



PARLIAMENT
OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI
**STANDING COMMITTEE ON JUSTICE, LAW AND
HUMAN RIGHTS**



Ref: Parl 06/12

09 September 2025

Delivered via email

The Chairperson
The Electoral Commission
59-63 High Street,
Toorak,
Suva.

Dear Sir,

**RE: Request for Clarification on Issues identified from the review of the Electoral Commission
Annual Report 2020 to 2022**

1. I write on behalf of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights ('Committee') in regard to the above subject.
2. The Committee had been referred the Electoral Commission Annual Report 2020 and Electoral Commission Annual Report 2021 and Electoral Commission Annual Report 2022 ('Report') to review and to table its findings back to Parliament.
3. The Committee has begun its review of the Report and has identified a few issues which it believes merit further clarification, and as such have formulated and compiled a number of questions based on these issues (appendix).
4. The Committee kindly request that responses to the questions are to be provided to the Committee through its Secretariat by COB Monday **15 September, 2025**.
5. Additionally the Committee would be grateful for your attendance before the Committee on **Wednesday 17 September, 2025** to discuss the responses and also provide clarification to any additional queries that may arise.
6. For any enquiries, please contact the Committee Secretariat on phone number: 9908595 / 9347970 or emails: jackson.cakacaka@parliament.gov.fj / jackson_cakacaka@yahoo.com
alumita.cabealawa@parliament.gov.fj

Respectfully,

.....
Hon. Ratu Rakuira Vakalalabure (Chairperson)

Queries on the Electoral Commission Annual Report 2020

Electoral Law Reforms

1. The Committee noted that the Fiji Elections Office through its legal and compliance department had reported on recommendations by the Multi Observer Group to be implemented by the Electoral Law reforms. The Committee queries the status of these recommendations and whether they have been implemented.

Internal Audit

2. The Committee noted that the Fiji Elections Office, via its Internal Audit department had conducted a review of the strategic plan pertaining to the respective directorates. The Committee seeks clarification regarding the current status of this strategic plan.

Communications and Public Relations

3. The Committee noted that the Fiji Elections Office through its Communications and public relations department had conducted a nationwide survey in 2020 and collected 14, 137 responses. The Committee seeks clarification on the purpose of the survey and how the information collected was utilized or implemented in decision-making processes for both the Electoral Commission and the Fiji Elections Office.
4. The Committee noted that the Fiji Election Office through its Communications and Public Relations department had planned for a Communications strategy for the 2022 General Elections and strategic awareness programme. The Committee seeks clarification on the implementation status of this strategy and the assessment of its overall effectiveness.

E-Training Platform

5. The Committee noted that Fiji Elections Office through its Human Resource department had developed an e-learning platform for the reported year. The Committee queries whether the program is currently in use, and how effective has it been in achieving its intended outcomes.

ICT project

6. The Committee noted that the Fiji Elections Office had planned projects for its ICT that included upgrading server infrastructure, redesigning network architecture, implementing disaster recovery solutions, and enhancing computer network security. The Committee seeks clarification on the implementation status of these initiatives during 2021 and 2022.

EMIS

7. Committee seeks clarification on the implementation of the EMIS, its architecture, ownership and service provider.

Data cleaning exercises for the National Register of Voters

8. The Committee noted that the Fiji Elections Office through its Operations Directorate had conducted a data cleaning exercise and had removed a total of 4,846 deceased from the NRV and reinstated 171 individuals. The Committee queried the frequency of these cleaning activities, and how regularly is the National Register of Voters updated.

Industrial Elections

9. The Committee noted that the Fiji Elections Office through the Operations Directorate had conducted 18 elections for student bodies, unions and association. The Committee seeks clarification regarding the current operational status of the Industrial Elections Department to date.

Reported Milestone Achievements for 2020

10. The Committee noted that under the Fiji Elections Office Strategic Plan included nine key goals of which six were successfully completed and three were deferred. The Committee seeks clarification regarding the status of these deferred goals and whether they have since been accomplished.

Voter turnout declined from 84% in 2014 to 68% in 2022.

11. The Committee noted the high frequency of voters registered from 2014 to 2022 with a low voter turnout experienced within the three election years. The Committee seeks clarification on how the Commission intends to address this downward trend and improve future participation.

Queries on the Electoral Commission Annual Report 2021 and 2022

12. The Committee noted that the strategic plan and key performance indicators (KPIs) for the current three-year period were not included. The Committee therefore request the following;
 - The Commission's strategic plan covering the current three-year period; and
 - A detailed outline of the KPIs used to measure performance against strategic goals.
13. The Committee seeks clarification if the Electoral Commission do consider its current human resources adequate, particularly in terms of permanent expertise in the legal, compliance, and ICT areas.
14. Committee seeks clarification on the reason(s) why the Fiji Elections Office Annual Report was excluded in the Electoral Commission Annual Report 2022.
15. The Committee seeks clarification on how many times have the Supervisor of Elections appeared in the Electoral Commission meeting(s) from 2020 to date.

- 16.** The Committee seeks clarification on the reason why the audit accounts is not included in the Electoral Commission report.
- 17.** The Committee seeks clarification on how does the Electoral Commission measure its effectiveness for voter education and communication campaign in terms of reach, engagement of voters and trust levels with the voters.
- 18.** Clarification is sought on what does the Electoral Commission intend to do to improve voter turnout for industrial elections, as it was noted that 3,115 out of the 6,125 registered voters participated in this election process.
- 19.** The Committee seeks clarification on how does the Supervisor of elections coordinate with Unions, CSO and political parties to foster trust and wider democratic engagement.

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15 September 2025

By Email

The Hon. Ratu Rakuita Vakalalabure
The Chairperson
Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights
Parliament of the Republic of Fiji
Government
Suva

Dear Hon. Vakalalabure,

**Request for Clarification on Issues Identified from the review of the Electoral
Commission Annual Report 2020 to 2022**

Ni Sa Bula Vinaka from the Fijian Elections Office (**FEO**).

I refer to your letter dated 09 September 2025 requesting our responses to the subject matter and inform that the same are highlighted herein:

Queries on the Electoral Commission Annual Report 2020

1. Electoral Law Reforms

Please find attached to this letter the 2018 Multinational Observer Group Report Recommendations Implementation Summary. It highlights in detail their recommendations and their status in preparation for the 2022 General Election.

2. Internal Audit

The strategic plan referred to in this report was in reference to the FEO Strategic Plan 2020-2023. Attached to this letter is a copy of the said Strategic Plan.

All correspondences must be addressed to the Supervisor of Elections and sent to the FEO Headquarters

Since its implementation, the milestones reflected on pages 42 and 43 of the FEO Strategic Plan 2020-2023 have been assessed. Therefore, for the year 2020 it was 100% completed, the milestone for the year 2021 it was 90% completed, the milestone for the year 2022 it was 86% completed and the milestones for the year 2023 was 100% completed.

3. Communications and Public Relations

The nationwide survey in 2020 was conducted to seek feedback from voters on their voting experience in the 2018 General Election. The survey was aimed at providing the FEO with a comprehensive understanding of voter turnout in the Fijian context. The information garnered from the survey helped the FEO in developing more effective strategies for the 2022 General Election.

4. Communications and Public Relations

Prior to the 2022 General Election, the Communication and Public Relations Department held workshops with all relevant departments to finalize their Communications Strategy and Public Relations Plans.

The Department developed structured outreach programs relying on media with most prevalence for dissemination of key messages. Social media was fully exhausted for maximum reach. New media strategies such as daily live updates on Facebook at 4pm turned out to be highly effective in engaging with voters. Media training was done virtually, followed by a face-to-face workshop. It further enhanced the Media Itinerary for coverage of election activities, adding more demonstrations and walk-through events that provided clarity on electoral processes.

Through effective media campaign, the FEO recorded 200,000 voter engagements during the first Registration Drive and Know Your Election Campaign. Bonanza promotions were used as incentives and the FEO rolled out last minute registration drives using 'rush' techniques to attract voters.

The public relations strategy promoted direct engagement at the grassroots level and featured the SoE and senior staff visiting a number of villages and settlements to speak with voters while discussion forums and informal sessions with youths and women groups were also undertaken.

In terms of the overall effectiveness of the Communications Strategy, the FEO submits that there is a lot more work to be done. The statistics for the last elections speak for itself in terms of a decrease in voter turnout. The FEO will ensure that in preparation for the next election, effective measures are put in place to promote awareness on elections.

5. E-Training Platform

The e-Vuli platform has consistently been in use since its development in 2021. Please refer attached with this letter, the E-Learning Training Summary providing a summary of all internal training programs conducted through e-Vuli for the years 2021, 2022, 2023 and 2024. It also captures the external training conducted in 2022.

The implementation of the e-Vuli learning platform has proved to be very effective. To date, a total of 3,527 participants has participated in a training program on the e-Vuli platform. In particular, the platform has proved to be an effective method for conducting external training for Election Officials engaged for the 2022 General Election. E-Vuli was used in this regard to train 2,638 participants for Presiding Officers training program.

6. ICT Project

In the year 2021 the planned projects for ICT were not implemented. However, in the year 2022 only the disaster recovery solutions were completed.

The enhancement of computer network security which was upgraded via the implementation of Endpoint Detection and Response (**EDR**) protection on all end user computers and servers was successfully completed in 2023.

Further, the upgrade to the core server infrastructure located at the FEO headquarters was completed in 2024. During this year, we also successfully redesigned the network architecture, the result, of which all Voter Services Centres of the FEO were successfully linked to the core servers located at FEO headquarters.

7. EMIS

EMS is the software developed for use in election management. The software was developed by Nadra Technologies from 2016 to 2017 based on specifications provided by the FEO. This software consists of various system modules used by the FEO to manage elections including Polling Venue Management, Nominations and Party Registration, Logistics, Voter List and Postal Voting. The FEO is the sole owner and service provider of the product, and this product has been successfully utilized for the 2018 and 2022 General Election.

8. Data cleaning exercise for the National Register of Voters

The data cleaning process is conducted twice a year, that is, once every six (6) months. This process is normally conducted in the months of January and July in a year. The data cleaning process allows the removal of voters that are no longer eligible to be registered in the National Register of Voters. This is effectively the method utilized by FEO to ensure the National Register of Voters is consistently maintained with the updated and accurate listing of voters.

9. Industrial Elections

The Industrial Elections Department still exists, and it is responsible for conducting two (2) types of industrial elections. Firstly, trade union elections for all trade unions registered with the Registrar of Trade Unions. Currently, there are 44 registered trade unions. Secondly, such elections as approved by the Minister Responsible for Elections (**Minister**) by a notice in the gazette. At the moment there are five (5) entities that have been approved by the Minister that the FEO is legally mandated to conduct elections for, including Fijian Holdings Limited, Fiji Cooperative Dairy Company

Limited, Fiji National University Students Association, Fiji National University and Fiji Medical Association.

10. Reported Milestone Achievements for 2020

The three (3) milestones deferred to 2021 were the following:

- i) Implement Inventory Management System;
- ii) Communications Strategy; and
- iii) Implement Industrial Election Management Platform.

For the Inventory Management System, it has been completed and is currently operational. As for the Communications Strategy, it was developed by the Communications Department and used in the 2022 General Election. Finally, the Industrial Election Management Platform, it was developed in 2021. The system was developed to allow trade unions to access it and input all pertinent information and documents required by the FEO to conduct their elections in a more convenient and accessible manner. The FEO is currently only using the back-end component of the system to facilitate administrative aspects of a trade union election.

11. Voter Turnout declined from 84% to 68% in 2022

While multiple factors influence voter turnout across all electoral systems globally, the FEO has identified that enhancing citizen confidence and knowledge through comprehensive voter education represents one of the most impactful interventions within our control. By delivering high-quality information through strategic stakeholder engagement and targeted awareness campaigns, we intend to improve both voters' understanding of electoral processes and their subsequent participation rates.

The Electoral Commission and the FEO are in the initial stages of implementing a three-phase awareness approach:

- i) Phase 1: Enhanced Media Presence
Diversification of social media platforms to reach broader demographics domestically and internationally, launch of the FEO Mascot - an animated ballot

box character, designed to enhance digital engagement and the interest of the youth and strengthened mainstream media partnerships for wider reach.

ii) Phase 2: Education and Training Programs

Introduction of the School Elections Toolkit **(SET)** Programme, which is still pending approval from the Ministry of Education and Cabinet. This program will assist all 176 high schools in conducting their student elections, featuring an online ballot paper generator and comprehensive resources. Also, the Year 10 Social Science Curriculum Review which is the updating of the electoral education content to be more engaging and relevant for students.

iii) Phase 3: Grassroots Engagement and Collaboration

This includes active partnerships with the Community Election Advocates Programme which is a face-to-face initiative of trained champions across communities nationwide to facilitate two-way information flow at the grassroots level, stakeholder coordination with media organizations, faith-based organizations, civil society organizations, non-government organizations, student bodies, municipal councils and educational institutions. This comprehensive approach represents a strategic shift to proactive engagement, ensuring every eligible Fijian has the knowledge, confidence, and support needed for meaningful democratic participation.

Queries on the Electoral Annual Reports 2021 and 2022

12. Electoral Commission Strategic Plan

The Electoral Commission does not have a strategic plan. However, its operational arm is the FEO who had a Strategic Plan 2020-2023. The Internal Auditor is tasked with assessing the achievement of milestones and activities reflected in this strategic plan.

13. Human Resources, Legal and ICT

The role of the Electoral Commissioners is such that they are not required to work or operate from their office on a full-time basis. The Supervisor of Elections is the secretary to the Electoral Commission and therefore provides the adequate resources when the need arises.

14. Exclusion of FEO Annual Report in the 2022 Electoral Commission Annual Report

The year 2022 was an election year, the FEO and the Commission are legally obliged under section 14(g) of the Electoral Act 2014 to jointly submit a post-election report to the President and to Parliament. This joint report covers all activities of the FEO throughout the year 2022. This has always been the practice for every year a general election is held.

15. Attendance of Supervisor of Elections at the Electoral Commission Meetings

From the year 2020 to date the Commission held a total number of 71 meetings. From this, the Supervisor of Elections has attended 56 meetings in her capacity as the secretary to the Electoral Commission.

16. Queries on the Electoral Annual Report 2021 and 2022

The auditing of accounts is conducted by the Office of the Auditor General and therefore, it is not reflected in the annual reports as is the usual practice. However, once the Office of the Auditor General submits the audited account for the Electoral Commission and the FEO, we do appear before the Standing Committee on Public Accounts to clarify any matters arising from this report.

17. Measurement of Effectiveness for Voter Education and Communication Campaign

The Electoral Commission recognizes that effective voter education requires comprehensive measurement across multiple dimensions. To ensure current and intended awareness campaigns meet strategic objectives, a thorough evaluation

framework has been defined, combining traditional performance indicators with engagement metrics and direct community feedback mechanisms.

These includes:

i) Primary Success Indicator

Voter turnout statistics remain the ultimate measure of success, with the 2022 baseline of 68.2% overall turnout providing the benchmark for improvement.

ii) Digital and Community Indicators

These includes the volume of queries, questions, and clarifications received on social media platforms, number of stakeholder invitations received for participation events, Community Election Advocate (**CEA**) activation rates across divisions and media coverage analysis (noting 70.5% rely on TV, 70.1% on radio for election information).

iii) Direct Community Feedback

The willingness of organizations to collaborate (e.g., the Methodist Church and the Assemblies of God providing free venues, electricity, and water) as well as partnership effectiveness with civil society organizations willing to work with the FEO in conducting awareness sessions.

iv) Voter Perception Survey

The 2024 baseline survey of 14,269 eligible voters, planned follow-up survey during Pre-Writ period to assess confidence levels and post-election comprehensive review measuring voter satisfaction.

18. Voter Turnout for Industrial Elections

The FEO has made available various voting methods including postal voting and office balloting to encourage voter participation. Further, the FEO organizes annual review workshops for trade unions to seek feedback from trade unions, and these are used to develop strategies to improve our service delivery and encourage voter participation. Further, trade union election news is consistently disseminated through

social media platforms as a means of creating awareness and encouraging participation.

19. Coordination of the Supervisor of Elections with Unions, CSO and Political Parties

The FEO, through its Stakeholder Engagement & Awareness (**SEA**) Department, coordinates all CSO engagement and collaboration activities. Additionally, the FEO participates as a member of Working Groups organized and facilitated by CSOs and NGOs, ensuring two-way communication and mutual learning.

The Community Elections Advocates Programme will also exemplify this partnership, engaging persons from grassroots communities identified by or currently engaged with CSOs as active and trusted community members. The CSOs help identify potential advocates, support their activities through existing networks, and provide continuous feedback on community needs throughout the electoral cycle.

Further to the responses provided herein, please note that the Supervisor of Elections Ms. Ana Mataiciwa, Director Operations Ms. Anaseini Senimoli, Director Corporate Services Mr. Sanjeshwar Ram and Manager Legal Mr. Mesake Dawai confirms their attendance before the Committee on Wednesday 17 September 2025.

For any further clarifications, please do not hesitate to contact our Manager Legal Mr. Mesake Dawai on mesake.dawai@feo.org.fj or 8907810.

Yours sincerely



Ana Mataiciwa (Ms)

Supervisor of Elections

Secretary to the Electoral Commission

Encl:

1. 2018 MOG Report Recommendations Implementation Summary
2. E-Learning Training Summary
3. FEO 2020 – 2023 Strategic Plan

**2018 Multinational Observer Group Report Recommendations:
Implementation Summary**

Recommendation Number:	Recommendations	Actions/ Decisions taken
ELECTORAL SYSTEM AND OPERATIONS		
1 Accepted.	Remove restrictions on party identification in official election material.	This has been reflected in the Electoral (Amendment) Act 2021 which commenced on 07 June 2021. Previously, there was a restriction on having any party name or party symbol on the National Candidates List. However, the amendment has allowed for the National Candidate List to contain either the party name or the party symbol or any other information as approved by the Supervisor of Elections (SoE). On 13/04/22 the Political Parties were consulted as to their preference and they have agreed to have their party symbol indicated on the National Candidates List.
2 Accepted.	Submit the voter Register to external audit.	Section 40 of the Electoral Act, 2014 and Goal 3 Objective 3.5 Activity 3.5.1. The Electoral Commission (EC) had advertised the Expression of Interest on 4 different occasions (03/11/21, 20/11/21, 01/08/22 and 20/08/22) inviting reputable organisations locally and internationally to submit their biddings regarding the audit of Fiji's National Register of Voters. Despite the Expression of Interest being advertised numerous times, there were still no suitable bidders. On 09/09/22 the EC agreed in its meeting to readvertise the Expression of Interest for the audit of Fiji's National Register of Voters after the 2022 General Election is conducted as the Writ could be issued at any time from the date of that meeting.

3 Accepted.	Legislation should incorporate the principle (which the Supervisor respected in practice in 2018) that the Fijian public can inspect the full Register.	This has been considered. Section 11 and Section 16 of the Electoral (Registration of Voters) Act, 2012 allows any registered person to inspect the National Register of Voters and make an objection to the inclusion of the name of any other person on the National Register of Voters. Section 11A (2) of the Electoral (Registration of Voters) Act, 2012 allows for any political party, on payment of such fee to obtain a copy of the National Register of Voters. Section 11A and Section 16 were 2 new provisions that were included in the Electoral (Registration of Voters) (Amendment) Act 2021 that commenced on 09 June 2021.
LEGAL FRAMEWORK		
4 Accepted.	Review s18 of the <i>Electoral Act</i> to ensure the Supervisor of Elections, the Registrar of Parties and the Electoral Commission can administer the law constructively, seeking compliance before redress and with criminal investigation as a last resort.	Section 18 of the Electoral Act 2014 has not been directly amended but it must be noted that other provisions of the same Act have been amended to cater for this recommendation by the MOG. For instance, section 6 (1B) is a new provision that was included in the Electoral (Amendment) Act 2022 that commenced on 02/09/22. This provision allows for the SoE to direct a person through a notice to furnish any information or document that the SoE believes is relevant to the performance of his function under the Act. Further, section 116 (4A) and section 144A (1) of the Electoral (Amendment) Act 2021 had commenced on 09 June 2021 and also provides the SoE an opportunity to seek compliance before redress. Section 116 (4A) allows the SoE to rectify breach to campaign rules immediately by removing or directing any political party, candidate or police officer to remove any material that is in breach of the campaign rules.

		Section 144A (1) allows the SoE to direct a person including a service provider or political party to remove or correct any statement or information that was published in or outside of Fiji and is accessible in Fiji, immediately, if he believes that the information is false and would likely to influence the outcome of an election or diminish public confidence in the performance of any duty and function of the EC or SoE. The inclusion of a new Section 116(4A) and section 144a (1) seeks compliance before redress and allows for criminal investigation to be a last resort for EC or SoE.
5 Not considered.	Review electoral offences to ensure penalties are proportionate and generally civil in nature rather than criminal.	It must be noted that most existing electoral laws around the world have electoral offences as criminal in nature rather than civil. For example, the Commonwealth Electoral 1918, India's Representation of the People Act 1951, Vanuatu's Representation Act 1982 [Amended 2006] and the Solomon Islands Electoral Act 2018, to name a few have similar electoral offences to Fiji, which are criminal in nature such as bribery, personation and offences in relation to ballot papers. Further, the penalties for the electoral offences in Fiji state the maximum fine or imprisonment term that could be issued to the person charged. Currently, the electoral offences committed could lead to either upon conviction to a fine not exceeding \$10,000 or a term of imprisonment not exceeding 5 years or to a fine not exceeding \$50,000 or a term of imprisonment not exceeding 10 years. It would be at the discretion of the Court to issue a penalty proportionate to the electoral offence committed. So far, electoral offence cases brought before the Court have not been served the maximum fine or imprisonments. This is reflected in the cases mentioned below: a) FICAC v Jale Baba Criminal Case No. 2091/18: Mr. Jale Baba was found guilty of the offence of Making a False Statement contrary to Section 27 (1)(b) of the Political Parties (Registration, Conduct, Funding and Disclosures) Act 2013. The maximum sentence for this offence is a

		maximum fine of \$10,000 or 5 years imprisonment. However, he was sentenced to 11 months imprisonment suspended for 3 years. b) FICAC v Rajnil Pratap Sobha Criminal Case No. 956/18: Mr. Rajnil Pratap Sobha was found guilty of the offence of Making False Declaration on an Application for Voter Registration contrary to section 136(a) of the Electoral Act 2014 and applying to be registered as a Voter on more than one occasion contrary to Section 4(4) of the Electoral (Registration of Voters) Act 2012. The maximum punishment for the offence of False Declaration on an Application for Voter Registration is a fine not exceeding \$50,000 or to an imprisonment term not exceeding 10 years. The maximum punishment for an offence of Applying to be registered as a Voter on more than one occasion is a fine not exceeding \$10,000- or 5-years imprisonment. However, Rajnil Pratap Sobha was sentenced to 22 months imprisonment, out of the final aggregate sentence of 10 months imprisonment term suspended for 5 years and the balance of 12 months imprisonment term to be served in custody. c) Maraivalu v FICAC Criminal Appeal Case No. 52/14: Mr. Maraivalu was charged for personation contrary to Section 142 of the then Electoral Decree 2014. The maximum punishment for the offence is a fine not exceeding \$50,000 or 10 years imprisonment term. He was sentenced to 2 years imprisonment but appealed his sentence. However, his appeal against his sentence was dismissed. It is clear that though maximum penalty is mentioned in the existing electoral laws, the Court uses its discretion when deliberating on electoral offence cases. Therefore, emphasis is placed on the statement made by Judge Sudharshana De Silva in the case of Mataraivalu v FICAC Criminal Appeal Case No. 52/14 that the sentence is neither harsh nor excessive in circumstances.
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6 Not considered.	Work towards consolidating and clarifying electoral legislation and, where possible, move to a principles-based legislative framework.	Currently, there are 60 Sections in the Electoral Act, 32 Sections in the Political Parties (Registration, Conduct, Funding and Disclosures) Act and 29 Sections in the Electoral (Registration of Voters) Act. Consolidating these different laws into one is not necessary as the respective laws each has its own function. For instance, the Electoral Act highlights processes surrounding the conduct of elections, the Political Parties (Registration, Conduct, Funding and Disclosures) Act focuses on the registration and administration of political parties and the Electoral (Registration of Voters) Act concentrates on voter registration and the administration of the National Register of Voters. Instead of consolidating, the EC and the FEO had sought to clarify certain provisions of each electoral law and this was reflected as follows: • 36 amendments made to the Electoral (Amendment) Act, 2021 which commenced on 07 June 2021. • 11 amendments made to the Electoral (Registration of Voters) (Amendment) Act 2021 which commenced on 07 June 2021. • 13 amendments made to the Political Parties (Registration, Conduct, Funding and Disclosures) (Amendment) Act 2021 which commenced on 07 June 2021. • 2 amendments made to the Electoral (Registration of Voters) (Amendment) (No.2) Act, 2021 which commenced on 06 October 2021; and • 5 amendments made to the Electoral (Amendment) Act 2022 which commenced on 02 September 2022. These respective amendments have now allowed the EC and FEO to deliver more effective election operations and further promotes consistency between the electoral laws in regards to the definition of certain terms and processes.
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ELECTORAL AUTHORITIES		
7 Accepted.	Take steps to enhance the institutional standing and capacity of the EC. The Commission should receive its own funding in the government budget and sufficient resources to achieve its mandate. At least one full-time Commissioner would also benefit the EC. Future appointments should be staggered to ensure the preservation of institutional memory and experience.	The EC had requested the Ministry of Economy for the separation of its budget from the FEO and this was facilitated in the year 2019. Consequently, the EC has had its own Budget, its own staffing under its secretary and the EC budget is also ample enough to obtain legal advice from a legal practitioner of their own choice. Further, after the expiration of the terms of the previous EC (who oversaw the 2018 General Election), 5 out of the 7 Electoral Commissioners were reappointed on 20 March 2020. It must be noted that while 4 are still continuing, the 5th had resigned on 24/11/21. This recommendation has been addressed administratively without the need for any amendments to the statute.
8 Accepted.	The EC should increase its public profile and the transparency of its operations. It should establish and publish a permanent timetable of regular meetings with political parties throughout the electoral cycle and look to publish an agreed outcome of these meetings.	The EC has made an initiative on this by having quarterly meetings with registered political parties. The first meeting was held on 28 January 2021 in which matters such as the registration of new voters, raising confidence in the 2022 General Election, the independence of the EC, voter confidence and opportunity to have a meeting with individual Political Parties to take them through different electoral processes were discussed and clarified by EC and the Registrar of Political Parties. In this meeting, it was also agreed that FEO would be liaising with Political Parties to finalise an operational workshop for them. The second meeting was on 18 February 2021 between the EC, the Registrar of Political Parties and representatives of Political Parties to discuss on the Audit Guideline for Audited Accounts of Political Parties. Currently, the Fiji Institute of Accountants have been approached to develop this Audit Guideline and this will be reviewed by the EC, the Registrar of Political Parties and representatives of Political Parties before it is approved to be implemented. The third meeting was on 18 March 2022 between the Registrar of Political Parties and representatives of Political Parties. The EC Chairperson also attended the

		meeting. The meeting was to demonstrate a Polling Venue simulation and election awareness session. Fourth, was a workshop held on 21 April 2022 by the Registrar of Political Parties to explain the electoral process to the representatives of the Political Parties. The workshop was attended by the EC Chairperson. It must be noted, in the year 2019 there were no meetings with Political Parties as the EC and the FEO were reviewing the 2018 General Election and amendments to the electoral Bills. Then in the year 2020, there was the Covid-19 pandemic, which interrupted the conduct of meetings. Lastly, all meeting minutes with Political Parties are normally circulated to them prior to the next scheduled meeting and EC decisions are accessible on the EC website: http://www.electoralcommission.org.fj.
9 Accepted.	The EC should develop and publicize procedures to ensure it can provide due process in considering complaints against the Supervisor of Elections and the FEO in line with s17 of the <i>Electoral Act</i> . It should publish responses to substantive issues that stakeholders raise with it.	Section 17 of the Electoral Act 2014 clearly outlines how a complaint against the SoE should be dealt with. The EC has on previous occasions dealt with complaints against the SoE and their decision has normally been relayed in writing to the complainant. In situations where the complaint against the SoE is dealt with, the SoE is normally excused from his duties as the EC Secretary as per section 5(8) of the Electoral Act 2014 to better allow for the EC to deliberate on the issues against him.
10 Accepted.	The EC should conduct a review of voter education activities with the aim of expanding partnerships, including with civil society organisations. A standing working group with civil	A Special Project Task Force ["SPTF"] was activated by the SoE on the 13 th of April 2022 to undertake Election Awareness training and project implementation of this project for the FEO in partnership with the United Nations Development Programme. This project mainly focuses on the CSOs.

	society organisations would be an important next step.	A total of 464 Community Election Advocates have been accredited which includes CSO reps, teachers and students. The Community Election Advocates have managed to conduct 145 sessions throughout the country with a total of 3416 participants engaged.
CAMPAIGN PERIOD		
11 Not considered.	Develop guidelines for the conduct of Ministers, Members of Parliament and the bureaucracy when the government is in caretaker mode to reinforce public confidence in a level electoral playing field.	Does not apply to the EC or the FEO as this is for Parliament and Cabinet to decide on.
12 Accepted.	Require parties to report campaign expenditure following an election and consider setting campaign expenditure limits.	Section 25(1A) is a new provision that was included in the Political Parties (Registration, Conduct, Funding and Disclosures) (Amendment) Act 2021 that commenced on 09 June 2021. This section states that a political party must, no later than the 60th day after polling day, submit to the Registrar of Political Parties a written declaration giving details of all assets and liabilities as at the 30th day after polling day and income and expenditure, including all contributions, donations or pledges of contributions or donations, whether in cash or in kind, made or to be made from the date the Writ issued to the 30th day after polling day. Practically, it is necessary for Fiji to first evaluate the extent of campaign expenses before it can determine if any campaign expenditure limits should be implemented. The data on expenditure will be collected in the next election and an appropriate decision can be made thereafter.
13 Accepted.	Clarify the start and finish of the campaign period so that stakeholders	Section 109(A) is a new provision that was included in the Electoral (Amendment) Act 2021 that commenced on 09 June 2021.

	understand their rights and obligations during this time.	This section allows the EC to determine the campaign period and it specifies that the campaign period must not be earlier than 30 days prior to the completion of 3 years and 6 months of the sitting of Parliament after the last general election and later than 48 hours prior to the general election. The section further specifies all the campaign rules and restrictions that is applicable during this period. On 17 March 2022 the EC published a decision that stated for the 2022 General Election, the current campaign period commenced from 26 April 2022 and will end 48 hours prior to polling day.
POLITICAL PARTIES		
14 Not considered.	Review the provisions in the <i>Political Parties Act</i> regarding restrictions on public officers joining political parties.	There is no need to review the provisions of Section 14 of the Political Parties (Registration, Conduct, Funding & Disclosures) Act and Section 57 of the Constitution of the Republic of Fiji as it clearly identifies the public office holders and restrictions placed on them. Section 57 of the Constitution of the Republic of Fiji has established and recognised the principle that Public Officer Holders, which includes Trade Unions, should remain apolitical. The political participation of such persons is not restricted. Under the current legal framework, they have to surrender their appointment to take up office in Political Parties. This ensures that public office holders conduct their duties and functions and exercise their powers with utmost impartiality, in compliance with the existing laws of the country and without regard to any political or personal factor.
CIVIL SOCIETY AND VOTER EDUCATION		
15 Accepted.	The EC and FEO should strengthen efforts to build productive partnerships with civil society organisations throughout the electoral cycle and actively work with CSOs in	This has been done through the establishment of the SPTF on 13/04/22. A total of 464 Community Election Advocates have been accredited which includes CSO reps, teachers and students.

	voter awareness and education activities.	The Community Election Advocates have managed to conduct 145 sessions through the countries with a total of 3416 participants engaged.
16 Accepted.	Review the appropriateness of s115 of the <i>Electoral Act</i> .	The EC reviewed the appropriateness of this section, the EC is of this view that this section needs to be maintained as it ensures compliance, accuracy and consistency of voter awareness and education programs organized or published by CSOs after the announcement of election date. CSO Guidelines and Forms for the 2022 General Election were approved by the EC on 25th April 2022.
ELECTORAL OBSERVATION		
17 Not considered.	The EC should clarify processes for the accreditation of domestic observers and support the participation of civil society organisations in future observation efforts.	Section 119 of the Electoral Act 2014 clearly states that the Minister responsible for Elections may appoint or invite any person, organisation or entity to be observers for any elections. There is no restriction to domestic observers. Any agency interested in observation activity must apply for approval from the said Minister. The Electoral Commission does not have any jurisdiction in this matter.
18 Not considered.	Transfer the authority to approve domestic observers to the EC, in line with international good practice.	Section 119 of the Electoral Act 2014 deals with both international and domestic observers. The Minister responsible for Election would be in a better position to appoint or invite international or domestic observers instead of the EC. This has been the trend in the last two (2) General Elections.
WOMEN, PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES AND OTHER MARGINALISED GROUPS		
19 Accepted.	All stakeholders should continue their efforts to promote women, including as candidates; the FEO should broaden its voter outreach to include village women's committees and the EC should work with women's advocacy groups (and other CSOs) in voter education.	The SPTF has in total trained and certified 47 women representatives from women's group from villages and settlements in Fiji. These female advocates have been conducting awareness sessions to their groups since being accredited.
MEDIA AND ELECTIONS		

20 Accepted.	Clarify the restrictions on media reporting during the restricted (blackout) period before and during polling.	This was done via the following: • Media Handbook has been released on the 14 June 2022. • E-training for media on E-Vuli platform for one (1) month (non-compulsory). • Face to Face Media Workshop on 08 September 2022.
21 Not considered.	The media regulatory framework needs to be reviewed including with respect to penalties and with respect to reporting against the public and national interest.	The EC is not in charge of media regulatory framework. Prior to 2023, the Media Industry Development Authority (MIDA) was the regulatory authority but given the repeal of the MIDA Act on 06 April 2023, this is no longer the case.



Fijian Elections Office
My Election. My Fiji

STRATEGIC PLAN

2020 – 2023

STRATEGIC PLAN

2020 – 2023



Fijian Elections Office
My Election. My Fiji

List of Abbreviations

BRIDGE	Building Resources in Democracy, Governance and Elections
CSO	Civil Society Group
DM	Divisional Manager
DSOE	Deputy Supervisor of Elections
EC	Electoral Commission
EMB	Electoral Management Body
EMS	Election Management System
EORS	Election Official Recruitment System
ESAG	Electoral Security Advisory Group
EVR	Electronic Voter Registration
FEEC	Fijian Electoral Education Centre
FEO	Fijian Elections Office
FICAC	Fiji Independent Commission Against Corruption
IFES	International Foundations for Electoral Systems
KYE	Know Your Election
MIDA	Media Industry Development Authority
MOG	Multinational Observer Group
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NCC	National Counts Centre
NCL	National Candidates List
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NRC	National Results Centre
NRV	National Register of Voters
PDW	Polling Day Worker
PIANZEA	Pacific Islands, Australia and New Zealand Electoral Administrators
PMS	Performance Management System
RMIS	Results Management Information System
SPC	Strategic Planning Committee
SPCT	Strategic Planning Core Team
SoE	Supervisor of Elections

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MISSION

Our mission as Fiji's election management body is to implement internationally recognized election best practises in accordance with the law, effectively regulate political parties and efficiently register eligible Fijians to ensure that we deliver the highest quality of election services under the supervision of The Electoral Commission.



VISION

Our vision is to be recognised as a professional institution that conducts fair and credible Elections broadly representing the will of the Fijian people.



Message from the Supervisor of Elections



Bula Vinaka,

Welcome to the Fijian Elections Office 2020-2023 Strategic Plan.

The 2020-2023 Strategic Plan follows on from the success of 2015-2019 Strategic Plan. As the head of the organisation, I have found that such a structured planning approach is instrumental in building a sustainable, structurally stable and dynamic organisation.

Since its formation in 2014, the FEO, while conducting its core business as required by law, has actively worked on developing modern and advanced human resource management framework, asset and finance framework as well as a highly successful public relations framework. During this cycle, the FEO needed to build its own capacity and this was done with high degree of success.

In many facets, the FEO has had to establish itself into an already existing spectrum and this challenge has not only motivated the management and the team but has been a key driver of innovation at the office.

The second Strategic Plan is aimed at driving sustainability and building of capacity of secondary stakeholder institutions in the electoral environment. The FEO is also intending to mobilise mobile-based solutions for the monitoring and handling of various processes in the operational delivery of elections.

Emphasis will be placed in developing election education materials at various levels and promoting research into election specific issues. The FEO will introduce newer design of the VoterCard and expire the first VoterCard that was in issue from 2012 to 2017. Cooperation with business and financial institutions will be boosted through opportunities to promote voter participation.

The 2018 General Election allowed the FEO to firm up on several electoral processes that until 2018, were mostly theoretical. This allows the FEO to stabilize its election planning now that it is aware of the 'knowns' and at the same time prepare for the 'unknowns'. The 2018 General Election Reports, the internal FEO reviews and a range of international experiences will form the basis for the planning and delivery of the next general election.

Lastly, quite sadly, engineered distrust and deliberate misinformation is a tool used by some in the Fijian political scene. That is why the FEO has adapted the accounting term 'verifiability' to apply to elections in Fiji as a standard.

I wish to acknowledge the hard work put in by the Directors, their teams and the technical consultants at the FEO supported by international partners. I also wish to convey a special thanks to all the speakers at the midday seminar series, which formed part of FEO's consultations.

I pray to the Almighty for the continued success of the FEO and this Strategic Plan.

Vinaka Vakalevu.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mohammed Saneem'.

Mohammed Saneem
Supervisor of Elections

Introduction

Fijian Elections Office

The Fijian Elections Office [**'FEO'**] is an independent election management body responsible for the conduct of General Elections and other elections in accordance with the legal framework. Under the Electoral Act, 2014 [**'Electoral Act'**], the FEO is the Office of the Supervisor of Elections [**'SoE'**] and is situated at 59-63 High Street, Toorak, Suva. The FEO has 76 core staff and employs up-to 1500 short-term staff during elections period.

As per section 6 (2) of the Electoral Act, the SoE has complete independence to determine the composition of the FEO including the authority to determine the remuneration, the terms and conditions of employment and the recruitment procedure as well as the disciplinary processes to deal with staff at the FEO.

Under Section 6 of the Electoral Act, the SoE as head of the FEO:

- Administers the registration of the political parties;
- Administers the registration of voters and maintains the Register of Voters;
- Administers the registration of candidates;
- Implements voter information and educational initiatives;
- Conducts election of Members of Parliament and such other elections as prescribed under section 154, including the conduct of voting, counting and tabulating of election results;
- Oversee compliance with campaign rules and reporting requirements; and
- Performs any other functions as conferred by any other written law.

The Parliament through the Ministry of Economy issues the FEO with an annual grant from the National Budget. The FEO Strategic Plan forms the foundation for the FEO budget requests. This long term plan also allows the Ministry to support electoral activities throughout the electoral cycle.

Donor Partners have also assisted the FEO in the implementation of its mandate through financial and technical support. Key support was provided by Australia and New Zealand through the cycle with wide deployment of Technical Advisors. These Advisors were instrumental in developing the capacities of the FEO team in specialised electoral processes. Further, India and Republic of Korea have consistently provided trainings and support in kind.

The FEO had previously developed a five (5) year Strategic Plan, which was for the period 2015 to 2019. The purpose of having such a Strategic Plan was to give the FEO a five (5) year roadmap in terms of implementing its various activities in accordance with certain timelines. In essence, these activities had focused towards the build-up of the 2018 General Election.

This time, the FEO has developed a four (4) year Strategic Plan for 2020 to 2023. The term of this plan has been adjusted to suit the electoral cycle in Fiji.

Electoral Commission

The Electoral Commission [**'EC'**] is an independent non-partisan authority, which consists of six (6) Commissioners and a Chairperson all of whom have been appointed for a term of three [3] years.

The SoE is also the Secretary to the EC. He or she is required to be present in all meetings of the EC but will be excused in the event the EC is required to make a ruling over a decision made by him or her.

The responsibility of the EC is laid out in section 75 (2) of the Constitution of the Republic of Fiji which mainly includes the registration of voters and the conduct of free and fair elections in accordance with the written law governing elections and any other relevant law.

In the lead up to the 2018 General Election, the EC worked closely with the FEO in ensuring that the country was ready to proceed to the polls. The EC was required to meet and provide approvals on areas that they had authority as defined in section 3 (1) of the Electoral Act. This was carried out smoothly and allowed the FEO to effectively deliver the 2018 General Election.

The EC and the SoE published a joint report on the 2018 General Election that was tabled in Parliament and published widely by the FEO.

Fijian Electoral System

Fiji uses a modified Open List Proportional System to elect its members of parliament. The whole country forms the Constituency and voting is not compulsory. The voting age is 18 years and registration of voters closes at 6pm on the day the *Writ* for the General Election is issued by the President.

Registration process is open throughout the electoral cycle and voters are regularly encouraged by the FEO to update their details. The FEO has opened Voter Service Centres ['VSC's'] in major centres to facilitate the need. Various voter engagement exercises take place as well to ensure that voters have access to the FEO services. Upon registration, the voter receives a VoterCard. VoterCards have become a universal source of ID in Fiji and this in turn promotes the voter to keep their cards safe and up to date.

Nomination of candidates to the election is to be submitted to the SoE. Nominations are in the form of Party Lists for candidates of political parties while independent candidates nominate individually. Parties rank their candidates in order of preference at the time of nomination, however, the final order of the candidates is determined by the total number of votes they received at the election. Parties can only nominate as many candidates as the total seats in Parliament.

A day is set aside as Election Day and is usually a public holiday. Voters are assigned a polling venue of their choice at the time of registration and they can only vote at the assigned polling venue. Venues that have more than 500 voters are divided into polling stations so as not to exceed 500 as the maximum number of voters at any polling station. The FEO conducts voting in remote areas such as the highlands and the islands in the week before the week (in which the election day falls) the General Election is to take place. Postal voting is available to anyone who may not be able to attend their polling station on Election Day.

All candidates at the election are allocated a randomly drawn three (3) digit number. The draw is done publicly by the SoE. The ballot paper only has numbers and in-order to vote, a voter is required to either circle or tick or cross the number of the candidate they wish to vote for. The FEO provides voters with a Voter Instruction Booklet that contains the list of all the candidates and their numbers.

Voting is by ballot and each voter receives only one (1) ballot paper. In the event the voter makes a mistake on their ballot paper, they are entitled to one (1) replacement ballot paper only. Voting is from 7.30am to 6pm and voters can choose to attend at any time in between to vote. Assistance is provided by Election Officials to illiterate voters while persons with disability can choose to be assisted by a person of their own choice who must be a registered voter.

After the close of the voting at 6pm on Election Day and after all voters in the queue have voted, the Presiding Officer at the polling station will initiate the Counting process. Counting of votes on Election Day are done at the polling station and results are transmitted, first by phone and then by the official protocol of results to the National Results Centre in Suva. After 6pm on Election Day, the Pre-poll and the Postal votes are counted at the National Count Centre in Suva.

The FEO publishes election results in real time on Election night through its website and a specially designed results application for mobile phones. The results on the night are provisional in nature and the FEO stops provisional result announcement at 7am the day after the election. Thereafter, the FEO compiles the final results directly from the protocol of results and publishes it. Once all the results are received, the FEO prepares the Final National Results Tally and hands it over to the EC for the allocation of seats. The Final National Results Tally contains candidates listed in descending order of votes by party.

Seat allocation is done using the D'hondt formula. A threshold of 5% of the total number of votes cast has to be met by any party or independent candidate before they qualify for a seat. Once the elimination process based on the threshold is completed, the EC uses the Party total to calculate how many seats a party has attained. The EC then refers to the Final National Results Tally and awards seats to the highest ranking candidates, the seats that have been won by the Party. If an Independent Candidate had met the threshold, they win one (1) seat.

The EC returns the *Writ* to the President with the names of the Candidates that have been awarded the seat based on the above. During the term of Parliament, should a seat become vacant, the Candidate who is next in the Final National Results Tally for the same party will take up the vacant seat.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Right to vote

Every citizen over the age of 18 years has the right to vote by secret ballot

One person, One vote, One value

Every voter has one vote, with each vote being of equal value

A credible single National Register of Voters

Every registered voter shall be listed on a single National Register of Voters

Independence, Impartiality and Neutrality

The Fijian Elections Office is an independent body and shows no preference in either speech or action for any individual candidate or political party

Excellence in Service Delivery

Provide highest quality of electoral services to all Fijians in a professional, effective and timely manner

Good Governance

The Fijian Elections Office values accountability, honesty, integrity and transparency in all its transactions and will ensure that all legislative disclosures are properly and adequately done

Participation

Empowering every Fijian to take ownership of the election through active involvement

Innovation

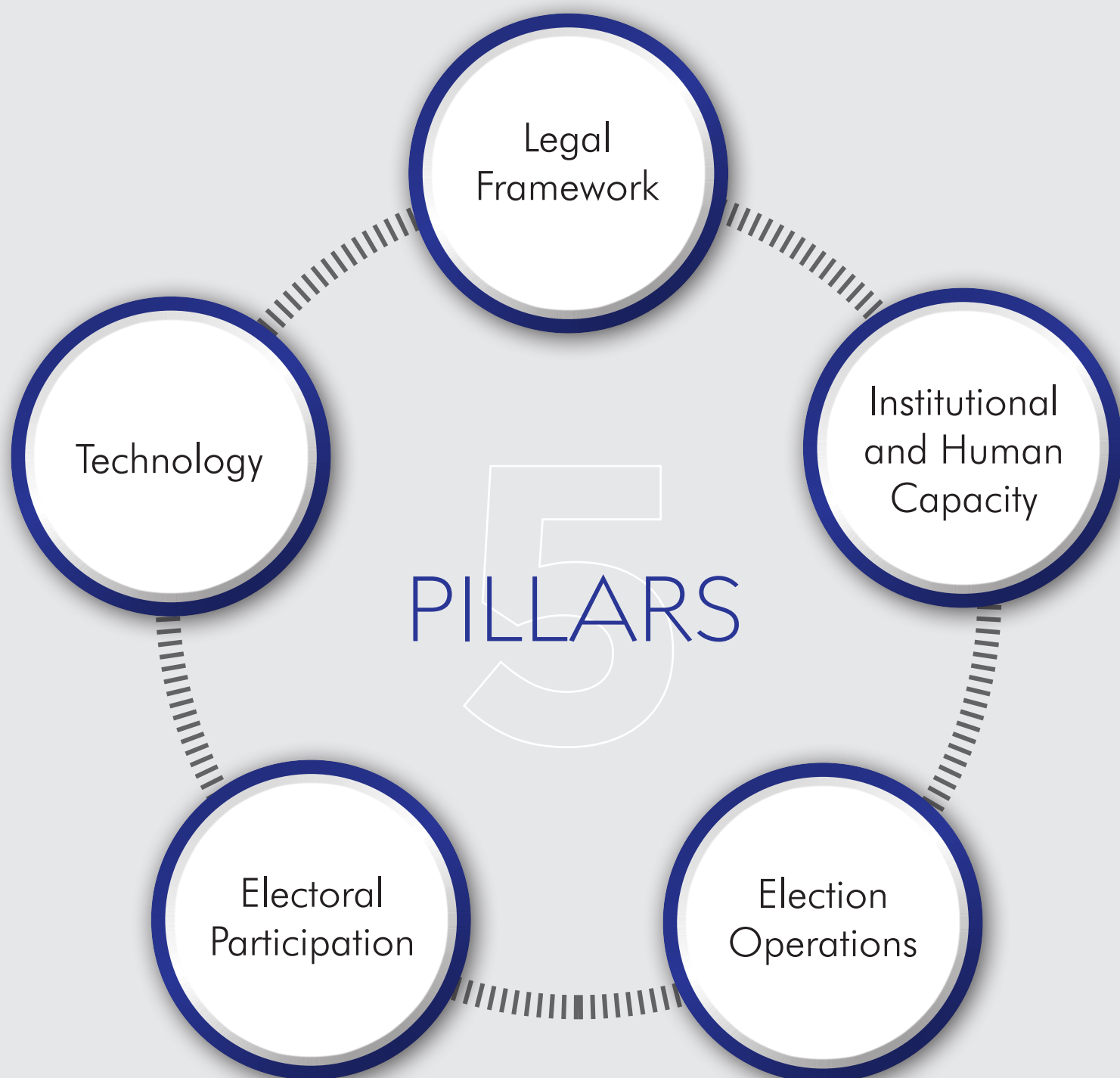
Strive towards continuous, innovative and practical solutions to contribute towards the evolution of electoral practices in Fiji

Verifiability

In elections, to mechanise Fijian Elections Office processes so that given the same data and assumption, an independent and impartial Observer can produce the same results



Strategic Pillars



Strategic Goals

1

Upholding the legal framework in delivering the elections

2

Strengthening the FEO's institutional and human capacity

3

Delivering election operations based on thorough planning and research

4

Strengthening electoral participation through effective outreach and engagement programs

5

Adapting the most latest and current technologies to enhance the efficiency of the delivery of FEO objectives

Pillar 1 – Legal Framework

Goal-Upholding the legal framework in delivering the elections

1. Ensure FEO Standard Operating Procedures comply with the law.
2. Provide relevant advice to and obtain directives from the EC.
3. Administer political parties in accordance with the law.
4. Streamline the nomination process for Candidates in the General Election.
5. Implement an effective mechanism to adjudicate complaints for the FEO.

Pillar 2 – Institutional and Human Capacity

Goal-Strengthening the FEO's institutional and human capacity

1. Implement excellence in leadership.
2. Pioneer research in areas of interest to the FEO.
3. Enhance the Human Resources Framework of the FEO.
4. An effective Procurement Program that ensures goods and services are acquired in a timely and financially prudent manner.
5. Providing management with accurate and timely advice to ensure FEO operates its finances with efficacy in a highly robust environment.
6. A systemized Asset and Infrastructure Management Program that bolsters FEO's operations.
7. Establish a statistics platform for effective planning and decision making.
8. Effective delivery of electoral services.

Pillar 3 – Election Operations

Goal-Delivering election operations based on thorough planning and research

1. Formulate a comprehensive General Election Plan and deliver the 2022/23 General Election.
2. Implement recommendations of the 2018 General Election Review.
3. Prepare the 2021 Fiji National Polling Venue Directory.
4. Implement a comprehensive Voter Registration Program.
5. Conduct an independent audit of the National Register of Voters.
6. Conduct elections as per section 154 of the Electoral Act.
7. Enhance collaboration with stakeholders to improve the delivery of elections.

Pillar 4 – Electoral Participation

Goal-Strengthening electoral participation through effective outreach and engagement programs

1. Introduce national programs that encourages voter involvement in the electoral processes.
2. Establish strategic collaboration with youth groups, CSO's, NGO's, faith based groups and informal groups in promoting electoral participation.
3. Initiating capacity building of political parties and interested individuals.
4. Exploring opportunities to introduce electoral education.
5. Establish FEO as the centre of election information.
6. Develop Communications Strategy for the FEO.

Pillar 5 - Technology

Goal- Adapting the most latest and current technologies to enhance the efficiency of the delivery of FEO objectives

1. Prepare comprehensive policies, procedures and user guides for the technologies available at FEO.
2. Establish a modern intranet solution.
3. Improve and enhance existing technological solutions at the FEO.
4. Test and certify software used at the FEO through independent audit.
5. Scope and reorganise the Human Resources managing Information Technology.

S

STRENGTHS

1. Experience of running 2014 and 2018 General Elections based on the current legal framework.
2. Institutional knowledge and capacity.
3. Implementation of electoral curriculum in secondary schools.
4. Open merit recruitment system.
5. Continuing interests in Donors to build capacity of the FEO.
6. Effective collaboration with other EMBs.
7. Proper Quality Assurance mechanisms in place.
8. Conducting election simulations and mock exercises.
9. Membership with International Electoral Bodies.
10. Fully operational international standard warehouse.
11. Effective operational planning experience.
12. Cycle based planning.

W

WEAKNESSES

1. Limited specialised electoral vendors.
2. Seasonal (election time only), short term employment for high intensity workload.
3. The mere enormity of the exercise creates scenarios that require spontaneous decisions and reactive planning.
4. Limited career progression due to specialization sector.
5. Lack of specialised training providers for elections.
6. Expiry of lifespan of electoral items in between elections.
7. Inadequate office space.

SWOT

OPPORTUNITIES

1. Enhancement of the EMS and other IT systems to improve output, reliability and user experience.
2. Consider the environmental impacts of elections with a view to make elections environmentally friendly.
3. E-training.
4. Online recruitment system for FEO.
5. Knowledge sharing with other EMBs.
6. Develop specific trainings for various aspects of elections for FEO Staff as well as stakeholders.
7. Election curriculum in University and Primary School.
8. Custom made voter registration database.
9. Establish terms of engagement with Civil Society Organisations and Advocacy Groups.
10. Strengthen FEO capacity through engagement with professional skills institutions.

THREATS

1. Spread of Misinformation and Disinformation.
2. Failure on the part of stakeholders to understand the legal framework.
3. Lack of powers in the law for administrative instructions to prevent/ injunct breaches/ potential breaches.
4. Force Majeure events affecting electoral process.
5. Cyber attacks and sabotage.
6. Untimely failure of IT hardware resources.
7. Unbalanced media coverage of political party events.
8. Unregulated debate practices at campaign time.
9. Failure of electoral officials to follow standard operating procedure.
10. Electoral *Writ* period falls within cyclone season.

O

T

Overview of the first 5 year Strategic Plan (2015-2019)

The FEO was successful in implementing its first Strategic Plan. This success is evident in the delivery of the 2018 General Election. All activities developed and implemented from 2015 to 2019 were a build up to delivering the main project, which was the 2018 General Election.

In analysing the major milestones achieved from the years 2015 to 2019, the FEO has achieved 80% of its milestones. There are some activities in 2019, which are currently in progress and if they were to be marked completed would increase the percentage rate.

We have also analysed the completion rate annually from 2015 to 2019 which is provided in the table below:

Years	Milestones Achieved
2015	86%
2016	83%
2017	100%
2018	93%
2019	42% (ongoing)
Overall Achieved (5 years)	80%*

**the year 2019 is still ongoing and hence the percentile rating does not reflect the outcomes of the 2019 activities, most of which are still ongoing.*

In the last five (5) years, the FEO had reviewed its electoral processes and procedures as well as finalised it in preparations for the 2018 General Election. As part of this review, the FEO also implemented recommendations by the Multinational Observer Group [**MOG**] in their report on the 2014 General Election. There were 38 recommendations in total and the FEO implemented 22 of those recommendations.

Strategic Planning Process in FEO

Overview

The experience of drawing the FEO Strategic Plan 2015-2019 allowed the Organisation to design an extensive plan for the 2018 General Election. The FEO considered lessons learnt from the two previous General Elections of 2014 and 2018 as a basis for its long term planning and preparation for the next General Election. It was crucial for the Organisation to conduct an extensive review exercise on the successes and shortcomings of the last Strategic Plan in order to identify the gaps and recognize the areas which would need improvements. This exercise, together with intensive research and consultations would ensure that a more practical, comprehensive and inclusive Strategic Plan is developed by the FEO for the next four (4) years.

Preliminary Approach

On 19 June 2019, the SoE released a press statement outlining FEO's plans for the next General Election beginning with the development of its Strategic Plan for 2020 – 2023. The development phase commenced with the FEO staff going through a BRIDGE Training on *Strategic Planning for EMBs* which was facilitated by BRIDGE Trainers from the Australian Electoral Commission, Mr Brian Latham and Ms Jennifer Hammond. The training was co-facilitated by two senior staff of the FEO, Ms Asenaca Kolinivala and Ms Ana Mataciwa.

Following the BRIDGE training on Strategic Planning, the FEO saw it necessary to select a Planning Team who would be responsible for the implementation of the planning process. As such, the FEO appointed a Planning Team consisting of two (2) separate committees to oversee the planning, development, compilation and finalisation of the four (4) year Strategic Plan. A Strategic Planning Coordinator was also appointed to coordinate the activities between the committees and oversee that the development of the Strategic Plan was carried out successfully.

The Planning Team for the FEO's Strategic Plan consisted of the following committees:

- **Strategic Planning Core Team ['SPCT']**

The SoE appointed a six (6) member SPCT on 21 June 2019. The SPCT reported to the SoE and was responsible for developing the overall strategic direction of the FEO by devising a Master Plan on how the Strategic Plan of the Organisation would be developed and implemented. The SPCT monitored the work progress of the Strategic Planning Committee and ensured that the Master Plan was carried out correctly in accordance with the agreed timelines. The SPCT was also responsible for carrying out consultations with external stakeholders and finalising the write up of the Strategic Plan document.

- **Strategic Planning Committee ['SPC']**

The SoE appointed a five (5) member SPC on 21 June 2019 to implement and initiate the Master Plan given by the SPCT to staff of FEO. They were responsible for collecting, analysing and collating the various activities and tasks required for the Strategic Plan through proper consultation with internal stakeholders. They also prepared output recommendations for the SPCT. Further, they ensured that reviews and outcomes of the Master Plan progress reports given by the SPCT were followed through with the FEO staff.

Planning Strategy

In line with international best practices and governance for Electoral Management Bodies ['EMBs'], the FEO decided to use as a planning reference the Strategic Planning process methodology outlined by international electoral expert, Antonio Spinelli in the IFES publication "*A Practical Guide for Election Management Bodies to Conduct a Strategic Planning Exercise*" and applied it to the Fijian context.

The FEO in its Strategic Planning exercise decided to adopt a four (4) year Strategic Planning cycle to coincide with Fiji's electoral cycle. This would guarantee that the planning for the next General Election, particularly on electoral operations are executed successfully, in a timely manner and are conducted in accordance with the legal framework.

During the preliminary discussions between the FEO Executive Management Team and the SPCT, a few guidelines were established to guide the Organisation in achieving its mandate and sole purpose which is to conduct a successful General Election in 2022 or early 2023. These guidelines lay the framework of the new Strategic Plan.

From these guidelines, and experience of the previous Strategic Plan, the SPCT agreed that the Strategic Plan would only comprise of the key strategies the FEO would like to engage in during the next four (4) years. A more detailed Annual Plan which would dictate how these strategies are achieved would stem out of the Strategic Plan. This change in approach would also highlight the maturity of the Organisation since developing its first Strategic Plan in 2015.

The SPCT agreed that the annual review and planning cycle for the Strategic Plan will be from July-July of every year. This would allow the FEO to strategically assess the progress of the activities for each calendar year midway and at the same time prepare the budget for the subsequent calendar year.

The SPCT also approached the planning exercise by deciding that the FEO would use cross cutting themes (multi-Directorate) in developing its Foundation document and strategic goals, thus moving away from the initial method (Directorate specific) used in 2015.

Developing the Strategic Plan

The Strategic Plan would be finalised in two (2) phases. First phase would be the Foundation document, which would include the Vision and Mission statements, Guiding Principles and the Strategic Pillars. The latter would be the finalisation of Strategic Goals, Objectives and the Activities.

Foundation document

Defining FEO's strategic foundation for the Strategic Plan is important for the Organisations' continuation. It was therefore necessary that the Foundation document of the FEO properly reflected the image and aspirations the Organisation would strive to achieve in the next electoral cycle.

In developing this very important aspect of the Strategic Plan, multiple workshops on the development of the Foundation document were conducted for the FEO staff by the SPC. The SPCT had the main task of finalizing and submitting the document for review by the SoE and endorsement by the EC, before the development of phase two (2) occurred.

Strategic Planning Workshops

Numerous internal workshops and information sessions were held with the FEO staff to assist them in developing the various components of the Strategic Plan. These were conducted in an interactive manner where participants were able to understand the various concepts they learnt and apply it to their four (4) year plans.

The FEO conducted the following workshops for staff:

- **SoE's Workshop on FEO's 2015-2019 Strategic Plan: 25-26 June 2019**

This workshop mainly focused on the review of the 2015-2019 Strategic Plan activities. An evaluation was carried out on the activities that were supposed to be implemented including assessing the milestone achievements. From this workshop, staff were able to identify which activities were not completed and its reasons. The workshop was facilitated by the Review and Compliance officer.

- **Information session on development of Strategic Foundation document and cross cutting themes: 1 July 2019**

This workshop was held to discuss the development of the Foundation document. It enabled staff to understand the importance of the components of the Foundation document as well as its significance. The workshop helped staff to generate ideas around what could be the possible Foundation document of the Organisation and this is in terms of the Vision, Mission and Guiding Principles. This was facilitated by Manager FEEC and the Legal Compliance Coordinator.

- **Development of Strategic Goals and Objectives Workshop: 9–11 July 2019**

For this workshop, FEO Staff collectively learnt how to develop strategic goals and objectives. Then they were organised into their own Directorates to discuss and come up with their own set of goals and objectives which were then submitted to SPC. This was facilitated by Manager FEEC and the Legal Compliance Coordinator.

- **Workshop on Development of Strategic Activities: 23–24 July 2019**

In this workshop, FEO staff were trained on how to develop and identify the activities that the Organisation would pursue in the next four (4) years. It helped them understand the importance of having activities as well as gave them ideas of the content of the activities. This was facilitated by Manager FEEC, Legal Compliance Coordinator and SoE.

- **Strategic Plan Activities Workshop: 2–6 August 2019**

The FEO staff were organised into groups, for this workshop, from their respective Directorates and were required to document their activities for the next four (4) years. This was very important because these activities outlined what the Organisation was going to be doing in the next four (4) years. The final activities from the different Directorates were then submitted to SPC for review and finalisation. This was facilitated by SoE.

- **Risk Management Workshop: 15-16 August 2019**

This workshop was held to identify the potential risks the Organisation would encounter in terms of implementing the Strategic Plan. It also focused on developing the mitigating factors that would reduce the risks. FEO staff were able to understand the different types of risks and how they could be mitigated through the activities organised by the facilitators of the training. This was facilitated by Manager FEEC, Legal Compliance Coordinator and SoE.

- **Awareness Activities Workshop: 22 August 2019**

This workshop was specifically held to address the issue of low voter turnout in the 2018 General Election. FEO staff were required to research and look at practices of other countries in improving voter turnout before developing strategies and activities which would be incorporated in the Strategic Plan with a view of increasing voter participation for Fiji in the next General Election. This was facilitated by SoE.

- **Corporate Social Responsibilities Workshop: 28 August 2019**

This workshop was held to formulate activities which would enable FEO to fulfill its corporate social responsibilities in the next four (4) years. This was facilitated by the Legal Compliance Coordinator.

Consultations

To create acceptance, understanding and support for the Strategic Plan, the FEO went into a series of consultation process with its key internal and external stakeholders as it was important to gather their input and feedback on the proposed Plan.

Upon the completion of the Foundation document, FEO used various platforms to conduct its consultation process. It was crucial for the FEO to gather a wide range of feedbacks and views during these consultations as it would form the basis of activities in the second part of the development phase.

FEO published its draft Vision and Mission statements, Guiding Principles and Strategic Pillars on 10 July 2019 for comments and consultations from stakeholders on its website, www.feo.org.fj.

- **Internal Consultations**

The FEO embarked on a comprehensive consultation process with its staff at headquarters, as well as those in the Divisional offices. This was to ensure that all staff were aware of the foundation elements of the Strategic Plan, as it would form the basis for the development of strategic goals, objectives and activities.

- **External Consultations**

The following methods were used for the various consultation sessions:

1. All stakeholders including voters were requested to participate in an online survey on the proposed Foundation document and this was available on the FEO's facebook page, Fijian Elections Office and website on www.feo.org.fj.
2. Direct consultations were held with the public through the conduct of individual interviews at the three (3) VSCs located in Suva, Lautoka and Labasa.
3. PowerPoint presentations on the proposed Foundation document were conducted for the Political Parties, Diplomatic Community, Media and Government Agencies from 09 to 15 July 2019. These stakeholders were given the link to the online survey and were encouraged to give their feedbacks on the proposed document.

NO.	Date	Presentation to Stakeholders
1.	Tuesday, 09 July	Director Corporate Services presentation to the Political Parties
2.	Wednesday, 10 July	SoE presentation to the Media
3.	Thursday, 11 July	Director Corporate Services presentation to the Diplomatic Community
4.	Thursday, 12 July	Director Corporate Services presentation to Government Agencies

- **Mid-Day Information Sessions**

The FEO also invited various prominent people from other organisations to share with FEO their expectation as well as proposed initiatives that could be considered in the formulation of the Strategic Plan. A total of 22 prominent people from reputable organisations presented in these mid-day sessions. FEO staff were also required to note important points that could be reflected in the Strategic Plan.

The following is the list of invited speakers during the consultation process;

NO.	Date	Name	Designation	Organisation
1.	Tuesday, 16 July	Late Ms. Loata Vakacegu	Deputy Secretary	Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development
2.	Wednesday, 17 July	Mr. Rashmi Aslam	Acting Deputy Commissioner	Fiji Independent Commission Against Corruption
3.	Thursday, 18 July	Mr. Kemueli Naiqama	Deputy Government Statistician	Fiji Bureau of Statistics
4.	Friday, 19 July	Ms. Anne Dunn	Commissioner	Online Safety Commission
5.	Friday, 19 July	Ms. Senikavika Jiuta	General Manager Operations	Fijian Competition and Consumer Commission
6.	Tuesday, 23 July	Mr. Sandeep Chauhan	Director	Star Printery Limited
7.	Tuesday, 23 July	Ms. Meizyanne Hicks	Director	Fiji Geospatial Council
8.	Wednesday, 24 July	Ms. Alison Burchell	Permanent Secretary	Ministry of Education Heritage and Arts
9.	Thursday, 25 July	Mr. Sanjeeva Perera	Permanent Secretary	Ministry of Housing and Community Development
10.	Friday, 26 July	Mr. Josua Namoce	Manager Research and Policy Analyst	Parliament of the Republic of Fiji
11.	Tuesday, 30 July	Mr. Shahin Ali	Acting Director	Legal Aid Commission
12.	Wednesday, 31 July	Mr. Nouzab Fareed	Chief Executive Officer	Fijian Holdings Limited
13.	Friday, 02 August	Mr. Vijay Narayan	Communications Fiji Limited News Director	Communications Fiji Limited
14.	Wednesday, 07 August	Ms. Karishma Kumar	Executive Director	Aspire Network
15.	Thursday, 08 August	Mr. Gareth Baber	Fiji Airways Sevens Coach	Fiji Rugby Union
16.	Monday, 12 August	Ms. Nalini Singh	Executive Director	Fiji Women's Rights Movement
17.	Tuesday, 13 August	Mr. Ravinesh Krishna	Vice President	Fiji Human Resources Institute
18.	Thursday, 15 August	Ms. Krishneeta Reddy	Manager Advertising	Fiji Sun
19.	Friday, 16 August	Mr. Epeli Lesuma	Stakeholder Engagement Officer	Fiji Higher Education Commission
20.	Monday, 19 August	Ms. Tupou Draunidalo	Party Leader	HOPE (Political Party)
21.	Friday, 23 August	Ms. Susan Grey	Executive Director	FemLINK Pacific
22.	Tuesday, 01 October	Mr Nilesh Lal	Executive Director	Dialogue Fiji

*The FEO invited all political parties; however, only HOPE attended the mid-day information session.

Formulation of the Strategic Goals, Objectives and Activities

The SPCT discussed the draft strategic goals and objectives in great detail and agreed on five (5) Strategic Goals, 31 Objectives and 227 Activities for the FEO. Since the concept of cross cutting themes formed the basis of the Foundation document, it was prudent that the three (3) Directorates of the FEO liaised with each other in order to ensure that various important activities were reflected in this Strategic Plan.

Further, during the process that followed, the FEO staff developed well thought out activities and assigned individual responsibilities and timelines as part of the implementation plan. These activities and timelines were thoroughly checked and vetted by the SPC and SPCT before its inclusion into the draft Strategic Plan.

The draft Strategic Plan was reviewed by a Review Team set up by the SoE to ensure that the operational timelines were workable. This occurred during a cooling off period. This period was set aside for staff to take a break from the planning sessions and allow the Finance Department to calculate the costings of the Strategic Plan in its entirety.

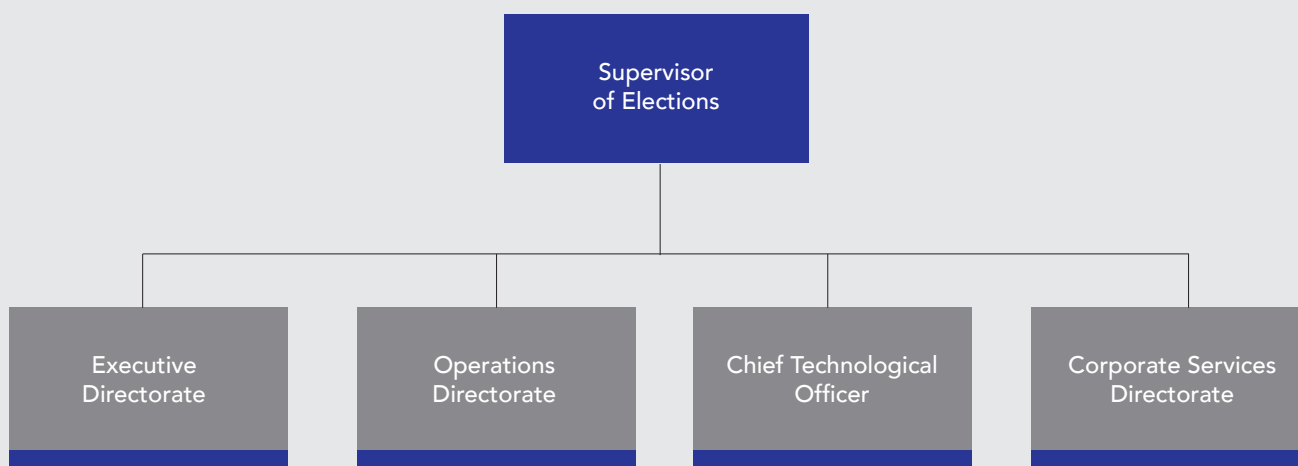
Following the cooling off period, final changes were made to the draft Strategic Plan before the document was submitted to the SoE for his final approval.

Fijian Elections Office Directorates

FEO Organisation Structure

The SoE during the election period is assisted by a Deputy Supervisor of Elections ['DSOE'] and three (3) Directors i.e. Director Corporate Services, Director Operations and Chief Technological Officer.

A graphical overview of the core structure of the FEO is illustrated below:



The Executive Directorate is supervised by the SoE. This unit comprises of Secretariat, Internal Audit, International Relations, Legal and Compliance, Design and Special Projects and Communications. This Directorate supports the SoE to manage and ensure that all functions of the FEO are carried out.

The Operations Directorate includes the Operations and the Industrial Elections department, as well as, the four (4) Divisional Managers. The Operations Directorate's core responsibilities include the maintaining of an accurate and current register of voters, assigning of polling venues, awareness activities, postal, Pre-poll and management of results.

The Information and Technology Directorate has been created under this Strategic Plan and is responsible for the overall IT infrastructure, networking, software development and providing IT support services. In particular, to ensure that the core systems such as Electronic Voter Registration ['EVR'], Election Management System ['EMS'] and the Election Official Recruitment System ['EORS'] are operating efficiently and effectively. This Directorate will oversee the development and deployment of new customised software systems at the FEO over the duration of this Strategic Plan.

The Corporate Services Directorate includes four (4) Departments: Procurement and Assets Management, Human Resources and Training, Finance and Administration and Ballot Paper Design and Production Division. This Directorate's core responsibilities are the implementation of corporate governance within the legal framework, to recruit, train and retain skilled staff, ensure sustainable management of resources and to exercise prudent financial management.

During a General Election, number of staff increases to some 1,600 FEO short term staff plus about 11, 000 Election Officials on Election Day. During an election the FEO normally establishes a field structure with 22 FEO Area offices which are opened some five (5) months before an election and 101 Hubs which are opened one (1) week before election and both are closed again after an election.

The Election Officials Recruitment and all election related training will be decentralised to the Divisional offices, which will be managed by Corporate Officers under the supervision of Divisional Managers.

FEO Human Resources Principles

The structure of the FEO has been developed in accordance with section 6 of the Electoral Act. The underpinning principles for the Human Resource Management strategies and activities of the FEO are:

- Merit based recruitment and selection-focused on selecting high performing, honest employees with high standards of integrity;
- Equal employment opportunity;
- Position based remuneration and benefits;
- Transparency and accountability in decision making;
- Fairness and equality in all staffing decisions; and
- Commitment to training and staff development in a variety of activities to enable all staff to reach their full capacity.

The FEO will ensure that all policies and procedures are consistent with these principles and is committed to creating and maintaining a high performing organisation.

Performance Management System ['PMS']

The FEO has developed a strategy for performance management which aims at establishing a culture in which individuals and groups take responsibility for the continuous improvement of business processes and their own skills, behaviour and contributions and commit to learning from experience.

The FEO's Performance Management is part of and feeds into the Strategic Planning by defining expectations and key performance indicators expressed as objectives in strategic and operational plans. Measurement of progress and on-going feedback are core elements of the FEO's Performance Management strategy. Performance Management applies to all employees, not just the managers, and to teams as much as to individuals.

The PMS is a continuous process and reviewed periodically, not a one-off event. The Performance Management is based on the continuous assessment of the Strategic Plan on a quarterly basis and it is measured on the completion of the individual activities under each projects.

The FEO's PMS includes Probation Appraisal and Ongoing Performance Appraisal. The probation appraisal is linked with determining the status for the confirmation of employment. All employees on a contract of service which exceeds one (1) month are required to serve a period of probation.

The ongoing performance appraisal is linked with salary appraisal. For instance, an employee whose performance management indicates rating of "Excellence" or "Very Good" are eligible for one (1) step salary increment, whilst employees with rating as "Requires Development" will have training needs assessment completed and a program developed in order to improve the overall performance of the individual.

Fijian Electoral Education Centre ['FEEC']

Following the completion of the 2014 General Election, the FEO in its post-election period worked towards strengthening its training capacity. It decided to give high priority to training and education for capacity building. Accordingly, in 2015, the FEEC was established. Its purpose was to enhance the knowledge and skills of FEO staff and stakeholders through training and capacity building.

The objectives of FEEC was to:

- Establish the FEEC to offer both internal and external training on elections;
- Ascertain the training needs of FEO staff;
- Provide capacity building programs for the FEO staff;
- Deliver electoral training programs to the relevant stakeholders;
- Review and develop operational training programs for the conduct of elections; and
- Gain accreditation for the establishment of the FEEC.

Unfortunately, after a review was carried out for its activities from the period 2015 to 2019, it was established that FEEC was not able to fully achieve its objectives for the very purpose it was established for. It was noted that certain trainings were not conducted nor any content materials developed for these trainings. Hence, in August 2019 FEEC was closed down as the investments done were not resulting in any tangible outcomes.

Training and Development Strategy

The FEO will introduce ongoing organisational functions and knowledge trainings that will require all staff to attend and undergo assessments to ensure that the capacity levels within the Organisation increases.

Training helps boost the efficiency of employees as well as their productivity. It also helps with their morale, which can then increase productivity and reduce turnover.

The Training and Development Unit will develop training materials and assessment for all trainings conducted at FEO. These assessment criteria will:

- Determine the calibre of the applicants for all specific projects;
- Improve knowledge and skills;
- Obtain full attention of the participants during the training; and
- Determining the effectiveness of the training in enhancing individual's performance.

In addition, the recruitment of project based staff will be determined through the assessment conducted after the project based training. Part of this training will include test whereby the intellectual capacity attained during the training will be assessed. This will ensure that the right calibre of applicants are recruited for specific projects.

Decentralisation Strategy

During the 2018 General Election, the Divisional offices were established. The purpose of opening Divisional offices was to ensure that the FEO was accessible to its stakeholders and could effectively deliver its services in preparation for the General Election. Subsequent to opening of Divisional office, certain aspects of operations was decentralised. This includes the execution of projects such as Awareness, Nationwide Registration Drive, partial Recruitments and Training. Also Divisional bank accounts were opened for disbursement and better management of funds.

In the 2020 to 2023 cycle, there are plans for decentralisation to a greater extent. In the Divisional structure, more senior level positions will be established to undertake the greater roles and responsibilities that will be delegated. It is envisaged that operational projects such as Awareness, Voter Information Booklet Distribution, Voter Registration, Voter Services, Logistics Operations, Polling Venue Assessments, Recruitment of Election Officials and Training would be delegated to Divisional offices. As part of the decentralisation strategy there would be development of standard operating procedures for these projects as well.

The Divisional Managers will become more accountable in the management/administration of operations under their respective divisions.

2018 General Election

Timetable of Key Events/Dates

01 October 2018	<i>Writ</i> Issued to the Electoral Commission. Voter Registration closed. Political Party Registration closed. Postal Vote Applications opened.
02 October 2018	Nomination of Candidates opened.
08 October 2018	Display of Provisional Voter List.
13 October 2018	Display of Provisional Voter List concluded.
15 October 2018	Nomination of Candidates closed at 12 noon.
16 October 2018	Withdrawal of Nomination by 12 noon. Objections and Appeals closed by 4pm.
17 October 2018	EC finalised Appeals and Objections decisions. Ballot Paper Production commenced.
18 October 2018	National Candidate's List Draw.
24 October 2018	Postal Vote Applications closed at 5pm.
26 October 2018	Ballot Paper Production completed.
28 October 2018	Final Voter Lists printed.
05 November 2018	Pre-poll Voting commenced.
07 November 2018	Verification of Postal Ballots commenced.
10 November 2018	Pre-poll Voting concluded.
14 November 2018	Election Day. Provisional Results announced.
17 November 2018	Polling conducted for the 22 adjourned Polling Venues.
18 November 2018	Final National Results Tally handed over to the EC. Seat Allocation announced. EC Returned <i>Writ</i> for the 2018 General Election to the President of Fiji His Excellency, (Retired) Major General Jioji Konrote.
14 December 2018	Report by the SoE pursuant to section 109 of Electoral Act.

Writ for the 2018 General Election

On 01 October 2018, the President of Fiji, His Excellency, (Retired) Major General Jioji Konrote issued the *Writ* for the 2018 General Election to the Chairperson of the EC, Mr Suresh Chandra. This day also marked the close of Voter and Political Party Registrations, as well as, the opening of applications for Postal Voting.

Political Parties Registration

The SoE is also the Registrar of Political Parties. The Political Parties legal framework makes it mandatory for Political Parties and its Office Holders to file Declaration of Assets, Liabilities and Income for stipulated periods with the Registrar. Thereafter, the Registrar is required to publish these declarations.

The FEO's EMS which was introduced for the 2018 General Election consisted of five (5) modules including the political party registration module. This module allowed the Legal and Compliance team at the FEO to verify membership listings submitted by the political parties during registration. In line with the legal requirements, the system verifies that a voter is not a member of more than one (1) political party by comparing names and voter numbers to existing records in the system. The system was used to register three (3) political parties: Unity Fiji registered in July 2017; HOPE registered on 10 February 2018 and proposed party Zionist whose application was rejected on 06 December 2017. This system reduces data entry and verification time to four (4) days in comparison to ten (10) days in the past. The registration process has been more efficient and the processing time for applications has significantly reduced.

As at 01 October 2018, eight (8) Political Parties were registered with the FEO. These were: FijiFirst, Social Democratic Liberal Party, National Federation Party, Unity Fiji, HOPE, Fiji Labour Party, Fiji United Freedom Party and People's Democratic Party. However, this was reduced to seven (7) after the deregistration of People's Democratic Party on 31 October 2018.

Candidate Nomination

The nominations process is governed by section 26 of the Electoral Act and the eligibility requirements are outlined in section 56 of the Constitution of the Republic of Fiji.

The *Writ* of the 2018 General Election had specified that the nominations process would commence on 02 October 2018 and close at 12pm on 15 October 2018. During the period of nominations, the FEO received nomination from six (6) registered political parties.

The FEO in ensuring that its candidates verification process for the 2018 General Election were carried out within the required timelines, took the approach of signing Memorandum of Understanding [**'MoU'**] with its relevant verification agencies to ensure that this process was carried out thoroughly within the required timelines. At the close of Nominations, 235 candidates were confirmed for the election.

Voter Registration

Facilitation for voter registration services had ceased on 4 August 2014, the *Writ* Day for the 2014 General Election and reopened in June 2015. This was to allow the FEO to review its voter registration system and procedures post 2014 General Election. The resumption of voter registration services ensured that voters had ample time to register, correct or amend their voter details before the 2018 General Election.

Beginning in 2017, the FEO conducted several nationwide voter registration programs in Fiji and overseas to allow all eligible Fijian Citizens to register. In 2015, the FEO took up the initiative to conduct a Fiji wide voter registration drive at secondary schools and tertiary institutions. This ensured students turning 18 years of age were registered and captured in the National Register of Voters [**'NRV'**]. During these voter registration sessions in schools, students were taken through a voter awareness presentation by the FEO teams. Since then, this event has become an annual event in the FEO's calendar.

Approximately 637, 527 voters were registered for the 2018 General Election.

Voter List

Prior to the conduct of the 2018 General Election, the FEO undertook an extensive internal review to determine the shortfalls and gaps in the various electoral procedures used in 2014.

One of the recommendations that came out of this review was the need to enhance and redesign the Voter Lists that would be used for polling in the 2018 General Election. This resulted in the Voter Lists being modified to allow Polling Day Workers to effectively and efficiently identify voters in the polling stations.

The law requires that FEO publishes the Voter Lists for verification purposes prior to the conduct of an election. The FEO ensured that the display of Provisional Voter Lists were carried out widely with all sectors of the communities in both the rural and urban areas. The FEO used its stakeholders who were already established in these communities such as the Turaga ni Koro's ['**TNK**'] and District Advisory Councillors ['**DAC**'] to conduct these verification processes. Provisional Voter Lists were made available to political parties upon payment of a prescribed fee approved by the SoE.

The FEO also introduced the 1500 SMS free text platform in early 2018 to allow voters to find their assigned polling station and was available for use on all mobile phone networks. Voters were able to make use of this service prior to casting their vote on polling day.

The FEO printed and distributed the final Provisional Voter List eight (8) days after the close of voter registration. After the finalisation of voter registration for the 2018 General Election, the FEO reopened its VSCs to facilitate replacement of VoterCards.

Ballot Paper Production and Management

The printing of Ballot Papers was tendered to a commercial printer and the successful tender organised with the FEO management to instil three (3) security features in all Ballot Papers.

For the 2018 General Election, the FEO saw it fit to have its Ballot Paper Production Manager work at the designated printing company in order to understand the complexity of printing materials within a tight schedule. This experience ensured the Ballot Paper Production Manager was able to properly plan and execute the printing schedule without any hindrance.

There were no reports of tampering or attempted fraud of Ballot Papers.

National Candidates List ['NCL']

The NCL containing the name of all candidates was prepared according to section 36 of the Electoral Act. A Ball Draw was held to assign numbers to individual Candidates and the numbers were drawn for all 235 Political Party Candidates. The numbers ranged from 508 to 743 and the number '666' was excluded by the EC from the series.

The NCL showed the Candidate's number, their name and their photograph. The NCL was prepared and published in the Gazette and the daily newspapers the following day, as well as broadcast on radio and social media. Copies of the NCL were provided to the EC, registered political parties and their candidates as well as copies displayed at all FEO's VSCs for public viewing.

Voter Education

In delivering its key messages for the 2018 General Election, the FEO used both existing and new channels of communications.

The use of these new channels was due largely to the ever-changing landscape of communications and how brands engage with their target audience. This has evolved over the years from simple radio and newspaper advertising to more complex integrated approaches using a range of communications mediums, such as television, digital publications and social media.

In order to capture our key target audience (voters), and to ensure the successful delivery of critical information relating to the conduct of elections in Fiji, a multi-media and multi-lingual voter awareness approach was used based on five (5) general themes: When to vote; Where to vote and How to vote; All Fijians should vote; General reminder for Election Day and Pre-poll voters and The Ideal voter.

The FEO's Voters Awareness Campaign for the 2018 General Election was named the Know Your Election ['**KYE**'] Awareness campaign. The FEO conducted 3,870 voter awareness sessions in Fiji which started from 15 March 2018 and ran throughout the election period.

Election Information Booklet

The Election Information Booklet ['**EIB**'] was produced in March 2018 as the primary awareness tool, containing all relevant electoral information for the voter. These included instructions on how to vote, illustrations of a standard polling station layout and pictorials, methods of voting, counting process, declaration of results and allocation of seats. The EIB was translated into i-Taukei, Hindi, Rotuman, Banaban and Chinese languages.

Accreditation of Polling Agents, Media and International Observers

The FEO conducted briefings and implemented individual Code of Conduct for polling agents, media, and election observers. For the 2018 General Election, the FEO accredited 77 International Observers who were part of the MOG. A total of 371 Media Personnel were accredited representing 18 Media Agencies.

Polling Day Workers

Polling Day Workers ['**PDW**'] were recruited through open merit-based tests throughout Fiji. Of the 18, 555 applications a total of 14, 508 were trained and 10, 071 were appointed to work for the FEO during the Pre-poll period and on Election Day.

For the 2018 General Election, a staffing formula was developed by the FEO to indicate the number of Election Officials required to work in a polling station on Polling Day based on the voter numbers allocated to that particular polling station. However, staff allocation for Pre-poll voting differed and was dependent on the mode of transportation used by the teams.

The FEO prepared various Operational Manuals and Task Sheets as a guiding tool for its staff. These manuals were used to develop comprehensive trainer guides, which were used by trainers during training sessions. To avoid dilution of information, the FEO decided against using a cascading training approach and instead trained a pool of 80 national roving trainers who would conduct the various operational trainings over a period of ten (10) months.

While waiting for the *Writ* to be issued, the FEO conducted refresher trainings for its Election Officials between the months of July and August 2018. Once the *Writ* for the 2018 General Election was issued, the FEO conducted refresher trainings for Presiding Officers and Assistant Presiding Officers. A total of 3,240 Presiding Officers attended this full day training which placed emphasis on the processes to be followed on Polling Day.

Postal Voting

Postal Voting provided an opportunity for overseas voters and those who could not attend a Polling Station on Election Day, to cast their vote. All voters that wanted to vote through postal voting were required to apply once the date of the General Election was announced.

When applications were received by the FEO, they were checked for completeness before being data entered into the EMS which had a module specifically created to manage postal voting applications for the 2018 General Election.

There were two (2) postal courier companies engaged for the delivery of postal voting packages to overseas and local voters. In cases where EMS courier could not deliver to local addresses, FEO made these deliveries itself. Over 90% of the 11,227 postal votes packages sent out were received by FEO on time for verification before being admitted to count.

Pre-poll Voting

The venues for Pre-poll were identified using the criteria outlined in the Electoral Act and incorporated into schedules was gazetted on 17 October 2018. Pre-poll was scheduled between 05 to 10 November 2018. The schedules took into account factors such as low voter numbers and remoteness of the locations. The military bases, naval bases and corrections facilities were also under Pre-poll.

For the 2018 General Election, gazebo like tents were used as polling venues replacing private residences. These light weight structures were easily erected and carried around by the Pre-poll teams.

The FEO developed a Presiding Officers Pre-poll Journal for each Pre-poll team. These customised journals were developed to outline the activities and programs the teams needed to adhere to during the Pre-poll voting period.

In the majority of cases Pre-poll schedules were adhered to as planned, however, in some cases there were amendments made to the schedules due to unforeseen circumstances (e.g. weather, tides, etc.). Where it was necessary to reschedule polling, approval was sought from the EC and changes were made accordingly.

Election Day and Counting

Polling took place on 14 November 2018. Majority of the Polling Stations began operation at 7.30am and closed at 6.00pm to begin counting. Polling Agents and International Observers were permitted into Polling Stations. The FEO ensured that maximum number of voters at any Polling Station was 500. Voters were assigned to a Polling Station closest to their residential address.

All votes cast on Election Day were counted at their respective Polling Stations. The results from the Count were transmitted by Presiding Officers to a toll free dedicated number at the National Results Centre. Count for postal and Pre-poll votes were conducted at the National Count Centre.

Due to the adverse weather conditions on Election Day, the SoE, in consultation with the EC, had to adjourn polling for 22 Polling Venues with 25 Polling Stations around the country. This was adjourned to 17 November 2018.

National Results Centre ['NRC'] and Results Management Information System ['RMiS']

The NRC was activated on Election night to receive "phoned in results" from the Election Day Polling Stations and postal/Pre-poll results from the NRC which was also the venue where Final National Results Tally was tabulated.

The RMiS was the application software used by FEO to capture the data contained in the Protocol of Results forms and consolidated these results into the National Results Tally for progressive display of results. The RMiS was based on a double blind entry of results and used two (2) modes; a provisional for the provisional results received by phone, as well as an official mode for the official results from the received official Protocol of Results. RMiS also provided the consolidated results to the SoE and the EC to prepare the Final National Results Tally.

Command Centre Operations

To ensure that it is in line with its five (5) year Strategic Plan 2015–2019, the FEO acknowledged the need to establish a unit that monitors FEO's election projects at the Divisional level. The Command Centre was established to monitor the following election related activities:

- Divisional Monitoring Process;
- Information Request Process;
- Call Centre Process;
- Incident Management Process;
- Change Management Process; and
- Media and Weather Monitoring Process.

A total of 86 daily Divisional progress reports were submitted to the SoE as Executive Summary Reports from 01 October 2018 to Announcement of the Final National Results Tally. The reports not only included situation updates from the Divisional offices and Area offices but also progressive reports from the project owners to highlight the status of their individual projects and to identify any setbacks that can hinder the Election Day preparation. The reports further included media and weather updates. The Divisional daily reports were also compiled and submitted weekly to the EC informing them of updates gathered from the team in the four (4) Divisions.

Elections Management System

The EMS was the application used by FEO to capture and validate operational data for the 2018 General Election. It consists of five (5) modules, which are Polling Venue, Logistics, Postal, Party Registration and Candidate Nominations.

The EMS has two (2) modes, the Testing Mode that was also used for training and the Production Mode, which was where the live data was used by the Operations Directorate. The system can be accessed based on role and for some modules by division. This is to ensure demarcation of role and also data responsibility by location.

Geographical Information System ['GIS']

The establishment for the GIS Unit in 2016 proved to be a successful venture for the FEO. Over the past two (2) years, the FEO has developed various maps and datasets which have assisted the various Internal Departments in their projects. The FEO has also shared data with other organisations such as the Fiji Police Force, Fiji Navy, Fiji Military Forces and the National Disaster Management Office.

FEO Results App

The FEO Results App was developed to provide voters and the public direct access to the 2018 General Election results. The App was developed in-house without any vendor collaboration. The App enabled users to download it on their mobile devices (Android and IOS) and be able to view results in real time with notifications on when results were being updated. The App features allowed users to view results information by Party, Candidates and Polling Venues. Users could view the breakdown of results by Candidates for each Polling Venue. The App also provided statistical information of total votes of Political Parties as a pie chart and voter turnout as a bar graph.

The Multinational Observer Group Report

At the invitation of the Fijian Government, the MOG for the 2018 General Election was established. It constituted of Observers from ten (10) countries, the Melanesian Spearhead Group and the Pacific Island Forum Secretariat. This group was co-led by Australia, India and Indonesia.

There were 77 Observers who were part of the MOG, 25 long term and 52 short term observers. Their backgrounds included Technical Experts, Parliamentarians and Government Officials. They commenced operations in Fiji on 28 September 2018 and concluded on 21 November 2018.

MOG issued a preliminary statement on 16 November 2018 and subsequently issued a comprehensive report on 21 February 2019. The MOG Final Report acknowledged major improvements by Fiji in relations to election operations and provided recommendations for enhancement of certain processes for future elections.

The MOG concluded that the 2018 General Election was transparent, credible and the results broadly represent the will of the Fijian Voters.

Electoral Calendar

The following electoral calendar has been derived from the Constitution and the Electoral Act, 2014. Dates fixed by the legal framework have little flexibility or discretion.

When	Reference	What
At least 3 years and 6 months after first meeting of Parliament	C. 58(3)	- Dissolution of Parliament. - The President may, acting on the advice of the Prime Minister, dissolve Parliament by proclamation, but only after a lapse of 3 years and 6 months from the date of its first meeting after a General Election of the Members of Parliament.
Within 7 days from the expiry of Parliament or from the proclamation of its dissolution by the President	C. 59 (2)	<i>Writ</i> for the election of Members of Parliament shall be issued by the President on the advice of the Prime Minister.
Day of <i>Writ</i>	ERV. 19	Closure of National Register of Voters.
At least 30 days prior to Election Day	EA. 41(1)	Identification of all polling stations and polling venues.
14 days after the date of the issue of the <i>Writ</i>	C. 60	- End of Nomination Period. - The last day for the receipt of a nomination of a candidate for election to Parliament is 14 days after the date of the issue of the <i>Writ</i>.
Maximum 30 days prior to Election Day	C. 61	Polling commences no later than 30 days after the last day for the receipt of nominations.
1 day following end of nomination	EA. 29 (3)	- Display of Nomination. - Nomination must be displayed and published the day following the close of nominations.
1 day (12:00pm) following end of nominations	EA. 28(1)	- Withdrawal of Nominations. - Candidates may withdraw their candidacy up until 12:00pm on the day following close of nominations.
1 day (4:00pm) following end of nominations	EA. 30(3)	- Objections to nomination. - An objection to a nomination must be delivered to the EC by 4:00pm on the day following close of nominations.
Within 3 days upon receipt of the objection on nominations	EA. 30(5)	EC ruling on objection and notification of the person objecting and the candidate whose nomination is objected to.
Within 7 days after the close of nominations	EA. 35 (1)	EC to give Notice of Poll in the Gazette and media including candidate names in alphabetical order.

Within 7 days after the close of nominations	EA. 36	Preparation of a National Candidates List containing the names of all candidates according to candidate numbers.
Within 7 days following end of nominations	EA. 82(3)	Schedule of Pre-poll published.
At least 21 days prior to Election Day	EA. 68	Close of Postal Voting Applications.
48 hours prior to Election Day and on the Election Day until the close of polling at all polling stations	EA. 63 (2)	Campaign Blackout.
Election Day	C. 61	- Election Day. - Polling commences no later than 30 days after the last day for the receipt of nominations.
Within 24 hours from receipt of Polling Station protocol of results	EA. 107	Declaration of results and the names of those candidates who are elected as members of Parliament must be done within 24 hours from the receipt of the original of the final protocol of results from all polling stations.
Within 21 days	C. 66(3)(b)	Election petition addressed to the Court of Disputed Returns.
Within 42 days (21 days of appeal)	C. 66(8)	Ruling by the Court of Disputed Returns within 21 days of the date when the petition or proceeding is brought before it.
Within 1 month	EA. 109	SoE Report submitted to the EC and published.
Within 60 days of Court decision	EA. 130(4)	Any repeat polling ordered by the Court to take place.
Within 3 months after the date of the election	EA. 14(g)	EC and the SoE submit a joint post-election report to the President and the Parliament.

Fijian Elections Office Stakeholders

Stakeholders are a person, group or organisation that has interest or collaboration with an organisation, which can affect or be affected by the organisation's actions, vision, mission, objectives and policies.

In the 2018 General Election, the FEO had its group of electoral stakeholders in the following categories:

- Fijian citizens;
- Political Parties and Candidates;
- Parliament of Fiji;
- Government Agencies;
- Media;
- Advocacy Groups;
- Supplies;
- International Partners;
- Multinational Observer Groups; and
- Professional Skills Institutions.

Fijian Citizens (Voters)

Voters are the primary stakeholders in the electoral process. In recognising this, the FEO places special emphasis on voter registration, engagement and participation. Voters are also the final beneficiary of the electoral process. The FEO also plays the role of protecting the voter, educating the voter and guarding the rights and freedoms of the voter. In the delivery of its mandate, the FEO guarantees the secrecy of the vote and promotes and protects the freedom of choice.

The FEO under the Electoral (Registration of Voters) Act, 2012 uses EVR to register eligible voters. The EVR system captures essential personal data of voters such as name, date of birth, residential address, contact and next of kin details together with its biometric information capturing fingerprints and facial photographs.

For the 2018 General Election, the total registered voters were 637,527 compared to 591,101 for the 2014 General Election. There was an increase of 46,426 voters compared to the 2014 General Election. From the total registered voters recorded, female voters constituted 49.63% which was a total of 316,431 voters and males at 50.37% having a total of 321,096 voters. It can be forecasted that there will be an increase in the number of registered voters for the 2022/23 General Election.

The FEO is in charge of registration for eligible Fijian Voters who are residing abroad. These eligible Fijian voters can get registered and vote through postal voting during election period. The only two (2) requirements for registering overseas voters are, that an individual needs to have an original Fiji Certificate of Citizenship or a valid Fiji Passport for registration.

Countries which have a larger number of Fijians include New Zealand, Australia, United States of America and United Kingdom. Other regions such as Asia and Europe have low numbers of potential Fijian voters so registrations are carried out only once. Upon formal requests from Fijian communities abroad, Voter registration is facilitated. The FEO works closely with respective Fiji Missions abroad in reaching out to Fijians and ensuring that the registration drive is carried out successfully.

In Fiji, once a voter is registered, they are issued with a VoterCard. The VoterCard 1.0 was introduced together with the Biometrics Voter Registration system in 2012 which contained a unique voter number, photo, full name, date of birth and residential address of the voter. Then in April 2017, the FEO saw the need to re-design and update the VoterCard 1.0 to VoterCard 2.0 to include the FEO logo and contact details as well as the incorporation of additional security features to avoid copying and duplication of cards.

After the 2018 General Election, FEO further improved the VoterCard 2.0 by including the polling venue information which became VoterCard 2.1. Inclusion of this information was introduced earlier this year (2019) and allowed voters to be able to view and confirm their polling venue as printed on the card. Fiji has a distinctive voting system whereby voters are registered based on their usual place of residence. On Election Day, a voter can only vote at his or her designated polling station as stated in the VoterCard.

The VoterCard 1.0 will be expiring on 30 June, 2020 and all voters who are holding the VoterCard 1.0 will need to update their VoterCard to 2.1 which has their Polling Venue details included.

All voter details are kept in a single register of voters called the National Register of Voters. The FEO is mandated by law (Electoral Registration of Voters) Act, 2012) to prepare and maintain the NRV. To comply with the legislative requirements, the FEO carries out continuous registration of eligible voters between elections and does frequent data cleansing to ensure that the NRV is accurate and up to date.

A master Voter List is divided into sub-lists for use at each polling station while a single Voter List is a detailed record of every person who is registered and eligible to vote. This contains information such as voter's EVR number, name, address, and voter's photo.

When voters present themselves at a polling station, a PDW checks that a voter's name appears on the Voter List before allowing them to cast their Ballot. Signatures on the Voter List are tallied for the final turnout calculation for each polling station on Election Day. The Provisional Voter List is published for the voters to view, correct their details and update essential details prior to the Issue of the *Writ*.

The FEO used a variety of platforms to engage with voters. These platforms were designed to target various areas ranging from the 'future voters' in the Secondary and Tertiary schools to 'potential and current voters' in the wider communities.

As part of its 2015–2019 Strategic Plan, the FEO developed a Year 10 Introduction to Elections Curriculum in partnership with the Ministry of Education. A specific module on Elections was developed and incorporated into the existing framework of the Year 10 Social Science program. This module introduced students to the voting processes while at the same time prepares them for the roles and responsibilities of being a Voter.

The curriculum was successfully launched and piloted in all secondary schools around the country in the 2018 school calendar and continues to be part of the Year 10 Social Science curriculum to date.

As part of the FEO's strategy in delivering voter education programs to potential and future voters of the country, the FEO in its 2020–2023 Strategic Plan is intending to further introduce the topic of elections into the curriculums of Primary schools and Universities.

Further, the FEO has continuously conducted school registration drives for all secondary schools throughout Fiji since 2015. The targeted audience for this exercise are students that have turned 18 years old while still in their secondary school level of education. This has become an annual event for the FEO, which has seen enrolments of around 6,000 to 7,000 students on a yearly basis.

Inclusive of the school registration drive program is a 30 minutes information session which is conducted for years 11 to 13 students. This category of students consists of those who have turned 18 years old or will be turning 18 years old during the school year. The key messages delivered during this information session included:

- Who can register to vote;
- How to register to vote;
- Your responsibility as a voter; and
- Eligibility and Requirements for registration.

This method has been found to be an effective and convenient way of providing voter awareness to students while capturing large numbers of new registrations at the same time.

In improving dissemination of information, the FEO revamped its website in 2017 in preparation for the 2018 General Election. The website had been vastly improved to ensure that all of FEO's stakeholders are better informed and can easily access information. The most significant step towards voter engagement via the website was the inclusion of disability friendly features. Users with visual impairments could increase the size of the fonts or even enable an automated readout of the text on the page.

The FEO also managed two (2) Facebook accounts for the 2018 General election. This platform allowed the FEO to engage directly with voters and other stakeholders who are users of this communication tool. All FEO followers were able to access news updates through live videos of all media events, press conferences and live CCTV feed from FEO facilities such as its main warehouse which stores its election materials. Both FEO Facebook accounts had a following of around 100,000 followers during the 2018 General Election.

For day to day voter services, the FEO opened VSC to cater for voter registration services. The FEO used these VSCs to be distributing points for election materials. Various brochures and booklets were placed in these centres for voter information and distribution.

The FEO also conducted its nationwide Voter Awareness Campaign for the 2018 General Election very thoroughly, targeting all settlements, villages, schools and communities in the rural, urban and peri-urban areas. The awareness sessions were designed to be interactive where the election officials were able to present and explain to voters the various electoral processes and at the same time answer questions or queries that were posed to them. These sessions were very effective drawing from positive feedbacks received from the participants.

In addition to the voter awareness campaign, the FEO also organised special programs to register eligible voters and conduct awareness either through home visits, business visits and community engagement programs.

The Home visits or Mobile Registrations were conducted upon receiving a formal request from the eligible voter or by the voter's relatives for those who are unable to access the services provided at various VSCs. The applicant provides the details of the voter and the reason for the request which may include physical disability, old age or ill voters.

During the build up to the General Election, the FEO also organised voter services and voter awareness sessions for the staff of various organisations or corporate houses. Staff are given the opportunity to obtain a replacement card, new registration or update their details to reflect the same on the NRV List and to avoid frustrations during polling. This program has been a successful initiative given the large number of requests from the various organisations whereby staff take full advantage of the services provided to them.

The Community engagement programs were developed and implemented to provide voter services and awareness programs to the voters living in remote communities including the voters living in the rural and maritime locations, where the voters do not have access to the services due to the remoteness and inaccessibility of the areas they live in. This exercise includes the Nationwide Registration Drives and other planned registration drives which target schools, communities, villages and settlements.

Political Parties and Candidates

Political parties and candidates play an integral role as contestants. According to the Political Parties (Registration, Conduct, Funding and Disclosures) Act, 2013 political parties in Fiji are to be registered with the Registrar of Political Parties who is also the SoE. Currently, there are seven (7) registered political parties.

Fiji uses a modified Open List Proportional Representation system in which Political Parties nominate candidates as Party List. Independent Candidates can individually lodge their nominations. Parties rank their candidates at the time of nomination, however, the final order of the candidates is decided by the number of votes each candidate receives.

Leading up to the 2018 General Election, FEO made various engagements with Political Parties including quarterly meetings, workshops and simulation exercises. In particular, there were six (6) quarterly meetings commencing from 2017 to discuss electoral issues with FEO and EC as well as ten (10) workshops and simulation exercises organised from 2016 to October, 2018 that assisted political parties in better understanding the electoral processes. Further, in equipping candidates and political parties with the relevant information required for the 2018 General Election, the FEO published the Polling Agents' Handbook in July, 2017 with the purpose of informing parties on the process of accrediting their polling agents, code of conduct, authorised designated areas as well as methods of voting, counting, tabulation of results, allocation of seats and electoral complaints mechanism.

Then in January, 2018 FEO also published the Candidates' Handbook that provided information on the nomination, withdrawal and appeal processes for candidates.

Moving forward, in strengthening its relationship with Political Parties and Candidates FEO intends to increase engagement with them by ensuring that there are more capacity building programs and trainings in the lead up to the next General Election. Induction programs will be developed for newly registered political parties. The FEO will also look into reviewing accreditation of polling agents and complaints processes to improve service delivery as well as ensure that information is readily accessible to political parties and candidates through brochures, pamphlets and an updated website.

It is to be noted that several core issues such as youth representation and participation, women's representation and participation, disabled persons representation and participation can now be directly dealt with at political party level and this is where the focus will transition.

Besides this, the political parties and candidates are required to comply with the Electoral Act, 2014 and the Political Parties Act, 2013 by ensuring that relevant Declaration of assets, liabilities, Income and Expenditure are submitted within the stipulated timeline. The FEO will work closely with the political parties and candidates to ensure compliance of these laws.

Parliament of Fiji

The last General Election was held on 14 November 2018. In the 2018 General Election, 51 seats were contested unlike in 2014 when only 50 seats were contested based on the 2013 Constitution.

The first sitting of the new parliament and the swearing in of the members of parliament took place on 26 November 2018. Currently, three (3) political parties are represented in Parliament with FijiFirst with 27 seats, SODELPA with 21 seats and NFP with three (3) seats.

The Parliament of Fiji has the powers to pass and amend relevant electoral legislations, which has an impact on electoral processes. Moreover, Parliament passes the budget for FEO for its planned projects and operations.

Government Agencies

A Government Agency is responsible for the oversight and administration of specific functions. There is a notable variety of agency types. Although usage differs, a Government Agency is normally distinct from both a Department or Ministry and other types of public bodies established by government.

The identified key government stakeholders for FEO are as follows:

- **Minister Responsible for Elections** is the Minister Responsible for matters related to elections in Parliament. The FEO also liaises with other government ministries through the Ministry Responsible for Elections. Parliamentary queries regarding the FEO are handled through the Minister.
- **Ministry of Justice** is the civil registry and custodian of all civil records. The FEO utilizes the data for various purposes in the performance of its functions.
- **Department of Immigration** maintains the travel history and passport related details of Fijians. The FEO refers all queries regarding candidate's eligibility under the requirements for verification by the department.
- **Ministry of Provincial Development** maintains the regional infrastructure within Fiji. The FEO liaises with the Divisional Commissioners from the Ministry for logistics and local support.
- **Fiji Corrections Services and Judicial Department** are information hubs for details of imprisonment records of individuals and assist the FEO in determining the eligibility of a person to be a candidate or a voter.
- **Fiji Police Force** are primary providers of security and also logistics to some extent. The FEO also utilizes the Criminal Records Database held by the Fiji Police Force for various eligibility checks.

- **Fiji Independent Commission Against Corruption ['FICAC']** is the primary investigator and prosecutor of all electoral offences. The FEO reports any suspected electoral offence to FICAC.
- **Bureau of Statistics** provides the FEO with the required statistical data to assist it in its planning and logistics.
- **Ministry of Education Heritage and Arts** is a key Ministry that FEO liaises with for access to schools and students e.g. schools to use as polling venues and voter enrolment of students.
- **Ministry of Economy** is the custodian of Government finances and the FEO liaise with the Ministry through its line Ministry for funding purposes.

Media

The Media Industry Development ['MIDA'] Act, 2010 which was amended in 2013 regulates media in Fiji.

MIDA collaborates with the FEO to implement media training and capacity building in election reporting as well as to introduce appropriate guidelines for media reporting within the legal framework.

The FEO also liaises with local and international media organisations. The FEO considers the following large media organisations as key partners in delivering its mandate:

- Fiji Broadcasting Corporation (FBC) - The FBC operates three (3) TV channels and six (6) radio channels covering the country;
- Communications Fiji Limited (CFL) – Communications Fiji Ltd operates five (5) radio stations covering the country;
- Fiji Television Limited;
- The Fiji Sun; and
- The Fiji Times.

For general elections, the FEO conducts media accreditations for media organisations and personnel to cover election coverage. Media training is also conducted which is co-funded by MIDA and training conducted by trainers from International Foundations for Electoral Systems ['IFES'] together with Media Handbook.

Advocacy Groups

The FEO maintains an open approach to advocacy groups within the legal framework. The FEO conducted various meetings with external stakeholders such as EDAWG, ESAG, FICAC and CSO's in preparation for the 2018 General Election.

Suppliers

Due to the nature of the operations of FEO, it has some specialised suppliers who only make and distribute the election materials.

During the 2018 General Election, FEO acquired materials from reliable vendors having regard to quality, timely delivery and back up services using its Procurement Policy.

For goods in excess of FJD \$200,000.00, the FEO's Tender Policy was followed. Goods, services and works of lesser value were purchased after obtaining a minimum of three (3) competitive quotations.

FEO appreciates the timely supply of election materials to successfully execute the election processes.

International Cooperation Partners

The FEO has received support, including technical support, in-kind support and fundings from international cooperation partners. These partners have been Australia, New Zealand, India, Korea and Belgium.

The FEO had received in-kind assistance from New Zealand and India in terms of key election material (voting screens and indelible ink respectively), as well as, funding from India to purchase key services (vehicles).

FEO had engaged Technical Advisors from Australia, New Zealand, Korea and Belgium that were based with the different Directorates to provide timely advice and share their knowledge and expertise with the FEO staff and New Zealand's bilateral support included topping up the salary of the DSoE.

Additionally, FEO has affiliated with regional and global agencies to build its capacity and share skills, knowledge and resources through the Electoral Network and is currently holding membership or affiliations with;

- A WEB – Executive Board Member since September, 2017;
- PIANZEA Network – Advisory Group Member;
- Commonwealth Electoral Network – Member of Executive Committee; and
- Association of Asian Election Authorities – Member.

Multinational Observer Groups

Pursuant to section 119 of the Electoral Act, the Minister Responsible for Elections may appoint or invite any person or organisation to observe any election and these persons or organisations are then accredited by the FEO.

FEO accredited 77 International Observers, which were from United States of America, Canada, France, Japan, New Zealand, Korea and United Kingdom. The Melanesian Spearhead Group brought Observers from Bougainville, New Caledonia, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu as well as the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat who brought in Observers from Rwanda, Tonga, French Polynesia and Federated States of Micronesia.

Professional Skilled Institutions

FEO believes in building the capacity and upskilling the Human Resources for the staff. FEO staff are encouraged to become members with the professional institutions to share and gather knowledge and skills in their specialised fields. FEO has staff who are members of Fiji Institute of Auditors, Fiji Human Resources Institute, Fiji Institute of the Accountants, GIS and Fiji Law Society.

Annually FEO funds the conferences costs for the staff of FEO to attend the conferences hosted by the respective professional bodies. Such conferences bring together all the personnel in the specialised field for networking and knowledge sharing.

Monitoring and Implementation Strategy

The final step in Strategic Planning process is to implement the plan and monitor the progress of the activities. The Strategic Plan for FEO has been designed for the year 2020 to 2023 due to the four (4) year electoral cycle.

Activities in this Plan have been tagged to various staff positions. These staff will be the sole custodian of the activity. Their supervisor and ultimately the Director to whom the staff reports to will be the direct authority on the activity. The Internal Auditor reviews the quarterly performance of each Directorate and tables its report to the SoE.

For the FEO Strategic Plan Year 2020 to 2023 cross cutting themes have been set for goals and objectives to promote coordination and increase resource efficiency though integration is not possible in all the goals and objectives.

With the clear line of accountability set for each individual activity in the Strategic Plan, the monitoring by either individual staff, respective Managers, Directors or the independent positions should be flawless.

The progress report for the review conducted by the Internal Auditor and Review and Compliance Officer will be discussed with the Directors by informing them of the performance of individual staff employed within their Directorates before it is escalated to SoE for the final endorsement.

The Executive Management Board should use reports against its annual plans to review progress towards meeting strategic objectives.

FEO has aligned the annual appraisal for each staff with the KPI's set in the Strategic Plan in ensuring all activities as set in the Strategic Plan timeline are achieved in a timely manner with the individual performance appraisal indicators aligned to this Strategic Plan. Annually, staff are motivated to achieve targets set to attain sufficient performance rating for benefits.

Monitoring Process

1	Data gathering on the projects, activities and KPI's on quarterly basis by Internal Auditor and Review and Compliance Officer.
2	Analyse the data including the Project Submission Papers and Project Reports.
3	Complete the monitoring matrix.
4	Compile the Findings Report from the monitoring matrix.
5	Discuss the findings with the respective Directors.
6	Submit the Findings Report to SoE.
7	Verification of Performance Management form vs Strategic Plan KPI's annually.
8	Approval of the Performance Ratings on PMS form.

Risk Analysis and Mitigation for the FEO's Strategic Plan

In order to successfully implement the Strategic Plan of the FEO, analysis of likely risks that can disrupt the implementation of the plan is important for the Organisation. Considering the significance and importance of this issue and huge impact or challenges these risks can cause, there is a need for the development of proper mitigating strategies to prevent or reduce the severity of these risks.

The FEO has considered specific strategies for mitigating risks and specific measures for reducing them in case of their occurrence. The likely risks that the FEO may encounter are categorised into two (2) groups; external and internal risk.

- **External Risks**

External risks include those instances where FEO has little or no control of and the implementation of the Strategic Plan is dependent on external factors or stakeholders. The external risks that the FEO have identified include the following:

1. Delayed or No Legislation in the areas identified in the Strategic Plan

Changes in legislation governing the conduct of elections in Fiji needs to be passed by the Fiji Parliament and is beyond the FEO's control. Delays or lack of will to pass the required legislation will have an impact on the performance and implementation of the Strategic Plan.

To mitigate this risk, the FEO will implement the activities in accordance with the existing laws and ensure that it is able to account for changes to the law, if and when that would take place.

2. Lack of adequate funding for the FEO

To carry out this Strategic Plan effectively, there needs to be sufficient and available financial capital to enable the scheduled implementation of activities. For the next General Election, the FEO is planning to decentralize its operational activities to its Divisional offices and this is reflected in the Strategic Plan. Decentralisation ensures that electoral activities and services are efficiently and effectively carried out in a timely manner. Lack of adequate funding or delays in accommodating budget requests for the FEO is considered as one of the main risks for the FEO as it could lead to the non-accomplishment of activities stated in its Strategic Plan.

To mitigate this risk, the FEO will ensure that proper and timely budget requests are submitted to the relevant authorities during the next four (4) year electoral cycle. The FEO intends to begin discussions with its major stakeholders such as the Ministry of Economy and the international community, which have been the main donors for electoral activities in the past on the implementation strategies of its Strategic Plan. This will ensure that financial support for the FEO is strategically planned and mapped out well in advance. The FEO will also ensure that its decentralisation activities are phased out evenly within the next four (4) years in order to avoid too much financial pressure at one particular time or financial year.

3. Unpredictable weather conditions

As a result of the Force Majeure that was caused by heavy rainfall and flooding during polling day in the 2018 General Election, the FEO is mindful of the irregular weather patterns experienced in the region during the last couple of years. The FEO expects to face similar issues, which could bring about natural catastrophes in its next planning cycle. Delays in activities due to natural disasters could lead to the non-completion of tasks in the Strategic Plan.

To mitigate the risk, the FEO will have a contingency plan strategy in place to mitigate and respond to these immediate situations when it rises. The FEO will continue to be in a state of readiness for any situation of this nature, which could arise at any point in time in the next four (4) years.

- **Internal Risks**

Apart from the risks that are of an external nature, there are a number of internal risks that can challenge the implementation of the Strategic Plan. Internal risks mostly include issues that the FEO is directly responsible for and is able to eliminate or reduce the severity of its impact. The internal risks that the FEO have identified include the following:

- 1. Resistance to Change**

As the FEO matures as an Organisation, it is important that FEO advance itself in the direction of becoming more established and stable in its affairs. This reflects how the FEO is willing to introduce new concepts and ideas in its evolution. However, the FEO sees challenges in managing this 'Organisational change' with resistance from its staff.

To mitigate this risk, the FEO will continue to expose its staff to international best practices in elections through capacity building programs and workshops, hold consultations, meetings and forums to address fears, doubts and uncertainties, which may arise in the Organisation.

- 2. Loss of experienced staff to implement the Strategic Plan**

The FEO is always facing the issues of retaining experienced staff. This has resulted in non-achievement of certain activities and tasks from the previous Strategic Plan. At the successful completion of the 2018 General Election, FEO staff have become marketable and widely sought after by other organisations. This has resulted in the departure of a great number of experienced staff during the post 2018 General Election period.

To mitigate this risk, the FEO intends to retain staff by providing better working conditions, environment and training opportunities to build capacity for them. To ensure skills and knowledge is not lost during the loss of experienced staff, self-development and knowledge transfer programs will be developed for the FEO to ensure that knowledge is transferred from one section of the Organisation to another to ensure its availability for future users.

- 3. Failure of IT infrastructure**

Cyber-attacks or sabotage and untimely failure of IT hardware resources remains to be one (1) of the major causes of delays, interruptions and non-completion of activities during the implementation stage of the Strategic Plan. To mitigate this risk, the FEO will develop and implement policies and procedures on actions to be taken when cyber-attacks occur and ensure that a disaster recovery plan for business continuity is in place.

The FEO will also put in place mechanisms to ensure that regular network monitoring and system audits are conducted. To reduce the severity impact of this risk, the FEO will ensure that adequate budgeting and aggressive up-skilling of necessary resources and staff skills are carried out effectively.

Milestone Year 2020

#	Milestone	Pillar #	Objective #
1	Develop an Online Register for political parties	1	3
2	Staffing structure for 2022/23 General Election approved	2	3
3	Implement Inventory Management System	2	4
4	Finalise the General Election Calendar for 2022/23	3	1
5	Publish Provisional Polling Venue List	3	1
6	Develop a four (4) year Voter Registration Strategy	3	4
7	Communications Strategy approved	4	6
8	Implement Industrial Election Management Platform	5	3
9	Establish IT Directorate	5	5

Milestone Year 2021

#	Milestone	Pillar #	Objective #
1	Finalise operational manuals, handbooks and trainer guides	1	1
2	PRINCE 2 – Project management training for senior staff	2	1
3	Finalise procurement plan for 2022/23 General Elections	2	4
4	Divisional offices are operational for 2022/23 General Elections	2	6
5	Finalise General Election 2022/23 operational plan	3	1
6	Publish Fiji National Polling Venue Directory (v 2.0)	3	3
7	Conduct Overseas Voter Registration	3	4
8	Audit of National Register of Voters	3	5
9	Implement E-Training platform and E-Service portal	5	3
10	Establish a software and network monitoring system	5	3

Milestone Year 2022

#	Milestone	Pillar #	Objective #
1	Declaration of Assets, Liabilities, Income and Expenditures for political parties published	1	3
2	100% Election Officials recruited	2	3
3	100% Election Officials trained	2	8
4	Area offices are operational for 2022/23 General Election	2	6
5	Conduct the 2022/23 General Election	3	1
6	Media training on elections conducted	4	4
7	Network and Software Audit completed	5	4

Milestone Year 2023

#	Milestone	Pillar #	Objective #
1	Review of the 2022/23 General Election processes	1	1
2	Supervisor of Elections report submitted and published	1	1
3	Joint report by the Supervisor of Elections and Electoral Commission published	1	1
4	Strategic Plan for 2024-2027 developed	2	1
5	Post-Election audit completed	3	1

Conclusion

This Strategic Plan (2020-2023) was compiled through the collaborative efforts of the FEO staff and Management. It allows all to have ownership of the activities they plan to undertake between 2020 to 2023 and it will also guide them in ensuring that the next General Election is delivered successfully.

In focusing on the period 2020 to 2023, the FEO has adopted new milestones that it aims to achieve. It will also look at strengthening collaboration with different stakeholders to ensure that all areas involving them will allow for maximum involvement and cooperation.

In terms of implementation, the FEO will closely monitor the implementation of all activities on a quarterly basis and milestones on an annual basis. The staff and management of the FEO are looking forward to the journey ahead with the responsibilities that come with it.

The ultimate aim is to stabilize the planning and delivery of elections in Fiji and reduce the ad-hoc changes that eventuate during the exercise. The enhancements of operational systems should result in greater control while at the same time allowing direct access to operational areas.

The plan seeks to secure greater collaboration and development of capacities of all Fijians and this will ultimately build stronger communities that understand the electoral process.

At the conclusion of all the activities in this plan, the FEO will have significantly raised the standards of delivery of elections and at the same time instilled confidence in voters in terms of the verifiability of the election process through the enhanced transparency of its activities.



HEADQUARTERS: 59-63 High Street, Toorak, Suva.
P. O. Box 2528, Government Buildings, Suva.
Phone: +679 331 6225 | Fax: +679 331 6026 | Email: info@feo.org.fj
Web: www.feo.org.fj | Facebook: [@Fijianelectionsoffice](https://www.facebook.com/Fijianelectionsoffice)

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E-LEARNING TRAINING SUMMARY

INTERNAL TRAINING

TRAINING REPORT AS AT 2021

Training Programs	Participation	Gender	
		Male	Female
Induction Training (September 2021)	12	6	6
Time Management (September 2021)	23	11	12
Project Management (Nov 2021)	23	14	12

TRAINING REPORT AS AT 2022

Training Programs	Participation	Gender	
		Male	Female
ICT Security and Troubleshooting Training	115	67	48
Induction for Short Term Staff	78	38	40

TRAINING REPORT AS AT 2023

Training Programs	Participation	Gender	
		Male	Female
Time Management Training (March 2023)	19	11	08
Managing Change Effectively (July)	26	14	12
Induction Training (August)	21	12	09

TRAINING REPORT AS AT 2024

Training Programs	Participation	Gender	
		Male	Female
Advance Time Management Training (May)	28	17	11
Workplace Harassment & Bullying Prevention (June)	55	28	27
Customer Service Training (July)	13	7	6

EXTERNAL TRAINING

TRAINING REPORT AS AT 2022

Training Programs	Participation
Presiding Officers Training	2,638
Introduction to Elections Training	341
Media Training-General Election	135



Parliament of the Republic of Fiji - Witness Attendance Form

Standing Committee on:	Justice, Law and Human Rights
Name of Organisation	Electoral Commission + Election's Office.
Submittee Category:	
Method of Submission:	Face to Face Submission
Date:	2:00 PM
Time:	10/09/25

Attendee's Details : Please enter/select your details in the below fields.

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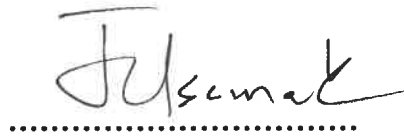
MEMBER'S SIGNATURES



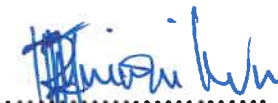
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Hon. Ratu Rakuita Vakalalabure
(Chairperson)



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Hon. Faiyaz Koya
(Deputy Chairperson)



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Hon. Jone Usamate
(Member)



.....
Hon. Ratu Isikeli
Tuiwailevu
(Member)



.....
Hon. Sachida Nand
(Member)



.....
Hon. Josaia Niudamu
(Member)

DATE: 26/09/2025

[VERBATIM REPORT]

STANDING COMMITTEE ON JUSTICE, LAW AND HUMAN RIGHTS

ANNUAL REPORTS

2020-2021 Annual Report

2021-2022 Annual Report

INSTITUTIONS:

Electoral Commission and FEO

VENUE:

Big Committee Room (East Wing)

DATE:

Thursday, 18th September, 2025

VERBATIM REPORT OF THE MEETING OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON JUSTICE, LAW AND HUMAN RIGHTS HELD AT THE BIG COMMITTEE ROOM (EAST WING), PARLIAMENT PRECINCTS, GOVERNMENT BUILDINGS, ON THURSDAY, 18TH SEPTEMBER, 2025, AT 2.21 P.M.

Interviewee/Submittee: Electoral Commission and Fijian Elections Office

In Attendance:

- (1) Mr. Usaia Ratuvi - Chairman, Electoral Commission
 - (2) Ms. Ana Mataciwa - Supervisor of Elections
 - (3) Ms. Ana Senimeli - Director Operations
 - (4) Mr. Mesake Dawai - Manager Legal
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MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, members of the public, the secretariat, ladies and gentlemen tuning in through the Parliament Channel, a very good afternoon to you all. It is a pleasure to welcome everyone, especially the viewers who are watching this session.

At the outset, for information purposes, pursuant to Standing Order 111, under the Standing Orders of Parliament, please, note that the submission is open to the public and the media, and being streamed live on Parliament's website and social media platforms.

For any sensitive information concerning the matter before us this afternoon that cannot be disclosed in public, that can be provided to the Committee either in private or in writing. However, please, be advised that there are only a few specific circumstances that allow for a non-disclosure, which includes:

- (1) national security matters;
- (2) third party confidential information;
- (3) personnel or human resources matters; and
- (4) Committee deliberation and development of Committee recommendations and report.

This is a parliamentary meeting, and all information gathered is covered under Parliamentary Powers and Privileges Act 2016. However, please, bear in mind that we do not condone slander or libel of any sort, and any information brought before this Committee should be based on facts.

In terms of the protocol of this meeting, please, minimise the usage of mobile phones and all phones are to be on silent mode while the meeting is in progress. I wish to also remind the honourable Members and our guests this afternoon that all questions to be asked are to be addressed through the Chair.

Ladies and gentlemen, I would like to take this time to introduce the honourable Members of the Standing Committee of Justice, Law and Human Rights.

(Introduction of Committee Members)

Ladies and gentlemen and honourable Members, today, the Committee will be hearing a submission on the Electoral Commission 2020-2022 Annual Reports. For your information, the Committee has resolved that we will ask our questions after you have completed your submission.

I now invite our guests to introduce themselves and begin their submission, after which, there will be a question-and-answer session.

(Introduction of Electoral Commission and Fiji Election Office Officials)

MR. U. RATUVILI.- In terms of the subject matter for which we are here today, unfortunately, I will try to be of assistance, but I assumed this post this year, so I will defer to the rest of my delegation who are here.

MS. A. MATAICIWA.- Mr. Chairman and honourable Members, with me this afternoon are my colleagues from the Fijian Elections Office (FEO). They will introduce themselves.

[Introduction of FEO Officials]

MS. A. MATAICIWA.- This afternoon, we will be going through the 19 clarifications that were sorted through the Electoral Commission. But before that, I would like to take this time to thank you, Mr. Chairman, for deferring from yesterday to today and we are appreciative of that.

In terms of queries on the Electoral Commission 2020 Annual Report, for Question No. 1 on electoral law reforms, the status of recommendations from the 2018 Multinational Observer Group (MOG), after the 2018 General Election, the MOG Report was published. It had 21 recommendations, which we had attached together with our letter of response whereby 14 were accepted and seven were not considered. So, we had accepted 14 of the 2018 recommendations. Attached with our letter is the 2018 MOG recommendation summary report, of which 14 were accepted and seven were not considered.

In terms of what was accepted, through you, Mr. Chairman, does the Committee want me to go through that?

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Can you just stick to the responses, please?

MS. A. MATAICIWA.- Thank you. Those 21 recommendations were mainly in terms of removal of restriction on party identification in official election materials. We had accepted Recommendation No. 1 and that was reflected in our National Candidates List.

Apart from that, there was also the voter registration external audit which we had also accepted. Although the Electoral Commission had tried its best through Expression of Interest on four different occasions to ensure that the National Register of Voters is audited before the 2022 General Election, it was not able to fulfil that. However, the Electoral Commission did make attempts to try and have an external audit done on the National Register of Voters in preparation for the 2022 General Election.

In terms of the Supervisor of Elections (SOE), the legislation should incorporate the principles which the SOE respected in practice in 2018, that the Fijian public can inspect the full register. We had accepted this recommendation, and we had clearly reflected it, Mr. Chairman

Then we have the legal framework recommendations. Recommendations No. 4 was to review section 18 of the Electoral Act, to ensure that the SOE - the Registrar of Political Parties and the Electoral Commission can administer the law constructively, seeking compliance before redress and with criminal investigation as the last resort. That was done through amendments to the electoral laws in which we had brought in section 116(4A) and 144(1A), which looked at what the SOE could do to rectify breaches.

Recommendation Nos. 7 and 8 were also accepted, which was in terms of enhancing the institutional capacity of the Electoral Commission, as well as increase its public profile and transparency of its operation. For the 2022 General Election, that was followed through. They had their own, as well as resources, to support the institution.

Recommendation Nos. 9 and 10 looked at publicising procedures in terms of any complaints that were brought against the SOE, as well as conduct a review of voter education activities. For those recommendations, the Electoral Commission, in terms of complaints that were received against the SOE, they normally had the SOE excused from his/her duty as Secretary to deliberate on the matter.

For the review of the voter education, a special project taskforce was activated by the then SOE that looked at awareness training in preparation for the 2022 General Election.

Recommendation Nos. 12 and 13 were also accepted, and this is in terms of campaign period, which required parties to report on campaign expenditure following an election and consider setting campaign expenditure limit. So, a new provision was introduced in the Political Parties (Registration, Conduct, Funding and Disclosures) Act 2013 to capture that, which was section 25(1A), that actually looked at how political parties submit to the Registrar of Political Parties a written declaration giving details of their assets and liabilities after the polling day.

For Recommendation No. 13 on the clarity, the start and finish of campaign period, that was also accepted, and it was through an amendment to section 109A, which is a new provision in the Electoral Act. For this section, it allowed the Electoral Commission to determine the campaign period. So, on 17th March, 2022, the Electoral Commission published a decision to that effect, which was from 26th April 2022 to 48 hours prior to 14th December.

On Recommendation No. 15 on civil society and voter education, there was a recommendation from the MOG Report for the Electoral Commission to strengthen efforts to build productive partnership with civil society organisations. That was also done through the taskforce that was set up, so through that, a total of 464 community election advocates were accredited and they performed their functions.

Recommendation No. 16, which was reviewing the appropriateness of section 115 of the Electoral Act, that was reviewed and a guideline and a form was formulated for the 2022 General Election, which was approved by the Electoral Commission on 25th April, 2022.

Recommendation No. 19 on women, people with disabilities and other marginalised groups, so for that recommendation, all stakeholders should continue their efforts to promote women, including candidates. So, through the taskforce which was approved by the Electoral Commission, it was able to train and certified 47 women representatives from women's group, villages and settlements in Fiji, and they were able to conduct awareness sessions.

On the last recommendation that was accepted which was Recommendation No. 20 on the restriction of media reporting during the blackout period, so for that request, there was a media handbook that was released on 14th June, 2022, which was approved by the Electoral Commission. There was also a face to face media workshop that was held on 8th September, 2022 and a training for media personnel on that.

Mr. Chairman, those were the 21 recommendations, 14 of which were accepted from the MOG Report.

For the internal audit in No. 2, seeking clarification regarding the current status of the strategic plan, at that time, there was a strategic plan which was the Fijian Elections Office 2020-2023 Strategic Plan, and we had also attached that in the letter, Mr. Chairman. Since the implementation of this Strategic Plan, if we look at pages 42 and 43, it has milestones for the FEO.

There were nine milestones that were reflected for the year 2020 which were all achieved and there are as follows:

- (1) the development of an online register for political parties;
- (2) staffing structure for the 2022-2023 General Election;
- (3) implementing inventory management system;
- (4) finalizing the General Election Calendar for the 2022 General election;
- (5) publishing the provisional polling venue list;
- (6) developing a four year voter registration strategy;
- (7) Communications Strategy approved;
- (8) Implementing the industrial election management platform; and
- (9) establishing the IT directorate.

If we look at 2021, we had ten milestones, but 90 percent was completed. Out of the ten, the nine that was completed, included the following:

- (1) Finalisation of the operational manuals and books and trainer guides.
- (2) PRINCE2 Project Management Training for senior staff.
- (3) Finalisation of the Procurement Plan for the 2022 General Election.
- (4) Divisional Office operational for the 2022 General Election.
- (5) Finalisation of the 2022 General Election Operational Plan.
- (6) Publication of the Fiji National Polling Venue Directory.
- (7) Conducting overseas voter registration.
- (8) Implementation of e-training platform and e-service portal; and
- (9) Establishment of a software and network monitoring system.

What was left was the audit of the National Register of Voters.

For the year 2022, we had seven milestones and completion rate was 86 percent. That was the election year. The ones that were completed were the following:

- (1) Declaration of assets and liabilities.
- (2) Publication of Income and Expenditure for Political Parties.
- (3) 100 percent recruitment of election officials.
- (4) 100 percent training of election officials.
- (5) Area officers were operational for the 2022 General Election.
- (6) 2022 General Election was conducted.
- (7) Media training on elections was conducted.

What was left to be completed for the year 2022 was the Network and Software audit.

For 2023, we had 100 percent completion rate. We had five milestones, as follows:

- (1) Review of the 2022 General Election Processes.
- (2) Submission and publication of the Supervisor of Elections Report.
- (3) Publication of the Joint Report by the Supervisor of Elections and Electoral Commission.

- (4) Development of the 2024-2027 Strategic Plan.
- (5) Completion of the Post-Election Audit.

For Question No. 3 - communications and public relations, the Committee had sought clarification on the purpose of the survey and how the information collected was utilised or implemented in decision-making processes. So, there was a nationwide voter survey that was done in the year 2020, its purpose was basically to seek feedback from the voters on their voting experience for the 2018 General Election. It was designed in such a way for the FEO to understand the context and background of the voters, their behaviour pattern, their expectations, election timeline and experiences in the 2018 General Election. The information that was gathered from the survey then assisted the FEO in developing more effective strategies for the 2022 General Election, which was then approved by the then Electoral Commission.

Sir, on Question No. 4 in terms of the Communications Strategy for the 2022 General Election and the strategic awareness programme, the Committee sought clarification on the implementation status of the strategy and the assessment of its overall effectiveness.

In terms of the Communications Strategy and Strategic Awareness Programme Plan, Mr. Chairman, we were not able to submit a copy of that because none of us have seen the copy. Nevertheless, whilst looking back at the 2022 General Election and prior to that, in terms of communication strategies and strategic awareness programme, what we saw was programmes that relied mostly on media, especially our presence on the social media, which was fully exhausted. We had live updates on *Facebook* every 4.00 pm by the then Supervisor of Elections. There was also media training that was done virtually in face-to-face workshops. Itineraries were prepared for the media, as well as for Civic Society Organisations (CSOs) and political parties. We had walkthrough events that allowed for observation purposes of electoral processes.

In terms of the media campaign, we recorded voter engagements around 200,000 during our 'Know Your Election Campaign', which was held in February 2022. We also had bonanza promotions that were rolled out to attract voters, as well as direct engagements at grassroots level. So, the SOE and his Senior Management Team visited a number of villages and settlements to speak directly with voters while also having informal sessions with them.

In terms of the overall effectiveness of the Communication Strategy, after the 2022 General Election, we had a review of all the processes and lessons learned from there are now reflected in our existing 2024-2027 Strategic Plan.

In terms of the e-training platform, we have the e-Vuli platform which was developed in 2021. We have attached that together with the summary of the e-learning training programme which was conducted from 2021 to 2022.

Mr. Chairman and honourable Members, if we look at that summary which also has training reports from 2023 and 2024, it does show how we have utilised our e-Vuli platform and that is through certain trainings that we conducted, including induction trainings, not only for our permanent staff, but to short-term staff as well, as well as time management training and other trainings that were required to ensure that staff were well prepared in terms of conducting the election. Today, a total of 3,527 participants have participated through this e-training platform, and we still continue to use it.

For the ICT project, in terms of the planned project that was reflected, for 2021, the planned project for ICT was not implemented. However, in 2022, the Disaster Recovery Solution project was

completed. The enhancement of computer network security was done successfully in 2023 and upgrade to the core server infrastructure located with us was completed in 2024. With the upgrade of our core server infrastructure, we have successfully redesigned the network, which now allows our Voter Services Centre to link to our server at the FEO Headquarters.

MS. A. SENIMELI.- For Question No. 7 - clarification on the implementation of the Election Management Information System (EMIS), the EMIS is a software which was developed to be used by FEO. It was developed from 2016 to 2017 by National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) Technologies and the specifications were given by FEO.

This software consists of various system modules including the polling venue management, nominations and party registration, logistics, voter list and our module for postal voting. The FEO is the sole owner and service provider of this system. This product has been utilised by the FEO for both the 2018 and the 2022 General Elections.

On Question No. 8 pertaining to data cleaning exercise for the National Register of Voters, the data cleaning process is conducted twice a year, that is, every six months. This process is normally conducted in the months of January and July every year.

The data cleaning process allows the removal of voters who are no longer eligible to be registered in the National Register of Voters (NRV). This process ensures that the NRV is consistently maintained within the updated and accurate listing of voters.

On Question No. 9 on industrial elections, the Industrial Elections Department still exists at the FEO. They are responsible for conducting two types of elections, firstly, for trade union elections for all trade unions that are currently registered with the Registrar of Trade Unions consisting of 44 registered trade unions and, secondly, is the responsibility of this Department which is the conduct of elections that is approved by the honourable Minister responsible for elections. That is done by a notice in the Gazette.

At the moment, there are five entities that have been approved by the honourable Minister for the FEO to conduct elections, which include:

- (1) Fijian Holdings Limited;
- (2) Fiji Co-operative Dairy Company Limited;
- (3) Fiji National University Students Association;
- (4) Fiji National University; and
- (5) Fiji Medical Association.

Question No. 10, Mr. Chairman, on the reported milestone achievements for 2020, those three milestones that were deferred from 2020 to 2021, included the implementation of the Inventory Management System, the Communications Strategy and the implementation of the Industrial Elections Management Platform.

For the three milestones that are were moved to 2021, the first one, which is the Inventory Management System, that has been completed, and it is currently operational at the FEO. For the second one, the Communications Strategy, that was used in the 2022 General Election. For the final one, which is the Industrial Elections Management Platform, that was also developed and completed in 2021. That system allowed trade unions to access and also put in information or documents that were required by the FEO, and the system is only being used by the Team for the back end component, just to facilitate the administrative aspects of a trade union election.

For Question No. 11 on the voter turnout, it declined from 84 percent in 2014 to 68 percent in 2022. There were multiple factors that influenced the voter turnout across electoral systems globally, and the FEO has identified ‘enhancing citizen confidence and knowledge through comprehensive voter education’ as representing one of the most impactful interventions within our control.

For the Electoral Commission and FEO, in the initial stages of implementing this three-phase awareness approach which we took, the first phase was to enhance our media presence and this approach that we are now doing is through the launch of the FEO mascot, which is an animated box character which we have launched recently.

The second phase which we are now doing is the education and training programmes. That is through the introduction of a school selection toolkit which we call the ‘SET Programme’. This, however, is still pending approval from the Ministry of Education and Cabinet, and we are hoping that this programme will assist 176 high schools in conducting their student elections.

For the third phase, which is grassroots engagement and collaboration, this includes active partnership with our Community Election Advocates Programme, which is a face to face initiative of trained champions around communities nationwide, to facilitate a two-way information flow at the grassroots level.

For stakeholders’ coordination, we are doing this with the media organisations, faith-based organisations and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), NGOs, student bodies, Municipal Councils and educational institutions. This comprehensive approach represents a strategic shift to proactive engagement, ensuring every eligible Fijian has the knowledge, confidence and support needed for meaningful democratic participation.

Mr. Chairman, for Question No. 12 on queries pertaining to the Electoral Commission 2021-2022 Annual Report on the Strategic Plan and KPIs for the three-year period, the Electoral Commission does not have a Strategic Plan. However, its operational arm is the FEO, which had developed a Strategic plan for 2020-2023. The internal auditor is tasked with assessing the achievement of milestones and activities reflected in this Strategic Plan.

Mr. Chairman, Manager Legal will take over now for the remaining questions. *Vinaka.*

MR. M. DAWAI.- Mr. Chairman, on Question No. 13, the Committee seeks clarification on whether the Electoral Commission does consider its current HR adequate, particularly in terms of permanent expertise in the legal, compliance and ICT areas. Our submission is that the role of the Electoral Commissioners is such that they are not required to work or operate from their office on a full-time basis. The SOE as the Secretary to the Electoral Commission, provides the adequate resources when the need arises. Currently, that is the arrangement that we have, and we attend to the requests of the Electoral Commission urgently and they are treated urgent.

For Question No. 14, the Committee seeks clarification on the reasons why the FEO Annual Report was excluded in the 2022 Electoral Commission Annual Report. The year 2022 was an election year. The FEO and Electoral Commission are legally obliged under section 14(g) of the Electoral Act 2014, to jointly submit a post-election report to His Excellency the President and to Parliament. This joint report covers all activities of the FEO throughout the year in 2022. This has always been the practice every year when a general election is held.

For Question No. 15, the Committee seeks clarification on the number of times that the SOE have appeared in Electoral Commission meetings from 2020 to-date. From the year 2020 to-date, the Commission held a total number of 71 meetings. From these meetings, the SOE had attended 56 meetings in their capacity as the Secretary to the Electoral Commission.

For Question No. 16, the Committee seeks clarification on the reason why the audit accounts is not included in the Electoral Committee Report. Our response is, the auditing of accounts is conducted by the Office of the Auditor-General (OAG) and, therefore, is not reflected in the Annual Report, as is the usual practice. However, once the OAG submits the audited accounts for the Electoral Commission and the FEO, we do appear before the Standing Committee on Public Accounts to clarify any matters arising from the Report.

For Question No. 17, the Committee seeks clarification on how does the Electoral Commission measure its effectiveness for voter education and communications campaign in terms of reach, engagement of voters and trust levels with the voters? Our submission is, the Electoral Commission recognises that effective voter education requires comprehensive measurement across multiple dimensions. To ensure current and intended awareness campaigns meet strategic objectives, a thorough evaluation framework has been defined, combining traditional performance indicators with engagement metrics and direct community feedback mechanisms. This includes:

- (1) Primary Success Indicator
Voter turnout statistics remain the ultimate measure of success, with the 2022 baseline of 68.2 percent overall turnout, providing the benchmark for improvement.
- (2) Digital and Community Indicators
These include the –
 - (a) volume of queries, questions and clarifications received on social media platforms;
 - (b) number of stakeholder invitations received for participation events;
 - (c) community election advocate activation rates across Divisions; and
 - (d) media coverage analysis - noting 70.5 percent rely on TV, 70.1 percent on radio for election information.
- (3) Direct Community Feedback
The willingness of organisations to collaborate, for example, the Methodist Church and the Assemblies of God, providing free venues, electricity and water, as well as effective partnership with CSOs that are willing to work with the FEO in conducting awareness sessions.
- (4) Voter Perception Survey
The 2024 baseline survey of 14,269 eligible voters planned follow up survey during Pre-Writ period to assess confidence levels and post-election comprehensive review measuring voter satisfaction.

Mr. Chairman, for Question No. 18, the Committee seeks clarification on what the Electoral Commission intends to do to improve the voter turnout for industrial elections, as it was noted that 3,115 out of the 6,125 registered voters participated in this election process. It is our submission that the FEO has made available various voting methods, including postal voting and office balloting, to encourage voter participation.

Further, the FEO organises annual review workshops for trade unions to seek feedback from trade unions, and these are used to develop strategies to improve our service delivery and encourage

voter participation. Further trade union election news is consistently disseminated through social media platforms as a means of creating awareness and encouraging participation.

Lastly, in Question No. 19, the Committee seeks clarification on how the SOE coordinates with unions, CSOs and political parties to foster trust and wider democratic engagement. Our submission is, the FEO, through its Stakeholder Engagement and Awareness (SEA) Department, coordinates all CSO engagement and collaboration activities. Additionally, the FEO participates as a member of working groups organised and facilitated by CSOs and NGOs, ensuring two-way communication and mutual learning.

The Community Elections Advocates Programme will also exemplify this partnership, engaging persons from grassroots communities identified by or currently engaged with CSOs as active and trusted community members. The CSOs help identify potential advocates, support their activities through existing networks, and provide continuous feedback on community needs throughout the electoral cycle.

Mr. Chairman, that is the submission from our delegation this afternoon. Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you very much, Justice Ratuveli, SOE, and your Team, for the responses provided to the Committee this afternoon. Honourable Members, I now open the floor, and you are now obliged or welcome to pose questions with respect to the Report that is before this Committee. You have the floor now, honourable Members.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Chairman, first of all, let me thank the Chairman of the Electoral Commission for his attendance, as well as SOE and the Team. Thank you very much for being here.

To start off, from a general perspective, SOE, in your capacity as the Secretary to the Electoral Commission, when you spoke earlier on regarding the MOG Report, when the MOG Report is actually presented to you, obviously, you come up with a list that says certain recommendations are accepted - certain are not. In that process - the acceptance and the non-acceptance of the recommendations, how is that determined? Is the Electoral Commission just decipher it and determine it on its own, or is there a consultation process that takes place with respect to the determination of what will be accepted or not?

MS. A. MATAICIWA.- Thank you, honourable Koya. Through you, Mr. Chairman, for the 2018 recommendations of the MOG Report, the SOE then basically gives the recommendations to his Team first, which consists of the operations team led by the Director Operations, who go through their recommendations to see operationally whether it is doable or not. Whatever the recommendations from the FEO Team, that would then be tabled to the Electoral Commission. Then there is a discussion between the Electoral Commission Secretary and the then Electoral Commission, and then it is tabled through.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- So, effectively, there is no other consultation that actually occurs with respect to the MOG Report in terms of the recommendations that are there. Once you present it to the Commission, I do not know for want of a better word, putting it, once it has gone through the process of going through the Director and you got it, and you send it to the Commission, does the Commission then go out and consult on the basis of, "These are the recommendations, we would like to hear from the civil society or members of the political parties or whatever, to see whether these recommendations should be accepted or not, or should be turned into law, et cetera". That is the question. Is there another consultation process that the Commission will undertake post-receiving the MOG Report from the SOE?

MS. A. MATAICIWA.- Mr. Chairman, through you, I am not aware if there were processes for the 2018 MOG Report recommendations, which was then reflected for the 2022 General Election.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Chairman, just on that MOG Report, I have three very brief questions on that Report:

- (1) On Recommendation No. 8, where we have meetings with political parties. You mentioned in this Report that meetings with political parties continued until 2022. A very simple question; is that continuing now?
- (2) On Recommendation No. 12, in the very last sentence, it said, “the data on expenditure – this is requiring parties to report campaign expenditure following election and consider setting campaign expenditure limits. The data on expenditure will be collected in the next election, as at an appropriate decision can be made thereafter”. What does that actually mean, and what is the progress on that particular aspect?
- (3) In relation to the MOG Report is Recommendation No. 18. It is about the approval for who is going to be an observer in Fiji. It is mentioned here that the way in which it is done is that the Minister responsible for election would be in a better position to appoint or invite international domestic observers instead of the Electoral Commission. This has been the trend in the last two years' General Elections.

People could say, in that particular case, that there could be some tampering in deciding who the observers would be, from the political sphere. Considering that, that sort of a judgment can be made, what is your thinking on this - keeping it to the Minister, or opening it up to the Commission itself to make a decision?

So, those very three short questions on the MOG Report.

MS. A. MATAICIWA.- In terms of clarification for Recommendation No. 8, we have not had any meeting this year. However, last year, we did have meetings, so we have been having meetings with political parties, but for this year we have not had any meetings so far.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Any reason for that?

MS. A. MATAICIWA.- We had scheduled meetings, but we had agreed with political parties that once agenda on the meeting has been resolved, then we would come together for the meeting.

In terms of Recommendation No. 12.

HON. J. USAMATE.- That is on expenditure.

MS. A. MATAICIWA.- For this statement, we have not done anything yet.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Do you have any plans to do so?

MR. M. DAWAI.- Mr. Chairman, for that, it has been accepted and it has been implemented. There was an amendment done to the Political Parties (Registration, Conduct, Funding and Disclosures) Act 2013 and the new inclusion was section 25(1A) which reads, and I quote:

“A political party must, no later than the sixtieth day after polling day, submit to the Registrar a written declaration giving details of all assets and liabilities as at the thirtieth day after polling day and income and expenditure, including all contributions, donations or pledges of contributions or donations, whether in cash or in kind, made or to be made from the date the writ is issued to the thirtieth day after polling day.”

The above recommendation has been implemented and adopted, and that has been done through the amendment to the Political Parties (Registration, Conduct, Funding and Disclosures) Act 2013, with the insertion of section 25(1A), political parties to declare their assets and liabilities, as well as their expenditure. The amendment was done in 2021.

MS. A. MATAICIWA.- For the Domestic Observer Group, in the 2022 Joint Report of the Electoral Commission and the SOE, the Electoral Commission had made an undertaking that they wish to be consulted in terms of the composition and architecture of the Observer Group. In terms of the current status, the law says it is the Minister responsible for elections, but if that does change, then what we have done so far is enable our stakeholders to be impart with electoral processes so that when the need does arise for domestic observers to be there, they are capable to take on that responsibility.

HON. S. NAND.- Mr. Chairman, through you, my query is on Recommendation No. 2 of the MOG Report. It talks about the external audit of the Register of Voters. In any election, to gain credibility is how current the register is for the voters. As you have said that you have made two attempts to get it audited by an external auditor and it has not happened in 2022. Has that been completed so far? We are into 2025 and nearing another election, have we had an audit of the Register of Voters?

MR. A. MATAICIWA.- At this stage, we have not had any external audit on the National Register of Voters. However, we are in the process of having it conducted because this was also one of the commitments of the Electoral Commission in the Joint Report in which they had made an undertaking that it will be done before the next general election.

HON. S. NAND.- Have you identified someone to conduct that external audit?

MR. A. MATAICIWA.- At this stage, no, but we are in the process.

HON. S. NAND.- Because of the Register audit per se, your results app was the topic of discussion. Has that been externally audited to ensure that there are no more glitches *per se* in the coming elections?

MR. A. MATAICIWA.- In terms of the glitch which occurred in the 2022 General Election results mobile app, it did not occur in the system itself. However, we note the plea from the public in terms of having it audited before the next general election. That is something we are working on. Please, be rest assured that we will be informing our stakeholders when it does happen and whilst we prepare for the next general election.

HON. S. NAND.- You are assuring us that both the Register of Voters and the App will be audited and will be up and running effectively before the next election.

MR. A. MATAICIWA.- For the mobile app, that has been an Electoral Commission decision. We are not using the mobile app for the upcoming general election, but for the results system, that is something that we will be auditing before the next general election.

HON. S. NAND.- Including the Register of Voters?

MR. A. MATAICIWA.- Yes, the external auditing of the National Register of Voters.

HON. RATU J.B. NIUDAMU.- Through you, Mr. Chairman, on the voter turnout, the data speaks for itself. There is a decrease in voter turnout from 2014 and 2022, so there is a decrease from 84 percent to 68 percent. My question to the SOE, do you have data on the racial breakdown of voter turnout in the last General Election? Is there data showing which racial communities in Fiji had lower turnout on the voting day, or if it is not racially from each Division or from different Province?

What I have noted is that the FEO has been doing multiple campaigns from 2014 till the last Election, but there is still a decrease in voter turnout. I believe you should target a particular person or a particular Division. You have to know your performance indicator. My question is, do you have data during this period of review that can assist you in the upcoming General Election?

MS. A. MATAICIWA.- Mr. Chairman, we do not have data based on racial breakdown, but we do have it in gender, age group and by areas. We have considered the reasons for the voter turnout, and we have built that into our strategies for the next election.

We are also working with our stakeholders, particularly the Divisional Commissioners and their teams in identifying some of areas that had recorded low voter turnout, both for pre-poll voting as well as election day. Our teams are working with them on the various types of strategies that we are going to use to increase voter engagement, registration engagement and access, as well as turnout for the next election.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Just a follow-up question, when you mentioned areas, do you mean those who are voting at that polling station or where they reside? What do you mean by areas?

MS. A. MATAICIWA.- The FEO has its own electoral areas and we try to align it with Government areas, mainly with the Divisional Commissioner's areas. Those are the areas where the voters reside and where their polling venues are located as well.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Are these reports and analysis showing voter turnout by age group and location published and are available to the public? Also, when the data shows that certain age groups or areas have lower voter turnout, does the FEO carry out any further research to find out why that is happening?

MS. A. MATAICIWA.- Mr. Chairman, we did a voter perception survey in terms of the 2022 General Election to assess our strategy and we will be happy to submit that as well.

A report on that was endorsed by our current Electoral Commission Chairperson, Mr. Ratuveli, and whatever was mentioned by our Director Operations has been reflected in this survey whereby we identified places that had low voter turnout in numbers.

We went to those places and asked specific questions. That is, apart from surveys that we conducted nationwide. In this report, it reflected the true outcome of why they did not turn up. It all came back to how we were engaging, how we were operating and how we were conducting our awareness back then from this voter perception survey.

We will also have another survey which is reflected in our current Strategic Plan. This will be a pre-writ survey in which we will be engaging our voters to see, with our current awareness

strategy, whether it is effective or not. We will have another survey after the next General Election to see the effectiveness of the new one.

For the new strategies of the awareness campaign, at the moment, it is with the FEO. We are finalising it before we table it to the Electoral Commission for their endorsement and implementation.

HON. S. NAND.- Mr. Chairman, on the same topic in terms of voter registration and voter turnout, I believe what you are telling us is that you have in your database the Register of Voters, the entire data, and you can also tell us from which Divisions, how many people turned in but did not vote and an analysis. Jumping the gun a bit, what if the electoral system changes and it goes with different constituencies and communal seats, will you need to carry out another set of voter registration because if you do not have the ethnicity data there, then how will you determine how many voters of which ethnicity are in each Division or in each constituency, whatever it may be? Will you need to do another set of new voter registration, making the current system redundant?

MS. A. MATAICIWA.- Mr. Chairman, in terms of our existing National Register of Voters and our system, it does reflect the current system which is an Open List System. However, if we do have a change in the electoral system, then that would also affect the system that we use in terms of registration and in terms of logistics.

HON. S. NAND.- You have not really answered my question. Can the current system or register or data be used if the electoral system changes or will this register become redundant and you will have to do another set of voter registration?

MS. A. MATAICIWA.- Mr. Chairman, it will depend on the legal reform because we could have a system that takes us back to the number of constituencies but then, we will have to see whether it will be reflected to our current system or we will need to enhance it. So, we will be able to honestly answer your question when we do receive the legal framework and see whether it matches with our current system. At the moment, we have the one that reflects the single, but it does have the name, gender, age, residential address, photograph, polling station and polling venue.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Chairman and SOE, I am not going to delve into the unknown because we still do not know what is actually going to happen. However, from the platform that we have at the moment in terms of the answers in Recommendation No. 8, I think there is a data cleaning exercise that actually occurs with the National Register of Voters. Is that data cleaning exercise (may be Mr. Dawai might be able to answer me) done digitally or are you physically having to go down every six months and get your records? Are you able to access it from a digital perspective?

MR. M. DAWAI.- Mr. Chairman and honourable Members, for data cleaning, we hold it every six months, so twice in a year - one beginning in January and another one in July. We have a memorandum of understanding with various statutory authorities that help us in terms of the exchanging of data. For instance, with the Fiji Corrections Service, they confirm to us if a person has been sentenced to a penalty of imprisonment, that is 12 months or more. As soon as they go in, what we do is we flag them as inmates. When they are discharged, they get a discharge letter from the Fiji Corrections Service and they come to the VCs to present that, and then we unflag them and they get to vote again.

For BDM in terms of deceased persons, they provide us with the list, so it is manually done. Our Manager Voter Registration basically sends an email, and we provide an excel sheet where we ask them to fill in the details.

Also, for Immigration which our third stakeholder for data cleaning, they provide us with a list of persons that have renounced their citizenship and are no longer Fiji citizens, so we remove them from the roll.

Basically, through exchange of emails and whatever information is provided, then we clean the National Register of Voters with that.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- So, it is still a manual process, so to speak, it is not being digitized?

MR. M. DAWAI.- Yes.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- My second question there, related to that, in terms of your MOU that you have with the BDM, for example, that it will pop up immediately in your system? For example, if someone passes away, immediately you will know, and you do not necessarily have to go through that manual exercise. I know it is a phenomenal exercise to actually do that twice a year to see how many people have passed on, how many people are convicted, how many people have removed their citizenship, et cetera. So, are you looking at completely digitising it, especially in light of the fact that the current government is going through this digitisation process?

MR. M. DAWAI.- For some of the data that have been provided to us, we have had to do secondary verification, especially for removal of deceased persons. If we have to resort to that, to entirely rely on digital data, there is a risk of us removing the wrong person. You would have heard from previous complaints where voters have been flagged as deceased. Sometimes, through this data cleaning process because of the issue of similar names where that risk can arise, so we have had to contact the voters again. So, we have our verification processes to ensure that we do not remove the wrong person. I understand what you are saying for convenience and efficiency, but there are risks out there, that we also would like to ensure that we address and to ensure that we do not remove the wrong people from the roll.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Thank you, Mr. Dawai, I think you have answered my third question, which is relative to that, which is about the risk. So, you will have a backup system to say, "Alright, so and so is digitally being declared non-existent anymore", but you will verify it.

My other question is with respect to Part 7 where we spoke about the EMIS. The system is now owned, from what you say, by FEO and the product was successfully utilised for the 2018 and 2022 General Elections. What you are telling us is that the technology that is there is currently fit for purpose. It does not have issues. Are you going to be looking at upgrading the system in terms of what we have seen, in terms of results, et cetera, in terms of the IT system - the software that was developed?

MS. A. SALABOGI.- Mr. Chairman, through you, the FEO owns the EMS, including all the source codes. After every election, we do review the system, and we look at ways of how we can enhance it or make it more efficient. It is a system that is basically or perhaps, used by the operational arm of the FEO, it contains our postal voting module, our polling venue management, so those are the areas that we normally review, and we enhance it before the following general election. Sir, we do review and update the system after every electoral cycle.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- This question is relative to Question No. 11 with respect to the voter turnout and the decline from 84 percent to 68 percent. I understand the explanation given was that voter turnout across global systems, there are various things that come up. The FEO has, obviously,

identified that citizen confidence and knowledge through comprehensive voter education represents one of the most impactful interventions within our control.

If that was recognised, have we done a survey or some kind of study that actually tells us the underlying reason for the voter apathy, or was it the system itself? What I am trying to determine is, what was the underlying reason for such a vast difference between the 84 percent and 68 percent. So, when we did our surveys, did we ask, “why did you not vote?” or “what was the large majority?”

I think we have had discussions on this, and we say there is a lot of voter apathy. People might say, “Oh, so and so is going to win and they are not going to go and vote”, but what was the underlying reason so that that that can be addressed. For us too, in terms of recommendations that we make to Parliament. So, is there a process of determination, SOE, that the underlying reason for the lack of turnout was that people just took off on a public holiday and did not want to vote? Was that determined?

MS. A. MATAICIWA.- Mr. Chairman, through you, in our Voter Perception Survey 2024, it does have some summary of key findings, some of which are included - accessibility of FEO services, trust in the institution, as well as basically to summarise it, comes back to our awareness strategy. An example that was given, although we did our Know Your Election Survey and we had visited our communities, but the materials that we had used were not suitable for the audience in that community. One which was brought to our attention was we brought into villages materials that were English speaking, so we had feedback from our voters, through this Voter Perception Survey, that materials to be submitted through awareness are to be relatable to them in terms of the language that is suitable to them and is a lay person’s language. In the previous one, we had basically copied the law - we put them into flip charts and into the English version for the communities.

However, apart from that, what was also gathered was in terms of the young voters. One of the common explanations given to us was that we had our young voters who were attending tertiary institutions, but they did not change their residential address. Some were here in Viti Levu, but then their polling stations were back in their residential address in the Northern Division, for example.

Apart from that is also how we had provided our services to the general public and the rest of the stakeholders. Because we also had reviews with our political parties as well as our media and CSOs, the feedback that we received as well was that we were not forthcoming in terms of our processes. For example, in the 2022 General Election, we had allowed polling agents to observe the electoral processes without them understanding the electoral processes and we also did last minute invites to them.

Those are some of the things that we have considered. Apart from engaging with our stakeholders, we have created events such as workshops, to start empowering our stakeholders so that they do understand the electoral processes and when it comes to them observing as domestic observers or polling agents, they are able to understand the processes. Those were some of the feedback, not only on this report, but also from the rest and we are trying to rectify them before the upcoming general election.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- My question, Mr. Chairman, is for the Chairman of Electoral Commission or maybe both of you can answer this. Moving forward, in terms of the decline we have had in terms of voter participation, are there thoughts being made at the Commission in terms of recommendation with respect to compulsory voting?

I gather also that in the 2014 General Election, I think there was a perception on that and because of that, we had a very high turnout. Secondly also, was there a determination made in terms of the response that you have given, SOE, about voter apathy? There was a lack of people voting because of apathy. Did we determine what percentage of it was voter apathy?

MR. U. RATUVILI.- Mr. Chairman, through you, in terms of the Electoral Commission, we have taken on board the Voter Perception Survey. I think it sets forth some strategies and target areas, so we are looking at the first-time voters, ensuring that they understand the process. Hopefully, if we have the endorsement of the Ministry and Cabinet, we would have done intervention at that stage.

The FEO is also promoting its strategies and engaging our partners, the CSOs, in trying to ensure that the people are more informed. That is something that we have noticed also when we were involved with the Electoral Reform Commissioners, as we were going around. One of the perceptions that we had was that people were, sort of, intimidated by the whole voting process. I think to cut through that barrier, is through information. Suddenly their village hall or their school, which they had access to, had all these restrictions, the policemen guarding it, et cetera, and it put some people off. I think it is very important in terms of the strategies that we employ through the FEO and the Commission as well, in terms of reminding people that voting is a duty, and it is not something to be afraid of. That is what we are trying to encourage people.

In terms of more concrete strategies, the FEO is doing its part, and we are relying very heavily on our partners. Just on a general note, what you are looking at here is our counterpart, called the electoral management body. This is the electoral management body of Fiji. The Electoral Commission is made up of the Chair which is me, and six part time Commissioners, and the operational arm is headed by the Secretary of the Commission who is the SOE. When we are talking about who is responsible for elections and the activities up to and after elections, it is basically all of us here.

HON. RATU J.B. NIUDAMU.- What measures are implemented to raise awareness and encourage people in the outer islands and in the interior to cast their vote during election day?

MS. A. MATAICIWA.- One of the measures that we have come up with is community election advocates. Previously, we brought our advocates, and it was centralised, and then they were doing awareness across the country. However, with the community election advocates, we are now working with our CSOs and those at the community level, who are leaders of the women's group, men's group, and even youth group.

We are reaching a stage where we are going to empower these leaders who are already influencers in their own community to be aware of elections. We are going to have these trainers at the fourth quarter of this year, and we will be launching this community election advocates. They are the chosen ones from the community whom we will empower. They will become advocates for election, and we will continuously provide them election materials, as we prepare them for the upcoming elections. Whilst they are doing that, when it comes to the issuance of Writ for the general election, then our awareness team from Headquarters would then go out to continue the awareness apart from those at the community level.

Apart from that, we also have lessons learned from the 2022 General Election in which we had placed more emphasis on social media. We did not have that much emphasis on our face-to-face, so this is something that we working on as well – having that face to face interactions and

discussions, not in a formal setting but also in informal setting, so that will also come through those election advocates.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Chairman, talking about the tertiary students that could not vote because they had to go back, I think in the 2022 General Election, from the Joint Report, you mentioned about the people who were registered offshore. Then you set up a special booth, was it Stanley Street or somewhere? I think that is an opportunity to be dealt with in that kind of situation, if possible.

Going back to your reporting on financials, if I am not mistaken, the approach now is that the Electoral Commission has a budget and SOE has a budget. Is that correct? Then you mentioned here that FEO have not been providing their financial reports to Committees of Parliament.

I would take it from our viewpoint as a Committee of Parliament, without the financials, it does not give us a fair reflection of the output of a particular entity, be it the FEO or be it the Electoral Commission. So, how is it that you are going to reflect that because, I think, you are just doing it on the basis of past practice?

For us as a Committee of Parliament, to get a good understanding of how well an entity is, we need to be able to see the financials and the performance against your targets, and also the relativity of your performance against similar entities in other parts of the world. So, looking at this financial aspect, do you have any consideration now to introduce that into this report so we can get a complete holistic view of the performance of the FEO, the SEO or the EC?

MS. A. MATAICIWA.- Yes, we have taken into consideration what you have mentioned and, through you, Mr. Chairman, you are, indeed, correct. For the past Annual Reports, this has been the practice, but it does not mean that we have to continue to conform into it. So, we will ensure that for the next Annual Report, that we submit our financials and data, as well as requests that have been made.

Apart from that, in terms of gearing up to the elections for the election year, that would be reflected in the Joint Report but other than that, it will be in the Annual Report.

HON. RATU J. NIUDAMU.- Mr. Chairman, a question on the electoral offences. I think there is a recommendation on the period under review under the MOG and also on the Joint Report 2022 for us to consider making election offences civil rather than criminal in nature. I would request the view of the Chairman of Electoral Commission on this recommendation which has not yet been considered.

MR. U. RATUVILI.- Basically, you are aware that Cabinet has approved the review of the elections legal infrastructure. There are currently Bills before the Solicitor-General Office, dealing specifically with that situation. I think the report that will also be tabled in Parliament has recommendations some of those things in terms of offences that are deemed as political offences or electoral offences and, hopefully, it will be tabled either in the October or November Sitting this year.

That also leads on to other questions in terms of whether we, as the election management body, are going to run the next election. But that is a question for honourable Members when this matter comes before you. That has been addressed in those proposed Bills that are before you. At the moment, they are, as they stand, and you can be assured that those have been considered and will be reflected in the Bills that will come before you shortly.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you very much.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Chairman, as I have mentioned before, reading the various documentation, the MOG Reports tend to portray that our elections as fair, even of our voter turnout. Even though the 68 percent is low, they regard it as similar to other Pacific countries. I do not know if I am talking about this MOG Report or the 2022 MOG Report.

I think a lot of your targets are making sure that you ensure that fairness but the critical target for us is voter turnout. Now, in this new Strategic Plan that you have, are you going to put a number that you will target, like 80 percent voter turnout. Are you going to put a specific target that will then direct all of your activities and focus to make sure that you achieve that target? As you have said, you will need to identify the things that are preventing you from getting to that target. What I am asking is that, is there a specific target that you are going to put in your Strategic Development Plan? I do not know whether it is there or not because if you have that, then you will focus your attention to be able to deliver this. Is that something that you will be doing?

MS. A. MATAICIWA.- Through you, Mr. Chairman, like you have rightfully mentioned, internationally even 68 percent is a good rate for voter turnout. However, in terms of target, we have not reflected a specific target in our Strategic Plan. However, in terms of voter turnout, we are looking at more than what we had seen in the 2022 General Election.

HON. J. USAMATE.- That is what I am going to say, better than 2014.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- I think in 2014, everyone had this fear that I must go and do it and that is why you had such a turnout, but it is an aspiration. I think it is important that we get as many people to vote as possible. We have had a tremendous political history. My question also relates to the data gathering exercise that you do with respect to all and sundry.

In that data gathering exercise, especially today, we have a lot of diaspora offshore who are still eligible voters. Sometimes, as you know very well, the election can hinge on maybe a thousand votes as to who gets into power or not in terms of government. The question is that in your exercise in terms of voter education, in terms of awareness, et cetera, are you looking at increased participation or increased awareness programmes going out to those whom you know? We have a considerable number of people who actually are offshore and are still eligible voters. We need to ensure that they also partake in the next election. Are you going to do that? Is it part of your Strategic Plan in terms of make sure that the awareness is there and utilising our embassies, et cetera, that when we do that and making it easier for those people to actually vote?

MS. A. MATAICIWA.- Mr. Chairman, we did note that in the 2022 General Election, there were 9,427 who registered and 651 had voted. So, in our Strategic Plan, we did mention that, and we are glad to inform the Committee this afternoon that we are at implementation stage. We have a team that is actually visiting our Fijian diaspora next month. We are targeting Fiji Day, and we have actually had MOUs with the Ministry of Employment as well as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. So, we are working closely with Ministry of Foreign Affairs in terms of involving our Fijian diaspora, as well as the Ministry of Employment with regards to those that are under the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) and New Zealand Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) Scheme.

We are targeting Australia first. We are working with the embassy, as well as with the Ministry of Employment, but we have teams that are going out to Australia covering the entire October month. We also have a team that is scheduled for New Zealand and the Cook Islands, so we are not just selecting countries randomly. These are through discussions with Ministry of Foreign

Affairs and the Ministry of Employment. We are looking at Australia, New Zealand, as well as Tuvalu and Samoa. If all goes well, then we are also looking at Papua New Guinea (PNG), Solomon Islands and United States of America (USA) for our voter registration as well as information sessions for them this year. So that is scheduled for October and November this year. We are going to New Zealand as well.

HON. RATU J.B. NIUDAMU.- Mr. Chairman, through you, I seek the opinion of SOE on this. Would compulsory voting be a solution to the poor voter turnout from 2014 to 2022 General Elections? What is your opinion if we make voting compulsory?

MS. A. MATAICIWA.- In terms of compulsory voting, at this stage, we would want to exhaust all other means before we go into compulsory voting. As reflected in our 2022 General Election review, as well as the perception report, we will need to exhaust our awareness strategies first. Once we are able to improve on that and we see the outcome for the next general election, then that would be the last resort. But at this stage, we do not want to go to compulsory voting when we ourselves as the implementers of the processes have not done our part in terms of exhausting all these awareness and registration strategies.

MS. M. DAWAI.- Mr. Chairman, through you, if I may just add on; the current Constitution does not allow for compulsory voting. If you look at the 1997 Constitution, we had compulsory voting back then. There were three elections that were conducted - the 1999, 2001 and the 2006 Elections and they all had compulsory voting. I will give you the voter turnout for those three elections.

For 1999, the voter turnout was 89.41 percent. For 2001, it was 81.05 percent and when it came to 2006, it dropped to 64 percent. Therefore, compulsory voting is not really definite in terms of improving voter turnout because experience-wise, for our country, we have had that through the 1997 Constitution. With the data that was given, we can see that we have to look at other measures to ensure that we improve on voter turnout.

HON. S. NAND.- Mr. Chairman, through you, a general question to the Chairman of the Electoral Commission and SOE. Is the Electoral Commission adequately resourced in terms of finance, personnel, or other resources, to perform its functions effectively?

MR. U. RATUVILI.- Mr. Chairman, through you, I can only answer in terms of my limited eight months on the job. I can say that the Government is adequately funding the Commission in terms of their budget for operations. They have approved personnel for support staff. We now have an Executive Secretary in place. Previously, all secretarial work and support staff work was done by a seconded staff from the FEO. We are housed at the FEO in Toorak. There is also provision for another officer, that post is being advertised right now. So, we have the secretarial support for us and in any event, all the Commissioners are part-time. We meet every month and there is adequate funding in terms of our programmes. We have had the funding for this year, as well as next year, and the Elections budget as well. That is from my experience so far.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- This is a question probably for both SOE and Chairman. In terms of the independence of the institution, I know you have said that you are literally the electoral management body but historically speaking, and I know this might be a bit thorny, SOE, issues can arise, as we all know. Do you believe that the Secretary (currently the SOE) to the Electoral Commission needs to be a completely independent person so the SOE can do his or her job single-mindedly and do it without fear or favour or influence or whatever it is at the end of the day? Do you believe that that

independence is required so we can have a qualified person sitting as the Secretary to the Electoral Commission?

MR. U. RATUVILI.- Mr. Chairman, there are two views on that, one is in terms of resources, and to have another person at that level as a Secretary to the Commission would involve utilisation of resources or funding. At the moment, under the Constitution, it just provides for a Commission and the SOE. Under the Electoral Act then, it is not in the Constitution, it came in under statute, and those are under review at the moment. Hopefully, if you feel strongly enough, then that is your opportunity to intervene at that stage, but operationally, as it is working now, it is fine looking at where we are in terms of resource constraints, et cetera.

When there are appeals, the SOE steps out, the Commission sits and hears the appeals, or when there are complaints in relation to that, the SOE also steps out. Ultimately, it is for Parliament to decide whether it is something sustainable going forth, looking at it in terms of governance, or if it is something that the Government feels that there should be stronger measures in place, then it ultimately is Parliament's call. But this is the way it is working at the moment, and I see no issues with it.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, one final question.

HON. J. USAMATE.- I noticed that for your other industrial elections, it is mandatory that all trade unions come to you but for the other bodies, do they have to apply? So, there is nothing mandatory about that at all, is that correct?

MR. M. DAWAI.- Mr. Chairman, through you, that is correct, and that is provided under section 154 of the Electoral Act 2014 gives the responsibility to the FEO to conduct trade union elections, general elections, municipal elections, and also elections that are approved by the honourable Minister. They must be registered trade unions with the Registrar of Trade Unions in order to qualify for that, to allow us to conduct the elections.

HON. J. USAMATE.- In fact, I was looking at the Sugar Cane Growers Council and they decided not to come to you because of the costs. Am I correct? Do you get these sorts of issues when people are deciding whether or not to come to FEO for the elections, or was that a rarity?

MR. M. DAWAI.- I was part of the consultation for the Sugar Cane Growers Council elections in terms of their reform. One of the things that we highlighted to them was section 154. It gives us the authority to conduct elections, and if they were going to name us in their Act to conduct elections, it would conflict with that particular provision in section 154. That was the reality, but what we advised them was they could go through the ministerial approval.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- I think this is relative to making sure that we get the right data and then we head towards bigger and better elections every single time. In terms of the voter perception and the survey that you actually conduct, is there a formula that you use in terms of, for example, we have 600,000 voters and we need to ensure that we survey, at least, x percentage, or is it just randomly done?

MS. A. MATAICIWA.- For the 2024 survey that we conducted, we had basically looked into the voter list for the 2022 General Election. We identified areas that had lower voter turnout, so we went to those areas to gauge the reasons behind their voter turnout. Then we had one that was

generalised, that went to other areas just to get their views on their voter perception towards the last General Election.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Is there a percentage that you say that when we do the survey, we will survey 20,000 people and that will be our determination?

MS. A. MATAICIWA.- For the survey that we did, we just looked at the areas that had low voter turnout, so there was no percentage allocated to it, but rather areas that had low voter turnout nationwide.

HON. J. USAMATE.- If you do not have any numbers or a formula to calculate the percentage, how do you know that it was random, or that it presented an appropriate sample for the size of the population that you are looking at?

MS. A. MATAICIWA.- We looked at the voter list for the 2022 General Election. For the Voter Perception Survey for 2024, it was just to gauge their reaction towards the 2022 General Election. We have another survey under our Strategic Plan that is scheduled for next year, which is the Pre-Writ Survey, in which we will then target areas. However, the main purpose for this survey, apart from the low voter turnout areas nationwide, how they saw the elections offers in terms of its services and providers so that we could improve on the feedback that we had received that previously portrayed fear and intimidation in terms of the services that were provided.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- You will understand why this is being asked. From a political party's perspective or independence or whatever, it is something that needs to be determined. In the future, I think it is probably wise that we look at a particular percentage of voters that need to be surveyed so that the political parties can say, "well, we can address this." As you have said, the pre-election thing and the post one is an important data for any political party or aspiring political party.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Just before I close our meeting, I offer the floor to the SOE or the Chairman of the Electoral Commission for their final comments before I close our meeting. Are there any final comments?

MR. U. RATUVILI.- Thank you, Mr. Chairman and honourable Members, on behalf of the SOE, we thank you for the opportunity to come and address you today. Hopefully, we have answered some of your questions and we look forward to your cooperation and your participation, especially the two Bills that are going to be presented in Parliament, in the not in the near future, hopefully.

The Bill, hopefully, has encapsulated what the public has indicated to the Commissioners and whether they become law now or it is deferred to come before the Committee, I think your election management body is ready for the 2026-2027 General Elections. Whatever law that is going to be guiding us, I think we are ready, we are prepared, and we look forward to more participation.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you very much, Mr. Ratuveli. On behalf of the Members of the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights and the honourable Speaker, just before I close, I take this time just to say a big *vinaka vakalevu* to you all. Thank you very much for coming this afternoon.

You are well aware of the concerns of the Committee, highlighting, touching on the points of voter turnout, digitization, et cetera. We are well aware of the work that is before you, leading up to the General Election next year. We wish you well on that. Should the Committee need further clarification on some matters, we will kindly write to you and, please, do provide responses.

On that note, honourable Members, Chairman of the Electoral Commission and SOE and your team, that concludes our meeting today.

The Committee adjourned at 4.07 p.m.