PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI



PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DAILY HANSARD

MONDAY, 2ND NOVEMBER, 2026

[CORRECTED COPY]

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MONDAY, 2ND NOVEMBER, 2026

The Parliament met at 9.46 a.m. pursuant to notice.

MR. SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

PRESENT

Hon. Sitiveni Ligamamada Rabuka, Prime Minister and Minister for Civil Service and Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics
Hon. Sevuloni Ratumaiyale Valenitabua, Minister for Justice and Acting Attorney-General
Hon. Viliame Rogoibulu Gavoka, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Tourism and Civil Aviation
Hon. Manoa Seru Nakausabaria Kamikamica, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Industries, Commerce, Business Development and Public Enterprises
Hon. Esrom Yosef Immanuel, Minister for Finance
Hon. Filimoni Wainiqolo Rasokisoki Vosarogo, Minister for Lands and Mineral Resources and Employment, Productivity and Workplace Relations
Hon. Ro Filipe Qaraniqio Tuisawau, Minister for Public Works and Meteorological Services and Transport
Hon. Pio Tikoduadua, Minister for Defence and Veteran Affairs
Hon. Charan Jeath Singh, Minister for Multi-Ethnic Affairs, Culture, Heritage and Arts
Hon. Tomasi Niuvotu Tunabuna, Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Sugar Industry
Hon. Sakiasi Raisevu Ditoka, Minister for Foreign Affairs and External Trade
Hon. Lynda Diseru Tabuya, Minister for Information and Environment and Climate Change
Hon. Sashi Kiran, Minister for Women, Children and Social Protection
Hon. Ifereimi Vasu, Minister for iTaukei Affairs
Hon. Maciu Katamotu Nalumisa, Minister for Housing and Local Government
Hon. Jese Saukuru, Minister for Youth and Sports
Hon. Viliame Naupoto, Minister for Immigration
Hon. Ioane Naivalurua, Minister for Policing and Communications
Hon. Alitia Vakatai Bavou Cirikiyasawa Bainivalu, Minister for Fisheries and Forestry
Hon. Aseri Masivou Radrodro, Minister for Education
Hon. Dr. Ratu Atonio Rabici Lalabalavu, Minister for Health and Medical Services
Hon. Aliki Bia, Assistant Minister for Youth and Sports
Hon. Sakiusa Tubuna, Assistant Minister for Office of the Prime Minister
Hon. Lenora Salusalu Qereqeretabua, Assistant Minister for Foreign Affairs
Hon. Iliesa Sovui Vanawalu, Assistant Minister for Education
Hon. Ratu Rakuita Solesole Sauramaeva Vakalalabure, Assistant Minister for Defence
Hon. Jovesa Rokuta Vocea, Assistant Minister for Rural, Maritime Development and Disaster Management
Hon. Ratu Josaia Bulavakarua Niudamu, Assistant Minister for Justice
Hon. Penioni Koliniwai Ravunawa, Assistant Minister for Health and Medical Services
Hon. Naisa Tatau Tuinaceva, Assistant Minister for Public Works, Meteorological Services and Transport
Hon. Sachida Nand, Assistant Minister for Commerce and Business Development
Hon. Shalen Kumar, Assistant Minister for Multi-Ethnic Affairs
Hon. Prof. Biman Chand Prasad
Hon. Siromi Dokonivalu Turaga
Hon. Kalaveti Vodo Ravu
Hon. Alipate Nagata Tuicolo

Hon. Taito Rokomatu Matasawalevu
Hon. Inia Batikoto Seruiratu
Hon. Jone Usamate
Hon. Premila D. Kumar
Hon. Faiyaz Siddiq Koya
Hon. Semi Tuleca Koroilavesau
Hon. Alvick Avhikrit Maharaj
Hon. Parveen Kumar Bala
Hon. Viam Pillay
Hon. Hem Chand
Hon. Joseph Nitya Nand
Hon. Rinesh Ritesh Sharma
Hon. Virendra Lal
Hon. Sanjay S. Kirpal

Absent

Hon. Mosese Drecala Bulitavu, Minister for Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management
Hon. Isikeli Tuiwailevu, Assistant Minister for iTaukei Affairs
Hon. Vijay Nath
Hon. Ketan Kirit Lal

ADMINISTRATION OF OATH/AFFIRMATION OF ALLEGIANCE

The honourable Sevuloni Ratumaiyale Valenitabua subscribed to the Administration of Oath and took his seat in Parliament.

MR. SPEAKER.- I take this opportunity to warmly congratulate the new Attorney-General, honourable Sevuloni Ratumaiyale Valenitabua, on your appointment. You are most welcome to Parliament, and I extend my best wishes for a successful and fulfilling tenure ahead.

Maiden Speech – Honourable Sevuloni Ratumaiyale Valenitabua

HON. S.R. VALENITABUA.- Mr. Speaker, honourable Prime Minister, honourable Deputy Prime Ministers, honourable Leader of the Opposition, honourable Members of Parliament and citizens of our beloved nation of Fiji, ni sa *bula vinaka, namaste, noa'ia é mauri* and a very good morning to you all.

Mr. Speaker, I acknowledge the traditional owners of the land we are on. To the *Vanua o Nadonumai vua na Turaga na Tui Suva*, I pay my respects to their chiefs, both past and present, as well as emerging leaders and members of the *Vanua o Nadonumai*. I also pay my respect to the *Gone Marama Bale na Roko Tui Dreketi*, Ro Teimumu Vuikaba Kepa, the traditional custodian and paramount chief of the *Vanua o Rewa* and to the chiefs, elders and people of the *Vanua o Rewa*, who continue to preserve its traditions, values and identity. I acknowledge the lands on which the nation of Fiji sits, which have nurtured our diverse people, our elders past and present whose wisdom had guided us in successive generations and our diverse traditions and cultures which we practice signifying our respective ethnicities and which at most times, we practice to manifest our love for each other, within and across our difference ethnicities.

I am honoured to have taken the Oath of Parliament this morning, an oath which I believe confirms my membership of the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji; an oath which follows a similar

oath which I took before His Excellency the President of the Republic of Fiji on my appointment as the Attorney-General of Fiji, and for that appointment, I thank the honourable Prime Minister.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I believe that we, as Members of this august House and as persons entrusted with the leadership of our nation, must ask ourselves a question at some point in time as Members of Parliament and as leaders; what will the people we serve remember us by when they look back at our time in Parliament? What will citizens of our nation remember us by? Will they remember the positions we held or the titles we carried or the speeches we delivered or will they remember how we treated them for better or for worse, the sacrifices we did or did not make, the divisions we healed or exacerbated or the differences we made in their lives, if any? When our children and grandchildren look back at this period in our nation's history, what will they say we did correctly consider the opportunity or opportunities which were available to us.

Mr. Speaker, these are not questions that can be answered by titles or positions or which political parties we join or what manifestos political parties have. They can only be answered by what we do, the decisions we make, the lives we touch, and the legacies we leave behind.

I thank the honourable Prime Minister for the confidence and trust he has placed on me to be the Attorney-General of the Republic of Fiji. Honourable Prime Minister, Sir, I am grateful for the appointment to be the Attorney-General of Fiji and honoured to accept the responsibility with humility. I recognise that trust is not something to be taken for granted. Trust is something that must be earned through one's conduct, one's decisions and one's commitment to the work and service needed to be done for the people we serve in accordance with our oath.

I understand that the position of Attorney-General and being a Member of this Parliament will present challenges and difficult decisions. I cannot claim to know all about the demands and solutions in respect of the position. I can say, however, that I am committed to listening, learning and carrying out my responsibilities with integrity, fairness and respect, to the best of my abilities.

To honourable Members of Parliament, I am here this morning as a new Member of this House, I look forward to working with you. As a former schoolteacher, I am approachable and easy to work with. Few Members of this House were students when I was teaching at Ratu Kadavulevu School - the honourable Leader of the Opposition included.

To my family, I also offer my heartfelt gratitude. Behind every person who accepts a responsibility of this nature are people who offer encouragement, patience, prayers and support, often away from the public eye. I thank my family for standing beside me and for reminding me of the values that matter most, which to me are, honesty, loyalty and love. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the family should also be the primary place where leadership begins.

Our children learn from the way we, as adults, behave long before they fully understand the words we speak. As they grow, they respond when we are challenged. They observe whether we keep our promises, whether we admit our mistakes and whether we treat others with respect, among other things. Similarly, citizens of our nation also watch us. They can either imitate us or demoralize us. We, as leaders, should take the greatest care to be role models for them and good role models.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I began my speech by asking what people would remember us by when our time in public office comes to an end. I return to that question because I believe it is one worth carrying with us throughout our service. One day, the speeches would have been delivered, the debates would have ended and the positions we hold would belong to others. What will remain will be the decisions we made, the people we helped, the relationships we preserved and the examples we set for those who watched us. Our "footprints" so to speak will remain.

Our children may not remember every law we debated, but they would remember the kind of country we gave them to grow up in. Our communities may not remember every promise we made, but they will remember whether we listened when they needed to be heard. They will remember our unity for the betterment of our nation. And the generations that follow may never know all our names, but they would live with the consequences of the choices we make today. Goodness and unity must begin with us. It must begin in this House. It must begin in our homes, in our communities and in the way we choose to treat one another, even when we disagree.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Prime Minister, honourable Deputy Prime Ministers, the honourable Leader of the Opposition, honourable Members of Parliament and citizens of our beloved nation of Fiji, I conclude by saying, may God lead us always.

MR. SPEAKER.- I thank the honourable Attorney-General for his maiden speech. Our paths have crossed many a times in the performance of our duties and responsibilities in the field of which we both belong, both for this nation and in the neighbouring regional countries. I am pretty certain that you will perform likewise in the duties that is before you.

MINUTES

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

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Friday, 2nd October, 2026, as previously circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE SPEAKER

Welcome

I welcome all the honourable Members to today's sitting, all those joining us in the gallery and those watching the live broadcast on television and the internet.

Honourable Members, please join me in warmly welcoming the students and staff of Fiji School of the Blind. Welcome to your Parliament. I hope you will learn more about the workings of your Parliament and thank you for joining us today.

Approved Sitting Arrangements

For the information of the honourable Members, the Business Committee had approved the following arrangements for this week's sitting:

(a) Parliament will sit for extended hours well into the evening.
(b) Parliament may take limited breaks including lunch breaks, at the discretion of the Chair.

Furthermore, the Business Committee has also approved the additional arrangements for the Committee of the Whole Parliament stage in line with the enabling provisions in the Standing

Committee. These arrangements pertain to the Bills that will progress in the course of the sitting week:

(a) Standing Orders permit the clustering of clauses to enhance efficiency. Accordingly, and pursuant to Standing Order 87(3), during the Committee of the Whole Parliament stage, the clauses be grouped together and voted upon in a group for the purposes of efficiency.
(b) That votes taken on the group of clauses during the Committee of the Whole Parliament stage be conducted through acclamation whilst the vote on the Third Reading be conducted electronically, that is, with the approval of the Business Committee.

Tabling and Circulation of Written Responses to Parliamentary Questions

For the information of honourable Members, the Secretariat has received the following written responses from:

(a) Honourable Prime Minister and Minister for Civil Service, Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics and Public Enterprises to Written Question No. 161/2026 asked by the honourable Premila D. Kumar and Written Question No. 193/2026 asked by the honourable Inia B. Seruiratu.
(b) Honourable Minister for Finance to Written Question No. 106/2025 asked by honourable Premila D. Kumar, Written Question No. 221/2026 asked by honourable Rinesh Sharma and Written Question No. 224/2026 asked by honourable V. Nath.
(c) Honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services to Written Question No. 258/2026 asked by honourable Premila D. Kumar;
(d) Honourable Minister for Housing and Local Government to Written Question No. 151/2026 asked by the honourable Premila D. Kumar;
(e) Honourable Minister for Education to Written Question No. 72/2025 and Written Question 260/2026 asked by the honourable Hem Chand.

Honourable Members, the responses have been conveyed to the respective honourable Members to all these Questions, and the copies are made available on the Parliament website.

Back-to-Office Reports

Honourable Members, please note that the back-to-office reports for the following visits are available in the Library for Members' perusal and reference:

(a) Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence visit to the New Zealand Parliament from 23rd to 28th August, 2026;
(b) Standing Committee on Natural Resources study visit to the Republic of China;
(c) 2026 Seminar for Parliamentarians for Pacific Island Countries from 21st to 27th July, 2026 in China;
(d) CPA Advanced Professional Development and Skills-Building Residency Programme held in Darwin, Australia from 21st to 27th June, 2026; and
(e) 4th Global Council for Political Renewal Conference (GCPR) held in Cape Town from 13th to 14th February, 2026.

2026 Fiji Women's Practice Parliament

Honourable Members, from 19th to 22nd October, we conducted the 2026 Fiji Women's Practice Parliament comprising 58 very capable women. The Women's Practice Parliament gave them the opportunity to learn more about Parliament, its key functions and procedures, the important

them the opportunity to learn more about Parliament, its key functions and procedures, the important role of parliamentary committees and understanding some key policy issues.

I had the opportunity to sit in and observe from the public gallery during their debates, and it was encouraging to hear the issues discussed and the research done by the women in the short time given to them. The confidence they portrayed gave me hope that, given these kinds of opportunity, more women will participate in the democratic and decision-making processes and will become change makers in their communities.

I also acknowledge the generous support of the governments of Australia, Japan and New Zealand through the UNDP Fiji Parliament Support Project for their collaboration and support in the exercise.

At this juncture, I will adjourn for our morning tea. We will resume our session in another half-an-hour.

The Parliament adjourned at 10.13 a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 11.00 a.m.

MR. SPEAKER.- For the purposes of complying with the Standing Orders with respect to motions, I now call upon the honourable Leader of the Government in Parliament to move a suspension motion.

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDERS TO PERMIT THE MOVING OF A MOTION WITHOUT PRIOR NOTICE

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

> Under Standing Order 6 that so much of Standing Order 46(2) is suspended, so as to allow the honourable Prime Minister to move a motion pertaining to the Special Committee on the Constitution (Amendment) Bill 2026.

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

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, as alluded to in the motion, Standing Order 6 refers to Suspension of Standing Orders, and I quote:

> "(1) A Standing Order may be suspended in whole or in part only by the leave of Parliament.
> (2) A motion to do so or a motion the effect of which will result in the suspending of a Standing Order in whole or in part, must not be moved except with the Speaker's permission. The Speaker may allow such a motion without notice…"

Standing Order 46 states, and I quote:

> "(1) A member wishing to move a motion must give notice of it before it may be moved, unless the requirement for notice is dispensed with by leave of Parliament…
> (2) Notice is given by delivering to the Secretary-General, no less than two days before the day on which the member intends to move the motion, …"

Given the pressing agenda of the Special Committee on the Constitution, whom have been working throughout the last few weeks or so, up to yesterday, the notice as required has been difficult to put in, which is why we are asking for this suspension motion for the required notice, as required under Standing Order 46(2).

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Leader of the Government in Parliament for the motion. We, on this side of the House were advised otherwise and I seek clarification because what we were advised this morning is, the motion is not going to come on the floor, it will just come through you, Mr. Speaker, after the letter from the honourable Prime Minister seeking an extension for the Committee in order to complete or even progress with the work that has been undertaken already. That is the advice that we were given this morning, and we were not prepared for this motion on the floor. That is what we wanted to seek clarification on.

MR. SPEAKER.- My understanding is that this is just procedural in accordance with the procedures of suspension to allow the two-day requirement for the report to be tabled, and for the suspension of that, to allow the motion to come forward without the two-day requirement. That is my understanding of the purpose of the motion.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, subject to your direction, from what I understand, any

other Committee, if they are seeking an extension of time, it is merely a matter of writing to the Speaker to get an extension in time for a Bill to come back or whatever work that is being done. We understand the issue of trying to suspend it, if you are filing a motion. However, I think the question from the honourable Leader of the Opposition is, is a motion required. It is merely a matter of an administrative letter going from the Committee Chair to the Speaker to say an extension is required. It is within your jurisdiction to do that. That was what we understood.

MR. SPEAKER.- I understand that, honourable Koya. However, I would have expected this matter to come through the processes of the Business Committee in relation to the business of the House. A request for an extension of time is something that would have been done.

However, since this matter concerns a Special Committee established by resolution of the House, hence the reason I had advised that he sought formal approval from the House, pursuant to the resolution of the House. If there are any further clarifications, we will proceed accordingly.

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

MR. SPEAKER.- In accordance with the procedure, Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

Motion agreed.

DEFERMENT OF THE TABLING OF THE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON THE CONSTITUTION'S REVIEW REPORT

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- I thank all the honourable Members who have contributed to the Suspension of Standing Orders motion.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I move that:

(a) Parliament allows the Special Committee on the Constitution (Amendment) Bill 2026 to table its review report at a later sitting date; and
(b) honourable Professor Biman Prasad be replaced by honourable Sachida Nand as a Member of the Special Committee on the Constitution (Amendment) Bill 2026.

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

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, as the nation saw, the Special Committee on the Constitution (Amendment) Bill 2026 has been going around collecting and listening to submissions. In the course of our rounds, I have received communication from honourable Professor Biman Prasad that the National Federation Party (NFP) will not be part of the Standing Committee in its deliberations. I have sadly taken that into account.

We saw in the Minutes presented before the House today that Parliament had agreed with the list that was presented and contained here in the Minutes of our meeting in paragraph 10(b) for those who make up that Committee, to gather contributions from the people in our consultations around the country. Personally, for me, it is a sad realisation of how far we have moved forward in our politics, and then I remember the processes that led to the adoption of the 1997 Constitution when the NFP became a very strong partner to the SVT that I led at that time, to come up with the 1997

Constitution. Our belief then was that this would truly mean the words in the Constitution, that *"We, the people of Fiji, adopt this as our Constitution"*. I moved it, and the honourable Leader of the Opposition supported it.

Now, we have more Parties in Parliament, and we have had the cooperation of the Members - two Coalition Members, we fortunately have the honourable Leader of the Opposition and those who were in an independent group have come along to work with us.

It is very important, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that we ask for this extension, so during the extended period, we intend to listen to more submissions from the public and also give time to our very hardworking parliamentary staff - the Secretariat, who have been supporting us in the collection, collation and compilation of the final report to be presented back to Parliament in due time. So, I ask Parliament to support this motion to enable us to facilitate, within time, the mission that has been given to us, and I commend the motion to Parliament.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, I thank the honourable Prime Minister for his motion. The honourable Prime Minister quite rightly referred to my letter to him, and in that letter, we expressed our view very clearly. I said in that letter that we, the National Federation Party, right from the beginning, believed that constitutional reform after the implementation of the 2013 Constitution some years back, and the time to review it, was appropriate.

The honourable Prime Minister referred to the 1997 Constitution, and I acknowledge his leadership at that time with Justice Jai Ram Reddy, the Leader of the Opposition and Leader of the National Federation Party, in working together and coming up with a consensus on the 1997 Constitution, despite the fact that there were very different points of view and opinions expressed with respect to the 1990 Constitution.

The issue and the difference that we are seeing now and the process for the 1997 Constitution, Mr. Speaker, Sir, was a matter of time and the perception of our people. Having been around with the Special Committee and with the honourable Prime Minister himself, we have heard a lot of views. Again, one central feature in those views expressed by people from different groups, communities and stakeholders, was the process. Additionally, I also want to say that I did write to the honourable Prime Minister very early last year on 9th December, asking the honourable Prime Minister, at that time, to take approach that we include the Opposition right from the beginning in terms of the Constitution Review Commission, its membership, et cetera.

I want to say that the initial timeline provided for the Committee was two days - Saturday and Sunday, to write the report and present it to Parliament today. The honourable Prime Minister's statement on Friday evening, indicating that the Committee would have approximately 48 hours to prepare its report, with the Constitution (Amendment) Bill 2026 scheduled to be debated and voted upon this week, made us very, very uncomfortable, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I am glad that the Committee has recognised that rushing this process does not help anyone because if the perception out there among the people is that the process is being rushed, then despite all the good things in the Draft Constitution, the legitimacy of the proposed new Constitution could become a serious issue.

I have no objection to the honourable Prime Minister's move to replace me, based on what I said on Saturday with another Member, but my position and the Party's position remains, Mr. Speaker, that we have done a lot of work already. We have started a lot of debate on the Constitution, and that is a good thing. However, the Party still feels that even if we extend this for another three weeks, leaving aside this week, the issue of time, the rushed implementation and the perception is not going to change.

As I have stated in my letter to the honourable Prime Minister, who is the Chairman of the Special Committee, that it would be very good if we had listened to the people and not impose this timeline, and we continue this process after the general election. Yes, the composition of Parliament may change, different players in different political parties, but the consensus, even from the Opposition side and the honourable Leader of the Opposition is on record saying that the 2013 Constitution needs to change, and we all share that view.

However, it would be appropriate for us, as Parliament, to accept the fact that we could continue this process. There is no wastage of resources, as some people might claim. The work that has been done so far in terms of consultation, in terms of debate, is worth the money spent, and we believe that these three additional weeks is not going to allay the fears, the suspicions and the perceptions of the people.

Therefore, I would urge the honourable Prime Minister and the Special Committee to reconsider the timeline. I, once again, propose that we carry out this process after the general election and build a much better consensus, discussion, debate and disagreement so that whatever we get after that, has the acceptance and perception of the people, and that is a document that would be owned by everyone in the country.

In that respect, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the National Federation Party differs on the motion to bring it back before Parliament in three weeks for debate and a vote. The National Federation Party will not support that.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, again, let me say that the Government's decision to seek an extension of time for the tabling of the Constitution (Amendment) Bill 2026 (Bill No. 32 of 2026) reinforces the concerns that we have raised earlier as well during the deliberations of the Special Committee, and alluded by the honourable leader of the National Federation Party as well.

We had raised this issue about timing. We had also reminded Government that the timetable was too compressed. It would be good if this be given more time for meaningful public consultations, rather than trying to rush this through, given the changes that have already been made from the recommendations of the Constitution Review Commission, what has been done by the Cabinet Sub-Committee and what is in the Constitution (Amendment) Bill 2026 that we have been taking to the people. I believe that our concerns were legitimate and deserved serious consideration as well from the beginning.

Unfortunately, despite repeated calls for a more measured approach, the Government remained determined to pursue its preferred timetable. I want to make our position very clear, Mr. Speaker, Sir, our continued participation in the Special Select Committee on the Constitution (Amendment) Bill 2026 should never be mistaken for an endorsement of the Government proposals, or the manner in which this process has been conducted. We remain in the Committee because we have a constitutional, parliamentary and moral responsibility to the people of Fiji. Together with my parliamentary colleagues, honourable Parveen Bala, honourable Alvick Maharaj and honourable Jone Usamate, we are determined to ensure that the concerns of ordinary Fijians are heard, respected and properly considered.

Our responsibility extends to every Fijian, particularly, those who may never have the opportunity to appear before the Parliamentary Committee, and this includes our people in the rural and maritime communities, women, young people, elderly persons, those living with disabilities and minority communities. As we have stated already in this House and, of course, we have been hearing as well from the consultations, that the Constitution belongs to the people of Fiji, not to a political or

to the Government. It is owned by the people.

Why will we remain in the Committee? There is a lot of speculation going on in the social media, and that needs to be corrected as well, even to the extent that people are saying that we have already been offered diplomatic posts. This is not helping us in the way forward. We come with a very open mind when we are approaching this because this is about Fiji.

I have already said in this House, let us do it right once and for all, so we have chosen to remain. We respect the decisions made by other political parties, but we are there to represent the voices. Government needs to be challenged with some of the changes, recommendations, rights and interests that are coming up in the amendments because if we also pull out of this process, then who is going to represent the voices of the people of Fiji?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, that is why we have chosen to remain. We were not pressured by any decisions. Even as I was walking into the Chamber after tea break, I was asked whether we had decided to support the Government and whether we had been approached by the honourable Prime Minister. Those were the questions put to me.

We remained determined to continue with our work. We respect the parliamentary process. That is also why we chose not to participate in the Town Hall engagement that was held last week because we respect the processes of this House.

I want to demonstrate to the people of Fiji that the Opposition will continue to discharge its responsibilities with seriousness, independence and determination. We will support what is right for Fiji, challenge what is wrong and oppose any provision that undermines the rights, freedoms or democratic interests of our people. We must always put the people first.

Governments come and go; political leaders change, parliamentary majorities shift and political alliances change. However, the Constitution endures and will continue to save the lives of our children and the generation that follow. That is why, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we choose to remain and we will continue with the work.

We support this motion to extend the work of the Special Committee.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak on the motion. As one of the other coalition partners in this Coalition Government, the Social Democratic Liberal Party (SODELPA) acknowledges the Government's effort in advancing Fiji's constitutional review process. As a party, we have also written to the honourable Prime Minister to voice our concerns and highlight specific areas on which the Members of the party and the people of Fiji, have raised concerns.

I thank the honourable Prime Minister for the extension of the timeframe because as already mentioned, the constitutional review process is very, very important at this juncture. The review and amendment of the 2013 Constitution is part of our Coalition Government's Manifesto. Some of the issues that we have highlighted were also raised by members of our political party during the public consultations held throughout the Western Division - Ba, Tavua, Ra and Tailevu, as well as in the Nasinu area. It is in that context that the party issued its statement outlining its position in support of the Coalition.

Bill No. 32, in its current form, was not supported by SODELPA, and we have raised some issues, including the timing. It is also important and I would recommend, that the Committee continues its consultations with communities and members of the public, especially in the Province of Naitasiri, where

there was minimal or no consultation at all. This Bill needs to be taken up to Naitasiri so that the people are fully informed of the contents of the Bill.

We hope that the final version of the Bill, when tabled in this House, will also consider the recommendations submitted by the Party in its letter dated 30th October, 2026 to the honourable Prime Minister, and delivered at Parliament House on Saturday during the Parliament Sitting.

HON. V. LAL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to respond to the motion before this august House seeking an extension of time for the tabling of the Constitution (Amendment) Bill, 2026. I seek your permission to speak in the vernacular.

Speaker *Mahoday, hum log vidhaan par baate kar rahe hai aur shuru se hum yah kahete aaye hai ki sahi tunali ka prayog karna chahiye. Abhi aap dekh rahe hai ki mananye Pradhaan Mantri chahte hai ki aur samay unhe mile taaki iss par aur logo ki raaye li jaye. Hum bhi yahi chahte hai, aur shuru se hum yahi kahete aaye hai ki isme jald-bazi na kiya jaye. Mai yah spasht karna chahta hoon ki samvidhaan par jo bhi vichaar ho raha hai, isko lekar ke jo* Special Committee *hai, usme hamare virodhi neta, mananye* Inia Seruiratu *ji hai aur hamare* Party *ke* Deputy Leader, *mananye* Parveen Bala *ji hai, mananye* Jone Usamate *ji hai aur mananye* Alvick Maharaj *ji hai. Hamare sadasye iss* Committee *mei hai aur iska yeh matlab nahi hai ki jo kuch bhi sarkar karegi, hum use manyeta denge.*

Hamara is Committee *mein rahene ka maksad yah hai ki hum chahte hai ki jo bhi vichaar ya raaye hamare log de rahe hai, uspar hum theek se gaor kare. Aysi baat nahi hai ki sarkar jo chah rahi hai use hum samarthan karenge. Hum dekhenge ki hamare logo ke liye, hamare desh ke liye aur hamare bhavishye ke liye kya sahi hai, aur hum uspar gaor karenge. Aysa nahi hai ki jo bhi sarkar kahegi hum use manyeta denge.*

Aapne dekha hoga ki bahut kam bhartiye janta saamne aa rahe hai. Mai iss ausar par unse maang kar raha hoon ki aap bhi saamne aaye aur apna vichaar de taaki sabhi ka vichaar ismei sammalit kiya jaye. Bahut log shayad yah sochte honge ki jo 2013 Constitution *(vidhaan) hai, wo sahi hai. aap yah bata bhi sakte hai, aur kiya sahi nahi hai yah bhi bata sakte hai. Agar aap purn roop se is vidhaan se khush hai, toh aap who bhi kahe sakte hai. Aapko mauka diya ja raha hai. Sarkare aati hai, sarkaare chali jaati hai,* Parliamentarians *bhi aayenge aur chale jayenge. Lekin samvidhaan jo hai, hamare bhavishye ke liye hai, hamare baccho ke liye hai. Iss liye hum chahte hai ki zyada-se-zyada log apni raaye de.*

Aapne suna hoga ki ek Party *iss* Committee *se nikal gayi hai, lekin hamare logo ka yaha rahene ka matlab hai, ki hum yeh dekhenge ki yeh jo vidhaan par baate ho rahi hai, yeh hamare liye, desh ke liye aye bhavishye ke liye bahut acha rahe, taaki saalo tak isspar hum kaam kare. Isliye hum chah rahe hai ki hamari bhartiye janta bhi samne aaye aur isspar apna yog-daan de. Abhi aur mauka mil raha hai. Abhi tak hum yeh dekhte aa rahe hai ki kai log jo vidhaan ke baare mein theek se shayad unhone padha bhi nahi hai ya samjhate nahi hai, aa kar bolte hai, lekin ab aap ko samay milega aur aap ispar gaor kijiye.*

Aap dekhna ki Constitution Review Commission *ne jo* report *diya hai aur fir* Bill *ke roop mei jo* report *saamne aaya hai, aap ispar gaor kare aur poonche ki pura ka pura* Constitution Review Commission *ka sujhao kyu nahi hai. Sarkar ne kuch* recommendations *ko badal kar laya hai, hum dekhe sakte hai. Sarkar ne kyu badla hai aur kuch ko bilkul nahi shaamil kiya hai. Kyu nahi shaamil kiya hai? In vishiyo par aap sabhi gaor kare. Jaise mai kahe raha hoon, ki samvidhaan aaj ya kal ke liye nahi hai. Desh mei bahut samvidhaan badla jaa chuka hai.*

Ab kai log bol rahe hai ki 1997 *samvidhaan bahut acha tha, lekin use bhi hata diya gaya. Usme kya khaamiya thi? Ayse sabhi janta ko mil kar ke ek aysa samvidhaan desh mein lana chahiye jispar sabhi ki raaye ho, sabhi ka yog-daan ho, aur jise sabhi log svikaar kare. Hum nahi chah rahe hai ki jald se jald hum log samvidhaan ko badalte rahe aur ek ayesa samvidhaan ho jo bahut saalo tak hamara saath de. Isliye hum isme bhaag le rahe hai. Kai ayse log bhi hai jo shayas saamne nahi aa rahe hai, jo gramin ilako mei rahte hai aur jo yog-daan nahi de sakte hai, toh unki or se hum iss* Committee *mei baithenge, unki awaaz uthayenge kyuki janta ne hume chun kar yaha bheja hai. Hum nahi chahte hai ki janta ne jo zimmedari hame saupi hai uss zimmedari se hum bhaage. Hamari zimmedari hai ki aap na aa sake to hum aap ki or se hum iss* Committee *mein baith kar aap ki awaaz rakhenge.*

Aap agar Committee *ke saamne nahi upastit hai, toh hamare log jo* Committee *mei hai, ko aap sampark kare aur apni raaye de. Ab aage jo baate hongi samvidhaan par, ispar* Committee *ke sadasye aap se baat-cheet bhi karenge. Abhi tak kewal yeh log baith kar sun rahe the, aur jo kuch bhi* submissions *abhi tak mila hai, uspar kewal ek tarfa aap ki raaye aa rahi thi. Lekin ab jab* Committee *baithegi tab* Committee *ke sadasye aap se sawal bhi karenge aur batayenge ki yeh samvidhaan mei hai aur yeh nahi hai.*

Mai logo se maang kar raha hoon, khaas kar ke bhartye janta se, ki aap log saamne aaye aur apni raaye aur vichaar de. Mai yeh dohra raha hoon ki hum yeh dekhenge ki sarv-pratham hamare liye kiya sahi hai, desh tatha hamare bhavishye ke liye kiya sahi hai, isspar hum sab mil kar ke gaor karenge aur baat-cheet karenge.

[Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are at present discussing matters related to the constitutional framework and from the beginning, we have maintained that a proper channel should be followed in order to do this. Our concern is that we should be given more time so that opinions of other people can also be sorted out. We also want the same, and we have been harping on from the beginning that this process should not be undertaken in haste.

I wish to clarify that although, in regard to the Constitution Review Committee, we have our Opposition Leader, honourable Inia Seruiratu, honourable Parveen Bala, along with honourable Jone Usamate and honourable Alvick Maharaj are members of the Committee, this does not mean that we will endorse or support everything the Government introduces.

The purpose of being in the Committee is to ensure that we give proper consideration of the ideas put forward by our people. It is not a matter of supporting everything the Government wants. We will consider what is right for our people, for our nation and our future. This is the reason we say we will not accept whatever the Government says, we will certainly give it due consideration where necessary only.

We have noticed that very few people, especially the Indians, are not coming forward in numbers to give their views and express their opinions. We want everyone to come forward so that everyone's views can be included. There may be many who believe that the 2013 Constitution is the right one. You are most welcome to come forward to say this and tell us what else you want to change, if any, or what you want not to be changed. If you are fully satisfied with the 2013 Constitution then come forward and say so. You are given one chance and one single opportunity to express your views. Governments come and go, but the Constitution stays, and it is for our future generations. That is precisely why we want as many people as possible to share their views and opinions.

You may have heard that one Party has already withdrawn itself from the Committee. However, our continued participation signifies that our people want the Constitution to be beneficial for us, for our nation and for our future. Precisely, this is why we want the Indian public to come forward and contribute. Many people are either unaware of the provisions of the Constitution or perhaps did not fully grasp it. Once you step in and share your views, you will realise how significant your thoughts are. It is worth examining the Bill and asking why the original report from the Constitution Review Commission is not being truly reflected. Why has the Government altered or modified it. You might ask why the Government made these changes in the first place, and why certain elements have been included and why some are excluded. In considering all these issues, a Constitution is not just for today, it is for the future.

Many constitutions have been changed in this country, yet now some people say that the 1997 Constitution was a very good one. However, the 1997 Constitution was also discarded, and the question was where was the flaw in it? Now, everyone has to come together to bring about a Constitution that reflects the opinions and contributions of all citizens and which is acceptable to everyone. A Constitution that will stay here for years to come.

We are taking part in the process where our party representatives are there. There are other people who really want to put forward their views but are living in the interior. For these people, we can be their voices that can be included in the submission. People have bestowed their confidence in us, and they have chosen us as their representatives, so we want to be justifiable in performing our responsibilities.

Our people need to contact our Committee Members if they want to put forward their views. We will take up their views to the Committee. All this time the Committee Members were listening to you, but now they will have straight conversations with you. So far, whatever submissions were received, it was considered as one sided, but now this will not be the situation. From now onwards, when the Committee sits, it will question you and tell you what is included in the Constitution and what has been omitted from the Constitution.

This is the sole reason why I am requesting, especially, the Indian people to come forward to give your views. I am reiterating once again that we all should come together to suggest a way forward as what will be better for us, what will be better for the future and for our nation.]

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank all the honourable Members for their contribution to the motion. I particularly thank the last honourable speaker, and the Hindi interpretations that are coming out accurately. He has expressed the wishes of everyone who have participated so far in the Special Committee.

Those who have been following the various submissions made will have noticed that a major part of the Coalition has not made any formal submission. We have made a formal submission to the Constitution Review Commission and individual members might have come up while we were going around our consultation visits. However, we assure everyone, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that we are not pushing anything from the Government side. We are promoting everything that will be of benefit to the people of Fiji. As we stand here today and look forward to the Census next year, there is the possibility that the results will give us a new understanding of Fiji's population, its demographic changes and its future growth.

I acknowledge and accept the views brought up by honourable Members that this Constitution must be a constitution of today while remaining relevant and applicable to future generations. I firmly

believe, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that if we get this process right, we will be able to have a constitution that serves the current population of Fiji, while also safeguarding the interests of generations to come.

I honestly believe that the honourable Members appointed to be part of the Special Committee working on this Constitution (Amendment) Bill have been very earnest and honest in what we do, particularly in listening to the views and submissions of members of the public who have appeared before the Committee.

We also continue to promise that when we sum up and bring back to Parliament the end result of our consultations, the outcome will be fair to all honourable Members of this House and also reflect our responsibility to the people of Fiji and future generations. I commend this motion before the House.

MR. SPEAKER.- The Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

PRESENTATION OF REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

Consolidated Review Report - Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2019-2023 Annual Reports

HON. L.S. QEREQRETABUA.- Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence's Consolidated Review Report on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Annual Reports for the periods 2019-2020, 2020-2021, 2021-2022 and 2022-2023.

The Committee examined the Ministry's performance, strategic direction, financial management, governance arrangements, and contribution to Fiji's national development priorities during a period marked by unprecedented global events including the COVID-19 pandemic, post-pandemic recovery efforts, evolving geopolitical dynamics, and a transition in Government.

The Committee acknowledges the Ministry's critical role in promoting and protecting Fiji's interests internationally through diplomacy, regional co-operation, trade and investment engagement, climate advocacy, peace and security initiatives, and the provision of consular and protocol services.

The evidence presented to the Committee demonstrated the Ministry's resilience and adaptability in responding to significant external challenges. Despite disruptions caused by the pandemic, the Ministry continued to deliver essential diplomatic and consular services. It facilitated the repatriation of Fijians stranded abroad, maintained Fiji's engagement with bilateral and multilateral partners, and secured international support that contributed to the nation's health, economic and development objectives.

The Committee also notes Fiji's continued leadership within the Pacific region, including its contributions to the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent, climate change advocacy, ocean governance, human rights, and regional cooperation initiatives. These efforts have enhanced Fiji's international profile and reinforced its reputation as a principled and constructive member of the international community.

During its deliberations, the Committee identified several challenges and areas requiring continued attention. These include:

- strengthening performance measurement and results-based reporting;
- improving oversight and coordination of international agreements and treaty obligations;
- enhancing the monitoring of overseas Mission performance;
- addressing workforce vacancies and succession planning; and
- strengthening financial management and asset oversight.

The Committee believes that placing greater emphasis on measurable outcomes and transparent reporting will further strengthen accountability and assist Parliament in assessing the impact of Fiji's diplomatic engagements on national development priorities.

The Committee's findings, observations and recommendations are intended to support the Ministry in further improving its effectiveness, governance and service delivery. The Committee trusts that the recommendations contained in this Report will assist the Ministry in strengthening institutional capability, enhancing accountability and ensuring that Fiji's foreign policy continues to deliver tangible benefits to all Fijians.

The Committee further acknowledges that the annual reports under review relate to reporting periods between 2019 and 2023. Consequently, some of the operational arrangements, administrative processes, policies and initiatives examined may have since changed, been strengthened, or are in the process of improvement. This time lapse necessarily limits the extent to which the Committee can make recommendations on matters that may have already been addressed or are currently being implemented. Accordingly, the Committee's recommendations should be considered in the context of the Ministry's current operating environment and are intended, where relevant, to reinforce ongoing improvements and address matters that remain outstanding.

On behalf of the Committee, Sir, I wish to thank the Permanent Secretary, management and staff of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and External Trade for their co-operation and assistance throughout the review process. I must also extend my appreciation to my fellow Committee Members and, of course, our very hardworking Secretariat, for their contributions in the preparation of this Report.

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

(Report handed to Secretary-General)

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, pursuant to Standing Order 121(5), I hereby move:

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

HON. V. LAL.- Mr. Speaker, I second the motion.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

<u>Review Report - Parliament of the Republic of Fiji 2023-2024 Annual Report</u>

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am pleased to present the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence's Review Report on the Parliament of the Republic of

Fiji 2023-2024 Annual Report. In undertaking this review, Sir, the Committee considered the written responses provided by the Parliament Secretariat, and evidence presented during the public hearing.

The Committee notes that Parliament continued to perform its core constitutional functions of law-making, oversight and scrutiny, and representation during the reporting period. The Committee further acknowledges the important work of the Parliament Secretariat in supporting Members of Parliament, facilitating Committee operations, strengthening public engagement and maintaining the institutional integrity of Parliament, amidst an increasingly complex operational environment.

The Committee's review found that Parliament has established a clear strategic direction through its 2023-2027 Strategic Plan, underpinned by priorities focused on strengthening support to Members, protecting parliamentary independence, developing workforce capability and enhancing public participation in democratic processes.

The Committee notes that significant progress has been made in advancing Parliament's digital transformation agenda through investments in information and communication technologies, digital records management systems, hybrid meeting capabilities and cyber security infrastructure. These initiatives, Sir, have strengthened operational resilience and improved access to parliamentary services and information.

Despite these achievements, however, the Committee identified several areas requiring continued attention. Of particular concern is the absence of a formal mechanism to monitor the implementation of recommendations made by parliamentary Committees. The Committee considers that a structured recommendation-tracking framework would significantly enhance Parliament's oversight function by enabling more effective monitoring of Government responses and implementation outcomes.

The Committee also notes ongoing workforce-related challenges facing the Parliament Secretariat, including staff retention, succession planning and capacity constraints, in a few critical operational areas. The evidence presented highlighted increasing demands on research, committee and parliamentary support services, underscoring the importance of developing specialist expertise and ensuring adequate staffing levels to effectively support Members and Committees in discharging their responsibilities.

The Committee further observed that several institutional reforms remain outstanding, including the establishment of a dedicated Parliamentary Counsel function, implementation of recommendations arising from the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) Democratic Legislature Benchmarks Assessment, and the long-term objective of establishing a standalone parliamentary precinct. The Committee considers these reforms important to strengthening Parliament's institutional independence, effectiveness and sustainability.

The Committee was encouraged by Parliament's continued efforts to promote civic education and public participation through initiatives such as the Parliament Bus Programme, educational outreach activities, and the Women's Mock Parliament Programme. These initiatives have contributed to improving public awareness of parliamentary democracy and encouraging broader engagement in national governance. However, the Committee notes that challenges remain in enhancing accessibility and increasing the representation of women in elected office.

The Committee found that Parliament continues to make a significant contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions), through its promotion of transparency, accountability and public participation. Parliament also

supports other key goals, including gender equality, reduced inequalities, quality education and climate action, through its programmes, outreach activities and engagement in regional and international parliamentary forums.

Accordingly, the Committee has made several recommendations aimed at strengthening parliamentary oversight, enhancing research and legal support services, improving accessibility and public engagement, advancing workforce sustainability, supporting ongoing digital transformation, preserving Fiji's parliamentary heritage and progressing key institutional reforms.

The Committee acknowledges the cooperation and assistance provided by the Secretary-General and officials of the Parliament Secretariat through the review process. I also acknowledge the contribution of my fellow Committee Members in the compilation of this bipartisan Report.

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

(Report handed to Secretary-General)

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, pursuant to Standing Order 121(5), I hereby move:

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

HON. V. LAL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I beg to second the motion.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

FIJI NATIONAL UNIVERSITY BILL 2026

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, pursuant to Standing Order 85(1), I respectfully move:

That the Fiji National University Bill of 2026 (Bill No. 27/2026), be now read a second time.

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

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, before I invite the mover of the motion to speak, I remind you that in accordance with Standing Order 85(1), the debate will focus on the principles and merits of the Bill, which means focusing on the big picture policy, purpose and the overall direction of the proposed law.

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise today to table the Second Reading of the Fiji National University Bill 2026 in this august House.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the passage of this Bill marks a significant milestone for the Fiji National University (FNU). It provides a modern legislative framework that will strengthen the University's governance, its management, enhances its operational effectiveness and supports its vision of delivering quality education, research, innovation and community service for the benefit of Fiji and

the wider Pacific region. It also strengthens the University's autonomy, accountability, academic excellence and national development objectives.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, further, the key principles reflected in the Bill include:

(1) Enhancing governance and accountability through a clear structure consisting of the Council, Senate, Vice-Chancellor and other statutory bodies, with defined powers, functions and responsibilities.
(2) Strengthening FNU by ensuring it continues to serve the country's tertiary education, training, research, innovation and workforce development needs.

(3) Promoting academic freedom and institutional autonomy, allowing the University to pursue teaching, research, free inquiry, and knowledge creation, without improper interference.

(4) Supporting national development and productivity, including technical and vocational education, professional training, apprenticeships, and industry engagement through the National Training and Productivity Centre.
(5) Ensuring non-discrimination and equal opportunity in the University's operations and activities.
(6) Preserving continuity and stability by protecting the rights of students, staff, assets and existing institutional arrangements during the transition to the new Act.

This legislation, Mr. Speaker, is not merely about an institution, it is about investing in our people; developing the skills and knowledge required for national development; creating opportunities for future generations; strengthening governance; enhancing institutional autonomy; protecting academic freedom, alignment with higher education standards, supporting national development, improving industry and community engagement, providing legal certainty and continuity; and strengthening accountability on public resources. It reaffirms our collective belief that higher education remains one of the most powerful drivers of economic growth, social progress and national prosperity.

Mr. Speaker, I now highlight the merits of Bill No. 27/2026, as follows:

(1) <u>Strengthens University Governance</u>
The Bill establishes a clearer governance structure with defined roles and responsibilities for the Council, for the Senate, Vice-Chancellor, and other statutory bodies. This promotes transparency, accountability, and effective decision-making. For example:

- Part 3 on Officers of the University captures a new structure whereby the Chancellor is now the Titular Head of State, to ensure stability with ceremonial functions; and Pro-Chancellor as an operational Chancellor who is assisted by the Deputy Pro-Chancellor. Their respective roles are now defined in the Bill for clarity, accountability, transparency, and for decision-making.

- Elimination of Excessive Power of the FNU Council. Clause 10 states that the FNU Council does not have separate powers, so they act on the power vested on the University, unlike the Fiji National University Act 2009 whereby the Council has separate powers - powers of Council and University, which allows micromanage and create instability to University management. Elimination of excessive power by ensuring accountability.

- Clause 14 on delegation, the Bill clearly demarcates the level of delegation of authority for clarity, accountability, responsibility and efficiency of administration.

- Clause 18 on Appointment of Members. With appointment of two internationally recognised academics and having the required criteria ensures that the Council's skills composition is balanced and can advance the University objectives to a greater level of governance, sustainability and productivity through the advisory role and experiential wisdom acquired thereby.

- Clause 79 of the Bill is about penalties where it has increased to $10,000 and/or 12 months in prison for breaching the Fiji National University Act, simply as a deterrent, and strengthen governance practices.

(2) Enhances Institutional Autonomy

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Bill reinforces the University's ability to manage its academic, administrative and financial affairs independently, while remaining accountable to the people of Fiji. Strong autonomy is a key feature of internationally recognised universities. For example:

- Part 2(4) defines the University as corporate entity with powers to purchase, borrow, and invest both locally or offshore, to allow the University to finance its own affairs and objectives in the future, and allows the University to engage in public private partnership with business sectors for the best interest of the University.

- Clause 64 (b), (c) and (d) allows the University to solicit funds through gifts, donation, contribution, levies, fees, loan, investments and other lawful means to assist in the financing of university administration, academics and object of the University. That will allow the University to be less dependent on Government for grants for operation and capital projects.

(3) Protects Academic Freedom

The legislation provides a framework that supports free inquiry, research, innovation, and the expression of scholarly opinions, which are essential for academic excellence and knowledge creation. For example:

- Clause 83 promotes and ensures academic freedom in the University by allowing students to question and test received wisdom, advance new ideas, express controversial and unpopular opinion, and engage in public research and publication. It requires FNU Council to preserve and enhance it, protect the rights of students and staff to pursue academic freedom, and requires the Government to act consistently with the promotion of academic freedom at FNU.

(4) Aligns FNU with Modern Higher Education Standards

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Bill modernises the University's legislative framework, ensuring that FNU operates in accordance with contemporary university governance practices and international higher education standards. For example:

- On Clause 3(1), the Vice-Chancellor is also the President of FNU, with easy collaboration and networks with US Universities.
- Part 2 - Clause 4(1) denotes the continuity of the University both locally and abroad.
- Clause 6(a), (b), (c), (d), (e), (i) and (k) provides some of the objects of the University that support higher education standards.

These provisions, Mr. Speaker, Sir, ensure that FNU programmes secure international accreditation for recognition and employability of its graduates locally and abroad. Thus, to meet overseas market that the nation would benefit through remittances.

(5) Supports National Development

By strengthening FNU's mandate in education, research, innovation, technical and vocational training, and professional development, the Bill enables the University to contribute more effectively to Fiji's economic and social development. For example:

Clause 6(c), (f) and (g) promotes research excellence and builds research capacity and contributes to national development priorities, economic growth, technological advancement and solutions to local, regional and global challenges, as well as ensuring graduates contribute to the development of our nation.

The dual sector education provided by FNU enables FNU to work in support and in collaboration with the Ministry of Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics, and all Ministerial sectors in providing research, academic advisory and human resources to further the development of our nation and meeting our National Development Plan and Vision 2050.

(6) Improves Industry and Community Engagement

The Bill supports stronger collaboration between the University, industry, Fovernment and community, ensuring that graduates possess skills that are relevant to national and regional workforce needs. For example:

- Clauses 55 and 56 of the Bill is about National Training Productivity Centre and Board that is responsible for all TVET programmes.

- Part 6 of the Bill is about levies and apprenticeship.

These two provisions, Mr. Speaker, Sir, have created avenues for continuous collaboration with industries over the years and for exchange of ideas, industry and market skills, demand and expectation, likewise, practices for equipping students to ensure they meet market demands. FNU has been facilitating training to communities around Fiji and the Pacific for skills empowerment as part of engagement with the community.

(7) Provides Legal Certainty and Continuity

The legislation also safeguards the rights and interests of students, staff, assets, contracts and academic programmes, ensuring a smooth transition under the new governance framework.

(8) Strengthens Accountability for Public Resources

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as a national institution, FNU receives significant public investment. The Bill also enhances mechanisms for financial oversight, reporting and responsible stewardship of public resources. For example:

- Part 5 - Clause 65, the Council is responsible for ensuring that the University operates within the annually approved budget and remains solvent.
- Part 5 - Clause 68, the University is under obligation to audit its financial account and submit its financial audited report to Parliament.

These provisions in the Bill ensure that public funds are accounted for in a transparent and accountable manner by FNU.

The FNU 2025 Annual Report has been submitted in a timely manner to the responsible Minister and Parliament, awaiting Cabinet approval for tabling to Parliament. For any mismanagement of funds in the past, it is under investigation by FICAC, likewise moving into the

future. Let us continue to work together to strengthen our national university and create a brighter future for all Fijians.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have the pleasure of presenting the principles and merits of the Fiji National University Bill 2026 for consideration of this august House.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Fiji National University (FNU) is one of our country's most important institutions owned by the people of this country. It provides opportunities for thousands of students to attain qualifications. The FNU develops our workforce and contributes to Fiji's economic and social development.

We all want to see FNU become stronger, better managed, and financially sustainable. I, therefore, recognise the need to review the Fiji National University Act 2009 and modernise its governance arrangements. However, good legislation must do more than change structures and procedures. It must establish sound principles, protect institutional independence and ensure that those entrusted with public responsibilities are properly accountable. The central question is whether this Bill achieves those objectives. I will address the merits of the proposed reforms in relation to university governance, institutional autonomy, accountability, financial management, employer participation and protection of academic freedom and individual rights.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, one of the greatest merits of a university is its ability to operate independently while remaining accountable to the public. A university must be free to make academic decisions, encourage research, promote debate, and develop future leaders without unnecessary political interference. This is not simply an academic principle. It directly affects the quality of education, the credibility of qualifications, and public confidence in the institution.

Internationally, university autonomy is recognised in the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) 1997 Recommendation concerning the Status of Higher-Education Teaching Personnel and the Lima Declaration. The Government's own Explanatory Notes also identifies strengthening institutional autonomy as an objective of this Bill. I support that objective.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have compared it Clause by Clause with the Act it replaces, and it does the opposite. Let me be fair, the 2009 Act was made by decree and it gave the minister powers. We do not pretend otherwise. However, the question is not whether the old law was perfect - the question is whether this Bill takes the University closer to independence or further away. In my view, it takes it further away and let me explain how, as follows:

(1) Let us consider the composition of the Council. Under the current Act, the Minister appoints 14 members and the Chairperson. Therefore, at least, 15 of the 25 positions are ministerial hands. Under this Bill, however, the Minister appoints 19 of the 25 seats. In 2022, Parliament removed the Permanent Secretary from the Council. This Bill brings three civil servants back.

(2) The Council loses powers it has today. The Council appoints its own Deputy Chancellor now. Under this Bill, the Minister appoints the Deputy Pro-Chancellor under Clause 37. The Council prepares its corporate plan for the Minister's approval now and in the same Bill, the Minister gets a new power to make regulations regarding national policy oversight of the University under Clause 81(2)(a), a power that the 2009 Act never gave.

(3) The academic voice is reduced. In the senate today, professors, academic staff and students are elected by their peers. Under this Bill, every senate member is appointed by the Council

on the recommendation of the Vice-Chancellor, and the Council may revoke those appointments at any time under Clauses 44 and 45(4).

The autonomy of a university means the autonomy of its scholars. Mr. Speaker, we ask the Government to restore autonomy. If the Government means what it says in the Explanatory Note, then autonomy must be considered seriously.

Let me now turn to the issue of effective leadership and accountability. A university needs strong leadership. The Vice-Chancellor must have sufficient authority to manage the institution, implement policies, and ensure that academic and administrative responsibilities are properly carried out. I recognise that the Bill grants the Vice-Chancellor significant responsibilities under Clause 39. These include managing staff, chairing the senate, and overseeing the operations of the University. However, authority must always be accompanied by accountability. Under Clause 29, the Bill establishes detailed procedures for the removal of council members, including written notice, a 14-days to response, and an opportunity to be heard.

These are important protections of natural justice. However, the Bill does not clearly establish an equivalent statutory process for suspending, disciplining, or removing the Vice-Chancellor. I wonder why there is a gap, and this gap should be addressed. The principle should be simple. Every person entrusted with significant public responsibility must be accountable regardless of their position. A strong Vice-Chancellor and a strong independent council should complement each other. Neither should operate without proper checks and balances.

I also wish to highlight the consensus requirement, under Clauses 29 and 30. Consensus can encourage cooperation but requiring it for every council decision, could make decision-making difficult. One member may be able to prevent an important decision from proceeding. A majority voting system would be more practical while still allowing members to debate and express their views. The council must be able to function effectively, particularly, when important financial, academic or Government decisions need to be made.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the financial sustainability of FNU is another important consideration. The Bill gives FNU significant commercial and financial powers, including international borrowing, share acquisition, joint ventures, and takeover of other institutions under Clauses 4, 8 and 12. These may be merit in allowing FNU to develop commercial partnership and generate additional revenue. Universities should explore opportunities to reduce their dependence on Government funding, and I support that.

However, commercial expansion must be supported by proper financial controls. The Bill does not establish clear borrowing limits or expressly require approval from the Ministry of Finance for these activities. Just remember, the University is funded by the Government, and it is owned by the people. This creates potential risk for the University's financial position and, ultimately, public resources. I, therefore, believe that the legislation should provide clear limits on borrowing and investment, together with proper disclosure of subsidiaries, joint ventures and contingent liabilities.

I also wish to raise the question of independent auditing. Clause 68 requires audited accounts but does not expressly name the Auditor-General. Given the University's public responsibilities, the role of the Auditor-General should be clearly recognised, to strengthen transparency and public confidence.

The Council is also required under Clause 65 to ensure that the University does not become insolvent. This is a serious responsibility. It must be supported by proper financial reporting, risk management and oversight arrangement. The merit of this safeguard is straightforward. They protect

the University from financial mismanagement and ensure that public money is used responsibly.

Now, let us look at the sustainable funding and fairness to employees. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the proposed Employer Levy under Clause 69 should also be considered in the context of sustainable funding for education and training. I recognise that technical and vocational education requires investment. Employees benefit from skilled workforce, and it is reasonable to consider ways in which the industry can contribute to skills development. However, any levy imposed on employees must be fair, transparent and properly managed. Clause 69 gives the Minister the power to impose, change or revoke the levy, but does not establish a clear ceiling or sufficiently detailed consultation requirements.

Before introducing such a financial obligation, employees should understand how the levy will be calculated, what they will be required to pay and what benefits they can expect. Clause 70 provides for the proceeds to be used for education and training. However, clear reporting is needed to show how the money is collected, allocated and spent. I recommend that the levy be subject to a defined limit, proper consultation with employers and transparent reporting to Parliament through the Minister. Mr. Speaker, Sir, sustainable education funding is important, but it must not come at the expense of fairness, transparency and confidence among employers.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Bill also seeks to strengthen FNU's role in national training and productivity development. There is merit in having a strong institution that supports skills development, improves workforce productivity and ensures that training meets industry needs. However, Clause 55 gives FNU several different responsibilities. It would collect the levy, regulate training providers, deliver its own training programmes, award training grants and act as national productivity organisation. This creates a potential conflict of interest.

An institution that regulates training providers should be able to demonstrate impartiality, particularly, when it also operates its own training programmes. Other training institutions must have confidence that they are being assessed fairly, and that funding and regulatory decisions are made objectively. The legislation should, therefore, establish clear separation between FNU's regulatory and training provider functions.

Similarly, the inspection powers under Clause 78, which allows authorised officers to enter premises and demand records, the objective should be effective regulation and not excessive or unchecked authority.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the University is not simply a place where students attend lectures and obtain qualification, it is a place where people learn to think critically, challenge ideas, conduct research and contribute to national discussion. That is why academic freedom and freedom of association are important to the quality and reputation of any university.

I welcome the inclusion of academic freedom under Clause 83; however, the provision should provide stronger protection for individual academics, researchers and students rather than focusing mainly on the freedom of the institution. There must be confidence that lecturers and students can express legitimate views and undertake research without fear of unnecessary interference.

Clause 8(f) which deals with national duty assignments involving staff and students should also be carefully framed. The University participation in national activities may have merits but it must not compromise academic independence or involve students and staff in political activities.

I also wish to highlight equality under Clause 82. The Bill identifies religion, ethnicity, gender and political alliance as grounds for protection. However, the provision appears narrower than the

protection under the Constitution, which cover additional grounds including disability, age and sexual orientation. A national university should promote equal opportunity and protect all students and employees from discrimination. The legislation should reflect the broader constitutional principles.

Another area requiring attention is the revocation of qualification under Clause 8(m). The University must have the ability to address academic fraud and serious misconduct. That is important for maintaining the credibility of its qualification. However, any decision to revoke a degree must follow a fair process with clear grounds, an opportunity to respond and a right to appeal.

Likewise, Clauses 27 and 28 should adopt a proportionate approach to convictions when determining eligibility for Council membership. A minor or old conviction should not automatically have the same consequence as a serious offence involving dishonesty or fraud.

Finally, Clause 25(3) addresses confidentiality of Council deliberations. Confidentiality is important for effective governance, but elected representatives should also be able to communicate legitimate matters to those they represent. I think that could be the reason why senators are no longer elected but would be appointed under the Bill.

The Bill should also provide appropriate protection for whistleblowers who raise genuine concerns about wrongdoing, and we know the situation at FNU earlier on. Therefore, this protection of whistleblowers needs to be included in the Bill. These safeguards are not about weakening the University management, they are about building trust, protecting rights and maintaining the University's reputation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the final point concerns the quality of the legislation itself. The merit of a consolidated Act is that it should make governance simpler, clearer, and more effective. However, this Bill contains drafting inconsistencies that should be corrected before it becomes a law. This include duplicated clause numbering - two subclause 3 in Clause 35; inconsistent references to the Deputy Pro-Chancellor; and overlapping responsibilities between Vice-Chancellor and Counsel concerning senior appointments.

There are also questions about the relationship between this Bill and the Higher Education Act 2008, particularly, on accreditation requirements. These matters may appear technical, but they affect how the law will operate. Clear legislation reduces confusion, prevents disputes and makes compliance easier for everyone and for that reason, one needs to look at the Higher Education Act 2008, along with what is being proposed in the Bill.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, having considered the objectives and provisions of this Bill, I suggest that the Bill:

- Be referred to a Standing Committee for proper consultation with FNU management, staff, students, employers, unions and Higher Education Commission.
- Establishes a more balanced and independent University Council.
- Provides a clear procedure for holding the Vice-Chancellor accountable with appropriate natural justice protections.
- Introduces practical majority voting arrangement for Council decisions.
- Strengthens financial oversight, expressly recognise the Auditor-General and establishes borrowing and investment limits.
- Provides a clear framework for employer levy including consultation, a ceiling and transparent reporting.
- Separates regulatory responsibilities from FNU's own training programme functions.

- Strengthens protection for academic freedom, equality, freedom of association and whistleblowers.
- Includes complaints handling mechanism for transparency and accountability in how grievances are resolved.
- Corrects the drafting inconsistency and clarifies its relationship with the existing Higher Education Commission.

I also believe Parliament should consider whether the decision should be deferred until after the next General Election, allowing the next Parliament to consider the long-term governance arrangement for this important national university. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I do not think we really have the time to take it to the next level.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, Sir, there is merit in strengthening university governance, improving financial management, expanding skills training and ensuring that leadership is accountable. However, these objectives must be supported by the right principles. A strong university requires an independent council; strong leadership requires accountability; sustainable funding requires transparency; effective regulation requires fairness; and quality education requires academic freedom. These principles must work together. We should not create a governance structure that gives one office too much influence or leaves important accountability gaps.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, at this point, we will pause and suspend our proceedings for lunch but before we do, I kindly invite all Members to join the Chair in the Big Committee Room for the launch of the Parliamentary Mobile Broadcasting System and then followed by your lunch. Parliament will now resume proceedings at 2.30 p.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 12.28 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 3.06 p.m.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, before we proceed, I wish to inform the House that in view of the time constraints and the business schedule for today, we will consider only three motions for debate during this sitting. The remaining four motions will be deferred to tomorrow's sitting.

We are now at the Second Reading of Fiji National University Bill 2026. We have heard the first contribution from the floor, so I will now call upon the next speaker, honourable Professor Prasad, for his contribution.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to support the Second Reading of the Fiji National University Bill 2026. We have heard from the honourable Prime Minister and honourable Premila Kumar on the merits of the Bill. I thought for a while that honourable Kumar was getting into the actual content of the Bill and the Clauses but, nonetheless, let me say that universities are still very close to my heart.

After being away from universities for 12 years now, I still have a lot of affinity to them. Having been a Senior Administrator in one of the universities, I know how important it is to have the governance, regulations and laws governing universities right. I hope that the Committee will look at the Act very carefully, compare it with universities, not only here in Fiji, but in other jurisdictions as well.

From my experience, one of the most critical elements for a good university is the quality of its graduates, the integrity of its qualifications and the opportunities that it provides to ordinary people. Indeed, the fundamental aspect of any university's ability to deliver good quality graduates is the idea of academic freedom. When we talk about academic freedom, it is not only about academic research, but also about the ability of students and academic staff in those institutions to question the management, the council and the senate. Another good measure as well of any university's quality and independence is its ability to question, to write and research about government policies.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I was in the University after the 2006 *coup* and subsequent years, and I know the pressure that the University of the South Pacific, where I was, was put in terms of the ability of academics and students to talk about Government and Government policies. I think some of us should remind ourselves why it is very, very important for universities to be respected in the manner in which they are able to deliver the programmes and the quality of graduates, et cetera. I will not go into the details of the Clauses, as you have highlighted as well.

I would, once again, urge the Committee to very carefully look at the Clauses that allow institutional autonomy, that makes it possible for universities to have a certain level of autonomy. This does not mean that universities cannot interact with Government or cannot interact with different Ministries, nor does it prevent universities from providing advice, consultancy and other forms of services to Government or Government Departments generally. Institutional autonomy, as a principle guiding good universities, is very, very important.

The second fundamental thing that I would like the Committee to look at is to ensure that there is no element that curtails any kind of academic freedom within the University, particularly, the freedom of staff and students in articulating issues with their own management and the council as well. Universities thrive on merit-based appointments. For example, to become a lecturer, or become a senior lecturer, or an associate professor and eventually, the highest rank in a university academic setting - a professor, these are very carefully crafted merit-based appointments in all universities and good universities, in particular, around the world. That is another thing that the

Committee ought to look at within the legislation, to ensure that the University's governing framework provides that safeguard for merit-based appointments.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as I have said, our national University would be very critical for Fiji in terms of supporting national development. Therefore, the University's governing principles - the laws governing the University, must allow the ability for it to contribute to national development, national priorities, and ensure that those activities in terms of what they produce in graduates is contributing to national development.

The other important thing that I think this legislation is trying to achieve for Fiji National University (FNU) is the integration of academic, as well as vocational programmes, because FNU was a technical institute. It remains a hybrid of academic, as well as vocational setup, so the integration of the two, in a way, will provide inclusive access and would be helpful for the country and for Government to provide those skills.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, those are some of the important principles that I would be looking at in the scrutiny of the Bill at Commitee level. As I have said, there are provisions in the Bill that may need to be carefully looked at, as well as those that are very supportive of the overall objective of the University in terms of facilitating national development. However, to get to that point of facilitating national development, you need all the other mechanisms within the University - the governance structure that supports this quality, merit, and, therefore, its objective would be bad as a result of that.

With those words, I support the Second Reading of the Fiji National University Bill 2026.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, on the Fiji National University Bill 2026, I think it is an appropriate time now for us to be going through this particular exercise of reviewing of this legislation. I actually served for a time there as a member of the new Fiji National University Council for quite some time, so I am happy to see that it is making its moment where there is now a review of the whole legislation and the review of the various parts of the University. I will speak on some of the areas that I see as obvious merits, as honourable Professor Prasad has pointed out when the Committee looks at the Bill.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in terms of the first few parts of the Bill, its objectives and functions of the University, I think Clauses 3 to 8 have actually expanded the objectives and the functions of FNU. It now includes an emphasis on both, higher education, as has been pointed out, on TVET; it has brought in the issues of research innovation, technological development; and it strengthens the need for industry partnership between the University and workforce development. As you know, Sir, a lot of the concerns that are coming out in terms of what we are getting from universities is the mismatch between what they learn at the institute and what their ultimate employer gets from them. So, I think there is workforce development, and working together with them is very good.

International academic cooperation has been included. Inclusive and equitable access to education, of course, is a right that people have under the Constitution. Under the Bill of the Rights, it is good to see that it is there. There has also been talk here about the commercialization of research and university services. Sometimes, I have a bit of an issue about commercialization of research, especially, an academia, when there is too much of a focus on commercialization but, hopefully, they will be able to balance that bit out.

There is a very strong focus now on the University's support for national priorities. I think that is one of the reasons why it has been moved from the Ministry of Education to the Office of the Prime Minister to strengthen it. If there are some areas of concern, the whole change strengthens the University's attempt to try and reflect current educational and workforce needs. As we all know, Sir,

this is something that people constantly talk about, the mismatch between what they are getting in terms of the graduates and what they are able to do and what the employers want them to do. That is, obviously, something that this whole structure will be able to improve, hopefully.

Also, the importance of TVET in Fiji's economic development. If there are some things that might need to be looked at, when you have the broad objectives that are outlined in the Act, there will need to be somewhere in the Act and in other places where you try to be a bit more specific on what those objectives are – more clearly defined performance targets. There might also be a need to look at how well the University is functioning in providing education, not just for those in rural areas but also in rural and maritime areas. There has been considerable focus on that over the past few years but that is something that will, perhaps, need to be looked at further.

In the next part of the Bill, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Powers and Functions of the University, the Bill now establishes the University Council as the principal governing body responsible for strategic direction and oversight. One of the good things is that one particular clause says that it removes the Council from interfering in the University's day-to-day management. This is something that has been talked about in the past, where people in the Council actually start tinkering with things that should be the purview of people who are employed in the University itself.

We noticed that the Council is now responsible for appointing the Vice-Chancellor, approving budgets, overseeing financial management and ensuring good governance, so that separation of governance responsibilities from operational management is very good – if you are able to separate that. Also, the strengthening of the Council's accountability for its institutional performance and the clearer arrangements for delegating powers and responsibilities – these are obvious merits.

If there are some areas that the Committee might need to look at, given the broad Council powers that are given in this Bill, there needs to be some focus on internal checks and balances to balance that off, rather than keeping it open-ended. Of course, the effectiveness of all of this depends on the independence and competence of Council members. If you have a lot of failed candidates from your last election and you put them in the Council, then you get all kinds of funny things. That happened the last time, and Government obviously remembers that.

The next bit, Mr. Speaker, Sir, talks a bit about the composition of the University Council - five official members, 12 appointed members, five elected members and upto three co-opted members. Under that, the Minister appoints 12 members from a list of, at least, 20, and one of the pros is that it allows the Minister to appoint up to three co-opted members. The merits of this is that it introduces a skills-based appointment framework. It tries to select people that have certain competencies - a fit-for-purpose type of people, to go into the Bill. That is a good thing about it.

On the function of the University Council, it has a good blend of a focus on academic, student, and stakeholder representation. All of these different groups are represented in the running of the organisation itself. If there are areas that the Committee might need to look at, it is the amount of influence that the minister will have on Council appointments. Obviously, ministers need to have that appointment power, but there might be a need to have checks and balances on that power because there could then be potential for political influence over university governance, which is something that we need to keep tabs on.

In terms of the duties and the removal of Council members which are covered in parts of the Bill from Clauses 24 to 29, the Bill establishes all the duties and obligations for Council members which includes –

- the need to act honestly and always in the University's best interest rather than the best interest

of any particular group;
- the need to exercise care and diligence;
- disclosing conflicts of interest;
- avoiding improper use of their positions; and
- complying with applicable codes of conduct.

A lot of good merits in this part of the Bill in terms of trying to strength the governance and accountability standards, it is much clearer in the responsibilities that it gives to Council members, and it also gives mechanisms for addressing misconduct and poor performance.

On the areas of concern and the conflict of interest provisions, perhaps, the Committee might have to look at whether that needs to be strengthened through mandatory recusal, where people recuse themselves if there is conflict of interest, especially, those who relate to significant personal financial interests, and there might be a greater clarity in terms of the independent review of contested removal decisions.

In terms of its Council meetings, Mr. Speaker, Sir, from Clauses 30 to 31, the Bill now provides for Council meetings and the procedure governing their conduct. Clause 30 requires them to meet, at least, twice a year, so it is good that the requirement says that you must meet, you cannot just go on and do not meet. It provides a framework for decision-making.

Looking quickly at the Bill, it says that the Council must meet, at least, two meetings annually. I am just thinking for a major National University, whether two meetings annually is adequate or not, is something that might have to be reviewed, and whether more frequent meetings would strengthen oversight of the University. That is something to be considered.

In terms of the appointment and responsibilities of university officers from Clauses 34 to 42, it provides for the various sources. We have the Chancellor, Pro-Chancellor, Deputy Pro-Chancellor, Vice-Chancellor and President, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Pro-Vice- Chancellors and the Director Secretariat. All appointment arrangements are done, spelt out, so there is a clearer university leadership structure. All these are defined, and it supports institutional, management and administrative accountability.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, one thing I would like to spend a bit of time on is in terms of the University Senate. As we all know, in a university, the University Senate is the principal academic authority. It looks at all the programmes and decides which programme meets the requirements, whether it is a diploma or a degree, or postgraduate qualification, et cetera, in terms of academic standards, teaching, research, examinations and academic policies. So, the Senate always includes university leadership, academic representatives, and undergraduate and postgraduate student representatives.

The strength of these particular provisions within this Bill strengthens the statutory framework for academic governance, which is very, very important. It goes back to the point that I made earlier, some concerns about why Government gives money to institutions, but when their graduates come out, sometimes the employers say that these people are not delivering what the employers expect from them, so it is very important for them. It provides academic oversight of teaching, research and qualifications and includes student representation and academic decision-making.

One of the challenges of FNU is because it is a dual university. It has both, an academic and a TVET focus. Sometimes, the kind of things that you want to strengthen in a TVET organisation is not necessarily what you do in an academic entity. In an academic entity, your higher-ranking people, you want them to have PhDs and volumes and volumes of written papers but in TVET, you do not

really need that. You need someone who has done the job and can teach someone to do it. So, I always find that it is not an easy thing to do, to meld these things together, and I have actually worked in this University. I have been involved in the Centre, so I know how hard it is. I think this will be the challenge, and I will give an example.

When you have an organisation like this, your highest paid people will be the people with PhDs and volumes of publications, whereas if you want a good technical trainer, you work with a person with a Certificate but 25 years of experience. How do you pay the money for that kind of person to stay with you and not go overseas where the money is better? So, this for me is going to be a challenge, especially when you have this marriage between academia and vocational training. So, in the Senate, I hope they will be able to find that balance because you will see that the qualification to become an Associate Dean, a lot of time is based on academic qualifications, publications, et cetera. How do you manage those things together? That will be a challenge.

Clauses 55 to 62 on National Training and Productivity Centre. This is the former Training and Productivity Authority of Fiji (TPAF) and part of TPAF has now been absorbed into FNU. Once again, it has a good reputation for recognising the importance of technical training and productivity, supports the collaboration between FNU and industry, and maintains a dedicated institutional structure for work and development.

You will find, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the same thing I had talked about applies when we talk about TVET training, the promotion of productivity and how well it ranks in importance within the overall framework of a university which focuses more on academia than promoting productivity, and sometimes the importance of pushing TVET and productivity gets consumed. It becomes a poorer cousin and that is always going to be an issue in a university, like FNU, which is a dual University. I hope that is something that the Committee will look at very carefully when it looks at this Bill and when it takes doubt for consultation.

I think a few times in Parliament; I have mentioned my suggestion that the honourable Prime Minister takes note of the Fiji Business Excellence Awards which is run by NTPC. I believe it is one of the best models that you can use to enhance any organisation. However, you can see that there is not much recognition of that given now because you now are in a university where those kinds of things play second fiddle to other things which are much more important. So, the Fiji Business Excellence Awards actually comes under this part of the University, which is the National Training and Productivity.

I appreciate the coverage on student and employee representation, as has been pointed out by the honourable Professor Prasad. It is always important to recognise bodies representing the interests of students and employees. Within this part of the Bill, it provides processes for recognising student and employee representation, and also on how disputes will need to be resolved. The process that I mentioned is that it may reduce unnecessary litigation and workplace conflict.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the second last bit that I would like to talk about is the bit on training levies and apprenticeships, under Clauses 69 to 79. The Bill, once again, provides for the collection of training levies from employers and the administration of these levies to enhance apprenticeship and workforce training.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I had pointed out that one of the big problems that we always have is that employers expect people to come out of institutions work-ready, and they never are. They never are work ready. No matter how much up to date your qualification is, they never are. So, this levy programme is a good way of collecting money and have some informal way of getting people to get some on the job training, so you can marry the institutional learning to what is actually needed on

the job.

Currently, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the levy is 1 percent of gross payroll. I do not think there is any mention of changing it, but one of the challenges that we have is to make sure that this levy actually goes to training because the money has been used in other areas over the past, and I think that is a challenge for us. We have a huge deficiency in terms of trade workers and technical skilled workers, so having the levy there, having the opportunity for organisations to do their on-the-job training or in-house training programme and apply for grants to help them fund to do that, which comes from this levy, is a very useful way. Even for Government, because Government will also pay the levy and will also claim for the training grant, it is a way of making sure that that money is used for people. I am hopeful that the number of apprenticeships in all different aspects continue to grow.

Another issue that has been pointed out, I think, by honourable Premila Kumar is when you handle the levy, and then you determine who gets the grant, and at the same time you are a training provider, you are refereeing and playing at the same time. This is not a new problem; it has always been a problem.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, FNU will be collecting the levy. It may also be paying out the training grants, but it is also competing for that training grant to provide for training. Ultimately, the better solution would be the removal of the administration of the levy and the grant to be managed by a separate body because when you do have a separate body, there is more operational expenditure in that. This is an issue that we need to grapple with. It is also going to be competing for that money because it is a training provider. That is an issue that we will have to manage, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

My last thing is right at the very end when it talks about ministerial authority and institutional independence in Clauses 18, 21, 69 and 81. There is a lot of provisions here that gives the minister the important responsibilities relating to Council appointments, co-opted memberships, training levies and regulations. There is a much stronger, clearer connection between national education policy and the University's statutory responsibilities. If there is one thing in this Bill that is the best aspect of this Bill, it is this bit. There is much closer connection between what we, as a country, need to do and the way the University is managed.

One of the things that they do in universities now is they do as many programmes as possible in order to get the money from Higher Education Commission Fiji. We need to be able to meld the Government money that is going to institutions, to exactly what is needed. So, for me, if this bit is managed well, then FNU will be able to become a much stronger provider of the kind of qualifications we need in this country.

As a former employee of FNU, I hope that the Committee that will be entrusted with this work will do a very good one in strengthening it because it is, after all, our Fiji National University.

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to speak in support of the Fiji National University Bill 2026 that has been read for the second time by the House. This Bill is not simply an administrative rearrangement, from my perspective, it is the most significant labour market intervention this Parliament will ever consider in this term. It is about closing the gap between the certificate of a young Fijian who holds it in his/her hand and the job that actually exists in the market.

Mr. Speaker, the problem we have is clear, but it is also very urgent. The problem is known not only to Fiji National University (FNU), but it is also known to the employers, it is well known to the employees and it is even known in this House. The problem is that we have a paradox in Fiji. On the one hand, the Fiji Commerce and Employers Federation's National Skills Gap Assessment found that employers are struggling to fill 95 different occupations locally, across sectors from trade to

tourism, and even to agriculture where the demand is there, at the same time, we have thousands of young Fijians leaving school or graduating without the specific applied skill that those employers need.

What is the result, Mr. Speaker? Employers are now forced naturally to look overseas. The proportion of foreign workers in our formal sector grew by 79 percent in recent years. That is not because employers prefer foreign labourers; they do not. It is expensive and cumbersome or because the local supply pipeline is not delivering what the industry requires. That is a productivity drain. Every time a company has to recruit offshore, they are paying for recruitment costs, airfares and paying for their bonds that could have been invested in a local apprentice or a local technician.

Mr. Speaker, how does this Bill fix that problem? I draw the House's attention to the specific function and powers embedded in this Bill. This is not a vague aspiration. Clause 7 explicitly mandates the University to provide courses of study that meets community needs, including technical and vocational education and training. It goes further, Mr. Speaker. Clause 7(d) gives the University the function to provide training, whether by apprenticeship or otherwise, to assist such persons in connection with available employment. That is the language of the workplace. It is not a language of just a statute or even of an ivory tower, but this Bill directs FNU to be an instrument of employment policy.

Furthermore, Clause 8 grants the University the power to enter into arrangements with industry for consultancy, research and advisory services. This means that the curriculum design is no longer something that happens in a vacuum in the Nasinu Campus, it can happen in partnership with the manufacturers who are located in Kalabu, hotels that are located in Denarau, or the ICT firms that now occupy multiple layers of our storey buildings here in Suva. When the industry helps with the design of the course, the graduate walks out of the gate with a qualification that we know is relevant with the time.

Mr. Speaker, I want to speak to the productivity argument that we have in the Bill. Productivity, I would suggest, is not just about working harder - it is about working smarter, with the right tools, and with the right skillset. For too long, the TVET sector has been treated as a second-class pathway. We have heard honourable Usamate spoke very highly of the TVET sector in the Bill this afternoon. This Bill, Mr. Speaker, and the principles it enshrines ends that prejudice.

Sir, FNU has already demonstrated what it can do when it aligns with the industry. Between 2019 and 2024, FNU has produced thousands of TVET graduates. These are electricians and mechanics who come to our homes to repair our fridges and our machines; chefs and nurses who are keeping the lights on and the engines running in our hospitals; and the tourists who need to be fed.

The University, Mr. Speaker, has set a target of 200,000 TVET graduates by 2030. To hit that target, it must be unshackled from the bureaucratic silos and allowed to simply respond to the industry signals we see today.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Bill also speaks to the dignity of labour. Clause 8(o) empowers the University to assist the Government in human resources planning and capacity building. The Ministry of Employment, Productivity and Workplace Relations needs that. We need FNU to be a partner in forecasting what skills the labour market will need in five years, not just producing graduates for what the market needed five years ago.

The National Employment Policy, which my Ministry is driving, emphasises aligning education and training with labour markets needed as a core priority. This Bill provides the legislative teeth to make that alignment real.

The Bill does not create a new bureaucracy, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it repurposes an existing national asset - FNU to serve a clearer and more economically vital mandate. It brings the Fiji Commerce and Employers Federation, Fiji Chamber of Commerce and Fiji Teachers Union onto the Council as co-opted members. That means that employers who are actually hiring sit at the table where the decisions are made about the industry and about our economy, ultimately. That is industry alignment in practice.

Let me be clear about these matters, Mr. Speaker, Sir. There have been opposition that have asked about investigations and internal matters. If those matters exist, they will be dealt with by the relevant authorities in future. What we cannot allow, Mr. Speaker, is potential misdeeds of a few in the past to freeze the future of thousands of young Fijians who need it in the future. The Government's focus is on the learner; the Government's focus is on the worker; the Government's focus is to ensure that the employer gets the employee that is fit for purpose. This Bill, Mr. Speaker, Sir, keeps that focus sharp.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Fiji National University Bill 2026 is not just an education Bill, it a productivity Bill and an employment Bill. It recognises that the University that sits apart from the economy is a luxury we can no longer afford. By legislating that FNU must engage with the industry, must provide apprenticeship pathways, and must translate research into practical application for society and enterprise, we are saying to the people of Fiji that your skills matter, your jobs matter, and your future productivity is this nation's future prosperity.

I support the Second Reading of the Bill before the House.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will make a brief contribution to the motion before the House since most of the honourable Members who have spoken have highlighted what I wanted to state. However, I would like to express my support for the principles and merits of this very important legislation.

The Fiji National University (FNU), being one of the few universities operating around Fiji and a government-owned university, occupies a significant place in our national education system, and for that reason, an institution that carries considerable responsibility for developing the human capita of our nation, preparing our young people for employment, strengthening professional competencies and contributing to Fiji's economic and social development.

This Bill must be viewed beyond the technical provisions of the piece of legislation. It is fundamentally about the future of Higher Education in Fiji, the quality of our graduates, the relevance of the qualification and the ability of our National University to respond to the changing needs of our country. The importance of a strong National University is very important. It is mandated to extend across vocational and technical education, teacher education, health sciences, engineering, agriculture, business, maritime studies, and other professional discipline. These are not merely academic programmes; they are the foundations upon which our national workforce is developed.

Fiji continues to need qualified teachers, nurses, doctors, engineers, accountants, agricultural specialists, maritime professionals, technicians, and skilled tradespeople. Our national university must therefore be equipped to respond to these needs through relevant qualifications, practical training, research, and innovation. The merits of this Bill must be considered against this national responsibility. The Bill ensures that the FNU remains responsive to the needs of students, employers, industries, communities, and the wider national economy.

In terms of the governance and institutional accountability, the National University manages public resources, employs a substantial workforce, delivers nationally important programmes, and

carries responsibility for the education aspirations of thousands of Fijians. Consequently, Mr. Speaker, Sir, its governance arrangement must promote transparency, accountability, sound financial management, and responsible decision-making.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, public investment in higher education must produce measurable public value. We cannot simply measure the success of a university by its enrolment numbers or the number of qualifications awarded. We must also examine graduate employability, teaching quality, research outcomes, industry relevance, and the contribution of graduates to national development. A university must have sufficient institutional independence to make academic decisions, undertake research, develop curricula, and pursue innovation without inappropriate interference. Academic freedom is fundamental to the credibility of any higher education institution.

The University must be able to encourage critical thinking, intellectual inquiry, evidence-based research, and constructive debate. However, autonomy must not be confused with the absence of accountability. The appropriate balance is an institution that is academically independent, professionally governed, financially responsible, and accountable to the people of Fiji; that is the standard that this Bill is aspiring for. The future of Fiji depends significantly on the quality and capability of our people. Our national development priorities require a workforce that is adaptable, technologically competent, innovative, and internationally competitive.

Young people should not graduate with qualifications that have limited relevance to the realities of the economy and FNU must be strengthened – strengthened partnerships with the private sector, major employers, government ministries, and statutory organisations, agricultural fisheries and maritime industries, tourism and hospitality operators, health and education institutions, regional and international universities. Such partnership should help ensure that our academic programmes are informed by actual workforce requirements. I particularly encourage stronger investment in technical and vocational education training.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the National University must remain accessible to students from all parts of Fiji. The students' educational opportunities should not be determined solely by their family income, geographical location or social circumstances. Students from rural communities, maritime islands, low-income households, and disadvantaged backgrounds must have fair opportunities to pursue tertiary education.

We must continue to strengthen access to scholarships and student financing, appropriate accommodation, counselling and mental health support, disability-inclusive learning facilities, digital learning and connectivity, student safety and wellbeing, support for student transitioning into employment. The success of this legislation must, ultimately, be measured by what it delivers for the students who depend on FNU for their future. In terms of research, innovation, and the future economy, universities must be more than institutions that transmit existing knowledge. They must also generate new knowledge, develop solutions to national problems and contribute to innovations.

As Fiji faces significant challenges in climate change, food security, public health, energy, environmental protection, technology, and economic diversification, the FNU must be positioned to contribute meaningfully to these national challenges. We need stronger applied research collaboration with industries and communities, commercialization of innovation, and opportunities for postgraduate programmes. Our graduates must be equipped, not only for the jobs that exist today, but also for the employment opportunities that will emerge tomorrow.

In terms of quality assurance and international recognition, the qualifications awarded by FNU must be credible, relevant, and recognised and this requires continuous quality assurance, regular programme reviews, appropriately qualified academic staff, modern teaching facilities, and

strong professional accreditation arrangement. The University should become an institution that attracts regional students, builds international partnerships, and contributes to Fiji's reputation as an education hub in the Pacific.

Mr. Speaker, institutional reform must also recognise the contribution of the people who make the University function. Academic staff, technical officers, administrative employees, and support personnel are essential to the delivery of quality education. Any reform of the University's governance and administration must be implemented with fairness, transparency, and respect for existing employment rights and legitimate staff interests. We must avoid unnecessary uncertainty, disruption, or loss of institutional knowledge. Staff development, professional progression, research opportunities, and merit-based appointments must remain central to the University's long-term success.

Mr. Speaker, legislation is only the beginning of reform. The real test will be on how effective a Bill is implemented and whether the intended improvements translate into better outcomes. I, therefore, encourage the responsible authorities and the University's leadership to develop a clear implementation framework with measurable performance indicators.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to conclude by emphasising that investment in higher education is an investment in the future of our country. Our young people are our greatest national resource. The opportunities we provide them today will determine the quality of our workforce, the strength of our institutions, and the prosperity of future generations.

The FNU must be a university that prepares graduates not only to seek employment, but also to create employment. It must develop leaders, professionals, entrepreneurs, innovators, and responsible citizens. It must be responsive to our national circumstances while maintaining international standards of excellence. It must be inclusive in its opportunities, excellence in its academic delivery, and accountable in its use of public resources.

Mr. Speaker, I support the principle of strengthening the legislative framework for the FNU. I also emphasise that the success of this Bill must, ultimately, be judged by its contribution to educational excellence, institutional integrity, student opportunity, and national development. Let us ensure that the FNU remains a university that Fiji can be proud of, a university that our young people can depend on, and a university that contributes meaningfully to the development of our nation.

Mr. Speaker, I commend the Fiji National University Bill 2026 to the House and support its progression through the Parliament process.

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- Mr. Speaker, I thank all honourable Members who have contributed to the debate and I value their contributions and observations. I am sure the Committee will come back with strong recommendations on how we move forward with this Bill when it becomes an Act.

The observations on accountability and transparency from honourable Premila Kumaris an issue that is always in the minds of the leaders of universities as they conduct the affairs of the institution. The point on levy will also be considered, taken seriously on board by those that will continue to deliberate on this, as well as academic freedom mentioned and continuing to uphold the culture of the University.

Mr. Speaker, we know that the University had very humble beginnings from the days of the Derrick Technical Institute and the Fiji Institute of Technology until the SVT/GVP Government decided to make it a university, under the leadership of the late Mr. Filipe Bole, in the Ministry of Education. We have had, as a nation, close interest and close watch.

We have given close watch on the development of the University, and we hope that the future will be brighter. I commend the motion to the House, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

MR. SPEAKER.- The Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

[Fiji National University Bill 2026 (Bill No. 27 of 2026) referred to the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights, and must report back to Parliament within 30 days]

RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES BILL 2025

In Committee:

Clause 1 agreed to.

Clause 2:

HON. I. VASU.- Mr. Chairman, pursuant to Standing Order 87(4)(c), I move:

That Clause 2 of the Bill be amended by deleting the definition of the word, "Council", and inserting the following:

"(a) Bose Levu Vakaturaga means the Great Council of Chiefs established under section 31 of the iTaukei Affairs Act 1944."

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- I second the motion.

HON. I. VASU.- Mr. Chairman, these amendments update the definitions of the institution referred to in this Bill. It does not change the Bill's main purpose.

Question put.

Clause 2 as amended agreed to.

Clauses 3 and 4 agreed to.

Clause 5:

HON. I. VASU.- Mr. Chairman, pursuant to Standing Order 87(4)(c), I move:

That a consequential amendment be made to Clause 5(1) by deleting the word, "Council", and substituting it with the words, "Bose Levu Vakaturaga".

This follows the amendment to Clause 2. It ensures that the National Action Plan is prepared in consultation with the Bose Levu Vakaturaga and the iTaukei Affairs Board.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- I second the motion.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Is there any intervention from the floor?

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Mr. Chairman, just an amendment, there is a typographical error in Clause 5.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- In the Bill itself?

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- In the Bill itself. If the spelling of the word, "Minister" in Clause 5(1) could be amended, please?

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Yes, I think that was already noted and it is in red ink? My understanding is that it is a correction. It is taken on board and is read accordingly.

Question put.

Clause 5 as amended agreed to.

Clause 6 agreed to.

Clause 7:

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Chairman, I have a query, Clause 7 reads that the Minister must table the Action Plan before Parliament within 14 sitting days. It should say 14 sitting days of the tabling or 14 sitting days of what? I think it just needs to add something.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Can I seek clarification from the Minister?

HON. I. VASU.- Mr. Chairman, after the tabling of the National Action Plan, then within the 14 sitting days, that should be presented to Parliament.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- So, it follows from Clause 6. We have the Action Plan that comes into force and 14 days from that Plan coming into force, I am presuming, that the Minister then tables the Action Plan in Parliament. Am I reading that correctly, honourable Minister?

HON. I. VASU.- Mr. Chairman, it is 14 days from the expiry of the 12 months' time limit.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- If I may assist, maybe the honourable Minister might want to amend it now on the floor to read: "The Minister must table the Action Plan before Parliament within 14 sitting days post the tabling of the Action Plan." Fourteen days after the actual tabling because in effect, Clauses 6 and 7 really need to go together.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Yes, that is correct.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Because if it is standalone, then it should say, 14 days of sitting days of what? That is probably an amendment that is needed, Sir. Alternatively, as you say, "14 days after it comes into force." That would make sense.

Honourable Vosarogo, would you want to assist with the drafting error?

HON. I. VASU.- Mr. Chairman, it is just a follow-up from Clause 6.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Correct, but I think I have got honourable Koya's point. Clause 7 may need to be clear as to the time - 14 days runs from and it can be with the expiry, or else when the Action Plan is ….

HON. I. VASU.- Mr. Chairman, we must table the completed Action Plan within 14 days. The Minister must table the complete plan before Parliament within the 14 sitting days.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Of or after something like that, yes.

HON. I. VASU.- After 14 sitting days.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- No, 14 sitting days after what? It is a fact we are trying to identify which is the ….

HON. I. VASU.- After it is completed.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, I would suggest that for that to be consistent with paragraph 6, if it can read, "The Minister must table the Action Plan before Parliament within 14 days after the day on which the Act comes into force."

MR. CHAIRMAN.- No, it is more than that.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Because it will come into force 12 months after. After it comes into force, then maybe the Action Plan comes in.

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- Mr. Chairman, I was just trying to help out, perhaps, resolve it because we really do not know what is really the sequencing of events. May I suggest that we adopt an amended Clause 7 to say, "that the Minister must table the Action Plan before Parliament as soon as practicable thereafter, following on from Clause 6" and not providing a timeline because the fear is that you might have the Action Plan completed. It might have been completed at a date or time that is very far away from the next sitting of Parliament, and you might fall foul of the 14 days' timeline that you have set yourself. So, without restricting it, you might just say that the Minister must table the Action Plan before Parliament.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Correct, it is an amendment, but I think we can actually put a full stop after Parliament and leave it at that.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Just to give it the background that it probably needs, this Action Plan is what it is all about. That forms a basis of this particular thing going into the legislation. I am sorry that the Committee has actually missed those two paragraphs, but it is actually quite important to keep it on a timeline. If you leave it, again, it may be left till 12 months, 14 months, two years after, and then we are going to get problems. If we stick to the timeline, because the Action Plan has been done, it specifically says 14 days. There is a reason why the drafters have put that in there, and this is why we agree, and that Action Plan is the operational part of implementing this particular Bill. This is something that has come out of the United Nations, et cetera.

In adding, Sir, to Clause 7, where it says, "the Minister must table the Action Plan before Parliament within 14 sitting days of the expiry of the 12 months", or within 14 sitting days of the presentation of the Action Plan, or something to that effect, Sir, because the Action Plan actually comes 12 months after the day on which the Act has come into force. First, you have the Action Plan, and then within 14 days, you have this. The time that is needed to do whatever is necessary is within post the Act coming into force. That is the preparation of the Action Plan.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Perhaps, honourable Members, if I can just go through the sequel, in Clause 6, the Action Plan must be completed within 12 months, where after the day, this Act comes into force, and then it follows at Clause 7, the Minister is then responsible for tabling the Action Plan before Parliament within 14 days after the completion of the Plan.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Mr. Chairman, perhaps, just to add to the discussion, you are correct. in Clause 6, in the 12 months. That is why the 12 months is being given to operationalise because during the 12 months, the Action Plan will be prepared. Then at the expiry of the 12 months, when the Act comes into force, the Minister must table that Action Plan that is being prepared within those 12 months. It may read in Clause 7, "the Minister must table the Action Plan before Parliament within 14 sitting days of this Act coming into force", because that is the day that the Act comes into force and they must present after those 12 months.

Within 14 sitting days, or it could be more days specified, but that is the event that comes into effect, which is the Act coming into force. From that date, after 12 months, that Action Plan must be tabled. So, 14 sitting days, maybe two Parliament sittings, which is two months since we are sitting every month, and it gives some time after that. I think that is the leeway that has been given here, Sir.

HON. S.R. VALENITABUA.- If I may, Mr. Chairman, you have to read the provisions, beginning with Clause 5(1). That is where we can take our bearing from, so to speak. The Minister must, in consultation with the Bose Levu Vakaturaga and the Board, prepare and implement an Action Plan. That puts the Action Plan into motion.

Moving on to Clause 6 which says, "the Action Plan must be completed no later than 12 months after the day on which this Act comes into force, and the Act is this Act here. From the date this Act becomes law, within those 12 months, the Action Plan must be prepared; no more. Then, at the end of the 12 months, the Action Plan must be brought to Parliament within 14 days after the 12 months.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- That is where we began. I think there are three distinct phases to this. I agree with the honourable Attorney-General. We have the Act coming into force, which is Phase 1. Phase 2 is 12 months, and after 12 months, the Action Plan is filed into Parliament within 14 days from the end of the 12 months. Am I reading that correctly?

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- You are correct, Sir, according to the honourable Attorney-General. But, if we are reading within the context of clause 5, where before it comes into force, they must prepare and implement, then it is inconsistent because when the Act comes into force, it says 12 months after it comes into force and that is, according to the Minister, this will come into force right away, it would be assented. I just want clarification.

HON. I. VASU.- Within 12 months.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Within 12 months of being passed by Parliament? I think I just wanted to seek clarification. If the Act is going into force right away after we pass it here, then it is 12 months from this date of assent would be the commencement date of the Act?

Mr. Chairman, I just wanted to see it in its entirety of it, because if an Action Plan is being prepared 12 months after assent from today, then that makes sense. However, if it is not effective after the Gazette? So, the Gazette is after we pass it here, or is it after 12 months from Gazette? My apologies, I am raising two parallel issues here. When is the commencement date of this Act is the first question.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- The commencement date is the date to be appointed by the Minister, as Set out in Clause 2.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- So would that be determined by the Minister?

MR. CHAIRMAN.- That is correct, and that is where we take the 12 months from.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- And that is the 12 months we operate from.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Once the 12 months expires, then the Action Plan has to be tabled from the expiry date of the 12 months.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- That is clear.

HON. F.W.R VOSAROGO.- Mr. Chairman, back to the timelines, as we understand you and Mr. Attorney-General's timeline according to this, the Act comes into force, and soon after the Act comes into force, the next 12 months is when the Action Plan gets cooked, gets prepared and must be prepared within the next 12 months. After that Action Plan is completed, clause 7 requires the Minister to table that Action Plan back to Parliament.

I suggest that because that 14 sitting days requirement might be a little bit rigid in the sense that, if I can just give an example, let us say 2nd November next year, the Action Plan is done, but the sitting of Parliament is not until 30th November, so you run foul of the 14 days that you have prescribed yourself. My suggestion is that we could do a little bit of re-amendment or amendment. The Minister must table the Action Plan before Parliament at its next sitting or immediate sitting of Parliament. So that just gives that flexibility to the Minister and not be struck down with the rigidity of 14 days.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Sir, what we need to understand is that you have to read clause 6 and clause 7 together. Clause 6 says that preparation of the Action Plan must be completed no later than 12 months after the day on which the Act comes into force, so within 12 months. When you tag in Clause 7, it should read that the Minister must table the Action Plan within 14 sitting days of the completion of the Action Plan. That simplifies it completely. Whether you do it right on the 12-month button, or you do it in 6 months, as soon as it is completed, within 14 days, you must table.

That makes sense, Sir, and that sort of tags it all together because the operational date of the Act is really when the Minister says, "Alright, it is now in force." That enforces the first part, second part, as you rightfully pointed out, but we need to just tag that Clause 6 and Clause 7 together by adding that sentence to the end to say, "upon the completion of the Action Plan."

MR. CHAIRMAN.- In fact, that is the initial suggestion I had made that 14 days after the completion of the Action Plan. Would that be suitable to everyone?

HON. S.R. VALENITABUA.- Mr. Chairman, the 14 days would be fine, but the problem which honourable Vosarogo is raising, what if the 14 days fall into a period where Parliament is not sitting? That is where the problem is. Could we put that in wording, which is flexible, instead of 14 days?

MR. CHAIRMAN.- 14 sitting days. I am just reading the consensus here, so honourable Minister, the proposal is that Clause 7 to be read as, "The Minister must table the Action Plan before Parliament within 14 sitting days after the completion of the Action Plan."

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- I have a question, why should the Action Plan come to Parliament?

MR. CHAIRMAN.- I think honourable Tuisawau has raised a different issue, put it that way. However, for our purpose, Clause 7, if you will agree, "The Minister must table the action plan before Parliament within 14 sitting days after the completion of the Action Plan."

Question put.

Clause 7, as amended agreed to.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Now, honourable Members, you can realise how difficult the world is when lawyers get to action.

Clauses 8, 9, 10 and Schedule agreed to.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, that brings us to the end of the Committee of the Whole Parliament. The Parliament will now resume its sitting, and I shall now resume my seat in the Chamber.

The House resumed:

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we will now proceed to the Third Reading of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (Bill No. 37 of 2025).

HON. I. VASU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, pursuant to Standing Order 88, I move:

> That the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Bill 2025 (Bill No. 37 of 2025), be read the third time and do pass.

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

HON. I. VASU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to support the Third Reading of the Rights of Indigenous People Bill 2025, following its consideration by the Committee of Whole Parliament. I acknowledge the work of the Standing Committee and the contributions of the Provincial Council, civil society organisations, institutions, experts and individual citizens.

The report records strong support for recognising the protection of indigenous rights. It also raises serious questions about who the Bill covers, accountability, consultations and how the Bill will be put into practice. It gives important legal responsibility to the Ministry, the Bose Levu Vakaturaga and the *iTaukei* Affairs Board.

The Bill reaffirms the United Nations declarations on the rights of indigenous people as a way to promote and protect indigenous rights in Fiji. It aims to support indigenous people's rights to make decisions for themselves, improve their well-being, address prejudice and discrimination, protect culture, traditional and customary practice, ensure a fair share of benefits from natural resources and create a way to review laws that affect indigenous interests.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the main way the Bill will put these commitments into action is through the National Action Plan. The Minister must prepare and carry out a plan after consulting the Bose Levu Vakaturaga and the iTaukei Affairs Board. The Action Plan must address injustice and discrimination, promote mutual respect and education about human rights, set out how progress will

be monitored and who will be accountable, support fair participation in benefits from natural resources, cover genetic resources, cultural resources and traditional knowledge, and provide for the plan to be assessed and reviewed.

Clause 3(g) also makes clear that the framework should support a full review of existing laws that affect indigenous interests. We must carefully examine the laws, policies and Government practices that affect land, marine resources, the environment, cultural heritage, traditional knowledge, participation in decision-making and sharing of benefits.

The Standing Committee recommended one wording change in the Bill. It appears in Bill No. 37(A), clause (5)(2)(e) says the Action Plan must include measures relating to the development of genetic resources, cultural resources and traditional knowledge. Adding the word traditional is a small change with an important meaning. It makes clear that the Bill recognises not only knowledge in general, but also knowledge, practice and innovations developed and passed down within indigenous communities. It brings the Action Plan closer to the cultural experience of indigenous people and how their rights should be understood and put into practice.

The Standing Committee considered whether the 12-month period in clause 6 would allow enough time for meaningful consultations across the country. The Ministry drew attention to the scale of the work and presented options to the Committee, allowing more time, work in stages, and setting the date the Act starts so that proper preparations can take place first. The Standing Committee kept the 12-month period. It expects the Ministry to prepare, engage stakeholders and consult before the Act comes into force. This means that the start and delivery of the work must be planned responsibly. The Ministry, the Bose Levu Vakaturaga, the boards and relevant public bodies will need to begin early, co-ordinate their roles, identify the resources needed and plan a credible consultation process. Consultations must be meaningful, not just a formality.

It must reach indigenous communities and customary institutions. While also making room for women, young people, persons with disabilities, and marginalised groups, civil society, technical experts, and public bodies whose work is connected to the Action Plan. People affected by the plan should be able to understand the issues, share their views, and see how those views were considered. The Standing Committee also considered concerns about clause 9. This clause does not complete immunity. The protection does not apply when the person fails to act honestly or take reasonable care. The Committee also noted that people may still seek a court review or use other lawful remedies if an administrative decision is unlawful or unreasonable.

The Standing Committee did not consider it necessary to name the Fiji Human Rights and Anti-Discrimination Commission as a separate oversight body in the Bill. The Commission also has constitutional power to receive and investigate human rights complaints, make recommendations, and seek suitable remedies. These existing safeguards will continue alongside the Bills' reporting and accountability requirements. Clauses 7 and 8 also require the Minister to report to Parliament. Each year, reports on the steps taken under the plan must also be prepared and presented.

Parliament will be able to check whether the commitments in the Bill are being turned into practical action. This Bill strengthens the regulations, protections, and promotion of indigenous rights. The report also makes it clear that putting the Bill into practice will require careful legal and policy work. Issues such as definitions, how the Bill works with existing laws and institutions, consultations, ways to seek remedies, rules made under the Act, and the capacity of institutions must all be taken seriously. The Ministry will approach the next stage carefully. The Action Plan must be based on evidence developed with Bose Levu Vakaturaga and the board, informed by indigenous communities and coordinated across Government. Any rules made under Clause 10 must stay within the power Parliament gives and must be developed with proper consultations in accordance with the

law and the practical results in mind.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this Bill creates a framework for turning the principle of declarations into a national programme that feeds Fiji's own constitutional, legal, cultural, and institutional setting. The Standing Committee report has shown both why this goal matters and the responsibility that comes with it. The success of this law will not be measured only by its passage, it will be measured by the quality of the Action plan, how widely and honestly people are consulted, whether the legal reforms that follow work together, and whether indigenous people see a real difference in their lives. Mr. Speaker, I commend the rights of the Indigenous People Bill 2025 to Parliament.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, do take note of Standing Order 88(2), which provides that the debate is confined to the question of whether the Bill should pass and if there are any amendments, it goes only to the postponement of the Third Reading or that the Bill be recommitted generally or specifically for a specific purpose. That is a qualification for the intervention on the Third Reading.

HON. F. S. KOYA.- If I may be permitted to just make a small statement because this has a very historical perspective on this. This is a matter that came to the fore at the United Nations (UN) discussions some 25 years ago and that is, the recognition of indigenous people's rights. I think it was 17 odd years ago that it came into force but at that particular time, Mr. Speaker, Sir, there were grave objections from Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the US, and over that span of time, they have also now changed their tune.

What I wanted to point out, Sir, is that whilst we are in this, the throes of amending Constitutions, et cetera, will become an important document. We must not forget that once this becomes law, then there are parts of it that we should and must pay heed to with respect to the very Constitution that is being amended. There are things in there that are important and need to be looked at, so speeding up that particular process may fall foul of this particular Act but we are all agreeing to it, Sir, which is the adoption of what we had signed at the UN with respect to this. It is an important document.

Again, as I have said, it has a huge historical perspective. We signed it right at the beginning. There were 144 countries that agreed to it. Four very large economies did not, but they changed so it can change over time, and we must respect the document. We must respect the fact that we are going to get 12 months to prepare an Action Plan, et cetera, for this. It will, it should, and it must also have a bearing on our Constitution about what we do and what we turn into law. That is what we have signed at the UN. Just a simple request, Sir, and I think it is important that we look at that and we support it.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to make a contribution on the Third Reading of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Bill 2025.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this legislation raises an important question about the future of indigenous peoples in Fiji. How do we move from the recognition of indigenous rights to the practical protection of those rights and, ultimately, to the economic empowerment of indigenous communities?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, for me, these rights must be understood through three fundamental principles - the recognition, protection and economic empowerment. Recognition of our identity, culture, language, customary institutions, ancestral heritage, protection of our customary land, traditional knowledge, resources and the rights of our people, and the economic empowerment that ensures indigenous communities are not merely custodians of resources, but meaningful participants and beneficiaries of the economic activities generated from these resources.

These principles, Mr. Speaker, Sir, are consistent with the longstanding emphasis in SODELPA's policy and constitutional reform submissions on protecting the *Vanua,* strengthening customary institutions, safeguarding indigenous land, *i qoliqoli* rights and ensuring equitable benefit sharing. I would like to speak on some of the issues.

on the recognition of indigenous rights, Mr. Speaker, Sir, SODELPA made a submission to the Constitution Review Commission in July 2026. It placed considerable emphasis on the protection of the iTaukei, Rotuman, Kioa and Banban land, *i qoliqoli*, culture, language, sacred sites, customary law and benefit-sharing rights. It proposed the constitutional recognition and strengthening of the Bose Levu Vakaturaga (Great Council of Chiefs), as an independent and properly resourced institution of the *Vanua*. These proposals reflect the importance of preserving our indigenous identity and ensuring that our traditional institutions have an appropriate role in national affairs.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the *Vanua* is much more than land, it is our identity, our genealogy, our customary obligations, our traditional leadership, our language and our relationship with our natural environment and traditional values of *veirokorokovi, veivakaturagataki, veikawaitaki, kei na duavata* which provide a foundation for community responsibility, mutual respect and collective development. However, recognition must not end with cultural persuasion - our people must also have opportunities to participate in the economic development of their ancestral territories.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), adopted in 2007, provides an important international framework for recognising and protecting indigenous rights. Fiji announced its official support in March 2023, and the Declaration provides important principles that should guide our domestic laws and policies, especially in Articles 3, 5, 18, 19, 26 and 32. These principles should guide our national development policies.

However, the UNDRIP must not be treated as a document that we simply refer to when debating indigenous issues. Its principles must be translated into practical domestic legislation, appropriate institutional arrangements and meaningful economic opportunities.

We must be honest about the economic realities facing many of our customary landowning communities. For generations, our people have protected their ancestral lands, forests, rivers, fishing grounds and natural resources. We need to change the way we approach indigenous economic participation. It is not enough for resource owners to receive a royalty or compensation payment and remain outside of the commercial activities taking place within their ancestral communities.

The Fair Share of Mineral Royalties Act 2018 provides for 80 percent of the relevant royalties to be paid to landowners and 20 percent to the State. This is an established royalty-sharing arrangement, and we must continue examining whether our resource owners have sufficient opportunities to participate in the wider economic value generated from mineral exploration.

Clause 5 of the Bill, particularly the provision dealing with equitable benefit sharing from natural resources and participation in economic activities derived from those resources, is an important provision. It addresses the genetic resources, cultural resources and traditional knowledge. This provision must not be treated as a general policy statement - it must become a practical economic development programme and would expect the action plan to identify specific opportunities for indigenous communities in mining, forestry, fisheries, agriculture, tourism, renewable energy and in other commercial activities.

While recognising the importance of this legislation, I wish to emphasise that rights must be accompanied by responsibilities and accountability. Customary institutions must be respected. They must also operate transparently and in accordance with the principles of natural justice, participation

of women, youth and elderly members of the landowning units must also be recognised. We must ensure that the benefits of development are shared fairly within the communities. The Bill's provision and its accountability safeguards also deserve careful parliamentary scrutiny. There must be confidence in the legislation through transparency, consultation and responsible implementation.

I wish to conclude by returning to the central purpose of this legislation - the protection of indigenous rights must not be limited to preserving our culture and tradition:

- It must also create opportunities for our people to participate meaningfully in the economic development of Fiji.
- We must protect our ancestral land. We must also ensure that the land can contribute to sustainable livelihoods.
- We must protect our traditional institutions. We must also keep them to support modern economic development.
- We must preserve our language and culture, but we must also invest in the education, technical skills and entrepreneurial capacity of our young people.

We must recognise our natural resources, but we must also ensure that communities connected to those resources have a fair opportunity to participate in the wealth generation. These principles must remain part of our continuing national conversation.

The challenge before us is to ensure that indigenous rights are not simply recognised in legislation but translated into a practical outcome. I, therefore, wish to leave this august House with three important considerations:

(1) Recognition of indigenous rights must be consistent with the principles of United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP) and supported by effective domestic protection.
(2) Customary resource owners must have meaningful opportunities to participate in the economic activities generated from the ancestral resources.
(3) Our children and future generations must inherit not only the cultural heritage of their ancestors, but also stronger economic foundations, better educational opportunities, and sustainable sources of wealth.

Mr. Speaker, our responsibility is to ensure that the *Vanua* is protected that its people are empowered, and the development benefits are shared equally.

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- Mr. Speaker, I have a very short contribution to this. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) has been around for some time. We have now incorporated it into our laws and, particularly, under the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs.

I want to make it very clear that the acknowledgement of the rights of indigenous peoples does not extinguish the rights of non-indigenous people. I am reminded of Leviticus 19:33-34 which states, and I quote:

> "When a foreigner resides among you in your land, do not mistreat them. The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the Lord your God."

The onus of responsibility now is upon the iTaukei of this land to look after everyone in the land.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are all in agreement with the sentiments of the Bill. Whilst we were in the Committee, we did receive some interesting submissions. There was even a submission that perhaps, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) was designed for a lot of countries that have not yet received the same level of support for indigenous rights, land ownership, and participation that we already have in our country, as has been expressed by, for instance, royalty, 80 percent, et cetera, 91 percent of them.

Despite that, Mr. Speaker, the Bill will be adopted today. It calls for the development of an action plan. Obviously, that action plan will be involved in looking at a lot of existing laws and how they can be improved upon. I think that was also an important issue that was raised by the Bua Urban Youth.

The point that I want to make, Sir, is that there are some legislations we have been working on for some time, one for 10 years now which is the Traditional Knowledge and Cultural Expression Bill. I am hoping that as we do this, we do not wait for the action plan to start implementing the things that we have been working on for 10 years, if I am not mistaken. There are a lot of other things that are here, the Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC). I think the action plan will come and the things that are already in the process, hopefully, can be moved on much quicker.

HON. I. VASU.- Mr. Speaker, I thank the honourable Members for their contributions for this debate. I also acknowledge everyone who has helped formulate and develop this Bill, in particular, the current and former civil servants, Members of Government and non-government organisations, institutions, experts and citizens who have given their time and knowledge. Their work has helped bring this Bill before the House for considerations.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the protection and promotion of indigenous rights should not be understood as diminishing the rights or dignity of any other persons in Fiji. It responds to a particular rights identity and heritage of indigenous people of this country. We make up approximately 0.0074 of the world's population. That small share reminds us of how vulnerable our distinct identity, language, culture, knowledge and institutions may be if they are not protected. If we fail to safeguard these rights, we risk the gradual loss, even the cultural extinction of what makes us indigenous. This Bill provides a framework to protect those rights while building mutual respect among all the peoples of Fiji.

With those words, I am honoured to commend the Bill to the House.

MR. SPEAKER.- The Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

Bill reported with amendments, read a third time and passed. (Act No. of 2026)

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I think it is an appropriate time now to take a break, but before that, since the Bill has now become law, if I may just offer my answer - my views as usual and, that is, in support of honourable Koya's contribution.

The historical context of the content of this Bill is quite interesting. As the honourable Prime Minister has referred to, the Convention of which this law is based has been around for a long time, almost 19 or 20 years. Initiative has been shelved every now and again, from my experience in the Civil Service, and in the meantime, countries such as Australia, Canada and New Zealand have

advanced and are now well ahead in the protection of the indigenous people and the preservation of their cultures. So, it is time for us to proceed, and I thank the honourable Members for that. We will now resume in half an hour.

The Parliament adjourned at 5.04 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 5.37 p.m.

COMMUNICATION FROM THE SPEAKER

Reallocation of Parliamentary Business

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, before we proceed, I wish to inform the House that it is in further view of time constraints for today and tomorrow and to ensure the equal distribution of parliamentary business and parliamentary time, that we will now consider only one motion for debate today, the next two motions on Tuesday and the remaining four motions on Wednesday. The Secretary-General is hereby instructed to amend the respective Order Papers and circulate thereafter.

GOVERNMENT GUARANTEE - PACIFIC FISHING COMPANY (PTE) LIMITED

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, for the purpose of Section 145(1) of the Constitution and pursuant to Standing Order 131, I move:

That Parliament approves -

(a) that the Parliamentary Approval of 14th September, 2015, be amended to allow for Government guarantee of PAFCO's borrowings with other financial institutions;
(b) for the Government of the Republic of Fiji to guarantee PAFCO's additional borrowing of $20 million, without restricting the Government guarantee to a specific lending institution, valid for five years effective from 1st November, 2026 to 30th November, 2031;
(c) that PAFCO be exempted from paying a guarantee fee; and
(d) for the Government to guarantee the specified borrowings facilities until their full maturity or discharge.

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

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, Pacific Fishing Company Pte Limited (PAFCO) is a 99.6 percent Government-owned public enterprise established in 1963, with its principal fish processing facility located in Levuka, Ovalau. Sir, PAFCO employs around 870 to 1,000 workers including permanent, casual and indirect workers, although the number of staff fluctuate due to seasonal fish supply shortages and required number of shifts run by the company. Women make up more than 60 percent of the workforce.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, following the exit of Bumble Bee Seafoods in July 2026, as well as Fong Chun Formosa (FCF), its primary fishing broker, PAFCO has been required to undertake a significant strategic transition from a business model substantially dependent on the principal customer towards a more diversified operating model involving the development of a new and export market, securing sustainable raw materials, and financing the procurement and processing of tuna.

The transition requires corresponding changes in customer relationships, raw material procurement, production capacity, financing arrangements and capital investments, with PAFCO identifying three critical priorities:

(1) securing customers in local and export markets;
(2) securing sustainable and reliable raw material supplies, particularly tuna; and
(3) financing the transition and targeted growth through adequate working capital and capital

investments.

Pursuant to section 62(1) and section 3C of the Financial Management Act 2024, it says that subject to any other Act, the government may guarantee the financial liability of the entity in respect of a loan or, otherwise, but only if the giving of the guarantee is approved by Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on 14th November, 2015, Parliament approved a Government guarantee to PAFCO's borrowing with a ceiling of $11.3 million in favour of ANZ, enabling PAFCO to access financing from the bank. And as of 31st July this year, PAFCO guaranteed debt to around $3.2 million.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the $20 million additional request is to fund PAFCO's capital projects, programme designed to modernise and upgrade plant and processing equipment to improve operational efficiency, increase production capacity to meet export and domestic demand, and strengthen compliance with international food safety and quality standards. All these guaranteed funds will now be utilised between now to 2028, and all these will be done to meet the requirements of the new partner Frinsa Group, founded in Spain, and is one of Europe's largest canned fish and seafood manufacturers founded in 1961. Without government support, Mr. Speaker, Sir, PAFCO cannot fund the capital expenses needed to upgrade this plant and equipment.

Without these upgrades, production and efficiency will decline, making it difficult to meet market demand and further weaken its financials, given that this investment is essential to boosting its long-term viability. The immediate whole of government intervention is necessary now to preserve PAFCO as the vital economic anchor of Lomaiviti province and especially Levuka.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in the last five years, the net profits have fluctuated. PAFCO recorded a net profit before tax of $4.78 million in 2024, and incurred a loss of $1.5 million in 2023, and a loss of $1.5 million in 2025. In 2026, the company is forecasting a net loss of around $5.5 million, equivalent to a negative net profit margin of around 14.8 percent. Following a loss in 2025, as I mentioned, the financial forecast after the funding support, I have indicated a return to profitability from 2037, projected net profits of around 1.06 million, 1.28 million in 2028, and 1.2 million in 2029. And these projected profits are at the back of the funding guarantee we are considering today. And there is expectations of increase in revenue by over 80 percent.

Apart from financial improvements, we expect production capacity to improve from around 26,000 tonnes per annum to around 130 tonnes per day. Canning capacity to increase from around the current 500,000 cartons currently to around 1 million to 2 million cases per annum. As well as improvement to the financials, part of the financing is for trade financing to assist in a $5 million trade facility to support PAFCO’s customer order fulfilment as well as export transaction.

There is around $1.4 million for repairs and maintenance to the current facilities. Apart from improvement in the financials, we expect learning recovery of around $15 per tonne of raw tuna processed. Together with that, there will be an energy efficiency as well as cold chain reliability in PAFCO’s operation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, total assets as well grew to around $45.9 million in 2024 compared to $44.6 million in 2023. This is driven by around $28 million in non-current assets, primarily property plant and equipment worth $26.41 million, with current assets of around $17.8, including inventories of around $7.8 million and receivables of $6.2 million.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, total shareholders' equity, still strong, strengthened to around $27.05 million in 2024 compared to $ 22.3 million in 2023. This is due to the increase in return earnings of around $12.25 million. Furthermore, total abilities decreased to around $18.9 million, reflecting an overall

healthier and more resilient balance sheet.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the additional guarantee of $20 million together with the existing government guarantee of approximately $11.3 million will bring the total government guarantee ceiling for PAFCO to approximately $31.3 million. The government recognises that this guarantee represents a contingent financial obligation and therefore expects PAFCO to utilise the financing prudently and in accordance with an approved business and investment plan to ensure its operationality and working capital requirements are adequately supported, as well as its requirements for capital for investments in critical equipment and infrastructure.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, at the end of July 2026, government's guaranteed debt to government-related entities amounted to around $1.2 billion or 8.3 percent of GDP. Subject to approval, the additional guarantee of $20 million to PAFCO will increase the total guarantee exposure to around $1.2 billion or 8.4 percent of GDP. In the event of a default, the government will have to settle any outstanding government guarantee at PAFCO.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the outlook, as said earlier, PAFCO has stood steadfast in these challenging times and remain operational despite all the challenges and hurdles. It has continued to operate and employ all its permanent staff. PAFCO management and board have paved a clear vision and pathway to achieving a return to its peak operational periods in the coming years. They have laid out a clear plan to achieve return to profitability within the next year and sustain that whilst growing their business in the region and globally.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, PAFCO itself has become a brand, a brand that is now trusted globally and has ensured that getting critical partners around the world for its business is no longer a hurdle. In simple terms, there are definitely better days ahead, once we help them get across their current challenges.

Therefore, I respectfully move that this august House approves that:

(a) Parliament approval of 14th September, 2015, be amended to allow for Government guarantee of PAFCO's borrowing with other financial institutions;
(b) Government to guarantee PAFCO's additional borrowing of $20 million without restricting the Government guarantee to a specific lending institution valid for five years, effective from 1st November, 2026 to 30th November, 2031;
(c) PAFCO be exempted from paying a fee; and
(d) Government to guarantee specified borrowing facilities until their full maturity or discharge.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I commend this motion to the House.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, according to the honourable Minister for Finance, he is seeking Parliament support for additional $20 million dollars, a Government Guarantee for PAFCO. We will definitely support this motion because the livelihoods of hundreds of Fijian families, particularly in Levuka and Ovalau, and the wider Lomaiviti group are at stake.

However, our support should not be mistaken for confidence in the management of this company. PAFCO is an important State-Owned Enterprise (SOE) and a major part of Levuka's economy. We have heard from the honourable Minister that it employs more than 70 percent women in their workforce. When PAFCO struggles, the impact goes beyond the factory gates. It affects shops, market vendors, transport operators, suppliers, and the wider economy of Ovalau. Basically, everything comes to a standstill. That is why we cannot simply stand aside and allow this company

to fail.

We also have a responsibility to protect taxpayers' money. I understand it is a Government guarantee. It is not an immediate cash payment, but it creates a potential liability for taxpayers if PAFCO is not able to pay the loan or the money that it borrows. We must, therefore, be confident that PAFCO has a realistic plan to repay its borrowing.

Again, we have heard from the honourable Minister saying that $20 million will bring PAFCO's total Government Guarantee ceiling of $31.3 million. The question is not whether PAFCO deserves support - the concern is whether previous support delivered the results promised. What improvements were achieved? Why did the company not diversify? We need to know what went wrong and what will be done differently this time.

We understand the immediate reason for this additional guarantee, which is the departure of Bumble Bee Seadfoods, PAFCO's major customer, in July 2026. We also understand that losing a major customer is a serious setback, but it also exposes the weaknesses of depending so heavily on one customer and only on two now. The Standing Committee on Economic Affairs had looked at their Reports. I recall when we, the Committee, visited Levuka, we had a meeting with the management team, and we highlighted to them that they need to diversify. They cannot just wait for the tuna to come to our waters, but they have to look at it because they already have a canning factory. They can process and can many other things and not necessarily just one item. However, I am glad to hear that they will diversify by processing not just tuna, but other fish, which is a good sign, but let us see how far they go with that.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wanted to say to the honourable Minister that what we need to see is the details of the proposal you have given that they found a new partner, a new company that they will be sending the tuna to. However, how long is that agreement, and what revenue is expected out of that agreement? The Government must demonstrate that these arrangements provide a genuine pathway to profitability, not simply another temporary solution because of what is happening currently with the customer.

Mr. Speaker, we all know PAFCO's challenges go beyond finance. One of its longstanding problems is the availability of tuna and this is a real issue which has lasted for so many years. Obviously, the problem is not Government's problem, but it has got to do with the climatic condition and the movement of tuna. Unfortunately, they do not like our waters and, therefore, they go away somewhere else before we can harvest them. That is beyond our control, and we understand that.

However, Mr. Speaker, bearing that in mind, we still need to have a better plan for PAFCO so that we are not just relying on tuna as the only source. We have heard in the past that whenever tuna supply was short, our Minister for Fisheries used to visit other countries to ask them to give more tuna to us so that we could process and keep the factory running. A lot of backdoor dealing happened during that time just to keep the factory going, and it is a longstanding issue. It is not a new issue whatsoever.

Mr. Speaker, I wanted to highlight one major issue with this company. I am quite disappointed that we are here trying to salvage the company by providing Government guarantee, however, the company management has not taken their responsibility well. I am speaking from the Parliamentary oversight point of view. The last Annual Report they submitted was a 2019 Annual Report.

As part of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs, we reviewed that Report and the management told us that all other reports are in the pipeline and will come to Parliament. It is now six years too late. We have not received six years of Annual Reports, yet here we are trying to talk

about a company that is linked to our people, and it is because of their survival that we want to uplift the company and give them more money. However, how can we do that? Really, someone has to take responsibility to provide the Annual Reports in a timely manner.

The other issue that I have, and I highlighted this earlier, is in regard to the public enterprise portfolio, and we tend to neglect that. It is like one portfolio that can be attached to any minister at any time, and we have seen this musical chair being played in this Parliament. Initially, the portfolio was with the honourable Prime Minister, then it went to the Minister for Multi-Ethnic Affairs, then it went for a short period to the Minister for Industries and Commerce, and now it is back with the honourable Prime Minister.

What are we doing with public enterprises? They are supposed to be generating a lot of money for the country but if we do not look after the SOEs, then obviously Government's liability will continue increasing because we keep on guaranteeing loans and giving them more money, yet there is no return for it, so public enterprises need to be looked after very well.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that this is timely assistance for PAFCO, but when we give this money, we must ensure that Parliament is regularly updated. I request the Minister responsible for PAFCO to present a ministerial statement, at least, every six months to provide feedback on how the company is doing. We are all interested in ensuring that this company does well, and it protects the livelihood of people living in Ovalau. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I support the motion before us.

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of the motion before the House, moved by the honourable Minister of Finance for the provision of additional Government guarantee of $20 million to the Pacific Fishing Company Limited (PAFCO). I also wish to land my full support that has been made this afternoon by the honourable Minister in his capacity responsible for finance. The honourable Minister has clearly outlined the commercial rationale, strategic importance and the broader economic significance of this guarantee in supporting PAFCO's transformation and its long-term sustainability.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, one of the enduring challenges for developing economies, is the export of raw resources but with limited local processing and very less value addition. While the resource undoubtedly originates in our waters, much of the value is often captured elsewhere along the supply chain. The long-term objective of Government must therefore be, to strengthen domestic participation in resource-based industries, expand local value addition and ensure that a greater share of the economic benefit, remains within Fiji. And this, Mr. Speaker, is precisely the direction in which PAFCO is hoping to move into.

As highlighted by the honourable Minister, PAFCO is undertaking an important transition towards a more diversified, commercially sustainable and competitive business model. The company's effort to secure new markets, diversify its customer base and strengthen its supply arrangement, are positive developments which deserve government support, during this critical phase of transformation.

Mr. Speaker, from a resource management perspective, there is also a broader national interest at stake. The fisheries resources within Fiji's EEZ, belongs to the people of Fiji. And as custodians of these resources, government has a duty not only to ensure their sustainable management but also to maximise the benefits that are generated from them. Supporting local processing capacity through enterprises, such as PAFCO, translates into greater economic participation, more jobs for Fijians, stronger business linkages, enhances export earnings and increased opportunities for our people to participate in higher value segments of the fisheries industry. This aligns squarely with Government's vision of sustainable resource development, where economic growth, environmental

stewardship and national prosperity must go hand in hand.

Mr. Speaker, the people of Levuka and the province of Lomaiviti understand the importance of PAFCO, perhaps, better than anyone else. For many families, PAFCO is more than just a company - it is a source of income, stability and opportunity.

Generations of workers have contributed to its success, Mr. Speaker. The economic impacts of the company extend well beyond its operations to encompass local businesses, transport providers, service industries and the wider community. Continued viability and strengthening of PAFCO, therefore, have significant social and economic implications not only for Ovalau, but for Fiji as a whole.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as Minister responsible for employment, productivity and workplace relations, I also view this motion through the lens of employment, security, workforce development and economic resilience. The Government guarantee before us today is about more than just supporting a company, it is about supporting workers and supporting the families who rely on those workers and opportunities that the company provides.

At a time, Mr. Speaker, when global economic conditions continue to evolve and we continue to face global headwinds, Government must act prudently to support industries that are creating jobs here at home, sustain our local communities and contribute meaningfully to national productivity.

PAFCO, Mr. Speaker, Sir, remains a significant employer. The continuity of its operation contributes directly to the livelihood of workers and indirectly to many others who depend on its commercial activities. Every job retained, every family supported and every opportunity created for a young Fijian entering the workforce in the depth of Lomaiviti matters. This Government also guarantees, therefore, an investment in employment, security and economic independence.

Mr. Speaker, productive employment remains central to this Government's development agenda. Reservation and creation of decent jobs enhance social stability, strengthen communities and improve living standards. It also reinforces our national commitment to inclusive economic development, where the benefits of growth are broadly shared across all society. Support being extended to PAFCO sends a strong signal that Government remains committed to supporting strategic enterprises that contribute to national development and provide meaningful employment opportunities for our people.

At the same time, Government support must be matched by accountability and performance. We expect the Board, management and workforce of PAFCO to continue strengthening governance, enhancing operational efficiency, fostering positive workplace relations and pursuing continuous improvements in productivity and competitiveness. Successful enterprises are built not only on financial support, but also on strong leadership, responsible governance, productive workplaces and a shared commitment to excellence.

Mr. Speaker, from a justice perspective, economic development must also be inclusive. The benefits derived from Fiji's natural resources should contribute to improving the lives of ordinary Fijians. They should create opportunities for workers, strengthen families, support communities and promote equitable economic participation.

When strategic industries grow, communities also grow and benefit. Workers are employed, and families that feed off their employment prosper as well. When productive enterprises succeed, we all naturally as a nation, advance. That is why supporting PAFCO extend beyond commercial considerations alone, it reflects the broader commitment, economic opportunity, social wellbeing and

national development.

Mr. Speaker, the motion before us is not merely about a financial guarantee, it is about:

- supporting a strategic national enterprise and it is also about protecting jobs and protecting livelihoods;
- strengthening value addition from Fiji's natural resources;
- boosting productivity and economic resilience; and
- investing the future prosperity of our people.

I, therefore, commend the honourable Minister for Finance for bringing forward this prudent and forward-looking measure. I support the Government's continued effort that is led by the honourable Prime Minister as Minister for Public Enterprises, to ensure that PAFCO emerges as a stronger, more resilient and a more commercially sustainable enterprise.

Mr. Speaker, before I take my seat, we were in Levuka last week as part of your Special Committee holding consultations in the matter of Bill No. 32 of 2026. I grew up on that island and as a *muri vuli* (daycare student) of Delana Methodist Primary School, the years before that too, while we lived in the era of the Golden Globe of Levuka. We berthed at a wharf where I remembered were filled with fishing boats at the time when I was very small. Days where Beach Street were littered with people and where opportunities for economic growth and jobs were in abundance. They were the days where Jimmy Subhaydas sang his very famous song, '*Sai Levuka Ga'* was very prominent in those days.

I hope, Mr. Speaker, that with the turn that this injection of guarantee will provide, we will go back and, probably, they would be better than the days provoked. Levuka will, once again, resurge to become a very prominent place to live but more importantly, a better PAFCO for all the people of Lomaiviti, providing employment and providing opportunities for all. I support this motion before the House, Mr. Speaker.

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Speaker, I rise to strongly support the motion moved by the honourable Minister for Finance. This motion is not just a financial arrangement; it is a critical vote of confidence in the backbone of Fiji's domestic fisheries sector and a direct investment in the resilient people of Ovalau and the wider Lomaiviti Province. As Minister for Fisheries, I want to clearly outline why supporting the Pacific Fishing Company or PAFCO, is absolutely vital for our nation's exports, our coastal livelihoods and our broader economic progress.

Mr. Speaker, our first and most immediate priority is securing sustainable supply lines and licensing spaces. To do that, the Ministry of Fisheries is systematically pursuing and securing dedicated licence spaces, tailored specifically to support PAFCO's extensive fishing aspirations. By issuing these critical offshore vessel allocations, we are directly enabling our domestic fleet to fish responsibly and legally inside our own waters.

This strategic move guarantees an uninterrupted, secure flow of resource assets straight to Levuka. However, we recognise that local waters alone cannot feed a world-class processing plant. That is why the Ministry is aggressively negotiating and developing diplomatic pathways with our bilateral, regional and international counterparts to secure raw fish in transit. Mr. Speaker, this continuous replenishment of materials maximises factory efficiency, builds consistent volume and keeps our processing lines moving at full capacity. Securing our supply lines naturally leads us to our second core objective, which is to drive export excellence and ensure market continuity.

Following a recent shift in our traditional commercial partnerships, PAFCO has successfully established a strategic transformative venture with a prominent Spanish EU company called Frinsa Group. This collaboration, Mr. Speaker, serves as a vital high-value bridge directly to premium international markets. By partnering with one of Spain's most renowned canned tuna exporters, we ensure that our global supply chain remains highly resilient, fully compliant with strict international regulations and perfectly positioned to leverage the lucrative trade opportunities. Ultimately, by combining the Ministry's assurance of raw material security with the European market access provided by Frinsa Group, we are optimising national export earnings and injecting long-term financial stability directly into Fiji's maritime economy.

This stability, Mr. Speaker, brings me to the third and most important pillar of this motion - sustaining and securing the livelihoods of our people. We must remember that PAFCO is the single largest employer in Levuka, serving as the absolute economic lifeline of Ovalau. The security of hundreds of those jobs is non-negotiable for Government. Beyond the immediate factory floor positions, our commitment to boosting production lines preserves economic stability for our domestic fishers, local co-operatives and small merchants across the entire Lomaiviti Province.

Mr. Speaker, Government guarantee acts as a definitive financial anchor that allows PAFCO to pivot, modernise and expand with international partners. With the Ministry of Fisheries actively securing our resource spaces and our new Spanish partner securing global retail links, I can confidently say that PAFCO's best days are squarely ahead. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I strongly commend this motion to the House.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to contribute very briefly and support the motion moved by the honourable Minister for Finance in support of Government's guarantee of an additional FJD20 million in borrowings by the Pacific Fishing Company Limited or known as PAFCO. This is an important decision for our country. It is a decision about protecting employment, sustaining one of Fiji's longstanding industries, strengthening our fisheries sector, and securing the economic future of Levuka and the wider Lomaiviti Province.

However, equally, Mr. Speaker, it is a decision about ensuring that a strategically important Government-owned enterprise has the opportunity to transition towards a more commercially sustainable future. We are seeking to provide the financial backing necessary for PAFCO to strengthen its operations, modernise its facilities, diversify its market, and position itself to compete in an increasingly challenging international seafood industry. This is not a decision we take lightly, it must be accompanied by financial discipline, commercial accountability, and a clear expectation that PAFCO delivers measurable improvement in performance.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, PAFCO is not just another commercial enterprise. For decades, it has been an important part of Levuka and Fiji's economic and social fabric. When PAFCO operates, the benefits extend beyond its factory gates.

The circumstances confronting PAFCO have changed significantly. The departure of its longstanding major customer, Bumble Bee Seafoods, in July 2026 has created a major commercial challenge for the company. The development came against a backdrop of fluctuating tuna supplies, increasing operating costs, ageing processing infrastructure, and competitive prices in international seafood markets. This challenge cannot be ignored, nor should they be understated.

We welcome its new partner from Spain. The proposed additional FJD20 million is intended to strengthen working capital and supporting compliance with international food safety and quality requirements, among other business requirements. These improvements are essential to restoring the company's competitiveness and strengthening its long-term commercial prospects.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, ultimately, this motion is about making a responsible decision in the national interest. It is about recognising that Fiji's economic resilience depends not only on developing new sets of industries but strengthening the productive industries and communities that have supported our country for generations. We recognise that Fiji's services sector, particularly tourism, continues to perform strongly and remains an important driver of economic growth.

However, the success of a handful of sectors cannot, on its own, be considered the success of our entire economy. True economic progress must be broad-based, inclusive, and sustainable. It must extend beyond those established growth industries to strengthen manufacturing, agriculture, fisheries and other productive sectors that support employment, exports, and livelihoods across the country. That is why supporting the transformation of enterprises, such as PAFCO, matters. It is about strengthening our productive capacity, diversifying our economic base, protecting jobs, and ensuring that the communities, even our major tourism centres, also benefit from Fiji's economic growth.

For those reasons, I support the motion moved by the honourable Minister for Finance. I commend the motion to this august House.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to speak on the motion by the honourable Minister for Finance. He asks this House to approve a further $20 million government guarantee for PAFCO. The guarantee would run for five years, be open to any lending institution and be exempted from any guarantee fee, and it would last until the facility reaches full maturity. I will say now, where will I end up? I will not leave the workers of Levuka waiting for my answers. I will not leave the workers of Levuka waiting for my answers, but a guarantee is a promise made in the name of every taxpayer in this country.

Before that promise is made, this House is owed the truth about how we got here. A departure, the country was never told about. I was surprised that the Government Ministers never mentioned about this company. For more than two decades, Bumble Bee Seafoods was the anchor of PAFCO. It was the buyer, the partner, and the market. Levuka's own Town Council once called the cannery, the backbone of its economy.

In July this year, that partner left. How did the people of Ovalau learn of it? They did not learn of it from this Parliament, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and they did not learn it from the Ministerial Statement. In May, the Lomaiviti Provincial Council was already voicing fear of PAFCO's closure because this company was understood to be winding up. Rumours on our coconut wireless travel faster than the Board of Directors. As usual, late and without a clue as to what was happening, it was left to the Fijian Media Association Town Hall in Levuka, the week Bumble Bee Seafoods finished processing for PAFCO's management to confirm what the Government had not told the nation. Bumble Bee Seafoods was ending its partnership and a new arrangement with the Spanish exporter had been secured.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, a mother in Lovoni should not have to learn the fate of a livelihood at a town hall meeting. Jimmy Subhaydas should be pulling in his fish trap when he listens to this news from a passing fisherman from Moturiki. So, I put these questions to the honourable Minister - when did the Government first know Bumble Bee Seafoods intended to leave? What became of the loans and investment Bumble Bee Seafoods made in PAFCO's cold storage facility and of the Government's own $9 million loan for that same project? Who is this new Spanish partner that we are now being told a little bit about? What are the terms, volumes, price per tonne and the duration and will they be tabled in this House?

The public has a right to know these answers, Mr. Speaker, Sir. This is a company that is 99.6 percent owned by the people of Fiji. The most serious failing is that no one can show us a transition plan. In July, we were told that people remained employed. We were also told that the company employed more than 400 people. Yet the Government's own announcement of this guarantee speaks of a workforce of between 870 and more than 1,000, depending on operational requirements, and more than 70 percent of those workers are women, so which is it? How many workers does PAFCO have today? How many have been rostered off, sent home or left without pay while they wait for fish?

I have heard accounts of women who have not had work for months, Mr. Speaker, Sir, who are told to apply for their FNPF savings after two weeks because the company provides no support. Villages that once sent 30 or 40 workers to the factory now send six. It is a slow bleed that this Government has neither named nor planned for. A real transition plan would tell us the following: What is the secured raw material supply? Fish not promised. Who supplies it? How much and for how long? What is the business model after the company left? What is the plan for the workers while the factory is rebuilt, retrained and restarted? What are the milestones? Who in Government will be accountable if they are missed?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as mentioned earlier on by the other side and this side, PAFCO is the economic lifeblood of Levuka. In a town of a little over a thousand people and an island of a little over 8,000, one factory is the difference between a family staying in Ovalau and a family moving to Suva.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Levuka is our old capital and a World Heritage Town. If the cannery collapses, the Town risks becoming a museum with no one left to live in. Fiji has some of the richest tuna waters. The tuna industry should be profitable by now. Yet here we are again, asking taxpayers to prop up a company that has landed on one customer for decades. This guarantee would bring total Government exposure to around $31.3 million, as mentioned earlier on, on top of the existing $11.3 million. It comes with no guarantee fee, no limit on who lends against it, and no end date shortfall maturity.

We are told, it is not a cash payment, true, but a guarantee becomes cash the day the company cannot pay. On that day, it is the Fijian taxpayer who pays. I ask the honourable Minister to provide the following:

(a) A full statement of PAFCO's current financial position, audited where possible.
(b) The identity of the lenders and the terms of borrowing.
(c) Its justification for exempting PAFCO from guarantee fee.
(d) Regular reporting to this House and to the relevant Standing Committees on how the guarantee funds are used.

This is very important. Why? I will nonetheless support this motion because of the people of Levuka, from our old capital.

I have spoken plainly because the fact is demanding, but I will not let my criticism cost the workers of Levuka and their jobs. If this guarantee fails, the people who pay first are not us or the Board members. They are the machine operators, packers and the cleaners. They are mostly women, many with 20 years or 30 years of service, who hold their families and villages together. They did not choose that company's departure. They did not draft the agreement, and they should not carry the cost of the failure or foresight by those in power. For that reason, and for the families of Levuka in Ovalau, the Opposition supports this guarantee, but it is a qualified support.

Our support is based on the following:

(a) The Minister tables the new processing agreement or a full summary of its terms in this House.
(b) A costed time-bound transition and business plan be provided to Parliament and the Standing Committee with the Government explaining how workers will be protected throughout.
(c) The Government report to this House every six months on PAFCO's finances, its raw material supply and its employment numbers.
(d) The Government commit to supporting retrench or rostered off workers through retaining and other measures until the factory is running at full capacity.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we will support the people of Levuka and we will not stand in silence while the future of an entire island is decided behind closed doors. I support the motion that is before the House.

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise in full support of the motion. As a son of Lomaiviti, honourable Ravu and I do understand the importance of PAFCO. This is not a factory; it is the lifeblood of the people of Lomaiviti. Yes, Sir, $8 million paid annually to the people of Ovalau, with 70 percent women. Everything hinges on, on PAFCO, but the most important point is, we have an economic arrangement, financial arrangement which has come to a full stop, and it is the moral and social obligations of the Government to fix that problem.

We have been highlighted that there are issues with previous Boards of PAFCO – annual reports not being provided, so there is an issue of good governance that was deeply lacking previously. The issue here is, the honourable Prime Minister has come on board and said, "yes we are going to save this factory" because it means a lot to the people of Ovalau, they need to be supported, they need to be stopped from moving to urban areas and it means so much; over 60 years.

When you talk about PAFCO, it is like talking about Vatukoula Gold Mine to the people of Vatukoula. It is so dear to us. I stand here to thank the Government and also for the current arrangements being done in terms of making sure that the new partner comes in, and there is diversification in terms of the operation of PAFCO. The Government will continue to assist PAFCO. It has a moral obligation. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to address in the vernacular language.

"*E marau saka na turaga ni Lomaiviti, turaga na* Prime Minister *kei na Matanitu Duavata e na nomuni kauta mai na mosoni, Minister ni Lavo, me kena vukei na PAFCO.*

E na siga Lotulevu e na macawa sa oti, na turaga na Prime Minister, *e na veitalanoa ni* Bill 32, *e curu tu mai e dua na taro me baleti PAFCO. E na vula o Jiulai, e ratou tiko mai kea na ka ni media, na veitalanoa, e curu talega mai na veitalanoa ni* PAFCO.

E vakabibitaki tiko, na veitalanoa ni PAFCO *e dua nai ulutaga bibi me vaka eda sa veitalanoataka nikua. Era vakavinavinaka taka tiko na turaga ni Lomaiviti, Ovalau kei Moturiki, na kena kauwaitaki tiko na kabani oqo me cici tikoga, me vaka ga na vei bisinisi. So na gauna toso vinaka, e sega ni mai yala ikea ni sa lutu, qai vaqaqara tale tiko na Matanitu me tomani na veiqaravi. Na ka e bibi ga, na kena tokoni.*

Vadeitaki tiko e na vakavinavinaka ni rawa ni tokoni tiko na cicivaki ni kabani oqo, ka vakavinavinakataki vakalevu na mosoni e kauta mai ko na Minister *ni Lavo*. The governmemnt guarantee, *e sega ni kenai matai qo me soli vua e dua na* public enterprise company. *E nona i tavi ga na matanitu me vukea.*

Sa tiko na vakanuinui vei ira na veiliutaki e na veisiga ni mataka, ni rawa ni na tubu, na veiqaravi vinaka o PAFCO, *ni na toso cake na ka vakai lavo, ena drodrova talega yani na yasana o Lomaiviti, curuma yani na veivuvale. E tokona saka tiko vakabibi na mosoni oqo ena siga e daidai.*

[The people of Lomaiviti, the Prime Minister and the Coalition Government, are grateful for the assistance you have brought forward, honourable Minister for Finance, in support of PAFCO.

Last Thursday, during the debate on Bill No. 32/2026, honourable Prime Minister, a question was raised concerning PAFCO. In July, during the media discussions and engagements held there, PAFCO was also raised as a matter of discussion.

PAFCO remains an important issue, as we are discussing it today. The people of Lomaiviti, particularly those from Ovalau and Moturiki, are grateful that the Government continues to give attention to this company to ensure that it remains operational, just like any other business. There are times when the company performs well, but when it experiences a downturn, it does not simply come to an end. Instead, the Government continues to look for ways to ensure that its operations can be sustained.

What is important is the support being provided. We are grateful that support is being extended to sustain the operations of this company. We also sincerely appreciate the assistance brought forward by the honourable Minister for Finance. The Government guarantee is not the first of its kind to be extended to a public enterprise company. It is the Government's responsibility to provide such assistance.

There is hope that, under the leadership of those who will take the company forward, PAFCO's operations will grow and improve. As its financial performance improves, the benefits will also flow through to the Lomaiviti Province and reach the households within the province. I, therefore, strongly support this motion today.]

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to speak in support of the motion on this guarantee additional $220 million to be provided to the Pacific Fishing Company Limited or PAFCO, as it is known for short.

The contributors before me have pretty much covered most of the issues that I thought I would speak on. They have talked about the significance of this company to the economy and the well-being of, not only the people of Ovalau, but the whole of Lomaiviti. They have talked about the fact that there have been some issues with supply or the buyer of the catch and the decision now being made to find another buyer and apparently a lucrative buyer out of Spain. Any place that employs 800 workers, 1,000 workers, or even 400 workers as suggested by honourable Bala, it is still a significant employer, and of course, we should not forget the fact that 70 percent of the workforce are women.

One of the important things that probably is lost in this debate, some of the excellent decisions that have been undertaken by this side of the House that have led to this ability to find a buyer very quickly. Bumble Bee Seafoods has been a buyer of processed tuna from PAFCO for some time and it was only because of the tariffs introduced by President Trump that created an issue for Bumble Bee Seafoods, and they decided to move to Mexico. So, number one, it had nothing to do with the performance of PAFCO. It was a decision taken by Bumble Bee Seafoods looking at their own economics and deciding that perhaps they could move to Mexico and make more money there.

Mr. Speaker, as I had mentioned, sometimes we forget some of the good work that occurs on

this side of the House. When we got into government, one of the things that certainly in the trade side that we discovered, that for some reason, the Interim Economic Partnership Agreement (IEPA) with the EU had not been ratified by the previous government or even recognised, for as almost quite a long time. So, what actually happened was, we worked on the approvals. It came through Cabinet and we recognised the Interim Economic Partnership Agreement with the EU.

It did two things immediately, Mr. Speaker. One, certainly from a trade perspective, it immediately accelerated some of the engagements that we had with the EU. We are now seeing things like New Caledonia engaging more closely in terms of trade for cocoa with Fiji. And also, Mr. Speaker, certainly on the tuna side, the signing of IEPA allowed us to actually source tuna from other jurisdictions other than the Fiji Waters and be able to supply it duty free to the EU. That is why we were able to get the lucrative market out of Spain. So, I thought I would just share that piece of information, just to underpin that some of the work undertaken on this side of the House is impacted on what has happened with PAFCO.

Beyond that, Mr. Speaker, the guarantee, of course, will do several things. It will facilitate the transformation of PAFCO. For those of us that have had the opportunity of visiting PAFCO recently, the equipment there, Mr. Speaker, is ageing. Some of the canning equipment perhaps is more deserved in a museum rather than actually production. So, the guarantee, Mr. Speaker, we will be able to modernise the factory. It will be able to improve on capacity and efficiency, and of course, in doing so, respond more effectively to any increased demands both domestically and internationally.

I do note the points raised by honourable Bala, but I think, before we get in the weeds in terms of what information is required, I think for a company to plan confidently, the fact that this Government and this House is supporting PAFCO in terms of a guarantee, even before they start looking at financing, is a very strong signal when this company tries to move ahead with its modernisation plans.

In conclusion, I voice my support for the guarantee for PAFCO, it does ensure that we continue to maintain significant assets in Government, we ensure that the economy of Ovalau and Lomaiviti continues to move, and more importantly, we set up PAFCO for a bright future in terms of both investment, capacity, and modernisation of its equipment and assets. With those few words, Mr. Speaker, I support the motion before the House.

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to thank those who contributed to this government guarantee motion on PAFCO, and I wish to state that this guarantee is the initial work to be done by the whole of government to ensure that not only PAFCO survives and consolidates itself and grow, but also to ensure that the economy of Levuka and Ovalau also survives, consolidate and also grow. As I mentioned, this is a whole of Government approach. It is not only the Ministry of Public Enterprises and the Ministry of Finance to look at the sustainability of PAFCO and also its growth but the other ministries as well.

Programmes are online, especially from the Ministry of Finance, to look at duty exemptions on parts, waive tax penalties and other systems. The honourable Minister for Fisheries and Forestry had already mentioned what they were targeted to do and, that is, to support the resource supply security, as well as licensing. The Ministry of Infrastructure, through Fiji Ports, on the fiscal asset remediation, as well as marine access. We have the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade that will be looking at trade, protection, tariff, resilience, as well as international fleet sourcing, especially, the discussion with Kiribati and Tuvalu, going forward.

On the question of its accounts and Annual Reports, its account is normally consolidated with

other public enterprises. The last one that I saw was for 2021, however, they have done up to 2024. The annual accounts are up to 2023.

Honourable Bala questioned the ability of the company to repay its debt going forward but remember that the last guarantee was in 2015. I am not sure whether you were in government at that time, it was around $11 million, and to-date or before July, the debt came down to around $3 million. So, they have the potential to produce, pay the debt, as well as to grow. We are continuing with the assistance that was provided.

However, going forward, the Management and the Board will update all the past reports and report to the Ministry of Public Enterprises, as well as to the Ministry of Finance, to ensure that updates are provided regularly and they are measured against the projections that are provided.

With those words, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to, again, commend the motion to the House.

MR. SPEAKER.- The Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, that brings us to the end of the sitting today. Just before we adjourn, I think I need to elaborate a bit more on my direction to move matters from today to tomorrow or forward. There is no dark side to it.

Agenda items for tomorrow and Wednesday were on the light side, as your Secretariat was anticipating some heavy lifting this week and in the coming days. Since this is not forthcoming, there is now a need to redistribute the workload for the next two days, hence my direction.

I thank you all for your contribution. You have a good evening and rest well. Parliament is now adjourned until tomorrow at 9.30 a.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 6.46 p.m.