

Hon. Sakiasi Ditoka

Minister for Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management

Response to Written Question 241/2025

Thursday 06 November 2025

Hon. Iliesa Vanawalu to ask the Minister for Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Risk Management – Can the Minister update Parliament with respect to the following:

- (a) number of projects carried out under the Rural Outer Island Programme for the period January 2023 to June 2025; and
- (b) number of projects under construction with the Rural Outer Island Programme to date.

Background

1. The **Rural and Outer Island Programme (ROI)**, established under the Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Risk Management in 2023, represents a cornerstone initiative of the Coalition Government to transform rural and maritime connectivity. Now in its third

consecutive year of implementation, the Programme has received budgetary allocations of \$2.5 million in the 2023–2024 financial year, and \$3 million each for FY2024–2025 and FY2025–2026, respectively.

2. In alignment with the Government's **rural transformation agenda**, the ROI Programme was strategically launched to strengthen basic infrastructure and access for remote communities, especially during the critical period of rebuilding national capacity following the re-establishment of the **Public Works Department (PWD)**.
3. With **41.29 percent of Fiji's population** residing in rural areas, this Programme continues to play a catalytic role in bridging connectivity gaps across Viti Levu, Vanua Levu, Kadavu, Ovalau, and the Lau Group. Improved road networks have expanded access to schools, health centres, markets, and essential public services, thus lifting social mobility and reducing isolation among rural families, farmers, and vulnerable groups.

(a) Projects Implemented (January 2023 – June 2025)

4. From January 2023 to June 2025, a total of **101 projects** have been successfully implemented under the ROI Programme. Of which:
 - **68%** focused on the construction of new community access roads;
 - **15%** supported the establishment of rural food processing units and facilities;
 - **9%** assisted agriculture and livestock farmers;

- **4%** strengthened communities with timber resources under the Rural Housing Initiative through portable sawmills;
- **2%** supported subsistence fisheries; and
- **2%** facilitated pontoon bridge construction.

5. This diversified investment mix demonstrates the Ministry's strategic shift from short-term infrastructure delivery to **integrated rural value-chain development**, ensuring that road access directly links to productive sectors such as agriculture, fisheries, and small-scale processing.

6. The ROI Programme is also reinforcing the **Integrated Rural Development Framework (IRDF)**¹ at operational level, encouraging provincial coordination, cross-sectoral partnerships, and long-term sustainability. New community access roads are now designed to interconnect provincial boundaries, enabling the **Fiji Roads Authority (FRA)** to progressively absorb them into its national inventory for maintenance and upgrading.

(b) Projects Under Construction

7. As of October 2025, **20 projects** are currently under active construction. Of these, **81%** are road projects, with **41%** progressing through Phase Two works, which cover gravelling, compacting, and formation to **FRA's Road Works Standards and Specifications**.

¹ Cabinet recently endorsed the review report of the IRDF 2009 that will form the foundation in the formulation of the National Rural Development Policy (NRDP).

8. The Programme also includes two major **pontoon bridge projects** - the Nokonoko–Laucala Bailey and Yanuca Pontoon Bridges, currently in the engineering scoping phase. These are vital to improving maritime mobility for coastal and island communities in **Rewa, Beqa, and Yanuca**, facilitating access to markets, education, and health services on the mainland.
9. Recognizing that poverty remains disproportionately higher in rural areas, at **40% in the Eastern Division**, according to the 2019–20 Household Income and Expenditure Survey, the Ministry has prioritized **targeted infrastructure and enterprise projects** that can generate inclusive and lasting impact.
10. To this end, three new **processing and value-adding facilities** are being established in the **Eastern Division**:
 - a **cassava cooling facility and yaqona processing centre** in Gau; and
 - a **fish cooling and processing facility** in Lakeba, Lau.
11. In the current financial year, the ROI Programme is further repositioned to establish **strategic manufacturing and logistics hubs** in the **Lomaiviti and Lau groups**. These hubs will serve as rural transformation anchors, enhancing inter-island trade, strengthening local supply chains, and promoting integrated island economies.

Conclusion

12. The **Rural and Outer Island Programme** reflects Government's strategic intent to build a **connected, inclusive, and resilient rural Fiji**. Its forward-looking design links physical infrastructure with economic empowerment, enabling communities to thrive within their natural environments.
13. Going forward, the Ministry will deepen coordination through the revised **Integrated Rural Development Framework**, mobilizing partnerships across government agencies, development partners, and local communities. By aligning financial, technical, and institutional resources, the Programme will continue to transform rural and maritime livelihoods—ensuring that **no community is left behind** in Fiji's path to sustainable and equitable development.

END.

(a) number of projects carried out under the Rural Outer Island Programme for the period

January 2023 to June 2025

Project	2023/2024	2024/2025	2025/2026	Total	Percentage
Roads	21	32	16	69	68%
Agriculture/Livestock	5	4	0	9	9%
Food Processing Unit and facility	11	1	3	15	15%
Forestry	4	0	0	4	4%
Fisheries	0	1	1	2	2%
Jetties (Pontoon)	0	0	2	2	0
Total	41	38	22	101	100.00

(b) number of projects under construction with the Rural Outer Island Programme to date.

Project	2025/2026
Roads	16
Agriculture/Livestock	0
Food Processing Unit and facility	3
Forestry	0
Fisheries	1
Jetties (Pontoon)	2
Total	22