



STANDING COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND DEFENCE

Consolidated Review Report of the Electoral Commission 2023 and 2024 Annual Reports



PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI
Parliamentary Paper No. 58 of 2026

July 2026

Published and Printed by the Department of Legislature, Parliament House, SUVA

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Acronyms

EC	Electoral Commission
EDAWG	Election Disability Access for Persons with Disabilities
FEO	Fijian Elections Office
FICAC	Fiji Independent Commission Against Corruption
FLRC	Fiji Law Reform Commission

Chairperson's Foreword

On behalf of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence, I am pleased to present this Report on the review of the Electoral Commission's 2023 and 2024 Annual Reports.

In undertaking this review, the Committee has fulfilled its constitutional and parliamentary responsibility to scrutinise the performance of public institutions and ensure accountability, transparency and good governance in the discharge of their mandates. The Electoral Commission occupies a central role in Fiji's democratic framework, with responsibility for overseeing electoral processes, safeguarding electoral integrity and promoting public confidence in the nation's democratic institutions.

The Committee's examination of the Annual Reports highlighted several significant challenges encountered by the Electoral Commission during the reporting period. These included prolonged vacancies within the Commission, the loss of quorum resulting from the expiry of Commissioners' terms, resource constraints, staffing limitations and disruptions arising from the unavailability of institutional records. The Committee notes that these circumstances affected the Commission's ability to fully discharge certain aspects of its constitutional and statutory responsibilities. Nevertheless, the Committee acknowledges the efforts of the Commissioners, the Supervisor of Elections and supporting staff in maintaining core functions and advancing important initiatives aimed at strengthening Fiji's electoral framework.

A key focus of the Committee's review was the Commission's ongoing electoral reform programme, which seeks to improve governance arrangements, strengthen legal clarity, enhance public participation and modernise electoral administration. The Committee welcomes the Commission's commitment to reviewing electoral legislation, promoting disability-inclusive electoral processes, improving access for overseas voters and addressing the continued underrepresentation of women in political leadership. These initiatives are critical to ensuring that Fiji's electoral system remains inclusive, credible and responsive to the evolving needs of its citizens.

The Committee also recognises the importance of strengthening institutional resilience within constitutional bodies. Throughout the review, Members emphasised the need for improved governance structures, enhanced records management systems, sustainable funding arrangements and a fully resourced Secretariat to support the Commission's long-term effectiveness. The recommendations contained in this Report are intended to address these challenges and support the Commission in fulfilling its constitutional mandate with greater efficiency, continuity and public confidence.

As Fiji prepares for the 2026/2027 General Election, it is imperative that continued efforts are made to strengthen electoral governance, uphold public trust and ensure that electoral institutions are

adequately supported to carry out their responsibilities. The Committee trusts that the findings and recommendations contained in this Report will assist the Electoral Commission and relevant stakeholders in advancing these objectives and further strengthening Fiji's democratic foundations.

I wish to acknowledge the Electoral Commission who contributed to the Committee's review process through their written and in-person submissions. I also extend my appreciation to the Members of the Committee for their diligence and commitment throughout the scrutiny process and compiling this bipartisan report.

On behalf of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence, I submit this report to Parliament.



Hon. Lenora Qereqeretabua
Chairperson

1.0 Committee Remit and Composition

Under Standing Order 109(2)(e) the Committee is mandated to investigate matters related to Fiji's relations with other countries, development aid, foreign direct investment, oversight of the military, and relations with multi-lateral organisations. The members of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence are as follows:



Hon. Lenora Qereqeretabua
Chairperson
Deputy Speaker of Parliament
Assistant Minister for Foreign Affairs



Hon. Rinesh Sharma
Deputy Chairperson



Hon. Ratu Isikeli Tuiwailevu
Member
Assistant Minister for iTaukei Affairs, Heritage and Arts



Hon. Penioni Ravunawa
Member
Assistant Minister for Health and Medical Services



Hon. Virendra Lal
Member



Hon. Taito Rokomatu
Member

1.1 Committee Secretariat Team

Supporting the Committee in its work is a group of dedicated Parliament Officers serving as the Committee Secretariat. These officers are appointed and delegated by the Secretary-General to Parliament by Standing Order 15(3)(i). The Secretariat officers are as follows:

- Ms. Tirisiane Logavatu – Senior Committee Clerk
- Mrs. Elesi Tabuyaqona – Deputy Committee Clerk

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2.0 Background and Terms of Reference

2.1 Presentation of the Annual Report

- 2.1.1 The Speaker of Parliament, on 13 March 2026, referred the Electoral Commission (EC) 2023 and 2024 Annual Reports to the Committee for review. The referral was made pursuant to Standing Order 38(2), which mandates that all annual reports tabled in Parliament be referred to the relevant Standing Committee for examination and report back to Parliament.
- 2.1.2 The Committee is responsible for reviewing matters concerning Fiji's international relations, development assistance, foreign direct investment, national security oversight, and engagement with multilateral organisations.
- 2.1.3 The EC Annual Reports falls outside the Committee's mandate, but the referral was made to assist in balancing the distribution of workload among the Standing Committees of Parliament.

2.2 Procedure and Programme

Public Submission

- 2.2.1 In relation to Standing Order 111 (1), the Committee is committed to upholding public trust in Parliament, by ensuring that there is public participation and that all such participation is given due consideration. The EC representatives appeared before the Committee at a public hearing in Suva on 11 June 2026. The public submission was broadcast live on the Parliament Facebook page and aired on the Walesi Parliament channel.
- 2.2.2 A summary of the submission is provided in a later part of this report, under the heading 'Committee's Deliberation and Analysis'. Copies of the written submission and the verbatim from the public hearing can be obtained from the online Appendices of the report, which can be accessed from the Parliament website: www.parliament.gov.fj

3.0 Committee Deliberation and Analysis

3.1 Introduction

- 3.1.1 This report presents a summary and analysis of the EC 2023 and 2024 Annual Reports. It highlights key achievements, challenges, and provides recommendations for improvement to support the Constitutional mandate of the Commission.
- 3.1.2 The Electoral Commission is an independent constitutional body established under section 75 of the Constitution of the Republic of Fiji 2013, with responsibility for ensuring the conduct of free and fair elections in accordance with electoral laws. Its key functions include overseeing voter registration and the maintenance of the Register of Voters, conducting voter education, registering election candidates, resolving electoral disputes, and monitoring compliance with laws governing elections and political parties.
- 3.1.3 The administration of voter registration and the conduct of elections are undertaken by the Supervisor of Elections, an independent constitutional office established under section 76 of the Constitution, subject to any directions issued by the Commission in the performance of its functions. The Commission comprises a chairperson and six other members as prescribed by the Constitution. Under section 5 of the Electoral Act 2014, the Supervisor of Elections is required to act as the Secretary to the Commission.
- 3.1.4 At the beginning of 2023, the EC comprised the Chairperson and five members. However, following the expiry of the terms of four members in March 2023 and the subsequent resignation of the Chairperson in June 2023, the Commission was reduced to a single member and was unable to conduct formal business due to the lack of a quorum required under the Electoral Act 2014. The Commission's operations were restored between July and August 2023 following the appointment of six new members by the President, enabling it to resume its constitutional and statutory functions for the remainder of the year.
- 3.1.5 At the beginning of 2024, the EC comprised its full complement of seven members. During the year, the Chairperson resigned, resulting in a vacancy that remained unfilled for the remainder of the reporting period. Apart from this vacancy, the Commission continued to carry out its functions, with members electing a presiding member to chair meetings in accordance with the provisions of the Electoral Act 2014.

3.2 Committee Findings

- 3.2.1 The Committee notes that the EC experienced significant governance and operational disruptions during the 2023 and 2024 reporting periods. The expiry of Commissioners' terms in 2023 resulted in the Commission being unable to maintain quorum for several months, effectively preventing it from carrying out statutory decision-making functions and constitutional oversight of the Fijian Elections Office (FEO). While routine electoral administration continued under the Supervisor of Elections, critical matters requiring Commission approval could not progress. The Committee finds that the simultaneous expiry of Commissioners' terms exposed a structural weakness in the current governance framework and created risks to institutional continuity and electoral preparedness.
- 3.2.2 The Committee further notes that the Commission operated without a substantive Chairperson for part of 2024, while also facing staffing shortages, funding constraints and the absence of a fully functioning Secretariat. The Committee is concerned that constitutional institutions responsible for safeguarding democratic processes should not be vulnerable to operational paralysis arising from vacancies, resource constraints or governance disruptions. The Committee therefore supports the Commission's proposal to align Commissioners' terms with the four-year electoral cycle, stagger appointments to preserve quorum and institutional memory, and strengthen continuity mechanisms through formal handover procedures, action registers, standard operating procedures and a permanent Secretariat.
- 3.2.3 The Committee notes with concern that the seizure of EC records by the Fiji Independent Commission Against Corruption (FICAC) and equipment significantly affected the Commission's ability to discharge its constitutional responsibilities. Evidence presented to the Committee indicated that the loss of access to official records disrupted reporting obligations, institutional memory, decision-making processes and oversight functions. The Committee further notes that subsequent Commissioners were unable to fully verify historical records and activities due to the prolonged unavailability of official documents. While the records have since been returned, the Committee finds that the experience exposed weaknesses in records management, business continuity planning and institutional resilience.
- 3.2.4 The Committee also notes concerns regarding leaks of confidential Commission deliberations and documents during the reporting period. The Committee considers that unauthorised disclosure of confidential information undermines public trust, institutional integrity and the Commission's ability to conduct sensitive electoral matters. While the Commission has introduced measures such as controlled document access, classification protocols and audit trails, the Committee emphasises the importance of strengthening

governance controls and accountability mechanisms to protect the integrity of electoral administration.

- 3.2.5 The Committee finds that the relationship between the EC and the FEO experienced significant strain during the reporting period due to communication challenges, governance issues, staffing disruptions and uncertainty regarding institutional roles and responsibilities. The evidence suggests that operational difficulties were compounded by the absence of records, temporary relocation of Commission operations and overreliance on individual personalities rather than institutional systems. The Committee welcomes the Commission's acknowledgement of these challenges and notes the recent efforts to strengthen institutional arrangements through clearer reporting structures, procedural frameworks, regular coordination meetings and the development of regulations and standard operating procedures. The Committee considers that a resilient electoral management system must be built on strong institutions rather than individual office holders.
- 3.2.6 The Committee notes that the EC has commenced a comprehensive review of Fiji's electoral framework, including the Electoral Act 2014, Electoral (Registration of Voters) Act 2012 and Political Parties Act 2013. The Committee finds that the proposed reforms seek to address critical issues relating to governance, legal clarity, voter participation, disability inclusion, electoral dispute resolution and public confidence in elections. The Committee welcomes the Commission's collaboration with the Fiji Law Reform Commission (FLRC), Ministry of Justice, political parties, civil society organisations and other stakeholders in advancing electoral reform.
- 3.2.7 The Committee is particularly concerned by the continuing underrepresentation of women in Parliament. Evidence presented to the Committee highlighted that women occupied only six of the fifty-five seats in Parliament following the 2022 General Election, representing only 10.9 percent of elected Members. The Committee notes that this remains significantly below regional and international benchmarks and supports the Commission's consideration of temporary special measures aimed at improving women's participation and representation in political leadership and decision-making processes.
- 3.2.8 The Committee commends the EC and the FEO for their ongoing efforts to improve electoral accessibility for persons with disabilities through the Elections Disability Access Working Group (EDAWG) and the development of accessible electoral materials. The Committee notes that initiatives such as Braille materials, audio resources, easy-read guides, accessible polling arrangements and specialised training for election officials demonstrate a commitment to ensuring equal participation in democratic processes. The Committee supports ongoing legislative reforms aimed at removing disability-based discrimination

from electoral laws and strengthening compliance with international human rights obligations.

- 3.2.9 The Committee notes that an independent audit of the National Register of Voters, recommended following both the 2018 and 2022 General Elections, remains outstanding. The Committee is concerned that the funding initially identified for the audit is no longer available and that implementation delays continue despite repeated recommendations from international observer groups. Given the central role of the voter register in maintaining public confidence in electoral outcomes, the Committee considers that progressing the audit should be a priority before the next General Election.
- 3.2.10 The Committee nevertheless acknowledges the systems currently employed by the FEO to maintain voter register integrity, including biometric registration, periodic data cleansing, verification against government databases and voter list publication processes. The Committee notes that these measures contribute to strengthening electoral integrity and reducing opportunities for error or duplication.
- 3.2.11 The Committee notes growing concerns regarding the participation of overseas Fijians in national elections. Evidence presented to the Committee highlighted significant barriers associated with postal voting, including administrative requirements, delivery timelines, accessibility challenges and low voter participation among overseas electors. The Committee notes that the EC and FEO are actively exploring alternative mechanisms, including enhanced cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and External Trade and potential physical ballot collection arrangements in overseas jurisdictions. The Committee considers that increasing outward migration requires a modernised electoral framework that enables eligible overseas Fijians to participate effectively in elections while maintaining electoral integrity and public confidence.
- 3.2.12 The Committee notes that very few public complaints were received during the reporting period and that no Commission decisions were published in 2024 despite statutory requirements. While the Commission attributed this partly to uncertainty regarding publication obligations, the Committee finds that transparency remains fundamental to public confidence in democratic institutions. The Committee welcomes the Commission's recent adoption of adjudication procedures, publication frameworks and complaints mechanisms aimed at improving accountability, transparency and public engagement.
- 3.2.13 The Committee further notes the Commission's decision to discontinue the election results application used during the 2022 General Election due to concerns regarding reliability and public confidence. While recognising the challenges associated with digital electoral systems, the Committee considers that electoral modernisation remains necessary and

encourages continued investment in secure, tested and accessible technology solutions, particularly in relation to voter engagement, information dissemination and overseas voter participation.

- 3.2.14 The Committee finds that funding limitations and staffing instability significantly affected the Commission's operations during the reporting period. The suspension of Commission meetings in 2024 due to exhausted meeting funds demonstrates the vulnerability of constitutional institutions when budget allocations do not adequately reflect operational demands. The Committee notes that the Commission's responsibilities extend beyond election years and include ongoing governance, legal, regulatory and oversight functions. The Committee therefore considers that sustainable, multi-year funding arrangements and a fully resourced Secretariat are essential to ensuring the Commission can effectively fulfil its constitutional mandate.
- 3.2.15 The Committee notes the Commission's assurance that preparations for the next General Election are underway and that both the EC and the FEO are operating under the current legislative framework while electoral reform processes continue. The Committee further notes ongoing voter registration drives, polling venue assessments, voter outreach initiatives such as the "Your Election, Your Say" campaign, and preparations to enhance electoral accessibility and participation. While significant progress has been made in restoring institutional stability, the Committee considers that the successful conduct of the 2026/2027 General Election will depend on strengthened governance arrangements, improved public trust and sustained investment in electoral administration.

4.0 Recommendations

- 4.1 The Committee recommends that the Government, through the Ministry of Justice, review the legislative and constitutional framework governing the EC to strengthen institutional continuity by aligning Commissioners' terms with the electoral cycle, introducing staggered appointments to prevent simultaneous expiry of terms, and ensuring the Commission maintains quorum and operational capacity at all times. The review should also provide for formal succession planning, continuity protocols, handover procedures and a permanent Secretariat to safeguard institutional memory and effective oversight.
- 4.2 The Committee recommends that the EC establish a comprehensive governance and records management framework that includes secure digital record repositories, business continuity arrangements, confidentiality protocols, document classification systems, audit trails and standard operating procedures. The framework should strengthen the protection of official records, minimise operational disruptions, and ensure the Commission can continue to discharge its constitutional functions during periods of institutional or operational challenges.
- 4.3 The Committee recommends that the EC and the FEO formalise their working relationship through approved regulations, policies and operational procedures that clearly define respective roles, responsibilities, reporting arrangements, information-sharing protocols and dispute resolution mechanisms. This will strengthen institutional resilience and reduce reliance on individual office holders.
- 4.4 The Committee recommends that the Ministry of Justice, in consultation with the Electoral Commission and relevant stakeholders, establish and communicate clear milestones and timelines for the electoral review process. The Committee further recommends that the review process continue to address issues relating to electoral governance, legal certainty, transparency, complaints and appeals mechanisms, voter participation, effective civic education and measures aimed at strengthening public trust and confidence in electoral processes.
- 4.5 The Committee recommends that the EC develop and implement targeted strategies to increase participation by women, youth, persons with disabilities and overseas Fijians. This should include consideration of temporary special measures to improve women's representation, expansion of disability-inclusive electoral services and voter education materials, encourage youth engagement initiatives such as the "Your Election, Your Say" campaign, and reviewing overseas voting arrangements to improve accessibility and voter turnout.

- 4.6 The Committee recommends that the Government prioritise funding and implementation of an independent audit of the National Register of Voters before the next General Election. The audit should complement existing voter registration safeguards and enhance public confidence in the accuracy, integrity and reliability of the voter register.
- 4.7 The Committee recommends that the EC strengthen transparency and accountability measures by establishing a publicly accessible register of decisions, improving public awareness of complaints and appeals mechanisms, publishing relevant determinations in accordance with legislative requirements, and enhancing public communication regarding electoral processes and reforms.
- 4.8 The Committee does not support the discontinuation of the electronic Results Application and recommends that it be retained and strengthened for future elections, noting that the 2022 difficulties arose from human error in the manual transfer of data and not from any defect in the application itself. The application advanced transparency, broadened public participation and gave every voter real time access to results, and its removal would create a vacuum that could be filled by speculation and misinformation. The Committee therefore recommends that the EC and the FEO retain the application, subject it to rigorous independent testing, debugging and live condition simulation, and introduce automated validation and reconciliation controls for all data transferred from the Results Management Information System, together with clear public confidence measures so that voters and stakeholders can verify the accuracy of results.
- 4.9 The Committee recommends that the Government provide adequate and sustainable funding to enable the EC to effectively fulfil its constitutional mandate. Funding should support governance functions, electoral reform initiatives, public awareness programmes, records management systems, legal and technical services, and the establishment of a fully resourced Secretariat capable of supporting the Commission's long-term operational requirements.
- 4.10 The Committee recommends that the EC and the FEO continue strengthening election preparedness through voter registration drives, polling venue assessments, accessibility initiatives, voter education campaigns and stakeholder engagement activities. Emphasis should be placed on strengthening public trust, transparency and confidence in the electoral process ahead of the 2026/2027 General Election.
- 4.11 The Committee acknowledges that changes in leadership and personnel may affect institutional knowledge, it considers that such circumstances should not diminish an entity's accountability to Parliament. The Committee recommends that agencies and statutory bodies to maintain adequate records and institutional continuity mechanisms to ensure that representatives appearing before parliamentary committees can effectively account for the

organisation's performance and activities during the reporting period. This will assist the Committee in carrying out its oversight role efficiently and ensure that parliamentary proceedings are conducted in a manner that respects the time and resources of both Parliament and submitting entities.

5.0 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)

5.1 SDG 5 – Gender Equality

The Committee notes the EC's advocacy for the inclusion of Temporary Special Measures (TSMs) within Fiji's electoral and governance framework as a means of addressing the persistent underrepresentation of women in political leadership. During the reporting period, the Commission made submissions supporting the incorporation of TSMs into the Local Government (Amendment) Bill 2023, highlighting Fiji's obligations under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the constitutional commitment to gender equality. The Commission emphasised that TSMs are internationally recognised mechanisms designed to accelerate substantive equality and increase women's participation in decision-making processes.

The Committee further notes the Commission's concern regarding the continued low representation of women in elected office. Following the 2022 General Election, women occupied only six of the fifty-five seats in Parliament, representing 10.9 percent of Members, a decline from 16 percent in 2014 and 19.6 percent in 2018. The Committee commends the Commission's efforts to promote greater gender inclusivity in political participation.

5.2 SDG 10 – Reduced Inequalities

The Committee observes that the Electoral Commission's mandate to register voters, conduct voter education and ensure equal access to electoral processes contributes directly to reducing inequalities in democratic participation. The Commission's focus on ensuring that overseas Fijians, persons with disabilities, women and other underrepresented groups can participate effectively in elections demonstrates a commitment to inclusive governance. The Commission's review of electoral laws and consideration of alternative voting mechanisms for citizens residing abroad further support efforts to reduce barriers to participation and strengthen equal access to democratic rights.

5.3 SDG 16 – Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions

The Committee finds that SDG 16 is the goal most directly advanced by the Electoral Commission's work. The Commission is constitutionally mandated to promote free, fair and credible elections, settle electoral disputes, monitor compliance with electoral laws and strengthen public confidence in democratic institutions. During the reporting period, the Commission continued its review of key electoral legislation, considered appeals and complaints, and undertook oversight of electoral administration despite governance and operational challenges. These functions support transparent, accountable and effective institutions and contribute to maintaining public trust in Fiji's democratic system.

5.4 **SDG 17 – Partnerships for the Goals**

The Committee notes that the Electoral Commission has strengthened partnerships with a range of national and international stakeholders, including the Fiji Law Reform Commission, Ministry of Justice, Attorney-General's Office, political parties, civil society organisations and international electoral bodies. The Commission's participation in regional electoral workshops, election observation activities and collaborative electoral reform processes demonstrates the importance of partnerships in strengthening electoral governance and institutional capacity. Such collaboration supports knowledge sharing, capacity building and the adoption of international best practices in electoral administration.

6.0 Conclusion

The Committee notes that the EC plays a fundamental role in safeguarding Fiji's democratic governance through its oversight of electoral processes, voter participation and compliance with electoral laws. Despite experiencing significant governance and operational challenges during the 2023 and 2024 reporting periods, including leadership vacancies, funding constraints, staffing shortages and disruptions to institutional records, the Commission continued to undertake its constitutional responsibilities and advance key initiatives aimed at strengthening Fiji's electoral framework. The Committee acknowledges the Commission's efforts in promoting inclusive participation, improving accessibility for persons with disabilities, and preparing for future electoral events.

The Committee is encouraged by the Commission's commitment to addressing identified weaknesses and strengthening the integrity, transparency and effectiveness of electoral administration. The recommendations contained in this Report are intended to support institutional continuity, enhance accountability, improve public confidence and ensure that the Electoral Commission is adequately equipped to fulfil its constitutional mandate. As Fiji prepares for the 2026/2027 General Election, the Committee emphasises the importance of timely reforms, sustainable resourcing, strong governance arrangements and inclusive electoral participation to ensure the continued conduct of free, fair and credible elections that reflect the democratic aspirations of Fiji.

7.0 Committee Members' Signatures



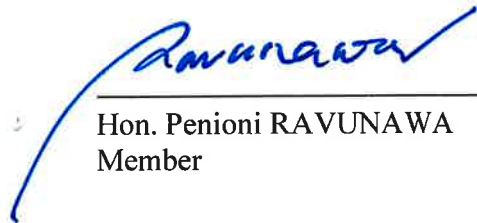
Hon. Lenora QEREQERETABUA
Chairperson



Hon. Rinesh SHARMA
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Hon. Ratu Isikeli TUIWAILEVU
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Hon. Penioni RAVUNAWA
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Hon. Virendra LAL
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Hon. Taito ROKOMATU
Member

8.0 Annexure

Published evidence

Written evidence, transcripts, and supporting documents can be viewed on the Parliament website at the following link:

<https://www.parliament.gov.fj/committees/standing-committee-on-foreign-affairs-and-defence/>