

PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI



PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DAILY HANSARD

WEDNESDAY, 19TH AUGUST, 2026

[CORRECTED COPY]

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WEDNESDAY, 19TH AUGUST, 2026

The Parliament met at 9.33 a.m. pursuant to adjournment.

DEPUTY SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

PRESENT

All Members were present, except the honourable Prime Minister and Minister for Minister for Civil Service and Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics; the honourable Minister for Public Works, Meteorological Services and Transport; the honourable Minister for Defence and Veteran Affairs; the honourable Assistant Minister for Assistant Minister for Commerce and Business Development; the honourable Assistant Minister for Youth and Sports; the honourable Professor B.C. Prasad; honourable P.K. Bala; honourable S.S. Kirpal; and honourable H. Chand.

MINUTES

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Madam Deputy Speaker, Sir, I move:

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Tuesday, 18th August, 2026, as previously circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed.

HON. S. TUBUNA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, Sir, I beg to second the motion.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE SPEAKER

Welcome

I welcome all honourable Members to today's sitting and those of you who are watching us live on your phone or your TV and those in the public gallery, I welcome you to your Parliament.

Request for Extension – Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights

Honourable Members, I want to point out a few things this morning. There has been a request for extension from the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights. For the information of honourable Members, the Business Committee has approved the request from the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights, to report back to Parliament on the Fiji Police Bill 2026, at a later sitting of Parliament.

The Standing Committee has informed the Business Committee that it needed to undertake a further comprehensive and inclusive assessment of the Bill. I thank you for your understanding, honourable Members.

WOWS Kids Fiji

Honourable Members, you will all know about WOWS Kids Fiji. It is a charitable organisation that has been supporting children with cancer and their families across Fiji and the

Pacific since 2009. Inspired by the vision of the late Tae Kami, the organisation provides vital assistance including transport, medication support, counselling, nutritional assistance, educational support, palliative care and family services to children undergoing cancer treatment.

Honourable Members will have the opportunity to learn more about the important work being undertaken by WOWS Kids Fiji, the challenges faced by children and families affected by cancer, and the organisation's vision for establishing a permanent resource centre to further strengthen its support services. Therefore, I encourage all honourable Members to take the opportunity, during our morning tea break this morning, to engage with the WOWS Kids Fiji Team in the Big Committee Room and learn more about their commendable work.

PRESENTATION OF REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, there will be five Committee Reports for tabling today. The first four are Review Reports on Annual Reports and the fifth is a Review Report on a Bill.

Consolidated Review Report – Rakiraki Town Council January-July 2020 and 2021 Annual Reports

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, on behalf of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence, I am pleased to present this Consolidated Review Report on the Rakiraki Town Council January to July 2020 and 2021 Annual Reports, referred to the Committee by the honourable Speaker pursuant to Standing Order 38(2).

While the Rakiraki Town Council falls outside the Committee's substantive mandate, the referral reflects Parliament's commitment to ensuring a timely examination of Annual Reports and strengthening accountability across all public institutions.

Throughout the review, the Committee remained guided by its responsibility to scrutinise the Council's performance, access the effective use of public resources and identify opportunities to improve governance and service delivery.

The Committee acknowledges that the reporting period, there were a lot of unprecedented challenges. The impacts of COVID-19 pandemic, successive tropical cyclones and increasing climate-related risks placed considerable pressure on the Council's financial resources and infrastructure, as well as operational capacity.

Despite these constraints, the Committee found that the Council continued to discharge its statutory responsibilities, maintained sound financial management and governance practices, and delivered essential municipal services to the people of Rakiraki.

The Committee particularly commends the Council's efforts in maintaining public health services, strengthening environmental management, supporting local economic activity through the Rakiraki Market and investing in initiatives that enhance community resilience.

At the same time, the Committee identified several longstanding issues that require stronger strategic attention. Delays in progressing key development initiatives, including flood mitigation efforts and infrastructure, boundary extension, waste management improvements and other capital projects continue to constrain the Municipality's long-term social and economic development.

The Committee considers that addressing these challenges will require stronger coordination

between the Rakiraki Town Council, the Ministry of Local Government and other relevant Government agencies, together with sustainable investment and more efficient project implementation mechanisms.

The Committee further acknowledges that the Annual Reports under review relate to the 2020 and 2021 reporting periods and some of the operational arrangements, administrative processes, policies and initiatives examined may have since changed, been strengthened or be in the process of improvement. This time lapse limits the extent to which the Committee can make recommendations on matters that already may have been addressed or are currently being implemented.

Accordingly, the Committee's recommendations should also be considered in the context of the Council's current operating environment and are intended, where relevant, to reinforce ongoing improvements and address matters that remain outstanding.

The recommendations contained in this Report are, therefore, intended to support practical and achievable improvements that will strengthen institutional effectiveness, climate resilience, infrastructure planning and service delivery and financial sustainability.

On behalf of the Committee, I extend our sincere appreciation to the Rakiraki Town Council and the Ministry for Local Government, who participated in the Committee's review through written submissions, public hearings and the provision of additional information.

I also acknowledge the dedication of the Committee Members in their deliberations and contribution towards the compilation of this bipartisan Report.

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

(Report handed to Secretary-General)

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 121(5), I hereby move:

A motion, without notice, that a debate on the content of the Report is initiated at a future sitting.

HON. T.R. MATASAWALEVU.- I beg second the motion, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

Consolidated Review Report–Food Processors (Fiji) Pte Limited 2008-2019 Annual Reports

HON. K.V. RAVU.- Madam Deputy Speaker, in accordance with the mandate conferred under Standing Orders 109(c) and 110(1)(c) of the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji, the Standing Committee on Natural Resources presents its Consolidated Review Report on the Annual Reports of Food Processors (Fiji) Pte Limited for the period 2008 to 2019.

The Committee was referred the Annual Reports of Food Processes (Fiji) Pte Limited for the period 2008 to 2019 on 13th March, 2026 for consideration, examination, and reporting thereon to Parliament.

The Committee undertook a comprehensive examination of the operations, financial performance, governance arrangements, and strategic direction of the company over the period under review. Food Processes (Fiji) Pte Limited, as a Government Commercial Company, plays a significant role in the value-adding of Fiji's agricultural and marine resources, contributing to rural livelihoods, supporting local producers, enhancing export earnings, and strengthening national food security. During the period under review, the Committee noted with commendation FPFL's investment in Batiri Farm processing facility as a key operational achievement.

The Committee commends the commitment and dedication of the employees who continue to sustain production operations through labour-intensive processes while maintaining product quality standards.

The Committee noted during the period under review, the company undertook initiatives aimed at improving operational efficiency, expanding product diversification, and strengthening market access.

The Committee also noted challenges relating to supply chain reliability, infrastructure constraints, financial sustainability and market competitiveness, which were addressed through various management and strategic interventions.

The Committee acknowledges the Board of Directors, Management and Staff of Food Processers (Fiji) Pte Limited for their stewardship, commitment and continued efforts in the discharge of the company's mandate during the period under review.

The Committee further records its appreciation to the Members of the Standing Committee on Natural Resources, namely, honourable Inosi Kurudrani - Deputy Chairperson; honourable Shalen Kumar, honourable Taito Rokomatu, honourable Vijay Nath and honourable Joseph Nand, for their deliberation and oversight.

On behalf of the Standing Committee on Natural Resources, I commend this Report to Parliament for its consideration.

(Report handed to Secretary-General)

HON. K.V. RAVU.- Madam Deputy Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 121(5), I hereby move:

A motion, without notice, that a debate on the content of the Report is initiated at a future meeting.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

Review Report – Fiji Revenue and Customs Service 2024-2025 Annual Report

HON. S. TUBUNA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, on behalf of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs, I am pleased to present the Committee's review of the Annual Report of the Fiji

Revenue and Customs Service (FRCS) for the financial year 2024-2025.

Madam Deputy Speaker, this review reflects the Committee's assessment of FRCS's performance, governance and service delivery based on its examination of the Annual Report, written submissions, oral evidence and consultations undertaken during the inquiry.

The Committee recognises the important role of FRCS as the Government's principal revenue collection and border management agency. Throughout the administration of Fiji's tax and customs systems, FRCS plays a critical role in financing public services, supporting economic activity, facilitating trade and protecting Fiji's borders. Effective revenue collection and administration is, therefore, essential to Fiji's fiscal sustainability and economic resilience.

The Committee noted the strong revenue performance recorded during the 2024-2025 financial year. Madam Deputy Speaker, VAT was the largest contributor to FRCS revenue, generating approximately \$1.54 billion, or 44 percent of total collection. This was followed by income tax at \$1 billion - 28 percent; customs tax at \$592 million - 17 percent, PAYE at \$239 million - 6 percent, and departure tax at \$123 million - 3 percent.

The Committee also notes the improvement in FRCS's financial position. Madam Deputy Speaker, FRCS reported a net surplus of approximately \$6.38 million, compared with a deficit of approximately \$598,000 in the previous year. While this is a positive development, the Committee considered it important to examine the factors contributing to this improvement, including Government grants, other revenue sources and expenditure patterns, to ensure that the financial position remains sustainable and transparent.

The Committee welcomes FRCS's efforts to modernise its operations and improve service delivery. Digital payment platforms, taxpayer outreach, stakeholder engagement, strengthened customs cooperation and investment in border detection as technology demonstrate progress towards a more efficient and accessible revenue administration system.

The Committee also examined customer service, including contact centre operations, abandoned calls, taxpayer accessibility and outreach programmes. While improvements have been made, there remains a need to ensure that taxpayers receive timely, efficient and accessible services.

The Committee also identified several matters requiring further attention, in particular, the level of outstanding Government tax arrears, which stood at approximately \$495.4 million, and Government refund liabilities of approximately \$639.9 million. These figures raise important questions about debt recovery, the timely payment of legitimate refunds and the overall management of outstanding liabilities. Effective management of these matters is important not only for Government's cash flow but also for maintaining public confidence in the tax system.

The Committee was particularly concerned about the \$184.6 million in penalty waivers and write-offs reported for the financial year. While FRCS has legislative authority to waive or write off penalties in appropriate circumstances, the Committee considers that such decisions must be underpinned by clear policies to guide tax waiver and write-off in an objective manner, with proper oversight and adequate transparency. Taxpayers must have confidence that these powers are exercised fairly and consistently.

The Committee also considered issues relating to tax crime, anti-money laundering, transfer pricing, repatriation of export earnings and inter-agency cooperation. Members noted the areas where revenue and enforcement data require further clarification and reconciliation with broader financial crime indications. Given the increasing international focus on illicit financial flows, tax evasion and

organised financial crime, Fiji must continue to be strengthened.

Border protection and enforcement were also important areas of the Committee's review. The Committee acknowledges the positive results achieved through cooperation between FRCS, domestic agencies and international partners. However, continued vigilance is required to address illicit trade, customs fraud, drug trafficking and other forms of revenue leakage. Strong coordination between FRCS and the Fiji Financial Intelligence Unit remains essential to protecting Fiji's economic and national security interests.

The Committee also encourages FRCS to strengthen the quality and transparency of its Annual Reports. Future reports should include clear performance indicators, measurable outcomes and detailed analysis of the effectiveness of key programmes and enforcement activities.

The Committee further expects FRCS to use the revenue targets approved through the Budget Estimates presented to Parliament as its performance benchmark. The Committee noted discrepancies between the revenue figures reported by FRCS and the corresponding Budget Estimates, which should be clearly explained and reconciled. Improved reporting will enable Parliament and the public to more effectively assess FRCS's performance and efficiency in the collection and management of public revenue.

I acknowledge the valuable contribution of my fellow Committee Members, namely, honourable Premila Kumar, honourable Semi Koroilavesau, honourable Alipate Tuicolo and honourable Kalaveti Ravu. Additionally, I extend my appreciation to the Alternate Members of the Committee, namely, honourable Jovesa Vocea, honourable Naisa Tuinaceva and honourable Rinesh Sharma.

On behalf of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs, I commend this Review Report to Parliament and respectfully urge all honourable Members of this august House to take note of its findings and recommendations.

(Report handed to Secretary-General)

HON. S. TUBUNA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 121(5), I hereby move:

A motion, without notice, that a debate on the content of the Report is initiated at a future sitting.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

Review Report – Fiji Financial Intelligence Unit 2024 Annual Report

HON. S. TUBUNA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, on behalf of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs, I am pleased to present this Review Report of the Fiji Financial Intelligence Unit 2024 Annual Report. This Report reflects the Committee's assessment of the Council's performance, governance, accountability and service delivery based on the review of the Annual Report, written submissions and oral evidence undertaken during the inquiry.

The Committee acknowledges the critical role of the Fiji Financial Intelligence Unit (FFIU) in protecting the integrity of Fiji's financial system from money laundering, terrorism financing,

organised crime and other serious financial offences.

Since its establishment under the Financial Transactions Reporting Act 2004, the FFIU has served as Fiji's central financial intelligence agency, undertaking both intelligence and regulatory functions that contribute significantly to national security, financial stability and public confidence in the financial system.

The Committee notes that during 2024, FFIU continued to operate within an increasingly complex and evolving financial crime environment. Notwithstanding its relatively modest staffing complement of nine permanent officers and two seconded officers, the Unit managed a database of more than 37 million transaction reports, processed over 6.1 million financial transactions, analysed 304 Suspicious Transaction Reports, and disseminated 237 intelligence products to enforcement agencies. The Committee further notes that authorised officers from enforcement agencies extracted 1,334 financial data reports directly from the FFIU database to support the ongoing investigations and intelligence activities.

Throughout its scrutiny, the Committee examined the effectiveness of intelligence products generated and disseminated by FFIU. While the Committee acknowledges that the Unit's statutory role is limited to the collection, analysis and dissemination of financial intelligence, concerns were raised by the Fiji Police Force regarding the quality of intelligence report submitted to them for investigations. The Fiji Police Force informed the Committee that due to poor quality of intelligence reports, they have to spend more time and resources in conducting investigations. Currently, most of these investigations are in the preliminary stages.

The Committee is concerned that this is happening, despite FFIU stating in the report that they produce a high number of intelligence reports, which is not resulting in the reduction of tax crimes, scams and money laundering. They also highlighted the delay in receiving additional information from FFIU and the absence of a central focal point within the Fiji Police Force to provide outcomes resulting from intelligence referrals. The Committee noted a lack of coordination between FFIU and its three clients - Fiji Police Force, FICAC and FRCS. This resulted in the organisation not pursuing these matters further, to ensure that prosecutions are effectively undertaken.

Madam Deputy Speaker, FFIU informed the Committee that officers seconded by FRCS and the Fiji Police Force are used as general intelligence analysis officers rather than being a conduit between FFIU and their respective enforcement agencies. These seconded officers could be effectively utilised by vetting and preparing intelligence reports to meet their respective organisation's requirements.

The Committee noted that although 237 intelligence reports were disseminated during 2024, there was no systematic feedback regarding the number of investigations commenced, prosecutions initiated, convictions secured, or assets recovered as a direct result of those intelligence reports.

A key finding arising from the review is the need for greater emphasis on performance measurement and reporting. The Committee observed that while the Annual Report comprehensively outlines activities undertaken during the year, it provides limited information on measurable targets, key performance indicators and outcomes.

The Committee considers the inclusion of annual targets and performance benchmarks essential to enabling Parliament and the public to properly assess organisational effectiveness, efficiency, and value for money.

The Committee was particularly concerned by the evolving financial crime landscape outlined in the Annual Report. Evidence presented to the Committee showed that scams accounted for 38 percent of disseminated intelligence cases during 2024, while tax-related offences represent approximately 86 percent of total transaction value associated with disseminated cases.

The Committee recognises that these findings reflect emerging risks within Fiji's financial system and underscores the importance of coordinated responses involving the FFIU, FRCS, Fiji Police Force, Fiji Independent Commission Against Corruption, the Reserve Bank of Fiji, and other relevant stakeholders.

The Committee further acknowledges the wider social and economic consequences of financial crimes, particularly, the links to organised crimes, illicit narcotics, fraud, corruption, and the concealment of proceeds of crimes through legitimate business structures. The Committee, therefore, supports ongoing efforts by the FFIU and partners to strengthen intelligence capabilities, regulatory supervision, inter-agency collaboration, and public sector accountability.

The Committee commends the FFIU for a number of significant achievements during the reporting period. These included the continued implementation of technology-driven intelligence systems, the introduction and operationalisation of the Taipan analytical platform with assistance from AUSTRAC, strengthened information sharing, arrangements with domestic and international partners, direct database access for 86 authorised officers from partner agencies and the advancement of Fiji's national risk assessment process in preparation for the 2026 Asia-Pacific Group Mutual Evaluation.

The Committee further recognises the Unit's efforts in promoting compliance amongst financial institutions through risk-based supervision, policy advisories, stakeholder training and targeted regulatory engagement.

I acknowledge the valuable contribution of my fellow Committee Members, namely, honourable Premila Kumar, honourable Semi Koroilevasau, honourable Alipate Tuicolo and honourable Kalaveti Ravu. Additionally, I extend my appreciation to the Alternate Members, namely, honourable Jovesa Vocea, honourable Naisa Tuinaceva and honourable Rinesh Sharma.

On behalf of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs, I commend this Review Report to Parliament and respectively urge all honourable Members of this august House to take note of its findings and recommendations.

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. S. TUBUNA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 121(5), I hereby move:

A motion, without notice, that a debate on the content of the Report is initiated at a future sitting.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- At this juncture, honourable Members, I would like to ask you to warmly join me in warmly welcoming the students, teachers, and parents from Korovou Primary

School. I hope that you will learn more about the workings of Parliament today. Welcome to your Parliament.

Review Report on the Statistics Bill 2026

HON. RATU R.S.S. VAKALALABURE.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I am pleased to present the Report of the Standing Committee on Justice, Law, and Human Rights on the Statistics Bill 2026 (Bill No. 11 of 2026).

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Bill was referred to the Committee for scrutiny in accordance with the Standing Orders of Parliament to examine its provisions and report back to Parliament with its findings and recommendations.

Madam Deputy Speaker, for more than 60 years, the Statistics Act 1961 has provided the legislative foundation for the production of official statistics in Fiji. While the Act has served the nation well, the demands placed on a statistical system have evolved considerably. Advances in technology, increasing data needs, and the importance of evidence-based policymaking have highlighted the need for a modern legislative framework that is aligned with international standards and best practices.

The Fiji Bureau of Statistics has continued to fulfill its vital role under the Statistics Act 1961 and the Census Act 1964. However, the existing legislation no longer adequately supports the production of timely, high-quality and independent official statistics required by Government and businesses. Limitations in the current law have restricted the Bureau's ability to access administrative records and effectively coordinate data sharing across Government agencies.

Madam Deputy Speaker, this Bill strengthens the institutional governance and operational framework of the Fiji Bureau of Statistics and promotes a whole-of-government approach to data management and data sharing. By facilitating the responsible use of administrative data, the Bill will reduce duplication of effort, minimise survey fatigue among respondents, making surveys shorter, easier, and less repetitive so people are willing to complete them and provide accurate answers. It will also improve efficiency and ensure better use of public resources. Most importantly, it will enhance the availability of reliable and relevant statistics to support national planning, policy development and informed decision-making.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Committee further considered the Bill's contribution to Fiji's commitments under the SDGs, in particular SDG 17, by improving cooperation and data sharing across Government agencies. The Committee also noted that the Bill would support SDG 5 on gender equality by helping to produce better data on women and men, which can be used to make informed decisions and develop policies that promote equal opportunities for all.

The Committee carefully deliberated on all submissions and concerns raised throughout the consultation process. After thorough consideration, the Committee is satisfied that the objectives of the Bill are fulfilled and that the concerns raised have been adequately addressed.

While the Committee has recommended several minor amendments to improve clarity and drafting consistency, it is of the view that the Bill provides an appropriate legislative framework for the establishment and operation of the Fiji Bureau of Statistics.

I would like to thank the honourable Members of the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights for their deliberations and input.

Madam Deputy Speaker, on behalf of the Standing Committee, I hereby commend the Statistics Bill 2026 (Bill No.11 of 2026) to Parliament and seek the support of all the Members of this august House.

(Report handed to Secretary-General)

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, pursuant to the resolution of Parliament on Wednesday, 27th May, 2026, the Standing Committee has now tabled its Report, and the Bill will be debated and voted upon by Parliament on Thursday, 20th August 2026.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the following honourable Ministers have given notice to make Ministerial Statements under Standing Order 40, the:

- (1) Minister for Justice;
- (2) Minister for Women, Children and Social Protection;
- (3) Minister for Fisheries and Forestry; and
- (4) Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Sugar Industry.

The honourable Ministers may speak to up to 20 minutes. After the Minister, I will then invite the honourable Leader of the Opposition or his designate to speak on the Statement for no more than five minutes. There will be no other debate.

Building a Modern and Responsive Legal Framework

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, the honourable Prime Minister, honourable Deputy Prime Ministers, honourable Ministers and the honourable Leader of the Opposition; good morning to all who are present in this august House this morning and to those members of the community listening in.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the topic that I will be speaking on is the achievements of Fiji Law Reform Commission since its re-establishment in 2023 and the current projects. A country cannot build a modern future with laws that belong to another era. That is the fundamental principle behind law reform.

Law reform is not simply about changing legislation for the sake of change - it is about asking more important questions. Are our laws still serving the people, the institutions and society they were created to serve?

Where they work, we preserve and strengthen them. Where they no longer work, we improve them. Where gaps exist, we close them. Where laws have become outdated, we have a responsibility to bring them into the present. We have just heard from the Chairpersons of the various Committees from yesterday, today, and we will be hearing them in the next two days, of what the Coalition Government is committed to do, which is to change the outdated laws of our nation.

In this context, I rise today to provide this House with an update of the important work undertaken by the Fiji Law Reform Commission (FLRC) since its re-establishment in 2023. At present, the Fiji Law Reform has seven ongoing law reform references and these include the:

- (1) Review of the Fiji Civil Court Rules;
- (2) High Court Rules 1998; Magistrates Court Rules 1945;

- (3) Mining Act 1965;
- (4) Quarries Act 1939;
- (5) Online Safety Act 2018;
- (6) Security Industry Act 2010; and
- (7) Fiji Human Trafficking Laws.

The Commission is also undertaking a review of the agriculture-related legislation, beginning with six pieces of legislation dating as far back as 1877, which include the:

- (1) Pounds Act 1877;
- (2) Brands Act 1928;
- (3) Trespass of Animals Act 1955;
- (4) Goat (Ear Marks) Act 1955;
- (5) Protection of Animals Act; and
- (6) Dogs Act 1968.

The Commission is reviewing the Liquor Act 2006 and the Legal Regulation of 2008.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the age of some of these laws should cause us to pause and reflect. A law written in 1877 was created for a Fiji that bears little resemblance to the Fiji we know today.

Our population and country have changed. Technology has transformed how we live and work. Our institutions have evolved and our understanding of rights and responsibilities has developed. So, the question is not simply whether an old law remains on our statute books - the question is whether that law remains fit for purpose. That is the question at the heart of Fiji Law Reform Commission's work.

These reviews are not undertaken in isolation from behind a desk. The Fiji Law Reform Commission is working directly with Ministries, Departments and institutions responsible for administering these laws everyday. They include the:

- (1) Judiciary;
- (2) Department of Mineral Resources in the Ministry of Lands and Mineral Resources;
- (3) Online Safety Commission;
- (4) Ministry of Defence;
- (5) Ministry of Agriculture, Waterways and Sugar Industry;
- (6) Ministry of Immigration; and
- (7) Office of the Solicitors General Office, amongst others.

This collaboration is critical since those who administer our laws, enforce them and work with them every day are often best placed to tell us where the law is no longer working as intended, where it creates unnecessary difficulties, where gaps exist and where reform is required. Good law reform must begin with an honest assessment of what is happening on the ground.

Madam Deputy Speaker, since its re-establishment in 2023, the FLRC has not simply undertaken reviews and produced reports. If I may go back for a little bit, the FLRC, as I had highlighted its function, was defunded. It existed by name but there was no budgetary provision provided by the FijiFirst Government. *E mate*, it went dead. This Coalition Government revived it so that it can do this important work of law reform.

Its work has moved beyond the pages of reports and into legislation and tangible reform. One significant piece of work was the development of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Act

2024, undertaken through the Office of the Prime Minister with the support of the then Assistant Ministers - honourable Sashi Kiran and honourable Sakiusa Tubuna.

That was followed by the Education Bill 2025 which was passed on 25th May, 2026. In the same week, Parliament passed three important pieces of immigration and citizenship legislation - the Immigration (Amendment) Act 2026, Passport (Amendment) Act 2026 and Citizenship of Fiji (Amendment) Act 2026.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the passage of legislation is not the end of the law reform. A law must be implemented, understood and where necessary, the supporting legal framework must be put in place.

The FLRC, therefore, continues to support the Ministry of Immigration, together with the International Organization for Migration, in developing the accompanying regulations. This work is expected to return to Cabinet at the end of August this year.

Another significant area of work has been the review of Fiji's electoral laws. Following its review of the Electoral Act 2018, the Political Parties Act 2013, the Electoral (Registration Voters) Act 2012, the FLRC, on 8th July, 2025, handed over its electoral law reform package. This included the final report, namely, the Electoral Law Review 2025: An Electoral System for the People, from the people, together with a Cabinet Paper and draft legislation.

What is important, Madam Deputy Speaker, is when FLRC is involved in this task, it participates with the people, not only in community halls or town halls, in businesses or in villages, the Committee, on the other hand, will attest to this. Never before had this Committee visited isolated villages to hear their voice on what should be the law for Fiji. The packages included the:

- (1) Political Parties Bill 2025;
- (2) Electoral Bill 2025;
- (3) Constituency Transition Regulations 2025;
- (4) Electoral Regulations 2025; and
- (5) Electoral Rules and Regulations 2025.

Madam Deputy Speaker, electoral laws are not ordinary laws. They provide rules through which our democracy functions. They determine how citizens participate, how political parties operate, and how representation is structured. It is, therefore, essential that our electoral laws remain clear, modern, credible, and capable of supporting a fair and effective electoral system. In the next few days, this side of the House is going to bring changes to those laws.

I now turn to another area of reform that is fundamental to Fiji. On 9th June, 2026, the Fiji Law Reform handed over the State Lands Bill 2026 and the Land Use Bill 2026 to the honourable Minister for Lands and Mineral Resources and the Solicitor-General.

Cabinet, subsequently, endorsed the State Lands Bill 2026, which seeks to modernise the State Lands Act 1945. The Bill proposed stronger protection against unlawful occupation activities on State land. It also introduced environment buffer zones. It provides for greater benefits to customary fishing rights owners from foreshore development within their customary fishing zones. These are significant reforms because land is not simply a legal or administrative matter - land is connected to who we are, how we live, how we develop our economy, how we protect our environment, and how we secure the livelihood of present and future generations.

I wish to respond to honourable Usamate about the changes that this Government has done.

Those changes benefitted the iTaukei. He said yesterday, did it benefit? Of course it did! We will continue to do so from this side of the House.

Madam Deputy Speaker, in terms of recognition of iTaukei, the very fact that this House can permit to speak iTaukei language - that was prohibited in the previous Government. That is close to our heart. They do it in New Zealand, they do it everywhere else. Why can we not do it here? I am going to demonstrate this so that people know, and also for those small parties who say, “change these laws”. We are changing the colonial laws.

Sa caka tiko ‘go. Au duavata tiko kei noqu Tau, o honourable Bulitavu, “E sega ni mai caka eke na vakavuka kaita.” Na cakacaka e caka tiko eke. E veisautaki tiko na lawa e Viti, era cakacaka tiko na vei Ministry.

[This is what is currently being done. I agree with my colleague, honourable Bulitavu, “We are not here to waste time or fool around.” The work is being carried out here. Fiji’s laws are being amended, and the various Ministries are working on them.]

Log into Parliament website and check what laws have been changed.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the review of the Land Use Act 2010’s final report dated 2026 contains the proposed Land Use and Development Bill and Land Use and Development Regulation 2026. It comes in a package - the Act and the Regulation. Previously, you enact a law, then you wait for two or three years to do the regulations. We have changed that. We are thankful for the system and process that we have. Both were approved by the Cabinet Subcommittee on Legislation on 7th July this year and are progressing into the next stages for consideration.

While we must recognise that it has already been achieved, the Fiji Law Reform Commission’s work is far from complete. There are several significant reforms currently at various stages of development, and first the Online Safety Act 2018. The review has recently completed its final validation workshop, allowing stakeholders to provide feedback on the interim final report and draft Bill. The review has been led by part-time Commissioners, Mr. Solovalu and Ms. Valerie Narayan. Its objective is very clear - to strengthen Fiji’s legal framework to better address cyber harm and challenges created by the increase in digital society. The final package is now being prepared for handover to my Office this month.

Second is the Mining Act 1965 and Quarry Act 1989. This review has involved Dr. Apete Soro, Mining Technical Advisor with the Fijian Programme Support Platform, supported by the Australian Government through DFAT; the Fiji Law Reform Commission Part-time Commissioner, Ms. Sovatabua Colavanua; and Ms. Una Rawaikela, Acting Assistant Director of Mineral Development. The Mining Bill 2020 is currently being consolidated.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I wish to highlight one thing that I have noted, which is the increase in the usage of our local resources. We are not hiring people from outside Fiji. We are using people who have gone through the system, who have technical know-how, and are best suited to do these reviews. I give credit to the previous Government and to the current Government, for continuing to invest in our children.

Kivei kemuni na gone ni vakarorogo tiko, e ka bibi ni o ni tiko e daidai, mo ni kila ni na dua na gauna, o ni na rawa ni vakaitavi talega ena kena veisautaki na lawa. Na nomuni lako mai nikua e dolava e dua na katuba vei kemuni. Levu vei keimami na tiko oqo, keimami sega ni vakabauta ni keimami na tiko eke, ia, na veituberi mai vale, mai na Matanitu kei na Lotu ena rawa kina moni vakaitavi.

[To you young people who are listening, it is important that you are here today, so that you understand that one day you too may have the opportunity to participate in changing the laws. Your coming here today opens a door of opportunity for you. Many of us who are here today never imagined that we would be here, but the guidance and support we received from home, the Government, and the Church have made it possible for us to participate.]

There is another principle that must guide law reform - good laws cannot be developed in isolation from the people who live under them. Consultation is, therefore, not a formality - it is a fundamental part of responsible lawmaking. The people affected by legislation must have an opportunity to understand it, question it, and contribute to its development. That is why several FLRC's current reviews are now moving through public consultation.

During August and September 2026, consultations are being undertaken on the Security Industry Act 2010, the Liquor Act 2006 and Liquor Regulations 2008, as well as the High Court Rules 1988 and Magistrates Court Rules 1945.

The review of the Court Rules is being undertaken by the Civil Review Committee, chaired by retired Supreme Court Justice, honourable Justice Alipate Qetaki, and is expected to be completed by the end of November this year.

The Commission is also entering into a public consultation stage for the review of the Fiji Human Trafficking Laws. At the same time, consultation is commencing on the review of the agriculture-related legislation, with support from the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), through the Ministry of Agriculture, Waterways and Sugar Industry.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the breadth of this programme tells us something important - law reform is not about looking backwards, it is about preparing our country to move forward. Since its re-establishment in 2023, the Fiji Law Reform Commission has worked across governance, elections, education, immigration, citizenship, land, mining, online safety, the security industry, liquor regulation, human trafficking, agriculture, and the administration of justice. Perhaps, more importantly, it has demonstrated that law reform is a process of listening, a process of questioning, evaluating and improving. It is about asking whether the law still reflects the realities of the people it serves because the Fiji of 2026 is not the Fiji of 1877, it is not the Fiji of 1928, nor of 1955, and it will not be the Fiji of 2050.

Our responsibility, therefore, is not simply to preserve laws because they have existed for generations. Our responsibility is to ensure that the laws we leave behind are worthy of the generations that will inherit them. That means preserving what works. It means correcting what does not, it means closing gaps where they exist, it means listening to the people, and it means having the courage to reform laws when the realities of our society demand it. A modern Fiji requires a legal framework capable of keeping pace with a changing Fiji.

That is the purpose of law reform, and that is the work the Fiji Law Reform Commission continues to undertake to build a stronger, more responsive and more effective legal framework for Fiji today, while laying the foundations for the Fiji we want to leave to our future generations.

Before I take my seat, Madam Deputy Speaker, I would like to commend the Fiji Law Reform Commission - from its Director, Ms. Tuivaga, through to very members of her staff, together with the Commissioners and technical advisors who have contributed to this important work.

The Government remains committed to strengthening and expanding the capacity and operation of the Fiji Law Reform Commission, and to ensuring that Fiji laws are modern, effective,

accessible, and responsive to the needs of our people.

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- I now call upon the designate of the Leader of the Opposition, honourable Koya, to reply.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, let me, first of all, thank the honourable Minister for his very arousing Statement this morning. Let me also make it clear to him that right from the outset, the Opposition does not disagree with the need for law reform, we understand that. Every law, regardless of when it was enacted, must, at some stage, be reviewed to determine whether it continues to serve the needs of the society.

We accept that Fiji simply cannot retain laws because they existed for generations. Some are still actually good but reforming a law and reforming a law properly are two very different things. Let me ask him a question, Madam Deputy Speaker. Honourable Acting Attorney-General, before any reform took place, did you or your Ministry conduct a gap analysis or an audit with respect to the laws in Fiji? We have not had an answer! We have not had an answer!

He has not said a word with respect to that particular gap analysis. Did we also think about digital integration? Nothing in his speech came with respect to that.

Did we also say that there is going to be a review of the framework of how we are actually doing this? No! I say this also because, Madam Deputy Speaker, when you start reviewing laws and doing reforms, you have to look at some considerable amount of things - constitutional stability is one, and probably the most; clear rules with respect to government and government's power and human rights and due process. And I just recall when he said this morning on the participation with the people, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Let me just remind him of a couple of Bills that have come to the House that have clearly not had the participation of the people. The Tourism Bill was never thoroughly discussed with the people, the Crimes Decree was never thoroughly discussed with the people, Madam Deputy Speaker. The Criminal Records Bill 2025, we went out as a committee and when we spoke to the people, they said they were not consulted.

Madam Deputy Speaker, they stand here and harp about consultation, consultation, consultation. Yet they do not do it thoroughly. Let me also remind him, right at the outset, he came here said, "We have done the consultation with respect to the change in the Liquor Act."

Guess what, Madam Deputy Speaker? The Liquor Act reduced the nightclub hours from 5.00 a.m. to 1.00 a.m. The justification was public safety, including concerns about brawls and robberies. Yes, we understand that but let me remind him that the concerns were legitimate. The problem was the approach taken to the reform. There was significant concern, Madam Deputy Speaker, about the economic consequences of you actually shutting down small businesses.

You shut down small businesses. There were businesses that were still recovering from COVID-19, but you shut them down, honourable Acting Attorney-General. What happens afterwards? Government eventually reversed the course at this particular hour.

He even said when he was asked by me, where did you do the consultation? "We did the consultation in Levuka somewhere with respect to that". They have no nightclubs there, Madam Deputy Speaker. There was no nightclub there, but he admitted it. It is in the *Daily Hansard*.

The experience should teach the Acting Attorney-General and this Government an important

lesson - the purpose of consultation is to identify these consequences before we amend the law. We have no problem in amending the law, but you must look at its purpose properly.

Madam Deputy Speaker, when you look at it worldwide, institutional trust in institutions is under pressure, and not just in Fiji. He will not mention that! If you look at the OECD reports, it states that trust in institutions all around the world is actually waning. This actual pressure, we should sit up and take notice. Every single Fijian should sit up and take notice regarding this.

The pressure also affects the rule of law, and we can see that now, Madam Deputy Speaker, on a daily basis. He has not done the right consultation exercise that he says he should have. His very own Prime Minister called him 'slow in getting it done'. He has not even got the Bill that requires it to be done.

The referendum one is still in his Office, and the whole of Fiji is still waiting, Madam Deputy Speaker, the level of work that has come out of there, and I commend him for that, he is trying to do it, but he just does not have the machinery. He will not admit that he cannot do it.

Madam Deputy Speaker, a responsive rule of law underpins economic growth, it underpins business confidence, it underpins innovation, and it greatly enhances SMEs. Ask the Minister behind you what he needs. He needs a positive SME environment. You have a big job on your hand, honourable Acting Attorney-General. You have had three and a half years, and guess what? The last words that I will say are very slow.

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Thank you, honourable Koya, for your reply to the Minister's Ministerial Statement. That brought us just on to 10.30, honourable Members. I would like, therefore, to adjourn for morning tea.

I just want to remind you, please, to take some time to listen to the presentation from WOWS Kids Fiji happening in the Big Committee Room. I have also been informed that the honourable Minister for Justice has only one Ministerial Statement. When we come back at 11.00 a.m., the next Ministerial Statement will be from the honourable Minister for Women, Children and Social Protection.

The Parliament adjourned at 10.30 a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 11.06 a.m.

Rehabilitation Facilities and Bebbu Parenting App

HON. S. KIRAN.- Madam Deputy Speaker, the honourable Prime Minister, the honourable Leader of the Opposition, honourable Ministers and Assistant Ministers, honourable Members of Parliament, and dear Fiji; Fiji has been facing an unprecedented social and public health crisis. The surge in alcohol and substance abuse among our children is driving an alarming rise in mental health challenges, domestic violence, self-harm and violent crime.

Because of Fiji's geographic position as a transit point for international trafficking networks, highly addictive substances, particularly methamphetamine, have become alarmingly accessible to our children.

Police records trace the influx of hard drugs back to before 2009. The trajectory continues to accelerate. In 2020, Fiji recorded 1,501 illicit substance cases, including 100 cases involving methamphetamine and four involving cocaine. This is in 2020, Madam Deputy Speaker. In recent years, we have witnessed a number of significant drug seizures. The data paints a sobering picture.

While our national strategy and joint taskforces are working tirelessly to disrupt supply chain, decades of exposure have left many families vulnerable. Most concerning of all, children as young as 10 years to 14 years of age, are now becoming trapped in the cycle of addiction. These figures are not merely statistics - they reflect a profound national challenge that demands coordinated, compassionate and evidence-based intervention.

Historically, the absence of an integrated adolescent-focused recovery programme left critical gaps in our response. We have witnessed rising youth mortality, an increase in crime, growing public health risks, including HIV transmission through shared needles, and ineffective treatment outcomes due to a shortage of specialist child psychologists and psychiatrists.

Today, Madam Deputy Speaker, we are actively changing this narrative. In partnership with Empower Pacific, we have established Fiji's first dedicated residential recovery facility for adolescent boys aged 14 years to 17 years. Named, "Na Sala Vou", a new pathway for our boys, this sanctuary in Lautoka provides a safe and structured environment where young men can heal, learn and rebuild their lives.

This represents a monumental milestone, Madam Deputy Speaker, and a powerful statement of our belief that every child deserves a second chance, that recovery is possible, and that healing is our collective responsibility.

Furthermore, we are establishing a specialised rehabilitation facility for street-connected children in Suva. We currently support a transitional facility through the Kauwai Restoration Youth Centre, operated by the Salvation Army, which provides temporary care and support for vulnerable children identified living on the streets.

Through our partnership with the Salvation Army, a dedicated day-service Drug Recovery Centre has been established in Suva, while individuals and families seeking support can access Salvation Army services throughout the country.

Madam Deputy Speaker, institutional intervention is only one part of the solution. The ultimate safety net begins at home. Data collected from street-connected youth highlights a heartbreaking reality. Family breakdown and emotional disconnection remain among the primary

drivers of displacement. When children do not feel safe, valued or loved at home, they become increasingly vulnerable to exploitation by criminal and drug networks.

As a nation, we must ask ourselves some difficult questions:

- Why are our children falling into these traps?
- Are we having the right conversations with them?
- Do our children know they are loved, valued and supported?

When a child does not feel loved under their own roof, predatory individuals are waiting to offer a false sense of belonging. People often ask, what are we doing to remove children from the streets? The real question is, why are they on the streets in the first place?

In my personal interactions with these children, a deeply troubling pattern emerges. Many speak of family breakdown, parental abandonment, violence, neglect and profound emotional disconnection. We have worked with families and supported reunification efforts only to see some children return to the streets weeks later. When asked why, they tell us that the streets are where they feel accepted and cared for.

It is a tragedy that a child can feel safer and more loved on our streets, while exposed to violence, exploitation, HIV, drugs and the other elements than within our own homes.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we must reverse this reality. We must strengthen the traditional protective pillars of Fijian society. Child protection must become a regular topic of conversation within our homes and communities. Active, emotionally present and nurturing parenting is essential in building the resilience and strength of character that children need to resist substance abuse and exploitation.

We must revive our traditional support systems. In the Fijian way of life, the family, community and *vanua* are our protective pillars. When these pillars weaken, our children fall through the cracks.

I am deeply grateful to quite a few Provinces, community leaders and local care communities that are mobilising to support vulnerable young children on our streets and within our correctional facilities.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we acknowledge that parenting today is increasingly complex. Families are navigating economic hardships, changing family structures, social pressure, and overwhelming volume of conflicting information. At the same time, access to trusted parenting guidance remains uneven. Supporting caregivers with positive nurturing and non-violent parenting strategies is central to our Ministry's mandate.

Through a whole-of-Government approach and in partnership with United Nations Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) Pacific, we have launched *Bebbo Pacific*, Fiji's first free digital parenting application. Supporting Fiji's National Early Childhood Development Policy, the app provides practical guidance from pregnancy through to a child's 6th birthday. This can be downloaded by parents and guardians, caregivers and grandparents through *Google Play Store*, and once downloaded, the app can run offline, that is, without internet connection as well.

With more than 1,300 downloads within its first six weeks, the initial response has been highly encouraging. To ensure broader accessibility, *iTaukei* and Fiji-Hindi versions are currently being finalised.

Children do not experience health, education or protection at separate silos, and neither should our response. Developed in collaboration with the Ministry of Health and Medical Services, the Ministry of Education, the Fiji Police Force and online safety stakeholders, Bebo Pacific is a localised tool, designed to ensure that no parent has to navigate the journey of raising their child alone.

Madam Deputy Speaker, when we build strong foundations of love, values and open communication at home, our children will possess confidence and resilience to resist harmful influences. They will not need drug dealers or criminal networks to tell them that they matter and belong.

Too many of our children are fighting battles they should never have to face. Too many are being pulled into the darkness and losing their childhood from as young as eight years old. Madam Deputy Speaker, these are our children who should be playing on our field, singing in school choirs, laughing with friends and dreaming about the bright futures they deserve, not enduring trauma, addiction and despair.

Today, help is available. Families can call on the 24-hour toll-free Helpline 5626, to seek support and assistance. Recovery is most successful when families are part of the journey though. I, therefore, urge parents and caregivers throughout Fiji to make children their highest priority. Active and loving parenting remains one of the most powerful protective shields in a child's life.

Madam Deputy Speaker, this means, knowing where our children are at all times as well as what they are watching on our gadgets. During the Bebo App awareness, grandparents showed us games their grandchildren had downloaded on their phones. They did not realise that some of these apps depict violence and not age-appropriate that could cause harmful behaviour early in life.

Madam Deputy Speaker, our long-term national objective is to build a compassionate inclusive society that replaces stigma with support, punishment with rehabilitation, and despair with hope. This commitment is not only a national priority but also aligns directly with Fiji's obligation under the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). By protecting children from substance abuse, violence, neglect and exploitation, we advance our SDGs.

The wellbeing of our children is fundamental to Fiji's sustainable development. A child struggling with addiction, homelessness, violence or trauma, cannot fully participate in education, achieve their potential, or contribute meaningfully to the society. Investing in prevention, early intervention, family strengthening, mental health services and recovery programmes is, therefore, not only a social responsibility, but an investment in Fiji's future human capital and national prosperity.

The Government, civil society, faith-based organisations, communities, development partners and families must work as one to safeguard the children of Fiji. Achieving the SDGs cannot be accomplished unless our children are safe, healthy, educated, and given every opportunity to thrive. Their success is a measure of our nation's success, and their protection must remain at the centre of our development agenda.

Madam Deputy Speaker, our children are our greatest treasure. May we protect them fiercely, may we guide them wisely, may we love them unconditionally.

I thank you for this time, Madam Deputy Speaker, and pray that God may bless our children.

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- I now call on the Leader of the Opposition, or his designate, to speak

in reply.

HON. V. LAL.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I take this opportunity to thank the honourable Minister for her Statement delivered this morning.

The issues raised by the honourable Minister concerning alcohol and substance abuse amongst our children and young people deserve the serious attention of every Member of this House. When children are becoming involved with drugs and alcohol, and when this is accompanied by mental health problems, violence, crime, and the breakdown of families, we are no longer dealing simply with an individual problem. We are dealing with a serious social problem that can have consequences for an entire generation.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Opposition, therefore, welcomes any genuine effort to provide rehabilitation and recovery services for our young people. The establishment of *Na Sala Vou* as a residential recovery facility for adolescent boys, together with the involvement of Empower Pacific, and the transitional work being undertaken with the Kauwai Youth Restoration Centre is a positive development. Young people who have already fallen into substance abuse need somewhere safe to go. They need professional assistance and, most importantly, they need a genuine opportunity to rebuild their lives.

Madam Deputy Speaker, however, rehabilitation must only be one part of our response. Government must also ask the more difficult question; why are so many of our young people reaching the point where rehabilitation is required in the first place?

Madam Deputy Speaker, if we concentrate our resources on treating young people after they have become addicted, while failing to address the circumstances that expose them to drugs and alcohol, then we will continue dealing with the consequences rather than the causes. Government must have a much stronger prevention strategy that reaches our schools, homes, settlements, villages and communities before a child becomes another rehabilitation case.

The honourable Minister has already correctly identified the importance of parenting and the breakdown of families. This is an area where we need much more than statements and programmes launched from Suva. There are parents struggling with the cost of living, unemployment, domestic problems and enormous pressures within their households. There are children growing up without adequate supervision, and young people who are increasingly exposed to drugs, alcohol, and harmful influences through their peers and through social media.

Madam Deputy Speaker, this means, our response cannot begin when a young person enters a rehabilitation facility - it must begin much earlier, with stronger families, better counselling services, effective school-based intervention and greater cooperation between teachers, parents, health professionals, religious organisations, community leaders and law enforcement agencies.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the honourable Minister has also referred to the Bebbio Pacific Parenting Application (App). Technology can certainly provide parents with useful information and guidance, and we should make use of every practical tool available to support families. However, we must recognise the limitations as well.

An application on a mobile phone cannot replace an involved parent, a counsellor, a social worker or a functioning family support system. We, therefore, need to know how Government intends to ensure that this initiative reaches the families who need assistance the most. Many vulnerable families may not know about the application. They may have limited access to reliable internet services or may simply require direct human assistance rather than information delivered

through a screen. The success of this initiative should, therefore, be measured not by the number of launches, downloads or announcements, but by whether it actually approves parenting practices and outcomes for children.

There is also an important question of accessibility to rehabilitation services. Fiji is not only Suva. Young people facing substance abuse problems live throughout our country, including the rural and maritime communities. Government must explain how a family in the Western Division, the Northern Division and the Maritime Islands will access appropriate rehabilitation and counselling services when their child desperately needs help. The Opposition would, therefore, like to see a clear national approach with measurable outcomes.

The Parliament and the public must all be told how many young people are being referred for rehabilitation? How many are completing programmes? What follow-up support is being provided when they return to their families and communities? And whether these young people are successfully remaining away from drugs and alcohol.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the honourable Minister has called for a whole-of-society response, and on this point, we agree. Families, communities, faith-based organisations, civil society and Government all have responsibilities, but a whole-of-society response does not reduce Government's responsibility.

Government must provide the leadership, resources, professional services and coordination necessary to make that response effective. The Opposition will support initiatives that genuinely help our young people. At the same time, we will continue to ask whether these initiatives are reaching the children who need them, whether sufficient resources are being provided, and whether we are seeing measurable improvements in their lives because, Madam Deputy Speaker, the measure of success will not be on how many programmes we announce or applications we launch, it will be whether fewer Fijian children become trapped in substance abuse, whether more families receive help before reaching a breaking point, and whether young people who enter rehabilitation are able to return to their communities with a genuine opportunity for a better future.

Sustaining Fiji's Blue Economy Through Scientific Management, Robust
Counter-IUU Action and Industry Partnership

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Madam Deputy Speaker, the honourable Prime Minister, honourable Cabinet Ministers and Assistant Ministers, the honourable Leader of the Opposition, honourable Members of Parliament, ladies and gentlemen in the gallery; *ni sa yadra vinaka*.

Madam Deputy Speaker, before I make my statement, I would like to pay tribute to my former boss and former Principal Fisheries Officer for the Offshore Fisheries Division, Mr. Anare Kataula Rewalui. For those of us who worked under his leadership, he was strict, but very hardworking, and time was very precious to him. He dedicated his career to the development and betterment of fisheries in Fiji.

He was instrumental in the drafting of the Offshore Fisheries Management Act of 2012 and its subsequent regulations of 2014. Madam Deputy Speaker, one of the lessons I learned from him and has stayed with me throughout, is that he would often remind us that, government does not pay you to have teatime at 10.30 or 11.30 in the morning. He would often say if you wanted to have tea, make your tea and have it at your workstation while you work.

He served the Ministry for 37 years until he retired in 2015 and went on to work as the Executive Secretary for the Fiji Fishing Industry Association until he passed away last Saturday morning. Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise today to present a crucial update on the state of our nation's offshore fisheries,

specifically focusing on the progress Fiji has made in maintaining exceptionally high standards of control, management and protection over our shared resources. Our tuna fisheries are not merely an economic sector, they are an integral component of Fiji's cultural heritage, national identity and food security.

As stewards of a vast exclusive economic zone spanning over 1.2 million square kilometers, this administration has shifted decisively toward a proactive, rigorous approach to ocean governance. Madam Deputy Speaker, Fiji's robust management measures do not exist in a vacuum. They are codified in law and anchored firmly in science. This means that as the responsible stewards, we do not guess the health of our oceans, we carefully and systematically measure it. Our sovereign control is legally empowered by the Offshore Fisheries Management Act of 2012 and its accompanying offshore management regulations of 2014. This legislative framework establishes the strict perimeters under which our waters are fished.

Madam Deputy Speaker, in recognizing these data-driven limits, Fiji has robustly been utilising these legal mechanisms and the rigorous science-based decisions to guide the exact levels of exploitation permitted within Fiji waters. Additionally, central to the work that we do and recognizing the need to meet mandatory regional requirements, the use of scientific data directly informs catch and effort limits aligned with the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission.

Madam Deputy Speaker, underpinning intergenerational equity, our use of the scientific discipline signifies Fiji's unwavering commitment to enjoying our resources today while ensuring they remain healthy, resilient, and abundant for future generations.

Madam Deputy Speaker, recognising science and on the other hand, while Fiji enforces strict internal legislative policies, management measures, and absolute protections, our borders and the entire region face a persistent external threat from illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing.

To provide needed therapy for this august House, Madam Deputy Speaker, and the public, IUU fishing is defined through three distinct components. Illegal fishing, this is when this is conducted by national or foreign vessels within Fiji's waters without permission or in violation of its maritime laws and regulations. Unreported fishing, catch that is never reported or is misreported to the relevant national fisheries authorities directly contravening mandatory reporting requirements. Unregulated fishing conducted by vessels without nationality or flying the flag of a country not party to the regional management organisation, operating in a manner inconsistent with species conservation.

Madam Deputy Speaker, if left unchecked, IUU fishing undermines decades of conservation work, sabotages the domestic economy, and steals the sovereign wealth of the Fijian people. To address the threats of IUU, we have not approached it with complacency, but with modern technology and heavy state investment. In aggressively countering IUU operations, the Ministry of Fisheries has deployed a multi-layered enforcement, compliance and surveillance metrics.

- (1) State-of-the-art operations - we have operationalised the Fisheries Surveillance and Operations Centre in collaboration with the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency.
- (2) Satellite tracking imagery - we now utilise cutting-edge satellite imagery to track real-time vessel movements, providing total visibility over blind spots in our EEZ.
- (3) Robust vessel monitoring system - mandatory tracking hardware ensures continuous automated precision reporting for every licenced vessel under our regulations.
- (4) Strict border control protocol - we enforce rigid entry and exit notification requirements alongside mandatory exhaustive reporting regimes.
- (5) 100 percent port call inspections - Fiji maintains a strict zero tolerance policy – 100 percent foreign fishing vessels making port calls undergo thorough manual physical inspections.

- (6) Risk assessment metrics - we employ an advanced, data-driven risk assessment approach to thoroughly vet all incoming vessel movements and historical arrival records before granting entry.
- (7) Physical patrols - these digital initiatives are backed by active surface and area patrols conducted in tandem with our naval and regional defence partners.

Madam Deputy Speaker, migratory fish stocks do not respect geopolitical boundaries, meaning our defence against IUU fishing must extend beyond our own EEZ and onto the high seas. Fiji is deeply committed to regional solidarity and actively participates in targeted sub-regional operations led by the Forum Fisheries Agency. These include Operation Tui Moana, Operation Island Chief and Operation Kurukuru. The strategic objectives of these operations are clear, to:

- (1) build an impenetrable intelligence network;
- (2) conduct aggressive boarding and inspection exercise; and
- (3) eliminate blind spots where rogue vessels hide.

The outcomes speak for themselves. Through the synchronised regional sweeps, Madam Deputy Speaker, we have successfully intercepted non-compliant vessels, detected hidden transshipments, and gathered invaluable maritime data. To complement these efforts on the high seas, Fiji actively participates in Operation Navigation Assistance Service (NAS), targeting illicit monitoring gaps in adjacent international waters.

Furthermore, through active Shiprider agreements, Fijian enforcement officers are legally empowered to board and inspect vessels on the high seas, utilising partner nations' assets, closing jurisdictional loopholes that poachers exploit. These operations would be impossible without the bravery, professionalism, and readiness of the Republic of Fiji Military Forces Naval Division. I want to explicitly acknowledge and commend the critical role played by the Fiji Navy and its dedicated fleet.

Our Guardian-class patrol boats, *RFNS Savenaca* and *RFNS Timo*, alongside our hydrographic vessel *RFNS Volasiga*, serve as our frontline shields at sea. These capital assets, backed by specialised naval boarding teams, provide Fiji with the long-range endurance and tactical intercept capabilities required to secure our vast blue frontier, execute hazardous boardings, and project sovereign authority across our entire EEZ.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we do not stand alone in this fight. This House must recognise and commend the invaluable commitment and support rendered to Fiji and our broader regional neighbours by the quad partners Australia, India, Japan, and the United States and international asset providers. These partners continue to equip Fiji with vital tactical advantages, providing much-needed surface vessels, aerial reconnaissance flights and sophisticated satellite surveillance tech. The opportunity to be part of these massive operations has fundamentally transformed our domestic capability. It has improved Fiji's ability to continue to combat illegal unreported unregulated fishing (IUU) and has built Fiji's capacity at all echelons, sharpening our skills in operational planning, intelligence analysis and tactical execution at all levels of our maritime law enforcement operations.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the deterrence effect of our maritime surveillance is only as strong as our ability to secure convictions on land. Fiji has significantly strengthened its commitment to go to thorough investigation and rigorous prosecution of complex fisheries cases. This House must recognise and applaud the immense support rendered by the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions. Their expertise has been instrumental in training our specialised fisheries prosecutors. This institutional collaboration has built critical capacity, enabling our courts to grow highly comfortable, knowledgeable and adapt to educating intricate maritime laws and fisheries-related

offences.

Much of this legal success is attributed to addressing our foundational capacity development needs, transforming how we conduct mandatory investigations. By ensuring our evidence gathering meets the highest legal standards from day one, we are turning maritime apprehensions into successful, legally binding prosecutions.

Madam Deputy Speaker, effective enforcement relies on more than just policing at sea. It requires deep cooperation on land, and I want to highly commend the Fiji Fishing Industry Association and our local offshore fishing industry for their exemplary cooperation over the years. Enforcement is most powerful when it transitions into self-regulation.

Over the last decade, the Minister of Fisheries has worked side by side with the Fiji Tuna Boats Association to transition our domestic fleet toward a culture of voluntary compliance. Through joint workshops, transparent policy dialogues and the adoption of global best practices, our local industry has embraced strict catch documentation, digital logbooks and sustainable harvesting standards. This progressive partnership ensures that Fiji's domestic operators are not just complying with law because they are being watched, but because they genuinely share our vision of protecting the long-term biological and economic health of our tuna stocks.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the crowning achievement of this state and industry partnership is our recognition on the global stage through the Marine Stewardship Council certification. Our longline tuna industry has successfully secured and maintained the gold standard prestigious ecolabel, which is globally recognised as the gold standard for sustainable wild caught seafood. The certification under market premium; this certification verifies to international consumers that Fiji's albacore and yellowfin tuna are harvested using sustainable, traceable methods that minimise environmental impact and protect non-target marine life. By achieving this ecolabel of economic resilience, our local industry has elevated Fiji tuna into a premium market bracket overseas. This ensures that our conservation efforts, directly translate into higher economic returns, long-term market access and secure livelihoods for our people without needing to overexploit our waters.

Madam Deputy Speaker, as the Minister responsible for this vital asset, I assure this House that Fiji will continue to lead from the front. Through the powerful combination of strict legislative acts, cutting-edge science, progressive industry partnerships, globally certified sustainability standards, robust international alliances and uncompromising enforcement tools, we are actively securing our waters. We will ensure that our blue economy continues to thrive as an engine of domestic prosperity, preserving the ocean's inheritance for the children of Fiji.

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- I now call on the designate of the Leader of the Opposition to speak in reply.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I want to thank honourable Minister for Fisheries and Forestry on her Ministerial statement this morning which covers sustaining Fiji's blue economy through scientific management, robust counter-IUU action and industry partnership. In that statement the honourable Minister has highlighted the state of nations, offshore fisheries, and standard of control management and protection over our shared tuna resources.

Madam Deputy Speaker, when I saw the subject, I actually thought that she will cover the Blue Economy. It is only after she made her delivery this morning that I realised that she was concentrating on the management of the offshore fisheries. I thank her for the detailed explanation on the various subjects that she covered this morning. Fiji's blue economy was and is still based on tuna. I wanted to encourage and ask the honourable Minister about our commitment to our

international community on the 30 by 30.

For the benefit of our honourable Members, Fiji had made an international commitment that 30 percent of our ocean will be protected under the MPA by 2030. I encourage the honourable Minister to work with the Ministry of Environment, because I understand that this is a huge challenge with only three years to go. I know by 2019, we only had achieved 12 percent. I encourage her to make sure that our commitment to our international community is achieved by 2030. This is a great challenge for the Ministry of Fisheries, but there are certain elements that is available to the honourable Minister to be able to achieve that.

I thank the honourable Minister for explaining the various, especially the scientific management of our tuna resources. She highlighted the robust management activities that are already in place, both electronic and physical monitoring. I know that we have a good coordination locally between the agencies and international partners, as she mentioned such as Australia, New Zealand, France, with the provision of assets to assist us in monitoring.

The honourable Minister also addressed IUU fishing. I also wish to add that illegal and unreported fishing also is within our own licensed fisheries. Some of our licensed fishing vessels that go out to sea and carry out illegal activities that are not in the provision of the licence that has been issued to them.

The honourable Minister then explained the industry partnership. I think this is very important. I thank the honourable Minister that she touched on this. I also join her in the condolence for Raiwalui, who was the Secretary for the Fishing Association when I joined the Ministry of Fisheries in 2015. I first met Raiwalui at Lelean Memorial School. He was normally called Watusi, because he was quite a tall boy that played in our senior rugby team during those years.

With that, Madam Deputy Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity this morning.

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- I also join the honourable Minister and honourable Koroilavesau in sending our condolences to the Raiwalui family.

Fiji's Blue Economy and Green Community Development Programme

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise to inform this honourable House of a significant milestone in Fiji's journey towards sustainable development, climate resilient and inclusive economic growth. On 24 July 2026, the honourable Prime Minister officially launched the Fiji's Blue Economy and Green Community Development Programme (BE-GREEN) in Koronatoga Village in Cakaudrove.

This landmark initiative reflects the Coalition Government's unwavering commitment to safeguarding Fiji's natural resources while creating sustainable economic opportunities for our rural communities. Madam Deputy Speaker, the BE-GREEN programme represents more than just another development initiative. It is a strategic investment into the future of Vanua Levu and Fiji, and a demonstration of our commitment to balancing economic development with environmental stewardship.

It recognises that the priority of all people is intrinsically linked to the health of our land, forests, rivers, and oceans. The programme has been designed to strengthen the productive capacity of Vanua Levu agriculture and marine sector through sustainable resource management, biodiversity enhancing practices, and climate smart approaches development. It will complement existing government programmes and those of our development partners, ensuring that investments are

coordinated, impactful, and responsive to the needs of our communities.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the primary objective of the programme is to boost rural income, restore ecosystem, and strengthen resilience against impact of climate change and environmental degradation. At the same time, it seeks to build stronger farming systems, healthier fishing grounds, improve access to market, expanded opportunities for rural enterprises, and greater participation of women and the young people in economic development. One of the key strengths of the BE-GREEN programme is its holistic and integrated approach.

It recognises that sustainable development cannot be achieved in isolation. The programme therefore brings together integrated island planning, sustainable agriculture and fisheries production, ecosystem restoration, improved market access, financial inclusion, and stronger policies and institutions to create lasting and meaningful change.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I wish to acknowledge and sincerely thank our valuable development partners, the International Fund for Agriculture Development (IFAD), and the Global Environment Facility (GEF), for their confidence in Fiji and their generous investment in our rural communities.

Through the support of IFAD and GEF, this programme will focus on six districts within the Cakaudrove province, namely the Eastern Wailevu, Savusavu, Navatu, Koroalau, Vatuova and Naweni. The investment is not only a financial commitment, but also a vote of confidence in the resilience, determination, and potential of the people of Vanua Levu. Approximately 3,050 subsistence and semi-commercial farms, households, fishing households, and handicraft-producing households will directly benefit from this programme.

Particular emphasis will be placed on supporting women, youth, and indigenous communities, recognising their vital role with drivers of sustainable development and inclusive economic growth. Madam Deputy Speaker, this investment comes at an important time, and Fiji continues to address the challenges of climate change, environmental degradation, food security and rural economic development.

The support provided through the programme will empower communities with new knowledge, improved technologies, better market opportunities, a stronger partnership that will enable them to build more resilient and prosperous livelihoods. To the people of the six participating districts of east Wailevu, Savusavu, Navatu, Koroalau, Vatuova, and Naweni, I wish to convey this important message.

This programme belongs to you. Its success will ultimately depend on your commitment, your leadership, your work together to protect your natural resources while embracing sustainable farming fisheries and business practices. The opportunities before you are significant.

Through this programme, you have the opportunity to strengthen your farms, restore your forest and coastal ecosystem, improve your fishing grounds, expand access to market, create new agribusinesses, generate higher household income, and secure a more sustainable future for your children and future generations. I encourage every community, every farmer, every fisher, every local leader, to actively participate in this programme, take ownership of its activities, and work collaboratively with government agencies and our development partners to achieve each objective.

If you work together, the benefits of this programme will extend well beyond the six districts. It will strengthen food security, improve environmental sustainability, contribute to national economic growth, and demonstrate how integrated community development can successfully transform rural livelihood across Fiji. Madam Deputy Speaker, the BE-GREEN Programme embodies the Government's

vision to a resilient, prosperous, and environmentally sustainable Fiji.

It demonstrates that economic development and environmental conservation are not competing priorities, but complementary goals that must advance together. As we continue to build a strong agriculture sector and a sustainable blue economy, partnerships such as this will remain essential in creating lasting opportunities for our people and ensuring that no community is left behind.

In closing, Madam Deputy Speaker, I once again extend my sincere appreciation to the International Fund for Agriculture Development and the Global Environment Facility for their partnership and continued support, and I also congratulate the people of East Wailevu, Savusavu, Navatu, Koroalau, Vaturova, and Naweni on this important opportunity.

I wish everyone, your communities, every success as you embark on the implementation of the BE-GREEN Programme. May your collective efforts strengthen your livelihood, restore and protect your ecosystems, empower your women and young people, and achieve ambitious goal and objectives of this programme for the benefits of present and future generations. Together we can build a stronger community, healthier ecosystem, and more resilient and prosperous Fiji.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and I thank the honourable Minister for his Ministerial Statement, but I will plead with the honourable Minister, add another district to the six that you have already identified, just further up from Koroalau. But the BE-GREEN Project, honourable Madam Deputy Speaker, supports three key principles already identified in Fiji's Blue Economy Framework, and I would like to link the two together.

One, is on sustainable development. All this is about sustainable development. Let us always be aware that despite the economic benefits, we need to look after our environment. Additional to that is the social well-being of not only the resource owners, but the beneficiaries as well of the project. Sustainable development, as already identified in most of our documents, including the Blue Economy Framework, that has already been launched, is important.

Two, is on integrated management. There are so many stakeholders involved in this. We had always talked about the development of policies and good implementation plans. As part of good implementation plans, we need to have a very strong monitoring, evaluation and feedback so that we can continue to move towards efficiency and improve, particularly the way we work in coordinating all the different arms that are involved so that we can achieve the aims of the project, as already identified by the honourable Minister.

The third principle is on inclusive participation. It is important. The honourable Minister has talked about the involvement of women and youths, because this is how we can address the rural urban drift phenomena. This is how we can create employment in the rural areas, and most importantly, empower them economically as well. The inclusive participation is so important.

I am aware of the Ridge to Rift project, Madam Deputy Speaker, that was implemented so many years ago, and I urge the two Ministries to continue to work together. I served in Vanua Levu and I know most of the issues in Vanua Levu, particularly when it comes to logging practices. We have the Fiji Code of Logging Practice, but the implementation and the monitoring, because this has resulted in a lot of impacts. I see the honourable Minister for Lands is listening very carefully, because he does not know much about Vanua Levu, but more about Vanuabalavu. It is the implications, and a lot of villages in Vanua Levu were affected because of logging within their immediate environment, and when it comes to the coral reefs as well.

I would urge the Government again on the initiatives on green economy. Let us look at the

issues like agro-photovoltaic projects, because that will not only improve our production, but at the same time minimise our energy use, and help us access new technologies that are available – the use of alternative fuels and green as opposed to small engines, particularly in the rural areas, and the use of organic fertilisers over synthetic fertilisers. These little things come and contribute towards the healthy environment and minimise costs as well for our people.

We have a very bad attitude when it comes to deforestation. We love to take down the trees. That is a challenge, Madam Deputy Speaker. If we can do agroforestry, good on us. If we can look at reforestation as well, a lot of natural Fiji species have been taken away – the logging history Vanua Levu over the years. However, what are we doing about replacing these indigenous species? Now, as we all know, in this House, there is an over-reliance on plantation – mahogany and pine.

It is not too late. Maybe we can revisit the policies. I support the BE-GREEN initiative, and wish all stakeholders all the very best in the implementation, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Launch of National Agriculture Show 2026

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise today to inform this august House and the people of Fiji of the launch of the National Agriculture Scheme 2026, which will be held from the 15th to 17th September, 2026 at Subrail Park in Labasa, under the theme “Green Growth, Golden Beans - Advancing agriculture through innovation, diversification, and value addition for the resilient and prosperous Fiji”. This year's National Agriculture Show is particularly significant because it brings our national celebration of agriculture to Vanua Levu and specifically through the Northern Division.

Madam Deputy Speaker, when I opened the National Agriculture Show in Nadi last year, I made a commitment that this year's Agriculture Show will be held in Labasa. Today, I am pleased to stand before this august House and say that this commitment has come to fruition. I am particularly proud to announce that the National Agriculture Show 2026 was successfully launched on the 13th August, 2026, marking an important milestone in our continued effort to advance and promote the agriculture sector.

This successful launch reflects the government's commitment to supporting our farmers, strengthening agriculture development, and creating greater opportunities for the growth and sustainability of the sector. This is more than just a change in venue. It is a deliberate recognition of the Northern Division's contribution to Fiji's agriculture economy and a clear demonstration that our national agriculture development agendas must reach every farming community, every processors, every agribusiness, and every young person who sees agriculture as a pathway to opportunity.

Madam Deputy Speaker, Vanua Levu has always played an important role in Fiji's agriculture story. From our farmers producing crops and livestock to those involved in fisheries-related activities, processing, transportation, marketing, and other agricultural services, the Northern Division is an essential part of our national food and economic system.

The National Agriculture Show provides us an opportunity to acknowledge that contribution, and it allows us to bring government services, agriculture knowledge, technologies, innovations, and business opportunities closer to the people of the North. That is why taking the Agriculture Show to Labasa is strategically important. It brings the conversation about the future of agriculture directly to the people who are producing, processing, selling, and adding values to their agriculture products.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the National Agriculture Show has several important objectives:

- (1) It is an opportunity to celebrate our farmers and recognise the essential contribution they make to our country.
- (2) It is a platform to showcase innovations, diversification, and the value addition across Fiji's agriculture sector.
- (3) It provides an opportunity for farmers to learn about modern technologies, improve farming practices, climate-smart agriculture, mechanisation, research, and innovation.
- (4) It creates opportunities for business networking and market linkages, bringing farmers closer to processors, buyers, financial institutions, service providers, and other actors along the agricultural chain.
- (5) It provides an important educational platform for our children and young people, allowing them to see agriculture not simply as traditional farming, but also as processing, research, marketing, and business;
- (6) The show allows us to demonstrate that agriculture can be both productive and profitable, innovative and sustainable, and traditional and modern.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the impact of the agriculture show will go beyond three days of activities at Subrail Park. It will provide an opportunity to stimulate economic activities within the Labasa and surrounding communities, and the farmers have the opportunity to display and promote their produce. Processors can showcase value-added products, agribusinesses can identify potential suppliers and customers, and students can interact with agricultural professionals and explore career opportunities available within the ministry.

Entrepreneurs can explore new ideas, and the government offices can engage directly with communities and respond to questions about programmes, services and opportunities. This is the kind of engagement we want, and we want agriculture to be connected to market technology, finance, research, processing, logistics, entrepreneurship and education. The farmers should not be viewed in isolation because they are part of the wider value chain and agriculture should be viewed as second to academic subjects. The success of our agriculture sector depends on strengthening every link in that chain.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the theme of Green Growth, Golden Gains appropriately reflects our to advance an agriculture sector that is economically viable, environmentally sustainable and resilient to climate change. In responding to increasing climate, pest diseases and soil-related pressure, we must:

- (1) strengthen innovation;
- (2) promote improved farming practices;
- (3) appropriate mechanisations;
- (4) modern technologies;
- (5) vision water management;
- (6) pest post-harvest system; and
- (7) value added processing and marketing.

Equally, diversification, especially with our sugarcane farmers, is essential to help them manage risk, response to evolving markets, and create new income opportunities. The Agriculture

Show provides a valuable platform for showcasing this innovation and keeping our farmers with practical solutions to build a more productive resilient and sustainable agriculture sector.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Agriculture Theme Park will be a key attraction of this year's show designed to provide visitors particularly young people, with an interactive and practical understanding of Fiji's modern agriculture sector by showcasing crops and livestock, modern technologies, innovative farming practices and value-added products, which will demonstrate the full agricultural value chain from production and processing to marketing and entrepreneurship, while highlighting the growing role of science, engineering, technology, finance and innovation. This hands-on experience will help inspire the next generation to recognise agriculture not merely as farming, however as a dynamic sector, offering diverse opportunities for education, employment, enterprise and economic growth.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I, therefore, take this opportunity to extend my warm invitation to the wider Vanua Levu communities to come to Subrail Park and be part of this important national event. I invite our farmers, farmers organisation, processors, agribusiness, entrepreneurs, development partners, private sector stakeholders, and community organisations to make full use of the opportunity available throughout the three days.

I especially encourage the primary and secondary school students to attend. Come and learn, come and ask questions, come and see what modern agriculture looks like and come and discover the opportunities that agriculture can offer you. I also extend an invitation to members of this honourable House to visit the show, engage with our exhibitors, meet our farmers and experience for the first time the innovation and the potential of future agriculture sector. This is not simply a ministry event, it is a national event, and it belongs to our farmers, our communities, our young people, our businesses, and Fiji as a whole.

Madam Deputy Speaker, to conclude, I return to the commitment I made to last year's National Agriculture Show in Nadi. I promise that this year's agriculture show will be held in Labasa and the show's presence in Labasa sends a clear. The contribution of the Northern Division matters, the contribution of our farmers matters, and the future of agriculture in Fiji matters. Let us therefore use this National Agriculture Show to celebrate what we have achieved, and to look forward to what is possible.

Once again, I warmly invite the people of Vanua Levu, our farmers, students, processors, agribusiness stakeholders, and our Members of Parliament to come to Subrail Park and make the most of the three days that we have, and most importantly, come and be part of shaping the future, future of Fijis Agriculture.

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- I now give the floor to the Leader of Opposition or his designate to speak in reply.

HON. H. CHAND.- Madam Deputy Speaker, first of all, I would like to thank the honourable Minister for his statement. It is very good to know that this year's Agriculture Show will be in Labasa. The National Agriculture Show is an important opportunity to recognize our farmers, showcase local produce, demonstrate new farming methods, and remind our people of the importance of agriculture to Fiji.

However, Madam Deputy Speaker, I believe we should take the concept of Agriculture Show one step further. Agriculture Shows should also be taken into our schools so that we begin developing an interest in farming amongst our children from an early age. Today, many of our children are growing up with very little practical exposure to agriculture.

They know that food comes from the supermarkets and municipal markets. But we need them to understand how that food is produced, the work that goes into farming, and the importance of agriculture to the food, security, and economy of our country. I would therefore urge the Ministry of Agriculture to work very closely with the Ministry of Education to introduce Agriculture Shows at school, district, and divisional levels.

Students could establish their own gardens, grow vegetables and root crops, and display their produce. Agriculture officers and local farmers could visit schools and demonstrate planting techniques, composting, irrigation, and other modern farming methods. Madam Deputy Speaker, the benefits would go well beyond simply teaching children how to plant.

School agriculture programs can teach responsibility, patience, and practical skills. They can educate children about healthy eating and the importance of fresh local produce. A child who learns how to grow vegetables at school can also take that knowledge home and encourage his or her family to establish a small backyard garden.

Madam Deputy Speaker, more importantly, we need to change the perception amongst some of our young people that farming is only about hard manual labor, or that agriculture is a career of last resort. Modern agriculture involves science, technology, machinery, climate-smart farming, hydroponics, food processing, and marketing. There are real careers and business opportunities available to young people throughout the agricultural sector.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we talk regularly in this House about food security, reducing our food import bill, and encouraging more young people into agriculture. If we are serious about achieving these things, then we must start developing that interest while our children are still in school.

QUESTIONS

Oral Questions

iTaukei Rehabilitation and Prevention Programmes (Question No. 139/2026)

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU asked the Government, upon notice:

Given that the *iTaukei* people comprise the majority of Fiji's prison population, can the honourable Minister for iTaukei Affairs inform Parliament on the programmes and initiatives the Ministry has implemented to reduce the number of *iTaukei* entering the correctional system?

HON. I. VASU.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I acknowledge the concerns. First of all, I thank the honourable Leader of the Opposition for this important question. The Ministry acknowledges with concern the disproportionate representation of *iTaukei* within the Fiji Corrections population. We recognise that there is no single cause. It is a complex issue involving social, educational, economic, families and community factors. Our approach is therefore preventative and holistic, strengthening the individuals, families, *vanua* and the communities while creating better pathways through education, employment and economic opportunities.

Madam Deputy Speaker, strong communities require strong leadership and functioning traditional institutions. The restoration of the Bose Levu Vakaturaga together with the strengthening of provincial, *tikina* and village structures, forms an important part of rebuilding accountability and community responsibility. Through the iTaukei Lands and Fisheries Commission, programmes such

community responsibility. Through the iTaukei Lands and Fisheries Commission, programmes such as *sausauvou*, *solesolevaki* continue to strengthen and present for the future traditional leadership.

The practical examples of community-level crime prevention crime is the *Solevaki ni Veitaqomaki* initiatives in Kadavu, involving the Kadavu Provincial Council, the Fiji Police Force, UNDP and other government agencies. Crime prevention and maritime security committees have been established across the nine *tikina* of Kadavu, bringing together the *vanua*, the police, and government agencies to strengthen the community policing, information sharing and crime prevention.

Madam Deputy Speaker, providing our youths with education, skills and employment pathways is equally important. The Centre for Appropriate Technology and Development at Nadave continues to provide technical and vocational training, with Government investing in increasing its capacity and developing a new campus in the Western Division. The iTLTB Education Scholarship also provides opportunity for *iTaukei* landowners to pursue professional and technical qualifications. These initiatives provide young people with skills, employment opportunity and productive pathways in life.

Madam Deputy Speaker, economic empowerment is another important part of strengthening families and communities. The iTaukei Affairs Board Commercial Unit assists religious groups and communities to move their products towards commercial markets. Sir, iTLTB initiatives such as iTaukei Wealth Fund and the iTaukei Development Fund facilities support landowners to develop their resources and participate more directly in economic activities.

The iTaukei Trust Fund Board also supports entrepreneurs while initiatives such as Vanua Finance and Marama Finance provide financial pathways for resource owners and businesses. The programmes collectively seek to create employment, strengthen household income and increase economic participation among our people.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we also recognise that many iTaukei now live outside their traditional village setting. The establishment of urban units within the iTaukei Affairs Board has strengthened outreach to the *iTaukei* living in urban and informal settlements. Work in communities such as the Jittu and Wailea includes community profiling, training and connecting families to Government services and development opportunities.

Madam Deputy Speaker, our responsibility also extends to those who have already entered the corrections system. A recent example in Bua, Community Action for the Rehabilitation of Ex-offenders (CARE) Network which brings together the Bua Provincial Council, Fiji Corrections Service, *vanua*, church, families and community leaders in support of prison visitations, reconciliations and the successful re-integration of former offenders into their families and communities.

Madam Deputy Speaker, when viewed collectively, this initiative demonstrates that our response is not confined to one crime prevention programme. We are strengthening leadership, governance, education skills, community opportunities, community resilience, crime prevention and rehabilitation. The Kadavu initiative demonstrates intervention before offending occurs while the Bua CARE Network strengthens support after incarceration.

Reducing the number of *iTaukei* entering the corrections system requires the whole of Government and community effort. The Ministry's role is to strengthen the institution's opportunities and support systems surrounding our people so that the problem can be addressed earlier, particularly for young people.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Honourable Minister, thank you for your brief detail on the question that was asked by the honourable Leader of the Opposition. One thing that seems to be quite visible is the breakdown in discipline within our villages, and this to me is one of the reasons that had led to our local iTaukei being taken into the hands of the law.

I see in the Western Division, I think the establishment of village bylaw, for example, Saunaka, the strictest of rules within the village are quite exemplary. If you walk into the village, the youth there just basically follow the traditional leadership and rules that has been governed in the village. My question is, can we introduce village bylaws or is that a dead issue?

HON. I. VASU.- Madam Deputy Speaker, the village guideline is still online. It will coincide with all the reviews that have been done within the iTaukei administrations, the iTaukei Land and Fisheries Commission, et cetera. The review has to go together. It cannot go by itself while the review is in process. That is the simple answer I can provide today, but we encourage the *vanua* base to continue to address the issue within their village, but we encourage the *vanua* base to continue to address the issue within their village.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Madam Deputy Speaker, my question is related to the young children roaming on the streets and harassing the public. It has been reported recently. Every effort has to be made by everyone to look after these children so that they are not only harassing the public, but they do not end up in prison. We have to reduce the number through early intervention.

Is there any programme whatsoever to ensure that these children who are roaming freely on the streets, they can be picked up and some conversation needs to take place with the parents or guardians? There has to be some level of discussion somewhere, other than not doing anything, because if you do not do anything, they will end up in prison. So, is there any intervention?

HON. I. VASU.- Madam Deputy Speaker, as I have already mentioned, this issue is a whole of government and whole of community issue. We have been working with the Ministry of Women, Children and Social Protection, the Ministry of Housing in regard to the issues regarding families who are here, especially in the urban centres. As I have already mentioned, our urban team is working closely with them. I call on the whole of government team to work together with the community. We are trying our very best.

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Honourable Premila Kumar, do you have a follow-up?

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- I appreciate the honourable Minister's response, and I can understand. It is a very, very difficult task, because we are relying on the government, we are relying on the public and we are relying on the community. But there has to be a single agency or entity, and maybe that is women and children who needs to take responsibility when it comes to loitering of children while the police and everyone else is trying to resolve it. If you do not do that, then again, the population number - criminals in jail will increase.

Is there any discussion with various other agencies, rather than using a very blanket sort of a line saying that, it is a whole-of-community and whole-of-government approach? Because when we think along that line, then no one takes responsibility.

HON. I. VASU.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I think from past experience, we had taken the children back to their families. We took them to the rehabilitation centre, but they still come back to the streets; we will continue. I think at a stage, we will find a solution. It is a national issue. We will work together to find a solution for our kids.

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I think it is a good time for us to break for lunch, and we will return at 2.30 p.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 12.29 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 2.41 p.m.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, before we proceed from where we left off at our lunch break this morning, I wish first to convey my gratitude to the honourable Deputy Speaker for presiding over this morning's session.

Honourable Members, please, join me in warmly welcoming the students and teachers of Adi Maopa Secondary School from Lomaloma, Vanuabalavu. *A malo bula, dou bula vinaka*. I hope that your visit today will provide you with an opportunity to learn more about the workings of your Parliament and the important role it plays in our democracy. Welcome to your Parliament and thank you for joining us today.

Update on the Hospital Bed Upgrade Programme
(Question No. 152/2026)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services update Parliament on the progress of the hospital bed upgrade programme?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, before I answer the question, I would just like to thank your goodself for endorsing honourable Vijay Nath and I to attend the 9th Asia-Pacific Forum on Global Health on behalf of the Parliament of Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise today to provide this august House with a vital update from the Ministry of Health and Medical Services ongoing commitment to upgrading our national health infrastructure, like core pillar of delivering quality health care is ensuring that our patients are treated in environments that have dignity, safety and modern clinical standards.

To this end, I am pleased to Report on the formal implementation of the comprehensive hospital bed programme, powered by a massive logistical rollout of 1,502 total units of vital medical furniture across the country.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, for too long, many of our health care facilities have operated with ageing infrastructure, including patient beds that have outlived their economic and clinical lifespans. Recognizing this urgent need, the Ministry successfully secured approvals in the last financial year for a major new tender specifically dedicated to the procurement of medical beds and equipment. This tender marks the commencement of a structured, multi-year initiative designed to replace obsolete beds across the absolute majority of health facilities in Fiji.

To ensure minimal disruption to clinical services and to manage logistics effectively, this national rollout is being executed in strategic phases. Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to inform this House that the tangible fruits of the B-Standard will materialize during the current financial year under Phase 1. We are on track to receiving approximately four hundred modern general hospital beds in this initial phase. These incoming units are being deployed immediately to target high-volume centres facing acute pressures. For example, in the Western Division, immediate relief is arriving with 84 beds for Nadi Hospital, 74 for Sigatoka Hospital, 43 for Rakiraki Hospital and 29 for Tavua Hospital.

In the North, Labasa Hospital is receiving specialized electric beds for its CCU and operating theatres. In the Central Division, our flagship hospital, Colonial War Memorial Hospital, is receiving dozens of new beds across critical wings, including Children's Ward, Labour Ward, Postnatal Ward, Birthing Unit and Intensive Care Units. Tamavua Twomey Hospital is also receiving 39 beds to

support its Dermatology and Tuberculosis Ward.

Looking at the medium-term horizon, this is a sustained investment across all four divisions. A total of 779 general hospital beds have been formally approved through the tender processes, specifically allocated to meet regional demands, 338 for the Central Division, 312 for the Western Division, 117 for the Eastern Division and 12 for the Northern Division.

Furthermore, we are expanding this modernisation beyond general beds to include specialized cleaning equipment. The full tender package includes 75 pediatric hospital beds, 40 psychiatric hospital beds, 23 five-function hydraulic cardiac beds, 58 emergency beds and 25 patient transfer trolleys. Additionally, we are reinforcing our frontline clinics with 150 electric examination couches, 76 scooped stretchers, and 372 wheelchairs to ensure comprehensive patient mobility and dignity.

Mr. Speaker, this phase procurement represents a prudent and accountable use of public funds. By structuring the delivery over a three-year window, the Ministry ensures that our biomedical technicians can adequately inspect, assemble, and maintain these assets. Further, it addresses critical frontline occupational health and safety issues and replaces non-functional and rusted equipment currently flagged in our smaller subdivisional centers, remote maritime nursing stations, and across the Eastern Division.

Investing in beds is a foundation touchpoint of patient recovery, and this Government remains fully dedicated to upgrading the frontline realities of our health system, systemically building a resilient health care infrastructure that every Fijian can rely on.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, are there any supplementary questions?

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Mr. Speaker, thank you honourable Minister. My question is around the timeline. When you look at the Emergency Department at CWM Hospital, it is overcrowded, chaotic, and the doctors and nurses are doing their best with the very little that they have. Is there some timeline on the expansion of Emergency Department if there is any idea or implementation of having a portable housing unit or building structure just to expand the Emergency Department because patients who are very critical are seen sitting on benches, and I visited there two weeks ago on a Sunday.

HON. DR. RATU. A.R. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think we were talking about hospital beds. But with Emergency Department, that is something that the project is within the Pacific Healthy Islands Transformation (PHIT) Project, that is something that is included into the expansion of the Accident and Emergency (A&E) area.

MR. SPEAKER.- I do apologise honourable Maharaj, you should have been asked first as you posed the question.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I thank the honourable Minister for the comprehensive answer. My question to the honourable Minister is on the standard operating procedures. I thank you for the modernisation that is taking place, but the responsibility of taking ownership. I have worked at CWM Hospital.

With regards to fixtures and fittings, we do not have dedicated personnel to take responsibility when these things are abused or misused, especially the wheelchairs. We hardly hear anyone surcharged when they break this equipment in hospitals. It is a continuous thing that goes on. If you go to the Emergency Department, if you use a wheelchair, most of the time they do not have the pedals and rubber. It is about responsibility. We are bringing in new fixtures and fittings. Who takes

the responsibility to ensure that these equipment are not misused or abused in our health facilities?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Sir, it is simple. The responsibility rests on those who are responsible for the facility, because with the facility comes all this equipment. They have the responsibility to look after the equipment, the machines, and everything that comes under a facility.

MR. SPEAKER.- Follow-up? Elaboration?

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Follow-up. That is where I am coming from honourable Minister. For example, if you look at a department, doctors are there to do their clinical programmes. Nurses are there to treat the patients, orderlies do not take responsibility for this. Otherwise, if you look at any other ward, there is no specified personnel to look after these fixtures and fittings. No one takes responsibility of what happens to the equipment that are placed in the wards. Are there any plans? Everyone's issue, but no one pays once the equipment are broken. If the Ministry is looking into it, to come up with personnel who will be responsible to look after these equipment because they are expensive.

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- The responsibility is everyone's responsibility to look after a public asset, whether the patient who uses the equipment or those who are tasked to look after it. For example, in a ward, there will be a nursing supervisor who looks after, not only the entire operation of a ward, but definitely on the finer details of anything that may be damaged or misused. In that case, if they are made aware of that, then they can do something about it. Again, the responsibility is on the patient and also those who are tasked to look after the facility.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- I have a question to the honourable Minister concerning the Emergency Department. Some patients sit there without beds for more than a day. Is it a bed issue, is it a space issue or is it both or more problems? What is the problem there and the solution, Sir?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Space issue.

HON. V. NATH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, from our recent visit, of course, leaving aside the food on Fiji Airways - pathetic, we learned a lot and it was an eye-opener as we visited Sonjay Kill Memorial Hospital at Kampot Province. The lessons learned from there, honourable Minister, how are we going to implement that in Fiji? It is a very good programme, and definitely we will want to see those implemented in a number of hospitals here in Fiji and probably some of the health centres.

(Honourable Members interject)

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister, I am sorry, I was getting distracted here.

HON. RATU DR. A.R. LALABALAVU.- Point taken and we will look into it.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I am advised that Elder Smith is in the gallery. He has been leading the Grant Assistance Programme of the LDS charities and assisting with funding projects across the ministries of education and health. So will you please welcome him. You are most welcome.

(Acclamation)

If you will kindly note, honourable Members, Question No. 153/2026 will be asked at a later sitting when the Minister has recovered from this illness.

We move onto the fourth Oral Question and it is from the honourable Shalen Kumar to ask Question No. 154/2026. He is not here.

Knowledge-Sharing on Improving Efficiency - CWMH
(Question No. 155/2026)

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

Efficiency at Aspen has improved in the last few years. Can the honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services inform Parliament whether there are any plans for knowledge-sharing to improve the efficiency at CWM and other hospitals?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, at the outset, I was hesitant on answering the question simply because how the question is framed, saying that efficiency at Aspen has improved without any data or evidence to back that up, is to me, something of an opinion maybe from the honourable Member himself.

In terms of the question as it is, on the efficiency at Aspen, the honourable Member is talking about efficiency in what areas, waiting or services or operations, et cetera. It is generalised. Nevertheless, I shall try to answer that question with data to back that up. Currently Aspen in Lautoka and Ba, if I can answer your question, Aspen Ba Hospital has achieved international gold standard in the Gold Seal of Approval for Joint Commission (JC), that is a standard that is recognised throughout the world.

Ba Aspen is the only one that has been recognised within the Pacific to have that standard. It is something that the Ministry aspires to have that kind of standard in one of our hospitals, probably the Nadi hospital, and that is something we are working in collaboration on the best practices on how they are achieved. Probably we can achieve it as well for one of our hospitals within Fiji.

Nevertheless, Lautoka and Ba Aspen, Colonial War Memorial Hospital and other hospitals, knowledge sharing is an ongoing thing. Talking about clinical services network, we continuously talk to each other on how best we can improve clinical services network on the various cadres – operational level, management level. That is something that is ongoing collaboration between the DPP arrangement at Ba and Lautoka and the public hospitals as well. That is the best on how I can answer your question.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, while we are talking about Aspen, I think the honourable Minister knows, Lautoka was supposed to be a referral hospital and there used to be a lot of outreach that used to happen from Lautoka Consultants going to Nadi, Sigatoka, even to Ba, Tavua, et cetera in the Western Division carrying out their consultant clinics. Knowing that that was not part of the agreement between the Fijian Government and Aspen, Aspen can cut it off anytime they would like to. What are the plans of coming up with, Nadi Hospital having consultants who can continue with the outreach, should Aspen decides to pull out tomorrow of the outreach programme that is currently happening from Lautoka Hospital?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, to answer that supplementary question, Lautoka Aspen is still a referral hospital. The Western Division still refers to Lautoka Aspen. As part of the outreach, yes, they have their own outreach programme, or they can piggyback on our outreach programme within the Western Division, that is, funding is allocated in this financial year's budget and it is something that we intend to utilise it to its maximum capacity because of the benefit it has in terms of taking out the service to the community. So, if Aspen pulls out at the last minute, we can still send our outreach team from CWM. Outreach teams are specifically for

specialist services. But other than that, if for public health, they can continue their outreach through the workforce that are already available within the Western Division.

Remote-Tower AFIS Project at Labasa Airport
(Question No. 156/2026)

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

Can the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Tourism and Civil Aviation update Parliament on the status of progress in establishing the Pacific's first Remote Tower Aerodrome Flight Information Service at Labasa Airport?

MR. SPEAKER.- Your question has been posed honourable Deputy Prime Minister. So do you want to have the question asked again or are you in the position to respond to it now?

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- My apologies, Mr. Speaker Sir. The Remote Tower Aerodrome Flight Information Service at Labasa Airport will be the first of its kind in the Pacific. It is a significant step in modernising aviation services in Vanua Levu, and in strengthening the safety, reliability and coordination of flights serving the North.

The system uses cameras and specialised equipment installed at Labasa Airport to capture high-resolution, real-time views of the aerodrome together with live weather and operational information. This information is transmitted to a remote tower centre at the Nadi Operation Centre where aviation personnel monitor aircraft movements and support flight operations remotely.

In practical terms, the eyes on Labasa's Runway are delivered digitally to Nadi. The project is delivered under the Na Vualiku Project, the Fiji Tourism Development Programme in Vanua Levu.

The Fiji Tourism Development Programme in Vanua Levu: This is a Government initiative financed by the World Bank, led by the Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation in partnership with Fiji Airports and other implementing agencies. The remote tower service is procured under the aviation components of the Na Vualiku Project valued at \$32.4 million, which also covers runway pavement upgrades, a new fire station, car parking, access roads, fencing, stormwater systems and creek embankments at Labasa.

Mr. Speaker, Sir on the status of progress, I can update the House as follows. First, the enabling works are advancing. Runway strengthening works at Labasa Airport have been completed, allowing standard ADR aircraft operations to resume. This provides the foundation on which the remote tower and the wide upgrades are also being delivered.

Second, the remote tower contract was awarded in June 2026. Fiji Airports awarded a contract to Adacel Technologies Limited to deploy its REVAL remote tower system. The contract is valued at \$7.6 million and covers the supply, installation, testing, training and commissioning of the system. It comprises a remote tower module installed at Labasa Airport and a remote tower centre located at the Nadi Operation Centre. This is the first remote tower installation in the Pacific Islands.

Third, the project has moved into the delivery phase. Following the contract award, Adacel completed initial site survey at both Labasa and Nadi in June 2026 and held a critical design review workshop in July 2026 to confirm the final system design and implementation requirements. The supplier is now procuring the system components. In parallel, arrangements are underway to engage a local sub-contractor for the civil and construction works required for the remote tower at Labasa Airport.

On timing, factory acceptance testing of the system is planned for December 2026, with equipment expected to arrive in Fiji in early February 2027. Site installation at Nadi and Labasa is scheduled for February and March 2027, followed by site exception testing and operator training in April 2027. Subject to successful reliability testing, the system is planned to be commissioned by the end of May 2027. Throughout the transition, air services to and from Labasa continue without interruption.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the benefits of this investment are substantial. It strengthens aviation safety through modern camera-based monitoring. It removes the reliability and coordination of services to Vanua Levu. It delivers those services efficiently from a centralised facility in Nadi, which is more cost-effective and more resilient than a conventional standalone tower. And it is scalable, positioning Fiji to extend the technology to other locations in future.

By making Labasa the first airport in the Pacific to operate a remote tower service, Fiji is placing itself at the forefront of aviation innovation in the region. This supports the growth of tourism and economic opportunity across the Northern Division, consistent with the objectives of the Civil Aviation Master Plan and the Na Vualiku Project.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this project demonstrates the Government translating investment into modern, the tangible infrastructure that connects our people, strengthens safety, and supports the long-term growth for Vanua Levu.

Government-Funded Student Cards
(Question No. 157/2026)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Education inform Parliament how the Ministry will ensure that Government-funded student cards are topped up on time in future?

HON. A. M. RADRODRO.— Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think the honourable Member is referring to the process within the Ministry. I would like to enlighten the honourable Member and Members of this House in terms of the student card's top- up.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, before the commencement of each school term, each new school year, all eligible students will have to apply for the transport assistance, be it the blue card assistance or the rural service license assistance. They need to make the application at their respective schools on the Ministry of Education's nominated application form. Upon the assessment and verification by the heads of schools, the Ministry of Education will process this transport assistance application form.

Once the application is approved at the beginning of the new school year by the respective schools' heads of schools, the students will have their cards topped up for use during school, and that is for Term 1. For Term 2 and Term 3, the cards are topped up at the beginning of the term automatically for existing students by the Ministry of Education. So, it is very important that students need to maintain and keep the card securely and safely.

In case they lose it, the students who have lost and damaged their cards will need to fill the lost and damaged replacement card form and get it endorsed by their heads of school and submit to any Vodafone outlet for the issuance of a replacement card. The head of school will need to update the system on FEMIS to activate the replacement card. If you get the replacement card, it does not automatically qualify you to get student assistance. Each student will have to make sure that their heads of school have updated the FEMIS system accordingly.

For Road Service Licence (RSL) users, vouchers will be issued by the heads of school for the eligible students on a daily basis for tendering to the RSL providers.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the students and parents need to understand the process and also need to ensure that this process is adhered to for the effective and timely redeeming of student bus fare cards. The Ministry of Education, in addition to the stakeholder involvement, is also putting up notices to schools through circulars to the Ministry of Education social media platforms and mainstream media outlets to create awareness and notify students and stakeholders on the transport assistance process.

By way of information, the 2026-2027 budget of \$54 million has been allocated for student transport assistance and the programme supports over 70,000 students using blue bus cards and over 44,000 students receiving rural service licenses. The Ministry tops up the blue bus cards twice during each school term. The first top-up covers Weeks 1 to 7 while the second top-up covers Weeks 8 to 14. The onus is now on the students to ensure that they use their cards as per intended.

For Term 2 of 2026, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the first top-up was undertaken during the two weeks' school holidays following Term 1, while the second top-up was undertaken in Week 6 of Term 2. This is the process the Ministry has used to top-up blue cards for eligible students in the previous term. The schools and district officers will be required to ensure that student applications and eligibility information are submitted and verified within the prescribed time frame, so this will minimize delays arising from incomplete applications or late submission.

HON. H. CHAND.- There are many students, honourable Minister, who are waiting for bus cards since the last few months. I am not sure whether you are aware or not. It is now the last week of Term 2, and the students are still waiting for the card. Most of the students who are yet to receive bus cards are Year 1 students. It is not only the bus cards; I think the honourable Minister is also aware that RSL operators have not received the payment. Can the honourable Minister guarantee that students will get their bus cards, especially the Year 1 students, before Term 3 begins?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have just described in detail the process that the students need to follow. Can I ask the honourable Member, what has he undertaken to assist the students who have brought up the... Have you directed them to the district offices? That is what you should be doing if they are bringing it to your attention, and which schools, and the details of the students.

HON. H. CHAND.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think the honourable Minister should be answering my question, but he is asking me to answer the question.

MR. SPEAKER.- You are quite correct. He should be answering, but you should be more specific in your

HON. H. CHAND.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, there are many students and parents who have called me from Nadi, Lautoka, Labasa, Suva, and Nausori, that the students have not received the card and parents are paying. My very humble request to the honourable Minister is for the Ministry to find out the students who applied and those who are yet to receive the card. The students have already applied, and they are yet to get the card. I am talking about the blue card, and this blue card, the students receive 100 percent Government subsidy under the National Transport Assistance Scheme. This is for the eligible high school students.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, as I said, if the honourable Members will provide the specific details of the students. As he has done in the past, he has also submitted the issues and information regarding the teachers that needed assistance and we have assisted them in

terms of the need that they need. Therefore, in this particular case, we would request the honourable Member to provide the list, if they do have a list, to allow us to process them so that they can get the necessary assistance.

MR. SPEAKER.- I think that is a fair enough answer. You provide them the list, and they will see what, in fact, had happened.

Return and Earn Fiji Initiative
(Question No. 158/2026)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Housing and Local Government update Parliament on the implementation of the Return and Earn Fiji Initiative during the first six months of 2026, and how has it directly benefitted members of the public and participating municipal councils?

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Return and Earn Fiji initiative was launched at Sigatoka Town in July 2025. Return and Earn Fiji consists of eight companies who came together under the banner of Mission Pacific and have been working collaboratively with the Ministry of Local Government and the Ministry of Environment to ensure success for its recycling programme.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is a practical step towards changing how we as a society think about waste. It gives used aluminum cans and packed IPT beverage bottles value that are sold at five cents per unit. It also encourages people to return them for recovery and recycling rather than discard them in streets, drains, waterways, municipal dumpsites as well as or even landfills. Since its inception, participation by the public and municipal councils as well as schools has continued to increase. This growth reflects increasing commitment of Fijians to responsible waste management resource recovery and the circular economy.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, operational rates of initiative have been strengthened through establishment of 11 new collection centres by the municipal councils, supported by the Mission Pacific. These centres have enabled the initiative to continue operating across participating councils throughout with level, bringing the service closer to communities, maintaining public access and supporting the sustained collection and return of recyclable materials.

During the first six months of 2026, participating councils collected approximately 6,213,070 aluminum cans and 6,595,038 PET bottles. The Lautoka City Council recorded the highest collection volume reaching approximately 3,545,521 aluminum cans and 2,645,467 bottles. Across the participating councils, these collections generate approximately \$1,995,564.46 in gross scheme revenue. Every participating council recorded a collection volume and corresponding Revenue during the period:

- (1) Lautoka City Council generated approximately \$619,098;
- (2) Nadi Town Council with around \$114,000;
- (3) Lami Town Council with around \$99,000;
- (4) Nausori Town Council around \$68,000;
- (5) Suva City Council with \$57,000;
- (6) Sigatoka Town Council around \$44,000; and
- (7) Nasinu Town Council around \$27,000.

These proceeds provide councils with a supplementary source of income while supporting the

continued operation of collection services.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, and members of the public have also been direct beneficiaries. Since January 2026, municipal councils have made payments to collectors totally, approximately \$681,947. These payments provide a direct source of income for community collectors, individuals engaged in recovering recyclable materials, supporting local livelihoods while rewarding responsible behaviour.

The collection centres make participation more convenient. Members of the public now have more accessible locations at which to return bottles and cans instead of placing them in ordinary rubbish bins or discarding them directly to the environment. Regular access combined with financial incentive is helping to make returning and recycling a normal part of household and community life. The behavioural change is one of the most important outcomes of this initiative.

For many years, waste management has largely followed engineered pattern. We purchase a product, use it once and then throw the packaging away. The return initiative begins to replace that practice with accounts in which people separate recyclable materials, return them and recognise that those materials still have value. Each returned plastic bottle or aluminum can reinforce a new habit. Each household that separates the bottles and cans, each community group that organises a collective drive, as well as schools and each council that provides a reliable return service, contributes to a broader culture of recovery, reuse, and recycling. These everyday actions are how the lasting national change is built.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the benefits to the Municipal Council extend beyond revenue. The recovery of more than 12.8 million aluminium cans and bottles mean that a significant volume of material has been removed from or prevented from entering the ordinary municipal waste stream. This also reduces the number of bottles and cans that councils must collect, transport and dispose of at dumps sites and landfills.

It also contributes to cleaner markets, parks, streets and communities, therefore, reducing the risk of cans and bottles blocking drains or being washed into rivers and the marine environment. It eases pressure on municipal collection vehicles and the disposal facilities. It can also help extend the operating life of existing dump sites and landfills. In the operational component programme it further assist councils with the cost of receiving, sorting, storing and preparing materials for recycling.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji cannot depend on an indefinite system on which increasing volumes of waste are simply collected and transported to dumps and landfills. Land is limited, disposal facilities are costly to operate, and poorly managed waste affects public health, tourism, our waterways and the marine environment. A sustainable system must progressively reduce waste at source and recover reusable recyclable materials before the remaining waste reaches our disposal facility.

The Ministry is pleased to note that the Tavua, Rakiraki, Labasa, Savusavu and Levuka Town Councils are preparing to launch their participation in the programme in September 2026. This next phase will extend the initiative to more communities in the Western and Northern Divisions and to Levuka while strengthening the foundation for a broader national participation.

Most importantly, it is helping to introduce a national culture of return and recycling. This culture is essential for Fiji to reduce the amount of waste requiring final disposal and build cleaner, healthier and more resilient communities for our children and our future generations.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry extends its sincere appreciation for the participating municipal councils, Mission Pacific Pte Limited, all the schools and the public for their continued support. I

also thank the Ministry for Environment for its support towards this programme. Their continued support and active participation have been instrumental. The achievements record to date will remain essential as the initiative expands.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Minister for this great initiative. I can see the dual benefits that you have highlighted. One is reducing the waste into the dump site and landfill, and the other one is the earnings for the public. Great initiatives, well done. My question is now related to the end life. Once the rubbish is collected or the cans and pet bottles are collected, do you know what happens to them? If you can explain that bit.

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, as I have also said in my presentation, this initiative that we have had with the Mission Pacific Pte Limited, who is responsible for the storage and recycling of these aluminium cans and bottles. We have been advised that these materials will have to be transported overseas to be recycled with one of the partners doing the recycling from overseas.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Yes, some of you were laughing when I asked this question. Let me explain why I asked this question. This project started way back by the Ministry of, but it is a caution. What they did was that, this is Mission Pacific, I am talking about. They collected the rubbish, all these PET bottles, they bundled it up and it ended up in the landfill. So, one has to be careful. They can collect, we may think that it has not gone into our landfill, but some kind of monitoring needs to be done, like they need to provide all that information in terms of what they have really done with it. Otherwise, the good intention of this particular project might not be realised. So, I just wanted to speak on that, thank you. I appreciate the project, it is a great project.

Promoting Religious Tolerance and Social Cohesion
(Question No. 159/2026)

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU asked the Government, upon notice:

In light of the incidents of vandalism involving Hindu temples reported around the country since 2024, can the honourable Minister for Multi-Ethnic Affairs, Culture, Heritage and Arts, and Sugar Industry inform Parliament whether the Ministry has any programmes or initiatives to educate young people on respecting different religions and promoting religious tolerance and social cohesion?

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think the honourable Leader of the Opposition missed me throughout the whole week. He kept on saying that I am not around.

Yes, I was around because I have got other business to do, apart from in Parliament. Having said that, I must thank the honourable Usamate that he raised a Point of Order, which actually made me more popular in this country when I got a yellow card from Parliament. This is the first in this session we got that, and of course, a lot of people called me and sympathised about what I had said.

Now, with this note, I would like to say, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I was actually given one and a half hour, but I misheard that it one and a half days, so I did not come back until the Secretariat called me to say that it was one and a half hour. But I still make sure I was here.

Now, Mr. Speaker Sir, before I actually answer to the questions proper about social cohesion and what is happening in this country, I must actually give you an example. Recently, I have done an investment in Dalton through my company. In that country, there is a population of 3,500 on the island, there is 150,000 outside the country that there is a remittance.

That country has a good social cohesion, and that country has zero drugs and zero crime. Now, what I am saying is, I must thank the honourable Tagelagi Prime Minister of Dalton that, that country has controlled that type of system.

HON. J. USUMATE.- Point of Order!

MR. SPEAKER.- A Point of Order.

HON. J. USAMATE.- The honourable Minister must reply to a Question, the reply must be relevant, concise, and confined to the subject matter. We are talking about the context of Fiji, not in the context of Tokelau, completely different. So, I think the honourable Minister must talk about Fiji, and what is being done about that country.

MR. SPEAKER.- Yes, try to give the example of social cohesion elsewhere, and I think that is relevant. Carry on.

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, when we talk about correctness, honesty, and the last 16 years of the last government that could control all this. I am giving the example that we are bringing entire examples and things in this country, how we can correct. Where was the social cohesion in the last government? Nowhere was the social cohesion in the last government? Where was the Multi-Ethnic Affairs? It was your government who had destroyed social cohesion.

MR. SPEAKER .- Point of Order ! One moment, Point of Order!

HON. J. USAMATE.- Point of Order on Relevance, because that particular country, everyone is of one ethnic group. Fiji is completely different. So he is trying to apply the learning of one country where it is a homogeneous society with one that is different.

MR. SPEAKER.- We will carry on. Just bear with me, I think he is talking about social cohesion generally, whether it is only of one race or multi-racial, social cohesion is a subject. So long as social cohesion is a topic, I will let him continue.

HON. C. J. SINGH.- I think the honourable Jone Usamate should go to Niue and see how many people from different countries are there? We have 80 people of different races there. Understand? Look, let me complete my everything. You had your time in the last week. Give me time.

Mr. Speaker Sir, when I talk about all this, I will give another example. Another example, last week, last week in New Zealand I had two friends, two friends whose house was breaking in, in Epsom. Epsom is a high class area of Auckland. Now, do you then blame Mr Luxon, the Prime Minister because of what had happened? Do you then blame Honourable Rabuka here? Because of your 16 years of rule, everything has broken down, the rule, in this country. So, Mr. Speaker said, can I now come back?

MR. SPEAKER.- Yes.

HON.C. J. SINGH.- Do you want to speak or should I speak?

MR. SPEAKER.- Can you now address the question?

HON. C. J. SINGH.- Yes, Sir.

MR SPEAKER.- You have done enough background analysis.

HON. C. J. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, I must thank the honourable Leader of the Opposition who will be out of Parliament in the next session. This Ministry strongly condemns any acts of vandalism, damage or deterioration of places of worship, whether it involves Hindu temples, churches, mosques or any other places of religious significance, such as acts that have no place in our society and are contrary to the values of respect, religious tolerance and peaceful coexistence that we seek to promote as a nation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry has visited a number of affected and engaged directly with respective communities for these reasons. For these engagements, we have observed that the circumstances surrounding these incidents are not necessarily the same. Some appear to be isolated in these incidents, while others appear to be optimistic in nature.

We must also recognise that many places of worship, particularly temples, are located in areas that are easily accessible to the public with limited on-site presence, caretakers or security outside the hours of worship. At the same time, there have been a few incidents where circumstances have understandably raised concerns with affected communities as to whether they have been religiously motivated.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we do not dismiss these concerns, nor do we deny that there has been an issue that needs to be addressed. However, it is equally important that we do not reduce individual cases. Determining whether incidents are criminally or religiously motivated remains a matter of appropriate law, enforcement authorities based on evidence available.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry already undertakes outreach programmes and community engagement sessions across the country. These engagements go beyond discussions on social cohesion, include religious tolerance, multiculturalism, mutual respect, peaceful cohesion, and existence amongst Fiji's diverse communities. For this financial year, the Ministry has planned approximately 70 outreach and community engagement sessions, of which five have already been conducted in the Northern Division, four in Western and two in the Central Division.

Importantly, these programmes are not confined to any particular ethnic community. Our approach recognises that social cohesion is about how people of different ethnicities, religion and cultural background live together, interact with one another, and share the same qualities. Our objective is, therefore, to strengthen our understanding, respect, and a sense of shared responsibility amongst all our Fijians living side by side.

Through our Multi-Ethnic Affairs Grant Programme, we have also supported a number of our religious and community organisations to improve their facilities, including repair and renovation of buildings, improvements to the fencing and other infrastructure. These investments not only improve community facilities but can also contribute towards making these sites safer and more secure.

With regards to the honourable Member's specific question about young people, I agree that there is an opportunity for us to strengthen and better target our engagements with our youths. The Ministry will explore opportunities to engage our young people more directly on religious tolerance, respect of places of worship, multiculturalism, and appreciation of Fiji's religious and cultural diversity.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to provide an important timely update. Just yesterday, my Permanent Secretary, met with the Director of the UNESCO representative in the Pacific States to explore opportunities for technical assistance, expert support, and capacity building in this important area. UNESCO brings significant international expertise, what is described as intellectual dialogue, peace building, and a social cohesion using dialogue, education, culture, community engagement to strengthen our understanding between the different groups and address the division and build more

peaceful and cohesive societies. This is particularly relevant to the works of the Ministry of Multicultural Affairs. We intend to explore how this international expertise can be adapted in Fiji's own context to strengthen dialogue between our diverse communities, promote mutual understanding and respect, and further contribute to the national unity of the social cohesion.

We believe that this issue must be addressed holistically. Religious tolerance and social cohesion cannot be the responsibility of one ministry or addressed through one programme alone. It requires collective involvement of families, schools, faith-based organisations, community and youth leaders, government agencies, and society as a whole.

Finally, our approach, therefore, must be not only about responding after an incident has occurred, but prevention is equally important. We need to continue building understanding, tolerance, and respect for elderly age, while at the same time working with the communities to strengthen the protection of the places of worship. Ultimately, respecting a place of worship is about respecting the faith, identity, and dignity of our fellow Fijians, regardless of their religions or cultural backgrounds. That is a culture of respect and coexistence that we must collectively continue to strengthen.

I, once again, thank the honourable Leader of the Opposition and I will see you in the next term of Parliament.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Minister for briefing this Parliament about social cohesion in Niue. The question that I want to ask is, since he became Minister for Multi-Ethnic Affairs, has he ever visited the Rabi community and the community of Kioa to find out what the issues are and of course social cohesion as well because he is talking about his ministry not only concentrating on one specific? So, has the Minister ever visited Rabi in Kioa during his term as Minister?

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am not going around the countries to campaign. My staff go around, they look at the projects, and I do not go around business. My business is not about me. What I really do is not because I want to go and show my face because election is coming. My staff have been going there, they have done the assessment, they have done the projects. And of course, I do have to show my face, my staff are doing the job. It is not like you, 16 years, you were running around doing nothing.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me ask a very basic question to the honourable Minister.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Let me finish, honourable Minister. The question that was asked to you was with respect to programmes and initiatives for young people on respecting different religions and promoting religious tolerance and social cohesion. One of the methodologies to ensure that we have good social cohesion is to inculcate good behavior from school. My question to you, honourable Minister, has your Ministry engaged with the Ministry of Education with respect to this particular issue and trying to inculcate that behaviour in schools?

MR. SPEAKER.- I said it was the last question. No. Your point of clarification, you have a right.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, just on question (159). The other day when honourable the Leader of the Opposition asked where the honourable Minister for Sugar was, we

were informed that he is not minister of sugar and today on the order paper it says, the minister for Multi-ethnic Affairs, Culture, Heritage, Arts and Sugar industry Can this be clarified on the floor, whether he is the Sugar Minister or not?

MR. SPEAKER.- We will let the Acting Attorney-General answer that question.

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- There are currently some changes that are yet to be accepted.

MR. SPEAKER.- That is the clarification. The reason why I allowed the honourable minister to speak longer is due to being a very important issue. Social cohesion is a very important issue. I would like to address the latest case of vandalism was the Hindu temple in Howell Road. It happens that we share the common boundary with the temple, so I was very concerned. For what it is worth, from my very reliable source, my taxi driver, Ashwin, told me this morning that the suspect was arrested yesterday, and the Minister of Policing will verify this.

Having used the CCTV, which the Minister had said, and this belongs to the school, in fact, is being held in Samabula Police station. He is an Indo-Fijian and he is in fact employed by the temple officials to perform during religious festivals, so I just want to put it into perspective. Whilst I fully support the issues that have been raised in here, I think the Minister may verify the information that was given to me this morning by my taxi driver.

HON. I. NAIVALURUA.- Affirmative, Sir.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I wish to go back, if you will forgive me. I would like to go back to honourable Shalen Kumar. I found the reason why he was not here, to ask his question, which was going to be dropped. I will take that back. We have just a bit of time for him to ask his question.

Special Schools in the Naitasiri Province
(Question No. 154/2026)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Education inform Parliament on the progress of the secondary school project in Naqali, Naitasiri, and whether there are any plans to establish a special school in the Naitasiri Province?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the establishment of a school is a policy in the Ministry of Education, which is establishment and recognition, registration of schools. For Naqali school, the preliminary process of establishing a school and assessment has been undertaken by the Ministry of Education officials in terms of the Asset Infrastructure Department. The Ministry of Education through its AIS has worked closely with the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs and the iTaukei Land Trust Board to conduct land lease consultation with the Landowning Unit in the village of Naqali in Naitasiri.

Consultations have been held with the Landowning Unit and iTLTB officers have visited the proposed site to identify the lease boundaries as Naqali is a flood-prone area. The landowning unit has also requested to identify land that probably may not be affected by the flooding.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the need to establish a secondary school in Naqali - there is a need there that has been requested by the *vanua* because there are no secondary schools around the Naqali area. The only available secondary schools are Lomaivuna High School and Naitasiri Secondary School. If you go from Suva, it is either Muanaweni College or Waidina Secondary School or Adi Cakobau School

(ACS,) or schools in the Nausori area.

Students who are currently in the primary schools in Naqali District, Viria Public School, Viria District, Lomaivuna, and students that are travelling far from there in Dravuni - the honourable Minister of Finance's village school - all need to look for a secondary school. Therefore, a genuine site in Naqali has been identified to accommodate these schools. Otherwise, these Year 8 students, because of travelling distances and other logistical difficulties, most of them finish their education journey at Year 8. This is what we are trying to address.

In terms of a special school, I think that is something that we will have to look at after the establishment of a Naqali Secondary School.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we missed one. Another Oral Question is still to be asked. I do apologise, honourable Ravu.

Registration of Sex Offenders Act 2021
(Question No. 160/2026)

HON. K.V. RAVU asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Justice and Acting Attorney-General update Parliament on the status of the Registration of Sex Offenders Act 2021?

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- I thank the honourable Member for the question. The responses is tied to my role as Minister for Justice. It is important for us as Christians, and for us as parents, because of the situation and the problems that are engulfing our nation, this is an important subject matter. Just for a brief background, the Sex Offenders Bill 2018 was finally enacted by this Parliament on the 21st September, 2021.

As I had explained yesterday and today, these are some of the practical issues, it is not as straightforward. You have the legislation, then it takes time for you to actually do the regulations. There are regulations, Section 34 of the Act provides the power to make regulations. Whilst the principal Act is vested with me, the Ministry of Justice, I had to also work with the Ministry of Policing, Ministry of Immigration, and of course the Ministry of Ministry of Women, Children & Social Protection.

However, I am happy to say, Mr. Speaker, Sir, in the first quarter of this financial year, the regulations for this particular Act will be tabled to Cabinet likewise, for the two regulations, the Child Justice Act and the Child Care Protection Act. The regulations for those two, have yet, they are being discussed within the Task Force Committee, and the first quarter of this year we hope to operationalise all three of them.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is very important that this Act is as soon as possible be operationalised because of the importance of this Act. I actually went through the debate in Parliament on the 21 September. There was a lively debate on this matter, and it is important to have the Registered Sex Offender Act. At the moment, the Ministry with the Ministry of Policing is finalising the forms and the requirements because we need to this register that will be kept by the police, will contain the list of those who are convicted of sex offences. At the moment, there is none, and this is troubling. Why is it troubling? Because we have a high rate of sex offences.

If I may just go to the stats by the DPP of the rape and sexual offence statistics from January to December last year, 252 in all.

Month	No.
January	11
February	15
March	32
April	23
May	30
June	30
July	21
August	12
September	12
October	34
November	27
December	5
Total	252

That is the largest when you compare to the previous years. So, it is very important that we get this thing done. There is a coordination between the committee chaired by the Permanent Secretary for Justice.

I think one of the problems this year has been because all the ministries are working in shallow, and no one has taken the liberty to call on all these forces. And this seems to be the problem with ministries in government. When there is a multi-agency, one of the difficulties is getting the officers on time and to deliberate on important issues, especially in terms of regulations.

The regulation will provide for corresponding laws of other countries that keep Register of Sex Offenders, enabling information sharing between Fiji Police, Immigration officials, and law enforcement and other countries and enable immigration officials to track individuals entering Fiji who are corresponding sex offenders.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think yesterday or the day before, we had someone who was wanted from the United States of America, who was not known to us because they did not send us the information. But once that information was passed to the immigration, the U.S. officials actually came and deported that person back. That is one of the difficulties. If there was a register, they would have informed us, we would have done it as soon as possible when that person arrived. We do not know what this person was doing all this time. It is a lesson for us.

However, let me reassure this House, Mr. Speaker, Sir, with the ministry and all the agencies, are fully aware of the responsibilities. And I thank the Permanent Secretary for Justice and all the agencies and officials who are committed to ensure that come the end of the first quarter. The regulations for these three Acts will be tabled in Cabinet and then the beginning of their operationalisation.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Minister for the comprehensive answer that he has given with regards to the registration of sexual offenders. This is one of the bills that my committee took for public consultation and we saw the biggest number of people who came in public consultation to give in their views.

I totally agree that this is a very important act that needs to be in place this question was raised then, I would like to actually again raise this question with the Acting Attorney General. The issue was that anybody who has been an offender will get registered. Does regulation, is regulation going to cover

those people who are already in civil service because once your name appears in the register it will have restrictions where you can work and some of these offenders might be civil servants as well. So is regulation going to cover whether their job is going to be secured or if their name appears in the register, they might lose their job. It was an ongoing issue that was discussed back then and it is still an issue once the register comes into place. If your name appears because the law restricts where you can work if your name appears in the register.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister, I do not have the specifics about the regulation in terms of the Civil Service, but the law is there. Yes, but let me say something. I think if you go back at the discussion in Parliament, one was the issue that was discussed was criminal records. The need from the opposition, the need to protect some people in terms of reformation, rehabilitation, that particular aspect has now been covered in the criminal records regulation which is going to be also activated on the 1st of September.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, just a clarification, honourable Acting Attorney General. You mentioned about the register, and you also said that there was a gentleman that was deported to the U.S. He was on the register. That was not a sexual offence. It was to do with the financial thing. So, what is the bearing of that on the register? Are you saying that the regulations will cover all offences? Yes or no?

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- If you had a register, according to the information, it is correct if they had informed us, immigration would have activated. But we were not informed when that person entered. But if we had a register and we would have been informed, that would have prevented that person from entering but that matter is not about sex. It is totally something to do with the scam, but more or less, most of these such crimes, offences, that will require some kind of registries to regulate the people who come in and out of the country.

MR. SPEAKER.- Thank you, honourable Members. I understand the issue that was raised by honourable Koya. It is time for the silly season, is it not? Time for point scoring.

Written Questions

Termite Control Assistance Programme in Divisions (Question No. 161/2026)

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

In light of the ongoing Asian Subterranean Termite infestation that has devastated thousands of homes across Fiji, particularly in the Western, Northern and Central Divisions, and noting the introduction of the Termite Control Assistance Programme, can the honourable Prime Minister and Minister of Civil Service and Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics inform Parliament –

- (a) On the number of applications received and approved for each Division in the 2025-2026 financial year;
- (b) For the 2025-2026 financial year, what was the approved budgetary allocation, actual expenditure, and any underspend or overspend recorded; and
- (c) For the 2025-2026 financial year, how many homeowners were assisted under the Programme, disaggregated by the amount offered by Division?

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- The honourable Prime Minister will table his response at a later date as permitted under Standing Order 45(3).

Mid-Term Review - NAP EVAWG
(Question No. 162/2026)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Women, Children and Social Protection update Parliament on the following –

- (a) the Mid Term Review for the National Action Plan for the Elimination of Violence Against Women and Girls was recently completed;
- (b) what were some of the achievements under the NAP EVAWG; and
- (c) how will the Ministry manage some of the gaps that were identified in the Mid Term Review Report?

¹ HON. S. KIRAN.- Mr. Speaker, I hereby table my response to the Written Question.

Fiji–New Zealand High-Level Consultation Outcomes
(Question No. 163/2026)

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU asked the Government, upon notice:

Recently, the Permanent Secretary for Foreign Affairs led a delegation to the annual Fiji–New Zealand High-Level Consultation held in Wellington, New Zealand. Can the Minister for Foreign Affairs and External Trade update Parliament on the following –

- (a) what was the purpose of the visit and what outcomes were achieved;
- (b) how many personnel from the Ministry were part of the delegation; and
- (c) what was the total cost of flights, hotel accommodation, per diem and other allowances?

² HON. S.R. DITOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I hereby table my response to the Written Question, 163/ 2026.

List of Schools Without Free Education Grant
(Question No. 164/2026)

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

Can the Minister for Education inform Parliament on the names of schools that did not receive Free Education Grant last year because the schools did not fulfill the requirements of the Ministry?

³ HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to table my response according to the Standing Order.

¹ Editor's Note: Reply to Written Question No. 162/2026 tabled by the honourable Minister for Women, Children and Social Protection, under Standing Order 45(3), is appended as Annexure I.

² Reply to Written Question No. 163/2026 tabled by the honourable Minister for Foreign Affairs and External Trade, under Standing Order 45(3), is appended as Annexure II.

³ Reply to Written Question No. 164/2026 tabled by the honourable Minister for Education, under Standing Order 45(3), is appended as Annexure III.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I think this would be an appropriate time to take our afternoon break. However, before we do that, we will entertain a suspension motion for the purposes of complying with the Standing Order with respect to sitting times.

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDERS

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

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the House still has to deliberate on two Bills this afternoon, so the need to suspend the Standing Orders.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

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

The Parliament adjourned at 4.08 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 4.45 p.m.

COMMERCIAL USE OF MARINE AREAS BILL 2025

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, pursuant to the resolution of Parliament on Monday, 1st December, 2025 and Friday 13th March, 2026, I move:

That the Commercial Use of Marine Areas Bill 2025 (Bill No. 42 of 2025) be debated, voted upon and be passed.

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

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to support the final passage of the Commercial Use of Marine Areas Bill 2025 (Bill No. 42 of 2025). This is the Third Reading and Parliament has been asked to bring to a conclusion a legislative journey that began with a clear policy objective and, that is, to resolve a longstanding legal and governance gap in the commercial use of Fiji's marine areas, while protecting legitimate interests and creating a fairer framework for customary owners.

Mr. Speaker, I acknowledge the Chairman and Members of the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights, the members of the public and industry, who have made submissions, and the customary owners and stakeholders who participated in consultations. Their contributions echo throughout this Bill.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the work that has brought us to this point did not begin with the introduction of the Bill - it has been an area of contention for decades since pre-Independence. Governments, past and present, have made attempts to resolve the issue of *i qoliqoli* ownership and rights through and present, have made attempts to resolve the issue of *i qoliqoli* ownership and rights through proposed former Bills and policies. This Government seeks to bring it to a conclusion.

The discussions on the review of the Regulation of Surfing Areas Act 2010 commenced in the 2022-2023 financial year, supported by public consultations around Fiji through the work of a joint working group led by the Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation.

The Bill was subsequently introduced in Parliament in December 2025 and referred to parliamentary scrutiny. That process has allowed Government, Parliament, effective stakeholders and the broader public to consider the legal, economic and customary dimensions of reform. As the Chairman mentioned, majority of those consulted are in support of the Bill, its intention and purpose.

Mr. Speaker, the central issue is straightforward - Fiji can no longer rely on fragmented and outdated arrangements to govern the commercial use of marine areas. Under the Commercial Use of Marine Areas Bill 2025, 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.

The Regulation of Surfing Areas Act 2010 was enacted to promote Fiji as a surfing destination by providing unrestricted access to designated surfing areas for tourism and recreation. While the framework supported access and tourism growth, it also provided for use without payment or compensation and did not adequately reconcile its commercial use with the interests of customary *i qoliqoli* owners.

The result has been continuing uncertainty - uncertainty over proprietary authority in certain

The result has been continuing uncertainty - uncertainty over proprietary authority in certain marine spaces, it disconnects between customary interest and commercial use, and in some cases, disputes and grievances over access, benefits, and the treatment of existing interests. These must change.

The Bill before the House addresses that uncertainty directly. It repeals the Regulation of Surfing Areas Act 2010 and replaces it with a modern statutory framework for the vesting, administration and commercial use of marine areas for tourism purposes.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Bill establishes a lawful and transparent pathway through which proprietary ownership of qualifying commercial use marine areas may vest in customary owners, and I wish to be clear that this is not an automatic transfer. It is a structured legal process founded on participation, due process and natural justice.

The process begins with an application by customary owners to the iTaukei Fisheries Commission. The Commission assesses the application and involves relevant interest holders. The Commission then makes their recommendation to the vesting authority, comprising of Ministers responsible for tourism, fisheries and iTaukei Affairs.

I wish to be clear, any negotiations or renegotiation terms and conditions will be party-led and not determined by the Commission, meaning, we want to ensure that the customary owner and the interest holder are the ones ultimately deciding what works for them.

The recommendation must address the proposed vesting order and either record agreed with renegotiated terms and compensation or identify matters that remain unresolved. The vesting authority then determines the vesting order in accordance with the Bill. Once a vesting order takes effect, ownership vests in the customary owners as *iTaukei* owners, while the iTaukei Land Trust Board assumes the responsibility for the administration of the vested marine area.

The Bill also provides mechanisms for unresolved matters. It allows for arbitration where the parties consent, enables the vesting authority to determine terms and compensation where necessary, and provides an appeal to the Marine Areas Appeals Tribunal within the prescribed period. The Tribunal is to be appointed by the Chief Justice in consultation with the Attorney-General.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this reform is not intended to create disorder or undermine legitimate investments. Existing legal interests and rights over the commercial marine area continue until they are dealt with through the processes established under the Bill, following a vesting order. The Bill also recognises that the renegotiation must be practical and proportionate.

The vesting authority may exempt renegotiation where existing lease or licence terms and compensation arrangements are already fair and equitable, and where renegotiation may adversely affect the economic viability of the marine area. Such exemptions may be time limited.

Equally important, a vesting order cannot be used to override constitutional rights or Fiji's obligations under international law and treaties, including applicable rights relating to movement and public enjoyment. This is why certain provisions of the Regulation of Surfing Areas Act 2010 have been kept.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it may very well be that current arrangements with certain tourism operators may be working well, and parties may wish to continue. This Bill does not stop that. These safeguards are deliberate. They ensure that recognition of customary proprietary interests is accompanied by legal certainty, orderly transition, and appropriate protection of existing commercial interests.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this Bill should not be characterised as a choice between customary-owners and tourism investment. This is an area where we were very careful with. Its purpose is to establish a clearer basis upon which both can co-exist and benefit. There has been no intention from the beginning to favour any one party, it has to right the wrongs of the past, but in a manner in which it will continue to attract investment.

The Bill enables customary-owners, existing operators and Government to determine practical transition arrangements through a transparent process, while avoiding punitive excessive financial demands that could undermine the viability or legitimate tourism operations.

For the tourism sector, the passage of this Bill will end a period of uncertainty. The industry has been known for some time that the Regulation of Surfing Areas Act 2010 was under-reviewed. Parliament now has the opportunity to replace that uncertainty with a definitive legal framework.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this Bill is the culmination of years of policy work, consultation, and Parliamentary scrutiny. It corrects an outdated legal framework. It provides a lawful process for recognising customary and proprietary interests. It protects due process and existing rights. It strengthens the role of established *iTaukei* institutions, and it provides greater certainty for tourism operators, investors, and communities.

Most importantly, it moves Fiji from an arrangement that has generated uncertainty and grievance to one founded on clarity, fairness, participation, and accountable administration. The time has come to complete this reform.

I, therefore, commend the Commercial Use of the Marine Areas Bill 2025 to the House and urge honourable Members to support its passage.

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

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, and honourable Members, I rise today on a Bill that touches something far bigger than the Clauses printed before us. It touches how this nation understands ownership, how we understand rights, and whether, after all these years, we are finally ready to speak up honestly about responsibility as well.

For decades, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have talked about indigenous empowerment in this House. We have talked about it on campaign platforms, in the Provincial Councils, in Committee Rooms, just like the one that produced this Report and rightly so, the history is real.

However, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I ask this House a simple question; for every hour we spend talking about rights, how many times do we speak about responsibility? Not the responsibility of Government alone, but the shared responsibility of a nation to build an economy that can actually deliver on the promises we make. Rights without a functioning economy to fund them are just words on paper, and an economy without secure rights is a house built on sand. We need both.

This Bill, as it stands, gives us neither of the confidence this country deserves, Mr. Speaker. We must understand the past, we must work in the present, but we are legislating for the future. That is a test I apply to every Clause of this Bill, and I ask every Member on both sides of this House to apply the same test. Does not this Clause feel good to announce this year, but what does this Clause do to the Fijian children that will inherit in the next 20 years?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we cannot keep taxing and retaxing, and renegotiating and asking again, and again, for compensation from the very goose that lays the golden egg.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, tourism did not fall from the sky. It was built dollar by dollar, resort by resort, by investors who took a risk on this country when they did not have to. Every additional layer of uncertainty we place on that industry, every unclear definition of commercial activity, every open-ended compensation formula left to be decided later by regulation, is a signal to that investor that Fiji is a harder place to do business than it was yesterday.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, when the investor walks away, they do not take only their money, but they take the jobs of the very communities this Bill claims to be protecting. This is the paradox this House must confront, honestly. Our policies must protect the rights of the indigenous owners of this land and sea. At the same time, those policies must win, not lose the confidence of investors in Fiji.

These are not competing goals, Mr. Speaker, Sir, they are the same goals seen from two sides. If there is no confidence in investment, there is no golden egg left to share. Forget compensation, forget benefit sharing, forget the revenue we hope to build schools and our roads in our maritime and rural communities. None of it arrives if the investor has left for Vanuatu, Samoa, or Cook Islands, or where the rules are clearer and the risk is lower.

Yet, Mr. Speaker, even at this late stage, this Government still seems to be rushing this Bill to Parliament without the groundwork properly done. Read the Committee's own report read what the Fiji Hotel and Tourism Association told this committee they wanted a transparent, structured consultation before this Bill proceeded.

Read what the Fiji Law Society told this committee a significant constitutional and legal uncertainty remains. If we read what the tourism operators in Savusavu told this committee, in their own words, that there were more questions than answers. And what was this Government's answer to all of this? The details will be sorted out later in regulations, after the Bill has already become the law.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, said that is not lawmaking, that is hoping for the best, legislating the cleanup later. Mr. Speaker, Sir, we must talk about the impact on future generations, and this is where I'm speaking from. Because that is who actually pays for our shortcuts.

How many investors, Mr. Speaker, Sir, has left this country quietly, and we have lost genuine investments in Fiji, Mr. Speaker, Sir. We do not always see these losses. There are no press releases when an investor decides not to come. There is no ribbon-cutting for the resort that was never built, the jobs that were never created, the scholarship funds that were never established, because the joint venture never happened.

This is the silent cost of uncertainty, and it falls hardest on the communities this Bill says it wants to uplift. So, what is the way forward, Mr. Speaker, Sir? I believe there are two paths, and the only two are genuinely to empower the indigenous and our local communities and all Fijians. The first is the legislation that needs to be clear and firmly protect the rights and resources of customary owners in the Bill itself, not deferred to regulations which we have not seen.

It is like signing a blank cheque. The second is legislation in that the very same breath provides certainty and confidence to the investors whose capital turns those resources into real income for families, not one trader off against the other. We do not need Band-Aid solutions that are designed to appeal to a few, whether that few sits in a boardroom in Suva or on the shoreline of a single *qoliqoli*. We need durable, balanced legislation that can survive the next election, the next government, the next generation, because the sea does not belong to one term of Parliament, it belongs to all of us across time.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji remains and must always remain a multiracial nation.

The benefit of one community properly built is the benefit for all of us. When an iTaukei landowning unit receives fair compensation, I will give you for an example, a certain well-structured compensation from a thriving tourism operation, the money does not stay in one village, it buys goods from a trader, it pays wages to workers, to every background on that, it pays wages to workers on that resort, it funds a scholarship that could go to any child in this country.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, every citizen of this country, iTaukei, Indo-Fijian and Rotuman, and every other community that calls Fiji home is entitled to their rights secured in law, but rights secured must also be followed by responsibility exercised, the responsibility to work, to build, to be productive, to make something of the opportunity our rights create rather than simply collecting from it.

This is the balance this House owes to the generations who are not yet born and cannot speak for themselves in this House. In my opinion, this Bill has been poorly drafted, has not had many consultations done which it required under the Constitution, the Supreme Law standing order, under the Constitution, Section 29, Clause 1 and 2, all ownership of land, all rights shall remain under the 2013 Constitution, and this Bill would be a breach of the Supreme Law, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Even the Prime Minister had to say in the media that his Attorney-General's work is slow and then had to defend his own Attorney-General by saying that he may be burdened with a lot of work.

Elections are close and there is no need to rush such sensitive matters. The landowning units and the *qoliqoli* owners are resource rich, not necessarily all of them are cash rich, otherwise, we do not need foreign investment. That is why whatever policy we bring, we cannot undermine investor confidence. I ask this House to send this Bill back for amendments, it genuinely needs it, so when we finally pass it, we pass it for once, we pass it right, and we pass it for every Fijian, and not for a few.

HON. I. VASU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to contribute to the debate on the Standing Committee's report on the Commercial Use of Marine Areas Bill 2025 as amended. I acknowledge the work of the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights, and the customary owners, public bodies, industrial representatives, communities, organisations and other stakeholders who contributed to the consultation.

This is an important reform because it concerns the rights, resources, and future well-being of the *iTaukei*. A starting point is the regulation of the Surfing Area Act 2010. The law vested designated surfing areas in the Director of Lands and concealed earlier arrangements without compensation. The result was a framework with which customary owners could not directly manage or receive fair benefits from commercial arrangements affecting those areas. The Bill before us seeks to restore balance. It provides a fair and orderly process through which proprietary ownership of qualifying commercial marine areas may be transferred to customary owners while respecting the rule of law, natural justice, existing interests, and the wider public interest.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is important to be clear. This Bill does not automatically vest every *qoliqoli* or every marine area. It establishes a structural process. Customary owners may initiate an application, after which the iTaukei Fisheries Commission verifies and delineates the areas, identifies the customary owners by reference to the register, determines whether the area qualifies as commercial marine areas, and considers the potential economic and environmental effects of vesting.

The Commission may also engage experts where necessary, and any environmental impact assessment required under existing environmental law, must still be undertaken. The Commission's role is compensation in primary to assist and facilitate negotiations between the parties. It does not

simply impose an arrangement under them. When an application is approved, the recommendation goes to the vetting authority. Where the parties have not reached the agreement, the authority's intervention is confined to the matters that remain in dispute.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this Bill is, therefore, not only about restoring ownership. It is also about managing the change responsibly. Existing legal interests and rights continue according to their terms. Existing lease conditions and compensation arrangements remain in place until they are lawfully renegotiated or determined under the statutory process. That provides certainty to investors and operators, while also protecting customary owners from sudden arbitrary changes.

A compensation framework itself seeks fairness on both sides. It the special indigenous, social, environmental and intergenerational values associated with customary rights while ensuring that compensation does not impose unreasonable or burdensome obligations on legitimate interest holders. Where agreement cannot be reached, the Bill provides a lawful dispute resolution process, including access to the Marine Area Appeal Tribunal.

The Bill also protects the wider public interest. A vesting order does not affect the sovereign rights of the State, Constitutional freedom of movement, non-commercial and recreation public access, aviation rights or the rights of innocent passage. So, the recognition of customary ownership does not mean closing Fiji waters to the public.

Mr. Speaker, once an area is vested, the iTaukei Land Board (TLTB) will administrate under the statutory framework for the benefit of the identified iTaukei owners. The Bill uses TLTB existing machinery for leasing, licensing, registrations, collections and enforcement. The committee has also reduced the maximum administration deduction available to iTLTB from 25 percent to 20 percent. It is an important adjustment. The iTLTB must have the capacity to properly administer those areas, however, the purpose of this reform is also to ensure that the greater share of benefits reaches the customary rights holders. Rights written in law must eventually translate into meaningful benefits for our communities.

The success of this reform will therefore depend not only on passing the Bill, but also on the readiness of the institutions responsible for implementing it. For TLTB and the other relevant agencies, that means clear regulations, headward court systems, proper coordination and transparent procedures for leasing, licensing, compensation, revenue collections, distribution and reporting. Customary owners and commercial users alike must understand how the systems operate.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs has consistently supported the objective of meaningful recognition and equitable benefits for customary owners. At the same time, we have emphasised that the transfer process must be structured, existing interests and public rights must be protected and the institutions responsible for implementing must work together. A number of operational matters will still be dealt with through regulations including:

- (a) Commercial tourism activities;
- (b) Timelines;
- (c) Compensation framework;
- (d) Consent thresholds;
- (e) Lease; and
- (f) Licence.

For that reason, regulation must not become a substitute for consultations. The Committee has recorded the assurance that further public consultations will take place before legislation comes into force. The engagement must be broad, meaningful and transparent, and must include customary

owners, relevant iTaukei institutions, Government agencies, commercial stakeholders, and affected communities.

Mr. Speaker, this is a significant reform. It moves Fiji away from framework that removes customary owners from the direct management and benefits of the designated commercial marine areas and towards one that recognises ownership, participation and equitable return while preserving legal, certainty and public rights. The Committee has strengthened the Bill by:

- Protecting existing arrangements;
- Clarifying the role of the iTaukei Fisheries Commission (TFC);
- Safeguarding sovereignty and public access;
- Providing for experts' input;
- Narrowing intervention to dispute matters and reducing TLTB maximum administrations' deductions.

Our responsibility now is to ensure that the promise of these legislations is matched by careful regulations, genuine consultations, and capable implementations. If we do that, this framework can support customary owners, provide certainty to legitimate operators, and strengthen the partnership between economic development and indigenous rights. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I support the Bill.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, my contribution to the Bill is a summary of my discussions with the hotel and cruise operators. It finished last night after my discussions with Ms. Fantasha Lockington, the CEO of Fiji Hotel and Tourism Association. This is a summary of what I could collect from the discussions that we have had.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Tourism approached this Bill in good faith, but also with a very clear message. They acknowledged that the *iTaukei* communities have deep and legitimate customary connections to their *iqoliqoli* areas. The current system has not consistently delivered fair commercial benefit from marine areas used by tourism. Reform is needed, and they support the principle of fair and equitable benefit sharing.

At the same time, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we must be frank. Many industry stakeholders feel they were intensely or otherwise misled in the earlier consultation process. The 2023 consultations was presented as a review of the Surfing Act. The *iqoliqoli* issues were repeatedly said to be outside the scope. Yet, this Bill is fundamentally about *iqoliqoli* and was only available to the industry after it had already been tabled. That has left operators feeling sidelined on matters that go directly to their operations, financing, investment decisions and long-term planning.

This industry is passionate and vocal, but it is also commercially disciplined. The tourism industry helps position Fiji in the global stage. But they must also answer to staff, banks, shareholders, communities and guests. A policy change in this scale requires transparent, timely and genuine engagement. We cannot build a stable future for customary owners or tourism operators on uncertainty. We do not understand the haste with which the Bill is being rushed through without wider input from stakeholders, communities and all affected *iTaukei* other than those who are actively pushing through with their own agendas.

The tourism industry recognises that CUMA is architecturally different from the 2006 Qoliqoli Bill. It is application-driven, not automatic. It notes a focus on tourism-only commercial marine areas, while reviewing elsewhere in the Bill what marine areas encompasses as vested in the State. It includes compensation in principle, while it mentions public access, safeguards and involves multiple Ministers. These are vague and must be made more specific because if the Bill is intended to improve clarity, it must absolutely be extremely clear. But the issue now is not the intention.

The issue is implementation. As drafted, the Bill is a structural risk, heavy in process, open to interpretation and vulnerable to inconsistent application. The Opposition identifies the following areas where certainty is required before the Bill is passed or commenced and provide the full submission separately that discusses each area in detail.

Reset and consultation process: Mr. Speaker, Sir, we must undertake transparent, timely and structured consultation with tourism and marine operators, customary owners throughout Fiji, the wider *iTaukei* community, financial institutions, affected communities, public agencies and other stakeholders before the Bill proceeds.

Reconsideration for propriety, ownership and transfer model: Mr. Speaker, Sir, we must determine whether the Bill's objective can be achieved through statutory recognition. Benefiting sharing, consultation, co-management while preserving State ownership and coherent national regulation of marine areas. The framework must recognise that marine access supports the wider national economy and should not concentrate compensation and administrative burdens principally on tourism and marine operators.

Clarity of the Bill and scope and legal effect: Mr. Speaker, Sir, we should clearly define the rights transferred by a vesting order, the rights and responsibilities retained by the State, the public rights that continue and persons, organisations, activities and supporting services captured by the Bill. The legislation must also explain how vested ownership interacts with navigation, existing leases and licences, infrastructure and minerals, environmental regulation and future development approvals.

Independent economic and physical assessment: Mr. Speaker, Sir, we must assess the likely effects of the Bill on investment, financing, property values, operating cost, employment, consumer prices, State revenue, public infrastructure and Fiji's competitiveness before enactment. We require a project specific assessment before vesting an area where significant existing and proposed activity may be affected.

Establish a coordinated process that avoids repeated negotiations and administrative duplication that prevents multiple or overlapping charges for the same journey. Activity or commercial use and accounts for existing state investment, infrastructure and incentives when benefits and compensations are determined.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we must establish a clear, nationally consistent compensation framework. Define fair and equitable compensation through a nationally prescribed and transparent methodology. Clarify the role of the *iTaukei* Fisheries Commission. Distinguish compensation from rent. Exclusivity payments, service charges, conservation contributions and other community benefits require closure of existing payments, provide written recent and independent review and ensure that compensation remains proportionate and commercially sustainable. Prohibition of double compensation to recognise existing arrangements.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, credit, prior rents, premiums, excess payments, licence fees, conservation contributions, goodwill payments and community benefits against any new liability. Existing community compensation arrangements should not be reopened unless all affected parties agree in writing or an independent court or tribunal determines under statutory and constitutional criteria that the alteration is necessary, lawful and fair.

Automatic preservation of existing legal interests: Mr. Speaker, Sir, protecting existing leases, licences, consensus, approvals, easements, mortgages, compensations, agreements sub leases, concession rights and State-approved projects need to be looked at.

The interest must continue according to their existing terms and must not be compulsorily renegotiated or altered solely because a marine area is vested. Alterations should occur only in the affected, oldest prior written concept or independent legal determination. Mr. Speaker, Sir, strengthened governance, procedural fairness and judicial oversight.

We require clear statutory clarification. Independent legal, technical, environmental, valuation, and economic advice on conflict-of-interest safeguards, public notice, access to methods, and evidence. The tribunal must be independent, appropriately qualified, have effective powers, and operate within the prescribed timeframes.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we must verify customary ownership and boundaries before vesting. We require an independent mapping and survey, publication of maps, coordinates, and supporting evidence, notice, and all affected customary groups, interest holders, finances, and public authorities, and formal objections to hearing process, written reasons, and final resolution of overlapping claims before any vesting order is made.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, protected public access, maritime operation, and essential State functions. We must preserve lawful passage, navigation, transit, anchoring, mooring, recreation, and subsistence use, and ordinary access to marine areas. We must clearly address declared poor shipping routes, navigation channels, cruise vessels, tenders, cargo vessels, ferries, marinas, and visiting yachts.

The preservation of State leases, minerals, revenue, and infrastructure rights: We must preserve existing State leases, licences, mortgages, and related financial arrangements, and clarify whether State, TLTB, or another authority will administer this interest and collect future rents.

The protection and encouragement of conservation partnerships: Mr. Speaker, Sir, we must include genuine non-commercial conservation, restoration research, and environmental stewardship, and activities from appropriate fees and compensation obligations. We must develop a more based alternative framework. We must develop a statutory benefit sharing and core management model that preserves State-ownership and regulatory responsibility while formally recognising legitimate customary interests.

Promote active iTaukei participation: We must complement compensation and benefit sharing with enterprise development, access to finance, technical and management training, joint ventures, equity participation, procurement opportunities, and support for iTaukei-owned tourism, conservation, transport, and marine service businesses. These objectives should be long-term economic capability and enterprise ownership by the *qoliqoli* owners, but supported by transparent arrangements for receiving, managing, distributing, and investing benefits in locally identified community development priorities.

Taken together, Mr. Speaker, Sir, this message would provide a more balanced framework for recognising customary interests and delivering fair economic benefits without undermining existing rights, public access, investor confidence, national infrastructure or coordinated management of Fiji's marine resources.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Opposition's central request is simple. We are not asking the Government to abandon the Bill. We are asking the Government not to create sovereign risk while trying to correct historical injustice. A stable framework must work for *iTaukei* owners, operators, finances, workers, communities and guests. We ask the Government to consider whether *iqoliqoli* recognition should be treated as a national issue, not a narrow tourism issue.

Fiji is a maritime nation. Every citizen and every business benefits from the sea through goods, fuel, food, infrastructure, connectivity and tourism. A national approach including a possible social or *qoliqoli* levy collected transparently and distributed through an appropriate mechanism, may

be a cleaner and more durable way to achieve equitable benefit sharing without destabilising tenure.

A well-designed Commercial Use of Marine Areas framework can strengthen social licences, improve benefit sharing and support sustainable tourism. However, a framework that is clear, discretionary and incomplete will create avoidable disputes and weaken investor confidence. We respectfully ask that these implementation gaps be resolved before the Bill is passed or commences.

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise in support of the Commercial Use of Marine Areas Bill 2025. This Bill places the iTaukei Fisheries Commission at the front of the process. I want to explain why the Commission is the right body for that work, and I want to settle one concern directly, that this Bill does not touch the right to fish for food. *E sega ni mai kauta tani na lawa vakaturi oqo na nomuni dodonu ni qoliva na kemuni.* (This proposed law does not take away your right to fish in your traditional fishing grounds.)

The Bill defines commercial purposes as commercial tourism activity and emission reduction projects. It expressly excludes fishing as fishing is defined under the Marine Spaces Act 1977. Subsistence fishing, customary fishing, the daily work of feeding a family and a village sits outside this Bill entirely. No vesting order under this legislation changes a person's right to fish their *qoliqoli* for food. I want every coastal and maritime community listening to hear that clearly. *Me vaka ga na noqu a vakaraitaka e liu, e sega ni mai kauta tani na lawa vakaturi oqo na nomuni dodonu ena nomuni qoliva na kemuni.* (As I had pointed out earlier, this proposed law does not take away your right to fish in your traditional fishing grounds.)

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Commission already keeps the register of *iTaukei* customary fishing rights. It knows the *iqoliqoli*, it knows the boundaries and it knows the owners. So, when a customary group applies to have an area returned, the Commission verifies the area against the register, identifies the entitled owners, confirms that the area is a commercial marine area, and assesses the economic and environmental impact before anything proceeds.

We establish the facts before we change ownership. The Bill also allows the Commission to consult experts such as valuers and environmentalists. Our people have managed these waters through custom for centuries, closing grounds to let them recover, protecting spawning areas and reading the reef. This Bill aligns legal ownership with that inherited stewardship. It does not weaken conservation. A vesting order can apply to a commercial marine area even where that area falls within a marine protected area, and where an Environmental Impact Assessment is required under the Environment Management Act 2025, that requirement must still be met.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, fisheries law does not stop at the edge of a vested area. Licencing, compliance and sustainable management continue under the responsible authorities. Ownership changes, the duty to manage the resource does not. This Bill strengthens the hand of the communities who know these waters best and it does so without disturbing the food of a single household. I, therefore, commend the Bill to the House.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, as a lot of speakers have spoken about this Bill, as we are all aware, it is something that is of intense interest in the *iTaukei* community for a long period of time, and having served in the Committee, we have heard the various sentiments that have been expressed in relation to *qoliqoli* rights and ownership, and a lot of the desires by *iTaukei* to take back control of *qoliqoli*. Some of the submissions that were made relate all the way back to Cession, all the things that took place in Cession coming across to Independence. So, it is something that is very critical and close to all *iTaukei* in terms of their sense of identity, and who they are, they are very closely associated with the *qoliqoli*.

The issue about this whole Bill is about the ownership of the *qoliqoli* and as we are all aware, currently all *qoliqoli* is owned by the State. The *iTaukei* have the customary usage rights of the *qoliqoli*, and there are also traditional owners of the *qoliqoli*. There are two different classes of people that you find in this particular Bill; it is the customary owners and also the *iTaukei* owners of the *qoliqoli* - two distinct classes that are there.

The Bill tries to deal with all of these, and at the same time, it tries to maintain, as the honourable Deputy Prime Minister has pointed out, tries to maintain our obligations to things like free passage, public access to sea areas, rites of passage, et cetera. It has been an interesting exercise in trying to manage all of these issues together. I think for all of us in Parliament, we want to make sure that the *iTaukei* get as much benefit as they can from the *qoliqoli* of which they are the traditional owners or traditional customary users.

At the same time, we have a very strong obligation to make sure that we protect tourism, the confidence in the sector, because as we all know, tourism is 40 percent of our GDP. A lot of the development work that *iTaukei* benefit from, come either directly or indirectly from tourism. Even there can be some development project up in Kadavu, where there is no tourism, but there are tourism dollars and tourism taxation dollars that impact all the far reach of the country.

Mr. Speaker, as we go down this route of trying to give more benefits to *iTaukei*, it needs to be done in such a manner that you do not kill or destroy tourism, which is having an impact on all of us *iTaukei*. Whether you are part in tourism area or not, those benefits accrue to all of us. Those are some of the key things that are coming out in terms of what we need to do in terms of this particular Bill.

As we moved around the country, there was a lot of talk. We went to villages and also as a Committee, we went to meetings of provincial councils, a lot of talk about minerals, people want the minerals, control of the minerals, a lot of talk about the *qoliqoli*, and in fact, the vast majority of ordinary *iTaukei* that we met were in favour of the Bill, to the extent also where they wanted to remove Clause 34 of the Bill. Clause 34 says about maintaining Parts 6 and 9 of the Surfing Act, which means, you keep the access open. Anyone can go to these reefs and use it for recreation, not for fishing, but it is kept open. That part of the Bill, people wanted to remove, but that also then has an impact on tourism.

So, in the development of this Bill, there has to be a fine juggling act of what we are trying to produce. We are trying to make sure that we get the best return for the *iTaukei* in such a manner that it does not hurt them in the long run. If tourism is hurt, it is going to impact all of us and the confidence in tourism itself.

I was very interested in a lot of the discussions that came up as we moved around the country as part of the Committee, there are people who expressed the fact they are not owners of the *qoliqoli* and they are *iTaukei*. They question is; how will they benefit from this? Will it just benefit some *iTaukei* and not all? That was a question that came up, not very often, but it did come up in certain areas.

The other concern was what happens to *iTaukei* who do not have *qoliqoli*. In some parts of the world, Mr. Speaker, Sir, *qoliqoli* or fishing rights, the benefits that come out of it is shared amongst all who are part of that indigenous community. In this particular one, the *qoliqoli* here is only the traditional owner. There are some *qoliqoli* where one chief can be the traditional owner, but there are others who are customary owners. So, there is customary owner and traditional owner. This is one of the issues that need to be sorted out.

The honourable Members here are saying, the boundaries are well spelt out. That might be right on paper, but if the boundary is spelt out and people know that their family has used that area, they understand to be theirs, their grandfathers and their great-grandfathers told them, they will not believe what is in those boundaries. That is a potential source of conflict. For all of us *iTaukei*, we need to make sure that we can deal with this issue. This is not a hypothetical issue, it is real one. This Bill is probably going to be passed today, but it is the implementation of this, we need to take it slowly, so we avoid that kind of conflict. That is a very, very serious issue.

You can go around and tell people, according to the register, this *qoliqoli* belongs to this group. But there will be people whose families have fished there for generations, they believed it is theirs. This is a major issue that will need to be sorted out. Who has the *qoliqoli*? Who will be able to get wealth out of it?

There were those who were also unhappy with the fact that now they will be pounded from iTLTB. As has been pointed out by the honourable Minister, the Committee actually tried to reduce the poundage. We know the poundage now from a maximum of 25 percent down to 20 percent. Currently, we know the poundage in iTLTB is set by policy at 18 percent, if I am not mistaken: 10 percent for welfare and 8 percent to be shared out.

The Committee felt we give them a bit of a 2 percent too in case there might be other things that iTLTB needs to do over the long term. They were actually *iTaukei* said, “Scrap it altogether, give them 10 percent”, which sounds completely unreasonable. It is incumbent upon us in Parliament, as we look at all of these arguments, to be able to chart a way forward that meets everyone’s best interest. Sometimes the best interest of people is not what they ask for, it is what they do not ask for. For us in Parliament, we must be able to determine what that path is.

There was one submittee who suggested that the Bill actually discriminates between *iTaukei*. That was from an *iTaukei* himself, a group of people.

The Fiji Law Society suggested that the Bill could lead to disputes over customary ownership and marine boundaries, and when that happens, it affects confidence. I think it is very important for all of us in the House as leaders, as we talk about these things - I am talking to myself here - to be wary about the choice of words that I use in talking about this, because we do not want to make confidence goes down, because it is going to have an impact on the whole industry.

As I mentioned, there was concern with the poundage that will be given, but there was also, as I pointed out, there was unanimous agreement by the provincial councils that Clause 34 of the Bill be removed. Honourable Koroilavesau spoke at length about the concerns by the tourism sector. I think one of the things that I found most interesting, Mr. Speaker, Sir, while the honourable Acting Attorney-General has talked about consultation, almost everywhere that we went and talked to people in the sector, they were not aware of what is in this Bill. They were not aware. Maybe there was some consultation just to tick the boxes. That is just being efficient, that is not being effective.

Effective is when you achieve what you are supposed to do. It is an important thing for us as government, as we are going around with this very major kind of Bill that can have an impact on everyone, it is not just about ticking the boxes. Everywhere that we went - we are talking about Nadi, we are talking about Labasa, Savusavu - people did not know, people from the industry themselves. It is very important that consultation takes place, and that was constant.

There was a lot of concern that the whole financial and economic aspects of this have not been fully assessed in terms of investment, tourism, employment, government revenue, business cost and international competitiveness. There are a lot of terms in this Bill which are very good, but it

needs to be further defined. What does fair and equitable compensation mean?

There needs to be some guidelines and guard rails developed. There is a concern also, if you put it in the regulations, then Parliament does not have any oversight on the regulations. One of the things that we have to seriously consider, the Ministry had said they are going to take these regulations out for consultation.

Perhaps, in this particular case, we need to bring those regulations back to Parliament for further scrutiny. I think there is room in the Standing Orders for us to do that, and I think that is an amendment that we need to make. If the regulations go out, Parliament must have some scrutiny over those regulations, because a lot of these terms, they will be further defined in the regulations.

The processes about them and the standards that will be used, the definitions, they need to be further looked at whether it is Justice, Law and Human Rights Committee or other Committees in Parliament. The statutory criteria for decisions, independent expert advice, conflict of interest projections, reasons for decisions, and we also need to be very careful, and I think one of the new clusters of persons that have been included in the list is interested persons.

Interested persons are people who have some interest. They do not own the business, and that includes the banks. One of the things I think, honourable Koya talked about the fact that the banks themselves were not consulted. When we are talking about this, tourism is big business. There are a lot of loans. We need to be able to take all of those into account. There is a lot of talks, as honourable Koroilavesau said, there has been a suggestion from the industry that existing arrangements should not be touched.

In the Bill, it says once a piece of *qoliqoli* has been vested, there can be some negotiation, and they can also be, if both parties agree, there is a possibility, they may agree that they exist in compensatory arrangements remain. Maybe the people in the tourism sector are still very fearful of that particular clause, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

The Fiji Law Society also suggested that proposed ownership transfer could create uncertainty. So, that is something, as I talk a bit more about the property rights. I think, for me, as I think about this, it is important for us to accomplish three things in what we are trying to do in this legislation.

First of all, we need to make sure that the *iTaukei* can get better returns. Secondly, we have to make sure we do not kill the goose that lays the golden egg. Thirdly, we must make sure that whatever we do, we do not impact on the security of our country, because if everyone does whatever they want to do with their *qoliqoli*, how does then the people that look after security of our country have the right to interfere in what they want done in their *qoliqoli* area? So, the fourth issue that we need to take into account is that national security issue that we really need to look for.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, just looking at some of the clauses that we have in the Bill. If you look at Clause 3(a) of the Bill – the objective of the Bill. It took me a long time to grapple with this, I, first, is to enable the reversion of the proprietary ownership of commercial marine areas. In my mind, constitutionally, that was not possible.

Now, we had a long discussion with the drafters, and they pointed out that in Sections 29(1) and (2) of the 2013 Constitution, it says that all ownership of land and all rights shall continue to exist under the 2013 Constitution, so the States and the rights relating to land cannot be changed. Now, the drafters tell us that, that is a transitional clause, that it will not continue into perpetuity.

Most of us in Fiji believe that that particular clause is not a transitional clause. It makes the declaration that things cannot be changed. Then the drafters pointed out that Section 28(1) and Section 29(5) of the Constitution states specifically that *iTaukei* and freehold land cannot be changed to any other form of ownership. Section 28(1) states that for *iTaukei* land, you cannot change it from *iTaukei* to State or Freehold.

Then it says again in Section 29(5) that freehold land cannot revert to *iTaukei*, cannot revert to State, it stays as freehold. So, *iTaukei* land and freehold is ring-fenced. They say that because that is in place, that means State land can be changed. I believe that that is something that a court needs to tell us what the real interpretation is. I have heard that explanation. Because if the court says that you cannot change the format of State land, that it cannot change, then we cannot revert this piece of land. I hope what I am trying to explain is coming through.

The drafters have stated this to mean that Sections 29(1) and (2) of the Constitution are transitional provisions. They further state that Section 28(1) and Section 29(5) are declaratory in nature, and therefore that State land is not ring-fenced like *iTaukei* and freehold land. It is for this reason they say that *qoliqoli* can be changed from state ownership to *iTaukei* ownership. But the other thing that I will say, Section 91(5) of the Constitution says that Cabinet may seek an opinion from the supreme court on any matter relating to the Constitution. That is what they did in relation to how you can change the Constitution.

I think this is a matter that Cabinet needs to take up to the Constitution. Let us resolve that particular issue because we do not want to be in a situation where we are stepping on our own feet by breaking our own Constitution. It is a very fundamental issue. I am not a lawyer, bit of a bush lawyer here, but this is what I have learned so far from being in the Justice, Law and Human Rights Committee.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Very much.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Very much so; true.

So that is what I am saying, it is that sort of getting an opinion from the supreme court is perhaps something that Cabinet and Government must do.

One of the things that it had there was that the iTaukei Fisheries Commission, one of their roles would be to assess the potential economic and environmental impact of a vesting order. In the Committee, I was thinking, how are the people that just looking at boundaries, how can they do that exercise of saying this one decision and its impact will be this, this, this in terms of economy investment? So, one of the things that has been added there, to give TFC the right to be able to get experts to help them in that particular role.

That is one of the issues that has been put there, and I think the role of the iTaukei Fisheries Commission is very important. It is very critical, it will really need to be built up so that they have their own expertise within the Commission itself, and they have access to expertise that can help them manage their way through all of the concerns that are coming through here.

Mr. Speaker, one of the other things that I am happy about with Clause 13(3), it says, for the avoidance of doubt, a vesting order does not grant the *iTaukei* owners or any other person the power to contravene a person's right of freedom of movement as guaranteed under Section 21 of the Constitution. That is good. Does not restrict or remove the right to the public to free an undisturbed access for non-commercial or recreational purposes. These things are good, it addresses to some degree some of the issues that have been brought up, especially by the tourism sector.

One of the other issues that I am just grappling with here as I am looking at the Bill again for the last time, I have spent a lot of time looking at this Bill. Clause 22A states that TLTB must not grant a lease or licence over a vested marine area unless TLTB is satisfied that the marine area proposed to be leased or licensed is not being beneficially used by the *iTaukei* owners. This is very important.

It says if it is not being beneficially used by the *iTaukei* owners, so *iTaukei* owner is the guy who is said to own. However, the people who have the customary right may not be that particular person, they are little groups, little chiefs around the place. You get what I am talking about, they might be using it, but this Clause of the Bill says that if it is not of beneficial use by the *iTaukei* owner who might be in Suva or somewhere else, he can vest it. So, there might be an issue of conflict here between the customary owners and the *iTaukei* owners. That, I think, is going to be a complex issue that will need to be looked at in great details.

As I said, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the whole intent of the Bill is good. It is going to be passed. We need to make sure. *Meda vakusakusa vakamalua* (Let us proceed slowly and carefully), and I am not joking about this. *Qoliqoli*, even right now, people scrap on the forefront. *Ke sa na mani caka, meda vakusakusa vakamalua*. (If it is to be done, let us proceed slowly and carefully.) We make sure we dot all the 'i's and cross all the 't's. *Meda vakusakusa vakamalua, me caka vakavinaka. Ena kauta mai vei keda na vinaka vei keda na itaukei ni qoliqoli, kakua ni vakaleqa na saravanua. Na saravanua 'qo eda bula kece tu kina o keda 'qo. E voli mai e dua na boto me kau i Ogea, dua na kena iwase e rawa tiko mai na saravanua*. (Let us proceed carefully and do it properly. It should bring benefits to us, the traditional fishing ground owners, without harming the environment. We all depend on this tourism for our livelihoods. A boat is purchased and taken to Ogea, and part of the income is generated from tourism.)

MR. SPEAKER.- I say you behave like a lawyer.

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to support the motion or the Bill that has been proposed on the floor of the House by the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Tourism and Civil Aviation. I am sure that all of us here in the House today would understand, and also, not just appreciate, but also agree that every property system depends on one thing. It depends on the certainty of who owns what and on what terms.

My portfolio as the Minister for Lands and Mineral Resources is to ensure that that certainty exists. When the marine area is transferred to or acquired for vesting under the Bill, a certificate must first be executed. It shows title ship; it shows that processes have been complied with, the leasing and vesting processes have all been ticked before that certificate is issued. What does that certification contain? It contains the diagram or the description of the area, and it is provided for by scale, which means that that area or the area that is going to be vested is going to be surveyed, that it is also signed and approved or certified to belong to a particular *qoliqoli* owning group, and that we all know.

The custodian of that record is the *iTaukei* Land and Fisheries Commission (iTLFC). It must be signed by the iTLFC, it will be signed by the *iTaukei* Land Trust Board and also by the Director of Lands. Only then, under this three-tier check and balance process, will one be able to get a transfer, and that transfer will then be recorded in the register.

Boundaries, of course, are going to be defined in the certification. Marks are set and are maintained, so it is a very clear process of boundary identification and boundary demarcation. The area returned is a known area that is going to be described on paper, and there will be no approximation. The fear that perhaps might exist where one *qoliqoli* owning group might have a claim over and above the *qoliqoli* owning group who have been consulted for a particular certification

or vesting, that can be done away with or can be mitigated by the fact that these areas are going to be first surveyed, boundaries identified, and clearly it show which *qoliqoli* owning group does that vested area belong to.

Once vested, leases over the area are entered in the register of *iTaukei* marine leases and licences in a dedicated register kept by the Board. The Land Transfer Act 1971 applies to these registered leases. This is the same discipline, process and governance that governs land dealings across Fiji up to-date.

Mr. Speaker, we are extending a proven system from land to the marine space. We are not reinventing or creating something that is untested. The Bill amends the State Lands Act 1945 and the Rivers and Streams Act 1980 so that our laws stays consistent. A vested marine area is carved out of the definition of the State land. Ownership of rivers and soil beneath them can rest with the *iTaukei* owners within a vested area. These are deliberate alignments that prevents conflict between the old law and the new law.

Mr. Speaker, allow me to be clear about sovereignty. A vesting order returns ownership on a proprietary basis. It does not affect the sovereign right of the State under the Constitution and under any public international law. The authority of the State over its waters remains intact. Here is the point for investment, Mr. Speaker. Security of tenure is what capital looks for. An operator who holds a registered lease, granted by a known owner through the board with a right of appeal to the tribunal holds something that is far more bankable than a right under a fragmented and outdated framework that currently exists.

I want to just address a few of the issues that have been raised by the honourable Usamate about possible conflicts between the Bill as it is and the Constitutional provisions and safeguards on State land and landowning tenure at the moment that exists in the 2013 Constitution. The first thing that I probably impress on the honourable Usamate is, yes, there are and may continue to be conflicting interpretations of whether those two provisions under the Constitution are transitory or they are declaratory.

As the Acting Attorney-General has highlighted to us this week and also has spoken about it publicly, the Constitution of 2013 (as we all know) is also under review and quite possibly, there may no need to have the courts determine anything that may come out of this Bill because there is quite surely a ground opposition to those existing provisions under the current Constitution as they are.

Yes, there may in this shape and form, perhaps the need to have clarity and that clarity, of course, is going to be given to us by the courts ultimately, where the provisions of this Act or the Act in its entirety contravenes certain sections of the Constitution. But beyond that, I think the more important, as we move forward together as a nation is, we also understand that whilst we are changing and amending this law, we are also in the process of changing and amending the supreme law of our country.

Clear titles, Mr. Speaker, serves the customary owner and the investor at the same time and I am sure the honourable Usamate had spoken about that at length, in suggesting that whilst we are passing this Bill, we are all cognisant of the fact that it needs to be balanced. I understand it to be a very, it requires a lot of juggling about interest, interest that exists in a developer bringing in capital, bringing in money to come and invest and also at the same time making sure that there is equitable compensation for those *qoliqoli* owners who own the *qoliqoli*. We know that in many of these developments, in practise and in reality, that when an area is identified and vested to be or that belong entitled to a developer, that in many ways they themselves are going to be restricted from usage.

It does not often come out in the media, but I personally have interacted with *qoliqoli* owners who have on their *qoliqoli* present leases, where they, for example, are not allowed to come and fish close by because, again, there are some activities that they might disturb because they sit quite close to hotels and resort areas. So, I think with this opportunity, where there is a lot of regimented steps that needs to be ticked, ensuring that balance, that the interest of the developer, as well as the interest of the *qoliqoli* owners, in as much as the interest of tourism and industry does to the entire country.

That balancing act is surely going to be served, and I am pretty sure it is going to be served, either through the principle legislation or in the development of the regulations where things will become a little bit more detailed so that we can capture the issues that have been raised by the hoteliers, issues that have been raised by a law society, and issues that have been raised by those who may have thought they were dealing only with a Surfing Decree and not something that is bigger than that. I am sure that in the passage of this Bill and in the passage of the regulations, all of these will be taken care of. We will continue to have a very vibrant tourism industry in as much as we would have good and willing *qoliqoli* owners to go into partnership.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to contribute to Bill No. 42 of 2025. Whenever Parliament is asked to change the legal rights relating to land or marine areas, we must approach the matter with care. Such decisions have consequences that can extend well beyond the immediate purpose of the legislation. This Bill is no exception. It concerns customary rights, commercial interest, existing investment, tourism, employment and the management of Fiji's marine resources. These are matters that affect not only those directly involved, but also the wider economy and communities across Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we also recognise the need for a clear legal framework that allows commercial activities to continue with certainty and transparency. Our responsibility in this Parliament is therefore to ensure that these interests are properly balanced. We must ask, does this Bill provide sufficient certainty and protection for everyone affected by it? Does it clearly establish the rights of customary owners? Does it provide certainty for existing businesses and investors? Does it provide a fair and transparent compensation system? Does it provide an effective mechanism for resolving disputes, and most importantly, is the proposed framework, fully consistent with the Constitution and the rule of law.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, these are not questions that should be addressed after the Bill is passed. Parliament should address this before the Bill becomes a law. With that in mind, I wish to raise several issues which, in my view, require further consideration by all of us.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights recorded concerns regarding whether state-owned marine areas can be transferred to customary ownership without a constitutional amendment, particularly in relation to Section 29 of the Constitution. This is what they raised.

“The Ministry has provided its interpretation that Section 29 is transitional in nature.” However, Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is a matter of considerable constitutional importance. We are dealing with the transfer of proprietary rights over Fiji's foreshore, internal waters, archipelagic waters and territorial sea. Parliament should therefore have the benefit of clear legal advice from the proceeding.

We should not legislate on an issue of this magnitude and leave the constitutional question to be determined later through litigation. I, therefore, believe the Committee should have obtained and tabled clear advice from the Solicitor- General on whether the proposed transfer is constitutionally

permissible under the existing Constitution, which in my view was not there in the Report.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, my second concern relates to the Marine Area Appeals Tribunal. Clause 16(3) provides that a decision of the tribunal is final and cannot be challenged in the court of law. But just a while ago, we have heard from other Ministers that there is structural process with natural justice and is going to follow the rule of law.

I believe this provision 16(3) requires reconsideration. The tribunal will make binding determinations over property rights and compensation affecting hotels, resorts, dive operators, charter operators, and in doing so, thousands of jobs in our tourism sector is at stake. Such decisions can have significant consequences. So, an appropriate safeguard must be maintained to ensure that if a party believes the tribunal has made an error of law or failed to follow proper procedure, there is an avenue for that decision to be reviewed.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Judicial Review is about ensuring that public decision makers act within the law and comply with the requirements of procedural fairness. We believe that the Bill must preserve the court's jurisdiction to review tribunal decisions on questions of law and procedural fairness, as we see in other cases where tribunal decisions can be challenged. Now let us move on to the compensation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the third major issue is compensation. Clause 9 of this Bill lists the factors of a Compensation Scheme may reflect customary rights, property rights, benefits to a developer, lump sum or recurring payment, but it does not set a formula. The actual methodology is left entirely to regulation that this House will never see or debate on. This is where we need transparency. Our law should be crystal clear in matters of such nature. We are being asked, in fact, to sign a blank cheque where the details will be later on filled by the Minister outside this Chamber, and that will be through regulations. Now this is a serious concern.

The Fiji Hotel and Tourism Association has told the Committee directly that the Bill threatens to replace statutory and contractual certainty with administrative discretion. Now, when administrative discretion comes into play, it becomes subjective, and subjective decision-making leads to uncertainty.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we hear of landowners demanding payment from operators even before the Bill has been passed. How can you do business in such an environment? This is a sign of exactly the kind of uncertainty that an undefined compensation framework invites, and this will definitely create uncertainty for everyone.

Customary owners need to know how their rights will translate into meaningful benefits and what are their responsibilities. Businesses and investors need to understand how their interests will be treated and what financial obligations may arise. A clear compensation framework is therefore essential. Government should therefore provide greater certainty on this matter and not leave it to the regulations.

Impact on Tourism and Investment, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we must also recognise the importance of tourism that contributes 40 percent to Fiji's economy. Thousands of Fijians depend on tourism for their livelihoods. This includes hotel employees, tour operators, transport providers, dive operators, boat operators, restaurants, farmers and many other businesses. In fact, everyone's life is linked to the tourism sector.

The tourism industry has raised concern about the certainty of existing legal and contractual arrangements. These concerns must be taken seriously. We must establish a framework in which

customary owners receive fair recognition and benefit from their rights while existing businesses and investors have sufficient legal certainty to continue operating and investing in Fiji. This is particularly important for both, foreign and domestic investors, and financial institutions that require certainty before providing finance. Unfortunately, the Bill is not providing that balance.

The Bill also needs to provide greater clarity concerning existing developments and agreements. Many hotels, resorts and tourism businesses have made substantial investments under the existing legal framework. If marine rights are transferred, what happens to existing agreements? What happens to existing licenses and commercial arrangements? How will businesses that have already invested substantial amounts of capital be treated, particularly when they had paid compensation earlier on? And how will the government ensure that uncertainty does not affect employment and economic activity? These matters should be addressed clearly in the legislation or through appropriate transitional provisions.

Then we have this issue of overlapping claims. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Committee heard evidence from Savusavu tourist operators that many *qoliqoli* areas are jointly owned or subject to overlapping claims. This Bill provides no dedicated mechanism to resolve such disputes before a vesting order is made. It offers only a right to appeal, and we know a tribunal's decision as I have said earlier on cannot be challenged in our courts. It is far better to resolve ownership and boundary issues before rights are transferred than to deal with disputes afterwards when the transfer is made.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we believe that the Bill must provide greater certainty before it is passed, and I have said this before. There are *iTaukei* who do not have *qoliqoli* and they will not be able to benefit from this Bill. What else can we put for those *iTaukei* who do not have *qoliqoli*?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are asking the Government to:

- Table the compensation regulations or at a minimum, a firm methodology, an indicative range before this Bill proceeds further so that this House knows what it is actually approving.
- Amend Clause 16(3) to allow the judicial review of tribunal decisions on questions of law of procedural fairness, consistent with the right to a fair hearing guaranteed under our constitution.
- Commission an independent social economic and fiscal impact assessment covering tourism investment, government revenue and banking and lending confidence before commencement.
- Resolve overlapping *qoliqoli* claims before vesting orders are made, not after.
- Obtain and table before this House clear Solicitor-General's advice on whether this transfer of proprietary rights requires constitutional amendments, given the doubts the Committee could not resolve.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, these safeguards are intended to ensure that the Bill achieves its objective without creating unnecessary legal disputes, economic uncertainty, loss of investor confidence or hardship for those affected. Today, we are debating this Bill, and it is a matter of time, maybe next five or ten years, we will see the result of this Bill. Now, to safeguard everyone's interest, there are certain provisions that I have mentioned earlier on, that need to be considered so that the Bill is fair, transparent, enforceable, it will not jeopardize the tourism sector, and it will continue contributing to our economic growth.

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL.-Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise in support of the Commercial Use of Marine Areas Bill 2025, a Bill that had gone through consultations and done partly by the partisan parliamentary Committee with Justice, Law and Human Rights. I think they did marvelously from consultations to the finalisation of the draft Bill.

I want to make the economic case, Mr. Speaker, Sir, because good social policy and sound economics are not in tension here. This Bill supports both social policy as well as the economics of it. The Bill will enhance both tourism and takes away the cost of uncertainty. Tourism is the mainstay of our economy and a major source of employment. Much of that activity happens on or beside marine areas held under custom.

For years, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the legal basis for that activity has been uncertain and uncertainty is the cost and is something that was raised by some of our Members. It sits on every investment decision, every renewal and every expansion and also undermines the marine owners. This Bill removes that uncertainty caused by replacing a fragmented framework with clear rules. *E kauta tani na rivarivabi se nuiqawaqawa vei ira na caka bisinisi, saravanua kei ira talega nai taukei.* (It takes away the uncertainty and anxiety of business owners, tourism operators, and the local people as well.) That uncertainty attracts investments.

Investors are not deterred by the recognition of customary ownership. They are deterred by not knowing who owns an asset; what rights are attached to it; and what happens in a dispute. This Bill answers all three, a known owner, a registered interest and a right of appeal. There is a more investable proposition than the arrangement it replaces.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Bill also enhances growth that reaches the communities. When customary owners hold ownership and share in the returns, income flows to rural and maritime communities that have carried the least benefit from tourism for the past years. That is growth reaching the places that needs it. It broadens the base of our economy rather than concentrating it.

The Bill is disciplined about cost as well. Compensation must not impose an unreasonable or burdensome payment on an operator, and as far as practicable, the cost is to be borne by the consumers and users of the commercial activity. It can be adjusted for inflation and structured over time as well. This protects the viability of the businesses, and it protects the treasury from becoming the player of the last resort.

The Bill provides a framework for the growth of the blue economy. The Bill requires regulations that establish a framework for the economic development of marine areas against clear qualifying criteria. It also captures emissions reduction projects under the Climate Change Act 2021 as a commercial purpose. So, that opens the blue economy and climate finance as a lawful new source of value for customary owners alongside tourism. This Bill is pro-growth, pro-investment and pro-community at the same time. I commend the Bill to the House.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me first take the opportunity to thank all my fellow Committee Members who put in some considerable hours and a lot of work with respect to this particular Bill brought to the floor of Parliament. A lot has been said already – I probably do not need to say – from my fellow Committee Members, honourable Usamate, honourable Kumar, and honourable Koroilavesau, our youngest Member of Parliament also is due to looking into the future, and some of the other speakers. However, I wanted to just touch on a few points that are worth considering. They actually have been raised, but it is something worth considering, and it is to do with the law.

Again, the honourable Minister for Lands has rightfully pointed out that the law can be subjected to several different interpretations, as you would know well, Mr. Speaker. Right at the outset, one of the hurdles that we faced, grappled with and we also look at, and I think everyone does the same was the particular provision with respect to the protection of ownership and interest in land in the Constitution. Let me say this also, that whilst the work is going on with respect to review, et cetera for the Constitution, this is the law of the land. So whatever we do, we must follow what is in

this particular book in terms of the law.

For purposes of ensuring that the general public also know that Section 29 (1) of the Constitution actually reads, and bear this in mind with respect to a specific provision in here that protects *iTaukei* land and also protects freehold land. However, this particular provision, the heading of which is “Protection of ownership and interest in land” and it reads:

“All ownership of land, and all rights and interests in land leases and land tenancies that existed immediately before the commencement of this Constitution shall continue to exist under this Constitution.”

There is no transition about it.

The second part of it, subsection (2) reads, and I quote:

“No law shall be made to diminish or adversely affect the rights and interests in land leases and land tenancies, whether existing immediately before the commencement of this Constitution or made or issued after the commencement of this Constitution.”

It actually goes on to subsection (3) where it says, and I quote:

“All land lessees and land tenants have the right not to have their land leases or land tenancies terminated other than in accordance with their land leases or land tenancies.”

These are not simple provisions. They need to be read properly or even interpreted by the highest court in the land, so that if something is to move forward then we have proper direction.

Subsection (4), thereafter, reads that there is further protection, and I quote:

“Parliament and Cabinet, through legislative and other measures, (there is no may, there is no shall, it says), must ensure that all land leases and land tenancies provide a fair and equitable return to the landowners whilst protecting the rights of the land lessees and land tenants, including security and protection of tenure of land leases and land tenancies and terms and conditions of land leases and the land tenancies which might be just, fair and reasonable.”

So, these provisions, Mr. Speaker, all lawyers will probably have a different interpretation, but they are protective and this provision is Section 29 captures the State lease and the integrity of State leases and State land. I believe that it is very important, and the question was asked when we sat with the drafters or with the Ministry to say, “why did you not take this for interpretation first before this was done. This would have created the path to actually do it if it was correct.”

Now, bear in mind that it may end up being subjected to a court action by an aggrieved lessee or a financial institution who forked out \$20 million for a foreshore lease, and now finds themselves in a completely different position because it is going to be re-negotiated. The \$20 million that was given for a foreshore will now have to be re-negotiated, but the loan that was given was on the basis of a particular lease. There is no issue with respect to the protection of the indigenous ownership of the land, but there are issues with respect to legal things. One of the other things that was important in terms of the law, it is important to actually recognise and this is a provision that was spoken by honourable Usamate.

Section 70 of our Constitution tells us that Parliament must under its rules and orders establish

committees with the functions of scrutinising Government administration and examining Bills and subordinate legislation, and such other functions as are specified from time to time in the rules and orders of Parliament. It is a must to establish the Committees for the function of scrutinising subordinate legislation.

In here, we have a lot of things that have been left into the regulations. Many governments have gone by, no one has actually ever utilised it, but even in our Standing Orders, if you look at it, Standing Order 110(b), where the functions of the Standing Committees are, and I am talking 110(b), they are to examine any subordinate legislation tabled in Parliament within its category of affairs.

You tell me, honourable Members, how many subordinate legislations have been put on the floor of Parliament? Absolutely none. No one's fault. No Parliaments have actually done it, maybe it slipped through. So, bearing in mind that all of this is actually there with respect to the law, the thoughts were that maybe we need to put a provision in this particular Commercial Use of Marine Areas Bill 2025 Bill to state that since you are leaving so much to the regulations, it needs to come back to Parliament because this is a very, for want of a better way, a sensitive area. It concerns 40 percent of our GDP, our indigenous landowners and *qoliqoli* owners. It is something that is that needs to be dealt with properly.

Mr. Speaker, a couple of other things, right at the outset in the Bill itself, in the definitions of the Bill, it refers to a commercial marine area where it says and I quote: "... means a marine area that is used for commercial purposes even if it is within the boundaries of a marine protected area."

Commercial purposes mean the use of a marine area for a commercial tourism activity or for an emissions reductions project, programme or activity undertaken in accordance with Part 10 of the Climate Change Act 2021, but excludes fishing as defined in the section 2 of the Marine Spaces Act 1977. Honourable Bainivalu actually spoke about it.

Then it defines commercial tourism activity, means a prescribed commercial activity in the tourism industry. The operators are asking, where is it prescribed? We do not know. No one is aware. So, it leaves a lot of space for different interpretations to the actual tourism operators that are in the country who have spent millions of dollars actually doing this. You cannot just say that, "okay, we will deal with that in the rain." Majority of everything is now being dealt with in the regulations. Will it come back to Parliament – we do not know. Maybe a provision needs to be put in there, maybe it ought to have been in there in the first place.

Mr. Speaker, I also wanted to address, because I know a lot of issues has already been addressed, the submissions from the Fiji Hotel Tourism Association was quite valid, the Fiji Law Society, et cetera and some of the landowning communities that are being left by because they do not own *qoliqoli* are also worthy of being addressed; they needed to be addressed.

Mr. Speaker, I see the honourable Acting Attorney-General shaking his head and saying, "no".

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- We don't have that.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- That is not the point. The point is, honourable Acting Attorney-General that in this, in the provision of 25 percent, the only way that they are going to get access to anything is through the welfare funds, part of that 20 percent or 25 percent that we put into the Bill, is actually going to go towards the welfare fund. It is an issue that raises it and remember, doing this will also mean repercussions on another side where it will open up an avenue for more at the end of the day, with respect to maybe not just tourism business.

As a particular area of concern, how this has been treated – the foreshore, the internal waters, the rivers and the reclaimed land. When people hear the title “commercial use of marine areas”, they may naturally think that we are actually primarily dealing with reefs, coastal waters and commercial activities taking place at sea. When we examine it, the actual definition contained in the Bill, it is considerably wider. The practical implications for major tourism areas, we were asked the question - Denarau, what about the golf club, what about the most of Denarau that was at one time someone *qoliqoli* and his reclaimed land and its tourism-based.

We were asked by the Suvavou villagers, the wharf in Suva, that is all their *qoliqoli* and guess what? Yes, they said to us, it is tourism. The cruise ships go in there everyday. So, you can see the far-reaching consequences of all of this, and the reason why I raise it is because I do not believe that it was given enough thought as to how far-reaching it can be. I do not believe that it is actually being dealt with in the manner it should have. This is not something that should have been rushed by us; not at all. I am being fair to the landowners and everyone else involved in the industry.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Denarau, as I have said, is a useful example of the type of major coastal development. You are talking about Fantasy Island, you are talking about Naisoso Island. You are talking about a whole lot of other places where there is foreshore leases. You are also talking about Momi. So, what is going to give here when you do not come to Parliament with a fully prepared Bill and leave everything to regulations?

One of the most important provisions in all of this, or one of the most important consultations that ought to have, and should have and must have occurred, when the question was asked of the Ministry, I shuddered and I felt really bad because at the end of the day, the financial institutions that have forked out millions of dollars with respect to mortgages that they may owe overwater bungalows or different areas all around Fiji, they were not even consulted, a fact that was admitted to by the Ministry.

Some of the provincial places that we had gone to and had a meeting with, they also said, we were not even told about this. They were not well informed, but because we managed to speak to them, there was support for it. There was not proper, thorough consultation, and it goes against the grain of what we spoke about this morning. The honourable Acting Attorney-General spoke about review of legislation and laws, et cetera and he talked about people participation; it did occur.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this kind of uncertainty should concern Parliament. It also concerned us in the Committee and let me tell you, Sir, the Committee took a bipartisan approach, like most of the stuff that we did, 99 percent of it - bipartisan approach to this, to try and find the right balance. We raised concerns about the inclusion of reclaimed land, and also because of the potential implications for existing developments that exist and investor confidence.

The Ministry itself confirmed that reclaimed land falls within the scope of the Bill. The FHTA, the Tourism Association were actually, as mentioned by honourable Koroilavesau, brought into discussions under the guise of, that we are just going to discuss the Surfing Act. But it was something completely different that they were told afterwards. They were caught by surprise.

It recommended that we leave out developed reclaimed land. It recommended that existing state leases, port areas and public infrastructure should be excluded from the Bill unless specifically identified. And there is a point there. We still have not been able to identify. So, the whole process, has actually going to have to go through all of this before any of this comes to fruition.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, if there is an investor considering putting in millions of dollars into a hotel or a tourism development, they actually need certainty. How does that certainty come about? That

certainty comes about in the law, not in the regulations. That can change every year or that can change at the whim of the Minister. It has to be in the law. You are talking about an industry which is the backbone of our country, and I am talking about 40 percent - that is huge. You are talking about people's jobs, you are talking about us developing into an even bigger industry.

The honourable Minister for Tourism has actually mentioned that we want to see if we can bring in 3 million passengers a year. Now, you are going to have to start thinking, how we are going to do this? If there is uncertainty with respect to reclaimed land and is subject to different ownership, leasing and the compensation framework, that uncertainty can actually affect investment decisions. Everyone knows that.

We, the Government and Parliament should be able to explain very clearly what this Bill means for existing and future developments. It does not show. It has all been left to regulations and no one is objecting to this, but we are saying that it required a better process to get to where we are today. You might have had it go through without any objections.

Mr. Speaker, something about internal waters. The same concern that I am talking about arises when you are talking about internal waters. This is not simply an issue about resorts or our coastlines - rivers. The honourable Minister for Tourism's own area, Sigatoka- the Sigatoka River. We actually sought clarification regarding internal waters and then we used the Sigatoka River as an example, which supports tourism activities. So, you have to understand how do we deal with that. We need to understand what happens when a commercial operator that is already using that existing area under established arrangements. What happens to the tourism operators that are using our rivers? What happens to the existing licenses? What happens to what new compensation or leasing obligations could eventually arise? The whole thing has to be flipped. It is going to be flipped under what – we do not know yet.

You cannot leave things to regulations. You have a tremendous job on your hand, whoever the Minister for Tourism is now and is going to be at a later stage, at the end of the day, in trying to get all of this done, because I hope that in your consultation exercise, you go right throughout the country and make sure that every single person is consulted. I am talking about *iTaukei* landowners, the Fisheries Commissions, the tourism operators, et cetera.

Mr. Speaker, something that needs to come out very clearly also, raising all of this does not mean that we are actually opposed to recognising customary rights and economic benefits. The economic benefits issue is set in stone in the Constitution. What also happens with respect to mineral rights? In the Bill that came to the House before we changed it, it also talked about the low flying areas, et cetera, which we had to remove because it just was not drafted properly. We had to do a lot of things to find some kind of easy balance. Parliament, Mr. Speaker, must find a framework that protects customary interests without creating unnecessary uncertainty for existing businesses, for public access, for investment and economic development.

One of the other issues before I take my seat, Mr. Speaker, is with the boundaries issue. There is a lot of issues. Honourable Usamate actually expounded on that quite well with respect to the boundaries and how that is actually going to be dealt with.

Before I sit, I think what needs to be said is before this legislation proceeds, the Government should clearly establish consequences for our foreshore rivers and streams, reclaimed land, existing leases and major coastal developments. It has not done a proper economic consequence and provide some certainty also to the customary owners, businesses, investors in the wider public community.

We need to also look at the fact that how is it that these regulations are going to take care of everything? We keep getting told that that it is actually going to come back. We probably need to exercise

those two provisions that are in the Constitution and in our Standing Orders with respect to bringing those subsidiary legislation. So maybe a Clause needs to be included to bring that particular legislation back into Parliament on the floor of Parliament so that it is scrutinized, because it is not something that should be left to a Minister and a Ministry, you are talking about the future of Fiji. We should know all of those consequences before we change the ownership and not actually discover them afterwards.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we have four more speakers, we might have to suspend our proceedings for dinner. Before we do, there have been talks about, the lawyers have been talking. I wish just to add my half-penny worth of view on the concept. I am talking about the concept of *qoliqoli* and because I had a role in it as a delegation of Fiji to the Law of the Sea, the concept of continental shelf and, in fact, the definition under the Convention on the Law of the Sea states that the continental shelf recognizes that it is an extension of dry land; understand that.

We, the Fiji delegation, were very active in the formulation of the continental shelf and we often discussed with our leader, Ambassador Satya Nand, that it recognizes in the process the extension of land, including the *qoliqoli*. Know also, when the chief ceded Fiji to Great Britain, to her Majesty, they asked for the protection of their land and their *qoliqoli* - understand that. So, this is the context of this debate. I am just trying to put it on the line, I am not adding or reducing anything from the Bill. That is all I wanted to add to that.

With that note, we will suspend our proceedings for dinner. We will resume in an hour.

The Parliament adjourned 6.46 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 7.54 p.m.

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am not going to touch on any policy reasons pertaining to the Bill but basically touch on the changes in the draft. Before I turn to the provision of the Bill, I wish to briefly highlight some of the key changes made since the earlier draft. These are not changes to the heart of the Bill. They are targeted refinements made to prove legal clarity, address gaps identified through consultation and make the Bill more practical to implement.

The centre of this change is a simple question. How do we give effect to reversion while ensuring that ownership, sovereignty, existing rights and the interests of those affected are properly protected? Clarifying what vest and protecting the State's sovereignty and international obligations. Marine area is a sovereignty language removed. The definition of a “marine area” no longer describes these areas as vested in the State, with the same sovereignty and ownership as its land territory. This avoids any suggestion that vest in customary owners could touch on sovereignty, which remains the matter for the State alone, as articulated by the honourable Minister for Lands.

Airspace and seabed relocated, not removed. The former general reference to lower airspace in the definition of marine area has been removed from Clause 2, and the point is now dealt with expressly in new Clause 11(6)(b). Vesting of a commercial marine area carries the associated common law rights, including rights related to a lower airspace above the area. The seabed and subsoil and reclaimed land remain part of what is defined and what vests.

New serving Clause, Clause 11(6), for the avoidance of doubt, a vesting order does not affect the sovereign rights of a State under the Constitution and public international law. This is an important assurance to development partners and to Fiji's international treaty obligations.

New Clause 13(3)(c), the Chicago Convention. A vesting order cannot restrict, vary, or remove any rights under the Convention or international civil aviation. This is a necessary and a direct consequence of vesting airspace related rights and protects Fiji's civil aviation obligations.

The rights of innocent passage. Now it is on paragraph. The right of innocent passage, now its own paragraph. The right of innocent passage under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea is now set out and stand-alone protection at Clause 13(3)(d), separated from the right of public access at 13(3)(b) for clarity.

Public access rewarded, Clause 13(3)(b), the guarantee is now expressed positively, and simply a vesting order cannot restrict or remove a public's free and undisturbed access to a marine area for non-commercial or recreational purposes. The earlier Clause refers to the River and Streams Act 1880, have been removed from the paragraph as the Act is separately being amended by the schedule.

A new category is the interested persons. The Bill now recognises a class of person, distinct from interest holders. Person who, while holding no formal lease, licence, or legal interest, nevertheless have a genuine commercial interest in a commercial marine area. For example, through a commercial activity carried out in the absence of a lease or licence. This is a deliberate policy addition and is carried through the Bill. The definition of an interested person is inserted in Clause 2, new Clause 33(2)(b) empowers the Minister to make regulations prescribing who is an interested person.

The new Clause 33(2)(e) empowers the regulation to prescribe compensation payments for interested persons. This closes the gap in the earlier draft, which risked leaving an informal by genuine commercial uses who were common in the tourism sector, without any recognised pathway

to compensation. There is now more flexibility in re-negotiation and compensation.

Sir, iTaukei Fisheries Commission compensation role has been softened. Clause 36(2)(f) and Clause 9(1), TFC's function has shifted from determining a compensation scheme to assisting in its development or negotiation between the parties. Correspondingly, Clause 9(1) now provides TFC “may”, rather than “must”, develop or negotiate a compensation scheme. This better reflects TFC's facilitative role and leaves primary responsibility for reaching agreement with the customary owners and the interest holder.

Earlier negotiation window Clause 8(2)(c), TFC may now initiate pre-negotiation with existing terms and conditions as soon as practicable within the prescribed period rather than only after the vesting order had commenced. This should shorten the overall transition timeline for interest holders and customary owners alike. There is a new Clause 9.4, mirroring Clause 8.4. This makes clear that the existing compensation arrangement continues according to its tenure and is unaffected by the Act until a new arrangement is agreed or determined. This gives commercial security to existing interest holders during the transition. New Clause 6.3 - TFC may consult an expert in carrying out its assessment functions appropriately given the technical, economic and environmental judgments TFC is required to make.

There is now a narrow scope of vesting authority which determines Clause 43(a). When arbitration is not agreed, the vesting authority fallback power to determine terms is now confined to the disputed terms and conditions, rather than extending to all interest and rights over the commercial marine area. This will proportionally safeguard the vesting authority, should only be deciding what the parties could not agree on and not remaking the whole agreement.

There is a lower cap on the TLTB's administrative deduction. Clause 27(1), the cap or the deduction of TLTB may retain from rents and premium for collection and administration expenses has been reduced from 25 percent to 20 percent. This increases the share of proceeds flowing through to the iTaukei owners. The concept of thresholds, customary owners now are included. Clause 33(2)(h), the Minister's power to prescribe thresholds for obtaining concept, now extends to customary owners as well as iTaukei owners, closing a gap that would otherwise have left concept threshold unregulated at the pre-vesting and customary owner stage.

Why these changes matter, Mr. Speaker, Sir? None of these changes depart from the Bill's fundamental purpose, taken together, they do three things:

- (1) Protect the State's sovereign and international obligations over airspace, aviation, and instant passage, so that the revision of propriety ownership cannot be misread as a cessation of sovereignty;
- (2) Extend fair treatment to a wider group of genuine commercial users through the new interested person category; and
- (3) Make the transition process more workable and practised.

Early negotiation, a facilitative role, rather than a determinant role of TFC, a narrower vesting authority, fallback power, and a higher return to the iTaukei owners through lease and licence proceeds. I support the Bill and commend it to this honourable House.

HON. V. LAL.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for giving me this opportunity to join the debate on the Commercial Use of Marine Areas Bill 2025. Much has been said from both sides of the House on this Bill, and considering the time, I will be very brief.

Mr. Speaker, let me state clearly from the outset, no one in this Chamber denies the

importance of this legislation. Reconciling our customary rights with modern commercial marine operations is a historic task. It is long overdue and deeply meaningful for our coastal communities. However, good intentions, Mr. Speaker, do not automatically produce good law. While the principle behind recognising customary marine rights is necessary, the actual Bill before Parliament today is incomplete, premature and fundamentally flawed.

Allow me to bring this down to a human level, a personal level that touches every family in Fiji. When I look at what is happening to our coastline, it breaks my heart. Taking my family to enjoy the ocean, to sit on a beach, is a simple joy that is disappearing left, right, and centre. Look around us, Mr. Speaker, Sir, Pacific Harbour is no more. Wailoaloa Beach in Nadi is fast disappearing. We are down to a handful of public beaches in our urban centres, where ordinary Fijian families can actually go, lay down a mat, swim in the ocean, and enjoy what Fiji is truly all about. It hurts my heart to think that we are heading towards a future where our people will have to pay a private hotel just to step onto a beach and then watch the hotel get taxed on top of it.

We live in an island nation surrounded by the ocean, yet our local families are slowly being pushed inland, looking at the Pacific Ocean from a distance. Walk around Pacific Harbour today - fences are up everywhere. Concrete walls are built right up to the water. There is nowhere left for a local family to enjoy a weekend picnic. Something cherished by generations of locals is gone.

I worry, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that because this Bill has been rushed without proper planning, it will make this problem ten times worse. Look at Wailoaloa Beach, the most active, vibrant spot for local families on the weekend. Yet a hotel development is about to close off another massive strip. Where are our families supposed to hang out? There are many things wrong with this Bill. Things that hurt my heart because of how rushed this draft is. But what worries me most is, how this Bill fails to respect true *iTaukei* custom, customs and traditional arrangements established long before settlers arrived, long before colonial rule touched this island.

I have said it before and I will say it again, the drafters of this Bill and those pushing it through Parliament today, simply did not do their homework. That is the frightening part, Mr. Speaker, Sir. They had years to get this right, yet here we are at the tail end of the term, rushing a piece of legislation, full of legal traps and missing provisions.

We, on this side of the House want our traditional *qoliqoli* owners to have their rights recognised. We support that goal 100 percent, but not through a flawed and dangerous process like this. When our *iTaukei* landowners finally see how this law operates on the ground, they will realise that ordinary villagers and customary keepers will not benefit the way they were promised.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, allow me to highlight the structural flaws inside this Bill. *Qoliqoli* ownership definition. In custom, marine ownership is anchored in a direct traditional relationship. The paramount chief, the *Mataqali Turaga*, and their traditional marine custodians, the *Mataqali Gonedau*, but under Clause 6, the Government defaults to broad administrative maps, risking the same mistakes as the 2005 *Qoliqoli* Bill, chopping up customary areas and ignoring the *Gonedau*.

Tourism Ministry Authority - The Bill hands licensing and enforcement powers to the Ministry of Tourism, even though marine property and foreshore management legally belongs to the Ministry of Lands. This creates overlapping enforcement regimes, instead of placing responsibility where it belongs.

Fine Revenue Allocation - when operators breach the law, fines will be levied. However, the Bill is silent on where the money goes to, whether the money goes to the Central Government or to

The traditional owners whose rights were violated.

Statutory overlaps - The Bill forces TLTB to manage marine leases without amending the iTaukei Land Trust Act, which limits TLTB's jurisdiction to land above the high-water mark. It assigns valuation duties to the iTaukei Fisheries Commission without amending the Fisheries Act. Clause 16(3) inserts an ouster clause attempting to block judicial review in the High Court.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, you do not build a historic law on weak foundations. We cannot support a Bill that seals off our public beaches, bypasses traditional custodianship, creates chaos across our State books, and deprives our people of access to the courts. This Bill is premature. It is incomplete. It is fundamentally flawed. I urge this august House to halt this legislation, do the homework properly, and bring back a law that truly protects our *vanua*, our public rights, and our country.

HON. RATU J.B. NIUDAMU.- *Turaga saka na Sipika ni sa yadra vinaka. Au tucake saka meu vosa ena kena veivosakitaki tiko na lawa vakatutu vakatokai tiko na Commercial Use of Marine Areas 2025.*

Turaga saka na Sipika, me vaka niu luveni vanua o Ra, kau taukei ni iqoligoli talega, au tucake saka na siga vinaka ni kua meu vakaraitaka na noqu tokona vakaukauwa na lawa vakatutu saka oqo. Na lawa vakatutu saka oqo, Turaga na Sipika, e vakabibitaka na noda dodonu vakaitaukei ni vanua, me baleta na kena tauyavutaki edua na vakarau vou me soli tale kina lewa ni qoligoli ka vakayagataki vakabisinisi, me vaka na saravanua, na surf breaks, diving, snorkeling kei na tourism excursions. E okati talega na climate kei na carbon project me vaka na Blue Carbon kei na Emission Reductions Project.

Na lawa qo, Turaga saka na Sipika, kevaka esa na mani pasitaki, esa na bokoca tani na Regulation of Surfing Areas Act 2010, ka dua vei ira na sunset clause strategy ka vakayagataki mai na matanitu sa oti, me vakadromuci vakadua kina na neimami dodonu na kawa itaukei ena vuku ni neimami iqoligoli.

Turaga saka na Sipika, na kenai vakadinadina, kevaka meu na vakaraitaka ena Vale ni Bose Lawa saka oqo, e tukuni saka tiko eke na transition provision ena tabana e 29 ni Yavu ni Vakavulewa. Na vakavakadewa vata oqo a mai tukuna talega na turaga na Vunilawa vakacegu ena nona vakadewataka tiko ni okoya oqo e sega ni transition provision, koya ratou vakayagataka tale tikoga na To ni Veisaga ena yakavi vinaka e daidai, ka dua na ka na noqu a mosita na yaloqu ni sa laurai tuga vakatabakidua o ira na tourism operators. E sega talega ni bau laurai vakadua o iratou na To ni Veisaga na neimami dodonu nai taukei ni qoligoli ka keimami maroroya tu na neimami iqoligoli mai na gauna ni koloni me yacova saka e daidai.

Keimami maroroya saka tu, keimami maroroi ira tale tu ga oira na sa mai tu vakavoliti keimami ena tiki ni qele keimami tu voli kina. Vosa saka tiko ena yakavi e daidai na turaga na wekaqu mai Ra, honourable Virendra Lal, e dua saraga vei ira na tu voleka ena neimami iqoligoli, na noqu iqoligoli, era siwa tu kina o ira na wekana, se tekivu mai vei ira nona kawa, mai Madhuvani me yacova na yakavi e daidai. Keimami kila vakavinaka tu o keimami nai taukei ni qoligoli ni saravanua e dua na ka bibi e Viti. Tourism is a very important industry in Fiji and the landowners understand that.

Na ka e mositi au vakaitaukei ni qoligoli ni vaka keimami sa dusi tiko ni keimami na vakayavalata e levu na ka; e sega. Au via tataunaka na Vale ni Bose Lawa saka ena yakavi e daidai, Turaga na Sipika, keimami sa rarama sara na neimami rai nai taukei ni iqoligoli. Keimami sega ni vaka na gauna ni koloni me keimami se vakalolomataki tu. Au sa kerekere vakabibi ena loma ni Vale ni Bose Lawa saka oqo, ni da dau vosa, eda dau tukuna eso na ka meda dau qarauna vakabibi baleti

keimami na kawa iTaukei. Keimami sa tiko ena dua na buturara keimami sa vuli vinaka, keimami sa rawa ni lewa vakavinaka na veika me baleta neimami iqoliqoli, ka ra na sega talega ni vakalolomataki o ira na dau cicivaki saravanua kei ira na veimataqali mata tamata keimami sa tu vata ena keimami uma qele.

Turaga saka na Sipika, vakaraitaka tiko o honourable Premila Kumar me baleta na interest koya era sa tu rawa mai, na veidinadinati sa tu rawa mai. Au kila eratou sega beka ni wilika tiko vakavinaka na lawa vakatutu koya tiko ena yakavi e daidai. Sa maroroi tu ena Tabana 8 na existing interest.

Na ka ga au via kerea saka, Turaga na Sipika ena yakavi edaidai vei iratou na To ni Veisaqa me dau qarauni vakavinaka nai tautau ni vosa baleta ni keimami sa tu vakarau nai taukei ni iqoliqoli, vakauasivi na vanua e caka tu kina na saravanua, me keimami na cicivaka na kena maroroi vakavinaka me rawa ni maroroi nai yau, maroroi talega na ka keimami taukena me baleti ira na neimami kawa ena veisiga ni mataka.

Turaga saka na Sipika, au via vakaraitaka saka talega, eso saka na yanuyanu e sega saka na kedra qele, era vakaiqoliqoli ga me vakataka na yatu Yasawa balabalavu. Qo e dua saka na lawa ena vukei ira saka vakalevu, kau sega ni taura rawa saka na vanua eratou lako saka tiko mai kina na To ni Veisaqa, de lakolako eratou vakamuria tiko na nona vakavakadewa na Turaga na Vunilawa vakacegu. E tukuna tiko vaqo e dua na vosa ni Vola Tabu, o ira ga na mataboko era veituberi vakamataboko.

[Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak in the debate on the proposed law entitled the Commercial Use of Marine Areas 2025.

Mr. Speaker, as someone from the province of Ra and also a customary fishing-rights holder, I rise today to strongly express my support for this proposed law. Sir, this proposed law emphasises our customary rights over our marine areas by establishing a new framework through which control of fishing grounds can be returned and used for commercial purposes, including tourism activities such as surf breaks, diving, snorkeling and tourism excursions. It also includes climate and carbon projects such as Blue Carbon and Emission Reductions Projects.

This law, Mr Speaker, if it is passed, will repeal the Regulation of Surfing Areas Act 2010, which is one of the sunset-clause strategies used by the previous government to permanently undermine the rights of the indigenous people in relation to our fishing grounds.

Mr. Speaker, as evidence of this, if I may point it out to this Honourable House, it states here that the transition provision is in section 29 of the Constitution. This same interpretation was also given by the former Attorney-General when he explained that this is not a transition provision, which was also used by the Opposition this afternoon. One thing that deeply saddened me was seeing that the tourism operators were given particular attention. The Opposition also never once recognised the rights of the customary fishing-rights holders, who have protected and safeguarded our fishing grounds from the colonial era right up until today.

We have safeguarded and protected it, and we have also continued to look after those who have come to live around us on the piece of land where we are settled. This afternoon, my fellow member from Ra, honourable Virendra Lal, spoke. He is one of those who live close to our fishing grounds, my fishing grounds, where his relatives have fished, going back to his ancestors, from Madhuvani up until this very day. We, as customary fishing-rights holders,

fully understand that tourism is an important part of Fiji. Tourism is a very important industry in Fiji, and the landowners understand that.

What concerns me as a customary fishing-rights holder is that it seems as though we are being portrayed as people who will cause a lot of disruption; that is not the case. I would like to assure this Honourable House this afternoon, Mr Speaker, that we, the customary owners of the fishing grounds, are very clear and enlightened in our outlook. We are no longer like we were during the colonial era, when we were still being oppressed. I strongly appeal to this Honourable House that, when we speak, we should be very careful about the things we say, particularly when it concerns us indigenous Fijians. We are now in a position where we are well educated and capable of properly managing matters concerning our fishing grounds, and the tourism operators and the various communities of people who live alongside us on our land will also not be oppressed.

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Premila Kumar is speaking about the interests that are already in place and the agreements that have already been established. I understand that perhaps they are not reading the proposed law being discussed this afternoon carefully enough. Existing interests are protected under Section 8. All existing interests will be protected under this new law.

The only thing I would like to request, Mr Speaker, this afternoon, is that the Opposition be very careful with the choice of words, because we, the customary owners of the fishing grounds, are ready—especially in areas where tourism activities are taking place—to take responsibility for ensuring that they are properly protected, so that the resources can be preserved and what we own can also be safeguarded for our future generations.

Mr Speaker, I would also like to point out that there are some islands that do not have any land, but are only fishing grounds, such as the Yasawa islands. This is a law that will greatly assist them, and I cannot understand where the Opposition is coming from, as they seem to be following the interpretation given by the former Attorney-General. As the Bible says, it is the blind who leads the blind.]

HON. J. USAMATE.- Hogwash!

HON. RATU J.B. NIUDAMU.- *Au via vakaraitaka saka talega eke, Turaga saka na Sipika, solia vei Sisa na ka sa nei Sisa. Ke me kalougata na vanua o Viti, solia vei Sisa na ka sa nei Sisa, Turaga saka na Sipika. Keimami sa maroroya tu vakasagavulu mai qo na yabaki na iqoligoli, era marautaka tu o ira na kawa tamata tu e Viti, sa kena gauna donu saka oqo, dua saka na ka na noqu marau ena yakavi e daidai, marautaka saka na lawa esa mai biu saka ena loma ni Vale ni Bose Lawa. Au vakavinavinaka vua na Turaga na Minista ni Saravanua, Uraga Auvu, au sa vakavinavinaka vakalevu kivei kemuni.*

Ni tiko saka na Turaga na Sipika, au vakaraitaka saka na noqu tokona vakaukauwa na lawa vakatutu ena yakavi edaidai, sa va saka tiko ya na kena levu.

[I would also like to point out here, Mr. Speaker, that we should give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar. If we want Fiji to prosper, we should give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar. We have protected our fishing grounds for many decades, and the people of Fiji have enjoyed them. This is the right time, and I am very happy this afternoon and pleased with the proposed law that has been brought before this august House. I thank the honourable Minister for Tourism, honourable ‘Auvu, and I extend my sincere thanks to you.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to strongly express my support for the proposed law this afternoon. That is all I have to say.]

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- Hogwash!

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Members for their contributions to the debate on the Commercial Use of Marine Areas Bill 2025. If I may, if I can just correct some of the misconceptions from the other side or clarify some issues that have been raised. Placing the commercial tourism activity classification and the associated compensation pricing formula within the regulations, rather than act itself, is a strategic choice designed to ensure operation of agility and legislative efficiency.

The tourism sector is dynamic with new commercial activities, technologies and market-driven visitor experiences. By having these definitions in the regulations, we retain flexibility to update the classification list in response to industry innovation without the administrative burden of a full parliamentary amendment. Similarly, the compensation formula is a technical instrument that requires periodic calibration based on economic data, inflation and shifting market conditions.

This structure allows Parliament to focus on the foundation principle and customary rights established by the Act, while empowering the Ministry to manage the complex evolving mechanics of the compensation framework, the responsiveness required to maintain fairness and economic stability for all stakeholders.

Additionally, while the decisions of the Marine Area Appeals Tribunal are final, they are subject to judicial review by the formal court system, is consistent with other laws of Fiji, such as the iTaukei Lands Act 1905. Overlapping boundary claims have been expressed as a concern, but we believe the institutions we have, the jurisdictions we have will ensure that these overlapping issues will be resolved satisfactorily.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there are matters that I also want to clearly address in closing, particularly around ownership, investor confidence, the role of the *iTaukei* institutions and why government has chosen a phased approach to this reform. There should be no misunderstanding about what this Bill does. There should be no fear that there will be wholesale transfer of Fiji's marine areas. It does not mean that upon commencement of this legislation, every *qoliqoli* of every marine area in Fiji automatically becomes proprietary land of customary owners. That is not what the Bill provides.

The Bill is focused on starting with commercial marine areas that are used for tourism. This is defined in the Bill with a more comprehensive list to be in the regulations. And importantly, the Bill recognizes commercial purposes subject to the framework established under the legislation. We have chosen this approach because government must balance several legitimate interests.

We recognize the long-standing aspirations of our customary owners, we also have a responsibility to protect existing businesses, employment, investment, public access, environmental interests, and the wider national economy. The Bill does not resolve every question of marine ownership. We are starting with where there is a clear historical and commercial issue that government needs to resolve, tourism-related commercial use of marine areas.

The Regulation of Surfing Areas Act 2010 created a particular legal framework around access to surfing areas. That framework supported the development of Fiji as an internationally recognized surfing destination, but it also left unresolved questions about customary interests and the commercial benefits derived from those areas. This Bill addresses that issue.

Mr. Speaker, this is a process, not an automatic transfer. I want to emphasise this because it is for customary owners and for tourism investors. There is no automatic vesting. A customary group cannot simply identify an area and say this now belongs to us. There is a statutory process. As I have mentioned, customary owners must first make an application to the iTaukei Fisheries Commission, and the Fisheries Commission has substantive work to do. It must:

- verify the marine area against the register;
- identify the relevant customary owners’
- determine whether the area falls within the scope of the legislation;
- consider the potential economic and environmental impacts; and
- identify the interests that may already exist over the area.

That is important because if a government changes propriety ownership, we need to know who has the customary interests, what area we are dealing with, who is already operating there, and what the consequences of vesting will do.

The Fisheries Commission must also involve interest holders. The hotel, resort, tourism operator, leaseholder, licence holder, or any other affected party is not expected to immediately receive a change in legal status in which they operate. They will be involved and they will be part of the process.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I also want to address directly the concern that this reform may undermine investor confidence. I would argue the opposite. Investors need certainty. As a former hotelier, if I lease a beachfront land and I have this provision that I can also lease the marine area fronting the resort, I will not say ‘no’. I would lease the land and also lease the marine area, having a total control over it. Indeed, there are many resorts now who expect this, who are looking forward to the Commercial Use of Marine Area Bill because they have been sitting on the marine area for years and they want to do some things with it, but they cannot because they do not control it. They will, through this, lease those areas and do what they need to do to enhance their products.

I had a case where one of the hoteliers wrote to me and said, please do something. Our guests are snorkelling out there in the marine area and the local villages are also diving there with their speargun. They have every right to fish in that area with a speargun, but you cannot allow that because tourists are snorkelling in that area. However, we cannot stop our people from diving in that area, from fishing. The only answer to that would be for them to lease that area and pay what is to be paid to the *qoliqoli* owners so that they do not fish in that area. These are the types of issues that we face most times.

Investors need to know whom they are dealing with and what rights they have. They need to know how those rights will continue, and importantly, they need to know what happens if there is a disagreement. The current uncertainty does not provide that confidence. The Bill establishes rules and sets boundaries. Existing legal interests and rights do not simply disappear because the investing process begins.

The Bill preserves existing interests and provides a structured process for annual renegotiation and deliberately place safeguards around compensation. The compensation scheme is required to be fair, transparent, inclusive, and informative. It may recognise customary rights, indigenous values, intergenerational considerations, and the commercial benefit associated with the use of that area, but there is another side of that equation. The Bill expressly requires that compensation must not impose an unreasonable or burdensome payment on an interest holder. The regulations will make this clear.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, when you look at the product offerings in Fiji today, most of our accommodation are on land, land-based resorts and hotels. The future growth would be in overwater bungalows. When tourism spreads across the country into regions, into provinces where you have overwater bungalows, this Bill will ensure that when they build a resort over water, they will pay accordingly to the *qoliqoli* owners, and it will not be unreasonable. All they will do is pay the same rate that other hoteliers are paying on land, TLTB, max charge is 3.5 percent of gross. So, we are looking to the future, when over water bungalows are built across the island, the CUMA Bill will help the resort owners in receiving equitable return on their *qoliqoli*.

Nothing unreasonable, as I say, it is like leasing on land. We cannot create a framework that recognises customer interest on one hand, but on the other hand, it makes the underlying tourism business commercially unviable. When the business fails, no one benefits, the investor loses, the workers lose, Government loses economic activity, and the customary owners lose most of all the long-term benefit this legislature was designed to deliver them.

The Bill is about sustainable commercial partnerships, not just compensation. There may be circumstances where existing lease, licence, or compensation arrangement is already fair and equitable. There may also be circumstances where forcing an immediate renegotiation would materially damage the economic viability of an existing operation. The Bill recognises that. The vesting authority may exempt an interest holder from renegotiation when the statutory requirements are satisfied and that exemption may also be time limited. It is not accidental. It gives Government the flexibility to manage the transition responsibly rather than applying a right, one-size-fits-all approach across very different tourism operations.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I understand there are concerns on why you have kept Section 6 to 9 of the Regulation of Surfing Areas Act 2010. Some have called it misleading and contrary to the objectives of the Bill. Please allow me to elaborate. Mr. Speaker, Sir, maintaining Section 6 to 9 of the Regulation of Surfing Areas Act 2010 is a deliberate transitional safeguard. These provisions are not being retained to allow commercial operators to continue using marine areas indefinitely without payment. They are retained to preserve public access, environmental and safety protections, and enforceable legal framework for individual marine area transitions into the new regime. We need to transit from what we currently have into the new arrangement which is why we are keeping Section 6 to 9 of the Surfing Areas Act 2010.

Section 6 currently permits a person to access and use a surfing area for surfing or another water sport without a permit, affordable payment and prohibits any person from obstructing their access. Under the CUMA Bill, however, Section 6 will continue to operate only subject to the Commercial Use of Marine Areas Act. This means that ordinary and non-commercial recreational use, such as any individual swimming or surfing for personal enjoyment, will not, merely by reason of directivity, be treated as a compassionate commercial use.

The reason is different. While the marine area is being used as part of a prescribed commercial tourism activity, for example, a paid surfer, at a resort-organised surfing excursion, or a commercial surfing competition may fall within the new commercial use framework. In those circumstances, the operator or relevant interest holder may be required to comply with an applicable compensation arrangement, lease licence, or other prescribed condition. The same provisions cannot be relied upon to avoid obligations imposed under the new Act.

Sections 7 to 9 also remain necessary. Section 7 requires users to protect the reef and marine environment, prevent pollution, maintain safety, avoid obstructing other users, and comply with applicable region laws. Section 8 enables the minister to issue additional access, safety, or abuse conditions where necessary. Section 9 makes breaches of those conditions and directions enforceable

through offences and penalties. Removing the provisions wholesale would create an immediate gap in relation to access, safety, environmental protection, and enforcement.

Mr. Speaker, most importantly, the Bill does not automatically vest every marine area and customary owners upon commencement. Until the transfer process is completed by a particular area, Section 69 must continue to provide the governing legal framework. Once a vesting order takes effect, the same provisions continue only to the extent that they are consistent with the new Acts.

The vesting order, compensation scheme, and any lease or licence conditions will govern the commercial use of that vested marine area. The savings provision, therefore, ensures legal continuity without defeating the new framework for customary ownership and equitable benefits sharing.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Bill establishes architecture. The accompanying regulations being drafted will provide much of the appraisal detail required to make the architecture work in practice. The Bill expressly provides regulation-making powers covering matters such as prescribed commercial and tourism activities, interested person, forms and fees, statutory timeliness, compensation payments, compensation schemes, and valuation methodology, payment schedules and distribution procedures. This will resolve processes, customary owner-consent thresholds, transitional treatment of vested marine areas, and the terms and conditions of leases and licences. We want the process to be clear, predictable, and capable of being understood before an investor enters into or renews a commercial arrangement. The regulations, therefore, give us the opportunity to establish the practical safeguards, procedures, and timelines necessary for an orderly transition.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I want to be clear. These regulations have been drafted by the Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation and our relevant stakeholders will be consulted on with the public.

Another important feature of this Bill is that the Government is not creating an entirely new bureaucracy to administer marine areas. We are using competent authorities and established iTaukei institutions. The iTaukei Fisheries Commission performs the verification and assessment role at the front end of the process.

The Bill provides for the Commissioner's authority to consult experts, such as evaluators and environmentalists. The vesting authority comprises the Ministers responsible for Fisheries, iTaukei Affairs, and Tourism provides the Government-level decision-making mechanism. We believe this tripartite approach was necessary.

Once the area is vested, it is common, it is controlled by the administration, is placed with the iTaukei Land Trust Board. TLTB has institutional experience in administering iTaukei interests, leases, licences, rents, and commercial arrangements. Under this Bill, leases and licences over vested marine areas will operate through a formal statutory system. There are requirements around registration, requirements around TLTB consent, protections against unauthorised dealings. There are provisions governing rents, fees, premiums, and the distribution of proceeds. There are enforcement powers.

Proprietary ownership does remain unregulated. Ownership is vested, but commercial administration remains within its statutory framework. That distinction is extremely important.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, neither should the Bill be interpreted as Government surrendering its responsibility over Fiji's marine environment. The State continues to exercise its regulatory functions. Fisheries laws continue to apply. Environmental laws continue to apply. Maritime safety

requirements continue to apply. Planning and other applicable laws continue to apply. Where another competent authority has a statutory responsibility, that responsibility does not disappear simply because an area has been vested.

The Bill changes proprietary ownership in different circumstances. It does not dismantle the regulatory authority of the States. There has also been concern that vast inland beaches, waterways, and marine areas are suddenly becoming closed to the public. Again, the Bill contains safeguards.

A vesting order cannot be used to interfere with the international freedom of movements, applicable rights of public enjoyment, or the right of innocent passage recognised under international law. So, we are balancing customary ownership with wider public interest.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we should also be realistic. Not every negotiation will end in agreement. We will have teething problems. We admit that. But with goodwill, we will overcome all the teething problems that will come our way.

The Bill provides a pathway where agreement cannot be reached, the matter might proceed to arbitration with the consent of the parties, where the arbitration arrangements themselves cannot be agreed. The vesting authority has powers under the Bill to determine the outstanding terms and compensation. Importantly, the aggrieved party has a right to appeal to the Marine Areas Appeals Tribunal, so there checks and balances throughout the process.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I know there will be customary owners who will say, “why only these areas, why no temporary proprietary ownership of all *i qoliqoli*? I understand the question, but the Government has a responsibility to legislate carefully. This Bill is addressing a specific historical and commercial problem arising particularly from using marine areas for tourism from the framework created under regulation of Surfing Areas Act 2010.

We are, therefore, taking a phased approach. We started where the issues clearly defined. We establish the legal process. We test the administrative arrangements. We ensured the Fisheries Commission, TLTB, the relevant ministries and other competent authorities have the systems and capacity to administer the framework properly.

We learn from implementation, and that is responsible lawmaking. It would not be responsible for the Government to undertake a wholesale transfer of propriety ownership across Fiji's marine areas without first understanding the implication for fisheries, navigation, conservation, public access, commercial leases and licences, commercial activities and the wider economy.

Let me be clear on two points, this Bill is not the end of the conversation about customary marine interests, but it also not a vessel for issues that go far beyond a specific problem, it was designed to resolve. If I may, this Bill sir, let me just speak in the *iTaukei* dialect.

Kivei keda na veiwekani, oqo edua na ituvatuva ena kena vakayagataki na nodai yau bula me bula kina o Viti. Meda veisemati, veiwekani meda veilomani ni gadreva na noda Matanitu me vinaka na bula vakailavo ka tiko ena ligada o keda nai taukei ni yau bula na veika ena bula kina vakailavo na noda vanua.

E vakabauta na Matanitu ni da na veisemati na veiwekani ka veilomani me rawa kina ni ia kina na qaravi itavi na Tabana ni Saravanua ka taura tiko edua na tiki ni noda bula edau bibi vei keda ya na nodai qoliqoli.

Sa vakabauta na Matanitu ni na tiko vei keda na yalo Vakarisito, yalo ni veilomani, meda

veinanumi ka veisemati na noda veiwekani me rawa kina ni bula noda vanua ko Viti.

[To us, our fellow citizens, this is a framework for using our living resources so that Fiji can prosper. Let us work together, as relatives and as people who care for one another, because our Government wants our economy and livelihoods to improve, and we, the customary owners of these living resources, have in our hands the means by which our country's economy can prosper.

The Government believes that we will work together as fellow citizens and care for one another so that the Tourism Department can carry out its responsibilities, while also taking into account an important part of our lives—the resources and fishing grounds that are important to us.

The Government believes that we will have a Christian spirit and a spirit of mutual care, considering one another and working together as fellow citizens so that our country, Fiji, can prosper.

On that basis, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put.

Votes cast:

Ayes - 27

Abstention - 7

Not Voted - 21

Motion agreed to.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we will now proceed to the next Bill. I will now call upon the Minister for Education to move his motion.

[A Bill for an Act to Provide for the Transfer of Proprietary Ownership of Marine Areas Used for Commercial Purposes to the Customary Owners; and the Establishment of an Equitable Compensation Scheme for the Access and Use of these Areas and for Related Matters (Bill No. 42 of 2026), enacted by the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji. (Act No.of 2026)]

PASIFIKA COMMUNITIES UNIVERSITY BILL 2026

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, pursuant to the resolution of Parliament on Monday, 25th May, 2026, I move:

That the Pacifika Communities University Bill 2026 (Bill No.09/2026) be debated, voted upon and be passed for approval.

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

HON. A. M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Pacifika Communities University Bill 2026 provides for the establishment of the Pacifika Communities University as a body corporate by an Act of Parliament. The Pacifika Communities University will succeed the existing Pacific Theological College, which has operated for 65 years under charitable trust deed.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this Bill, because it establishes a university that is uniquely Pacifika, is an institution that honours our indigenous knowledge system, cherishes our faith traditions and prepares our people to navigate the complexities of this age with moral clarity and cultural confidence. It is for this compelling reason, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and the urgent need for this distinctive form of education, that this Bill must be passed by this Parliament.

This Bill will provide the Pacifika Communities University a legal status under the Fiji High Education Act 2008. The Bill establishes a robust, transparent and accountable statutory framework that will enable the university to serve the tertiary education needs of diverse religions and indigenous communities throughout Fiji and the wider Pacific region.

Since 1961, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the University retains its sphere of influence with regards to its faith and spiritual traditions and to further this with the inclusion of indigenous knowledge, traditions and learning.

Our society faces unprecedented challenges, erosion of traditional values, breakdown of community cohesion and a growing disconnect between education and ethical formation. The Pasifika Communities University Bill 2026 intends to address this crisis by establishing a university dedicated to whole-of-life education, an approach that integrates academic excellence with moral and spiritual development which will contribute uniquely to national and regional development goals.

The Bill is consistent with section 21 of the Higher Education Act under the Higher Education Commission, which will provide a Bill for the establishment of a university to the Minister for Education for tabling in Parliament. Upon enactment, the University will become subject to the Higher Education Act 2008 and must formally apply for and receive registration and apply for grants through Higher Education Commission of Fiji.

The key provisions and merits of the Bill, its legal status, which is stated as Part 2, Clause 4(3) of the Bill provides that the University is a body corporate with perpetual succession. The merits of this provision, the University Boards of Trustees ensures that the body corporate is accountable to the provisions of Part 2, Clause 4(a) to (g), drawing expertise in finance, law, and management to guide its stewardship.

Governance structure: The Bill establishes a governance framework designed to ensure separation of powers, accountability, and academic integrity. It has a council representing the 20-founding member churches. It has an Executive Board responsible for day-to-day administration, financial management, and implementation of council decisions. It has an Academic Board, an independent body governing all academic matters, including curriculum excellence, quality assurance, and contextually appropriate research.

It has merit and the structure ensures the University focusses in accordance with the Act and remains focused on its core business, which is the delivery of whole-of-life education, grounded on indigenous and religious faith traditions. These bodies collectively ensure ongoing monitoring, sustainability, and accountability.

The member-churches: The Bill designates 20 Pacific churches from 16 Pacific countries as listed in the annexes of the Bill, which included Fiji, Samoa, Tonga, Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea, Kiribati, Tuvalu, and others as member churches. The churches are an independently religious entity in the countries they are situated in across the region and empowered by their own constitution and status as legal entities.

Academic freedom: The Bill explicitly mandates academic freedom, ensuring non-discrimination and access for all qualified persons, regardless of background. The University is empowered to offer higher education programmes, grounded in Judeo-Christian and ancestral indigenous traditions, while embracing interfaith learning and exchange.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Bill includes comprehensive transitional provisions to transfer all assets, liabilities, staff, and student records from the Pacific Theological College to the Pacific Communities University. These staffs are to be transferred under the same terms and conditions provided in their current employment contracts. The Pasifika Communities University, through its self-funding accrediting status, will be subject under regulations under the Education Act. They will also be subject to the Higher Education Act 2008, including quality assurance and registration requirements of the Higher Education Commission.

The Pasifika Communities University will become a statutory body under the Higher Education Act 2008, enabling it to expand academically by offering accredited programmes beyond theology, including indigenous knowledge, skills training, ecumenism, and community development. Financially, it will be supported through church contribution, student fees, grants, and internal revenue, with eligibility for competitive Higher Education Commission funding.

In terms of human resources, existing PTC staff will be transferred with their current terms and conditions. This Bill has been thoroughly debated, scrutinised, and refined through the legislative process, which is a testament to the collective wisdom of this Parliament and the shared commitment of all members to the future of education in Fiji and the Pacific.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, through the Pasifika Communities Bill 2026, although it is not merely a technical piece of legislation, it is a declaration of our values, a statement that we believe in the power of education to transform lives, to heal communities and to build a future worthy of our children. It is a declaration of identity, that Pasifika people have their own ways of knowing and their own ways of learning and being that deserve to be honoured. We serve and advance in our own institution. It is a declaration of hope, that despite the challenges we face, such as climate change, social fragmentation, cultural dislocation, we have the wisdom, resources and the will to build institutions that will guide us through. This Bill respects Fiji's national higher education framework, preserves Pacific indigenous and faith traditions, ecumenism, and promotes interfaith academic future.

With those words, Mr. Speaker, I urge all honourable Members to vote in favour of this Bill to send a clear message that education grounded in Pasifika values matters, our identity and future matter. Education is a tool for such transformation.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate on the motion.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, I rise to support the bill before the House. Let me begin by acknowledging the institution at the heart of this Bill. The Pacific Theological College has served our region for 60 years, in fact, longer than the University of the South Pacific (USP), training pastors, scholars, and community leaders since 1965, awarding its first degrees in 1968 and building postgraduate capacity through master's programme from 1987 and PhDs from 2004. With these achievements, Pacific Theological College's aspiration is to become the Pasifika Communities University, and we support that.

This Bill expands access to tertiary education for our Pacific communities and gives legislative recognition to an institution owned by 20 member churches across 16 Pacific countries and territories. To achieve that objective, the Bill seeks to modernise the governance framework of

the college while providing continuity of its assets, staff, students, contracts, and other existing arrangements.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I just want to highlight a few issues that I saw in the Bill. The Office of the Chancellor, under this Bill chairs council meetings however serves for only one year, with the position rotating alphabetically among members. I question whether alphabetical rotation is the best basis upon which to select the person who will chair the university's highest governing body. Leadership of a university council requires experience, judgement, independence and the ability to manage difficult governance issues. It should be based on merit and leadership capacity rather than simply where a person's name appears to fall in the alphabetical sequence.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, again unfortunately, there are some drafting errors in the Bill, and I would like to highlight that. For example, Section 16(1) refers to no civil criminal proceedings lie personally. There appears to be a missing 'or' between civil and criminal. Section 19(3) states that a person must not "serve" for more than eight years. That should obviously read must not "serve" for more than eight years.

Another issue that I have in regard to this Bill is an offence without a penalty. Clause 15(4) creates an offence where it states a council member or employee who discloses material information acquired in the course of their duties commits an offence. Mr. Speaker, say an offence clause is there with no stated penalty, so I do not understand what purpose it is going to serve. Let us look at the strength of this Bill.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I want to acknowledge what this Bill does well, particularly welcome Clause 27 on Academic Freedom. Academic Freedom is fundamental to any institution of higher learning, where ideas can be examined, debated, challenged, and researched, including ideas that may be controversial or unpopular. I also acknowledge the transitional provisions in Part 7. The continuation of assets, staff, students, contracts and other existing arrangements provides important legal and practical continuity.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there is a section on self-accreditation. The power in Clause 5(a) is not in itself, an unprecedented legal concept; the Higher Education Act 2008 already recognises self-accrediting institution established under their own legislation. Therefore, I do not regard self-accreditation itself as the legal gap. However, there should be absolute clarity that self-accreditation does not mean operating outside the National Higher Education Quality Assurance Framework.

The University should still be subject to the appropriate requirements of the Fiji Higher Education Commission, including registration and the recording or recognition of its qualification, the usual processes which all other universities follow.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this will definitely protect the credibility of qualifications awarded by the institution because we must recognise students invest years of their lives and significant resources in obtaining a degree. So, the qualification must be recognised and respected within Fiji and across Pacific as well as internationally.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we recognise the legitimate purpose of this Bill, as I mentioned earlier on. We recognise the importance of modernising the governance of the Pacific Theological College and we welcome the transitional provisions. We acknowledge the protection of academic freedom. We also recognise that the self-accreditation provision can operate within the existing higher education framework.

On that basis, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank you for giving me this opportunity and I support this

Bill.

HON. N.T. TUINACEVA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to support the Pasifika Communities University Bill 2026. I want to begin by saying this Bill is significant because we are not simply changing the name of an institution. We are recognising its growth and the changing needs of our Pacific people. We are also recognising that education itself must change with the times.

The Pacific Theological College has served this region for more than 60 years. It was established at a very different time to prepare church leaders to respond to the challenges facing their churches and their communities. Those challenges have changed. Today, we are dealing with Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs). Illicit drugs are destroying young lives and families. Artificial Intelligence (AI) and technology that are changing the way we work and communicate and the growing impacts of climate change. We are also dealing with poverty, violence, exploitation, and modern forms of human enslavement. These are the realities of our time, and our education must be able to respond to them.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, education cannot simply be about getting a qualification and finding a job. An institution of higher learning should challenge the way we think. It should expose us to ideas that we do not necessarily agree with, it should make us question what we know and sometimes even question what we have always accepted to be true. That is part of education.

That is why I welcome the protection of academic freedom under Clause 27 of this Bill. It allows staff and students to question and test received wisdom, put forward new ideas and undertake research. I think that is important because a university should not simply tell people what to think; it should give them the knowledge and the confidence to think for themselves.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there is another part of the thinking behind this Pasifika Communities University which I believe is very relevant for the Pacific, and that is the world of life approach. World of life asks us to look beyond the individual. It recognises our families, our communities, our culture and values, our economy and importantly the environment that sustains all of us. That matters, really matters to the Pacific.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, much of the development thinking around the world has been driven by economic growth. We measure how we produce, how much we sell, how much we consume and how much the economy grows. Of course, economic development is important.

People need jobs, families need income and countries need strong economies. But surely, development has to mean more than that. We cannot think about development only through the lens of capitalism and economic growth, particularly when that growth comes at a cost to the environment and ultimately to our people.

What is the value of development if we destroy the very environment that sustains us? What will we really achieve if our economy grows while our oceans are depleted and our land is degraded and our communities carry the cost? There are questions worth asking.

Our Pacific ancestors understood the vital connection between people and the environment. For long term, such a sustainable development became part of the international development language. We understood that land sustained the people and that the ocean sustained the people. We also understood that people had responsibilities back to those resources. We did not simply take. There had to be balance. There had to be responsibility.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, that is knowledge too. That is why I think there is value in an institution

that recognises Pacific knowledge, wisdom alongside modern academic knowledge. We do not have to become less Pacific in order to become more educated. Neither should we have to discard the knowledge of our ancestors in order to embrace science, technology and modern development. There is room for both. Perhaps, bringing those different forms of knowledge together will help us find better answers to some of the problems we are facing today.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is also where value-driven education becomes important. Of course, we need doctors, engineers, teachers, scientists and economists. We need people who understand artificial intelligence and the technologies that will shape the future. However, qualifications alone do not determine what kind of society we become. We also need people who understand that knowledge comes with responsibility and that the decisions they make can affect other people, their communities and their environment.

Sometimes education must give a person the confidence to ask whether something should be done simply because it can be done. It is good for our people, but what will it do to our communities and our environment? What will be left of the generations that follow us? Those questions matter.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I also appreciate that the Pacific identity of this Institution is reflected in its governance. The Council becomes the *Waatele*, the Chancellor, the *Taumuana*, the Pro-Chancellor is the *Kauta'i* and the Vice-Chancellor is the *Manufo'álau*. These are not simply names that have been added to the institution just to make it sound Pacific. They carry ideas of navigation, leadership, responsibility and journey.

There is something important about a Pacific university being confident enough to speak to the world using concepts that come from their own region. For generations, our ancestors navigated one of the largest oceans on earth. They read the stars, understood the winds and the currents, and viewed the environment around them. They had knowledge that allowed them to navigate the challenges of their time. The challenge for this Pasifika Communities University now is to help our people navigate the challenges of ours.

Mr. Speaker, the Pacific Theological College has served this region for 60 years. That foundation remains, but the horizon is now much wider the Pasifika Communities University is an opportunity to produce graduates who are academically strong while remaining grounded in who they are, where they came from, and the responsibilities they have to others, because ultimately, education should not simply prepare somebody to make a living. It should help us understand how to live well with each other and with the environment that sustains us.

That, Mr. Speaker, is how I understand education for the whole of life, and I support the Pasifika Communities University Bill 2026.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have great pleasure in supporting the Bill and the motion that is before the House in terms of the Pasifika Communities University.

As the speakers before me have said, the PTC has had a rich and powerful history and impact not only in Fiji, but also in the region. As has been pointed out, it was actually founded one year before I was born, so a long time. It was registered in Fiji back in 1964, established in its current location in 1965, and offered degrees before the University of the South Pacific came into being.

It started offering bachelor-level degrees in 1966, and then it began to offer its first master's programme in 1987, a pretty ominous year to start a master's programme. In 2004, it had its first PhD programme. So now in 2026, it has moved on; after this Bill has been enacted to become an Act, it will become a university after many years.

There are a lot of things about the university that I particularly like, how it is structured and some of the things. I think the honourable Tuinaceva has talked about this concept that they have of a whole of life. A lot of us, when we go to universities, we tend to think of life only in terms of Westernised civilisation, ways of looking at what is important and what is not important, but in this university, one of the things that seems to permeate the way that it is structured and what it is teaching is about whole of life rather than just pure subject matter expertise.

The way they describe it in the presentation they made to the committee is that this whole idea of whole-of-life vision is about an educational consciousness that includes every dimension of life; it's not just about strict teaching. And that, in turn, is rooted in the idea of the collective rather than the individual. Today in the world, we tend to look more at my understanding, my expertise myself.

The idea here is rooted in the idea of the collective, where everyone is differentiated yet integrated and everything is differentiated but still integrated. There are ideas of contrast but together becoming something bigger than us and better than us. And it talks about all of this being grounded in the Christian religion in mutual life-giving relationship of the divine community of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

All of this is then revealed in the diverse life-affirming cultures and kinship traditions of the Pacific. It is talking about all of these relationships are actually seen in the way that we live our lives in the Pacific in terms of our cultures and our kinship. It goes on to say this is manifested in our interconnected ways of being and relational ways of knowing that are both harmonious and contradictory at the same time, communicated through our diverse languages and dialects and constantly displayed in our sacred traditions of sharing, caring and custodianship of creation.

I like that idea because a lot of us, when we go to school, we have always focused on the westernised way of thinking about what is important, what is not important. The way that the PTC and other Pasifika Communities University talk about this whole-of-life concept, it gives us Pacific islanders we should be conscious of how unique we are in the world.

In the Pacific, Australia has been inhabited for 60,000 years. People live there using the knowledge that they have. People have lived in Papua New Guinea for more than 40,000 years. They travelled great distances to be there. People have lived in this country, in Fiji, for more than 3,500 years. They have sailed oceans. I think it is incumbent upon us to take cognisance of the special skills that allowed them to live in those circumstances at that particular time. I think that kind of thinking is permeated in what the University is trying to propagate.

Now look at some of the pillars on which this whole-of-life vision that they talk about in the University, they talk about six pillars. One is relationality. Education must be relational and holistic. It is not standalone; it is just not individual. Look at how things work together. It is about decoloniality. Education must challenge colonial systems of knowledge. We are brought up in this colonial type of system where we think that whatever the colonial master says is always right. However, we need to value ourselves and our own societies.

It must be community-based. Education must be developed by communities for communities. Justice, education must be prophetic and justice driven. It must be contextualised. Education must recognise the legitimacy of Pacific homegrown models and methodologies. So many times, we disregard the way that we traditionally think – the methodologies, the models that we have been brought up. However, this University says there is a value to all of these things as we go forth in the world that we live in today. That, to a large extent, is reflected also in the kind of schools that they have in the university.

Looking at the structure of the University, they have a school of Pasifika Philosophies,

Education and Science. So, when you look at education, do not only look at the Western philosophies, also look at the Pasifika philosophies, and these have value. To advance education and research by Pasifika philosophies and science fostering whole-of-life learning that empowers future educators, thinkers, and innovators. That is something very good for us.

Even when it talks about theology and ecumenism, which is what we normally associate with PCU, it talks about providing theological and ecumenical education that prepares faith-rooted leaders for the church and society grounded in Pasifika values. We need to cherish biblical wisdom and justice-orientated mission.

The third school that they have is about the things that are happening around us today. The School of Ecology and Resilience Development. We Pacific Islanders have shown over millennia, over thousands of years, that we have that resilience. It talks about the School of Ecology and Resilience Development. Its purpose is to equip students with knowledge and skills to respond to ecological and climate challenges through indigenous wisdom. To value our indigenous wisdom, through our faith-based perspectives and our community-resilient practises.

When you think about all the universities that you have in Fiji, this one is particularly unique, one because it tries to capture all the attributes of the Pasifika communities from the different countries that are part of the founding members of the University.

What I would like to say, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we need to send our appreciation to those churches that have been there for the past 60 years. The Anglican Church of Melanesia, the Anglican Diocese of Polynesia, the Congregational Christian Church in American Samoa, the Congregational Christian Church of Samoa, the Cook Islands Christian Church, the Ekalesia Kelisiano Tuvalu, Ekalesia Kelisiano Niue, Eteretia Porototani Ma'ohi, Evangelical Church in New Caledonia and Loyalty Islands, Evangelical Lutheran Church of Papua New Guinea, the Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga, the Kiribati Uniting Church, the Methodist Church in Fiji and Rotuma, the Methodist Church of Samoa, the Nauru Congregational Church, the Presbyterian Church of Vanuatu, the United Church of Christ in the Marshall Islands, the United Church of Christ in Pompeii, United Church of Papua New Guinea, and the United Church of Solomon Islands. And has this been expressed by the Honourable Tuinaceva, they use terms within the Pacific.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate all those that have been involved in the Pacific Theological College (PTC) over the years, and for us as young members of the Church, we always look forward to people coming out of PTC delivering sermons and teaching us in Bible studies et cetera over the years. It is great to see that they have reached this level. I would like to wish the Va'atele, I hope I pronounced that correctly, the Council, the Taumoana or the Chancellor and the Tau Tai, who is here with us, Dr. Akanisi Kedrayate, Pro Chancellor of the University all the very best with a wonderful future ahead. With that, I fully support this Bill before us.

HON. A.D. SINGH.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I also rise to lend support to the Bill before us. We all know that the Pacific Theological College has served very well for the last six decades, and it is now being upgraded to university status. I believe it meets all the requirements as per the Fiji Higher Education Commission (FHEC). It has competent faculty and adequate infrastructure. I know the Pioneer Vice Chancellor has over two decades of experience in university education, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I have full confidence in her leadership and her capability.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I had the opportunity to serve together with her at the University of the South Pacific (USP) in the Curriculum Advisory Committee of the School of Humanities, and I found her to be a very constructive contributor whenever we met.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this university is going to be very strong on soft skills and will produce ethical graduates, which is indeed very important for us. We need an ethical workforce, and we need upright citizens who are strong on values. I am indeed very happy that they are also getting involved in skills development in Technical and Vocational Education Training (TVET), through carpentry, food and beverages, and arts and craft. I am sure the university will continue to develop its TVET education, strengthen it and expand it to other areas. This is a gap that we have in terms of the workforce that we have here.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the university is going to build a very strong Pacific community, not only Fiji, but the entire Pacific community, including responsible parenting and engaging with the communities. It is, indeed, a very important area of community education. With this brief contribution, I support the bill fully.

MR. SPEAKER.- Before I call on the Minister of Education, the House recognises the presence of – with us tonight of Vice Chancellor Dr. Akanisi Kedrayate and her colleagues to follow through with the Bill I mentioned tonight.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank all the members who have contributed in support of the Bill. This is a historic moment, not only for this August House, but for every Pacific family, every Pacific community, and every Pacific child who dreams of a future grounded in their identity, their culture, and their faith.

Additionally, in that recognition of this historic moment, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to all those who have contributed today, all those who have contributed to bringing this Bill to this stage. Gratitude to the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights for the thorough examination of this Bill, scrutiny of every provision, and ensuring that this Bill meets the standards of legal and constitutional integrity required for legislation of this nature.

I also thank the Chairperson and all the Members of the Committee for their continued commitment and due process to the principles of good governance. Appreciation also to colleagues in Cabinet for collective wisdom and support. I thank every honourable Member of this Parliament on both sides of the House for your engagement in this exercise on the Bill.

To the Office of the Attorney-General, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and the Office of the Solicitor-General for drafting under legal guidance - the Bill before us is a product of careful legal work, ensuring that every provision is constitutionally sound and legally robust.

To the Fiji Higher Education Commission, for the partnership and guidance - the expertise ensured that this Bill aligns with the Higher Education Act of 2008. I also thank the Pasifika Communities University, with their representative present in the House today, leadership staff, students, and supporters for their vision and commitment.

I thank the member churches, 20 founding members, for their role as owners of the primary supporters of this university, as well as the staff and faculty members who have dedicated their service to this institution. I also thank the people of Fiji and the Pacific who are the beneficiaries of this legislation. I thank the indigenous communities, the faith-based communities, and all the people of our region who have supported this vision.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this Bill represents a partnership between the State and the church to serve the common good. The member churches bear primary responsibility for funding and

governance. The State provides the legal framework and regulatory oversight to the Higher Education Commission. This collaboration recognises that education requires the involvement of the Government, faith-based communities, and civil societies. It is about the kind of society we want to build, the kind of leaders we want to raise.

With those words, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank you very much. I thank all the honourable Members for their support.

Question put.

Motion is agreed to.

[A Bill for an Act to provide for the Establishment and Administration of the Pasifika Communities University and for Related Matters (Bill No. 9 of 2026), enacted by the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji. (Act No.of 2026)]

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, our work is done for another day. That brings us to the end of today's sitting. I thank you all for your contributions.

Before I forget, just to complete the circle of hot news of today. The latest update from the Ministry of Policing on the Howell Road vandalism. It says, "Sir, the suspect is in custody and charged and will be produced in court tomorrow. There are some stolen items recovered too. He also has an accomplice, and the Police are looking for him." Thank you, Police, for your good work. I think we, the residents of Howell Road, will sleep well tonight.

I will inform the House of the latest from my reliable taxi driver, if the honourable Minister does not mind our intruding into his space tomorrow.

Honourable Members, thank you for your contribution. Parliament is now adjourned until tomorrow at 9.30 a.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 9.25 p.m.

ANNEXURE I

Reply to Written Question No. 162/2026 tabled by the honourable Minister for Women, Children and Social Protection (Ref. Page 1747)



MINISTER FOR WOMEN, CHILDREN AND SOCIAL PROTECTION
(Hon. S. Kiran)

Reply to Question No. 162/2026 is as follows:

- (a) The Fiji National Action Plan to Prevent Violence Against All Women and Girls (NAP-PVAWG) was endorsed by Cabinet in May 2023, which outlines Fiji's long-term commitment to prevent violence against all women and girls in Fiji. It is first in the Pacific, with a historic regional achievement.

The National Action Plan is a world-leading, evidence-based policy framework that demonstrates Fiji's resolve to address one of its pressing human rights challenges. It is coordinated by the NAP Coordination & Implementation Unit (CIU) within the Ministry for Women, Children and Social Protection.

The NAP Mid-Term review was conducted between July – December 2025, assessing implementation progress over 21 months (November 2023 – August 2025). It reviewed the processes and structures enabling the NAP and documented recommendations as the plan moves to the next stage. The Mid-Term Review Report findings and recommendations, which I will later highlight were validated by the Technical Working Group on 14th April 2026 at the Great Council of Chiefs (GCC) Talanoa Complex, Nasese.

The Mid-Term Review Report was made possible through the engagement of a writer-consultant who coordinated an extensive review process involving all key stakeholders. This work was funded and supported by the Government of Australia.

- (b) Since the launch of the National Action Plan, we have made significant strides that demonstrate both progress and promise. Allow me to highlight some of the key achievements:
- (i) In relation to Governance & Political Commitment of Government towards the implementation of the National Action Plan:
 - Government was able to dedicate Fj\$357,375 towards four ministries in support of the implementation of the National Action Plan initiatives for the past 3 years. (2024/2025-2026-2027 Financial Year). The Ministries included the Ministry of Health & Medical Services which consisted a 35.3 percent (\$126,250) allocation, Ministry of Education with a 29.7 percent (\$106,250) allocation, Ministry of Youth and Sports with a 19.6 percent (\$70,000) allocation and the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs with 15.4 percent (\$54,875) allocation.
 - The NAP is aligned with the Fiji National Development 2025-2029, ensuring long term policy coherence.

- Establishment of the Coordination and Implementation Unit (CIU) within the Ministry of Women, Children and Social Protection, growing to five staff by mid-2025.
- Transition of NAP management from the UN Women to the Ministry with the support of DFAT's Fiji Programme Support Platform, strengthening national ownership.

(ii) Integration Across Key Settings:

- The Fiji NAP PVAWG aligned with the Fiji National Development Plan 2025-2029, ensuring long term policy coherence for the PVAWG agenda across government.
- The NAP Coordination and Implementation Unit (CIU) was established and grew to a team of five staff by mid-2025.
- The traditional institutions setting achieved the strongest integration nationally: the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs appointed 23 GEDSI officers as NAP focal points and incorporated PVAWG into the Great Council of Chiefs Strategic Plan.
- Multi-faith leaders united under the "My faith says NO! Campaign established a shared prevention language and integrating PVAWG into church governance structures across denominations.
- The Service Delivery Protocol was reviewed and updated, strengthening referral pathways, intersectional practice and coverage of emerging issues related to Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence (TFGBV) and inclusive pathways for persons living with disabilities. The Ministry acknowledges the support of the Government of Australia and UNFPA in providing technical support towards this review process.
- The Online Safety Commission shifted toward a proactive GBV prevention approach in informal partnership with the NAP CIU, resulting in increased TFGBV reporting and community outreach.
- Integrating gender perspectives into the Law and Justice Reform Roadmap across all seven pillars representing a significant step toward legal system alignment with the National Action Plan.

(iii) Sectoral and Community Engagement:

- Strong momentum in traditional, faith-based, and health/social services setting, showing structural integration and ownership.
- Early but limited progress in universities, sports, media, public spaces, transport and disciplined forces.
- Engagement of diverse stakeholders, including civil society, faith communities and government ministries has created a whole-of-society commitment.

(iv) Listening to our people: The Rapid Attitude Survey, engaging over 600 adolescents and adults, is now complete. This provides us with a vital evidence base to shape prevention messages and inform our national communication campaign.

(v) Partnerships through sports: A national sports landscape assessment and dialogues have positioned sporting organisations as active partners in prevention, safeguarding and promoting respectful relationships.

(vi) Engagement of disciplined forces: For the first time, more than 250 women in uniform marched together during the Combined Disciplined Forces International Women's Day

Parade. This visibility underscores the critical role of our disciplined forces in prevention, protection, and access to justice.

- (vii) Young women leading change: At the second Young Women's Forum, 76 participants provided practical recommendations on online safety, reporting mechanisms, and digital literacy – ensuring that our responses to technology-facilitated violence are informed by the voices of young women themselves.
- (viii) Education sector reform: The Family Life Education curriculum has been reviewed and validated, creating a pathway to integrate respectful relationships, human rights, and gender equality into our schools.
- (ix) Traditional governance engagement: Thirty GEDSI focal officers from the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs have been trained on drivers of violence, disability inclusion, and technology-facilitated GBV, strengthening culturally grounded responses.
- (x) National standards and protocols: We have launched the National GBV Shelter Guidelines and the revised Service Delivery Protocol, setting clear expectations for survivor-centered, coordinated, and quality services across health, welfare, police legal, and civil society sectors.
- (xi) Through the coordination and support of the NAP, the Ministry was able to:
 - Coordinate developing GBV Awareness packages with Child Protection components to allow officers within the Ministry to disseminate and undertake awareness programmes in the communities;
 - Strengthening coordinated approach with line ministries and identifying safeguarding principles embedded into their policies, plans and strategies.
- (xii) These achievements are not isolated – they represent a whole-of-society approach. They show that when government, civil society, traditional institutions, young people and disciplined forces work together, we can transform harmful norms, strengthen protection systems, and deliver justice for survivors.
- (xiii) We must acknowledge that violence against women and girls remains one of the most pervasive human rights violations in Fiji. The NAP is our roadmap, but its success depends on sustained political will, adequate resourcing, and collective accountability.
- (xiv) There must be continued support of the implementation of the NAP – through budget allocations, policy alignment and oversight.
- (c) Strengthening accountability and evidence: The Ministry have recruited a dedicated Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Manager, embedding a culture of evidence-based reporting and accountability across the NAP. This ensures that our actions are guided by data and that progress is consistently measured.

The Ministry have streamlined the settings from 13 to 8 specific settings/sectors which provides strategic mobilisation and maximisation of resources with tangible impacts of addressing gender-based violence across all settings.

With a more coordinated and strategic approach in achieving its targets, the Coordination & Implementation Unit have realigned its roles with preferred outputs achieved through close

monitoring and evaluation of activities and programmes outlined in the Plan. Agencies are required to report every 6 weeks to identify progress, gaps and support needed for the implementation of the NAP;

Development and adoption of the MEL Framework will be critical, and we acknowledge DFAT support in this process, to ensure coordination and implementation across all settings.

The Ministry will be working towards strengthening messaging approaches on gender-based violence, having to recruit a Strategic Communications and Resource Personnel in coordinating wider circulation of communication packages and IEC materials on NAP activities in all 3 languages.

Update of the implementation Plan for the next 3 years that integrates contextual changes, updated plans and budgets. This will drive the whole-of-government delivery and holds ministries accountable for GBV budget expenditure with the consolidated interventions across the eight settings of the National Action Plan.

Launch the social norms and behavioural change campaign. This will delivery NAP's most significant unfulfilled priority action with population wide reach across all settings.

Finalise governance arrangements and prioritise coordination over implementation. This will clarify roles and reset realistic expectations with its revised TOR for Technical Working Group, mapping aligned work in settings, data sharing and donor coordination.

Ensure physical and psychosocial safety for survivors and staff prioritising safety particularly where primary prevention activities may increase reporting.

The Ministry wishes to acknowledge the continued support of the Government of Australia. The coordination and implementation of the National Action Plan is supported through the Fiji Programme Support Platform.

ANNEXURE II

Reply to Written Question No. 163/2026 tabled by the honourable Minister for Foreign Affairs & External Trade (Ref. Page 1747)

**MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS & EXTERNAL TRADE
(Hon. S.R. Ditoka)**

Reply to Question No. 163/2026 is as follows:

- (a) The Duavata Partnership, initially signed in 2022, provides an overarching framework of engagement to guide Fiji and New Zealand's relationship. It lays out our shared principles, areas of priority for collaboration and levels of joint ambition for the bilateral relationship.

Part and parcel to the effective implementation of the Duavata Partnership is the convening of the high-level consultations; a senior-officials level mechanism that is purposed at reviewing and assessing progress of our collaboration and exploring potential new areas for cooperation.

The high-level consultations are intended to be held annually, last year Fiji hosted and this year it was New Zealand's turn to host. The high-level consultations was held on 14 July, 2026 in Wellington led by the Permanent Secretary for Foreign Affairs and External Trade, Dr. Raijeli Taga.

Discussions centered on progress in various projects under the five pillars of partnerships and democracy, economic resilience, peace and security, social well-being and climate and disaster resilience. These include climate-related initiatives stemming from New Zealand's provision of flexible climate finance, collaboration between the Fiji Police Force and the New Zealand Policy, ongoing support to the health sector including Fiji's efforts to combat HIV, as well as support to the Fiji's Elections Office and the Parliament of Fiji; this is just a handful of a range of projects currently underway under the Duavata Partnership.

A key area explored in the discussions was potential support towards Fiji's MSMEs, this was especially important given that Fiji's economic relationship with New Zealand is already significant, and we are working together with New Zealand, to reach the target of NZ\$2 billion trade ambition by 2030.

Furthermore, the meeting also discussed opportunities for collaboration at key regional and multilateral engagements including the upcoming Pacific Islands Forum Leaders meeting, the Pacific Pre-COP 31 and at multilateral trade discussions.

Following the conclusion of the high-level consultations, the delegation continued onto the Second Ministerial Meeting of the Future of Investment and Trade Partnership (FIT-P) in Auckland. Before the formal meetings began, I had the opportunity to meet with New Zealand Foreign Minister, Hon. Winston Peters and together we signed the refreshed Duavata Partnership.

The refreshed Duavata Partnership is an expansion of the original Partnership Statement, and we look forward to working closely with New Zealand to implement initiatives under this

refreshed Partnership Statement in our joint efforts to meet Fiji's development goals under the National Development Plan.

- (b) There were two officers from the Ministry who were part of the delegation to support the Permanent Secretary at the meeting in Wellington.

As the Duavata Partnership is an overarching framework and New Zealand's support to Fiji cuts across a number of sectors, the Fiji delegation also comprised personnel from several Ministries including the Office of the Prime Minister, the Ministry of Commerce and Business Development and the Ministry of Policing.

The Fiji High Commission in Wellington also provided support to the delegation while they were in Wellington.

- (c) New Zealand provided support towards the Fiji delegation's participation at the Fiji-New Zealand High Level Consultation. Total costs to the Ministry for the participation of the Permanent Secretary and the two support officers amounted to \$4,942.82.

ANNEXURE III

Reply to Written Question No. 164/2026 tabled by the honourable Minister for Education (Ref. Pages 1747-1748)



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

Reply to Question No. 164/2026 is as follows:

Free Education Grant disbursement is subject to schools meeting the Ministry's financial management and accountability requirements.

Based on the Ministry of Education's records for the Year 2025, a total of 42 schools, comprising 35 primary schools and 7 secondary schools did not receive the Free Education Grant in the academic year due to non-compliance with the Ministry's requirements.

District		Primary	Secondary
1	Eastern	20	4
2	Lautoka/Yasawa	6	1
3	Macuata/Bua	2	-
4	Nadroga/Navosa	3	-
5	Cakaudrove	2	1
6	Nausori	2	1
Total		35	7

However, compared to previous years, for example in 2022, 117 Primary and 41 Secondary Schools were non-compliant and did not receive the Free Education Grant during the academic year.

As per the School Management Handbook, the grant payment conditions are completion of class audit (student numbers) on termly basis on FEMIS, update of the monthly bank reconciliations, submissions of Annual Financial Report (AFR) and the submission of Annual General Meeting minutes.

As a way forward for better accountability and transparency for the use of FEG, MoE is reviewing the School Manager Handbook in line with the Education Act 2026 and for efficient operations and maintenance of the school.