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Government will continue to provide free water to households earning \$30,000 or less annually. This initiative currently benefits about 31,574 households across the country. Again, Mr. Speaker, Sir, as other speakers have pointed out, the 2025-2026 Budget also provides our commitment for necessary legislative changes required for the corporatisation of WAF. I know honourable Usamate talked about the low cost for water. He is correct. That is something the new institutional structure of the Water Authority of Fiji will consider, and the financial sustainability and ensuring that adequate funding is available for the massive infrastructure needs in the water and wastewater sector.

With that contribution, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Members of the Committee and the honourable Minister and everyone else who spoke on the Report.

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to thank all honourable Members for their contribution to this debate, and I also express my sincere gratitude to the Standing Committee members.

MR. SPEAKER.- The Parliament will now vote to note the content of the Report.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

CONSOLIDATED REVIEW REPORT – SAVUSAVU TOWN COUNCIL 2014-2015 ANNUAL REPORT

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I move:

That Parliament debates the Consolidated Review Report on the Savusavu Town Council 2014-2015 Annual Report, which was tabled on 1st May, 2025.

HON. I. TUIWAILEVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I second the motion.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, honourable Members, I rise to present the Standing Committee's findings and recommendations from our review of the Savusavu Town Council 2014-2015 Annual Reports.

A town with immense potential but facing pressing structural and service delivery challenges. The committee notes with appreciation that the Council has improved its rates collection from as low as 23 percent in 2015 to 71 percent in recent years. This is a commendable achievement attributed to stronger legal enforcement and community engagement. To sustain this momentum, we recommend expanding digital payment options and legal mechanisms to further improve collection and boost

municipal revenue. However, we must also draw attention to gaps in stakeholder coordination, particularly with Energy Fiji Limited (EFL).

Sir, EFL's absence from local planning discussions has created delays in infrastructure delivery and placed excessive financial burdens up to \$50,000 on residents and businesses for transformer installations. The Committee recommends EFL to strengthen its local engagement and review its cost recovery approach to support inclusive development in emerging towns like Savusavu.

In the area of waste management, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the absence of an environmentally complained landfill remains a serious concern. We urge the council to prioritise the establishment of a proper landfill facility. Similarly, reliance on septic tanks across Savusavu poses public health and environmental risks. The committee recommends initiating plans for a centralised sewerage system plan to improve sanitation and align with national and sustainable development goals.

On infrastructure, we recommend close collaboration with national authorities to upgrade the airport and transport infrastructure, a key enabler of tourism and economic development in the North. The committee is deeply concerned about the rising drugs issue and public safety threats. We call on the council to work with law enforcement to implement community policing, establish rehabilitation programmes, and fast-track CCTV and public surveillance projects.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to address traffic congestion, especially in the CBD, the council should conduct a traffic and mobility study and move towards installing parking metres, both as a regulatory measure and a potential revenue source.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, one of the most serious issues raised was the historical financial mismanagement. From 2011 to 2015, the council failed to maintain proper records, used a single general accounting system, and made land transactions without accountability. A parcel of land sold for \$350,000 during this period is now valued over \$7 million. The Committee recommends that these matters be referred to the appropriate authorities for independent investigation and proper legal action.

Beyond this, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Council must improve its asset management, as evidenced by a compactor truck donated in 2015 that remains unused to this day. We recommend the development of a formal asset management policy and proper maintenance schedule. On urban planning, we support the council's move to expand its municipality's boundaries, currently home to just 644 ratepayers. This will help increase revenue, support urban infrastructure, and enable comprehensive town planning.

The Committee also supports the planned installation of CCTV systems across high-risk zones within the CBD, in collaboration with Police and Fiji Roads Authority to ensure and enhance safety and deterrence.

The Na Vualiku Project is a promising initiative supported by the World Bank. We recommend the council establish a clear governance structure for this project to ensure its alignment with the National Tourism Master Plan.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in terms of recreation, the Committee urges the redevelopment of the Ratu Ganilau Park into a modern sports complex serving both residents and attracting regional athletes. We suggest that the Council explores a Public-Private Partnership and Government grants to support this project. Finally, we support the Council's beautification and coastal protection efforts including hiring of town beauticians and implementing erosion mitigation works to protect vulnerable shorelines and promote climate resilience.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Committee believes that these 14 recommendations form a practical roadmap for transforming Savusavu into a vibrant, well governed and sustainable township. We call on all relevant authorities to act with urgency and purpose in implementing these reforms for the benefit of the community and our nation. On that note, I support the motion before the House.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate on the motion. I have a list of speakers. Each speaker may speak up to 10 minutes; at the end of the debate, I will grant the right of reply to the mover.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will be quite brief but I want to thank the Committee for the report and recommendations. There are some 14 odd recommendations that they have come up with, and as we can all see they are quite old reports, but the recommendations are more aligned to what is actually happening today. Some of the ones that I wanted to just briefly say things on, I will refrain on one or two because I have a question tomorrow on Savusavu, but I think what needs to be aired is the issue regarding the landfill that has been ongoing for a while. That is a question that I have for the honourable Minister tomorrow, so I will refrain from speaking about it.

With respect to sewage treatment plants, I think it is something of some urgent nature purely because from a tourism perspective, this is one on Fiji's tourism map, it is actually a premier destination so things such as these need to be looked at. I am hopeful that this is part of the Northern Development that is going on and the World Bank Funding that is actually there.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, one of the most important things that we must realise with respect to Savusavu, is that it is a phenomenal seaport in terms of yachts that arrive to the North. There are quite a substantial number of yachts that come in from the United States of America, sometimes they berth there because they have a lot of revenue also from Fiji, but at the same time, we need to also be vigilant about is transpiring.

Savusavu, as a port needs to be looked at in terms of the security arrangements that are in there. They need to be beefed up so that we are making sure that it is not the poorest border in any shape or form whatsoever. So, they will need all the assistance that we can get for them from Government with respect to ensuring the borders are safe because of the large number yachts. I am not saying they are all bad, it is just the large amount of revenue that they actually bring. Super yachts that come in, some actually berth there, there are facilities being built to be able to dry dock there also. It is a growing destination.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as I was talking earlier on, with respect to landfill issues, it is a town that could probably lead the way because we are pressing the reset button in terms of recycling. It could do a lot in terms of being able to recycle properly and show the rest of Fiji how it can be done. It is still a small place, it is still developing and at the end of the day, it is ripe for something like that, and we can see if we can enough help with respect to turning it into a good recycling little town and also from a sewerage perspective too. I know they have difficulties with respect to power, that is a serious issue that needs to be looked at, there are a lot of 5 Star, 6 Star and 7 Star hotels that are there and it really is something that requires urgent attention. I could tell you a few funny stories about what happens at night when the power goes off but that is for another day.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the sporting facility, at the last visit, I think it requires a serious upgrade. Maybe, the honourable Prime Minister could find some funding somewhere to help the Savusavu people with respect to the grounds and stadium facilities so they can host also. In the last couple of days, we have had some football out in Labasa. The north is not just about Labasa, it is also about Savusavu. It really does need good attention, a whole lot of attention with respect to bringing it up to speed, to turn it into the tourism destination that it should be, and it ought to be. It is a beautiful place.

Lastly, I am not sure if the Report actually covered it, but it is something that requires dire urgent attention, and that is access into restricted flights and how we can increase the capacity of people going into Savusavu. The necessary infrastructure, these are towns that we can actually do really well, because they are at a stage of development where we can see what is going to happen in the future, and then we can do it really well. The infrastructure also will need a hell of a lot of help in getting things right and making sure that we filter proof Savusavu for what it can be, what it should be and what it may become.

Tourism in Fiji is not just about Mamanucas, it is also about the North. It is clearly a fantastic destination for our tourism people. Just short, Sir, and I think some of the recommendations that have come through are really good. It is quite an old report, the recommendations are more aligned to the development going on at the moment, and I wholeheartedly agree with the recommendations.

HON. N.T. TUINACEVA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to contribute to the debate on this Consolidated Review Report of the Savusavu Town Council 2014 and 2015 Annual Reports. Let me begin by stating clearly, Savusavu is more than just a town. It is a gateway to opportunity, a gateway to Fiji's northern tourism economy, a pilot site for climate resilience and a platform for decentralised urban growth.

This Report, tabled by the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence reveals both the growing pains and potentials of Savusavu. I want to speak to that potential. Despite its modest population of around 6,000, Savusavu stands as the entry point for Vanua Levu's tourism; high value resorts, yacht berths, ecologists and a hotspot for investment. With the World Bank support for the Vualiku Project already underway, we are seeing strategic steps to position Savusavu as a premier sustainable tourism destination in the region.

Tourism cannot thrive on paradise alone. It needs infrastructure, and this is where the findings of the Report matters to us. The Report rightly reflects the need for a proper landfill, a centralised sewerage system, and improved transport connectivity, including upgrades of the local airport. These are not just local issues, but national development imperatives. When we modernise Savusavu's infrastructure, we do not just serve the ratepayers, we serve the entire Northern Division growth agenda – tourism demands pull up, the agriculture sector expands, creates rural employment and builds local enterprise.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry for Public Works, Meteorological Services and Transport recognised this already. We are working in co-ordination with the Ministry of Local Government to support the town's infrastructure priorities. We are advancing feasibility assessment for drainage upgrades and working with FRA on town connectivity.

I also want to acknowledge the Council's effort to strengthen rates collection, achieving a 71 percent success rate after historically low performance. Their move to expand municipal boundaries is forward thinking. More ratepayers mean better service, greater planning capacity and a stronger platform for managed growth. This Report also calls us to vigilance. It documents historical financial mismanagement, missing records, misused accounts and undervalued land sales. I support the Committee's recommendation for this to be referred to relevant authorities.

Transparency is the foundation of trust and Savusavu deserves that. Mr. Speaker, we must not view this Report as relic of past failures but as a blueprint for future reform with sound planning, targeted investment and national level support, Savusavu can become a model town; climate ready, economically vibrant and community focused. Let us honour the resilience of its people and the foresight of its planners. Let us support Savusavu, not as a small dot on the map, but as a critical zone in Fiji's development journey. With those remarks Mr. Speaker, Sir, I support the motion before the House.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will be very brief as well, knowing that this is 2014-2015 Annual Report, but I do acknowledge the Committee for the work undertaken and providing this Report to Parliament.

The honourable Prime Minister would know a former Territorial Force (TF) officer by the name Tuikorocau, he was DO Savusavu as well. He used to welcome the soldiers when they come to Savusavu and being a son of Savusavu, he is always proud of Savusavu. And he always tells the soldiers, “welcome to Savusavu boys, this is the Hidden Paradise.” If I translate that in the *iTaukei* dialect, it means, “*na vanua ni lasa vuni*”.

(Laughter)

That is Savusavu, Sir, perhaps the potential that the honorable Tuinaceva talked about.

Just a few quick comments, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I do sympathize with the small towns. I have been to Tavua, Rakiraki and then further exacerbated by the low collection in rates, so I hope that the Ministry and the officials will continue to pursue on this because we have a responsibility, we expect so much from the councils, but we are not willing to pay our rates. I think the finding in 3.1 of the Committee’s findings as alluded to by the honorable Tuinaceva, very much linked to 3.3.10 which is on Town Expansion and Urban Planning.

I know that for some of the towns, I thank your good office, Mr. Speaker, Sir, for allowing me to do the visits and as usual, when I come to the divisions, the three normal courtesy visits are the Office of the Commissioner or the Provincial Administrator if I come to a township and then the Roko Tui’s office and the town council office. I am learning a lot, apart from my very limited knowledge as a ratepayer about how these councils are run and the problems that they face. It is quite consistent with most of the small towns that we have in Fiji. I agree that we need a good forward planning, particularly when it comes to the expansion of town boundaries, so that growth can take place in these small townships.

Stakeholder Meetings, I stand to be corrected, but I know that there have been some initiatives taken to address this issue about those that cannot afford to pay the fee required for three phase power connection. This is a very important issue, particularly when we deal with MSMEs in these small towns, the implication, the rippling effect when it comes to creation of employment, so with just some assistance or some flexibility probably for EFL to facilitate those that probably, part-payments or installments, et cetera, it would really help because it means a lot to the local communities. I hope that EFL will also, through the board and management take this responsibility seriously and attend to meetings if and when required.

I know that the landfill, sewerage treatment and wastewater management, additional to the other infrastructure needs in Savusavu is quite long overdue. It has been pending for quite a while, I know for a fact about wastewater management. There has been a plan long ago and I think the issue was the discharge. The honourable Prime Minister talked about Kinoya and where it is discharged into the ocean, I think on some of these issues, it is just a matter of awareness and providing the communities with the facts.

I was talking to the honourable Minister for Communications today about the tower and the health risks, hazards that come with it. Right now, when he is talking about the 5G, even the RKS community is very worried about the tower that will be constructed just near the RKS main gate. This is coming from people who we think are educated. I think there needs to be some aggressive awareness on some of these issues, because there are a lot of bush lawyers too around these areas and

we need to state the fact. But do not worry about RKS, maybe move down to QVS, there are more problems down there.

Airports and transport infrastructure, the honourable Pio Tikoduadua is well aware of some of the plans from yesteryears because he brought a team back then, the Ministry of Works and the Prime Minister's Office about the long term plans, particularly for Savusavu and linking that to Labasa as well. Vanua Levu needs international air connectivity apart from the Savusavu airport and Matei in Taveuni. The same thing with seaport connectivity as well to the international market, because what comes out of Vanua Levu into the international market is raw sugar, chips in Wairiki in Bua and crude coconut oil from Labasa. Timber, all of these comes to Suva with added costs and likewise, when it comes to the imports that go into Vanua Levu as well, this is why this infrastructure is so important.

For facilities within Savusavu itself, again the honourable Tikoduadua knows this, there was an agreement back then by the Ministry and the stakeholders in Savusavu for the current port facility to be relocated to Valaga Bay where Copra Millers is. The current port facility, all that they need is dolphins so that it can be used as a tourism port. This, Sir, is plans from long time ago, hopefully we can look into this.

Drug related issues. Of course, there are concerns. I know the police, few years back have deployed Rigid Inflatable Boats (RIBs) from Japanese aid to assist in the combating of drugs. The honourable Minister knows that this is also a development related issue when we deny infrastructure to the triangle area honourable Vosarogo as a result, our people will turn to drugs because they can just carry it in a bag and come down to Savusavu. All the stakeholders need to be communicating in this regard.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on the ground, we definitely need lots of good talents in Vanua Levu. If you go to Vanua Levu now, one of the locks in the 1970s is Mr. Isimeli Cerelala, these are the talents that are available in these local communities but if we provide the facility, it will be good.

On the accountability and financial management issue, I do agree that we really need to have investigations by the relevant authorities so that they can be taken to task, those who are responsible. I am not sure. I was told that the land sales occurred well before this period. Maybe something that can be corrected or further clarified. I know this is an issue also in the Sigatoka Town Council. The briefing that I had in Sigatoka, same thing, land sales but if we conduct a thorough investigation and bring those responsible to task, as a deterrent in the future, it will send some strong messages to the community.

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to contribute to the motion before this august House on the Consolidated Review Report of the Savusavu Town Council Annual Reports for the period 2014 to 2015.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Local Government, takes note of the findings of the Report of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence. The 14 specific recommendations for the Savusavu Town Council to action as well as implement.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Report highlighted several key issues from the period under review ranging from financial report delays and non-compliance with audit procedures to capacity constraints, demonstration and project implementation. Findings of the Report, though historical, provide a valuable reference point for the reforms that we have implemented in recent years.

The Municipal Council, Mr. Speaker, Sir, have undergone fundamental institutional reforms and strengthened from changes in organisational structures, policies, standard operating procedures, capital infrastructure, project management, reengineering of revenue streams, clearing backlogs of accounts,

publication of pending annual reports and trainings of officers of the councils.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, since 2023, we have prioritised the professionalisation of municipal governance. The Ministry is committed to supporting the Savusavu Town Council in diversifying its revenue resources through initiatives such as reviewing and updating rates, exploring new income generating opportunities including Public Private Partnerships and ensuring effective collection of fees and charges.

It is significant to note that the Council is focusing on recovering rate arrears by re-engaging an officer to improve the revenue stream. It is very encouraging to note, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that as of 30th June, 2025, the council has collected 71.31 percent of the rates.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as part of strengthening revenue the Ministry is working closely with the council to ensure that parking meters are installed in strategic spots in Savusavu Town. Currently, the council is negotiating with Fiji Roads Authority (FRA) as well as the Town Country Planning to address the issues of parking in the main area. It is really a challenge and also concern now in Savusavu. In addition, the council has already procured 10 digital parking meters and parking meter layout plans have been approved by FRA, however, still awaiting the gazette of the parking meters.

The Ministry has also further provided technical support and training to the council staff to enhance the capacity in revenue management and compliance with finance regulations. We are working closely with councils to ensure timely submission of audited financial statements and adherence to standardise accounting policies. Plans are underway to roll out a standard financial management system across all municipal councils including Savusavu to promote transparency, accuracy and accountability in financial reporting.

Strengthening internal controls and regular financial audits will remain a priority to ensure prudent management of public funds. Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are pleased to confirm that stage one of the unified of standardised accounting system consultation project comprising visits to all municipal councils as well as town councils, has been successfully completed by the consultant.

On stakeholder meetings, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry supports the standing committee's recommendation to enhance stakeholder engagement between Energy Fiji Limited and the council through regular meetings and consultations. I must also thank the new CEO for Energy Fiji Limited, for being proactive, as well as working closely with my Ministry and the residents when there are issues regarding power supply around Savusavu.

I also recognise the importance of inclusive decision-making, ensuring that ratepayers, business owners, and community representatives have a platform to contribute to the planning and development of Savusavu Town. Also, to strengthen our approach on drug-related issues, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the council has conducted meetings with Divisional Police Commander Northern, as well as officers in charge of Savusavu Police Station, regarding visibility of police officers in town especially on weekends, and more foot patrols in hotspots areas.

The Council has also given a space for Fiji Police to set up a police post in town. A joint survey was conducted between the council, Fiji Police Force, and FRA on the installation of CCTV surveillance cameras within the main CBD areas. Discussions are also underway to seek the support of the business houses, and stakeholders as well.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, under the Na Vualiku Project which is funded by World Bank, the council is working closely to identify a suitable site for a proper landfill for Savusavu. Solid waste management,

Mr. Speaker, Sir, is one of the project components with the Na Vualiku Project. A funding of \$6.75 million has been allocated for a landfill project for Savusavu and Labasa.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Terms of Reference has been finalised on the said project, and a proposed site has been identified in the Savudrodro area. Thus, a proper feasibility study will be conducted by the environmental consultants. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry also support the recommendation of the committee, the council to initiate planning for a centralised sewerage treatment plant. This initiative is also one of the project components within the Na Vualiku Project and relevant stakeholders and the working group are working closely to ensure that this project is carried out in an efficient and effective manner.

Beautification, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is also part of the Na Vualiku Project. It is also one of the components. The Council has recruited a full-time Gardener who looks after the beautification of the town. Mr. Speaker, another important aspect of the Na Vualiku Project is the tourism development projects. The council, in collaboration with the Savusavu Tourism Association, is working with the Na Vualiku project to develop a tourism master plan for Savusavu in line with the Blue Town model.

On sports and recreational facilities, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry is committed to supporting the council in upgrading and maintaining such facilities to ensure that they are safe, functional, and accessible to community use. The Ministry has also given consent to the redevelopment of Ratu Ganilau Park in partnership with the Fiji Sports Council. The terms and conditions have been discussed by both parties. The council will continue to explore Private-Public Partnership (PPP) to improve infrastructure, enhance community engagement in sports and recreational activities and ensure these assets are sustainably managed for long-term benefit.

Also, a budget has been allocated for repair and maintenance of all council fleets. The Ministry reaffirms its commitment to improving municipal governance and service delivery across municipalities, including Savusavu. My Ministry will continue to work with councils, relevant government ministries, and community stakeholders to implement the committee's recommendations and build a more responsive, inclusive, and efficient local government system.

I would like to take this time, Mr. Speaker, Sir, to thank the chairman, as well as Special Administrators and the staff of Savusavu Town Council for the provision of basic services for the people of Savusavu, residents as well as rate payers. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, for giving me this opportunity to contribute to the debate.

HON. R.R SHARMA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir. I would like to thank all the speakers who have spoken before the House. It is indeed an old report. All those important points are noted down, and to the residents of Savusavu, be rest assured that the legislative and executive branch with all the other stakeholders who are responsible will work together in combating the challenges faced in Savusavu. I would like to thank the honourable Minister, I would like to thank the Savusavu Town Council, the committee members and our Secretariat for their commendable work.

MR. SPEAKER.- The Parliament will now vote to note the content of the Report.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, before we adjourn, I wish to inform the honourable Members that we now have at least five honourable Members who are unwell and have absent themselves

from today's proceedings, either prior to or in the course of the day. There appears to be a new strain of flu going around and I can safely say, in the absence of the honourable Minister for Health, that my taxi driver asserts that this is so in our ride this morning. So, honourable Members, be wary, beware, be careful.

That brings us to the end of today's meeting. Parliament will now adjourn until tomorrow at 10.30 a.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 5.27 p.m.

ANNEXURE I

Reply to Written Question No. 83/2025 tabled by the honourable Minister for Education (Ref. Page 1462)



MINISTER FOR EDUCATION
(Hon. A.M. Radrodra)

Reply to Question No. 83/2025 asked by honourable T.R. Matasawalevu is as follows:

(a) Detailed breakdown of how the \$66 million allocated for Free Education has been utilized -

Schools have been receiving Free Education Grant (FEG) since 2014 and strong measures have been placed on the utilization of grant by schools to ensure all schools are well resourced - improved sanitation, water tanks and water supply. Hence, there is no need for parents to send their children to urban schools.

It is mandatory for all schools to adhere to the Financial Management Handbook 2020. The summary of the utilization for the \$66 million for the financial year 2024-2025 has been analysed below:

Terms	Amount (\$)	Schools Paid
Term 2, 2024 - 50 percent Primary	\$5,488,047.58	695
Term 2, 2024 - 50 percent Secondary	\$5,261,668.44	175
Term 3, 2024 - ECE	\$485,050.00	431
Term 3, 2024 - Primary	\$11,156,547.74	710
Term 3, 2024 - Secondary	\$10,172,454.26	175
Term 1, 2025 - ECE	501,850.00	446
Term 1, 2025 - Primary	\$11,101,210.44	706
Term 1, 2025 - Secondary	\$10,172,454.26	176
Term 2, 2025 - ECE	\$464,350.00	406
Term 2, 2025 - 50 percent Primary	\$5,364,388.52	676
Term 2, 2025 - 50 percent Secondary	\$5,180,389.11	174
	\$65,579,327.96	
Centralised Payments	\$313,465.30	9
Payment of Unutilised FEG	\$1,021,144.05	20
	\$66,913,937.31	

(b) What measurable impact has it had on classroom resources, teacher-student ratios, and student performance?

Schools have utilized FEG to upgrade learning resources like:

- Interactive panels
- Comm Box
- Overhead Projectors
- Laptops
- Desk top computers
- Tablets
- Internet upgrade and availability
- Desks

- Chairs
- Whiteboards
- TVET equipment, for TVET subjects such as Home Economics, Agriculture Science, , Vocational Studies , Industrial Arts, Computer Studies, Business Administration
- Physical Education, Music and Art & Craft (PEMAC) equipment
- Pre-Primary Recreational Resources
- Upgrading school libraries
- Science Labs - chemicals and apparatus

Teacher- Student ratios

While there is no direct impact of FEG on the teacher-student ratio, the FEG for each school depends on the number of students enrolled at each level.

Student Performance

- FEG allows us to achieve outcome-based learning objectives which in turn helps students academic performance.
- It also allows schools to conduct Professional Development (PD's) for teachers on student learning and strategies to improve student performance.
- Well maintained facilities such as upgraded classrooms, libraries, sanitation and recreational spaces improve attendance, morale, student focus (concentration) and performance.
- In most schools FEG is used to facilitate extra-curricular activities such as Cadet training, Duke of Edinburgh, Scouts, Girl Guides and other sporting activities provided to our students and strengthens their character and make them more responsible.

ANNEXURE II

Reply to Written Question No. 84/2025 tabled by the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Tourism and Civil Aviation (Ref. Page 1462)



MINISTER FOR TOURISM AND CIVIL AVIATION
(Hon. V.R. Gavoka)

Reply to Question No. 84/2025 asked by honourable P.K. Ravunawa is as follows:

1.0 Summary

- 1.1 During the period July 2023 to June 2024, tourism earnings totalled approximately FJ\$2.57 billion, well-surpassing pre-pandemic levels.
- 1.2 Our top five source markets – Australia, New Zealand, United States of America, China and the United Kingdom collectively accounted for over 86 percent of this revenue.
- 1.3 Australia contributed nearly half of all tourism revenue (49 percent) followed by New Zealand (23 percent), USA (11 percent), China (3 percent) and UK (1 percent).
- 1.4 The quarterly trend over the financial year shows the highest earnings recorded in July to September 2023, at \$775 million, largely driven by peak seasonal travel from Australia and New Zealand. Earnings were lower in the January to March 2024 quarter, at \$441 million reflecting the traditional seasonal slowdown, before rebounding to \$717 million in April to June 2024.
- 1.5 When compared to the same period last year (July 2022 – June 2023), tourism earnings grew by FJ\$359.9 million, a 16.3 percent increase. All major markets experienced growth, with China and USA showing the strongest percentage increases.
- 1.6 Australia and New Zealand remain Fiji's most important source markets, together accounting for over 71 percent of total revenue in 2023 – 2024.

2.0 Key Highlights

- 2.1 The breakdown of tourism earnings by market for the period July 2023 to June 2024 is as follows:
 - Australia: when compared to the same period last year, earnings increased by \$302 million, a 31 percent growth, driven by strong air connectivity and repeat visitors.
 - New Zealand experienced a solid growth of nearly 33 percent with market share rising by nearly 3 percent.
 - USA: Saw a 41.8 percent increase in earnings, contributing 10.5 percent of total tourism revenue.
 - China: was the fastest growing market by percentage, with over 150 percent increase in earnings. This was attributed to the gradual return of Chinese outbound travel.
 - United Kingdom: experienced a modest growth of 58 percent from a low base.

3.0 Conclusion

- 3.1 Australia and New Zealand remain the backbone of our industry, accounting for more than 70 percent of our tourism revenue.
- 3.2 The USA is a growing market, with higher spending visitors who tend to stay longer.
- 3.3 China and the UK, while smaller in contribution, show potential for growth as connectivity and marketing efforts are strengthened.

Annexures:

Table 1: Tourism Earnings for the period July 2023 – June 2024

Tourism Market Earnings (millions)					
	Australia	New Zealand	USA	China	UK
July – Sept 2023	360.7	207.5	78.4	25.3	8.1
Total Earnings	774.9	774.9	774.9	774.9	774.9
Market Share	46.55%	26.78%	10.12%	3.26%	1.05%
Oct – Dec 2023	324.6	136.3	65.3	17.3	7.1
Total Earnings	640.4	640.4	640.4	640.4	640.4
Market Share	50.72%	21.28%	10.20%	2.70%	1.11%
Jan – Mar 2024	217.8	77.6	50.8	17.1	7.2
Total Earnings	440.5	440.5	440.5	440.5	440.5
Market Share	49.44%	17.62%	11.53%	3.88%	1.63%
Apr – Jun 2024	363.7	161.3	75.8	19.4	6.8
Total Earnings	716.8	716.8	716.8	716.8	716.8
Market Share	50.74%	22.50%	10.57%	2.71%	0.95%
Total (market)	1267	582.7	270.3	79.1	29.2
Total (earnings)	2572.6	2572.6	2572.6	2572.6	2572.6
Market Share	49.25%	22.65%	10.51%	3.07%	1.14%

Table 2: Tourism Earnings for the period July 2022 – June 2023

Tourism Market Earnings (millions)					
	Australia	New Zealand	USA	China	UK
July – Sept 2022	199.6	116.1	45.6	3.3	4.8
Total Earnings	562.1	562.1	562.1	562.1	562.1
Market Share	35.51%	20.65%	8.11%	0.59%	0.85%
Oct – Dec 2022	213.5	89.3	36.7	3.7	3
Total Earnings	577.4	577.4	577.4	577.4	577.4
Market Share	36.98%	15.47%	6.36%	0.64%	0.52%
Jan – Mar 2023	223.5	75.7	39.9	5.9	5
Total Earnings	406	406	406	406	406
Market Share	55.05%	18.65%	9.83%	1.45%	1.23%
Apr – Jun 2023	328.4	157.4	68.4	18.7	5.7
Total Earnings	667.4	667.4	667.4	667.4	667.4
Market Share	49.21%	23.58%	10.25%	2.80%	0.85%
Total (market)	965	438.5	190.6	31.6	18.5
Total (earnings)	2212.9	2212.9	2212.9	2212.9	2212.9
Market Share	43.61%	19.82%	8.61%	1.43%	0.84%

Table 3: Tourism Earnings for the period July 2024 – March 2025

Tourism Market Earnings (millions)					
	Australia	New Zealand	USA	China	UK
July – Sept 2024	341.4	185.1	84.2	21.9	8
Total Earnings	730.8	730.8	730.8	730.8	730.8
Market Share	46.72%	25.33%	11.52%	3.00%	1.09%
Oct – Dec 2024	349.5	124	63.1	16.2	6.8
Total Earnings	648.7	648.7	648.7	648.7	648.7
Market Share	36.98%	15.47%	6.36%	0.64%	0.52%
Jan – Mar 2025	223.5	75.7	39.9	5.9	5
Total Earnings	406	406	406	406	406
Market Share	55.05%	18.65%	9.83%	1.45%	1.23%
Total (market)	965	438.5	190.6	31.6	18.5
Total (earnings)	2212.9	2212.9	2212.9	2212.9	2212.9
Market Share	43.61%	19.82%	8.61%	1.43%	0.84%