



Honorable Charan Jeath Singh
Minister for Multi-Ethnic Affairs and Sugar Industry

Reply to Written Question 240/2025

Hon. Viam Pillay to ask the Minister for Multi-Ethnic Affairs and Sugar Industry—

“Can the Minister inform Parliament the specific types of financial assistance and non-monetary support provided, to date, to affected farmers with respect to the following –

- (a) cane cutters, lorry owners, drivers, and co-operatives who have lost income; and
- (b) incurred additional costs due to the disruption caused by the Rarawai Mill fire.”

1. Mr. Speaker, I thank the Honourable Member for the question.

2. The unfortunate fire incident at the Rarawai Mill caused a significant disruption to harvesting and transportation operations in the Rarawai mill sectors, affecting cane cutters, lorry owners, and co-operatives.

3. The Ministry, together with the Fiji Sugar Corporation (FSC) and the Sugar Cane Growers Council, has been working closely to ensure that the impact on growers and stakeholders is minimised through both financial and non-financial interventions.

Impact on Cane Cutters

- i. Prior to the incident, a total of 380 gangs were in operation with approximately 2,964 cane cutters engaged. Following the fire, 71 gangs were directly affected, resulting in 532 cutters leaving midway through the harvesting season.
- ii. As of now, 355 gangs remain operational, comprising around 2,485 cutters, as some gangs have resumed operations following remedial arrangements.
- iii. Currently, approximately 18,000 tonnes of cane remain impacted due to the shortage of harvest labour. To mitigate this, the FSC and the Ministry have mobilized mechanical harvesters and labour from neighbouring sectors, including the Lautoka Mill area, to support harvesting continuity.

Impact on Lorry Owners and Drivers

- iv. Before the fire, 503 Lorries were engaged in cane transportation. Presently, 442 Lorries remain active, with around 60 Lorries temporarily out of operation due to poor roadworthiness and the extended haulage distance to Lautoka Mill.
- v. Operational Lorries are currently operating at approximately 35–40% capacity, consistent with the reduced crushing requirements at the Lautoka Mill.

Impact on Co-operatives

- i. Prior to the incident, 36 co-operatives were actively managing harvesting and transportation logistics. Of these, 30 co-operatives continue to operate daily, though at 35–40% capacity, ensuring continuity of operations despite the constraints caused by the mill outage.

Financial Assistance Provided

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in recognition of the additional costs incurred by affected farmers, the following financial measures have been implemented:

- i. **Cane Transfer Allowance:** a payment of \$15 per tonne has been approved to assist affected growers

transporting cane from the Rarawai Mill area to the Lautoka Mill.

- ii. **Rail Growers' Conversion Allowance:** support has also been provided to rail growers converting to lorry transport in line with provisions of the Master Award. The additional transport costs from this conversion are being fully absorbed by the Fiji Sugar Corporation (FSC).

4. These interventions are ensuring that growers are not burdened by unexpected costs arising from circumstances beyond their control.

Non-Monetary Support

In addition to direct financial assistance, several non-monetary measures have been introduced to maintain harvesting momentum and minimize operational disruptions. These include:

- i. Deployment of mechanical harvesters and redistribution of cutters from unaffected sectors;
- ii. Reallocation of logistics and transport resources from Rarawai mill to Lautoka;
- iii. Continuous coordination between FSC, Growers Council, contractors, and co-operatives to ensure efficient movement of cane and to minimize delays; and

- iv. Ongoing stakeholder engagement to address operational bottlenecks as they arise.
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- 5. Mr. Speaker, Sir, despite the significant setback caused by the Rarawai Mill fire, the Government, FSC, and stakeholders have responded swiftly and collaboratively.
 - 6. Through a combination of targeted financial relief, strategic operational adjustments, and strong field coordination, the sugar industry in the Rarawai sector is steadily recovering and maintaining supply continuity to the Lautoka Mill.
 - 7. Mr Speaker we remain committed to ensuring that no grower is left behind and that the sector continues to recover strongly in preparation for the next crushing season.

Thank you, Mister Speaker Sir.
