

PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI



PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DAILY HANSARD

MONDAY, 1ST DECEMBER, 2025

[CORRECTED COPY]

C O N T E N T S

	<u>Pages</u>
Minutes	2568
Communications from the Speaker	2568-2569
(1) Welcome	
(2) Visitors in the Public Gallery	
(3) Queen Victoria School 2025 Dux	
Presentation of Reports of Committees	2569-2572
(1) Review Report – Credit Union Bill 2025	
(2) Review Report – Trademarks (Amendment) Bill 2025	
(3) Review Report – Amendment to Article and Protocol of the Chicago Convention	
Questions	2572-2621
<u>Oral Questions</u>	
(1) AI Credit Assessment Pilot Project - Unsecured Lending	(Q/No. 318/2025)
(2) Adoption of Global Data Protection Standards	(Q/No. 330/2025)
(3) UNCDF Initiative – Parametric Insurance	(Q/No. 358/2025)
(4) Status of ‘Call for Tender’ – Rakiraki Sugar Mill	(Q/No. 289/2025)
(5) FSC’s Export Quota – Timely Payment to Farmers	(Q/No. 305/2025)
(6) Update on RESAR in Fiji Project	(Q/No. 312/2025)
(7) Ministry’s Plans – 2026 Teaching & Learning Resources	(Q/No. 313/2025)
(8) Fiji Resilient Informal Settlements Programme	(Q/No. 314/2025)
(9) Development of Livestock Industry in Fiji	(Q/No. 316/2025)
(10) Bus Shelters in the Western Division	(Q/No. 319/2025)
(11) Ratification of UN Cybercrime Convention	(Q/No. 320/2025)
(12) 2023 Agricultural Programmes for Smallholder Farmers	(Q/No. 322/2025)
(13) New Hospitals in Suva	(Q/No. 317/2025)
(14) Re-Development Project for Kings Charles Park	(Q/No. 321/2025)
(15) Revision of School Curriculum	(Q/No. 323/2025)
(16) Bright Journey Initiative	(Q/No. 324/2025)
(17) Logistics of Transporting Sugarcane to Mill	(Q/No. 325/2025)
(18) Marine Research Vessel <i>RV Yau Dikevi</i>	(Q/No. 326/2025)
(19) Complaints Against Licensed Surveyors	(Q/No. 327/2025)
(20) Pending Requests – Construction of Seawalls	(Q/No. 328/2025)
(21) Scuttled Vessels – Suva Harbour	(Q/No. 329/2025)
(22) dPlans to Enlarge Valelevu Health Centre	(Q/No. 331/2025)
(23) Mechanisms and Processes – Leased State Land	(Q/No. 332/2025)
(24) Attracting Younger Generation to Sugarcane Farming	(Q/No. 357/2025)
(25) MOU with Rakiraki Chamber of Commerce	(Q/No. 359/2025)
(26) ITEC Programme – Suva Super Speciality Hospital	(Q/No. 360/2025)
(27) Key National Infrastructure Projects Facing Delays	(Q/No. 361/2025)
(28) Update on Fire Victims Assistance Programme	(Q/No. 362/2025)
(29) Addressing the Growing Demand for State Land	(Q/No. 364/2025)
(30) Direct Consultation/Collaboration with Gen Z	(Q/No. 365/2025)
(31) Addressing Cases of Child Sexual Abuse	(Q/No. 366/2025)
<u>Written Questions</u>	
(1) Funds Allocated for Termite Infestation	(Q/No. 333/2025)
(2) Chiefly Positions/Titles to be Registered	(Q/No. 334/2025)
(3) Statistics on Sugar Production	(Q/No. 302/2025)
Suspension of Standing Orders	2614
Environment Management (Amendment) Bill 2025	2622-2630
Forestry Bill 2025	2630-2638
Criminal Records Bill 2025	2638-2640
Commercial Use of Marine Areas Bill 2025	2641-2644

MONDAY, 1ST DECEMBER, 2025

The Parliament met at 9.49 a.m. pursuant to adjournment.

MR. SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

PRESENT

All Members were present, except the honourable K.V. Ravu; the honourable P.D. Kumar and the honourable S.S. Kirpal.

MINUTES

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

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Friday, 28th November, 2025, as previously circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE SPEAKER

Welcome

I welcome all of you honourable Members to the final sitting for the year 2025. I also welcome all those sitting in the gallery and those tuning in live through television or our online platforms. You are most welcome. Thank you for staying engaged and connected with the proceedings of Parliament.

Visitors in the Public Gallery

Honourable Members, please join me in welcoming our two visitors from the Fijian Association of Canada, Mr. Sam Basra, the President of the Association, and Mr. Jeff Lal, the Association's Head of Commerce and Investment. You are most welcome to Fiji Parliament.

Honourable Members also, please join me in warmly welcoming the students, teachers and the parents of Nawaqavesi Primary School and Nawaqavesi Kindergarten from Rakiraki in Ra. On behalf of the honourable Members, I warmly welcome you to Parliament and I hope that this visit will inspire and enrich your young minds help you understand how Parliament functions and the vital role this legislative body plays in shaping and safeguarding our democracy.

Queen Victoria School 2025 Dux

Still on the topic of students and school, I congratulate the honourable Minister for Fisheries and Forestry, on the achievement of her son, Sakiusa Bainivalu, who was declared as the 2025 Dux of Queen Victoria School (QVS). Hard work, dedication and perseverance always wins out at the end. I wish him every success in his future endeavours. A footnote, it is no surprise that Sakiusa Bainivalu belongs to the champion house, Rewa House, of QVS - the yellow house, a colour

representing, in some cultures, happiness and optimism.

PRESENTATION OF REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

Review Report on the Credit Union Bill 2025

HON. S. TUBUNA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, on behalf of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs, I am pleased to present the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs' Review Report on the Credit Union Bill 2025 (Bill No. 29 of 2025). This Report presents the findings of the Committee's review process and outlines recommended revisions of the Bill by including a legislative framework that safeguards public confidence in Fiji's credit unions by strengthening the overall stability of the financial system.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, credit unions have operated in Fiji for more than half a century. However, their growth has been relatively slow, primarily due to a legal framework that has not evolved in line with the developments of the credit union movement, both domestically and internationally. Consequently, a reform initiative was introduced to enhance the regulatory regime with the aim of strengthening the safety and soundness of credit unions, while carefully balancing the need to avoid imposing undue regulatory burdens.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, during its deliberations, the Committee received several requests from credit unions for an extension of time to prepare their written submissions, allowing them to provide a thorough and informed feedback on the Bill. It was also brought to the Committee's attention that the version of the Bill presented during the Reserve Bank of Fiji's consultations with credit unions differed from the version referred to the Committee. As a result, the Committee granted additional time to ensure that all credit unions were afforded a fair opportunity to present their views on the Bill.

The Committee observed that the Bill proposes to subject the credit unions to income tax, notwithstanding that their commercial activities are already taxed. The Committee recommends that the Bill be reviewed to prevent instances of double taxation and to ensure fairness and consistency in the treatment of entities within the financial sector.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Committee noted the concern raised by the credit unions regarding the potential for excessive regulatory oversight and micro-management under the proposed provisions of the Bill. The Committee observed that the Bill does not adequately address specific needs of small credit unions compared to the large ones, as this may have unequal implications due to their differing capacities and financial strengths.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to promote transparency and inclusivity, the Committee had invited registered credit unions to provide oral and written submissions. Notices were also placed in the *Fiji Sun* on 13th September, 2025, and disseminated through the official Parliament website.

Schedules for public consultations and the procedures for submissions were shared via the Parliament's official *Facebook* page and mainstream media to ensure a wider public consultation on the subject. Additionally, invitation letters were also sent to credit unions, government departments, statutory bodies, workers' unions, school heads and management and business stakeholders, inviting them to contribute their views on the Bill. The Committee conducted extensive public consultations across the various locations across the country. The insights gathered from these consultations were meticulously analysed and incorporated into this Report.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I extend my sincere appreciation to the Governor of the Reserve Bank of Fiji and their team, the credit unions, members of the various unions and the Office of the Solicitor-General for their timely assistance during the scrutiny of the Bill. I would also like to acknowledge all the stakeholders who actively participated in this consultation process. Their valuable contributions have played a crucial role in shaping the bipartisan Report and informing them of the necessary amendments to the Bill.

I would like to express my gratitude to the honourable Members of the Standing Committee for their dedication and contributions to the production of this Report. I acknowledge my Committee colleagues.

On behalf of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs, I commend this Review Report on the Credit Union Bill 2025 to Parliament and request all Members of this august House to take note of the Report.

(Report handed to Secretary-General)

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, pursuant to the resolution of Parliament on Thursday, 7th August, 2025, and the Communication from the Speaker on Monday, 29th September, 2025, the Standing Committee has now tabled its Report, and the Bill will be debated and voted upon by Parliament on Thursday, 4th December, 2025.

Review Report on the Trademarks (Amendment) Bill 2025

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I begin this morning by reminding the august House and those who are watching us in the gallery today, that today is World AIDS Day. The theme for 2025 World AIDS Day is, “Overcoming disruption, transforming the AIDS response”.

Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Committee, I am pleased to present the Review Report on the Trademarks (Amendment) Bill 2025 (Bill No. 28/2025). The Bill seeks to strengthen Fiji's trademark laws by addressing gaps in the protection of cultural heritage and indigenous intellectual property. Once commenced, the Trademarks Act 2021 will replace the Trademarks Act 1933, modernising the legal framework and aligning it with Fiji's international obligations under the Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) and the Paris Convention.

Key reforms include the adoption of the Nice Classification System, multi-class applications, a fair opposition process and stronger measures against infringement and large-scale counterfeiting. While these enhancements significantly improve the registration, protection and enforcement of trademarks, the World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO) has highlighted the need for clearer procedures under the High Court Rules 1988 to fully safeguard trademark rights.

Any opposition to accepted application by the Commissioner must be in writing, outlining the grounds of opposition and the Commissioner is empowered, under section 44 of the Trademarks Act 2021, to determine the opposition to all other sections of the Act.

Under section 12(2), the Minister responsible for trademarks, who is the Attorney-General, has ultimate power to approve or reject any trademark application under the section. Under section 13 of the Trademarks Act 2021, no court, tribunal or Commission has the power to hear or determine any challenge to the decision of the Minister on a claim, complaint or application for registration section 12(2). The Attorney-General will, therefore, need to work very, very closely with the Minister for iTaukei Affairs and other indigenous groups to ensure no conflict arises.

To effectively review the Trademarks (Amendment) Bill 2025, the Committee received public submissions from relevant stakeholders to address specific provisions within the Bill that they considered most pertinent. This was livestreamed via the Parliament's *Facebook* page and aired on the Walesi Parliament channel. The submissions assisted the Committee in comprehending the practical implications of the proposed amendments and identifying potential challenges.

The Committee also saw it fit to visit the Fiji Intellectual Property Office (FIPO), which sits under the Office of the Solicitor-General on 9th September this year, to gain a better understanding of the operations of FIPO. The FIPO has submitted several requests to raise its budget so it can set up the Intellectual Property Office. At present, funding goes mainly towards overtime, allowances and running expenses. Staffing remains managed by the Solicitor-General's Office and the Committee recommends creating an established structure to better support the office's management and operations.

The Committee observed that existing procedures under FIPO are predominantly manual, using up significant time and effort, particularly for the review of applications spanning 50 distinct classes and subclasses. To improve efficiency, FIPO has reached out to WIPO for technical support to assist with the digitisation process and this support has recently been approved. While full and proper digitisation has not yet been implemented, preparatory steps including the scanning of documents have already commenced. It is hoped that WIPO will assist in providing access to the Industrial Property Automation System (IPAS) which will be instrumental in digitising records and streamlining the operational processes.

Capacity building also remains a priority for the office, with minimal WIPO-led training sessions both online and face-to-face for administrative staff and legal offices having already taken place. Additional staffing for the proper operation of the office is sought but must be supported through an effectively structured business case model that would cover all intellectual property rights, patents, trademarks, copyrights, registered designs, geographical indications and traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions.

The Committee expresses its appreciation to the Office of the Solicitor-General and the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs for availing themselves on 20th August, to provide valuable insights and a brief overview of the Bill which greatly assisted the Committee in our deliberations. The Committee would also like to thank the submitters, including those who provided written submissions, whose contributions greatly assisted in the compilation of this Review Report.

I thank the Members of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence for their contribution in producing this bipartisan report. Sir, on behalf of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence, I respectfully submit this Report to Parliament.

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, pursuant to the resolution of Parliament on Wednesday, 6th August, 2025 and the Communication from the Speaker on Wednesday, 1st October, 2025, the Standing Committee has now tabled its Report and the Bill will be debated and voted upon by Parliament on Thursday, 4th December, 2025.

Review Report – Amendment to Article and Protocol of the
Convention on International Civil Aviation

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, on behalf of the Committee, I am pleased to present our Standing Committee Review Report of the Protocol relating to an amendment to

Article 50(a) of the Convention on International Civil Aviation and the Protocol relating to an amendment to Article 56 of the Convention on International Civil Aviation. These instruments were referred to the Committee by you, Sir, on 5th November, 2025 for consideration in accordance with Standing Order 130.

During our review, the Committee examined the written analysis tabled in Parliament and further consulted the Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation, together with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and External Trade. The Committee noted that the proposed amendments are administrative and procedural in nature, aimed at expanding the membership of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) Council and the Air Navigation Commission (ANC) to reflect the significant growth in ICAO's global membership, which now stands at 193 states. Both Ministries expressed full support for Fiji's ratification of the protocols, highlighting the benefits of enhanced global representation and improved participation in international aviation governance processes.

The Committee, therefore, is satisfied that the amendments do not pose any financial or legal obligations in Fiji. The Committee further concurs that the ratification will strengthen global aviation governance, enhance the representation of Small Island Developing States, and support Fiji's commitments to sustainable aviation. Accordingly, the Committee recommends that Parliament approves the ratification of both protocols without reservation.

On behalf of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence, I wish to thank the honourable Members of the Committee for compiling this bipartisan Report, and I therefore submit this Report to Parliament.

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

MR. SPEAKER.- Pursuant to Standing Order 121(1)(b) and Standing Order 130(4)(a), the Standing Committee has now reported back.

QUESTIONS

Oral Questions

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the following Oral Questions – Question Nos. 318, 330 and 358 of 2025, will be moved forward as the honourable Minister for Finance, Commerce and Business Development will be attending official meetings this morning. Oral Question No. 363 of 2025 will be deferred to Wednesday, 3rd December, 2025.

Artificial Intelligence Credit Assessment Pilot Project (Question No. 318/2025)

HON. S. TUBUNA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Finance, Commerce and Business Development update Parliament on Fiji's first Artificial Intelligence (AI) Credit Assessment Pilot Project for Unsecured Lending?

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, thank you for allowing me to answer my questions first, to allow me to meet and welcome the President of the OPEC Fund who is here on his first trip to Fiji.

I am pleased to provide Parliament with an update on a significant milestone for our nation's

financial sector. On 13th November, I had the privilege of launching the Fiji Development Bank's groundbreaking AI credit assessment pilot project. First, I would like to congratulate the Fiji Development Bank for taking this first stride in Fiji's financial technology (fintech) history.

In a global financial landscape where Artificial Intelligence is revolutionising, credit access from automatic risk analysis to enabling financial inclusion for underserved population, Fiji is now actively participating in this technological shift. For the benefit of all honourable Members, let me explain how this innovative system works, putting together the power of finance directly into the hands of our people, while ensuring the highest standard of security and human oversight are met.

First, customers download the official FDB app. Then they log in securely using a one-time password. Next, they complete and submit their loan applications entirely digitally. All data are encrypted and hosted on secure AWS servers in Sydney with strict data residency. It is governed by a contract that mandates Fijian law and guarantees the return or deletion of data upon termination. Once submitted, the system instantly processes the application. The FDB staff automatically receives a notification and is provided with an AI-generated credit assessment report to aid their review. This is crucial, Mr. Speaker, Sir, as the AI provides a recommendation, but the final decision always rests with our experienced officers, who can override the tool with a documented rationale. This ensures FDB staff are empowered and not replaced.

Finally, the customer receives a confirmation email with the goals of approval, possibly in just under 24 hours. This means, Mr. Speaker, Sir, no travel, no waiting in line – just trust innovation and connection. This is the first initiative of its kind in Fiji and its scope is carefully designed. The pilot project will accept loan applications from existing FDB customers for up to \$100,000 with loans under \$10,000 available as unsecured, subject to standard eligibility. The initiative has gathered support from international partners, the Australian government through the Market Development Facility (MDF) is a key core-funding and implementation partner.

As, Mr. Nicholas Wolf, the Regional Director for the Market Development Facility (MDF) Pacific stated at the launch, this pilot demonstrates how digital innovation can unlock new opportunities for financial inclusion in Fiji by supporting FDB's efforts to integrate AI into credit assessment will help access to finance faster, fairer and more efficient for businesses and individuals. The MDF is proud to partner in this initiative which aligns with our commitment to fostering inclusive economic growth in the Pacific. This partnership underscores the regional significance in this pilot.

Following the launch, the project team has been enhancing the tools features and continuing to train the AI model for even greater accuracy. We are already seeing strong interest with over 100 existing customers registering their interest through the platform. The FDB is now practically guarding them to complete the applications to ensure nationwide benefits, the pilot is accepting applications from all regions overseen by dedicated staff to ensure fair, first in, first out process and to meet the pilot's 24-hour target.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me be absolutely clear on the safeguards. This is a pilot designed to assist not only automate. Final lengthy decisions remain firmly with FDB's experienced Credit Officers. We are tracking this pilot against clear KPIs including turnaround time, concordance rate between the AI and officer decisions and customer satisfaction.

Full report on these measurable outcomes will be presented to the executive committee and can be made available to this House, ensuring full transparency on whether this pilot delivers real value for the Fijian people. This more than an app, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is a bridge connecting Fijians to opportunities, empowering our people and transforming how we access finance. It is a testament

to what we can achieve through responsible innovation and strong partnership, and it is firmly aligned with our National Development Plan and our National Digital Strategy.

HON. S. TUBUNA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, on data security and privacy, given that the system will process highly sensitive financial and personal data of the Fijian citizens, can the honourable Minister give us the detailed concrete measures in place to prevent data breaches and to ensure this information is not exploited by the vendor at ThirdRoc or hosted on insecure foreign service?

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the protection of Fijian citizens' data was a paramount concern from the outset. It was taken into full consideration. The Legal Aid Binding Service Agreement with ThirdRoc mandates the following the concrete measures:

- (1) Hosting and Residency
All data hosted on Amazon Web Services in Sydney, Australia, a globally recognised secure cloud environment. The agreement explicitly states data residency in Australia, providing clarity.
- (2) Security Standard
ThirdRoc is contractually required to maintain security controls equivalent to ISO 27001 and SOC2 the international gold Standards for Information Security.
- (3) Breach Control
In the event of any suspected data breach, ThirdRoc is obligated to notify Fiji Development Bank within 24 hours and provide a full report within 48 hours.
- (4) Data Use Limitations
The agreement prohibits ThirdRoc from using Fiji Development Bank's data to train models for other clients or for any purpose outside of providing the specific service to FDB. Our data is our asset Mr. Speaker, Sir and it is legally protected as such.
- (5) Audit Rights
Fiji Development Bank retains the right to audit ThirdRoc security practices annually to ensure ongoing compliance.

MR. SPEAKER.- I am reminding honourable Members that we have 32 Oral Questions today, so I will be very strict with the supplementary questions. If you do not mind, I will allow honourable Koya to ask his question.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, honourable Minister, we have not seen any new laws come into place with respect to data privacy and compliance, et cetera through Parliament. So, in that case, the question is, have you put in some new regulations because this is an entirely new platform and area that we are going to enter. Will we be seeing more regulations or new regulations, or have you already put some in place with respect to the laws and regulations specifically for privacy and also for regulatory compliance?

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, our plan within our digital strategy to have laws and regulations that will protect or cover what we are talking about today.

Adoption of Global Data Protection Standards
(Question No. 330/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Finance, Commerce and Business Development update Parliament on how the Ministry is supporting the outsourcing of the industry's growth to promote the adoption of global data protection standards, like ISO 27001, to secure business opportunities from Australia and New Zealand?

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Member for the question. Fiji's outsourcing industry continues to grow at an impressive pace and has become one of the most dynamic contributors to our modern services economy. It currently supports more than 8,500 jobs with women accounting for close to 70 percent of the workforce, and it plays a significant role in strengthening our foreign exchange earnings and broader economic resilience. As Australia and New Zealand remain our dominant source markets, that demands for strong data protection and information security compliance has never been critical.

In today's global operating environment trust, regulatory alignment and secure handling of client information are decisive factors when international companies choose where to place their high value work. That is why, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry has placed strong emphasis on the adoption of ISO 27001, the world's leading information security management standard, particularly in regulated services such as finance, aviation, telecommunication, utilities, tourism, healthcare and digital services.

Achieving this standard signals to the world's leading information security management standard, particularly in regulated sectors such as finance, aviation, telecommunication, utilities, tourism, healthcare and digital services. Achieving this standard signals to the world that Fijian companies operate with the same level of security, governance and professionalism expected internationally.

Through Outsource Fiji, the Ministry is implementing a comprehensive programme to lift national information security standards. These include awareness sessions, hands-on technical advisory support and capacity building delivered in partnership with the Market Development Facility. We are already seeing results, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

A great number of Fijian outsourcing operators including Digicel, Duco Consultancy, HLB Mann Judd, KPMG, Mindpearl, My Koro, Packleader Pacific, Pacific Centrecom, Proficient Customer Solutions, RCL Services and Vodafone have successfully achieved ISO 27001 certification. Each certification is independently audited and demonstrates that Fijian providers can meet the security expectations of major clients in Australia and New Zealand. The recent certification of Proficient Customer Solutions calibrated by Outsource Fiji, further strengthens our credibility in these markets.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, ISO 27001 is not a simple technical standard. It is an organisation-wide system that requires companies to assess risk, implement robust controls, undertake regular independent audits, and continuously strengthen their security posture. To ensure MSMEs are not left behind, Outsource Fiji is developing shared templates, baseline policies and group training programmes to help small operators achieve security maturity in a cost-effective manner.

Raising this standard, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is also enabling the sector to respond from traditional call centre work into high-value digital roles, including analytics, IT support, finance operations, and knowledge process outsourcing. These functions offer high income, stronger career progression, and help keep our young talent employed here at home rather than migrating overseas.

The Ministry continues to promote Fiji's outsourcing value proposition through trade missions and international marketing in Australia, New Zealand and the United States. At the same

time, the Government is strengthening national cyber security and data protection frameworks with a national digital strategy, ensuring that industry growth is underpinned by a secure and predictable digital environment.

A secure industry is a competitive one by lifting national information security standards, expanding ISO 27001 certification and aligning our digital reforms with global expectations. Fiji is positioning itself as a trusted, resilient and high-quality outsourcing destination. This will directly support job creation, export growth and long-term investor confidence in one of the most promising sectors of our economy.

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- Can the honourable Minister outline specific incentives that are being provided to encourage more outsourcing companies in Fiji to pursue ISO 27001 certification?

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir , the Government through Outsource Fiji is prioritising the development of a secure and globally competitive outsourcing industry. One of the key initiatives or incentives we are providing is subsidised industry-wide ISO 27001 training and capacity building programmes.

Outsource Fiji with Government funding is coordinating structured readiness training so that service providers can prepare for certification at significantly reduced cost. There are other incentives as well provided by the Government. One is tax holidays, income tax exemptions, tax and import duty exemptions or concessions on equipment and setup cost, allowances, deduction and depreciation type benefits, apart from employment-based tax initiatives to encourage local hiring and social benefits. As we are aware, there is no stamp duty, simpler reduced business licensing and streamlined setup procedure. So, Government is fully supporting the industry and providing incentives as well.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to congratulate the BPO sector, particularly the Government, for taking this important step. The BPO sector is a growing part of our GDP and something that we look to grow, and we know also that cybersecurity is a very important component. As I am listening to the work that is being undertaken, I am impressed by it, and I am thankful that this is taking place. However, we also have a lot of local institutions that manage a lot of data.

In the world today, I think there are two things that are going to be the cause of conflict in the world - control of data and control of water. Is there anything being done also, maybe a bit aside from your question, but the local entities that are not in the outsourcing sector that also need to make sure that the way they manage their data is also upheld to this ISO 27001 type sense. Is there any work taking place in Government, perhaps not in yours, but related agencies to make sure that knowledge and systems are also used in our local domestic market?

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the local providers or those who are interested locally are part of the plan as well. The target, at the moment, are the overseas investors. It is part of the strategy that the local will be consulted or will try to attract them considering the challenges that we have.

HON. F.S. KOYA.-Honourable Minister, very commendable about what is happening in ISO 27001, it is extremely important to the landscape, but because it is such a volatile area and it could be quite dangerous, have we carried out a data protection impact assessment prior to going down that particular road?

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, yes we have done an assessment. We have yet to do a strategy to include the maximum coverage that is needed in this outsource industry.

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

The Parliament adjourned at 10.33 a.m.

The Parliament resumed on 11.07 a.m.

UNCDF Initiative – Parametric Insurance
(Question No. 358/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Finance, Commerce and Business Development update Parliament on the activities in relation to the UNCDF initiative on Parametric Insurance?

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the contribution of the United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF) to the development of Fiji's financial system over the past decade, and the positive impact it continues to have on Fijian lives and livelihoods cannot be overstated. In the area of parametric insurance, UNCDF has introduced a unique and innovative solution that has positioned Fiji as a leader in promoting financial inclusion, not only in the Pacific, but globally.

At the 2024 Alliance for Financial Inclusion Global Policy Forum, the Reserve Bank of Fiji (RBF) was honoured with the Nesto Espenilla Junior Award, recognising Fiji's leadership in fostering financial inclusion and innovation. This recognition is attributed in part to the successful implementation of parametric insurance and the tangible benefits it has delivered to ordinary Fijians.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, allow me to highlight as well, the important role of RBF in this initiative. As the insurance market regulator, the RBF identified early during the design and development stages of parametric insurance product led by UNCDF the immense potential this solution offered, not only to increase insurance penetration, but also to protect communities, household and sectors of our economy that are fully underserved and highly vulnerable to extreme weather events. In partnership with UNCDF, through its Pacific Insurance and Climate Adaptation Programme (PICAP), the RBF has actively worked to introduce and scale parametric insurance solutions in Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in 2021, when Fiji's first climate risk parametric microinsurance product was being developed under the Pacific Insurance and Climate Adaptation Programme (PICAP), the RBF took the step of admitting these solutions into its FinTech Regulatory Sandbox for live testing.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in 2024, RBF took another groundbreaking step by becoming the first central bank in the Pacific, possibly globally, to assume ownership of the national implementation of paramedic microinsurance. A dedicated Climate Finance and Insurance Unit was established at RBF to oversee and drive the expansion of this solution.

In August 2024, RBF signed a grant agreement with the InsuResilience Solutions Fund (ISF), partnering with Tower Insurance and Sun Insurance with technical assistance from United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF), to expand parametric microinsurance across Fiji.

Key achievements for the first year of implementation include:

- (1) 4,249 policy holders up from 1,196;
- (2) 10,258 Fijians reached through outreach and awareness;
- (3) 29 workshops were conducted to deepen the understanding; and
- (4) 1,101 policyholders eligible for payouts included 60 persons with disabilities and 132 social welfare recipients with 95 percent paid via mobile wallets.

These payouts are in addition to nearly 2,000 Fijians who received more than FJ\$200,000 in prior

periods following heavy rainfall events, particularly in the Western Division.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have been informed that for the second year of the project, the RBF and partners are targeting to increase coverage to vulnerable Fijians of 10,000 policyholders. As a build up to this, SUN Insurance has recently launched its revised suite of products with a specific product covering social welfare recipients and persons with disabilities. Tower Insurance also launched a new standalone rainfall product, timely and relevant as we enter the wet and cyclone season.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, one of the key success factors for Parametric Insurance Implementation and Scaling as part of the lessons learned from other countries is premium subsidy. For the first year of implementation, a total of \$355,000 was allocated from all sources, including the RBF, to enable coverage for 2,000 social welfare recipients and 700 persons with disabilities. For the second year, RBF has increased its allocation to \$275,000, alongside subsidies from ISF and UNCDF, aiming to cover 4,000 social welfare recipients and 2,000 persons with disabilities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, another critical success factor is partnership and collaboration. The UNCDF's design of the Paramedic Insurance ecosystem ensures an enabling environment. Aggregators such as the Sugar Cane Growers Council, Fiji Crop and Livestock Council, Cane Farmers Cooperative Savings and Loans Association and the Pacific Disability Forum have played vital roles in outreach and onboarding.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the RBF, in its recent media releases, highlighted continued technical and funding support provided by the UNCDF, PICAP, and the vital role played by aggregators as I have mentioned before. It is also encouraging to see the important contributors by a few Ministries in collaborating with RBF and the private sector to, not only scale parametric insurance but to facilitate the education and awareness of insurance and its benefit, apart from products to the targeted areas and groups. This includes the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs; Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management; Ministry of Women, Children and Social Protection; and our Ministry of Trade, Co-operatives, Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises and Communications.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji is proud to be the first country in the Pacific to implement parametric insurance at scale. These efforts, led by the RBF, supported by UNCDF and strengthened by partnerships across Government and the private sector, are critical for climate resilience. They ensure vulnerable communities receive fast, predictable financial assistance after disasters, reducing reliance on *ad hoc* relief and strengthening long term economic stability. This collaboration reflects Fiji's commitment to innovative financial solutions that protect our people and economy from the increasing impacts of climate change.

HON. N.T. TUINACEVA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, a supplementary question, honourable Minister, you talked a bit on the premiums and the subsidy on this. Who pays for the premium and what is the level of cover and the average premium?

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, premium is supposed to be paid by individuals and is currently subsidised by ISF and RBF. Premium subsidy is offered to insurers who are part of this project, especially to SUN Insurance and Tower Insurance. Under the ISF project, the total premium subsidy available to each of the insurers for the duration of the project is around \$180,000, and RBF made available an additional \$175,000 for year one and \$275,000 for year two.

Sir, the premiums are quite reasonable. For example, for farmers, sum insured of \$1,000, the premium is \$100; for sum insured of \$2,000, the premium is \$200. For welfare products, sum insured of \$500, the premium is \$50 per annum. So, the premiums are quite reasonable, apart from the subsidy that is provided. If you calculate that \$100 or \$200, it comes to around \$6 a week or \$16 for

high end cover, which probably correlates to two bags of *kava* or one packet of cigarette. So, it is quite reasonable, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and there is still the challenge of awareness to take this product down to all our people.

Status of Call for Tender – Rakiraki Sugar Mill
(Question No. 289/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Multi-Ethnic Affairs and Sugar Industry update Parliament on the status of the Call for Tender for the construction of a sugar mill in Rakiraki?

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, firstly, I would like to thank you and your good office for allowing to shift all my Questions from last week to this week. As you know, I had a death in the family and for that reason, I had to miss the Parliament Sessions last week.

Having said that, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Member for asking this question because I know there is a strong desire to know when and how the Rakiraki Mill will ever get off the ground.

At the outset, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to clarify that the Fiji Sugar Corporation (FSC) did not issue a Call for Tender for the construction of the sugar mill in Rakiraki but instead, issued an Expression of Interest (EOI) and there is an important distinction between the two. A call for tender is a formal procurement process, whereas a EOI is a preliminary.

A Call for Tender is a formal procurement process, whereas an EOI is a preliminary step used to gauge market interest, assess capability, and identify credible firms before proceeding to any tender stage. The purpose of an EOI is simply to understand who in the global and local market has the expertise and capacity to support such a major development.

Mr. Speaker, FSC issued an EOI on 30th August, 2025, inviting potential partners to design, finance and construct a proposed 10,000 tonnes per day integrated sugar mill in Rakiraki. The EOI closed on 30th September, 2025.

To ensure maximum international reach, this IOI was extensively advertised at the International Society of Sugar Cane Technologists Congress in Colombia, an event attended by more than 1,500 delegates from 70 countries, including leading global sugar technology companies and engineering firms. A total of 13 companies submitted their EOI to FSC's online procurement portal.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, these submissions were rigorously evaluated against the criteria set out in the EOI document. This included the firm's technical competence, financial strength, experience in large-scale sugar or agro-industrial projects, and overall alignment to the requirements of the proposed 10,000 tonnes of cane per day integrated mill.

Following this comprehensive assessment, FSC has identified a number of companies that are best suited to progress to the next stage. While I will not name them at this point, given that the process is still active, I can confirm that several firms have been invited to provide more detailed presentations to FSC and key stakeholders within the sugar industry.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, before last week on 21st November, one of the shortlisted firms - China Machinery Engineering Corporation (CMEC), a major Chinese State-Owned Enterprise, made its

formal presentation on the proposed new mill. Sir, CMEC entered this process with a recommendation from the People's Republic of China, and is now among the companies undergoing deeper technical, financial and operational evaluation.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to inform this august House that this morning, a high-level CMEC delegation, accompanied by their technical experts, has returned to Fiji to undertake a more detailed on-ground assessment as part of the next phase of their study.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I also wish to emphasise that the proposed facility is not intended to be a traditional sugar mill alone. The Government's vision is for a diversified, modernised and value-adding industrial complex, that includes:

- refined sugar production for domestic, regional and export markets;
- ethanol production, supporting fuel blending and for sustainable aviation fuel;
- co-generation of electricity using bagasse, contributing to Fiji's renewable energy targets; and
- additional value-added by-products that will enhance commercial viability and reduce waste.

This diversified product approach, Mr. Speaker, ensures that Fiji does not rely solely on our own sugar revenue, but instead builds a resilient, profitable and future-focused sugar industry.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in terms of delivery mechanisms, Government is open to innovative partnership models. We are exploring the Build-Operate-and Transfer Model arrangements, turnkey models and other forms of public-private partnership that can bring in global expertise while safeguarding the national interest. These models will ensure that construction, operation, knowledge transfer and long-term sustainability are embedded into this project from the outset.

Mr. Speaker, for the proposed new mill, we are also exploring a comprehensive field-to-product solution, including models where companies invest not only in the mill itself, but also in modern cane-growing techniques. We recognise harvesting and a fully integrated logistics to ensure a more efficient and sustainable supply chain.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in conclusion, the EOI stage for the proposed sugar mill in Rakiraki has attracted strong international interest. With the preliminary evaluation completed, FSC is now progressing towards the next phase of procurement, ensuring that due diligence, transparency and the value for Fiji's sugar industry remains at the forefront of the process.

HON. V. LAL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, since January 1993, we have been hearing in this House that a mill will be built in Rakiraki soon. Now, the honourable Minister has just clarified that we have not reached the tender stage - we have just called for EOI. By when will the cane farmers of Rakiraki have a sugar mill? Is there any timeframe?

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, this honourable Member should understand that your government had destroyed and closed the Rakiraki Mill. When are we going to start?

It is not our money. Honourable Usamate, it is not \$10 million, we need \$200 million to set up a mill. What I am saying is, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that this sugar industry with its entirety will only happen when we will win the next election.

(Laughter)

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Of course, we are going to win it, there is no doubt about it. What I am saying is, this is not a small matchbox project.

HON. J. USAMATE.- You promised?

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Yes, we are doing it. It is not going to happen overnight, but we are on track. Vinaka.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to highlight in this Parliament that I agree with the honourable Minister. It is not a matchbox project because we deal with ageing infrastructure, how to motivate young farmers to get into sugarcane industry, and the financial backing for new mills and lease expiring. With the EOI that you have alluded to, how do you still ensure that enough sugarcane will be grown to meet the operational demands so that the mills do not operate or continue to operate at a loss? What is the point of having a mill when you do not have sugar or land to go through with it?

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, on one side, one honourable Member is asking when is the mill going to come and on the other side, the other honourable Member is saying when the sugarcane is going to grow. The question is, if you look at the statistics, from 1.3 billion tonnes of cane last year, we are now estimating 1.5 billion tonnes of cane this year. Next year, another 200,000 tonnes. The target is going to keep increasing, so the mill will be there on time when we have sufficient cane there.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Honourable Minister, a few weeks back, you were in the papers with the Australian High Commissioner concerning the Penang Mill. While the EOI process is currently being undertaken, what is Australia's expected role in terms of the new direction for Penang Mill?

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Honourable Leader of the Opposition, that is something very confidential at this stage. I hope you understand that. I do not want to declare something here and you try to derail it later. Vinaka.

FSC's Export Quota and Timely Payment to Farmers
(Question No. 305/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Multi-Ethnic Affairs and Sugar Industry update Parliament on how FSC will honour its export quota as per the deadline, and ensure timely payment to farmers?

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Member for the question. Today, I have five questions to answer so, please, bear with me, and just take one supplementary question per time.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to assure this House that the FSC remains fully committed to meeting all export obligations for the 2025 season and in maintaining a timely payment cycle for our cane farmers. First of all, let me inform this august House on the status of the 2025 sugar exports.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to-date, FSC has already completed two export shipments for the current season - 9,425 tonnes of sugar was shipped to the United States under the USTR tariff rate quota, and 38,000 tonnes was shipped to the UK. In addition, FSC has scheduled a third shipment of 33,000 tonnes, also to the UK, which will depart in mid-December 2025. Despite the volatility in the global sugar market, FSC has been able to secure reliable buyers of Fiji sugar. This is due to the diversified market portfolio and its longstanding relationship with refiners in the UK, Europe, Asia and the US.

Also, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to clarify on how FSC manages its sugar sales. All bulk sugar exports are conducted on an open market pricing, and FSC does not have a fixed or committed buyers for its bulk shipments at the start of every crushing. It provides a forecast production schedule to its international brokers, in particular, Zeneca Sugar, which then negotiates with major global refiners based on the demands and market conditions.

Sales, therefore, a lot are predetermined or any specific refiner in the market. All decisions are made on commercial terms, selecting the offer that provides the best financial return for Fiji. This allows FSC to maximise revenue by targeting buyers, offering the most favourable pricing at the time of sale.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji's only fixed sugar export quota is the United States' tariff rate quota, which stands at approximately 9,500 tonnes annually. From time to time, the US Government issues additional allocation based on domestic market requirements.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, allow me to briefly outline Fiji's quota allocation for actual shipments to the US over the past five years. In the 2020 season, Fiji was allocated 14,330 tonnes quota and exported 15,600 tonnes. In 2021, our quota was 9,477 tonnes and we exported 10,500 tonnes. In 2022, our allocation increased slightly to 11,785 tonnes against which we exported 12,500 tonnes. In both, 2023 and 2024 season, our allocated quota stood at 9,600 tonnes, and FSC exported 13,000 tonnes and 13,800 tonnes respectively.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, over the past five years, FSC has consistently exceeded its US quota allocation. This strong historical performance clearly demonstrates FSC's capacity and reliability in honouring the requirements of US tariff quota arrangements.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the positive aspect is that over the years, Fiji, through FSC, has successfully diversified its global sugar market well beyond USA. While the US quota remains important, it also represents a small portion of our total export, approximately 13,000 tonnes in a typical year. Fiji's main export destination continues to be UK, South Korea, Asian refiners and neighbouring eight Oceania markets. I have got a huge table which I will perhaps later on present as I do not want to waste a lot of time of honourable Members here.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this diversified sales strategy ensures that Fiji is not dependent on any single market. It allows Fiji to better manage price fluctuation, mitigate quality-related risk and maintain a stability in the export markets.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on the matter of ensuring timely payment to our farmers, FSC's ability to meet its obligations is anchored in a prudent financial planning and a stable export revenue. To achieve this, FSC projects an annual revenue from both, sugar and molasses sales. Based on this forecast, it identifies any additional cash flow requirements. The FSC then secures financing through a local financial institution, as well as a broker-supported financing arrangement linked to stock and level of shipment schedules. This structured approach ensures payments to farmers remain uninterrupted, even during periods of short-term market brutality.

In summary, the facts speak for itself. The FSC has already completed two export shipments for the 2025 season, with a third shipment scheduled to be dispatched next month. It continues to market Fiji sugar successfully across multiple regions, ensuring that we are not dependent on any single buyer or the market. Fiji also maintains an exceptional track record in meeting, in many years, of exceeding its obligation on the US tariff, which remains only a fixed quota. With a disciplined financial planning and a diversified export strategy, FSC is strongly positioned to meet all its export commitments and, most importantly, ensure timely, uninterrupted payments to our farmers

throughout the 2025 season.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, canefarmers face challenges if payment is eaten up by penalties. With reports indicating that over 60 percent of cane entering mills are burnt, largely due to mill efficiencies coming and harvesting delays forcing farmers' hands, will the honourable Minister commit today that FSC will waive the burnt cane penalties for this final payment, so that full payment reaches farmers' pockets?

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I agree that the farmers are going through hardship, but it is not our doing. The FSC mill in Rarawai got burnt, we managed to get it fixed and it will be up and running from next week. The structure of penalties is all within that masterwork. The FSC cannot, on its own, repeal – we have to go through a process. We are now working with the Sugar Tribunal to ensure we amend this old document which has been in for decades. Let us be patient, we will have it done.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Honourable Minister, you have talked about timely payments to farmers. Can you please give assurance in this House that the final cane payment for the hard-working growers will be in full and on time as well?

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thought we had done the final payment for the last season. We are now in the new season and, yes, definitely, as we have promised, we will get a better payment for the farmers and very timely.

MR. SPEAKER. - Honourable Usamate, there are five more questions that are addressed to him in the course of today, and I am sure they are not on Multi-Ethnic Affairs, they will be on sugar. The questions will be quite appropriate in the circumstances to be asked later, if you so wish, unless they are relevant - and I use the words, “very relevant”, to the question.

HON. J. USAMATE.- If you allow me, I will voice the question out, and I will leave it to your better judgment.

MR. SPEAKER.- Thank you.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, and to the honourable Minister, given that the Rarawai Mill has faced significant shutdowns due to the recent fire, and Lautoka is reportedly choked with diverted cane, can the honourable Minister explain to this House the mathematical reality of how the FSC intends to meet its export quota commitments when thousands of tonnes of cane are sitting in lorries for days, losing weight and sugar content, effectively reducing the very TCTS ratio needed to meet those quotas?

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, again, honourable Usamate, are you a cane farmer?

(Laughter)

You need to know that the figures that you are saying - many thousand tonnes - where are your figures? You keep repeating the same. The exact figures, we have that. There is enough milling capacity to crush all the sugarcane.

Update on RESAR in Fiji Project
(Question No. 312/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Environment and Climate Change update Parliament on the Revitalising Ecosystems for Sustainable Agriculture and Resilience in Fiji Project?

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to provide an update to the august House on the Revitalisation Ecosystem for Sustainable Agriculture and Resilience (RESAR) in Fiji Project. The RESAR forms part of Fiji's Global Environment Facility or System for Transparent Allocation of Resources (STAR) which determines the amount of Global Environment Facility (GEF) funding that each eligible country can access within a given replenishment period.

Under this system, the GEF Secretariat allocates resources in an indicative manner based on biodiversity importance, land degradation, prices, climate vulnerability and national environmental performance, providing countries like Fiji with a predictable funding enveloped to support national priorities. Importantly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, STAR allocation represents the maximum allocation a country is permitted to a programme during a replenishment cycle. These funds must be implemented through the GEF Accredited Implementing Agency, ensuring fiduciary oversight, safeguards, procurement standards and international best practice. Governments are not permitted to directly execute STAR resources.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, after careful assessment, Fiji selected the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) as the implementing partner of the RESAR. The IFAD has proven expertise in agriculture, rural livelihood, sustainable land management and resilience, and has a long-standing operational footprint in Fiji and the Pacific. Selecting IFAD ensures strong governance, full compliance with GEF requirements, access to technical, fiduciary and safeguard systems that will support effective delivery. By programming the RESAR under our STAR allocation, Fiji is ensuring that its infinite allocation is utilised within this replenishment period and does not risk lapse of unused allocation. This decision has leveraged US\$8.2 million GEF investment, complemented by a US\$3.5 million IFAD concessional loans.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the RESAR Project aims to address ecosystem degradation, biodiversity loss arising from unsustainable land use, haphazard coastal development and over-exploitation of forest, minerals and marine resources. If unaddressed, these challenges will continue to undermine food security, livelihood and climate resilience across our communities.

This project is expected to deliver significant national and global environmental benefits, including restoration of 3,250 hectares of degraded ecosystem, the adoption of sustainable land use practice across 150,000 hectares of terrestrial landscape protection and restoration of 500 hectares of marine habitats and the mitigation of an estimated 1.127 million tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent emissions. These outcomes position Fiji as a regional leader in nature-based solutions and climate-resilient development.

Mr. Speaker, RESAR will be implemented in Vanua Levu, supporting the sustainable management, protection and enhancement of unique ecosystem biodiversity found across the provinces of Bua, Cakaudrove and Macuata. The islands geological history, diverse habitats, and altitudinal gradients create distinct ecological zones that support high levels of endemic species and intact forest systems. Safeguarding these values is essential, not only for biodiversity conservation, but also for ensuring sustainable blue and green development in the Northern Division. The project will directly benefit 26,300 Fijians, and at least half of whom are women, creating scalable and replicable model of resistance, livelihoods, biodiversity protection and climate adapted development.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Government, in partnership with IFAD, conducted a full design mission from 23rd June to 4th July this year in Vanua Levu. The mission team was led by the international

consultant and supported by a team of local consultants, including specialists from the Fiji National University. Meetings were held with a wide range of stakeholders, including community representatives from Nabouwalu, Savusavu, Natewa, Taveuni, Labasa, Korotari, Government officials, NGOs and the private sector.

The mission convened a stakeholder workshop in Labasa on 2nd July to validate issues, feedback and recommendations from these consultations. A draft CEO endorsement report or design report was shared with stakeholders in mid-October for comment, followed by the validation workshop on 27th October, 2025 to review the project design plan activities and project targets. Feedback from Government agencies, communities and stakeholders has since been incorporated into the revised design report, which is currently undergoing IFAD's internal quality review and will be submitted to GEF on 12th December, 2025.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, from past experience, GEF typically undertakes a six-month technical review period during which they provide comments and technical feedback and submitting countries provide responses. This process is anticipated to take place during the first half of 2027, noting that earlier approval may be possible should comments be addressed expeditiously to the satisfaction of GEF. The Government will be supported throughout this process by IFAD. Subject to Cabinet's approval of the financing agreement, the project implementation is expected to commence in January 2027.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in conclusion, the Ministry remains fully committed to the successful development and delivery of the RESAR project. This investment represents a strategic and high-value use of Fiji's STAR Allocation and has the potential to transform rural livelihoods, strengthen ecosystem resilience, enhance sustainable land management and support climate-resilient agriculture across Fiji. The Ministry of Environment and Climate Change will continue to support the successful implementation of this project to deliver tangible and lasting benefits for our people, our economy and our natural resources.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, a quick question to the honourable Minister is, as part of your deliberations, was there any work or discussions on the impact of the use of synthetic pesticides in our agriculture that harms our soil quality, human health, and that also leeches into our rivers and oceans?

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Yes, of course, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I can confirm with the honourable Member that is also part of the package. There were discussions around it, especially on land degradation.

Ministry's Plans – 2026 Teaching and Learning Resources
(Question No. 313/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Education update Parliament on the Ministry's plans to ensure all schools have the required teaching and learning resources when schools re-open in January 2026?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Education has made clear and practical arrangements to ensure that all schools have the necessary teaching and learning resources when school re-opens in 2026.

HON. H. CHAND.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, beginning of this year, honourable Minister, many

schools faced a shortage of teachers, and it took the Ministry of Education months, and in some cases, it took almost the whole year to address the issue. Some schools, even today, are facing teacher shortages. What plans are in place to ensure that when school re-open in 2026, the schools are fully staffed?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have already addressed those concerns in the previous session regarding teacher shortages in schools and I made a Ministerial Statement on it. Referring to 2025 is quite different from the question that we have here. We have taken steps to address the teacher needs in schools, but it does not take away the fact that we still have challenges in terms of the specialised subjects - Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM), as I have alluded to, Computing and primary school teachers. These are some of the things that were inherited when we took office. We have taken steps to address this. Like I said, we have taken all necessary practical arrangements to ensure that the schools are ready when it reopens in 2026.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I have been advised that the honourable Minister for Health has some responsibilities to attend to today before noon. Honourable Members who have questions before his, I will now ask that those questions be moved forward. I think there are four in all that are directed to the honourable Minister. Is the honourable Minister here? We will proceed as we were until the honourable Minister appears.

Fiji Resilient Informal Settlements Programme
(Question No. 314/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Housing and Local Government update Parliament on the Fiji Resilient Informal Settlements Programme and its planned activities to mitigate climate change impacts and reduce disaster risks in vulnerable communities?

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, before I provide my response to the question, I would like to express a congratulatory message to our victorious Fiji 7s Team for winning the bronze medal at the Dubai 7s as well as our women's team. Although they fell short to the Japanese ladies' team, they were placed fourth. We wish them well in the upcoming Cape Town 7s in South Africa in the coming weekend.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Fiji Resilient Informal Settlements (FRIS) Programme is a transformative initiative being implemented in partnership with the UN-Habitat, the Ministry of Local Government and the Ministry of Housing. This programme is central to our national efforts to mitigate the impacts of climate change and reduce disaster risks in vulnerable urban communities, particularly for those living in informal settlements.

The Agreement of Cooperation (AOC) was first signed in October 2018, with the objective of strengthening resilience in informal urban settlements that are highly exposed to climate and disaster risks. Since its inception, the programme has been progressively expanded through successive amendments to increase resources, extend timelines, and broaden its scope to ensure that its objectives are fully achieved.

As of Amendment 6, signed in May 2024, the Programme was extended until 31st May, 2025. Recently, the Ministry, in collaboration with the UN-Habitat, has further extended the Programme until May 2027. This extension provides the necessary time to complete pending activities under the second phase of the project. Importantly, it comes at no additional cost, taking prudent financial

management and the commitment of all parties to deliver results within the agreed budget of US\$3.12 million.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this FRIS Programme is structured under three major components in 16 settlements located in four municipalities around the country. They are in Lami, Sigatoka, Nadi and Lautoka. The first programme component is an Agreement with USP, which will deliver four finalised city or town level climate action plans, including vulnerability assessments and hazard maps. At the city level, institutional strengthening has been a major focus, with particular emphasis on informal settlements. These tools guide planning decisions and ensure that resilience is embedded in municipal governance. The development of city-wide climate change action plans will result in the establishment of dedicated urban planners and resilient officers within local councils, ensuring the sustainability of these efforts beyond the life of the project.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Programme also provides capacity development strategies that strengthen household and community livelihoods against climate impacts. Training workshops and community capacity development plans will be rolled out, equipping residents with practical skills in disaster preparedness, sustained livelihoods and climate adaptation. These activities are designed to empower communities to take ownership of resilience measures and to build long-term adaptive capacity.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the second component is infrastructure development. Pilot sub-projects are currently underway in two settlements. These are Korociri and Nawajikuma Settlements in Nadi, resulting in tangible improvements to drainage systems, access roads and community facilities. The construction of Korociri Settlement Evacuation Centre which was previously suspended in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, is now being completed.

The next major infrastructure project will be the construction of an evacuation centre in Nawajikuma Settlement, together with an elevated connecting footpath linking both settlements to Nawaka Village School. In the event of flooding caused by prolonged heavy rainfall, this infrastructure will ensure safe access to evacuation centres and provide secure evacuation routes for residents should relocation to safer areas become necessary.

The Korociri Settlement currently has 63 vulnerable households of more than 300 people, comprising elderly persons, men, women, and children. There are more than 400 households in the Nawajikuma Settlement, and both of these settlements are susceptible to the effects of heavy downpours.

The third component of the FRIS project focuses on the scaled-up delivery of critical infrastructure. Under the grant agreement, the planned interventions include drainage upgrades in Kalekana and Wainivokai, as well as sanitation improvements in Wailekutu, the construction of a double-storey women's resource centre, community hall, a dispensary unit and an evacuation centre.

Other infrastructure projects include the construction of food storage and harvesting facilities for Kulukulu, and the completion of an evacuation centre at Vunikavika in Sigatoka. In relation to the settlements of Vunato, California, Veidogo, Taiperia, Naqiroso and Nasoata in Lautoka, the planned works include the construction of connecting footpaths across all six settlements and drainage clearing to improve flood mitigation and access. Guided by the community action plans, Mr. Speaker, Sir, by May 2027, at least, 16 infrastructure projects will be completed and formally handed over, providing safer, more resilient living environments for thousands of Fijians.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, knowledge management and advocacy are also integral to the programme. A knowledge management platform has been established to capture lessons learned and best

practices. The programme will systemise knowledge sharing and implement a communications strategy to ensure that communities, policymakers and stakeholders are fully engaged.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the financial framework of the programme is structured to link disbursements directly to outputs. The fourth and fifth instalments, amounting to over US\$2.4 million will support the completion of subproject designs, training and infrastructure implementation. The final instalment of more than US\$300,000 will be disbursed upon delivery of project handover reports, settlement upgrading guidelines and audited financial statements. This structured payment schedule ensures accountability and guarantees that funds are tied to measurable achievements.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the FRIS Programme is a lifeline for vulnerable communities who face the daily realities of flooding, cyclones and rising sea levels. By strengthening institutions, empowering communities, and delivering resilient infrastructure, we are laying the foundation for safer, healthier and more sustainable futures. This programme reflects Government's unwavering commitment to inclusive development, climate resilience, poverty reduction, and also ensures that no Fijian, regardless of where they live, will not be left behind in our national journey towards resilience.

MR. SPEAKER.- Given the absence of the honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services, we will proceed to the tenth Oral Question. My apologies, honourable Members, there is a request on my desk from the honourable Minister, that his questions be moved up to after lunch when he returns from his duties, so that explains his absence.

Development of Livestock Industry in Fiji
(Question No. 316/2025)

HON. RATU J.B. NIUDAMU asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Agriculture and Waterways update Parliament on the development of the Livestock Industry in Fiji?

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to sincerely thank honourable Ratu Josaia Niudamu for raising this very important question. I also wish to update this Parliament on the development of the livestock industry in Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, agriculture, including livestock accounts for about 7 percent of Fiji's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). According to the 2020 Agriculture Census data, there were 22,991 households with 28,719 individuals engaged in livestock farming in Fiji. Livestock contributes FJ\$61.5 million to the GDP of 2023. The livestock sector is a vital component of our agriculture economy, providing income, employment and nutrition to our people. It also plays a critical role in our national food system, accounting a significant portion of our protein intake through meat, milk and eggs.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Animal Health and Production Division (AH&P) within the Ministry of Agriculture and Waterways is responsible for governing development of our livestock industry. The budget of \$19.5 million had been allocated for the 2025-2026 financial year, with a capital budget of \$14.5 million covering 29 programmes and an operating budget of \$4.6 million. The investment was strategically focused on developing seven key commodities: beef, dairy, sheep, goats, pigs, poultry and apiculture across the four regions, that is, Central, Eastern, Western, and the Northern, and further support veterinary and regulatory service. This comprehensive approach aims to improve productivity, ensure regulatory compliance, and promote sustainable agricultural practices in these

sectors.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, eggs and chicken meat have been performing exceptionally well, achieving approximately 104 percent and 93 percent self-sufficiencies respectively, compared to the last five years, that is, from 2019 to 2024. There has been a growth of 8.3 percent in egg production and a 7.9 percent in chicken meat production.

The key areas of poultry production over the years has been strengthened through the annual distribution of poultry packages, that includes chick and feed to 500 farmers, upgrading 25 existing sheds and also the provision of essential equipment such as feeders, drinkers and incubators to promote climate- resilient local chicken breeds, and the prioritisation of social inclusion by ensuring that around 50 percent of the recipients of these poultry packages are women and youth.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the cattle industry has faced a series of long-standing challenges over the past decade, and has undergone significant transformation, including the strengthening of disease surveillance programme that has effectively mitigated the incidence of tuberculosis and brucellosis. Consequently, the incidence rate have declined markedly from over 23 percent to at least less than 1 percent on farms. Even though this is the main contributing factor to the decrease in cattle numbers, we have been able to reduce the risks of the disease transmitted to humans.

Over the years, the sector had been prioritising the need for genetic improvement, nutrition and herd health and management practices. Moreover, with the use of biotechnology, four exotic breeds namely, Senepol, Droughtmaster, Wagyu and the Swiss Brown breeds have been introduced, which are globally recognised as prolific meat producers. These genetics have been successfully disseminated to around 100 farm through artificial insemination programmes and the supply of bulls to-date. Additionally, the Ministry has reinforced its genetic multiplication through the establishment of a laboratory designated for embryo harvesting and transfer of semen collection and storage.

Farmers have also received support for fencing, stockyard development, pasture establishment and capacity building. In addition, the Ministry is dedicating reviving to the former beef schemes that operated successfully in 1970s. Over the past two years, roughly 76 farmers have benefited from \$2.4 million in assistance, and are expected to make substantial contributions to current production.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, for the dairy industry we have also supported through genetic improvement, nutrition, milk cartage, milk prices incentive, calf rearing, farm roads, herd health and management practices and these are being carried out through the dairy extension programme through the Ministry of Agriculture, and a grant to the Fiji Cooperative Dairy Company Limited for 368 registered farmers. These efforts have led to a steady 17 percent increase in milk production over the last three years, increasing from 5.2 million litres in 2022 to 6.1 million litres in 2024.

As part of its expansion programme, the Ministry has established a formal market for the Sigatoka and the Nadi farmers to value-add dairy products such as mozzarella, cottage cheese and ghee with plans to extend this model to farmers in Ra and the Northern Division. This initiative aims to create new income opportunities through diversification, while also strengthening existing farms by boosting productivity and quality standards.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, from 2020 to 2022, the sheep and goat industry recorded substantial growth, that is, 66 percent for sheep and 32 percent for goats. This expansion is largely attributed to an increase in the number of farms, the availability of funding assistance packages, and strong market demand. By 2023, the sector comprised 2,558 registered goat farms, housing approximately 90,321 goats, along with 1,164 registered sheep farmers, maintaining about 38,000 sheep.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, during COVID-19 pandemic, the temporary closure of hotels led to a 50 percent reduction in commercial pig-breeding stock and forced many smallholder piggeries to shut down. The pig industry demonstrated resilience from a drop in pork production from 1,752 metric tonnes in 2019 to 1,167 metric tonnes in 2021: a reduction of 34 percent to 1,421 metric tonnes in 2022, an increase of 21.8 percent – a recovery driven by Government support through breeding stocks and feed supply, infrastructure improvements, and the provision of improved genetics.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, despite the gains, the productivity level remains below the national benchmark. This is due to a number of challenges identified during the 2025 Livestock Forum. The Ministry will continue supporting on-farm infrastructure by providing farm packages - including fencing, farm roads, livestock sheds, farm equipment, and stockyards to maintain animal welfare standards and enhance farm husbandry, and management practices.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, a key driver of productivity enhancement lies in genetic improvement. The Ministry's new cattle-breeding centre will harvest, preserve and mass disseminate improved genetics to private farms, an approach also planned for sheep, goat and pig while maintaining its nucleus herd through the imported embryos and semen.

To enhance nutrition in both ruminant and non-ruminant animals, the Ministry has partnered with donor agencies such as Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) and the European Union (EU) to acquire machinery and equipment that will enable production of high-quality, low-cost feed and fodder using local ingredients. In addition, the Ministry is collaborating with the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR) that has been exploring incorporating insect protein from black soldier flies as an affordable protein source for livestock feed.

To conclude Mr. Speaker, Sir, livestock holds the potential to drive economic growth, alleviate poverty, and enhance food security. Therefore, I encourage all stakeholders to stay committed, so that together we can provide sustainable development of the livestock sector in Fiji.

HON. J.N. NAND.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, are there any plans to revive the Yalavou Cattle Scheme in Navosa?

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I did mention that we are reviving the old beef schemes, and Yalavou and Tilivalevu will be part of that development programme.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- What measures are being taken to address the shortage and accessibility of veterinary and pharmaceutical supplies for livestock in Fiji?

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA.- We import veterinary supplies through a number of contracted suppliers, and they are in the final stages of processing those companies that will be tendered to import medical supplies to Fiji.

MR. SPEAKER.- We will skip the eleventh Oral Question to await the return of the honourable Minister for Health in the afternoon.

Bus Shelters in the Western Division
(Question No. 319/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Public Works, Meteorological Services and Transport update Parliament on the status of requests for bus shelters in the Western

Division, particularly in Nasikawa Vision College?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are programming that for Quarter 3 in the financial year. In the West, we are planning to build 30 - 30 is in the programme, but 10 has been completed. We will try to complete all by the end of the financial year, however, we are also looking at the revised design, some which are a bit cheaper, but also climate-resilient, so that more is completed.

UN Cybercrime Convention
(Question No. 320/2025)

HON. S. NAND asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Policing and Communications inform Parliament on how Fiji has leveraged its ratification of the UN Cybercrime Convention to improve national cybersecurity and attract international technical assistance?

HON. I. NAIVALURUA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, if I may, please, allow me a few moments to reaffirm our commitment to end gender-based violence on our women and girls on the 16 Days of Activism. Every woman and girl deserves to be safe, respected, protected both online and offline. My Ministry remains committed to strengthening laws, supporting survivors, and ensuring those who cause harm are held accountable. I call on all of us, especially men and boys, to stand together against violence against women and girls - by uniting our voices, followed by actions, we can end violence and build a safer, and more respectful future for all our women and girls.

Mr. Speaker Sir, I wish to provide an update regarding Fiji's signing of the UN Convention Against Cybercrime, and how we are improving our nation's cyber security and attracting international technical assistance. So far, no country has ratified the United Nations Convention Against Cybercrime, as the Convention was only opened for signature on 25th and 26th October in Hanoi, Vietnam.

To-date, 73 parties have signed it. As we may recall, the honourable Prime Minister, in the last parliamentary session, answered a question on our signing of the UN Convention. It is important to note that Fiji, actively participating during the three-year negotiations and shaped the UN Convention. Mr. Speaker Sir, Cabinet has already endorsed for Fiji to sign the Convention, and we will be working closely with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to complete the necessary formalities to sign at the earliest opportunity, as the Convention is open for signature at the United Nations Headquarters in New York.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, although the UN Convention is not yet ratified by any State, Fiji's leadership is on early alignment with the only international cybercrime treaty that is in force, the Budapest Convention, which the UN Convention is aligned to, has already positioned us strongly to access international assistance and improve our national posture.

First, Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji continues to benefit significantly from its partnership with the Council of Europe through the Budapest Convention. Our co-operation with the Budapest Convention includes, if I may, three key areas on -

- (1) policy development, including support in drafting our data protection frameworks;
- (2) legal reforms, ensuring our laws, especially the Cybercrime Act 2021, aligns with newer treaties like the UN Convention; and
- (3) law enforcement and prosecutor capability building, specialised trainings and workshops

on areas such as electronic evidence and support to our 24/7 point of contacts network.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji is honoured to serve on the nine-member Bureau of the Committee of the Parties under the Budapest Convention – a significant leadership role for a Small Island Developing State and the first of the Pacific. Additionally, Fiji is the first Pacific country to sign the second additional protocol of the Budapest Convention ahead of even Australia and New Zealand. In preparation for signing the UN Convention, we are already doing the following:

- (1) Engaging development partners to identify targeted areas for technical support, ensuring this is non-duplicative, needs-based and aligned with our national cyber security priorities.
- (2) Streamlining legislative reforms by synchronising amendments required for Fiji's accession to the second additional protocol, and amendments needed to domesticate the provision of the UN Convention against cybercrime.
- (3) Ensuring that our cooperation frameworks continue to strengthen our law enforcement and Fiji's Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT), judiciary and policy capabilities in a coordinated way.

In closing, Fiji's strong leadership at the global, regional and national levels, and our reputation as a responsible and forward-looking cyber partner continues to position us to drive our national and regional objectives. Our focus now is to finalise Fiji's signing of the UN Cybercrime Convention and finalise our national cyber security and resilience strategy, which I will be providing an update on later. At the same time, we are leveraging all international partnerships to build a safer and a more resilient digital Fiji.

HON. S. NAND.- Could the honourable Minister advise on how the Budapest Convention is different from the UN Convention on Cybercrime?

HON. I. NAIVALURUA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, both the treaties have the overarching goal of combating cybercrime and the three key differences are as follows:

- (1) The Budapest Convention is the world's first international treaty on cybercrime and was developed by the Council of Europe, negotiated by 46 Council of Europe Member-States and opened for signature in 2001. The Budapest Convention came into force in 2004.
- (2) The UN Convention against cybercrime, on the other hand, has been developed under the United Nations framework, was negotiated by 193 member-States and was opened for signature on 25th October, 2025. This will only come into force once 40 member-states have rectified it, as of now, it has not come into force.
- (3) The UN Convention against cybercrime is open to all 193 UN members, whereas the Budapest Convention is open to Council of Europe (COE) members, and for non-COE members, upon being invited by the Council of Europe.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, regarding the scope of the two international treaties, the Budapest Convention focusses on harmonising national laws, improving investigative techniques, and strengthening international cooperation in tackling cybercrime, whereas the UN Convention Against Cybercrime builds on the Budapest Convention and seeks to create a more inclusive framework that addresses the needs of developing countries, capacity building and safeguards for human rights. In signing both Treaties, our criminal justice authorities will have all the necessary tools that are offered to combat this global challenge of cybercrime.

2023 Agricultural Programmes for Smallholder Farmers
(Question No. 322/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Agriculture inform Parliament on which Agricultural Programmes that were implemented since 2023 have helped increase crop yields and productivity for smallholder farmers?

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to thank honourable Tuiwailevu for raising this important question.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am pleased to provide an update of the major agricultural programmes implemented since 2023, particularly those that are delivering increased crop yields and are improving productivity for smallholder farmers across Fiji.

(1) Mechanisation and Outsourcing Programme

Since 2023, the Ministry has increased its support for mechanisation, recognising that machinery can rapidly increase smallholder farm productivity and expansion. Under successive national budget allocations, significant funding has been allocated for the hire-out of farm machinery and the outsourcing of land preparation and mechanisation services to private contractors.

Specifically in the 2023-2024 Operational Plan, the Ministry earmarked funding for Farm Mechanisation that supports the provision of tractors, excavators and diggers at subsidised rate or through hire services. Outsourcing land clearing and farm preparation services has helped unlock underutilised or fallow land, enabling smallholder and highland farmers, including those in remote areas, to bring more land into production.

In the current year 2025-2026 financial year, the Ministry has, again, allocated funds for Farm Mechanisation and access of machinery, reinforcing the commitment to mechanisation. These mechanisation efforts reduce labour needs, accelerate land preparation and planting, and improve timeliness, which together raises yields, increase planted areas and allow smallholders to produce at a scale close to semi commercial. This drive is closely aligned with our broader goal under the Ministry's 5 Year Strategic Development Plan for 2025-2028 and, that is, to accelerate commercial agriculture through mechanisation.

(2) Small Farming Equipment Programme

Recognising that not all smallholder farms require large tractors, or where farms are located in remote or fragmented land, and where large machines is impractical, the Ministry maintains the Small Farming and Agro-Processing Equipment initiative. Under this Programme, smaller but appropriate tools and machines, such as rotavators, power tillers, sprayers and small-scale agro-processing equipment are made available to farmers.

Through subsidised cost sharing of one-third from the farmers' contribution and two-thirds Government contribution, smallholder farmers can acquire equipment at a lower cost. This assisted in –

- reducing the labour cost, especially in root crops and vegetable production;

- speeding up land preparation; and
- enabling diversified crop production and value-adding through small-scale processing.

By making appropriate equipment accessible and affordable, the Ministry ensures that smallholder farmers are not left behind as the sector develops.

(3) Agro-input Subsidy Programme

A major milestone since 2023 has been the introduction of a fertilizer and weedicide subsidy for non-sugar crops, including rice, *dalo*, ginger, cassava and vegetables. This subsidy of FJ\$1 million aims to reduce input costs for smallholder farmers, enabling them to apply fertilizers and weed control more regularly and effectively to obtain higher crop yields. In turn, this contributes to enhanced food security, greater farm income and stronger resilience in the face of variable weather or soil fertility constraints. This agro-input subsidy is a key pillar supporting the Ministry's mission to promote food security.

(4) Farm Access Road and Infrastructure Programme

Another critical constraint for smallholder farmers has been the lack of reliable access to markets, inputs, and services due to poor road and infrastructure connectivity. Since 2023, the Ministry has initiated and supported programmes for the upgrading and construction of farm access roads, as well as land preparation infrastructure such as flatland development, drainage and irrigation and waterways maintenance.

The 2023 Operational Plan included Farm Access Roads as a priority. Improved road access reduces post-harvest losses, accelerates input delivery such as fertilizer, seeds and agro-inputs, and allows farmers to bring produce to the market faster and more reliably, thus incentivising production, increasing volumes and supporting transformation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, apart from the core programmes currently offered, the Ministry also provides a range of tailor-made, region-specific development programmes. Examples of these include the:

- (1) Highland and Flatland Development Programme, which focusses on improving land preparation, soil conservation and crop diversification in highland and lowland farming communities.
- (2) Sigatoka Valley Development Programme, which supports farmers in the Salad Bowl of Fiji by strengthening vegetable production, irrigation support, and sustainable land management.
- (3) Rotuma Island Programme is tailored to the island's unique geography and farming systems, assisting farmers with inputs and crops suited to Rotuma's conditions and market success.

In addition to those, the Ministry also implements other local specific programmes aimed at strengthening food security. Collectively, these programmes are designed to help smallholder farmers in the rural areas and the maritime islands to increase their productivity.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to highlight that the Ministry also continues to implement several Commodity Development Programmes designed specifically to support our smallholder farmers. These programmes are an important component of our national strategy to strengthen food security,

expand rural livelihoods and increase Fiji's overall agricultural productivity. Through these commodity programmes, farmers receive targeted assistance such as improved planting material, essential farming inputs and technical training and advisory support.

The objective of the Commodity Development Programme is clear - to help smallholder farmers increase their crop yields, adopt better production practices and move towards more sustainable and commercially viable farming systems. These initiatives have not only helped farmers boost production, but has also encouraged diversification, improved market access and support resilience against climate change. This transformation is essential not only will it raise income and livelihoods for rural households, it will also strengthen national food security, support export potential, encourage agro-business and diversify our economy, away from over-reliance on traditional sectors.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry remains committed to working closely with farmers, communities, private sector partners and other stakeholders, to ensure these programmes deliver tangible lasting benefit for Fiji's agriculture sector, rural communities and the national food security.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, a supplementary question; the increase in yields due to the various programmes has increased but one of the major concerns is the crop compensation rate. Yes, this is long overdue. I think, if I am correct, 1989 was the last review. Are there any plans to review the crop compensation rate because this is something that the farmers would be interested to hear?

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Leader of the Opposition for raising this very important question on crop loss and the damages that have been long pending. There have been a lot of discussions between the Ministry and the Ministry of Finance. Part of the requirements will be fulfilled by the Ministry of Finance and that we will continually work towards trying to review current rates. I think it has been there for long, and I am quite sure there will be something very positive towards the end of next year.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I think this is the appropriate time for us to suspend our proceedings for lunch. Parliament will resume at 2.30 p.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 12.37 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 2.36 p.m.

Honourable Members, we will continue with Oral Questions from this morning. We will go back to the questions that have been left behind due to the absence of the honourable Ministers responsible.

Private Public Partnership (PPP) Scheme
(Question No. 315/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services inform Parliament whether there was any evaluation of the Private Public Partnership (PPP) Scheme?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank honourable Nand for his question. In keeping up with the commitment to transparency, value for money and continuous improvement, yes, an evaluation was done on the Private Public Partnership (PPP) Free Health Scheme Programme.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, my question to the honourable Minister is, under the (PPP) programme, there are many doctors and dentists who have applied to be part of the programme but have been waiting for a number of years now. When are you going to increase the number of doctors to improve the service to the citizens?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I believe there is a process to go through, not only with the Ministry of Health but with the Ministry of Planning as well. Once they meet all the required recommendations for inclusion into the programme, then that can be facilitated.

HON. V. NATH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is a very relevant question asked to the honourable Minister, but his answer was very short. In fact, we understand that PPP is a very useful agreement. We would like to know from the honourable Minister the challenges that the Government has seen from this programme?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- The initiative started during the COVID-19 pandemic, as you may be well aware of. A total of more than 500,000 patients have visited the programme at a cost of more than \$27 million for these services. Again, as part of the ongoing improvement of the programme, that is why the evaluation was done, to see the gaps and strengthen things that need to be strengthened so that the programme itself continues.

The Government, through the evaluation, has seen the value of the programme. Through a continuous monitoring and evaluation plan, we can ensure that the programme lives up to its expectation in ensuring that it takes the load off from the public health service delivery.

New Hospitals in Suva
(Question No. 317/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services update Parliament on how far has Government moved in terms of having new hospitals in Suva?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have moved far in terms of

the development of new hospitals. I have mentioned in this august House the new Rehabilitation Hospital in Tamavua. Currently, our work in that area in terms of site preparation has been done. If you visit Tamavua now, you will see that parts of the old hospital have been pulled down, and the next phase is to have the preparatory phase so that KOICA can start to do its work. Even KOICA has gone beyond and are in the tendering phase of their work.

In other areas, in terms of the new Super Speciality Hospital that is to be built by the Government of India, that is something on our part we have done in terms of the land. Now, it is with the Government of India in terms of their processes. Once we start with that, then we will look at how we will operationalise the initiative of those plans.

There is also development within the public hospital in terms of the CWM Hospital. The issue right now is in terms of the master plan, which is being funded by DFAT, and that master plan will aid and outline the need in terms of building on the current hospital or having a new one, so it is in the process.

While at the same time with the master plan, an initial PIP plan was developed to ensure that certain areas or things within the CWM Hospital continues to function such as water, fire safety and other issues to do with PIP plan. That is at the initial stages and is something that we will try and look after so that CWM Hospital continues to have some functionality before we branch out into the long-term aspect and, that is, to build on the current hospital or a totally new site altogether.

HON. V. LAL.- Sir, anything on the new maternity unit for CWM Hospital which is now being used as a car park?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Initially, that was done by the previous government and I believe part of the plan was shelved because of COVID-19. As I have said, the master plan is what that will guide us to see how we will utilise that space. As I have said, it can be for the new hospital or part of the new hospital, while at the same time, planning for the other sites as well in terms of other services.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Minister mentioned about the Super Specialty Hospital. The land allocated for the Super Specialty Hospital sits beside Kinoya Wastewater Treatment Plant, and the stench from that plant is unbearable. What are some of the possibilities of doing something to the stench that will be coming to the Super Speciality? Why have we selected such an area that is so close to Kinoya Wastewater Treatment Plant?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, my short answer to that question, the Government of India did the selection.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, can you please join me in welcoming the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) Fund Delegation, who are here with us, led by Dr. Abdulhamid AlKhalifa, the President of OPEC Fund. Welcome to Fiji's Parliament, Your Excellency and your delegates, and we thank you for joining us this afternoon.

Re-Development Project for Kings Charles Park
(Question No. 321/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Youth and Sports inform Parliament if the re-development project for King Charles Park in Nadi is going ahead?

HON. J. SAUKURU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, as it is, there is no immediate plan for the upgrade of Prince Charles Park. As you know our Prince Charles Park has now become King's Charles Park comes under the Nadi Town Council. It is not within the ambit of the Fiji National Sports Council or Government.

Revision of School Curriculum
(Question No. 323/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Education outline the Ministry's plan to revise the school curriculum to include digital literacy, financial management and entrepreneurship training aligned with Gen Z's modern career needs?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, in 2025, we have piloted the new compulsory digital literacy subject in 60 primary and secondary schools and based on the lessons learned, we will move to full implementation in 2026.

Bright Journey Initiative
(Question No. 324/2025)

HON. RATU R.S.S. VAKALALABURE asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services update Parliament on the Bright Journey Initiative that has benefitted Fijians from cataract surgeries?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Bright Journey is a government-funded initiative of the People's Republic of China, supported specifically by the Government of Guangdong Province. Its purpose is twofold, to provide free, quality cataract surgeries to restore vision and improve quality of life; and strengthen local capacity by working alongside and training our eye-care specialists and nurses.

The medical team typically comprises three ophthalmologists and three nurses from the Zhongshan Ophthalmic Centre of Sun Yat-sen University, one of China's leading eye care institutions. Fiji is very grateful, some of the visits, they are very dedicated and hard-working staff, especially one of their professors, who I am told is one of the best in China.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there have been six missions so far - 2015, 2017, 2018, 2023 and 2024. They have done extensive amount of work. For this year in November, 303 cataract surgeries were carried out, of which 111 surgeries were carried out a month from 5th to 7th November.

I was very fortunate to also witness one of the removal of cataract for a Mrs. Varomue Marans, who was partially blind, and upon completion of the surgery, which was a merely 10-minute surgery, she was able to regain her sight. In this initiative as well, I want to ask how well it was done, I believe honourable Premila Kumar and honourable Jone Usamate both had eye surgeries during that time as well. So, again, we are grateful to the Government of China and their continued assistance in this manner.

Logistics for Transporting Sugarcane to the Mill
(Question No. 325/2025)

HON. R.R. SHARMA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Multi-Ethnic Affairs and Sugar Industry update Parliament on the long-term solutions to improve the logistics of transporting sugarcane to the mill for crushing?

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Government, together with the Fiji Sugar Corporation, continue to implement long-term sustainable measures to improve the logistics of transporting sugarcane to our mills. Efficient cane transport is essential for maintaining cane quality, reducing delays and ensuring timely crushing. Sir, today over 90 percent of our cane is transported to the mills by road. With the increased use of mechanical harvesters and the gradual shift away from rail, there is now greater demand for upgrading infield roads and the rural infrastructure.

Because of this, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Government has significantly strengthened the Cane Access Road Programme. Between the 2012, 2024 and 2025 season, a total of \$43 million has been invested in upgrading and maintaining Cane Access Roads. For 2025-2026, the Government is seeing the need for better maintenance and has increased the allocation to \$3.9 million. The works include the maintenance and construction of crossings, the installation of culverts, and replacement of watery log crossings. These long-term upgrades are critical for improving access for trucks and machinery.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, over the last two years alone, 35 crossings have been repaired, upgraded or newly constructed across the Lautoka, Rarawai and Labasa Mills. In addition, 1,351 roads have been assisted with culverts under 100 percent Government Grant Programme to improve farm access and replace unsafe log crossings. This has allowed more growers to transport their cane reliably to the mill. While most of the growers now rely on road transport, some still depend on the railway system, particularly where labour shortages limit their ability to harvest manually.

To support these growers, Mr. Speaker, Sir, 44 new cage bins were fabricated at a cost of \$1 million under the 2023-2024 programme. These bins are now used in Lautoka and Labasa Mills to transport billet cane. The FSC continues its annual maintenance of rolling stock and railway infrastructure to keep the railway system operational where it is needed.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, while FSC continues to strengthen the efficiency and commercial operation of cane logistics, we as the responsible Government must also ensure that no group of growers is left behind, especially those for whom rail transport is the only viable option due to the challenging topography of the land.

This year, despite the Lausa Loop and Malele Loop being deemed economically unviable and subsequently closed, the Government made the decision to reopen the loop to ensure that the 88 growers in the upper Duavata, Rakavidi and Malele were not disadvantaged and could deliver their cane without disruption. This intervention cost the Government \$454,000, but it ensured fairness and quality for our farmers.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, allow me to provide an economic perspective for those on the other side of the House who frequently criticise FSC for not generating profit. In the Dromasi Sector alone, there were 88 growers who relied entirely on rail for the transportation of their cane, and each produced an average of 34 tonnes on their farms. To transport this cane from Dromasi to Rarawai Mill, it cost FSC approximately \$85 a tonne. This is the reality of the industry we are managing. Nowhere in commercial viability must be balanced without our responsibility to ensure that every grower, regardless of the location or volume, is able to deliver the cane.

There has also been considerable public discussion about using the rail network during off-season to transport goods, even passengers, for that matter. However, comprehensive FAO study on the sugar industry undertaken last year, it was made abundantly clear that the current rail track design

is not suitable nor is it safe for any such use. The system was engineered solely for cane transport and repurposing it without major redesign would pose a significant safety risk.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are also exploring the establishment of the Cane Reception and Transfer Point (CRTPs) for growers who are located far from the mill. For example, those in Sigatoka, this would be a dedicated facility for those growers who can offload their cane quickly and return to their fields without long transport delays. The cane would then be consolidated and transferred to the mill using mass-transport vehicles.

We have seen this system operating very efficiently in the French Reunion where it has significantly improved logistics and reduced transportation cost for the farmers. However, for such facilities to be viable in Fiji, the growers in designated areas will need to increase their production so that the volume of cane justifies the operation and transfer point.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the FSC is modernising transport logistics through technology. Cane Monitoring System - This year, FSC introduced a real-time Cane Monitoring System that tracks field balance, that is, cane already harvested, but awaiting transport. This is helping reduce deterioration, improve turnaround time and ensure that the cane reaches the mill while still fresh.

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, Sir, FSC is embarking on a pilot GIS project integrating satellite imaging and geospatial analytics. This will enable accurate crop and yield prediction, better harvest planning, improved logistics management and real-time monitoring of burnt cane areas, harvesting progress, field balance and transport delays. These digital tools will strengthen planning, improve efficiency and help growers to deliver cane to the mill with optimal quality.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the cumulative effect of these long-term measures is clear:

- (1) cane access infrastructure has to be strengthened;
- (2) growers have better access through improved roads, crossings and culverts;
- (3) rail support continues for the growers who require it; and
- (4) technology is now being integrated to modernise, harvest and transport coordination.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in conclusion, the Government and FSC remain firmly committed to implementing solutions that ensure cane is transported efficiently, safely and on time to our mills. Through these continued infrastructure upgrades and the adoption of modern technology-driven systems, we are laying the foundation for a more reliable and resilient logistics framework - one that will better support our growers and strengthen the sugar industry for many years to come.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Honourable Minister, of the two forms of transportation for sugar, rail and road - to the farmer, which is less expensive?

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, to be honest, railway system is much cheaper. Today in Australia, they still have the railway system where they transport cane at \$4 per tonne. In Fiji, it is costing us \$35 per almost per tonne all the way from Sigatoka. The railway system is an option, and I must thank the honourable Prime Minister who has been pushing to bring the railway system back.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have heard from the honourable Minister that the railway system is cheaper, and I agree. Can the honourable Minister inform Parliament whether there is any major capital works for the repair and maintenance of the railway system?

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, we need to first get our farmers to start producing in a

big way. We cannot be spending money on the infrastructure when we cannot see results on the ground. Yes, it will go side by side, and when we are assured by the farmers that they are producing well, we will definitely start maintaining from the place where it should be.

Marine Research Vessel - *RV Yau Dikevi*
(Question No. 326/2025)

HON. A.N. TUICOLO asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Lands and Mineral Resources update Parliament on how the Ministry's Marine Research Vessel *RV Yau Dikevi* will be utilised to support the strategic goals and operational needs of the Ministry?

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Marine Research Vessel *RV Yau Dikevi* is a state-of-the-art, very modern research vessel which was launched in December 2023. The vessel serves as a floating laboratory equipped with advanced scientific survey tools. The vessel was a fit-for-purpose design and constructed overseas and has met specifications for Fiji waters.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this research vessel will enable our scientists, not only within our Ministry, but also scientists within the Government departments, they will be able to help environmentalists, scientists at the Ministry of Environment to conduct foreshore and inshore marine geology and coastal surveys. They are also able to map ocean floors and identify vulnerable coastal areas, to support climate-affected communities with linkages to study tectonic activities and understand the processes shaping our underwater landscapes.

The research vessel will soon be deployed for oceanographic surveys to several coastal villages in Tailevu, which are Sawa, Buliloli, Sawakasa No. 1, Dakuinuku, Lodon, Nananu, Burelevu, Qelekuro, Driti, Natalaira, Silana, Lolomalevu and Nasinu Villages. Additionally, the vessel will also be used for groundwater surveys on the island of Yasawa and in the Malolo Group, Matuku and Moala in the Lau Province. These are efforts that will contribute to global scientific knowledge and enhance our ability to safeguard our marine and other natural resources for future generation at national level.

Complaints Against Licensed Surveyors
(Question No. 327/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Lands and Mineral Resources inform Parliament on measures that are in place to address complaints against licensed surveyors who accept payment but fail to complete the contracted work?

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- Mr. Speaker, all complaints that are placed against licensed and registered surveyors are handled by the Surveyor's Registration Board (SRB). It is an independent body appointed by the Minister for Lands and Mineral Resources, under the Surveyors Act of 1969. Honourable Usamate and honourable Koya, of course, know this process.

The SRB is mandated under section 4 of the Act to investigate complaints and take disciplinary actions where it is appropriate. Any complaint received by the Ministry is immediately referred to the Board for investigation. Where a surveyor is found to have accepted payment, but had failed to complete the contracted work, the Board has the authority to revoke the surveyor's registration.

Complainants are also advised to report matters to Police or to the Fijian Competition and Consumer Commission for further redress. The SRB convenes on a monthly basis, Mr. Speaker, Sir, to ensure that complaints are dealt with on a timely manner. Over the years, the Board has deregistered surveyors due to unprofessional and unethical conduct.

To further strengthen compliance and safeguard public interest, the Ministry has appointed an Inspecting Surveyor. This officer rechecks surveyors' fieldwork against information presented on submitted survey plans to ensure that the plan accurately reflects what has been carried out on the ground. When surveyors fail to uphold proper survey standards, the Board will take necessary action, including the revocation of registration or their licence.

Pending Requests – Construction of Seawalls
(Question No. 328/2025)

HON. I.S. VANAWALU asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Agriculture and Waterways update Parliament on the status of pending requests for the construction of seawalls?

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA.- Mr. Speaker, I will be highlighting the concerns of vulnerable coastal communities and how we are safeguarding our people from the increasing impact of coastal erosion and climate change.

The issue of coastal erosion is an essential threat to many of our communities, and this Coalition Government is fully committed to protecting every Fijian citizen. The Ministry maintains a comprehensive master list to track every seawall request from initial scoping to completion. This allows us to strategically plan, prioritise based on urgency, and allocate resources effectively.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, today I would like to provide this august House with a breakdown of the status of those critical projects. In the Northern Division, in progress we have completed several seawall projects using in-house funding, such as those in Raviravi - 160 metres, Naividamu - 150 metres, and Drekeniwai - 350 metres, which have benefited households using cost-effective nature-based solutions. We are fortunate that we have a lot of support from communities when they are constructing their seawalls. In ongoing pipelines, a significant number of seawall projects are advanced. In the completion phase, for instance, we are fortunate that we have a lot of support from communities when they are constructing their seawalls.

Ongoing Pipelines: A significant number of seawall projects are advanced in the completion phase. For instance, construction will start soon for Navetau - 350 metres, Kanakana - 400 metres and Vanuavou - 400 metres, under the ADB-funded Enhancing Climate Resilience Project, with the disbursement expected through the Ministry of Finance.

Future Commitments: Several communities including Sese - 400 metres, Saqani - 280 metres, and Visoqo - 200 metres have projects approved under the Adaptation Fund with the implementation by the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) scheduled to commence in March 2026.

Challenges and Action: We are also addressing gaps where international donor funding was insufficient for seawall projects like in Nakawaga - 400 metres, Vesi - 300 metres and Ligaulevu - 350 metres, initially under Kiwa Initiative. The Ministry has taken the initiative to complete them using in-house capacity with some already finished, including the seawall project in Somosomo Village, where 425 metres of seawall have been completed.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Western Division shows a similar story of strategic implementation and Public- Private Partnership. Completed Projects: We have strong records of completion with successful Nature-Based Solutions (NbS) and concrete seawall built in Rukurukulevu - 200 metres, Namoli - 450 metres, Nabukadra - 300 metres and Vaidoko - 90 metres, primarily through our in-house budget.

Advanced Preparation: Some communities are in the construction preparation phase, and these are 380 metres of seawall in Namarai and 390 metres of seawall in Nadogoloa, which approved by ADB funding, while others like Saioko - 190 metres, Nayavutoka - 474 metres and Tagaqe - 170 metres were approved under the Adaptation Fund, awaiting disbursement.

Addressing the Urgent Need: We are also tackling urgent cases, for example, in Viseisei Village, a 550 metres seawall construction is ongoing. It was delayed as the community contributed boulders were exhausted. I am pleased to inform this august House that this project has been prioritised for funding in the 2025-2026 Budget to ensure its completion.

Mr. Speaker, Sir in the Central Division, encompassing Tailevu, Rewa, Serua and Namosi, major infrastructure delivered significant projects have been completed, including the substantial reinforcement concrete seawall of 633 metres on Bau Island and an NbS project in Ovea Village of 500 metres of seawall.

Focus on Scoping: A considerable number of villages, such as Dromuna - 400 metres, Vatani - 200 metres, and Nasilai - 220 metres have had scoping and surveys completed. This crucial step will enable us to accurately cost and prioritise them for future funding cycles, including the upcoming 2025-2026 Budget.

Donor Engagement: We also have projects like Veivatulua Village with 380 metres of seawall that are approved for construction under ADB funding, showing our diversified approach to finance. The maritime islands presents our most significant challenge due to their remoteness and vastness, while they remain a top priority for this Government.

Proven Delivery Methods: We have been very successful to track record using in-house funding to complete seawall projects in remote islands, such as Namuana Village - 400 metres, Tavuki District School - 250 metres, Daliconi Village - 250 metres and Viro Village - 300 metres.

Acknowledging the Scale of Need: The master list clearly shows the emerging need, with over 50 villages across Lau, Lomaiviti and Kadavu listed. Many like those on Vanuabalavu and Matuku are still in the scoping phase due to logistical challenges.

Targeted Intervention: We are making progress, for example, in Ketei Village and on Totoya, where 250 metres of seawall is already completed, with more planned. Furthermore, villages like Nasegai in Kadavu, 300 metres of seawall, and Nasau village in Koro Island, with 200 metres of seawall, have been allocated funding within the 2025-2026 financial year.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to provide a clear, direct answer to the honourable Member's question, let me summarise the national picture. In the Northern Division, 20 communities will need seawalls, but still lack funding. In the Western Division, 15 communities will need seawalls, but still lack funding. In the Central, we have 35 communities needing seawalls with no funding. In the maritime zone, 50 communities need seawalls, but still lack funding.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in total across our nations, we have identified over 120 communities that require seawalls, and approved funding is not yet secured - this is the scale of the challenge we face.

Our strategy is threefold - complete the groundwork, strengthen collaborative financing and leverage national resources and prioritise.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the list is long because the threats are real. Through inter-Ministerial collaboration and the proactive, innovative approach to climate finance, we have a plan, we have a system, and we have the unwavering commitment to protect our people. We will work through this list, village by village, until the job is done.

HON. I.S. VANAWALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, what are some of the mitigation factors and challenges faced with the construction of the seawalls?

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, there are quite a number of challenges that we normally face during the construction of a seawall. One in particular is the resources that we use, and it normally requires approval of a landowning system. That seems to be a hindrance when there are some disputes within landowners, and I believe the initial preparatory work normally addresses those that normally involves the use of natural resources, including boulders and soil.

HON. J. USAMATE.- I would just like to ask the honourable Minister, because there are so many requests, as you rightly say. Is there a place that we can access the priority listing by province obviously in the next three years that the Ministry is using in terms of the one that are next coming up in the pipelines?

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA.- The list, Sir, is available with the Ministry of Agriculture. You can easily access the list through our office in Raiwaqa.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am thankful that Kanakana Village is now part of your list in the Northern division - I remember that I raised this with the late honourable Rayalu back in 2023. There were three villages in Tailevu, I declare my interest, but they were approved prior to 2016 and then *TC Winston* came, and there was a redeployment of funds - Qelekuro, Nananu and Naloto Villages. I have raised this with the honourable Minister for Rural Development. Kindly request the honourable Minister, if you can re-look at your master list if it is still there, or maybe another reassessment on the costing for these three villages, please.

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will provide the master list, and I will see that those three villages, because they have been approved, will be included if they are not in the master list.

Scuttled Vessels – Suva Harbour
(Question No. 329/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Public Works, Meteorological Services and Transport inform Parliament on the measures in place to address the issue of scuttled vessels at the Suva Harbour, particularly during the current cyclone season?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is timely and significant that Fiji continues to prepare in this cyclone season and the heightened risk. The issue of scattered, unsecured and derelict vessels within Suva Harbour is a long-standing issue in terms of maritime safety, environment protection and resilience. The Ministry, together with the Maritime Safety Authority of Fiji (MSAF), Fiji Ports Corporation Limited (FPCL), Fiji Navy, Ministry of Environment, as the honourable Minister had already updated a few times, and other key

agencies, continue to undertake coordinated surveillance and compliance to ensure that the vessels are properly secured, moored and relocated, if necessary.

These efforts are essential to prevent drifting vessels, collisions and damage to harbour assets. As already alluded to by the honourable Minister for Environment, derelict vessels have been removed. There were 44; 17 had been removed. Currently, there are 27 remaining. Regarding the update on the process of that, the Waitt Foundation-funded programme, which is currently underway, and Expressions of Interest (EOI) have been advertised and received and currently being evaluated by FPCL. We acknowledge the assistance of the Waitt Foundation of US\$1 million to continue this work, not only that, but also the comprehensive review of legislation and regulatory frameworks regarding this issue.

Moving forward on this, we also intend to seek Cabinet's endorsement for the formal establishment of these frameworks, especially to accede to the Nairobi Wreck Removal Convention. This basically provides international rules for the prompt and effective removal of hazardous wrecks and establish a legal framework for coastal states to deal with wrecks and require ship owners to be strictly liable for costs for relocating, removing hazards and also ensuring that they have a mandatory insurance scheme.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, for the timelines regarding the work with Waitt Foundation, the expressions of interest have come in. There was also discussions regarding International Quality Review (IQR) with Waitt Foundation and that work has been carried out to be finalised this week. By the end of week one of December, we hope to finalise the tender evaluation to be submitted to the FPCL Board for approval. Once that is done, hopefully we will engage the contractors for the removal of these wrecks for the work to start towards the end of January or February 2026.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Supplementary question, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I thank the honourable Minister for his answer to my main question. I just wanted to ask the honourable Minister if he is aware of the vessels that used to tie together, about 10 fishing vessels that have been moved into Bay of Islands right in front of Novotel? It is directly opposite the Westerland, which is beached off Mosquito Island. Westerland is still owned by an operating company. I just wanted to ask if he is aware of that vessel.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will need to get further information and look into that issue.

Plans to Enlarge the Valelevu Health Centre (Question No. 331/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services update Parliament on the plans to enlarge the Valelevu Health Centre?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to address the concerns regarding future plans for Valelevu Health Centre. I would like to inform that the upgrade of Valelevu Health Centre is aligned to the recently approved six-year Pacific Health Islands Transformation Project (PHIT), which is focused on the upgrade of our health systems and health infrastructure that deliver our primary healthcare.

I would like to stress that the PHIT Project is a comprehensive initiative aimed at strengthening health systems across Fiji by ensuring equitable access to healthcare for all citizens.

The project strategically recognizes the unique geographical challenges the diverse populations phase, especially in the areas of Valelevu and are leading to the implementation of a tailored patient pathway focusing on urban, rural and maritime communities.

Our urban areas, especially Valelevu, has been identified as a priority zone with a large population and high prevalence of Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs). Currently, the Valelevu Health Centre is always congested, often overcrowded and lacks space, and it is an old infrastructure. The Ministry's plan is to undertake a major refurbishment and upgrade of the infrastructure. The new building is to meet current service demands and exploring other options for provisional other services during construction.

As I have said, it is part of the PHIT Project. In terms of upgrading urban friendly healthcare facilities, right now in terms of the plan, we will include integrated network of care, telehealth, telemedicine, and again, workforce transformation, adding value to the facility so that it takes the load off the work of Colonial War Memorial Hospital in terms of some of the services. That is the currently the plan and we look forward to the implementation.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, is there any likely timelines for the various phases of Valelevu in particular?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- The PHIT Project is a six-year initiative, and it is something that will come together with the overall development of the new hospital. When we develop the Valelevu Centre, the service will cease. It will take time, and I ask the public to bear with us, but nevertheless, it is something that is currently being planned for with the PHIT Project that is coming up.

Mechanisms and Processes –Leased State Land
(Question No. 332/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Lands and Mineral Resources update Parliament on mechanisms and processes that are in place to ensure there is no misuse of leased State Land or property?

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Lands and Mineral Resources take very seriously its responsibilities under the State Lands Act and before leases are issued. Under section 13 of the Act, the Minister is empowered to impose conditions on leases and licences on Crown land, including restrictions of use, development and occupation. This provision ensures that every lease agreement is not only a contractual arrangement but is also a legal instrument that binds the lessees and to ensure that they comply with the intended purpose of the land.

To give effect to this, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry over the years have established several mechanisms and processes.

- (1) Lease conditions and covenants - All State land leases are issued with clear conditions of use aligned with section 13 of the Act. This condition specifies what can be done, permitted activities, development timelines and obligations of leases.
- (2) There are regular inspections carried out by our land officers who are located around our offices in Fiji. They are to ensure that land that is being used or applied for and used, are used in accordance with the lease conditions. Any breaches are documented and corrective notices are also issued.

- (3) There are enforcement measures where misuse or breach of condition is identified, the Ministry has the authority under the Act to impose penalties, issue rectification orders and also, in very serious cases, cancel the lease. This ensures accountability and also to deter misuse cases.
- (4) We have inter-agency collaboration where we work closely together with municipal councils and other statutory organisations and relevant agencies such as the iTLTB to monitor development approvals and land use compliance.
- (5) Transparency and public reporting, where lease records are maintained centrally, and processes are being digitised to improve transparency and reduce opportunities for misuse.

Attracting Younger Generation to Sugarcane Farming
(Question No. 357/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Multi-Ethnic Affairs and Sugar Industry update Parliament on the Ministry's strategic plan to attract the younger generation to sugarcane farming to ensure long-term sustainability of the sugar industry?

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think the Parliament is getting very boring now, so I will give some stories about how we can produce and bring new generation into cane farming.

Now coming back, I was once a partner of the late Prime Minister, Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara. We were running this airline called Vanua Air, and he used to come to Labasa quite often. I said to him, "Sir, how have you maintained the sugar industry?" He said, "first thing Charan, I introduced television very late in the country, because now when you have television, you see *Ghar Ghar Ki Kahani*, you see all the series with a bit of kava." He was joking to me as we had a little radio and no television.

My parents had 13 to 14 children in their household. In fact, I am the 11th amongst my siblings, and Ranjit Singh who was in Bua did better than my father - he had 15 siblings. So, the more he went into the interior, the more children he used to have. Out of that, six may have become doctors, nurses, but five stayed on the cane farm. I am now a cane farmer from my family, that is a good example.

What I am saying here is, we need the younger generation to come out and farm, but we need to also give them some incentives. To reply to the question by honourable Pillay, the challenge for the ageing farmer population and the decline of interest from our young people in the farm is not unique to the sugar industry in Fiji. It is a national concern, both for non-sugar and the sugar industry.

The Youth in Agriculture Policy highlighted that Fiji's farming population is ageing rapidly while youth participation remains far too low. This poses a direct risk to our long-term food security, rural development and national resilience. The age profile of sugarcane farmers underscores the urgency. Our latest assessment shows that 7 percent of our growers are over the age of 70 years; 12 percent are between the ages of 60 years and 70 years; 14 percent are between the ages of 50 years and 60 years; 62 percent are between the 40 years and 50 years age bracket, while only 5 percent of the cane farmers are below 40 years. These figures speak for themselves that a number of young farmers entering the industry is critically low, and without intervention and sustainability, the sugar sector is at a risk.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the future of the Fiji sugar industry, therefore, hinges on a crucial question, how do we bring our next generation back into farming? The Government recognises that long-term

sustainability depends on attracting young, energetic and innovative farmers who can modernise the sector. This is not simply about increasing numbers, it is about bringing the right calibre of young farmers who are committed, business-minded, technology-ready and willing to embrace modern agriculture practises.

Over the past two years, the Ministry, together with our key industry partners have taken deliberate steps to re-strategise, modernise and reposition our programmes to make sugar cane farming a viable, competitive and attractive career pathway for our young Fijians. One of the strongest deterrents for our young people has been the highly labour-intensive nature of cane farming. To address this, the Government has advanced a suite of mechanisation initiatives through FSC to replace all manual labour with modern technology-driven solutions.

We have expanded access to tractor through the Tractor Service Provider model and introduced mechanical planters, mechanical harvesters, and precision farm tools across the industry. This innovation makes farming faster, more efficient, significantly less physically demanding – an essential factor in attracting the younger generation who naturally gravitate towards technology-based careers.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in September, we successfully imported attested Japanese mechanical harvester specifically engineered for hilly terrain, addressing a long-standing challenge faced by the growers in difficult landscapes. Building on this progress, during a visit to French Reunion Island last month, we witnessed firsthand the use of a modified excavator mounted harvesting attachment, capable of operating on steep slopes with impressive efficiency. We are now in the process of bringing these machines to Fiji for local trials, with the objective of further broadening of mechanisation options for growers in a rugged and hard reach areas.

Mechanisation has also been embedded into our youth-focused programme and cooperative farming ventures, ensuring the young farmers see sugarcane not as a traditional labour, but a modern, technology aligned profession with real potential for growth. The Government has introduced the Farmers Incentive Programme, which rewards growers, particularly young farmers, to adopt the best practices, improve farm efficiency and meet the production targets. This performance-based incentives sends a clear message – sugarcane farming can be profitable, professional and rewarding for those who are willing to modernise their approach.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to further attract the new entrants, especially youths, the Ministry has implemented the New Farmers Alliance Programme, through which, the Government provides 30 percent or \$7,500 to support the first-time farmers entering the industry. To-date, we have 202 new farmers, most of whom are young growers, who have joined the sugar sector through this initiative. This support has significantly reduced the financial barriers that often discourage young people, allowing them to invest in land preparation, quality planting material, essential farm inputs and mechanised services.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are already seeing a positive shift, with more young individuals choosing sugarcane farming as a business venture rather than a subsistence activity - an encouraging sign for the future of the industry.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are working in close partnership with Fiji Sugar Corporation (FSC), Sugar Research Institute of Fiji (SRIF) and the Sugar Cane Growers Council (SCGC) to strengthen youth engagement in sugarcane farming, and together we have intensified our outreach through Farmer Information Days, targetted training workshops and awareness programmes tailored for new entrants and farmers seeking to expand or commercialise their operations.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the SRIF has played a central role in building young farmer capability, and over the past two years has trained 150 women farmers in key production practices, provided introductory modern cane farming training to 20 young female farmers, equipped 32 new farmers with skills in planting, ratoon management and weed control, and delivered foundational sugarcane production training to 10 to 12 youth.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, SRIF has also initiated with the Ministry the Youth to roll out dedicated sugarcane training across districts from 2025 to 2026, taking programmes directly to youth groups in their communities to deepen participation. In addition, SRIF conducted targeted training for iTaukei landowners in Nawaicoba, Yako and Sikituru, many of whom were young participants, supporting the productive use of fallow and idle land for cane cultivation. Furthermore, training and awareness programmes are planned for Nasarowaqa, Tabia and Bocalevu in the Northern Division in 2025-2026 to empower landowners, especially the youth, to unlock the economic potential of their land.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we must change the mindset of our younger generation towards farming. For far too long, agriculture has carried an unfair stigma, a perception that it is a last choice career. That mindset must change, and it must change now.

With that in mind, Mr. Speaker, Sir, my Ministry has directed all industry stakeholders to actively participate in the Ministry of Education's VITI Showcase at the HFC Stadium beginning today. This is an opportunity to present the sugar industry, in particular, as a modern, technology-driven and highly skilled profession.

I encourage all honourable Members to visit our industry booth and witness firsthand the innovations, technological advancements and exciting career opportunities that the sugar sector offers. On a lighter note, you will also get to see some of our cane varieties such as Beqa, Nadhri, LF91, Kaba and the commonly grown Mana variety.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Government is fully committed to empowering young people to take ownership of the sugar industry's future. Through mechanisation, targeted incentives, financial support, modern training, improved land accessibility and strong institutional partnerships, we are transforming sugar farming into a modern, competitive and profitable career path.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, when they ask me questions, they are not prepared to listen. So, with those words, we are definitely working hard to make this initiative workable.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, if a young son watches how his father's hard work is still standing on the farm, whether it is burnt cane or green cane, he will never be encouraged to take up sugarcane farming. I am talking about Labasa. There are thousands of tonnes of cane is still standing, there was an extension done, but the bad weather, the flooding and the heavy rain did not help. Whether a further extension will be done to accommodate all the cane to the Mills?

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, yes, as I have said earlier, the Tribunal decides on the dates, but in consultation with the Growers Council and FSC. We had given an initial date of last week to close, we have reviewed it for another five days, and we will further review. If cane is still there, we will continue to harvest.

MOU with the Rakiraki Chamber of Commerce
(Question No. 359/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services update Parliament on the MOU with the Rakiraki Chamber of Commerce in constructing a new mortuary at Ra Divisional Hospital?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, in response to the question, in terms of the MOU between the Ra Chamber of Commerce and the Ministry of Health, currently I am happy to inform this august House that the MOU for the mortuary in Rakiraki Hospital is currently with the Office of the Solicitor-General for finalisation. The post facility is to house 18 births, valued at more than FJ\$250,000.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the members of the Ra Chamber of Commerce, the Ra diaspora, the *Vanua* of Ra for coming together and starting this initiative to take ownership of the facility and their hospital that will look after them now and into the future, especially for the future generations of Ra. I have been informed by the Ra Chamber of Commerce that they not only assess the progress of the mortuary, but also other developments. They have given their assurance that they will try and assist the Ministry in the areas of improvement of the Rakiraki Sub-Divisional Hospital, as well as relevant health facilities that do refer to Rakiraki Subdivisional Hospital.

HON. V. LAL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, has the Ministry has carried out any due diligence with the Ra Chamber of Commerce to check if they have \$200,000 that has been prepared to build the new mortuary.

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- As I have said, the current MOU is with the Solicitor-General's Office. We also have to go through the Ministry of Finance. That is how we will do our due diligence in terms of ensuring that proper documentation and records are in place before any agreement is done.

ITEC Programme – Suva Super Speciality Hospital
(Question No. 360/2025)

HON. S. TUBUNA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services update Parliament on Fiji's partnership with India through the ITEC Programme, particularly regarding the Suva Super Specialty Hospital?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to address the question raised by the honourable Member regarding the partnership between the Government of Fiji and the Government of India through the India Technical Economic Co-operation (ITEC) programme, as well as the establishment of the Super Speciality Hospital in Suva. I touched on it earlier on.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would just like to emphasise the significance of the ITEC programme. It has been instrumental in fostering skills development in our nation. For the past three years, approximately 200 participants from Fiji have availed themselves of this opportunity, bringing a total of 850 participants since 2014. In this year alone, 70 Fijians have already benefitted from the ITEC Scholarship Programme, specifically in the health sector, and we have seen approximately 10 individuals participate in health-related courses over the last three years.

Turning to the Super Speciality Hospital, I am pleased to inform this House that the MOU for its construction signed in August, during the recent visit of our honourable Prime Minister to India. The land for the proposed hospital has been secured at Nadera under the Ministry of Land Leasing

Agreement, the iTLTB and the construction will be for five years from 2026 to 2030.

The initiative marks a significant step towards enhancing our healthcare system following the signing with the Government of India's Ministry of External Affairs in coordination with relevant agencies has initiated the administrative process required for the hospital's construction. The tendering process is currently underway to select the company as the project executing agency. At the same time, a separate tender for an Indian concessionaire at the hospital operator will also be finalized soon. It is running parallel together.

Under this agreement, the Government of India will provide support across various stages including design, construction, procurement of medical equipment and operational support for the state-of-the-art Super-Specialty Hospital.

I would like to outline the hospital post-specializations - cardiovascular, thoracic surgery, cardiology, general medicine, general surgery, obstetrics, gynaecology, urology, gastroenterology, ophthalmology, orthopaedics, paediatric dental services. We also might be considering regel therapy as well. This facility will not only enhance the quality of healthcare in Fiji, but it will also be for the region as well. In conclusion, Super Specialty Hospital represents a significant investment in the health and wellbeing of our nation, and we are committed to optimizing the partnership to its full potential.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the service that is going to be provided at the Super Speciality Hospital, is it going to be free of cost to the Fijian citizens or do people have to pay to visit this particular hospital?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, currently we are now at the stage of construction, in terms of the operational aspect of that agreement that is currently in discussion and will be finalised probably in the next year – its user-pay. As I have mentioned, you were not listening, there will be a concessionaire paid by the government of India but before that is done, there will be ongoing discussions between the relevant ministries, through the High Commission and the Ministry of Health.

Key National Infrastructure Projects Facing Delays
(Question No. 361/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Public Works, Meteorological Services and Transport update Parliament on key national infrastructure projects currently facing delays, and what is the long-term maintenance plan to mitigate the recurring severe damage to our road network?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, in terms of the infrastructure on roads, significant improvements have been delivered including upgrades. Some major projects, of course, are currently facing delays – the Nadera to Laqere four-lane upgrade, a critical component of the Suva-Nausori corridor has been delayed due to design finalisation. That would include the relocation of utilities, as well as continuing procurement challenges.

Another project, which had been on and off for the last 15 years, is the Rewa/Vutia Road upgrading, including bridge to connect the 12 villages to the mainland, is awaiting environmental approvals and faces logistical difficulties given the sensitive environment and river systems.

Projects such as Waidalice has been affected by land ownership issues, disputes and design changes for climate resilience. While the current work on Tamavua-i-Wai Bridge has encountered some ground condition challenges and alignment adjustments, FRA is currently implementing stronger project planning, accelerating utility relocation and adopting climate resilient engineering standards.

On water, some of the works include expanded access to treated water upgrades, treatment facilities, delays persist in sub-critical projects. The Moturiki Water Project, one of the largest maritime initiatives costing \$3.2 million has struggled to deliver consistent supply due to repeated pipeline bursts caused by inadequate pressure control and poor-quality materials.

The \$2.6 million Rara Housing Reservoir project in Labasa, due to unresolved water main connections, and the Suva-Nausori corridor ageing infrastructure high turbidity levels at treatment plants have led to prolonged disruptions. I have already mentioned the projects regarding this, not only the new Water Treatment Plant in Tamavua, but also the pipeline extension from the Sawani Junction to the pump system, and also the two five megalitre reservoirs up in Colo-i-Suva; these are ongoing. These are compounded by the fact that nearly over 40 percent of treated water is lost through leaks, et cetera.

The way forward is anchored in the Water Sector Strategy. In terms of long term, the details are there. Please do read through a copy where we will work through that strategy to the year 2050, not only us, but also any incoming government with the costing of \$8.7 billion. Non-revenue water, which is the water leakage, we have engaged through the Asian Development Bank, a consultant contractor and currently working on specifications to reduce that from 40 percent to 20 percent.

The immediate actions, with some of the issues I have mentioned include upgrading pipelines with high density ballast materials, installing advanced pressure control mechanisms, expanding treatment capacity with new plants and reservoirs, and international partnerships. As I have already mentioned, in some of my presentations with the World Bank, ADB and consultants/contractors such as SUEZ from France. Together with our development partners, we will continue to work towards solutions in these issues.

I have already mentioned the work currently being done with our development partners on the Fiji Roads Strategic Plan 2050, and that work in the Water Sector 2050 will have a clear pathway/pipeline moving forward, especially in terms of specific works to be planned, not only that but also the financial strategies relating to that.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Minister for the update with regards to the delay, the work and the infrastructure. With the recent flooding in the Northern Division, especially in Boubale, Bulileka, there was damage to the Boubale Bridge and the road is currently closed. There are more than 45 households on the other side of the bridge, along with the primary school, which is being affected. Can the honourable Minister update Parliament as to when that bridge is expected to be renovated for traffic to go from one side to the other?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Yes, definitely. At the moment, the latest update is the assessment regarding costings, and I have stressed to our team to hasten the work regarding that, not only that but also some of the various areas where it got impacted in terms of the latest high rainfall and floods so that we can work on rectifying that. I will continue to follow that up.

HON. V. NATH.- Honourable Minister, one water project which connects at the border of Nadi and Sigatoka are basically Tunalia, Marasa, Rada, Malamala, Nawai, Uciwai - all this time, this project has been on hold for more than a year. Would you like to throw some light on that please?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- I think that is a new question, so I will get further information on that and get back to you.

MR. SPEAKER.- Before we proceed given the hour, and also the fact that there are four more items in addition to the Oral Questions still to be asked, we will now entertain a Suspension Motion. For the purposes of complying with Standing Orders with respect to our sitting time, I now call upon the honourable Leader of the Government in Parliament to move the Suspension Motion.

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDERS

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

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

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

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, as already alluded to, we have five Oral Questions and the Written Questions and Consideration of Bills for today.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate on the motion, if any? I do not see any.

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Mr. Speaker, I do not have any further comments.

Question put.

Motion agreed.

QUESTIONS

MR. SPEAKER.- I would like to clarify that this question was supposed to be asked by honourable Ratu Josaia Niudamu but he is not feeling well. He has taken himself home and that is why honourable Alipate Tuicolo is asking the question.

Update on Fire Victims Assistance Programme (Question No. 362/2025)

HON. A.N. TUICOLO asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Housing and Local Government update Parliament on the Fire Victims Assistance Programme?

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Fire Assistance Grant was introduced in 2015 to assist low and middle income households earning \$50,000 and below to rebuild their homes lost due to accidental fires. Eligible households receive a grant of up to \$5,000, provide they meet the criteria outlined in the Housing Assistance to Fire Victims Policy. This includes proof of ownership, confirmation that the property was uninsured and assurance of accidental cause by the

National Fire Authority, and there must also be a police report.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, since its inception in 2015, a total of 248 households, with total Government Grant assistance of \$1.245 million was provided to-date. Some of the key highlights of this programme has been extended to rural and maritime areas, with verification by the Provincial Administrator and Roko Tui. Recognising the unique challenges faced by these communities such as limited access to government services and logistical constraints, the Ministry of Housing worked closely with the Provincial Administrators and Roko Tui to verify ownership and confirm eligibility.

Another major development materialised in 2023, when the eligibility criteria were broadened to include agricultural lease holders and members of landowning units residing on *mataqali* land outside village boundaries.

Looking ahead, the Ministry of Housing will continue to refine the policy, based on emerging needs as well as lessons learned, while strengthening partnerships with stakeholders, development partners and civil society to expand the programme's reach and effectiveness.

HON. A.N. TUICOLO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, we understand that this programme is meant to help low-to middle-income households with an annual income of \$50,000 or less, both in urban and rural areas. Can a property owner, whose property is built on land under the *vakavanua* arrangement and his or her property is destroyed by fire apply for this assistance?

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Currently, it is outside the policy, but if the victim can verify and confirm the owner of the land, then they can also be provided assistance. That is something that we have also been working with the National Fire Authority to work with the insurance companies to come up with a product to be able to assist property owners whose houses are not insured, but at least a grant or premium can be used when it comes to disasters like fire.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, considering the cost of building materials, can the amount of \$5,000 be increased so that people will have access to building materials?

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, \$5000 is the amount that is currently being used just to see the family go on with the lives and provided with some kind of shelter. It is a good question because the policy was legislated in 2015, but as I said, we are in the process of refining a policy and also with the increase in the construction cost as well as material costs, that can also be taken on board and be reviewed.

Addressing the Growing Demand for State Land
(Question No. 364/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Lands and Mineral Resources inform Parliament on the measures undertaken by the Ministry to address the growing demand for State land in Fiji, particularly in light of its limited availability?

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, land is a very finite and invaluable resource. Of the 18,274 square kilometres of land under our national jurisdiction, 4 percent of that or 730 square kilometres constitutes State land. In recognition of the growing demand and competing interests across all sectors, particularly around the major urban and peri-urban development centres of Fiji, the Ministry has initiated these strategies:

- (1) We are now finalising the State land use master plan, which is a very comprehensive document that will serve as a guiding framework for the systematic and co-ordinated allocation of State land. What it does seek to provide, Mr. Speaker, is to promote fairness and equity in land distribution while ensuring that developmental needs of all sectors that energise our economy are adequately addressed.
- (2) There is a significant exploration of land reclamation initiative. Given the scarcity of land, the Ministry has commenced preliminary planning to create additional real estate through extensive reclamation works. While this is not something that we are planning to move towards anytime soon, because it is going to require a lot of capital and labour intensive, comparative studies, Mr. Speaker, will be undertaken to examine successful models used in other countries and we have seen reclamation done properly and efficiently in places such as Dubai, UAE, Qatar, and even closer to home.

However, studies will be undertaken to examine successful models used in other countries and assess how it can be applied in Fiji. These initiatives will be pursued, of course, with strict compliance with the legislative requirements, including Environmental Impact Assessment, consultation with the owners of *qoliqoli* and the provision of compensation for fishing rights and fishing rights laws.

Mr. Speaker, these are measures that underscores the Ministry's commitment to sustainable land management and equitable access for all our citizens.

Direct Consultation/Collaboration with Gen Z
(Question No. 365/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Youth and Sports inform Parliament on what formal mechanism is the Government establishing to ensure direct consultation and collaboration with Gen Z representatives regarding national policy and legislative development?

HON. J. SAUKURU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the question focusses on Generation Z, young people born between 1997 and 2012, today aged 10 to 28 years. They fall squarely within Fiji's official youth definition of 15 to 35 and, therefore, represent significant demographics through the Ministry of Youth and Sports.

Technology has profoundly shaped their identity, behaviour and aspirations of this generation. Allow me to highlight the key areas of influence:

- (1) Digital natives: Gen Z is Fiji's first true digital native generation. They have grown up with smartphones, internet and social media. They have shaped how they communicate, learn and access information.
- (2) Social media influence: Platforms such as *TikTok*, *Instagram*, *Snapchat* and *Twitter* are central to Gen Z's daily interactions. These platforms enable self-expression, activism and communication, but also expose them to risks including misuse and online harassment.
- (3) Education and learning: Technology has reshaped education. Online learning, digital resources and e-platforms have increased accessibility. Gen Z is accustomed to interactive learning, instant information and digital classrooms.

- (4) Consumer behaviour: This generation is highly responsive to online trends and digital marketing. They value sustainability, ethics and authenticity in brands, influencing the market and shaping business strategies.
- (5) Gaming culture: Gaming is not just entertainment; it is a social space and a growing global industry. Mr. Speaker, Sir, gaming revenues now surpass those of the movie and music industries combined, demonstrating where Gen Z invests its time and attention.
- (6) Workplace expectations: As Gen Z enters the workforce, they value flexibility, work-life balance, inclusive leadership and technology-enabled environments. Digital tools and remote work solutions strongly influence their job expectations.
- (7) Impact of AI and automation: This generation is aware of AIs growing influence on employment. They are adaptive, tech-orientated and inclined to expose careers in emerging technology-driven industries.
- (8) Information consumption: Gen Z relies primarily on digital platforms, especially video content for news and current affairs. This shift affects how they engage with national and global issues.

Key challenges – Gen Z also faces significant challenges that the Government is actively addressing:

- (1) Mental health - there is a rising prevalence of anxiety, depression, and stress among young people. Unemployment and social media pressures exacerbate these issues.
- (2) Digital divide and online safety - despite being digital natives, many lack equal access to devices, internet connectivity, and digital literacy, especially in rural and maritime communities. Online risks include cyberbullying, scams and misinformation, and identity theft.
- (3) Education and skills gap - only 55 percent of students need upper-secondary education. School dropout rates, skills mismatches, and limited career guidance continue to hinder workforce readiness.
- (4) Social issues and violence - high rates of violence against children and women. Exposure to drugs and community-level crime directly influence the well-being of Gen Z.
- (5) Climate change - Fiji remains vulnerable to climate impacts. Cyclones, floods, sea-level rise, which disrupts schooling, healthcare, and economic stability for young people.
- (6) Workforce expectation and social skills - some employers observe gaps in face-to-face communication and professional etiquette, influenced by the digital upbringing of this generation.

Government mechanisms ensuring youth participation. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I reaffirm that the Government has established strong formal mechanisms to ensure meaningful consultation with young people, including Gen Z:

- (1) National Youth Council of Fiji, reactivated in 2023. This Council is the apex youth body, directly advising government. It represents the 15 to 35 age group, with about 60 percent being Gen Z. It provides structured submissions on national policies. It works

closely with the Ministry to ensure youth voices shape government programmes.

- (2) National Youth Governance Structure, bottom-up approach. This Government has revived Fiji's entire youth governance system. From youth clubs, we engage nationwide to strengthen grassroots youth participation. District and provincial youth councils now active again, enabling young people to participate in planning and consultation at all levels. Provincial youth forum and youth assembly, these feed into the National Youth Council, ensuring a clear, legitimate pathway from village youth clubs to national representation. This structure ensures every young person has a voice from village to parliament.
- (3) Youth Parliament, we acknowledge, Sir, your office in Parliament and staff for successfully hosting Youth Parliament. Young participants, many from Gen Z, debated national issues, presented policy recommendations and engaged directly with Members of Parliament. It remains a powerful platform for civic learning and national engagement.
- (4) Youth co-operatives, a major reform under this government is the introduction of youth cooperatives, supporting income generation, strengthening formal youth organisation, enhancing financial independence, enabling structured participation in national programmes. These cooperatives ensure youth are empowered not only socially and, but economically.
- (5) National Youth Festivals, these newly introduced festivals have become flagship programmes. They bring youths from all provinces together, revive dormant youth structures, provide leadership training, facilitate consultation on national policy, support the formation of youth co-operatives and consolidate youth feedback for government. The festivals play a central role in strengthening youth development system.
- (6) Regional leadership, a historic shift. During the Pacific Youth Minister's meeting hosted in Fiji, our nation championed a landmark change. Youth representatives were brought to the main table alongside Ministers. They co-chaired sessions, presented youth positions and influenced regional policy outcomes. This is now a regional benchmark for youth inclusion.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in conclusion, Fiji has a strong formal and inclusive system that ensures Gen Z is consulted meaningfully. This Government believes that young people must not only be informed but actively involved. They must be part of decision-making from the beginning as we affirmed at the Pacific Youth Minister's meeting - nothing about us without us.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, for the first six minutes I thought I had asked for the definition of "Gen Z" but in the last two minutes, the honourable Minister was on par to give us what national policies and legislative developments these Gen Zs were involved in. As the honourable Minister highlighted that the Gen Z population are moreso reliable on digital platforms, online, social media, et cetera, when is the Ministry of Youth and Sports going to implement online or digital platform for youth club registration?

HON. J. SAUKURU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, we will be taking that on board, as I mentioned. We are developing it into a system that can serve the Gen Z generation as we have mentioned, digital native of Fiji.

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

The Parliament adjourned at 4.22 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 4.49 p.m.

Addressing Cases of Child Sexual Abuse
(Question No. 366/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Women, Children and Social Protection update Parliament on what the Ministry is doing to address cases of sexual abuse of children?

HON. S. KIRAN.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank honourable Bia for raising this very important issue. Before I proceed with answering the question, I wish to acknowledge the work of the honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services and his Team, the HIV/AIDS Taskforce and all the frontline workers who are fighting the emerging crisis of HIV/AIDS, as we commemorate World AIDS day today.

Increasing cases of HIV transmission from mother to child is a grave concern and another form of violence we are witnessing against unborn children. We know we can eliminate mother to child transmission, a few countries have done it, and I hope with awareness, we can eliminate this in Fiji as well.

To answer the question, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the prevalence of sexual violence against children in Fiji is deeply alarming. The Fiji Police Force data on crime against children for the period 2020 to 2024 indicates a child sexual abuse remains the most pervasive and alarming crime against children in Fiji. A total of 4,159 child sexual offence cases were recorded between 2020 and 2024, making sexual offences the largest category of crimes against children. Unfortunately, most of these crimes are committed by trusted individuals within their home or community environment.

To draw attention to the issue, our Ministry convened a dialogue with all stakeholders. We are now embarking on the development of National Action Plan on Elimination of all Forms of Violence against Children. The National Plan will provide a coordinated roadmap to address gaps, improve service delivery and give priority to prevention, especially in schools, in homes, communities, and also on the online domain.

The National Coordinating Committee for Children (NCCC) was revived in February 2025 and will play a central role in shaping this work. The Ministry will work with a wide range of stakeholders including key Government Ministries, statutory bodies, law enforcement agencies, faith leaders, CSOs, community leaders, development partners and child focused organisations to ensure that the National Action Plan is comprehensive, culturally grounded and is multi-sectoral to ensure the elimination of violence against children. I would like to thank UNICEF for providing technical support to undertake this work.

The Ministry is currently undertaking significant child welfare reforms. The cornerstone of our service delivery is case management, with interventions tailored to the specific needs of each child victim. Following the establishment of the Department of Children in 2024, we have expanded our reach and scope in preparation for the operationalization of Child Care and Protection Act.

Senior Welfare Officer positions dedicated specifically to children have now been confirmed to oversee case management and service delivery through our field offices across Fiji. The recently endorsed National Child Safeguarding Policy further strengthens our ability to mainstream protection across different settings.

In addition, the Ministry continues to create awareness on child sexual violence in our communities. We also provide financial support to NGOs working with children, including victims of child sexual abuse. These organisations deliver specialized services such as care homes, counselling, family assessment and provide critical processes that address trauma and promote healing. I must thank all the Orphanages and care homes run by our faith organisations who look after children in State care.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, some of our workers are deeply impacted when they have to deal with multiple cases of child sexual abuse during the same week and need constant support in dealing with this trauma. We are closely working with UNICEF to provide support to caregivers, ensuring mechanisms are in place to maintain mental health and address burnout.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, when there is abuse, someone in the community is watching and knows about it. We urge the parents and guardians to listen and trust their children. Silence perpetuates continued harm, Sir, and this has long term effects on the victims. We continue to encourage community members to speak up and report cases through our toll-free line 1325. Partnerships and collaborations remain central to our work, and the Child Care and Protection Act now provides explicit provisions to promote prevention efforts within communities.

In recognition of the sexual violence in digital environment, we are working with the Online Safety Commission on community awareness. We also request them for removal of images when they are reported. We continue to engage Save the Children Fund to ensure that children themselves are heard and actively contribute to shaping safety measures from their perspective.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we remain steadfast in our commitment to strengthening child protection systems and broadening the range of services available. We know there is a lot of work ahead to end violence against our children, and we will continue to work collaboratively with communities, partners and stakeholders to create a safe environment where every child in Fiji is protected and empowered to thrive.

Written Questions

Funds Allocated for Termite Infestation (Question No. 333/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Agriculture and Waterways inform Parliament how much has been allocated to fight the termite infestation and how many households received the funds in each of the past three years?

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I request your approval if I can answer the supplementary question that was raised by the honourable Leader of Opposition in the morning regarding seawalls for the three villages in Tailevu.

MR. SPEAKER.- Are you providing a written answer later, honourable Minister?

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA.- It is an Oral Question and I have the answer to that supplementary question.

¹However, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to table my written answer for the written question.

MR. SPEAKER.- Thank you.

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, can I reply to the Oral Question that was asked by the honourable Leader of Opposition for the benefit of the viewers?

MR. SPEAKER.- Yes, I will allow you to and, please, proceed.

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA.- I wish to place on record that the request for seawalls at Qelekuro, Nananu and Nalato are also included in the Master List for the seawall.

Chiefly Positions/Titles Yet to be Registered
(Question No. 334/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for iTaukei Affairs and Culture, Heritage and Arts inform Parliament on the number of chiefly positions/titles that are still yet to be registered in each Province in Fiji?

² HON. I. VASU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, pursuant to Standing Orders, I now submit the written response.

Statistics on Sugar Production
(Question No. 302/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Multi-Ethnic Affairs and Sugar Industry update Parliament with respect to the following –

- (a) sugar production for the last five years per tonne;
- (b) export price per tonne for the last five years; and
- (c) amount topped up by Government to meet the payment to farmers per tonne for the last five years?

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, with the four Oral Questions that I answered today, ³and one Written Question, I think I am getting very tired, so I am handing over my report now.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, please, take note that we have four Bills to deal with today. The first and second Bills will be for third reading and the third and fourth Bills will be moved under Standing Order 51.

¹ Editor's Note: Reply to Written Question No. 333/2025 tabled by the honourable Minister for Agriculture and Waterways, under Standing Order 45(3), is appended as Annexure I.

² Reply to Written Question No. 334/2025 tabled by the honourable Minister for iTaukei Affairs and Culture, Heritage and Arts, under Standing Order 45(3), is appended as Annexure II.

³ Reply to Written Question No. 302/2025 tabled by the honourable Minister for Multi-Ethnic Affairs and Sugar Industry, under Standing Order 45(3), is appended as Annexure III.

We will now proceed to the first Bill. I remind honourable Members that pursuant to the resolution of Parliament on Wednesday, 26th of November, 2025, the debate on the Bill will be limited to one hour.

ENVIRONMENT MANAGEMENT (AMENDMENT) BILL 2025

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, pursuant to the resolution of Parliament on Wednesday, 26th November, 2025, I move:

That the Environment Management (Amendment) Bill 2025 (Bill No. 39/2025), be debated, voted upon and be passed.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I beg to second the motion.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, as alluded to on Wednesday last week when I moved the Bill under Standing Orders 51, that the current Environment Management Act is 20 years old and was done during the time when we do not have the current issues that we face now in terms of environment. We need to update the Bill so that we can address the gaps that are in the current legislation. That is why it was moved under Standing Order 51.

Let me go straight into the salient features or the substance of the Bill. In Clause 2 on the definition of the “approving authority” and the “improvement notice”, “expense activity” and “undertaking to cover” an activity that alters land or changes land use amended the proposal to refer to the department. Mr. Speaker, Sir, this Clause modernises the backbone of the Act, it removes the definition of “approving authorities” and replaces it with “licensing authority”. By doing this, we clearly recognise that any Ministry or statutory body that issues a licence or development consent becomes a licensing authority bound by the EIA process.

Further, it expands the development activity or the undertaking and facility so that the proponents that carry out subdivisions, coastal reclamations, quarries and gravel extraction activities can no longer argue that they fall outside the EMA. We also introduced the term “development site”, so that even illegal sand mining areas, unauthorised reclamation, mangrove clearing sites are covered by the Act irrespective of whether an approval was given or not. The revisions also provide for official identification cards and makes it an offence to forge or misuse them, so communities or businesses can trust that only genuine environment officers exercise powers under the law.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, by deleting the improvement notice concept, we cleaned out tools that no longer fit the modern enforcement model. These amendments close real loopholes where ministries and developers hide behind the technical definition and centralises accountability to the department.

From Clause 7(7) to Clause 7(3) and (4), Mr. Speaker, Sir, the adjustment simply brings the council into line with the way Government is now structured and how it operates in practice. It ensures that the correct office holders, such as the CEO of iTaukei Trust Board, are explicitly mandated to sit on the council and it sets a realistic minimum meeting requirement of, at least, once a year while still allowing the council to meet more frequently whenever required. In reality, much of the heavy environment work is now driven through Cabinet decisions and specialised taskforce.

Another clause that this amendment proposes is Clause 14(6), Mr. Speaker, Sir. This Clause turns a strategic planning requirement into an ongoing obligation. It directs the department not only prepare, but also to implement and monitor an integrated waste and pollution control strategy, which is critical, given the challenges such as illegal dumping, market waste, broken drains and incidents

like the Marine Drive paint spill last week in Lautoka, or the Sabeto River chemical waste discharge that happened a few months ago. It links waste and pollution control to public health.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, these changes are necessary for the Ministry to move away from the *ad hoc* responses to a living integrated waste and pollution strategy that can tackle both everyday litter and serious industrial pollution.

In Clause 15(2)(7), Mr. Speaker, Sir, this Clause recognises that environment management is a shared responsibility across government. It gives clear, concrete duties to Environmental Units in key sectors such as lands, infrastructure, agriculture and ports, requiring them to pre-screen projects, support compliance with environmental conditions, keep data, and act as focal points for incidents. No Ministry can simply say that that is the work of the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change's problem while moving ahead with roads, jetties and other infrastructure.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Environmental Units will be critical to our coordination efforts. The Ministry deals with a range of sensitive development projects, and these units will aid in ensuring that environmental issues are addressed early in the project.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Clause 20 - inspection powers. This Clause equips inspectors to deal with the surge of issues that we face today in relation to unauthorised development and illegal activities. It empowers inspectors to enter unauthorised development sites or facilities without valid waste permit. It also allows inspectors to stop truck, vessels and aircraft suspected of transporting or discharging waste. It removes an outdated blanket exclusion of residential premises that used to be a shield for large-scale activities happening in these premises.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we just had a case a few months ago where a vessel that carried 800 litres of oil had sunk, and did not have a valid waste permit. When inspectors went to the facility to issue a non-compliance notice, they were not permitted. Another case where a residential house had harmful chemicals and gases stored without permit, my officers had to go in to confiscate these items at midnight. Recorded notices will still be issued for seized items, but the bottom line is that our inspectors need to act immediately, based on risk, rather than arguing over technicalities about the status of the site.

The Act also provides an appeal mechanism, that is in Clause 33, where an appeal can be lodged to the Permanent Secretary, and if the proponent is not satisfied, it can appeal to the Environment Tribunal within 21 days. These are a few clauses or salient features of the Bill that is proposed by the Bill, and I urge the Opposition to support this, because it will take care of the current issues that we face in terms of litter, waste discharge, and also the EIA processes, which I already talked about. That will streamline the process and also proper monitoring and give teeth to the inspectors and officers at the Ministry, plus other relevant authorities, to enforce the Act.

MR. SPEAKER.- Before I open the floor to honourable Members, was there a minor amendment, which I had suggested that you introduce with the Bill, Minister? Am I reading it correctly?

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Yes, Sir, I apologise for missing that. There is another amendment in 24 and Clause 43, which is a new amendment to the Bill.

MR. SPEAKER.- It is a new amendment, but it is relatively minor. That is why I wanted to make it clear to the honourable Members.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- It is minor, Sir.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate on the motion. I have a list of speakers with me. As we had agreed, the arguments are contained in one hour capsule, which means that all the speakers including the mover of the motion will be inside that one hour capsule. So, you have five minutes each to the interveners.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to contribute to the debate on the Environmental Management (Amendment) Act 2025. We all are in agreement because as I have said the other day, we believe that we have to move with the time. We have gone through the Bill. We have seen that this Bill will strengthen the laws. Having said that, there are some areas of concern that we wish to raise, and I hope the honourable Minister responsible, in his Right of Reply, will respond to some of the concerns that we have.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Clause 16 - Competition of the Environmental Management Committee. The current Act, as well as the proposed amendment, lack details regarding the competition of the Environmental Management Committee. In particular, it does not specify how many members will be appointed to the committee or the process of the appointment. In addition, it should be clarified whether the committee is intended to be a one-time assembly for each referral or if it is going to be a standing committee.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Clause 20 - Powers to enter and inspect. The amendment expands the powers of inspection to include residential properties. This was not in the previous law, but as the honourable Minister has stated, they have come across cases and that is why they have included that. So, we do not have any issues with that.

Inspection of the automobile and vehicles - the role of Land Transport Authority in inspecting automobiles and vehicles within the Environmental Management framework needs to be clearly defined. It is essential to outline the scope of LTA's involvement, including how this inspection will contribute to environmental compliance and the measures in place to ensure that they align with LTA rules.

Clause 43 - Approvals or Licences without EIA Report or EMP Reports. The proposed addition of new subclause (1) and (2) states that approvals of licences granted without an Environmental Impact Assessment Report, or an Environmental Management Plan Report will be null and void. We want to say here, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is to ensure the compliance and prevent unnecessary difficulties for developers.

It is crucial that licensing authorities implement comprehensive checklist, and this must be at the initial stage for the authorities not to accept any application when all boxes are not ticked. So, there is no runaround. I mean, there is no point going to Level 10 and then say, "Alright, you have missed point three and the whole exercise is null and void." I hope the honourable Minister, in his Right of Reply will respond to that as well.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the breakdown of offence and penalties. The proposed Bill outlines a breakdown of offences and penalties but many of the fines are in relation to the level of the offences. Currently, there is a framework that allows for a maximum one-time fine, with discretion granted to the courts to assess – it is \$750,000 in the existing one but now there is a breakdown of \$250,000 in the new one. If that can be looked into, as well.

The last one, Mr. Speaker, Sir, since time is running out, with the appeal, here it says that if an applicant is not happy, they can appeal to the Permanent Secretary, but then again, there is a tribunal. The Permanent Secretary is part of the team. We are saying that there may be a conflict. We are saying that if that appeal can be done directly to the tribunal rather than to the Permanent

Secretary. Those are few concerns that we have, and I hope the honourable Minister in his right of reply will respond to that.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, thank you for the opportunity to speak very briefly on the Environment Management (Amendment) Bill 2025.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, a few days ago, I did talk about the Town Planning (Amendment) Bill. Essentially, the amendments today follow in train with the amendments that were adopted in last week's sitting. Perhaps, for the context of everyone here and also for those listening in, explain what essentially is happening with these amendments?

There are some additional amendments that, hopefully, will come through towards the end of the week and, essentially, this is perhaps the first major step that the country has taken in quite a number of years to really begin the process of making Ease of Doing Business easier and starting to digitise the national systems of Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have in the past done sporadic automation. This side of the House has a national digital strategy, which together with these reforms that were initiated by the previous government will form the basis of changes in the years to come. The amendments are to facilitate what is planned to be achieved with the new digital platform. It is called the Building Permits Approval Subsystem (BPAS).

As we all know, technology can never compensate for legislation. Rather, legislation needs to facilitate technology. In this case, the amendments before us allow for the exciting times ahead in terms of automation of our business processes.

The other important point to make is that the BPAS system, as I mentioned earlier, will allow for greater convenience to the public, prior to this endeavour, when you go and make applications, you have to fill form after form in every single Ministry. The backbone of the system is called FILPAS, it is an integrated approval system that allows all ministries to access the same information and share the same information across the ministries. For example, Mr. Speaker, Sir, in this instance, once a builder fills his details once, he no longer has to do that for any other forms that he fills in the system; the information populates itself.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, very quickly given the time, this reform is actually going to do wonders for the country, and certainly it allows for better management of the environment. We have used this opportunity to create some sort of predictable time frames, Mr. Speaker, Sir, in terms of approvals and of course, what this will mean long term, that the experience that our people get when they deal with the Government services will be certainly best practice, not only in Fiji, but certainly across the region and around the world.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I do support the amendments before the House and look forward to the continuation of the digital transformation journey of this country, to ensure that we deliver effective and efficient services to the people of Fiji.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank you for the opportunity given to me to address this august House regarding the Environment Management (Amendment) Bill 2025. The Minister of Environment has eloquently presented the case for an urgent amendment of the Environment Management Act 2005, which has served Fiji for over two decades.

We acknowledge the severe pressure on our nation currently faces rapid development, expanding urban growth, climate impacts, complex waste streams and increasing

illegal activities. The recognition that the current legislation is no longer fit for purpose and lacks the adequate tool to deal with illegal development and environmental emergencies, is a point the Opposition wholeheartedly agrees with.

The Minister mentioned that this reform is intended to bring about the long-debated balance between development and conservation. This is a core principle that must guide our debate, and it is here that the Opposition has both - condemnation and caution. We support the intention to create a comprehensive, modern and accountable framework that addresses the red tape, slow approval process and legal ambiguities that have plagued investors and the environment for years.

The move to align this Bill with the Building Permit Approval Subsystem and the digital transformation across Government is forward-thinking and essential for modern governance. The mandatory legal timeliness for environmental approval are without doubt transformative. Reducing the timeframe for screening decisions from 10 to 7 working days, for the term of reference from 21 to 15 working days and for the management plan discussion from 30 to 20 working days is a necessary measure to support the essential ease of doing business agenda.

The question the Opposition has is: how will the Government ensure that this increased efficiency will benefit investors does not come at the expense of thorough environmental impact assessment and meaningful community consultation? The centralisation of decision-making under the development of environmental is logical, creating one process, one standard and one accountable decision maker will undoubtedly strengthen the consistency and efficiency.

Nevertheless, the Opposition urges the honourable Minister, to outline the plan for capacity building within the Department of Environment. Shorter timelines will only lead to better service if the Department has the skilled manpower and resources to process this application within the required due diligence. Simply shortening the deadlines without addressing the resource constraint could lead to rubber stamping, which would defeat the entire purpose of environmental protection.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to ensure that this Bill truly assists all Fijians and improves service delivery, the Opposition proposes a few areas for the Government's consideration.

- The formalisation of the management plan system introduces the use of accredited consultants for lower risk activities. While this ensures professionalism, the Government must commit to a policy that actively prioritises and develops local Fijian environmental consultants. We must use this reform to build local capacity, providing training and accreditation pathways so that the economic benefit of the new system remains within Fiji rather than exclusively relying on expensive international expertise.
- Digital access and transparency — the Bill supports digital transformation. This is a golden opportunity to make environmental governance truly accessible to every Fijian. The new centralised process should not only be digital for the benefit of the bureaucrats but should also incorporate a full public-facing online portal. This portal should allow citizens to track the real-time status of any EIA or management plan application in their community.
- Easy public access to non-confidential documents associated with development - a simplified digital mechanism for citizens to submit consent or non-compliance report directly, which should then be back-tracked by the reporting citizen. This level of transparency will dramatically improve public trust and serve as an invaluable real-time audit on the Department's performance, ensuring the new timeliness is met with integrity.

- Proactive enforcement and community empowerment - we commend the introduction of strong enforcement powers including immediate prohibition notice, powers to inspect unapproved sites and significantly higher penalties for illegal development. This is a crucial response to the continuation of illegal development, pollution breaches and compliance loopholes. However, the best tool against the environmental crime is the community itself. The Government must commit to public awareness campaigns, advocating the public on the new higher penalties and the immediate prohibition powers to serve as a stronger deterrent. We shall do a protection mechanism establishing a formal, legally protected process where citizens can report illegal activities without fear of retaliation, ensuring their complaints are acted upon swiftly by the empowered officer.
- Waste management focus - the strengthening of waste management by allowing fixed penalty notices and prosecution is directly aimed at facilitating operating without a valid permit. The Opposition insists that the Government ensures that the revenue generated from these penalties are directly reinvested into local community-level recycling and waste minimisation programme. This makes the enforcement system cyclical and directly beneficial to the communities most impacted by the complex waste stream.

This raises serious concern. When will the Sigatoka Rubbish Dump be moved as it sits on a heritage site? The Opposition recognises the current law is outdated, and the absence of a clear mechanism compromises public interest and environmental protection. The honourable Minister is correct – immediate action is in the national interest.

We support the spirit of the Bill to move towards a responsive, development-ready and future-focused environmental framework. Our support, however, is conditional on the Government's commitment to implementing the new framework with transparency, adequately resourcing, and a genuine focus on empowering all Fijian stakeholders, not just streamlining the process for the corporate investors.

I must raise the concern which I have been raising all this while, EFL installing 13 diesel generators, which has a huge impact on our environment, and the Ministry remains silent. This Bill must not simply reduce red tape, but waive a stronger, more protective green tape around our precious natural resources for generations to come. I support the Bill.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, there are five important points that I want to make as part of the amendment. Before that, if you look at our National Development Plan, it is crafted in a way where the environment is not seen as a sector. It is a cross-cutting pillar across our development agenda.

The first improvement this amendment makes is that it improves institutional clarity and accountability. It doused with the outdated administrative provisions, it was ambiguous for the business community, for developers, that has been removed as a result of this amendment.

The second point that I want to make is that it provides a very clear legal framework for developments and waste pressures. It recognises the changing landscape, changing trends in urbanisation, pollution, wastewater management, et cetera. All these new developments provide new challenges and, therefore, a clearer legal framework for developments and waste pressures. Waste management is very important.

The third point, as the honourable Kamikamica said earlier, it modernises and digitises environmental approvals. EIAs are very, very important, but what it needs is efficiency, timely approval so that developers do not face delays. I think the linking of the approval systems with the

building permit approval system is a very, very important innovation. I think the business community, the investors, would be very happy to see that.

The fourth point is the stronger enforcement powers and ability to act quickly. So under the old law, and we used to hear this from the investors, Mr. Speaker, Sir, regulatory officers reportedly lacked sufficient authority and could not respond promptly. Apart from not dealing with environmental exigencies of waste, et cetera, there was delay caused for the investors and the developers. This amendment provides stronger enforcement powers and ability to act quickly. I think it is a very, very important amendment supporting that.

The fifth point, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is that it balances development with conservation and national priorities. The amendment provides a modern, accountable framework aligned with contemporary environmental governance, national development priorities, et cetera. As I have said, the 2005 Act was increasingly outdated. It was designed in a different context, in a different era, when the environmental pressures were different. I listened very carefully to the contributions from honourable Bala and honourable Maharaj.

I think if the amendments are implemented with efficiency, clarity, appropriate personnel, appropriate skills, then some of those concerns can be taken care of very, very easily because what it does, apart from the issues of fines and the committees, the concerns that most investors and most developers have at the moment, I think the Ministry of Environment, with the new Permanent Secretary and the work that they have done, they have cleared all the backlog. There is quite a pleasing environment or feeling amongst the investor community, the business community, and this amendment, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is going to add further efficiency, further clarity and further accountability. That is why I think this is a very, very timely amendment, and I urge all Members to support this Bill.

HON. V. LAL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to contribute to the debate on Bill No. 39/2025. Often, it is the duty of the Opposition to oppose. However, it is also our duty to recognise when a step is being taken in the right direction. Today, regarding the modernisation of our environment laws, this is one of those days. I want to focus my contribution on a systemic issue that has plagued environmental governance globally, the issue of pay for play. I have always found it strange that it is standard practice that an applicant for a development project appoints and pays the company doing their EIA. It is the classic case of he who pays the piper calls the tune.

This structure has inherently left room for corruption. I am happy to see that clause 17 and clause 30 of this Bill finally address this. By giving the Director the power to appoint an independent reviewer, we are breaking the direct link between a developer's money and a favourable report. If a developer submits a floppy report, the Ministry can now order a second opinion, and the developer cannot choose who writes it.

Furthermore, Clause 24 is a game-changer. It states that any licence issued by any authority without an approved EIA is automatically void. This is the nuclear option against corruption we have been waiting for. It tells developers, "You cannot bribe your way past the process anymore." However, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I must sound a note of caution. While we support these strict measures, we must look at the impact on our own people.

Clause 18 introduces mandatory environmental cash bonds. While this is excellent for holding foreign mining giants accountable, we must ask, can our local SMEs afford this? We must ensure that the high cost of these bonds and mandatory accredited consultants do not accidentally shut out local landowners from developing their own land. We do not want to trade corruption for elitism.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have concerns about clause 21. Why are appeals for management plans directed to the Permanent Secretary and not the independent tribunal? This creates a situation where the Ministry is effectively marking its own homework. True justice requires an independent avenue for appeal for all decisions, not just the big ones.

Finally, regarding Clause 12, this Bill gives inspectors the power to enter premises without a warrant if they suspect risk, and it removes the exemption of residential homes. We want enforcement, but we must be careful not to trample on the constitutional privacy rights of our citizens in our zeal to protect the environment.

This Bill is not perfect. The 21-day appeal window is tight for community groups, and the Director's powers are vast. But it finally puts teeth into a system that has been toothless for too long. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, Sir, with the hope that the Ministry implements this with fairness to our local SMEs and respect for privacy, we on this side of the House support this Bill.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank those who have contributed to the debate and supported the Bill, especially honourable Bala, honourable Maharaj and honourable Lal. Honourable Bala was just telling me, in his term as Minister of Environment, he wanted to amend the Bill too. However, it has come at the right time; the opportunity was not given then by the former Attorney- General at that time.

(Laughter)

Mr. Speaker, Sir, just to respond to a few of his questions, the membership of an Environment Management Committee will be an *ad hoc* one and will also be guided by the guidelines after these amendments come through when we have the regulations. The developers, too, will have a voice in the composition. For the appeals, the answer is that some of the things will go to the Permanent Secretary, while others go to the Tribunal. The Permanent Secretary goes out, conducts his inspections. These are the two tiers that will be there: those cases that will go to the PS and those cases that will go to the Tribunal. Given the costly exercise, that is why we had put in a first tier to go to the PS rather than going into the Tribunal, because it might take time, and given that these appeals need to be fast-tracked.

On the fines, we need deterrents, that is why it has been increased, so that people and developers are more respectful of the law. On the fine that was raised by the honourable Bala on the \$250,000, is referring as subject to court proceedings, and they will be decided by the court. That is the fine that is referred to.

In terms of the issue that was raised by the honourable Virendra Lal, in the inspection into a residence, that is included in the Bill. Let me assure the honourable Member that we will not infringe in their human and constitutional rights. This is just to clamp down on illegal activities, sometimes the residents are used as a shield to conduct these activities. So, those are the few things that I would like to raise.

The others that was raised by honourable Maharaj on fossil fuel - that is currently under the Climate Change Act 2021. We have just passed our National Determined Contribution (NDC3) at COP, and the statement I delivered the other day in answering a question -we are transitioning into that by 2035.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, thank you once again to the team at the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change, plus the stakeholders who had participated in the making of the Bill. I thank you for the effort and the work that has been carried out, so that this particular Bill can come into

Parliament. I also would like to thank the Office of the Solicitor-General and the drafters, who have been working very hard in putting together this Bill and the format it has finally come into the House.

MR. SPEAKER.- Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

[A Bill for an Act to amend the Environment Management (Amendment) Bill 2005 enacted by the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji (Act No. of 2025)]

FORESTRY BILL 2025

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, pursuant to the resolution of Parliament on Friday, 7th November, 2025, I move that:

The Forestry Bill 2025 be debated, voted upon and be passed.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I beg to support the motion.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, please, be reminded that the debate on this Bill is limited to one hour. Your speaking time allocations will be displayed on the wall.

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Prime Minister, honourable Ministers and Assistant Ministers, the honourable Leader of the Opposition, honourable Members of Parliament, ladies and gentlemen; I rise this afternoon to respectfully seek the support of Members for the passage of the Forestry Bill 2025, a landmark piece of legislation that represents nearly a decade of rigorous policy reform, public consultations, technical reviews and Government commitment to modernising Fiji's forestry sector.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the foundations of our current Forest Act were laid on 20th May 1992, when the Act first came into force with a primary focus on forests and forest produce. While the Act served Fiji well during its time, the decades that followed saw major developments in forest conservation, sustainable forest management, climate policy frameworks and international obligations. Unfortunately, the Act did not adequately reflect these evolving priorities making a comprehensive review both timely and necessary.

The first major review commenced in 2007, eventually leading to the formulation and tabling of the Forestry Bill 2016. During its Second Reading, the Bill was referred to the Standing Committee on Natural Resources under Standing Order 85(4), however, the Bill lapsed in 2018 when Parliament was prorogued and was not brought back for debate. The reform process was revitalised in 2020, when the Ministry engaged the Pacific Community to assist with the technical review of the Act. The analysis focused on the provisions of the 2016 Bill, excluding carbon related elements, and provided valuable guidance for the next stage of the review.

In 2021, Fiji enacted the Climate Change Act 2021, establishing a comprehensive national framework for climate governance and introducing robust systems for measuring, reporting and verifying greenhouse gas emissions. Although Part 10 of the Act is yet to come into force, its provisions made it necessary to revisit the forestry legislation and ensure alignment with Fiji's broader climate commitments.

In that same year, the Ministry also engaged the Polynesian Group, supported by the Global Green Growth Institute (GGGI), to examine carbon market provisions and to further refine the draft law. Their work strengthened integration between forestry, climate policy and emerging carbon market mechanisms. These earlier efforts paved the way for the extensive work undertaken from 2022 to 2025, during which the Ministry conducted nationwide consultations, technical workshops, legal vetting, drafting sessions and interactive policy enhancement.

During this phase, development partners - the Asian Development Bank played a critical role. They engaged their forestry legal experts who work directly with the Ministry to refine and finalise the draft provisions, ensuring the Bill reflects international best practices, strong legal coherence and a modern regulatory framework suitable for Fiji's current and future needs. Their contribution has been instrumental in producing the high-quality draft that is before us today.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, what we now present to this august House is the culmination of 33 years of policy evolution, nine years of review, and five years of intensive consultation, and drafting a Bill that integrates science, climate policy, cross-sector coordination, sustainable land use principles, and a Bill that respects the rights of the indigenous people, and local communities across Fiji.

The Forestry Act 1992, though appropriate for its time, is no longer capable of supporting today's economic, environmental and social realities. If we continue to rely on this outdated law, we risk undermining sector growth, investment confidence, climate resilience and sustainability of our natural resources.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, allow me to summarise the major reforms introduced in the Forestry Bill 2025. The Bill introduces modern institutions that did not exist under the current law, and this includes the Forestry Advisory Council. This serves as a formal platform for consultation with landowners, industry, conservation groups and communities and ensure participatory and transparent decision making.

The Forestry Tribunal is an independent appeals and dispute resolution mechanism that provides timely, expert based decisions on technical and regulatory matters, and reduces delays and inconsistencies that affect investments and operations. These institutions address long standing governance deficiencies and increased accountability.

There is the modernised licensing, compliance, and enforcement provisions that streamlines permit and license applications, introduces clear compliance responsibilities, strengthens penalties for illegal harvesting, enhances monitoring and enforcement powers, and ensures consistency across native forests, plantations, and mahogany operations. This will provide certainty for operators and encourage responsible harvesting and protect landowner interests.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the integration of climate change, biodiversity and sustainable forest management which, for the first time, will explicitly mandate sustainable forest management practices, require the protection of biodiversity in all forestry operations, modernise codes of forest practices, introduce resilience measured aligned with international commitments, and support carbon market opportunities, including REDD+ participation. These provisions:

- ensure that forest management aligns with the Paris Agreement and our National Climate Strategies;
- improve landowner engagement, benefits and safeguards, which strengthens the role of landowners in decision-making;
- ensure communities are consulted in planning and harvesting;

- improve benefit sharing transparency; and
- enhances protection of customary rights and traditional forest users.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this reflects the Government's commitment to empowering landowners and ensuring equitable participation in forest-based development.

Under updated administrative, regulatory and operational procedures, it:

- includes modernising definitions that reflects the current practices;
- clarifies roles of the Ministry, operators, contractors and relevant agencies;
- introduces clear processes for reforestation, rehabilitation, forest fire management; and
- resolves longstanding ambiguities in the 1992 Act.

These changes are essential for operational clarity and investment security.

The Forest Bill 2025 is a legislative update that captures the comprehensive transformation of how Fiji manages, protects and benefits from its forests. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I respectfully request the support of this august House for the passage of the Forestry Bill 2025 in the interest of our forests, our environment, our people and its future generations. I thank you for your indulgence.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate on the motion. I have a list of speakers with me.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank the honorable Minister for her commentary on the development of the Bill, and as she has pointed out, it has been something that has been brewing over time, and you can see that it is apparent in the way that the Bill is written. It is one of the Bills that has come back to Parliament with very little red ink, which shows the amount of preparation that went into it, and I congratulate those that have been responsible for this.

As the honourable Minister has pointed out, just a number of things I would like to highlight, I will try not to comment on the issues that the honourable Minister has commented on, but I appreciate the fact that it is a more holistic approach to forestry. Rather than seeing it as forestry and trees is something that is only useful for business, to see the overall holistic importance of forests - the conservation, the importance that it has for all the ecosystems, and the things that work together. So, it is not just about extraction of timber.

The other thing that I have liked about this particular Bill, probably it was right, it came at this particular point in time, because it is coming at a time when it harmonises with other legislations that have come into being. As the honourable Minister has pointed out, climate change itself is the biggest thing that affects life on this planet and affects us in particular, and small island developing states. The Bill coming out now, allows it to work in harmony when they are developing the Bill, it harmonises with that, and as the honourable Minister has pointed out, fixes a lot of the problems that they have had in the past about managing forests, licencing, harvesting, all the problems. Some of the ways of addressing those problems have been built into this particular Bill, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

I also like the fact, that looking at the way in which the Bill tries to ensure compliance, it has a range of steps that it goes through, rather than immediately going to using a big stick. It talks about improvement notices, the issuance of fixed penalty notices, and then other heavier penalties to try to change behaviour, because as we know, we make a living, we make GDP out of forests, but at the end of the day, the more important value is a value that it has for life itself.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, one of the particular points I like also about the Bill, is the fact that in sections 4, 5, and 6 - it lays out something very clearly that was not in the previous Bill. It lays out a set of objectives, about what we are trying to achieve in this Bill, and over on that, it lays a set of principles. So, if the objectives are not clear, what are the principles that you apply if there is some debate on what a particular clause means, and those principles would be foundational guidelines of how you would look at implementing the Bill. Also, it very clearly spells out the obligations that any person has, that is all of us. Obligations also for the department itself, and the obligations for the parties that are involved in timber, wood, or non-timber products. So, it sets that out very clearly, in the way that it goes about it, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

As I have spoken about the governance, the definition, the specification of governance, the role of the conservator, the department, the establishment of an advisory council that gives a forum for stakeholders to be actively engaged in the work that is being done by the Ministry. There are too many times that we come across Ministries where stakeholders feel left out, whereas in this, there is an opportunity for them to actively participate, and they also establish their own organisations. There is also the tribunal, as the honourable Minister has highlighted.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, one of the things that also spells out is the importance of getting forest finance. I was a member of a committee that was looking at the forestry at one time. The staff who came said, one of the most important things is managing, or looking after the forest itself, and it was very difficult for them to get finance to help them do that. I am seeing the various mechanisms here, getting forest finance, Public Private Partnerships, payments for ecosystem services, carbon and biodiversity credits. I am hopeful that the Ministry will be able to use this guideline to get the financing that it needs. A lot of these things, over time, will require a lot of heavy investment in money, and maybe forestry might not be an area that people would be wanting to spend a lot of money in.

The Bill talks about the importance of managing our water catchment areas. There is a big surge now from agriculture cutting into the forests and the trees. We, as a nation, have to remember that if we cut down the trees, we become deserts. We have the danger of desertification and water drying up, so, I am glad that all of these concerns are being addressed in the Bill. With that, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I fully support the passage of this Bill in this august House.

HON. S.R. DITOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Prime Minister, honourable Cabinet Ministers and Assistant Ministers, the honourable Leader of the Opposition and honourable Members of Parliament. I rise to speak in support of the Bill that is before us in two capacities. Firstly, as the Minister for Maritime Development and Disaster Management. Secondly, as a son of Tailevu North, where some of Fiji's finest mahogany and native forests stand upon the land of my own people.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, while the Bill sits primarily within the mandate of the Ministry of Forestry, it has deep and direct relevance to the work of the Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management. Forestry is not an abstract policy sector. It is directly tied to livelihoods, water security, soil stability, disaster risk, and the dignity and wellbeing of our *vanua*. When forests are cut carelessly, my Ministry is on the front line responding to the consequences, such as floods, landslides, washed out crossings, damaged farms and displaced families - the way we manage forests determines the safety and resilience of communities downstream.

The current Forest Act 1992 belongs to a different era. It is built around extraction, not sustainability. It does not reflect ecosystem-based management, it does not align strongly with the Climate Change Act 2021 or the Environment Management Act 2005, and it does not reflect our modern understanding of watershed protection, disaster risk reduction or rural livelihoods.

This Bill modernises this framework. It provides a legal foundation to implement the Fiji Forest Policy 2007, our National Development Plan 2025-2029, and Vision 2050. From a rural and maritime perspective, the objective speaks directly to our realities in terms of sustainable and planned forest management, conservation of native forest ecosystems, equitable benefit sharing with landowners, integrated, transparent, and efficient forest governance, climate mitigation, resilience, and watershed protection, promoting a high value sustainable forest-based bi-economy. These are not abstract ambitions, they are the foundation of rural prosperity, community resilience, and long-term national wellbeing.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Bill also strengthens our Ministry's Integrated Rural Development Framework (IRDF) review philosophy of change, which highlights the need for coordinated planning across sectors, community-centred development, data-driven decision-making, integrated watershed land use, and resilience planning. So, this Bill is expected to operationalise these principles. It requires forest classification, inventories, watershed level protection, and coordinated interagency planning, all of which address longstanding gaps identified in our own IRDF review.

The Bill also aligns with our co-creation approach for the new National Rural Development Policy that we are developing. It is being built through co-creation where communities, landowners, provinces, civil society, industry, and Government jointly design practical solutions. This Bill reflects the same ethos. It is built on inclusive participation, customary recognition, local engagement and shared decision making.

The Bill contains 12 parts, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will not go through them in detail, but I just wish to draw attention to several important improvements. First one is stronger governance and planning, which provides clear functions for the conservator and Department of Forestry. We all know what forests we have, what conditions they are, and how they contribute to flood control, water supply, and ecosystem health in doing this. With smarter licensing and enforcement, various stakeholders raise real concerns about licensing delays and compliance burdens, so the Bill responds through this in clear predictable licensing pathways and long-term licences for serious operators.

Linking harvesting to replanting, one of the clear messages from the submission was concerned about declining forest cover and inadequate planting. The intention is simple - if you cut trees, you must also be part of planting trees. This is aligned with Fiji's 30 Million Trees Programme, and ensures that all operators, not just the large players, contribute to forest recovery.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, and customary practices, through collecting firewood for ceremonies, accessing building materials for cultural obligations remains untouched. This is crucial for rural communities who depend on forest materials for daily life and traditional functions. Forests are our first line of defence against disasters. Every protected hectare upstream reduces erosion, sedimentation, flash flooding, the cost of disaster response, and the Bill's provision on watershed protection, forest fires and pests, and appointment of fire rangers directly support my Ministry's work in disaster risk reduction and community resilience. I support the Bill, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I can only be brief because I think what needed to be said has already been said. But right at the outset, let me say that this side of the House is in complete support of this particular Bill before us. I think the honourable Minister has actually spelled it out quite clearly with respect to what is in it, and why it was needed. But it is actually something that was begun a long time ago, and I think it has been a long time coming. I think some people need to be acknowledged with respect to this.

We had the opportunity to be accompanied in our travels around the country on the consultation exercise for this Bill by a gentleman, who is a staff at the Ministry, by the name of Viliame Rokovu. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I must take my hat off to him and commend the kind of work that he has done. He has a wealth of knowledge, and he had an answer to every question that was asked by us and also by the general public. I think he has worked very hard together with his team and the Minister, and they must be commended in terms of the kind of work that has gone on with respect to this Bill.

Just to let everyone know, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that the questions did not come thick and fast because I think the consultation exercise had taken place through the Ministry, and this is across the board in terms of the landowners, in terms of the foresters, in terms of the companies that are involved in it - everyone was accounted for with respect to this particular Bill coming to the floor.

Now, what it has done, it has actually been pointed out by honourable Usamate and the honourable Minister - both Ministers actually, and I think one of the most important things that we must remember, it embraces the sustainable management of our forests, and the utilisation of those particular resources whilst we ensure that we take care of the consultation exercise.

We have commitments, we also have opportunities that arise out of this Bill, and one of the things that is really important, is carbon trading. More and more people are actually looking at carbon trading and it caters for everything. This particular Bill allows you to carbon trade, and also sustainably do some harvesting if necessary, and it is really important that we actually remember that. It has taken care of all the indigenous interests that are required and anyone and everyone involved in this particular area is taken care of. There are issues that also needed to be dealt with, with respect to the people who would be basically taking care of any instances that arose that would become unlawful.

There are opportunities being risen; the fines have actually gone up. I think the only complaint that came out, in Nadi, Mr. Speaker, Sir, with respect to the areas that were being harvested, they were taking too long to get the EIA done and the monies that were being paid were quite substantial to forest the area. I think it was important they actually told us that, but it was also taken care of by Mr. Rokovu, who explained to them how it could be done quicker. I think, there is a process in there now that makes it a lot easier to get done because it is a bit of a long-winded process. It is an expensive exercise, but all of those little things have been taken care of in this Bill before the House.

The other thing, Sir, there is an endorsement on it of the Forest Management policies and certifications for appointment of a Committee by the conservator to review a list of forest species under the Endangered and Protected Species Act. That is an important area.

From a climate change perspective, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it does not just say that you can go and harvest this area. It also talks about replanting. It also talks about the protection of our endangered species. There is a percentage that has been worked out, I cannot remember at the moment, that we have got a lesser number of endangered species of trees that are around because we have been harvesting them too much. Things like that, but it has all been taken care of.

It is actually quite a comprehensive Bill, Mr. Speaker, Sir, which has taken some time to get to the floor. I have to thank the Minister and her staff for bringing this very timely, especially in light of the fact that the whole landscape with respect to forests has changed around the world and Fiji is now on top of it, and we have got a phenomenal Bill that is before us, and I can assure you, you have the total support of this side of the House with respect to the Bill on the floor.

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, we all realise that the more speakers speak before you, the fewer points that are available for you to speak on. I think I spoke with the honourable Koya during the afternoon tea, and he had assured me that this was a bipartisan Bill, and we have heard from honourable Koya as well as honourable Usamate of their full support for the Forestry Bill 2025. I think honourable Maharaj, honourable Lal and, of course, honourable Bala, will learn a lot more from the bipartisan approach that has been taken by the two honourable Members of Parliament.

Perhaps, Mr. Speaker, Sir, with the contents that have already now been fully canvassed by the speakers before me. I wanted to share, perhaps, the core principles or the undergirding philosophies of why this law needed to change and, in fact, why laws are changed in this Chamber. The first of that has been realised by the honourable Minister for Forestry and Fisheries. The reality of forestry in Fiji has changed and that the law no longer fits. I think that is very pertinent from the report that was shared in this House by honourable Ratu Vakalalabure.

What we are doing with the introduction of this Bill is correcting, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the unintended consequences of having law that is dated back to the 1990s. We are trying to resolve fresh scenarios, scenarios that exist today with laws that were drafted and passed in 1992. There is also a more pressing principle that undergirds the change that needs to happen. It is when society, people like we represent, we do a moral evaluation that represents the collective effort of people who speak to us. With the consultation that has been undertaken by the Ministry of Forestry and Fisheries, these are the results of what is on the ground.

There are, of course, also economic pressures that undergird why laws need to change. Perhaps more importantly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, as you will see, features mostly in the Bill that is before us are the international mandates. We call it international pressure or limitations of domestic law in line with international standards.

As the Minister had introduced during her speech in Parliament today, we are now adopting international best practices. Issues like international financing. Now, symbolic politics in today's world usually when it comes to matters of ownership and proprietorship, whether it be in minerals or whether it be in forestry, is always going to move around free, prior informed concepts. I think that is also part of why this legislation or this Bill needs to be passed today.

Lastly, but not least, simple housekeeping we need more clarity on the law today, and we need the law to be a lot more efficient. Why are we changing the laws today? Why do we need to change laws? One of the reasons I think that we all can agree to and identify with is that in economic cost terms, it is easier. It sustain the cost of the change than it is to sustain the cost of not changing the law. We already heard the challenges that the Ministry of Forestry and Fisheries have encountered over the years, and this Bill has had the full support of the entire of the all the Committee Members, and we are very grateful to the Members of the Opposition who are part of the consultation. I support the motion before the House.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I also lend my support to the Bill, knowing that a lot has progressed over the years since 1992 when we initially had a similar Bill or Act, so to speak.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will just put into context some of the clauses of the Bill so that it makes sense to us.

“4 (b)The conservation of Fiji's native forest ecosystems, with the emphasis on biodiversity, soil and water, and the least goes on.”

I will just use the example of Tukuraki in 2012 when we had *TC Evans*. The landslide on Tukuraki was mainly due when we did the investigations was due to the loss of canopy up the hills because we have pine (needle leaves), and we have lost the canopy. Rain was falling on the bare hills of Tukuraki that led to the landslide. So, we need to look after our native forest ecosystems, and that is just a typical example of why this Bill is so important to all of us.

“4 (j) ensuring legal timber trade, and preventing illegal logging, with actions to support the trade of legally harvested timber, and to prevent the trade of illegally logged timber.”

Honourable Tikoduadua would recall that one of the struggles that we had was with the Fiji hardwood. I am not sure whether that has been addressed - the issue of certification. I am sure and confident that with this Bill we should be able to address some of those issues, particularly when it comes to environmental issues, forest management practices and, of course, governance.

We could get into the niche markets of mahogany if we had that certification process. Unfortunately, because of non-existence of data and because of the non-existence of records, apart from sustainable practices and environmental practices, we were struggling to have that certification process and that denied us a lot of opportunities when it comes to economic benefits out of our mahogany plantation. I really appreciate the fact that this Bill will address most of these issues.

If I can just go quickly to the issue on governance - the role of the Conservator and, of course, the Ministry, all that I would like to say, honourable Minister, is we have very good laws in Fiji, not only the Forest Bill but other laws, but we are weak when it comes to enforcement, and we need to pay particular attention to that.

We have the Code of Logging Practice, et cetera. I had an exciting time as Commissioner Northern. Unfortunately, the Divisional Forestry Officer ended up in jail because money was involved. Unfortunately, it looks good on paper, but when it comes to the enforcement of the law, we are quite bad at it. I would like to issue a word of caution on the roles that the various organisations, individuals and institutions play when it comes to implementation.

I also appreciate the fact that fire is addressed in this. There was a committee headed by Mr. Robin Yarrow a few years back. I was part of that committee, to address the issue of fire, not only in forests, but in agriculture and the sugar sector as well.

We are very irresponsible, and I am thankful that even the native forest owners are also cautioned in one of the clauses, which I will not go into. We really need to take this serious responsibility about looking after our forests because for us, it is something that we enjoy - setting up fires, but we are very irresponsible.

We are destroying the ecosystem and the biodiversity, the flora and fauna, and that needs to change. Those who are responsible will be taken to task as well. Unfortunately, time is limited, but thank you for the change, and we support the Bill.

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank all the honourable Members for their contribution to the motion before the House. I would also like to thank all those who have contributed to the Review of this Bill since its first review in 2007. I would like to thank the staff of the Ministry of Forestry, from the Conservator of Forests, the two Deputies, the Divisional Heads and all the Forestry staff, who contributed to the development and review of the Bill.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would also like to acknowledge the contribution of former Ministers and former Permanent Secretaries, as well as former staff, who also contributed to the review of the Bill.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would also like to acknowledge and thank our development partners and non-governmental organisations that continued to work with the Ministry to meet its targeted outcomes.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, last but not the least, I would like to thank the Members of the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights, and the Forestry Officer, Mr. Viliame Rokovu, who accompanied the Standing Committee to the consultation and review of the Forestry Bill.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I, therefore, request the support of this august House for the passage of the Forestry Bill 2025.

MR. SPEAKER.- The Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

Motion agreed.

[A Bill for an Act to provide for the planned management and conservation of Fiji's forests and to foster the development of Fiji's forest industry in alignment with national policy, respect for traditional landowner rights, and the preservation of ecological integrity through sustainable resource management and compliance with environmental laws and international best practice and other related matters, enacted by the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji. (Act No. of 2025)]

CRIMINAL RECORDS BILL 2025

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Mr Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 51, I move –

That the –

- (a) Criminal Records Bill 2025 (Bill No. 41 of 2025), be considered by Parliament without delay;
- (b) Bill must pass through one stage at two sittings of Parliament;
- (c) Bill must be immediately referred to the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights;
- (d) Standing Committee must report on the Bill at a sitting of Parliament next year; and
- (e) That upon presentation of the report on the Bill by the Standing Committee, the Bill must be debated and voted upon by Parliament, with the right of reply given to me as the Member moving this Motion.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Speaker, I beg to second the motion.

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Mr Speaker, honourable Members of Parliament, I rise to introduce the Criminal Records Bill 2025, a landmark piece of legislation that stands on justice, protects dignity, and advance rehabilitation in our nation. The Bill is built on the premise that community safety is safeguarded, and rehabilitated individuals, who have not re-offended, are given real chances at employment, training, and access to services and justice.

This Bill recognises that while justice must be firm, it must also be fair and restorative. It provides a modern framework for how criminal records are managed, ensuring that individuals who have served their sentences and demonstrated rehabilitation are not permanently burdened by past convictions.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the key objectives of the Bill include:

- (1) Allowing certain minor convictions to become spent on the day the person is convicted, allowing certain convictions are spent on completion of rehabilitation period or spent on application to a court and completion of a rehabilitation period, so that rehabilitated persons can move forward without a lifelong stigma.
- (2) Allowing a person to resolve and end legal action for fixed penalty offences, where the person has paid the fixed penalty or served a term of imprisonment in default of payment.
- (3) Providing for the expunge of historical convictions, particularly those relating to homosexual offences and larceny offences tied to customary rights, so that past injustices no longer shadow our citizens.
- (4) Dealing with past injustice through efficient and accessible administrative decision-making process, so that citizens are provided with a determination, on the expense of a conviction in a timely manner.
- (5) Establishing clear processes for review of determinations by the Mercy Commission, ensuring fairness and accountability in decisions.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, another principle is protecting the privacy of making an offence to unlawfully disclosed, spent or expunge convictions, while setting out necessary exceptions for law enforcement, child protection and national security. The last principle is ensuring that once conviction is spent or expunged, a person is deemed to have no criminal record, restoring their dignity and opportunities in employment, education and civic life.

This Bill will offer real hope to those who take the path of rehabilitation. Take an example of Josese and John Prasad, who are both convicted of assault causing actual assault. Their offence acts as a maximum penalty of imprisonment for five years. Josese and John, on conviction, are sentenced to two years' imprisonment. They both work hard and undertake programme in constructive skills while serving their sentences. On release, Josese and John will find employment as construction workers and help each other to find a new way of living.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this Bill will give Josese and John a second chance after living conviction-free for seven years. Their convictions will be spent and no longer be included in the police clearance check unless an exception applies. This Bill will deem Josese and John not to have a criminal record. They will be able to answer questions about their criminal record by saying no, they do not have a criminal record. Josese and John will have the benefit of a clear Fiji Police clearance check certificate if they choose to apply for the PALM Work Scheme. They will only need to disclose their past convictions if asked a question under the law of another country.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this Bill is about recognising and rewarding offenders who find the right path to a new life. This Bill will apply principles of forgiveness and respect for people who receive fixed-penalty convictions for minor offences like COVID-19 non-compliance. Take an example of Mary and Maria. We have a fixed-penalty conviction for conducting an indoor religious gathering of more than COVID-19 limit on sitting capacity under the Public Health Regulation 17A.

Under this Bill, Mary and Maria's fixed-penalty conviction will permanently be specked. Mary and Maria will no longer be deemed to have a criminal record and may state that they do not. If Mary and Maria apply for a new job, the Fiji Police clearance check will not include the fixed-penalty conviction for COVID-19 rule-breaking.

This Bill repeals outdated laws and replaces them with forward-looking systems that balance justice with compassion. They can acknowledge the importance of rehabilitation, the rights of indigenous communities, and the need to correct historical wrongs. It is important to note that the

definition of an indigenous person includes a person who is a citizen of Fiji, of Indian or Chinese heritage, and who has been recognised by the iTaukei, the Rotuman or Banaban people of Fiji as entering and belonging to the *vanua*. This Bill promotes equality by correcting past discrimination. For these reasons, the provision does not give preferential treatment, rather it promotes equality before the law.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Criminal Records Bill 2025 is not just about records; it is about people. It is about giving our citizens a genuine second chance, strengthening trust in our justice system, and affirming that Fiji is a society where fairness, dignity and opportunity prevail. I commend this Bill to the House.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I understand what the honourable Attorney-General has just put forward to us. Just a slight amendment, honourable Attorney-General. I think you mentioned that it was to go through one single sitting. It obviously will not be because of the way you have presented it. You may wish to amend that, Sir.

I think the three things required for Standing Order 51 is that it goes through one or more stages at a single sitting, and if so, which stages? It goes through one or more stages at a single sitting, and if so, which stages, the time limits which apply, and also whether it is being referred to a Standing Committee. The other two have been complied with, but I think you probably need to just reword your motion, honourable Attorney-General.

Apart from that, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are happy that it is going to the Standing Committee to be actually brought back at a later stage next year.

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Yes, I wish to make that amendment, that the Bill be passed through two sittings of Parliament, Mr. Speaker, Sir, if that amendment can be done to (b).

MR. SPEAKER.- You are recommending that these changes be made now? You have no problem with that?

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Yes, Sir.

MR. SPEAKER.- Fine. So the (b) then reads and I quote: “(b) that the Bill must pass through one stage at two sittings of Parliament;”

As I have said, the floor is open, honourable Koya has spoken. Is there anyone who wishes to speak?

Since there are no more interventions, I will call on the Minister to speak in reply.

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Mr. Speaker, I have no further comment, except to commend this Bill before the House and refer it to the Standing Committee.

Question put.

Motion agreed.

[Criminal Records Bill 2025 (Bill No. 41/2025) moved under Standing Order 51 and referred to the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights]

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we will now deal with the fourth and final Bill for

today.

COMMERCIAL USE OF MARINE AREAS BILL 2025

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, pursuant to Standing Order 51, I move:

That the -

- (a) Commercial Use of Marine Areas Bill 2025 (Bill No. 42 of 2025), be considered by Parliament without delay;
- (b) Bill must pass through one stage at a single sitting of Parliament;
- (c) Bill must be immediately referred to the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights;
- (d) That the Standing Committee must report on the Bill at a sitting of Parliament in the first quarter of next year; and
- (e) That upon presentation on the report of the Bill by the Standing Committee, the Bill must be debated and voted upon by Parliament, with the right of reply given to me as the Member moving this motion.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I beg to second the motion.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to see the urgent passage of the Commercial Use of Marine Areas Bill 2025, because it addresses a longstanding legal and governance gap, impacting the rights of customary owners, the integrity of our marine resource management, and the certainty needed for sustainable commercial use of Fiji's valuable marine areas.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, for too long now, Fiji has operated under fragmented and outdated arrangements governing marine areas. One such law being the Regulation of Surfing Areas Act 2010. This Act aims to promote Fiji as a surf destination through unrestricted access to surfing areas for tourism and recreation.

Mr. Speaker Sir, while this Act allows tourists, hotels and businesses to use these areas freely without exclusivity, it expressly provides that any person can use a surfing area without any payment or any compensation to any person.

It has contributed to growth in tourism, but it has also socio-economically impacted customary owners, who previously received compensation for the use of their traditional *i qoliqoli* areas. This has resulted in:

- (1) Unclear proprietary authority over certain marine spaces;
- (2) Misalignment between customary ownership and commercial use; and
- (3) Tension across tourism businesses, tourists and customary groups.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the delay in clarifying this legal position has allowed disputes, grievances and inequitable benefit sharing to continue. Therefore, this Bill will provide long overdue legislative clarity by recognising customary propriety rights in a manner that is consistent with natural justice, constitutional principles and modern governance standards, and introducing a fairer, more equitable benefit sharing framework.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, overall, this motion is important, given the impact of this law to the tourism sector. Since we announced the review of the Regulation of Surfing Area Act two years ago, there has been ambiguity on what there is to expect. It will, therefore, give the tourism industry a definitive

timeline in which this law will take effect.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Commercial Use of Marine Areas Bill 2025 seeks to repeal the Registration of Surfing Areas Act 2010, and replace it with a new, fair and transparent framework that reverts proprietary ownership of marine areas used for commercial purposes to customary owners.

Sir, the Bill provides for a reversion process, which will be in line with the rule of law and principles of natural justice, with all parties actively involved. It also empowers existing indigenous institutions to play a central role in administering and overseeing these marine areas.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it further addresses gaps in the Regulation of Surfing Areas Act 2010, which aims to promote Fiji as a surf destination through unrestricted access to surfing areas for tourism and recreation.

Under the Commercial Use of Marine Areas Bill, customary owners will ultimately take back ownership. Currently, marine areas are customarily owned by indigenous people who have access and usage rights, but not proprietary ownership.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I want to be clear - this will not be an automatic reversion. There will be processes to follow, and we will involve all interest holders to be part of the process.

The process is as follows:

- (1) The transfer process is initiated by customary owners through an application to the iTaukei Fisheries Commission.
- (2) iTaukei Fisheries Commission assesses the merits of the application. At this point, the iTaukei Fisheries Commission will be required to involve interest holders in the transfer process.
- (3) The iTaukei Fisheries Commission, once it approves a transfer application, will make a recommendation to the vesting authority, which is a tri-ministerial committee comprising the Ministers responsible for Fisheries, iTaukei Affairs, and Tourism.
- (4) The recommendation must request a vesting order and include either agreed, renegotiated terms and compensation or a statement of unresolved matters.
- (5) The vesting authority then makes a vesting order, transferring ownership once the recommendation is received.
- (6) On commencement of the vesting order, ownership vests absolutely in the customary owners, as *iTaukei* owners.
- (7) The Bill also sets the process when the parties fail to reach agreement. In this case, the vesting authority may refer disputes to arbitration, if both parties consent. If the terms of arbitration are not agreed, the vesting authority may determine the terms and compensation itself. Aggrieved parties may appeal to the Tribunal within 30 days.
- (8) There will also be a Marine Area Appeals Tribunal, appointed by the Chief Justice in consultation with the Attorney-General.

- (9) Finally, control of the vested marine areas will be vested in the iTaukei Land Trust Board as administrators.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I also wish to make a few clarifications:

- Existing legal interests and rights over a commercial marine area will continue, until renegotiated after a vesting order.
- As the vesting authority, the Bill gives powers to exempt renegotiation if existing lease or licence terms and compensation arrangements are fair and equitable, and re-negotiation may harm the economic viability of the marine area. Exemptions may be time-limited.
- The vesting order cannot be used to infringe constitutional rights and international laws and treaties, such as freedom of movement and the rights of public enjoyment. This was a recent addition.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, discussions on the review of the Act and the Commercial Use of Marine Areas Bill began in 2022-2023 financial year, with public consultations around Fiji. This work was guided through a joint working group.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to reassure all tourism stakeholders that existing interests, investments and operations within marine areas will be fully considered through a clear, participatory and transparent process under the new Bill.

While the Bill aims to transfer proprietary ownership of commercial use marine areas back to indigenous customary owners, the Bill proposes that any financial consideration should not be burdensome. Instead, it establishes a fair, consultative framework where stakeholders, customary owners and Government collectively determine political transition arrangements and mutually beneficial partnerships.

The intention is to protect business and business affinity, business certainty, maintain investor confidence and ensure that any changes are managed through dialogue, not through punitive or excessive compensation demands.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, again, I agree with the same sentiments. I think this Bill also is being dedicated to Standing Order 51, and a single sitting on the motion. It is not going to be a single sitting because our sitting ends on Friday. It is to be brought back next year. So, it should be two sittings. Just a correction, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Otherwise, the messages is actually going to the Standing Committee, so, we have no problems with that.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank my colleagues in Parliament for enabling this Bill to proceed through the pathway that has been established, which is through the Standing Committees. We will hold consultations across the country, which will take about two or three months, and we expect input/contribution from across the country to be comprehensive and to reflect all that we want to do about the use of marine areas for tourism purposes.

We look forward, my Ministry and my team are ready to be part of the process of the consultation, and for tourism, Mr. Speaker and colleagues, this is the way forward. Tourism going forward will see a huge degree of participation for the indigenous people. This is a forecast for the UN Tourism and other bodies, and this is one way that Fiji can ensure that our indigenous community are part of tourism in a big way, in the way we use their marine areas. As I have stressed, it will be process driven. It is not going to be, one day we come in and take everything - it is going to be process

driven and specific to areas and granted. There will be some teething problems, but there is a way to go to strengthen tourism.

I have here a letter from one of the leading resorts in the country today, asking me for my help on what to do in an area where the guests are snorkelling, and where the local community are also spear fishing. Right now, there is nothing we can do to stop them because it is free. They can spear fish there, but through this, we can bring in an arrangement that can allow tourists to enjoy those areas without the fear of swimming together with those who are fishing with spear guns.

There are more opportunities ahead of us in terms of the total enjoyment of our visitors using our marine areas, and at the same time making sure that the resource owners are also part of it, in the way they are compensated. If you allow me, Mr. Speaker, Sir, if I can just end this in the vernacular.

“Ra veiwekani, na lawa baleta na i qoliqoli ena kena vakayagataki vei ira na saravanua, sa mai biu toka ‘go e Palimedi na kena i tekitekivu ni veitalanoa. Ena vakayacori na veisoli vakasama, na veitalanoataki ni ka ogo, me yacova sara ni sa la’i lawa ena yabaki ka tu mai.

Kerei na veiwekan,i na veitalanoa ni ka ogo me veitalanoataki ena savasava kei na yalo vinaka. Me kakua ni da baci taura cala na i tukutuku ogo baleta ni tara tiko na i qoliqoli. Me da nanuma tiko na saravanua, meda nanuma na veiwekani. E dina ni noda na i qoliqoli, ia, eda sa na bula vata vakaveiwekani, ka da veiwasei, ka da veisolisoli ena yalo e vinaka me rawa ni bula kina na noda vanua.

Na saravanua, na i vurevure ni lavo ena noda vanua, me maroroi; na veitalanoa, me maroroi. Na lawa ena vakarau buli tiko ogo me na vukei keda ena veigauna mai muri.”

On that note, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I commend this Bill to the way forward and to the Standing Committee, and into the debate in the first quarter of next year.

MR. SPEAKER.- The Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

Motion agreed.

[Commercial Use of Marine Areas Bill (Bill No. 42/2025) moved under Standing Order 51 and referred to the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights]

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, that brings us to the end of the sitting today - a long but productive day, and I thank all of you, honourable Members for your presence and your contributions.

The Parliament is now adjourned until 2.30 p.m. tomorrow.

The Parliament adjourned at 6.59 p.m.

ANNEXURE I

Reply to Written Question No. 333/2025 tabled by the honourable Minister for Agriculture and Waterways (Ref. Page 2621)



MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE AND WATERWAYS
(Hon. T.N. Tunabuna)

Response to Written Question No. 333/2025, asked by honourable J. Usamate, is as follows:

Background

The presence of the Asian Subterranean Termite (AST) has become an increasingly serious concern in recent years, especially in the Western Division, including areas around Lautoka. These destructive pests are known for their aggressive feeding habits and ability to rapidly infest wooden structures, trees and crops, causing extensive economic and environmental damage.

The Coalition Government has acknowledged the attention and noticeable rise in AST activity and its spread into new communities, prompting increased coordinated efforts to manage and contain the infestation. This growing challenge highlights the need for stronger public awareness, improved monitoring, and sustained mitigation strategies to protect homes, infrastructure, and livelihoods from the escalating threat posed by AST.

Termite Taskforce

On 24th November, 2023, the Coalition Government announced a termite initiative, including the creation of a special taskforce to coordinate and oversee the implementation of the Termite Control Assistance Programme (TCAP). The Taskforce consists of a multi-stakeholder committee, chaired by the Minister for Women, Children and Social Protection and the Assistant Minister for the Office of the Prime Minister, the Lautoka City Council, Biosecurity Authority of Fiji (BAF), and the Ministry of Finance, Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics.

The BAF plays a central and ongoing role in the Taskforce, providing technical expertise, data sharing, inspection and verification functions.

Termite Control Assistance Programme (TCAP)

The TCAP offers relief through the Termite Subsidy Programme, the Termite Baiting Programme, and public outreach on AST, helping the public stay informed and vigilant while supporting efforts to control the spread of AST infestation.

Over the past two years, the Government has allocated a total of \$5 million under Head 50: Miscellaneous Services: 2023-2024 Financial Year - \$3 million; and 2024-2025 Financial Year - \$2 million (*Source: Strategic Planning Office, Ministry of Finance*). The Government has also allocated a sum of \$2.9 million in the current 2025-2026 Financial Year for the TCAP.

The TCAP, through the Taskforce, has four main activities which include:

(1) **Termite Subsidy Programme**

The programme intends to provide relief packages to homeowners for repair and reconstruction works due to damage caused by AST infestation in the Western Division.

- (a) A subsidy of \$5,000 is provided for households with a combined household income

- of less than \$30,000.
- (b) A subsidy of \$2,000 is provided for households with a combined household income between \$30,000 and \$50,000.
- (c) A total of 807 households have been assisted under the programme with a total monetary value of \$3,990,000 in the last two years.

The detailed breakdown is tabulated below:

Particulars	No. of Household	Amount (\$)
2023-2024		
Household income below \$30,000	439	2,195,000
Household income between \$30,000-\$50,000	9	18,000
Total	448	\$2,213,000
2024-2025		
Household income below \$30,000	353	1,765,000
Household income between \$30,000-\$50,000	6	12,000
Total	359	\$1,777,000
Total TCAP Subsidy Assistance over the past two years	807	3,990,000

(2) Termite Baiting Programme

Under this programme, Flick Hygiene Pte Limited has been contracted to deliver baiting services to 1,000 affected households in the Western Division at a total cost of \$290,000.

To date, a total of 766 homes (*Source: Strategic Planning Office, Ministry of Finance*) have received above-ground baiting services, which have been verified and paid. The contractor is currently working on the remaining 234 homes, with completion expected in December 2025.

(3) Media Awareness and Education Programme

Several media awareness sessions have been conducted through the local radio stations and social media in the last two years. The media awareness sessions prompted an influx of requests for baiting services from individuals, indicating the effectiveness of the outreach.

Three media companies were engaged for the termite awareness and education programme, which incurred a total cost of \$48,942.50. The three media companies are:

- (i) Fiji Broadcasting Corporation (FBC), to create awareness on AST and termite baiting through its radio stations and talkback show - \$21,792.50.
- (ii) Fiji Village, with a broad audience, was engaged to ensure the information reached the wider population through all its sister radio stations and media platforms - \$24,150.00.
- (iii) Street Smart Media was engaged to create awareness through the different social media platforms with content sharing on different platforms - \$3,000.00.

(4) Establishment of three additional BAF Offices in Nadi, Ba, and Nakasi
This is to –

- (a) address the issues of inadequately staffing, reduced response time, and improved efficiency, a sum of \$343,714.50 had been provided to BAF to assist in the containment of AST in other populated places like Nadi, Suva, and Ba; and
- (b) provide better service delivery while developing the best strategy to help control the spread of termites.

The Ministry of Agriculture and Waterways, through BAF, reaffirms its unwavering commitment to the fight against AST. We remain steadfast in safeguarding our communities, protecting our agricultural sector, and preserving the livelihoods who depend on it.

Through strengthened surveillance, coordinated action, public awareness and partnership with stakeholders, we will continue to work diligently to contain, manage and eliminate this destructive pest. Together, we can ensure a resilient and secure future for Fiji's agriculture and its people.

ANNEXURE II

Reply to Written Question No. 334/2025 tabled by the honourable Minister for iTaukei Affairs and Culture, Heritage and Arts (Ref. Page 2621)



**MINISTER FOR ITAUKEI AFFAIRS AND CULTURE, HERITAGE AND ARTS
(Hon. I. VASU)**

Response to Written Question No. 334/2025, asked by honourable I. Kuridrani, is as follows:

Table 1 below sets out the total number of traditional positions within the country's 14 Provinces, clearly portraying the total number of filled and unfilled traditional positions within each Province respectively.

PROVINCES	TOTAL TITLES	FILLED	VACANT	% FILLED	% VACANT
Ba	532	485	47	91	9
Bua	391	337	54	86	14
Cakaudrove	501	440	61	88	12
Kadavu	385	329	56	85	15
Lau	314	295	19	94	6
Lomaiviti	495	262	233	53	47
Macuata	470	413	57	88	12
Nadroga/Navosa	443	290	155	65	35
Naitasiri	610	523	85	86	14
Namosi	103	83	20	81	19
Ra	666	539	127	81	19
Serua	81	77	4	95	5
Rewa	340	320	20	94	6
Tailevu	876	772	104	88	12
TOTAL	6,205	5,164	1,043	83%	17%

As clearly outlined in the Table above, 83 percent of these total traditional positions are filled while 17 percent are still vacant.

For the sake of a better portrayal of the Specific Categories of these titles by Province, Table 2(i) sets out the total number of Turaga ni Vanua positions within each Province, and the respective number of these that are filled, and those that are still vacant.

PROVINCES	TURAGA NI VANUA (TV)		
	TOTAL TV	FILLED	VACANT
Ba	21	17	4
Bua	10	9	1
Cakaudrove	20	16	4
Kadavu	15	15	
Lau	12	10	2
Lomaiviti	9	6	3
Macuata	15	15	
Nadroga/Navosa	24	17	7
Naitasiri	22	20	2
Namosi	3	1	2
Ra	22	11	11
Serua	2	2	
Rewa	8	8	
Tailevu	29	24	5

TOTAL	212	171	41
--------------	------------	------------	-----------

Further, Table 2(ii) sets out the total number of Turaga ni Yavusa within the country by Province, again, noting the number of these that are filled and those that remain vacant.

PROVINCES	TURAGA NI YAVUSA (TY)		
	TOTAL TY	FILLED	VACANT
Ba	139	130	9
Bua	74	62	12
Cakaudrove	107	98	9
Kadavu	88	73	15
Lau	74	77	4
Lomaiviti	119	61	58
Macuata	104	94	10
Nadroga/Navosa	117	232	85
Naitasiri	128	105	23
Namosi	23	18	5
Ra	136	109	27
Serua	20	20	
Rewa	66	63	3
Tailevu	176	155	21
TOTAL	1,371	1,140	231

Finally, Table 2(iii) outlines the total number of the Turaga ni Yavusa within the 14 Provinces, together with the total of these that are filled and those that remain vacant.

PROVINCES	TURAGA NI MATAQALI (TM)		
	TOTAL TM	FILLED	VACANT
Ba	372	338	34
Bua	307	266	41
Cakaudrove	374	327	49
Kadavu	282	241	41
Lau	228	215	13
Lomaiviti	367	195	172
Macuata	351	304	47
Nadroga/Navosa	302	189	113
Naitasiri	458	398	60
Namosi	77	64	13
Ra	508	419	89
Serua	59	55	4
Rewa	266	249	17
Tailevu	671	593	78
TOTAL	4,622	3,850	771

For the information of the Members, the only two Provinces that have not undergone the Leadership Awareness Programme are Lomaiviti and Nadroga, hence their high total vacancies as reflected in Table 1.

ANNEXURE III

Reply to Written Question No. 302/2025 tabled by the honourable Minister for Multi-Ethnic Affairs and Sugar Industry (Ref. Page 2621)



MINISTER FOR MULTI-ETHNIC AFFAIRS AND SUGAR INDUSTRY
(Hon. C.J. Singh)

Response to Written Question No. 302/2025, asked by honourable V. Pillay, is as follows:

I thank the honourable Member for the question, and I am pleased to provide the following update.

1.0 Five-Year Sugar Production Trend (TCTS)

Table 1 below outlines the tonnes of cane crushed, tonnes of sugar produced and the Tonnes of Cane to Tonnes of Sugar (TCTS) ratio for the last five seasons.

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Tonnes of Cane Crushed	1,729,170	1,417,185	1,638,967	1,565,564	1,331,922
Tonnes of Sugar Produced	151,591	133,209	155,812	139,628	126,522
TCTS Ratio	11.4	10.6	10.5	11.2	10.5
POCS	9.75 %	10.06%	10.28%	9.78%	10.27%
Cane Purity	79.2%	79.5%	80.0%	79.1%	78.3%
Burnt Cane	53%	54.4%	45.8%	49.2%	55.3%

[Table 1 shows the tonnes of sugar produced, along with other parameters]

Summary of Trend

Crushing seasons 2021, 2022 and 2024 recorded significantly better TCTS ratios compared with 2020 and 2023, largely due to improvements in cane quality delivered to the Mills.

One of the key indicators of cane quality is Pure Obtainable Cane Sugar (POCS), which measures the percentage of recoverable sugar in cane. Ideally, POCS should exceed 12 percent for higher sugar recovery.

However, the Mana variety, which accounts for nearly 90 percent of cane grown in Viti Levu, is a mid-to-late maturity variety. That means that sugar content is naturally lower at the beginning of the crushing season. While the variety begins to reach maturity around August, this period also coincides with widespread cane burning, leading to premature harvesting. Burnt cane deteriorates rapidly, resulting in longer cut-to-crush delays, reduced sugar purity, and higher losses during processing.

Compounding that issue is the challenge of an ageing ratoon population, which generally produces cane with lower sucrose content and weaker yield potential. Factors such as declining soil fertility, poor farm husbandry practices, and inadequate fertilizer application also negatively impact cane quality and overall productivity.

In seasons where cane quality improved, the Mills experienced better processing performance, reduced losses and higher operational efficiency. This trend was also supported by a lower proportion of burnt cane being delivered, which directly contributed to improved

factory throughput and greater sugar recovery. Together, these factors explain the superior outcomes achieved in the 2021, 2022 and 2024 seasons.

2.0 Export Price per Tonne (Last Five Years)

Mr. Speaker Sir, the export price per tonne of sugar over the past five years is tabulated below:

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Export Price Per Tonne of Sugar Sold (FJD)	727	737	1,068	1,485	1,088

[Table 2 – Sugar Export Price]

Summary of Trend

Export sugar prices are driven primarily by global supply and demand dynamics. Prices were stable in 2020-2021, increased sharply in 2022, and peaked in 2023 due to lower global sugar production, increased ethanol production and stronger international demand.

Prices declined in 2024 as global supply conditions stabilised but still remained higher than 2020-2021 levels.

The export price figures provided relate only to sugar exports and do not include regional or domestic sugar sales. Molasses revenue is also not included in the export price figures. All these revenue streams - export sugar, regional and domestic sales, and molasses, must be combined to calculate the final cane price paid to farmers.

3.0 Government Top-Up per Tonne to Farmers (Last Five Years)

Mr. Speaker Sir, Government has continued to ensure stable and predictable returns for cane farmers through top-up payments over the prevailing FSC share.

Summary of Trend

Government introduced guaranteed cane price of \$85 per tonne from the 2018 season onward. However, under industry cost-sharing arrangements outlined in the Master Award, certain deductions are applied to cane proceeds, which meant that the net payments to farmers for the 2020 and 2021 crops fell below the guaranteed \$85 per tonne.

The Coalition Government has since taken the decision that farmers must receive a minimum net payment of \$85 per tonne, ensuring that deductions no longer reduce the final amount paid below this threshold.

Over the last three crop payments, farmers have received more than \$85 per tonne, driven by favourable global sugar prices and supported further by Government top-up contributions.

4.0 Conclusion

Mr. Speaker Sir, the last five seasons reflect both industry performance and Government's ongoing commitment to stabilising farmer livelihoods.

Mr. Speaker Sir, I assure this House that the Ministry, together with FSC and all stakeholders, remains committed to strengthening the resilience, productivity, and long-term sustainability of Fiji's sugar industry.