

# **PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI**



## **PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES**

### **DAILY HANSARD**

**FRIDAY, 3RD OCTOBER, 2025**

**[CORRECTED COPY]**

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**FRIDAY, 3RD OCTOBER, 2025**

The Parliament met at 9.37 a.m. pursuant to adjournment.

MR. SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

**PRESENT**

All Members were present, except the honourable Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, Civil Service, Public Enterprises and Information; honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Tourism and Civil Aviation; honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade, Co-operatives and Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises and Communications; honourable Minister for Defence and Veteran Affairs; honourable Minister for Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management; honourable Minister for iTaukei Affairs and Culture, Heritage and Arts; honourable Minister for Youth and Sports; honourable Leader of the Opposition; honourable Assistant Minister for Foreign Affairs; honourable Assistant Minister for Defence; honourable Assistant Minister for Justice; honourable V. Pillay and honourable A.A. Maharaj.

**MINUTES**

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

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Thursday, 2nd October, 2025, as previously circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

**COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE SPEAKER**

Welcome

I welcome all Honourable Members to the final sitting for this sitting week of Parliament. I also warmly welcome our guests in the gallery and those joining us via broadcast and online platforms. Thank you for staying connected and engaged in the workings of your Parliament.

Professional Development Seminar

For the information of honourable Members, a two-day Professional Development Seminar for Standing Committee and Subcommittee Members on “Bill Review in Committee”, will take place next week on Tuesday, 7th October and Wednesday, 8th October. The Seminar will be held at the Novotel Hotel in Lami, and in that respect, all Standing Committee and Subcommittee proceedings will be suspended on those two days so that Members can attend the Seminar. I would urge everyone to attend.

## QUESTIONS

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, kindly be advised that Oral Question Nos. 179/2025; 180/2025; 182/2025 and 187/2025 are deferred to the November Sitting of Parliament, so we will begin with the third Oral Question for today.

### Oral Questions

#### Purchase of Renewable Energy from IPPs (Question No. 181/2025)

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, if I may be just permitted 30 seconds just to give a little background on this particular issue, and the honourable Minister will understand it. It is relative to the amount paid to Independent Power Producers (IPPs) in terms of renewable energy, and it has been a bit of an obstacle for investors.

My question is:

Can the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance and Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics inform Parliament whether EFL will raise the rates at which it purchases renewable energy from Independent Power Producers (IPPs), in order to make it viable for landowners who wish to invest in this sector?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Member for his question. Before I answer this specific question about whether we will raise the rates, let me just give you a little background and use this opportunity to explain what the Government's agenda is and what Energy Fiji Limited (EFL) is trying to do at the moment.

Let me begin by reaffirming the Government's ambitious renewable energy targets of 100 percent electricity from renewable energy sources by 2035. So, that remains a key part of the nation's Climate Strategy. Mr. Speaker, Sir, these targets are aligned with the National Energy Policy 2023-2030, National Climate Finance Strategy and the National Development Plan 2025-2029 and Vision 2050.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in 2024, EFL's production of electricity comprised of 51.73 percent from hydro, so we are doing well with the existing infrastructure, if you look at where we are in terms of some of the other countries; 42.9 percent from thermal diesel fuel; 0.07 percent from wind and solar power; and 5.23 percent from IPPs, namely Tropik Wood Industries, Fiji Sugar Corporation and Nabou Green Energy Limited, which uses biomass for power generation, and that is considered renewable, honourable Koya.

At the outset, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to clarify that the FCCC serves as the independent regulator for electricity tariffs charged to EFL's customers. These tariffs are determined under an approved tariff methodology that is based on allowable revenue formula. It is also important to note that the feed-in tariff offered to IPPs are not regulated by the Fiji Competition and Consumer Commission (FCCC), so that is clear at the moment, until such time that we get to them.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the EFL, on the other hand, applies the same allowable revenue-based methodology when determining the feed-in tariff for IPPs. In doing so, EFL must factor it, in its required investment, costs for transmission, distribution and retail services, which are necessary to evacuate and deliver the power generated by IPPs to consumers. Sir, EFL has also recently adopted a tender process to determine the rates for IPPs. I think this competitive approach allows market

forces to drive the pricing, ensuring that the outcomes remains sustainable and equitable for both, EFL and the IPPs.

Within this framework, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the prospective IPPs are expected to undertake their own financial assessments to determine whether the feed-in tariffs provide the viable return on investment. Sir, EFL then finalises the arrangements through commercial negotiations, consistent with the approved methodology and in line with system requirements.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this approach ensures a fair, transparent and market-driven process that balances the interest of landowners and investors with the broader need to safeguard electricity affordability and reliability for all Fijians. This year, EFL announced some major decisions - an ambitious \$2 billion green energy transition plan over the next four years. This programme will be critical to ensuring that Fiji's electricity sector remains reliable, sustainable and consistent with our national development and climate commitments.

Half of this investment, Mr. Speaker, Sir, will be directed towards developing 165 megawatts of solar energy capacity. To achieve this, EFL will actively engage with IPPs, recognising that the scale of transition cannot be achieved by the utility alone.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, discussions, at the moment, are taking place with potential IPPs. This is ongoing with Government support, and I think it is essential in ensuring that the right incentives are put in place to encourage private sector investment in this sector. Without private sector investment, without independent IPPs, this dream of achieving the targets will not see fruition in the timeline that we have set in. This process requires close collaboration with FCCC, particularly in relation to tariff stabilisation and timely adjustments to ensure that investors can secure fair returns and reinvest in Fiji's energy future.

Mr. Speaker, EFL has indicated to Government that it is considering a submission for a tariff review, while also pursuing parallel projects to diversify renewable energy generation. This include the development of the 21-megawatt solar facility in the Western Division, as well as the identification of hydropotential on Viti Levu.

Beyond solar and hydro, EFL is also exploring opportunities in geothermal, wind and other modern renewable technologies. As we all know, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the provision of electricity remains the backbone of our economy, and we find that it is one of the obstacles to bid and sometimes, even smaller investments in areas where EFL has difficulty in providing transformers and reliable power. So, while renewable energy projects remain a clear national priority, Government is mindful that concessional resources must not be diverted from critical, social and infrastructure needs.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, EFL is, therefore, encouraged to actively pursue alternative financing options, including market-based instruments, greater participation of IPPs and blended finance structures. We are ready, as a government, to provide guarantees for well-structured domestic or external loans were justified to lend concessional funds. However, all borrowing must be undertaken prudently and within our existing debt management framework and within our fiscal strategy.

Government, through the Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Public Works, Meteorological Services and Transport Ministry and FCCC, is currently reviewing the tariff framework. The purpose of this review is to strike a balance, ensuring financial viability for landowners and investors, while also safeguarding electricity tariffs for households and businesses.

With respect to EFL's power purchase rates, these are determined through a transparent process that considers three key factors - cost of generation and system integration, viability for investors, and long-term security.

Mr. Speaker, Government wants to ensure that the importance of landowner-led renewable energy projects is always considered carefully. Therefore, we are exploring support measures for landowner groups, including concessional financing, capacity building and public-private partnerships, so that their participation is not solely dependent on higher feed rates, because if we leave it to just higher feed rates, their participation would be very minimal.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the short answer after this long explanation is that the rate for IPPs must follow a proper market pricing strategy, and that is what EFL has put in place. I think what we have put in place now, as part of a Government strategy, is going to work, and we will have a lot of investments coming through.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Minister for his very detailed response. My question is related to the rooftop solar panels for homes. Will this be also included or taken into consideration when EFL is developing their strategy, to also consider homes that use rooftop solar panel and when it produces extra energy, can that be put on the grid?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, as I had announced in the Budget, that is one of the things that we are perceiving. There was a very clear statement in my Budget address, which says that we are going to provide incentives for those who include rooftop solar and there is now technology that the EFL is looking at, which would be useful in making sure that surplus that is created through rooftop solar panels is taken into account when the usage is calculated and any extras goes to the grid. That is the plan and that is the announcement that I made as part of the Budget, and that is the Government's plan to promote, together with EFL, to encourage more households to move towards rooftop solar panels to add to the energy supply.

Update – Labasa Bypass Project  
(Question No. 183/2025)

HON. J.N. NAND asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Public Works, Meteorological Services and Transport update Parliament on the Labasa Bypass Project?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank honourable Joseph Nand for the question. A previous study examined a range of capacity-focused improvements along the Labasa Town Road corridor with the objective of enhancing the management of current and projected traffic operations. The proposed interventions encompassed both, physical infrastructure upgrades and corridor-wide management and policy measures, aimed at ensuring the long-term safety, efficiency and functionality of the transport network.

Among the recommended options, the construction of a new southern bypass route around the town centre, combined with targeted capacity enhancements along Labasa Town Road, including the rationalisation of on-street parking, was identified as a strategic solution that aligned strongly with the desired outcomes for corridor performance and mobility.

The proposed southern bypass reduces travel distance for regional traffic. It requires a new bridge over the Labasa River and four new intersections with other major roads with an estimated approximate cost of \$50 million. A corresponding point-to-point travel distance on the existing

Nasekula Road is approximately 3.8 kilometres.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the bypass plan has been facilitated as part of the project preparation and detailed design for 40 critical bridges and three jetties project with consultancy services provided or funded under the Asian Development Bank (ADB), World Bank Transport Infrastructure Investment Project (WBTIIP). Designs are underway, targeting signing at the end of the year, or first quarter in 2026.

The current Labasa Bridge is also included in the bridge replacement programme. In the meantime, a temporary Labasa Bridge access will connect to Siberia Road towards the new temporary Bulovi Bridge access located off Namoli Road beside Batinikama School and will connect to Bulileka Road. Based on the current programme of delivery for the above, investigation and design works are to be completed by the end of this year. Temporary bridges are determined as per on-site situation and has a design life of five years. This can also be easily upgraded to be permanent.

Additionally, for the Labasa temporary bridge, the Fiji Roads Authority (FRA) has coordinated the land access consultation and attained the consent from the Labasa landowning unit, who owns the land on the Naqai end where the road realigns the new bypass to connect with Siberia Road.

Special Fishing Arrangement - Tuvalu and Kiribati  
(Question No. 184/2025)

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Fisheries and Forestry update Parliament on the progress of discussions with Tuvalu and Kiribati regarding special arrangements that would allow Fiji's fishing vessels to fish for abundant tuna resources, specifically Albacore, Yellowfin and Bigeye, in their rich Exclusive Economic Zones?

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank honourable Semi Koroilavesau for his question. Discussions and negotiations are of paramount national importance, and as honourable Members are acutely aware, the viability and importance of our tuna processing industry, including our State-owned enterprise, PAFCO, relies heavily on a stable and sufficient supply of raw material of tuna, particularly Albacore, Yellowfin and Bigeye stocks. Sir, given the climatic shifts affecting migratory patterns with tuna resources increasingly congregating further North and East in the EEZ of our neighbours, securing this access is an economic imperative.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, our most recent bilateral engagement with the Tuvalu Fisheries Department has been highly constructive. These high-level talks are primarily aimed at negotiating access agreements to secure raw tuna materials, predominantly Albacore, which is the backbone of our domestic processing needs.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the current status of this bilateral discussion is that the Ministry of Fisheries has established a clear pathway for finalising a memorandum of understanding for fishing access. We have presented a case based on our strong bilateral relationship and the mutual economic benefit, as securing supply supports our processing hub for the region.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, my technical team is currently working on the final details of the fee structure, and the specific number of vessel days to be allocated. We are seeking a preferential fee structure that recognises the unique position of Fiji as a processing hub within the region rather than being charged higher Standard Vessel Day Scheme fees levied on distant water fishing nations. The

final agreement will be presented to Cabinet for endorsement.

On the other hand, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to update the House and the honourable Member regarding our dialogue with Kiribati, a major tuna resource owner and a key member of the Parties to the Nauru Agreement (PNA). Our dialogue has been focused on bilateral access and exploring cooperation under the regional framework.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the current status of this discussion is understandably cautious, given Kiribati's reliance on its own fisheries revenue. However, we have engaged them in talks on a hub-and-spoke model, where a stable supply of fish to Fiji's processing facilities offers mutual benefits in the form of employment and value addition for the region.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the hub-and-spoke model reinforces Fiji as a processing hub, allowing neighbouring island countries to prioritise locations where their catch is processed, and not be transferred to competing foreign countries. The approach advocates for regional concessions, and Fiji has strongly advocated within regional bodies for special consideration for Forum Island countries that operate processing plants, seeking a reduced price for concessionary term of fishing days in key PNA EEZ, which includes Kiribati. This attempt is to move beyond purely bilateral negotiations and build a cohesive regional economic strategy.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Fisheries has an upcoming meeting scheduled on the third week of October, and this is where we will continue negotiating vessel day allocations and a specific fee arrangement that will be financially viable for a long-line fleet, while respecting Kiribati's sovereign rights and revenue model.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Minister for her explanation on the agreement between Fiji and the Government of Kiribati and Tuvalu. Honourable Minister, has there been any discussions with Kiribati of them exploring and using their freehold land that was recently purchased, I think, about two years ago that belonged to the Anglican Church in Natewa Bay and if there is a possibility of them having a tuna factory adjacent to their land, which can then encourage a seasonal work programme between Kiribati and Fiji? It may be a useful tool to attract them to bring fish to Levuka and their factory here in Fiji. I just wanted to seek your comment.

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I can confirm that discussions have not involved their land at Natewa Bay, but it is something that we will consider when we meet in Nadi later this month.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, will the Government of Fiji also be exploring possibly a joint venture exercise with Kiribati specifically, and I refer to this because I understand that they have done a JV exercise with some company out of China which a company in Fiji also has a share, just got two new signers in, that supply a lot of fish to them? In terms of us being able to expand, will we also be looking at some avenue like that with respect to PAFCO because they have done extremely well out of this particular partnership?

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- For that question, I can confirm that those options are currently being explored as well.

Socialisation Meeting - WEENAP 2025-2030  
(Question No. 185/2025)

HON. I. KURIDRANI asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Women, Children and Social Protection update Parliament on the recent socialisation meeting for Fiji's Women's Economic Empowerment National Action Plan 2025–2030?

HON. S. KIRAN.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, before I provide an answer, Mr. Speaker, in Fiji, a Member of Parliament will go down in history asking for a Ministry of men. Let me respond to the honourable Member who was asking why I did not speak about men in my yesterday's statement.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, perhaps, he was not listening or did not understand my statement. It was an update on what Government is doing on the prevention of violence against women and girls. This kind of flippant remarks are part of the problem.

In data, I quoted, nine lives were lost, four were men - two who killed themselves after killing their partners and two others who were victims of intimate partner violence. Violence leaves deep traumatic impact on all members of our family, especially children.

We primarily focus on violence against women because it is a pervasive gendered crime rooted in patriarchy and structural inequalities, leading to higher rates of severe harm and death for women. While violence can affect anyone, the emphasis on women is due to the disproportionate rates of severe victimisation, with men being the dominant perpetrators in these cases. He obviously needs to go through an awareness and gender training on why there is focus on women.

Look at police reports for the last 10 years to understand the avalanche of abuse against women in Fiji. There is multiple research available that shows that two out of three women in Fiji face violence in their own homes and communities, and our Government has taken the issue seriously with the launch of Fiji's National Action Plan to Prevent Violence Against All women and Girls 2023-2028, and is working across sectors to prevent violence against our women and girls.

Everything he is calling for is already being done - toll free lines, shelters, budget allocation, and if a Parliamentary leader does not know these, I wonder what he is sharing with his communities. I invite him to visit our Ministry to find out about our services on what we offer, since he did not hear a word of what I said on what Government is actually doing.

I invite him to read the Gender Assessment Report that was the base research before the National Action Plan was developed, and his questions will get answered.

(Honourable Opposition Members interject)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. S. KIRAN.- We do work with men, and if he had listened carefully, we look after juveniles as well. This issue is too grave to be used for cheap point-scoring, Mr. Speaker, Sir...

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. S. KIRAN.- ... and I urge honourable Members of this House to learn about this issue and become an advocate to help stop violence against our women and girls.

He screamed his instruction that I should just go and build a home for older persons. That is what we did, we have placed the residents in a safe, newly renovated facility who were left in termite-infested buildings in Lautoka's Golden age home. We cannot just build new facilities without scoping. Maybe, he needs to understand how these processes work, so I ask him to have patience.

We are working on scoping to have the facilities built.

(Hon. R.R. Sharma interjects)

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Listen, listen!

(Hon. R.R. Sharma interjects)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. S. KIRAN.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, now to the question. On 11th September, 2025, the Ministry convened a Socialisation Meeting for Fiji's Women's Economic Empowerment National (WEENAP) Action Plan 2025 to 2030 at Level 9, Suvavou House.

The representatives who attended the meeting included Government agencies, civil society, private sector associations and development partners. The meeting provided a platform to share the plans, objectives, actions and targets. It also underscored areas of collaboration, strengthened partnerships and shared responsibility to achieve women's economic empowerment.

Mr. Speaker, this socialisation meeting provided an opportunity, not only to present the plans for key pillars, but also to ensure that our stakeholders across Government, civil society, private sector and development partners, clearly understood their actions in the plan and gave their commitments towards this implementation. This is critical, Mr. Speaker, as the success of the WEENAP depends on shared responsibility, strong collaboration and sustained action.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this plan will be launched on Monday, 6th October, 2025 at the Ba Women's Forum Complex. After the launch, we will then establish a WEENAP secretariat, an advisory committee and an implementation unit. This structure will help us stay on track, measure progress and make sure we deliver on our targets.

We also aim to roll out the plan in two phases:

- (1) Building the foundation between 2025 and 2027; and
- (2) Scaling up and embedding lasting change between 2028 and 2030.

In 2027, we will take stock of what we have achieved, identify what needs more attention and adjust our actions to keep moving forward. I wish to reiterate that Fiji's Women's Economic Empowerment National Action Plan represents a shared commitment by Government, civil society, development partners and the people of Fiji, to empower women and girls across our nation. The plan's four pillars - Women at Work, Women in Business, Women's Financial Inclusion and Women's Health and Wellbeing, are actionable steps towards building an inclusive, resilient and equitable society.

The commitments made and the partnership strengthened through the socialisation process will guide our implementation and, together, we can create opportunities, strengthen protections and foster an environment where every Fijian woman can thrive.

Before I sit down, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish you a very happy and blessed birthday. May you continue to be blessed with good health and may we be guided by your leadership.

MR. SPEAKER.- Thank you for those sentiments at the end, honourable Minister, I now invite our supplementary questions.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- She took my thunder, Mr. Speaker, Sir, on what I was going to say on behalf of all of us in the House. We wish you a very happy birthday. We also want to say a big thank you and a big *vinaka vakalevu* for being fair and reasonable.

(Acclamation)

HON. F.S. KOYA.- I am only doing this because I am also an elder citizen here, Sir. May God bless you always and thank you very much for all your hard work that you do in keeping us in check.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Are you sure about being a senior citizen?

HON. F.S. KOYA.- I can assure you I am. I may not look like it but I am. I think the honourable Speaker knows.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, honourable Minister, this is quite a statement with respect to the particular plan. The question is relative to, will you be also taking this plan through to our young women in schools, who will be able to see this and aspire to do what needs to be done in terms of empowerment? Will this be taken and handed out to those who are in Year 12 and USP, et cetera, or will it be just disbursed digitally? I think it is a vitally important document for women's economic empowerment and what they need to see, what they can do, and these are fresh minds. So, will you be doing that, honourable Minister?

HON. S. KIRAN.- Thank you, honourable Member, yes, indeed. We are rolling out digitisation programme and we are already working with the young girls in high school – Year 12 and Year 13 girls, as well as tertiary. We are already working with them on career, encouraging in STEM, et cetera, and we will be sharing this plan with them.

Initiatives for Rehabilitation - Drug Offenders  
(Question No. 186/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services update Parliament on initiatives that are being undertaken to rehabilitate drug offenders who are being treated at St. Giles Hospital?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, just for the benefit of honourable Members, you should know that a drug offender means a person who manufactures, stocks, imports, exports, sells, distributes any drug, cultivates any plant, or does any other thing in contravention of any of the provisions of the Illicit Drugs Control Act. Therefore, in terms of the rehabilitation of drug offenders, that is under the purview of the Ministry of Justice through the Fiji Corrections Service.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am not going to redraft the question. I think the honourable Minister knows that the rehabilitation that he is actually speaking about, maybe he ought to have used another word, but it is about the facilities that are available in St. Giles to be able to assist those who are there because of drug-related issues. I mentioned this before already, so I have it on good authority that the facility just does not have the capability.

I think the question is, are we able to cope with that at the moment at St. Giles or do we still need to get much more assistance to be able to cope with the number of drug-related people who are

coming into St. Giles Hospital?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Member for the supplementary question. Currently, as it is, we need a specific rehabilitation hospital, just to look after the welfare of drug users and how we can get them back to normalcy in terms of treating their addiction. With that being said, St. Giles is doing a marvellous work, even though the capacity to look after those patients is something new just in the last few years. Nevertheless, they are doing their best to treat the acute phase of drug users, such as psychosis, et cetera.

A long-term plan will have a dedicated rehabilitation facility. We have identified the land, currently through the Ministry. We have done the costing, and we are approaching one of our development partners to assist the Ministry, as well as the country, in ensuring that we build a dedicated rehabilitation facility to address the addiction aspect of drug users. We feel that in the long term, it will definitely not only look into the drug issue but at the same time, tackle the additional problem that it is causing, which is the HIV outbreak.

Under the National Narcotics Framework and National Strategy, our role in the Ministry of Health is harm reduction. We have objectives under those aspects, and one is to support counselling, ensure adequate access to treatment, rehabilitation and reintegration services including prison settings, the use of culture and tradition, as well as religion, to strengthen capacity for acute management. This is something St. Giles Hospital, CWM Hospital and some of our NGOs are currently assisting us with in terms of strengthening capacity for the acute management of dependency or psychological disorder.

Another aspect of the objective under the harm reduction is to address the existing barriers to the availability of access to internationally controlled drugs for medical and scientific purpose. In essence, the plan is to have a dedicated facility, and we are working towards that, but at the same time, St. Giles Hospital is doing a marvellous work in terms of trying to look after these drug users in their acute phase while at the same time, ensuring that they undergo certain programmes to try and alleviate their addiction.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, honourable Minister, I totally agree with you, they are doing as much as they can. I think they are doing the best job that they can. Again, relative to the schools, the support programme that you are referring to, does the support programme also mean that because our health professionals are dealing with this firsthand, they are able to visit the schools and make sure that there is enough awareness, together with all the other institutions that are doing the anti-drug campaign, especially because the figures with HIV, et cetera, are quite high? I think there is a carefree attitude that exists sometimes that people just do not think about it, more needs to be done. So, the support programme, does that include our health professionals also being part of the education programme to be able to make sure that all of this is done in our schools?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I definitely agree, that this is something that the Ministry of Health cannot do alone. Therefore, we rely on NGOs, such as Medical Services Pasifika or other relevant NGOs that do get grant from the Ministry and they look after those certain areas and certain gaps in which we believe that because of our capacity in the workforce, we are unable to reach probably the vulnerable communities such as schools. Therefore, we work in close collaboration with the Ministry of Education, the Fiji Police Force, et cetera.

Nevertheless, in these kinds of situations, we do work with the established NGOs out there. We found out that they are the ones well-received in the community when they visit. If doctors and nurses come in with uniform, a stethoscope, et cetera, people tend to hold back. Again, it is one of our challenges and to work around it, we feel that we assist established NGOs out there, so that they

can go out into the workforce and provide us with the relevant data so that we can improve our work.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, I just have a question to the honourable Minister. The fact that you have so many people that are in St. Giles because of drug-related issues, I am just wondering, given that mental health was always an under-reported issue in terms of what St. Giles was set up to establish, how is that affecting your problems in addressing the mental health issues? I mean, a lot of it is undiagnosed, unreported, but the symptoms come in and it affects the ability to be able to address that issue. I am just thinking, people who are taking drugs, they are taking up a lot of space in St. Giles, how is that affecting the work of the Ministry in terms of addressing mental health issues?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, as I have said, with the capacity at St. Giles Hospital, the staff are doing all they can to ensure that it provides the service it was meant to do. However, the last time when I visited St. Giles, I was informed of a number of patients who have been admitted there because of drug use.

With that being said, the programme of treatment and the care is the same, but they just undergo – if they are admitted there for an acute phase of psychosis, et cetera, then they are treated accordingly. The long-term part of the plan is to treat the addiction, and that is another different aspect of treatment in which rehabilitation comes in. For that, we still do not have a dedicated rehabilitation facility, but we are very grateful for the partners out there, especially Salvation Army and our NGOs that do support us. They do have these certain programmes so when they are treated in the acute phase, they are much stable then we send them off to these NGOs for rehabilitation programme.

Nevertheless, it is still something that the Ministry wants to have in its own capacity as a rehabilitation hospital specific to treat the addiction. Without treating the addiction, you can treat the acute phase, send them back home, and they continue the cycle of drug use and they return. So it becomes a burden again on the Ministry as well as St. Giles because it was meant to be a psychiatric hospital. But now because of the consequences of drug use, they have added furthermore to the burden of care within St. Giles Hospital.

To answer your question, yes, the St. Giles Hospital right now is inundated with a lot of these patients, but they are trying their best to ensure that they treat them in the acute phase, while at the same time aligning them to a programme of rehabilitation that is available currently with our partners.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I remember that there was a lady called, if I remember correctly, her name was Kalesi Volatabu, her ideas of rehabilitation things done with NGOs. I know you are talking about getting development partners, agencies like CSOs that wish to do drug rehabilitation centres. Is there any sort of programme where the Government is giving any incentives to help that get underway? I think she was looking at a piece of land near Kiuva or somewhere where she was hoping to do it.

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Yes, Ms. Volatabu, I believe her programme is the Drug Free World. As I mentioned, when it comes to drug use and drug addiction, that is something that the Ministry, with the current workforce capacity as we have, we are limited in doing our part in trying to ensure that we provide the necessary service to ensure that the drug users are taken care in terms of their drug addiction through rehabilitation programmes. Definitely we work with established NGOs at the moment, local as well through the assistance from the development partners.

Drug Free World, definitely we have already talked with them, and they will be part of the panel for our upcoming RCM to the share challenges in what Fiji is experiencing. It is something we definitely not only taking on board, but what we are doing right now is working with the established agency to ensure that they do some of the works that we feel we lack in because of workforce issues.

### Written Question

#### Breakdown of Scholarship Grants - Higher Education Institutions (Question No. 188/2025)

HON. P.D. KUMAR asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Education provide Parliament with a yearly breakdown of the total value of scholarship grants given to each local Higher Education Institution for 2023 and 2024?

MR. SPEAKER.- In the absence of the honourable Minister for Education, I will invite the honourable Leader of the Government in Parliament to respond on his behalf.

<sup>1</sup> HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I hereby provide the written question as requested on behalf of the honourable Minister for Education.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we will move on for the reason I will explain at the end. If you bear with us, we will move on because we have only one item left on our Order Paper.

### **END OF WEEK STATEMENTS**

MR. SPEAKER.- We come to the End of Week Statements. Each honourable Member may speak for up to ten minutes, with a 10-minute response by the honourable Minister or Ministers responsible for the subject matter of the Member's speech. No seconder is required and there will be no other debate.

### Marine Degradation and Pollution

MR. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, congratulations on your birthday and also my lady sitting on my left whose birthday is also today.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, my mother worked as a housegirl to an infant in Marou Road, Nasese, and one of the enduring memories of those times is accompanying her as she used to forage along the Nasese seashore for the things that might supplement her pay to help her feed us in the late 1960s and early 1970s. She was village bred from Nabasovi, Koro (her mother's village), she knew what she was doing. I did not because I was a *susu madrai* boy, I just tagged along. There was always something to take home from those foraging visits along the seashore, and we later moved to Wakanisila Settlement, where I was also brought up in the early 1970s.

One of the endearing memories of growing up there is the boats that used to come up the Laqere River on Saturdays and Sunday mornings, bringing fish to sell at the Laqere Bridge. Today, you buy fish at Bailey Bridge in Jerusalem Road but in those days, it was the Laqere Bridge. It was at the Laqere Bridge that people used to come up to buy fish, and in those days, we could dive off

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<sup>1</sup> Editor's Note: Reply to Written Question No. 188/2025, tabled by the honourable Leader of the Government in Parliament, on behalf of the honourable Minister for Education, under Standing Order 45(3), is appended as Annexure I.

the Laqere Bridge. Today, if you try to dive off the bridge, your head will get stuck in the sand from all the sedimentation and the rubbish that are there.

As the population increased dramatically, siltation has been intense, the river sides have shrunk and now there are islands growing where those boats used to drive up at full speed, and fancy boats come and slide around at the river before they start selling their fish. The river now stinks. The fish are not as they used to be.

One of the things we used to do at Wakanisila was walk past the Vunivaivai Settlement. This is the settlement that is opposite where the Laqere Market is now. Those people have moved up to the Davuilevu Housing area and then you will pass the road to Nepani. Then we will follow a very rough, barely discernible road down to what is now known as the Nadawa Housing area, which has houses now.

During that time, it was a dairy farm, vegetable farm, et cetera. We walked through the mangroves down to Laucala Bay and after one or two hours of walking on the flats, we would have enough *kaikoso* and *voce*. I hope you all know what *voce* is with a long tail. We eat that raw and then have enough to take home; trudge back to the roads, back to Wakanisila.

We always have food to take home to feed our families for dinner. So, those were some of the things that we did, other times in the creek in Wakanisila, we are catching the eels, *vo*, shooting the prawns with the spikes of the umbrella, *samarini* they used to call it to catch fish. But today, that creek smells bad, siltation is bad, and a lot of rubbish. There is a lot of overflow also from Kalabu Housing, the rubbish that flows down.

Why I brought that up, Mr. Speaker, Sir, because I recently went to Muana-i-Ra Village in Vutia, Rewa. There was a death of a mother of one of my friends from Wakanisila. So, I went as part of the *reguregu* and as I was there, we talked to a lot of the villagers who talked about a lot of the challenges that they are facing. Some of the things that they said, *na sasalu ni waitui*, the bounty of the ocean that they used to feed off and gain economic living from was no more or was very less. The *kaikoso* and the *voce* had disappeared from the flats that they used to have around Nadawa, completely disappeared. Nowadays, if they want that *kaikoso* and *voce*, they have to go to Nukulau to get it, which is a bit far from them.

The island of Savaivai which they used to get their ocean bounty from, basically the *sasalu* is not there anymore. People are finding it hard to sustain themselves and those who are able to support themselves economically by harvesting from the sea are not able to do that. The seas in the bay have become very shallow. Before they used to run across from Laucala straight across to the Bailey Bridge, today, they can only do that in high tide because the siltation that has covered up. The *dio* or the mangrove oyster is dying. They used to harvest this. They used to plant this in the bay, but it is dying. Now, the *dio* is supposed to be closed. When you go there it is open, when its open, that means its dying. So, what we are seeing is death and destruction.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is something that needs to worry all of us because we know everything ends up in Laucala Bay. The run-off, we have greater Suva areas, all these urban concentration, the run-off, the infrastructure development, the sediment discharge from the Rewa River and other streams, Laqere River and of these is affecting life there. It is also affecting the mangrove forest, coral reefs and also the seagrass that used to grow in the area around the reef or what is also known as *coi ni waitui* or *vuvutia*. This has been a long-standing issue, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Looking at a lot of the research over the years, there was some research I looked at in 1991 that highlighted the water quality in this bay; a major cause for concern, high coliform counts. Mr.

Speaker, Sir, 95 percent of oyster samples at that time exceeded the International Safety Standards for faecal coliform. So, there is potential for disease outbreak. Back in 2014 and 2015, we had that major spillage of raw sewage that came into the ocean and that, of course, then also points to us the infrastructure challenge of that time.

Now, we talk about non-revenue water, but it is also the pipes that get the sewage down to the Kinoya Treatment Plant. There have been other studies that have talked to the high content of metals in that bay - cadmium, chromium, copper, lead, zinc, et cetera. The Report stated that some of these things like cadmium and lead, pose no immediate toxicity threat but because they are being planted into this bay, there is a high challenge likelihood of toxicity into the future.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there is also high nutrients coming to the bay. When you have a lot of nutrients, what do you do? You have algal blooms because it is so rich. Algal blooms means that oxygen is sucked away from the marine life that is there, and it can affect the marine life. So, all of these things, I think are contributing to what the people of Vutia were telling me. There is a study now showing the high rate of microplastics that are now in the ocean, in the sediments and also infused in the fish and the livelihood that is there.

This week I have been very glad to hear of the progress of the ADB Healthy Oceans and Water Supply Programme that will enhance the capacity of the Kinoya Sewerage Treatment Plant to be able to address the effluent that will come out from now on, but it does not address what has happened over the past few decades.

The success also of the Healthy Oceans Water Supply Scheme that we have from Water Authority of Fiji will also depend on a number of things:

- (1) Regulatory Compliance - the ability to get those that use that facility to be able to meet the regulations that the Ministry and WAF will be able to come up with.
- (2) The other thing that will be very important to try to safeguard this bay, it is very important for all of us in this area, the people of Vutia, Rewa Island and all of that area is, mandatory long term toxicological surveillance of the heavy materials that is being deposited in this particular bay.
- (3) The establishment of a transparent, public facing system for monitoring recreational water quality is essential to be able to address these issues which can have an impact on public health policy.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as we move forward, there are a number of questions that I have been thinking to myself after coming back from Vutia. Is it possible for us to get this bay back to the status it was a few decades ago? I think, for us as Fijian citizens, we must decide that there must be a way to do this, and we need to get there. It is not an easy thing because Laucala Bay just captures everything from everyone. There are issues to do with siltation, agricultural practices, rubbish, plastics, et cetera. We need to be able to strengthen the way that we approach this to maintain the quality of the bay itself. Even if we are able to enhance the facilities that we have at the Kinoya Wastewater Treatment Plant, will still not take into account the pit latrines, septic tank systems, and the effluent that comes from silt sips into the river. I think as I raise this particular issue, sewage and all of these things, the question that we have, can we bring Laucala Bay back to what it was?

I think given the importance of seagrass, coral reefs, mangrove forests and what they do, I think 50 percent of our marine life, the fish, at one stage of their life or not exist in the seagrass or in the mangroves. We need to be able to protect Laucala Bay so that it can continue to provide sustenance to the people of Vutia, Rewa, and for the rest of us that go there for recreation and enjoy ourselves. I think for all of us as a country, we need to really look at how well we can all work

together, not blaming anyone. This is something that is affecting life right now. We need to find ways and means to addressing things to bring Laucala Bay back to the state it was.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I used to go to Beijing in China back in the early 90s, and you could never see the clouds because it was also full of smoke. You go now, it has changed. They have been able to do it because they had a strong commitment to be able to preserve the atmosphere and do things that need to be done. My message today is a wake-up call for us to let us see how we can save and bring Laucala Bay back to what it used to be.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Usamate, that was a very touching contribution today. Everything that honourable Usamate said is something that we really need to take seriously as we move forward in terms of a whole of government or as a community or as a nation. It is not only for the Suva Peninsula areas going on to Rewa, but all over Fiji.

In terms of Government, the Water Authority of Fiji has already mentioned putting in place measures in terms of the wastewater, and the percentages are clear. There is an insignificant percentage of wastewater treatment in Fiji, and we really, really need to improve that area. Not only that, but also currently a lot of the issues faced in terms of the sewage is because of blockages. So we go back to public attitude.

Not only that, but even with the disposal of rubbish, a group in Rewa just started a clean-up campaign. It is just not only in this area, but even those within the community, each one of us as leaders and responsible citizens need to change our attitude in terms of rubbish disposal. It really starts from home on how we work to change that attitude and ensure that simple things such as rubbish disposal is dealt with.

Even in the villages, apart from the organisations or polluters in the city area, there needs to be proper waste disposal. At the moment, even around the villages mentioned by the honourable Minister, the waste disposal is the same as before Independence. So, it is just being disposed around the environment either buried, or some are using it for land reclamation, but as he already mentioned, a lot of these wastes contain toxic and they seep into the environment and, of course, into the marine life. Definitely that is something that we, as a government, the Ministry of Environment and Local Government, all need to put our heads together to come up with effective strategies that will bring changes at the ground level. I am sure that all our Ministries are working on that.

Generally, if we look around this area, we have also been working with the Ministry of Environment on derelict vessels. Some of those have been disposed of, but there are regulations and legislations that need to be updated to enforce that.

That is an ongoing issue, we really need to work with our development partners to assist us. Some have come on board, and I would like to thank all of them. Of course, there are international forums where we really need to target our participation, conventions, for example, on plastics, et cetera, that need to be enacted, enforced and also regulated within our national level.

The indication of pollution in terms of the marine life, we can reverse the situation. It needs a concerted effort from the various stakeholders and Ministries. Before that, we need to stop the pollution and that boils down to what is happening to all the manufacturers, factories, wastewater outlets, and even, household wastewater on how it is treated and going out into the environment. That really is a huge task, but something that we need to undertake.

This issue has been expressed in nearly every *Bose ni Yasana* or *Bose Vanua*, regarding the concerns of the people, not only in the province, but also along Suva City, the residents, upper Samabula River and also up the Rewa River and the later tributaries. Of course, we have to face up to the challenges of climate change and as we move forward, and that is something we need to deal with in terms of its ongoing challenges.

The varying levels of water in terms of hydraulics, that is something the Ministry is working on - the study of the level of water and the flow. This also needs to be incorporated into our planning in terms of the waterways and the riverbank retention. We really need to look upriver, and there are various projects ongoing, and all those need to be interrelated and interconnected because they all affect the health in the way it eventually ends up, which is around the Suva Harbour and also the bay area up to the Vutia and Rewa Delta areas.

### Teenage Pregnancy: Ending the Stigma

HON. P.K. RAVUNAWA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Prime Minister, honourable Deputy Prime Ministers, fellow Cabinet Ministers and Assistant Ministers, and honourable Members of Parliament; I rise today with both a heavy burden and a determined spirit to address an issue that touches the very heart of our nation – the crisis of teenage pregnancy in Fiji and the urgent need to end the stigma or shame surrounding it.

This is not a health statistic, it is a national emergency - a crisis that erodes the foundation of our families, compromises our social and economic development and challenges the very moral fabric of our society. As a father, as a Christian leader and as your Assistant Minister for Health, I speak not only from policy, but also from deep conviction. We must treat this as a matter of national priority. The statistics are alarming.

In 2023, hospitals recorded 519 teenage pregnancies, including 15 girls under the age of 15 years, and 504 between the age of 15 years to 19 years. In 2024, the figures nearly doubled to 858, with 17 cases which are under 15 years and 841 aged 15 years to 19 years. From January to May this year alone, we have already recorded 489 pregnancies among underaged girls, including eight below the age of 15 years. If this trend continues, we will surpass the number of the past two years.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, these are just not numbers, they are children. Some only 12 years old or 13 years old, forced into motherhood long before their bodies, their mind and their hearts are ready. This is more than a health issue; it is a social justice crisis. Teenage pregnancy is closely linked with:

- (1) HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases and unsafe and abusive sexual encounters place young girls at risk.
- (2) Child sexual abuse and rape where perpetrators – often family members or trusted community leaders – take advantage of our vulnerable girls.
- (3) Gender-based violence where power and control are used to silence victims. Poverty, which both drives and deepens this crisis, traps young mothers and their children in cycles of poverty.

When a girl becomes pregnant as a teenager, her –

- chances of completing her education plummet;
- ability to secure meaningful employment shrinks.
- health risk increases with higher maternal complications.
- dignity and future are diminished, not because of her failure, but because society failed to protect her.

Today's adolescent pregnancies are tomorrow's poverty, inequality and national instability.

To solve this crisis, we must be brave enough to confront the hard truth. For those under 15 years, a teenage pregnancy is rarely about choice. Too often it is about rape, incest and abuse. Perpetrators are not strangers lurking in the dark, they are, heartbreakingly too often, family members, trusted community figures or leaders in positions of authority in our society.

Abuse is often hidden under a cloak of silence. Families afraid of shame, communities unwilling to confront and victims too young to even understand what has happened to them. Girls as young as 12 years and 13 years carrying pregnancies are not just a statistic; they are victims of crime. Yet, too often, perpetrators go unpunished while the young girl is left to carry the burden in silence. This is a failure of justice, protection and morality.

Additionally, girls with disabilities face even greater barriers - denied equal access to sexual reproductive health, making them more vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. If we are serious about change, we must break this silence and hold abusers accountable.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me be clear that teenage mothers should not carry shame - the shame belongs to the abuser, the rapist, the predator and the system that failed her. As a Christian, I recall the words of Jesus Christ in John 10:10, and I quote, "the thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I have come that they may have life and have it in full."

Our teenage mothers deserve life to the fullest, not shame or stigma, not rejection, and not hopelessness. They deserve our love, our protection and our second chances. When we stigmatise them, we push them further into isolation, into fear and despair, but when we extend compassion, we open the door for restoration.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, no ministry, no department, no church, or no parent can tackle this crisis alone. It requires a national movement, government ministry, the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education, Social Welfare Department, Fiji Police Force, Ministry of Justice and Ministry of and Ministry of Home Affairs must work in unity.

When a 13-year-old is identified as pregnant, it should trigger not just healthcare, but child protection, justice and law enforcement action. Schools must not turn away young mothers, instead we must help them to re-enrol, complete their education and build a future.

Faith leaders and traditional leaders, you are a trusted voice in our communities. Preach protection, speak against silence and lead the charge to safeguard our children. NGOs and civil society, your grassroots work is invaluable. Together, let us strengthen programmes that empower young women and protect vulnerable children. To the private sector, support skills training, create opportunities and invest in a second chance programme for young mothers. To the media society, shine the light of these issues responsibly, not to shame, but to educate and empower and inspire action.

I propose that we establish a National Framework for Inter-Ministerial Coordination with regular meetings, cooperative budget and joint accountability. Let us create a National Teenage Pregnancy Response Taskforce just as we had mobilised during COVID-19.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I speak not just as an honourable Minister, but as a father to my daughter. To us parents, talk to your children. Create a home of trust, safety and open dialogue in our communities. Do not hide abuse. Do not protect perpetrators. Protect the child. To our churches and faith leaders, do not condemn teenage mothers, work with them, restore them and love them. To our

young people, your life is precious, you are loved and valued. You have a future and a purpose.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in conclusion, teenage pregnancy is more than a health statistic, it is a mirror reflecting the failure of our society, but also an opportunity to act with courage and compassion. If we continue with business as usual, the number will continue to rise, cycles of abuse and poverty will deepen, and Fiji's future will be compromised. However, if we act together now, Government, family, churches, faith-based communities and the private sector, we can turn the tide.

Let this Parliament declare with one voice - Teenage Pregnancy is a National Priority. Ending the shame with our shared duty, protecting our children is our sacred responsibility. May God guide us in this work. May He strengthen our resolve, and may He bless the children of Fiji with a future of dignity, health and hope.

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Assistant Minister for Health for his End of Week Statement titled; "Teenage Pregnancies and Stigma", a timely reminder to us all.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, before I respond to the honourable Assistant Minister, I would like to begin by acknowledging two significant events for the Health Sector recently, first, the certification of 21 countries in the Pacific on measles and rubella elimination status on 26th September, 2025, and Fiji is included. This is a milestone achievement, reflecting many years of hard work and dedication by healthcare workers throughout the country, and I applaud the immunisation nurses and public health teams that go out everyday to immunise and protect our babies against these two deadly diseases. I also applaud the parents and communities that agree and support immunisation in every effort to protect our children so they can live a healthy life and achieve their goals and dreams in life.

Secondly, the certification of our National Public Health Laboratory at the Fiji Centre for Disease Control (CDC) as a WHO National Measles and Rubella Laboratory on 1st October, 2025. This is another significant achievement for Fiji. It shows that we have the expertise and experience to be able to correctly diagnose measles and rubella, and immediately respond, without any delay, to achieve quick control of the disease in our community.

With that said, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to briefly respond to the End of Week Statement by my colleague, the Assistant Minister for Health, on two aspects in terms of his End of Week Statement. Firstly, how important is the family unit in terms of prevention of teenage pregnancy? Studies have found that the corrosion of the family unit has led to several issues and one in particular is teenage pregnancy.

As a community, I still believe that it takes a village to raise a child and nevertheless, the core unit of the family in raising the child. As a father of three boys, I try to instil values and responsibilities in my three boys and that there are consequences if they act otherwise. It is something that I believe we lack in our society which is that support that is very much needed. Therefore, in speaking in response to the End of the Week Statement, I fully support and I, again, support the strengthening of families to be able to support and nurture young minds so that they can make well-informed decisions.

Another aspect I would like to touch on is the awareness part of this social issue. I believe that in our education sector, sex education should be taught in a much deeper context than what we have at the moment. We may not be aware, we may think that it is not that time to learn about these things, but they have this, and they are well aware of the consequences of these things, so, again, I fully support the statement.

I know that the review of the Education Act is ongoing, and I fully support the context of a much-detailed sexual education which is needed to be taught in our schools so that students are aware of the consequences of certain actions. If they are aware, then they will have informed decisions to make the right choice.

I fully support the End of Week Statement by my colleague, and I thank you, Sir.

### Plight of Ratepayers and Key Stakeholders in Municipalities

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to make an End of week Statement on the plight of the ratepayers and key stakeholders in the Municipalities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, local government is meant to be the closest arm of government to the people, responsible for service delivery, infrastructure upkeep and responding to the daily needs of the citizens. Instead, Mr. Speaker, Sir, what we have witnessed is the breakdown of basic services, such as rubbish collection, drainage, road maintenance and street lighting are either irregular or completely neglected. Towns that were once models of well-planned are now in disrepair. Low staff morale means that work is not up to the standard and needs of the ratepayers are not met.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, waste management remains one of the biggest failures. Overflowing of rubbish bins, irregular garbage collection and illegal dump sites are a common sight. The councils appear reactive instead of proactive. The result is not just an eyesore, Mr. Speaker, Sir, but also a breeding ground for health risks including dengue.

Another issue is the state of drainage and flood mitigation. Urban areas suffer flash flooding after heavy rains with blocked drains and poorly maintained culverts, making the problem worse. Residents and business owners lose property and stock, while councils issue excuses about budgets and manpower.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, councils have a statutory duty to look after the interest of ratepayers and citizens of the respective municipalities. Another issue is the lack of communication between ratepayers and councils. Too often complaints lodged with the councils are ignored, delayed or brushed aside. Ratepayers feel that councils are unapproachable, unaccountable and indifferent to community concerns. Instead of being partners in urban development, Mr. Speaker, Sir, citizens feel like powerless players to a system that does not respect or deliver on its obligations.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in regard to the maintenance of streetlights, there is a lot of blame game between the council and Fiji Roads Authority. Complaints raised by the ratepayers for the maintenance of the streetlights are told to go and see Fiji Roads Authority. Councils should receive complaints and forward it to Fiji Roads Authority rather than making them run around. It is their duty, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and they should do it rather than this blame game. Too much of this is going on in all the municipalities. Some of the streetlights have turned into flicking lights, similar to the ones that we use during Diwali. There have been no major projects to note, and all the current infrastructure were the result of the previous government's initiative.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Hear, hear!

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, loss of morale amongst council staff. Many dedicated employees feel undermined and disempowered. Decisions are imposed from the top without consultation and staff are demotivated by the clear double standards and favouritism in appointments and promotions. Many others have left especially in mid and senior management roles with no replacements in many positions. Again, service delivery is compromised.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Very poor.

HON. P.K. BALA.- The frustration of ordinary Fijians, Mr. Speaker, Sir, are now boiling over. Every now and then we receive and we are told the complaints from ratepayers who are paying their dues but not receiving the services they deserve.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Very poor.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Social media is filled with evidence of overgrown grass, uncollected garbage, broken facilities, and entire uncleanness of towns and cities. We also need the mainstream media to do their job and report this frustration instead of sitting on their hands.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Opposition calls on the government to immediately set out a clear timeline for the local government elections as promised.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. P.K. BALA.- This is what I wanted to hear from you and I knew you people will say 8 years, 10 years, 16 years. You have been there for three years and your manifesto stated that. We never stated anything in our manifesto. You stated that elections will be held within 100 days. I want to ask, where is the municipal election? Mr. Speaker, Sir, in recent days, there was a call from the Nadi Chamber of Commerce asking for municipal elections, likewise the President of the Nadi Chamber of Commerce.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Who said that?

HON. P.K. BALA.- Read some newspapers. You the Minister for Information, you do not know? What type of Minister are you?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, other stakeholders are also asking, when will the municipal elections take place? The people deserve better than political appointees failing in their duties.

(Honourable Government Member interjects)

HON. P.K. BALA.- I was NFP that time. They appointed me on merit, not on political basis. The people deserve better than the political appointees failing in their duties. They deserve elected representatives who are responsible to them, and not to political masters in government.

I have not mentioned any particular Special Administrator. It is a general statement, and wherever we go, these are the issues that the ratepayers are talking about, and they want to put it to us, so that we can put it across the floor of the House, and the honourable Minister responsible can take it on from there.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the recent increase in car park fees at Ba Market has impacted both vendors and the customers. A few weeks ago, the market vendors wrote a petition, signed by almost 200 poor market vendors, requesting the council to reduce the parking fee for the market vendors. We are not saying, or we are not suggesting that there should be no increase, no. What we are saying is that there has to be a gradual increase. The increase that they did is a thousand percent. I am also told, and to be corrected that the fee has not been gazetted and they have been charging. I want some clarification on that gazette part from the honourable Minister when he is going to respond to me.

MR. SPEAKER.- You have exhausted your time.

HON. P.K. BALA.- One minute, Sir.

MR. SPEAKER.- Not one minute. You are going to read one last paragraph. I will allow you that one last paragraph.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

I urge the honourable Minister for Local Government to look into these grievances raised by the market vendors.

Finally, the demand from the ratepayers is clear that the councils must lift their game, improve basic services and show accountability for the funds that they collect. Failure to do so only deepens the mistrust and dissatisfaction of the very people they exist to serve. With those few words, I want to say thank you very much and happy birthday.

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to provide some response to the End of Week Statement delivered by honourable Bala, the former Minister for Housing and Local Government. From the outset, this side of the House, while listening to his presentation, most of what he had shared are just generalised statements with baseless allegations against some issues that he had raised. I was waiting for him to at least pinpoint some councils or mention some councils, but he never mentioned. He did not do a good job by going around the councils and getting those issues discussed and confirmed at the council level.

I also want to comment on a few things that he had shared. First one is the breakdown of basic services like garbage collection, roads, drainage and streetlights. When he was the Minister in 2018 and when the Ministry of Waterways was created, the drainage responsibility from the council was transferred to the Ministry of Agriculture and Waterways. When the Fiji Roads Authority was created in 2012, this basic service was also transferred to FRA. There was no clear arrangement, but an MOU was done, but there was no clear direction on the shared services between the FRA and the councils. So, he should get his facts right before he comes to this House and present to us his figures.

He should also note, at the end of this month, this Government has also acquired six more garbage compact trucks that will be given to five councils. He also commented on the lack of communication between councils and ratepayers. Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is a government that listens to the people. We have been doing a lot of consultations, even I had been involved in some of these consultations, but during his time, I do not know whether he has even attended any consultations that were held in these municipalities. That is something that he needs to understand.

He mentioned about the cleanliness of towns and cities. Mr. Speaker, Sir, you should go to Sigatoka Town Council and find out from the chairman about the rubbish being there for so long; used cans and the bottles. The Sigatoka Town Council has also entered into an arrangement with Mission Pacific and Coca-Cola on the collection of all the cans and bottles. They have a scheme that is called "Return and Pay". Now, for any can as well as bottles that are returned to the councils, is paid 5 cents per can or 5 cents per bottle. These are some of the small initiatives done by some of the councils. Just recently I have also launched the "Smart and Clean Town". It is like a competition. Most of the towns and cities are now doing their beautification because they want to be the smartest as well as the cleanest town in Fiji.

Another very important issue mentioned this morning is on the Municipal Election. During his time as a Minister in this august House in 2014, he promised that there will be....

HON. P.K. BALA.- Point of Order.

MR. SPEAKER.- Point of Order, honourable Bala.

HON. P.K. BALA.- I never said in this House that we are going to hold municipal elections. If he has evidence, he should prove to the House, otherwise he should shut up.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Bala you know the drill. When you stand to make a Point of Order, you refer specifically to a Standing Order.

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- He was also interviewed by a *Fijivillage* journalist where he mentioned that there will be a Municipal Election held. From then till now, the ratepayers are still waiting for the Municipal Election to happen.

When we came in, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we amended the Local Government Act in 2023 to allow for local government elections. We have completed the regulations, we are now on the tail-end, and we are going to hold Municipal Elections when the time is right. He also mentioned something about the Ba Town Council car park fees. According to that, there is no need to gazette the increase in fees in the Ba Town Council market car park. The Council have had consultations with the market vendors on the increase in car park fees. They have held another two consultations and have come to an agreement on the increase in fees. That is something that they have done.

HON. P.K. BALA.- You are misleading Parliament.

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- They have just held another consultation lately on how the market fees will be increased, and how market fees will be charged. For the information of the House, I think when we come to this House we must come here with facts. We do not want to mislead the people of Fiji as well as yourself.

#### Shift of Focus and Reprioritisation - Ministry of Agriculture

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, thank you for the opportunity to deliver my End of Week Statement. The topic is on the shift of focus in the Ministry of Agriculture and Waterways, the welfare of the staff and the supporting infrastructure.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, following my new appointment as the Assistant Minister for Agriculture and Waterways, I did engage a three-week familiarization tour to all the agriculture and waterways stations and research stations in the Central and Western Divisions. During that visit, I met the staff, listened to their grievances, stories, complaints and saw the challenging work environment.

During that visit, I met the staff members and heard their grievances, stories, complaints, and actually saw the challenging work environment. I rise today to bring to this august House several issues of deep concern, those that affect not only the morale and productivity of our Ministries' workforce, but also the very foundation of service delivery to our farmers in rural communities.

On the welfare of the labour force, Mr. Speaker, Sir, if you can remember that in our last Parliament sitting, I stand in this august House to respond to the Standing Committee on Natural Resources in the Consolidated Review Report of the Ministry of Agriculture 2020 to 2022 Annual Report, which highlighted a series of systematic challenges challenging the consistency and effectiveness of programme delivery across the agriculture sector.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, these findings are drawn from extensive stakeholder consultation and field visits point to deep-rooted structural and operational inefficiency. Notably, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the

Committee's observations implicitly reflect the strain placed on the Ministry's staff members, whose welfare appears to be compromised by inadequate resourcing and poor working conditions. The persistent gaps in programme execution are not merely administrative. They are symptomatic of a workforce stretched beyond its capacity, emphasising the urgent need to prioritise staff welfare as a cornerstone of agriculture reform.

On the labour force and infrastructure, Mr. Speaker, as of the latest census in the operation report, the Ministry of Agriculture and Waterways employs approximately 375 Government wage earners, 565 established staff members and 17 project officers, totalling 957 staff members across its divisions. The staff members are stationed throughout 87 agriculture stations across Fiji, serving our farming communities and the nation's food security goals; however, the reality on the ground is deeply troubling.

On the living working conditions, Mr. Speaker, Sir, many of our staff members have stayed in Government quarters that are in poor condition. Some still bear the damage inflicted by *TC Kina* and have yet to be repaid, while others have deteriorated over time due to a lack of maintenance. These residences are not just uncomfortable. They are unable and unfit for habitation. Likewise, the offices in which our office work are dilapidated and lack essential infrastructure and amenities. In numerous stations, officers operate without access to laptops, reliable internet connections or even proper furniture, all of which significantly impede the ability to perform their duties effectively.

On the impact of service delivery, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the consequences of these conditions are far-reaching. Officers are unable to process data, communicate with stakeholders or access digital platforms. Farmers are not being served efficiently, especially in remote areas. The Ministry's strategic outputs, such as improving food security, increasing farmers' income and promoting climate-smart agriculture, are compromised. We cannot expect excellence from our offices if we do not provide them with the tools, resources and environments they need to succeed.

On the call for action, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is imperative that we prioritise the welfare of our Ministry staff. This includes:

- The immediate assessment and repair of cyclone-damaged quarters and offices;
- Allocation of funding for the renovation and modernisation of facilities;
- Provisions of essential ICT tools such as laptops and internet access; and
- Development of long-term infrastructure and welfare improvement plan.

Mr. Speaker, investing in the welfare of our officers is not a luxury, it is a necessity. Their wellbeing directly affects the productivity of our agriculture sector and the livelihood of thousands of farmers.

On the payment of overtime, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to acknowledge the unwavering commitment and dedication of our staff members and officers who have consistently worked beyond regular hours to ensure the timely completion of essential tasks. Despite the absence of a current budget allocation for overtime, these individuals have gone above and beyond their duties, often sacrificing personal time to uphold the standards and responsibilities of the ministry. It is both a matter of fairness and professional integrity that we recognise and compensate their effort through the payment of overdue overtime allowance. Doing so not only honours their contribution, but also reinforces a culture of accountability and motivation, ensuring that future work continues to be carried out with diligence and excellence.

On insurance for Ministry staff, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to highlight the urgent need to establish a comprehensive insurance coverage for all the ministry staff members. Our personnel

operate in an environment full of risks. We are in the field or on the road, or in the sea. Staff members in the animal health and production division, for instance, routinely face exposure to zoonotic diseases such as tuberculosis during cattle testing. Drivers and field officers have encountered threatening accidents while travelling to carry out our duties.

Despite these hazards, our staff members remain uninsured, leaving their families in vulnerable times of crisis. It is both a moral and operational imperative that we safeguard those who serve the nation by ensuring they are protected through appropriate insurance mechanisms. The safety is not a matter of policy, it is a matter of principle.

On collection centres, as part of our community equitable agriculture development, the ministry recognised the urgent need to establish collection centres for isolated farmers in the interior Viti Levu and Vanua Levu and the maritime islands. While commercial farmers are increasingly equipped with polar trucks and advanced logistics, many smallholder farmers in the interior of Viti Levu and Vanua Levu and other islands remain devastated, disadvantaged by the limited access to post-harvest infrastructure. This collection centre will serve as a critical hub to ensure post-harvest losses are reduced, preserve quality and fast produce and ensure the farmers in remote areas are not left behind.

The final item is the minimum price for every commodity. I would like to emphasise the critical necessity of our Ministry to set a minimum price for all agricultural commodities to guarantee a return on investment to our farmers. For an extended period, our diligent farmers have faced exploitation by unreliable intermediaries or middlemen who acquire produce at unjustly low prices, preventing farmers from recouping their labour and input costs. This pervasive problem has discouraged investment in agriculture.

To conclude Mr. Speaker, Sir, we need to draw a time frame and seek funds for this special project. As far as the funding is concerned, we will uphold some of the programmes initiated to divert their budget to the funds proposed to improve staff-welfare and its supporting infrastructure. We will look at the budget, decide which programme to uphold or amalgamate that will have minimal impacts to the overall agriculture and waterways production and target the GDP contribution.

The timeframe, considering the urgency of the matter, will be immediately engaged in this project that may take four to six months. Completion of the above project, we believe that we have addressed all the Standing Committee for Natural Resources recommendations that will improve service delivery and increase productivity.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, investing in human resources is a smart business strategy. It fosters a healthier, happier and productive workforce, leading to employee satisfaction, boosting morale and loyalty, and reducing staff turnover. With those remarks, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I express my gratitude for the chance to present my End of Week Statement.

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, and I also wish to thank the honourable Assistant Minister for his thoughtful insight and recommendations based on his experiences when he visited our staff members in the field the last three weeks. I also wish to thank the staff members of the Ministry for openly discussing with the honourable Assistant Minister issues of concern to them when they are carrying out their work in the field. This was an opportunity they had never had in the past due to the risk of being victimised when they openly discuss issues affecting their work. For that, I would like to thank the staff members of the Ministry for openly coming and discussing issues related to how they carry out normal business with the honourable Assistant Minister.

I fully endorse the sentiments expressed by the honourable Assistant Minister regarding the strategic importance of investing in staff-welfare and infrastructure development within the Ministry. His emphasis on staff-welfare and infrastructure development resonates deeply with our shared vision of resilience and thriving the agriculture sector.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, our staff are our greatest asset. When we prioritise their well-being through a safe working environment, professional development opportunities, and robust support systems, we lay the foundation for a Ministry that will not only be productive but also resilient and forward-looking. Staff morale and job satisfaction are not only desirable outcomes, but also essential drivers of performance, innovation, and self-excellence.

Equally, infrastructure development is a critical pillar in our mission to modernise agriculture and water management across Fiji. Upgrading facilities, improving access to technology, and streamlining operation systems will empower our staff members to deliver more effectively and efficiently. These improvements will also foster a culture of innovation, where creativity is encouraged, and solutions are developed collaboratively to meet the evolving needs of our farmers and communities and stakeholders.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, due to unforeseen circumstances and inherent vulnerabilities within the Ministry, critical assets such as staff welfare and infrastructure support may have been overlooked. These challenges have likely disrupted the Ministry's ability to maintain operational efficiency. As a result, the Ministry has struggled to achieve the targets outlined in the costed operational plan, underscoring the need for a more resilient framework that prioritises both human and infrastructure resources to ensure a sustainable process.

I wish to inform this august House that the Ministry will undertake a comprehensive review of the costed operational plan to enhance the achievement of our outlined targets. This review reflects our commitment to aligning strategic priority with a measurable outcome that supports the well-being of our staff and resources. Furthermore, the Ministry acknowledges and will carefully consider the recommendations put forward by Standing Committees on Natural Resources, particularly those concerning staff-welfare and infrastructure development.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as Minister for Agriculture and Waterways, I reaffirm our commitment to these priorities. Together, we will continue to build a sector that is not only productive and innovative but also inclusive, supportive, and grounded in the values of service and integrity. Let us continue to build a Ministry that will not only meet today's challenges but is prepared to lead Fiji's agriculture and water sector into a prosperous future. For that, I fully support it.

MR. SPEAKER.- Thank you, honourable Members, for your forbearance. Before I invite the honourable Leader of the Government in Parliament to move his adjournment motion, I would firstly acknowledge the sentiments and best wishes from honourable Minister for Women, Children and Social Protection, honourable Koya, honourable Usamate, and the honourable Members on my birthday. As it turns out, and revealed by the honourable Usamate, I share my birth anniversary with the honourable Premila Kumar. I wish a happy birthday to you, honourable Kumar. On our behalf, I say a big *vinaka vakalevu* for all your best wishes to us today.

Secondly, I am grateful to all the honourable Members for heeding my plea at the beginning of this week, asking if they can make haste in their interventions and their contributions and statements. By so doing, it has now allowed more time for me and my delegation, consisting of the honourable Minister for Agriculture, the honourable Assistant Minister and Deputy Speaker, and honourable Viam Pillay to pack our suitcases and travel this afternoon to Nadi on our way to attend the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Meeting in Barbados next week.

**ADJOURNMENT**

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

That Parliament adjourns until Monday, 3<sup>rd</sup> November, 2025 at 9.30 a.m.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, that concludes the end of our sitting, and I thank you all for your contributions throughout the week. I now declare Parliament adjourned until Monday, 3rd November, 2025, at 9.30 a.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 11.43 a.m.

**Reply to Written Question No. 188/2025 tabled by the honourable Minister for Education (Ref. Page 2043)**



**MINISTER FOR EDUCATION  
(Hon. A.M. Radrodro)**

Reply to Question No. 188/2025 is as follows:

- (1) Tertiary Scholarships and Loans Service (TSLS) administers government scholarships, grants and study loans. The TSLS has continuously been working on strengthening the policies to ensure transparent and efficient management of taxpayer funds for scholarships and study loans.
- (2) In 2023, there were 13,860 students funded by TSLS under scholarships and study loan schemes at various Tertiary Education Institutes while in 2024, there are 15,666 students currently being funded by TSLS.
- (3) TSLS has disbursed tuition payment to various Tertiary Education Institutes as follows:
  - (i) 2022-2023 Financial Year - \$56,875,980
  - (ii) 2023-2024 Financial Year - \$62,414,805
- (4) The breakdown of disbursement to Tertiary Education Institutes are as follows:

| Tertiary Education Institute                              | Disbursement Amount (\$) |                     |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------|
|                                                           | 2022-2023                | 2023-2024           |
| University of the South Pacific                           | 15,537,414               | 13,143,401          |
| Fiji National University                                  | 30,565,249               | 30,758,717          |
| University of Fiji                                        | 5,729,074                | 6,695,178           |
| Sangam Institute of Nursing                               | 1,905,438                | 1,933,200           |
| Fulton College                                            | 661,136                  | 485,128             |
| Advanced Aviation Training (PTE) Limited                  | -                        | 350,000             |
| Centre for Applied Technology Development                 | 54,500                   | 473,700             |
| Corpus Christi Teachers College                           | 492,700                  | 420,200             |
| Keshals Business Education Institute                      | -                        | 53,400              |
| Montfort Boys Town                                        | -                        | 16,835              |
| Navuso Agricultural Technical Institute                   | -                        | 6,080               |
| Pacific Flying School                                     | -                        | 608,189             |
| Pacific Polytechnics                                      | 16,000                   | 3,926,699           |
| Pivot Point Fiji Institute                                | -                        | 656,952             |
| Service Pro International Tourism & Hospitality Institute | -                        | 45,500              |
| SPA Academy Fiji                                          | -                        | 70,000              |
| Overseas                                                  | 1,914,469                | 2,771,626           |
| <b>Total Disbursement</b>                                 | <b>\$56,875,980</b>      | <b>\$62,414,805</b> |