STANDING COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND DEFENCE

Review Report of the Fiji-Australia Vuvale Union and Ocean of Peace Alliance *('Veitacini Treaty')*

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ACRONYMS

ANZUS	Australia, New Zealand and United States Security Treaty
API–PNR	Advance Passenger Information – Passenger Name Record
APTC	Australia Pacific Training Coalition
AUD	Australian Dollar
AUKUS	Australia, United Kingdom and United States Security Partnership
BA&S	Business Analysis and Solutions
CCTV	Closed-Circuit Television
CSOs	Civil Society Organisations
CWM	Colonial War Memorial
DAWN	Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Australia)
EEZ	Exclusive Economic Zone
FASANOC	Fiji Association of Sports and National Olympic Committee
FCOSS	Fiji Council of Social Services
FJD	Fijian Dollar
FMA	Fiji Medical Association
FRA	Fiji Roads Authority
FRCS	Fiji Revenue and Customs Service
FSM	Federated States of Micronesia
GCC	Great Council of Chiefs
HECF	Higher Education Commission Fiji
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus

IBMS	Integrated Border Management System
ICAO	International Civil Aviation Organization
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
IP	Intellectual Property
IUU	Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (Fishing)
KOICA	Korea International Cooperation Agency
LTA	Land Transport Authority
MERIT	Migration Enforcement and Response Intelligence Tool
MESC	Maritime Essential Services Centre
MHMS	Ministry of Health and Medical Services
MPWMST	Ministry of Public Works, Meteorological Services and Transport
MSAF	Maritime Safety Authority of Fiji
NSW	New South Wales
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OPM	Office of the Prime Minister
PACER Plus	Pacific Agreement on Closer Economic Relations Plus
PALM	Pacific Australia Labour Mobility
RFMF	Republic of Fiji Military Forces
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
TIF	Transparency and Integrity Fiji
TSLS	Tertiary Scholarships and Loans Service
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UN	United Nations

UNDRIP	United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
US	United States of Ameria
WAF	Water Authority of Fiji
WWI	World War I

CHAIRPERSON'S FOREWORD

The Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence ("Committee") presents its Review Report on the Fiji-Australia Vuvale Union and the Ocean of Peace Alliance *('Veitacini Treaty')* for the consideration of Parliament. The Committee acknowledges the significance of these treaties in strengthening Fiji's longstanding bilateral relationship with Australia and the opportunities they present for economic development, national security, infrastructure, health, education, climate resilience and regional cooperation. However, the Committee recognises that these opportunities must be carefully considered against the legal, constitutional, financial and strategic implications of the commitments Fiji may assume upon ratification.

In undertaking its review, the Committee examined the provisions of both treaties, the accompanying Written Analysis and submissions received from Government Ministries and Agencies, stakeholders and members of the public. The Committee's deliberations identified substantive concerns specific to each treaty, particularly regarding the preservation of Fiji's sovereignty, independent foreign policy, national security, institutional accountability and long-term development interests.

In relation to the **Fiji-Australia Vuvale Union**, the Committee acknowledges its potential to strengthen economic cooperation, infrastructure development, education, health services, climate resilience and people-to-people relations. However, concerns were raised regarding the implications of closer economic and institutional integration, Fiji's ability to maintain independent relationships with other development partners, the protection of critical infrastructure and sovereign data, and the transparency of the proposed ten-year Work Plan and financial commitments. The Committee further notes concerns regarding the sustainability of development assistance, the distinction between grants and loans, and the need for clear implementation responsibilities, measurable outcomes and parliamentary oversight. While the term *Vuvale* reflects family, trust and mutual responsibility, the Committee considers it essential that the partnership recognise the differences in economic capacity between Fiji and Australia and ensure that cooperation does not create disproportionate dependence or undermine Fiji's sovereign decision-making.

In relation to the **Ocean of Peace Alliance *('Veitacini Treaty')***, the Committee expresses particular concern regarding the interpretation and potential implications of mutual defence obligations, visiting forces arrangements, foreign military presence, intelligence sharing, third-party security engagements and the protection of Fiji's constitutional authority over defence and national security decisions. The Committee emphasises the need for clear legal and operational safeguards concerning military deployments, jurisdiction, accountability, environmental protection and parliamentary scrutiny of future defence arrangements. The Committee also recognises concerns regarding the potential implications of the Treaty for Fiji's independent and non-aligned foreign policy, particularly its ability to maintain balanced relationships with other international partners. While *Veitacini* reflects kinship and mutual respect, the Committee considers that defence cooperation must preserve equality between the Parties and must not expose Fiji to security commitments or strategic obligations that are inconsistent with its national interests.

Regarding the treaty process, negotiations and safeguards, the Committee considers it important to formally record procedural gaps identified during its review. The Committee expresses concern that, despite the Office of the Solicitor-General being invited to engage with the Committee for over a month and subsequently being provided with written questions, no response has been received to date, thereby limiting the Committee's ability to obtain authoritative legal clarification on significant provisions of the treaties.

The Committee further notes concerns regarding the limited involvement of relevant divisions within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and External Trade in the treaty process and the absence of comprehensive public consultation before the treaties were signed. These matters underscore the importance of strengthening legal scrutiny, inter-agency coordination, institutional accountability and meaningful engagement with traditional and community leaders, civil society organisations, faith-based organisations, youth and other relevant stakeholders in the formulation of international agreements.

The Committee further emphasises that both treaties must be considered within the broader context of Fiji's Foreign Policy White Paper, its longstanding commitment to being friends to all and enemies to none, and its leadership in advancing the Blue Pacific Ocean of Peace Declaration. The Committee considers it essential that Fiji maintain an independent foreign policy, diversify its international partnerships and undertake comprehensive assessments of the long-term strategic implications of both treaties, including potential future security scenarios. The Committee maintains that lasting peace and regional stability must be supported by sustainable development, strengthened national institutions and the ability of Pacific Island countries to determine their own futures.

The Committee also identified drafting and editorial inconsistencies in the treaty documents that warrant attention. These include a typographical error in the signature block, which reads "FOR THE GOVERNMENT OF THE OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI", the absence of a definition of "Party" despite the distinction between signatories and acceding States under Article 12, and the failure to clearly identify the signatories to both the Veitacini Treaty, and the Fiji–Australia Vuvale Union. While these may appear to be technical matters, they raise concerns regarding the adequacy of legal scrutiny, proofreading and quality assurance undertaken before the treaties were finalised and signed. The Committee emphasises the importance of ensuring that international agreements undergo rigorous legal and editorial review to safeguard their clarity, accuracy and integrity, particularly given their potential legal and policy implications for Fiji.

Accordingly, the Committee recommends that Parliament defer approval of the ratification of both treaties in their present form and that the Government undertake further negotiations with Australia to address the concerns identified in this Report. The Committee emphasises that deferral does not constitute rejection of the treaties or Fiji's longstanding friendship with Australia. Rather, it provides an opportunity to secure appropriate legal safeguards, clarify treaty obligations, disclose implementation arrangements and strengthen mechanisms for parliamentary scrutiny and democratic accountability. The Committee maintains that Fiji can remain a trusted friend and development partner

of Australia while preserving its sovereignty, constitutional authority and independence in determining its foreign policy and national security priorities.

On behalf of the Committee, I extend my appreciation to the Government Ministries and Agencies, organisations and members of the public who contributed to this review through their submissions and engagement. I also acknowledge the dedication and commitment of Committee Members in undertaking this important examination.

On behalf of the Committee, I submit this report to Parliament for its consideration.



……..
Hon. Lenora QEREQERETABUA
Chairperson

RECOMMENDATION

The Committee recommends that the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji defer approval of the ratification of the Fiji-Australia Vuvale Union and the Ocean of Peace Alliance *('Veitacini Treaty')* and that the Government undertake further negotiations with Australia to address the concerns identified in this Report.

1.0 Committee Remit and Composition

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



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



Hon. Rinesh Sharma
Deputy Chairperson



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



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



Hon. Virendra Lal
Member



Hon. Taito Rokomatu
Member

1.1 Committee Secretariat Team

The Committee is supported by Parliament officers serving as the Committee Secretariat. These officers are appointed and delegated by the Secretary-General to Parliament by Standing Order 15(3)(i). The Secretariat officers are as follows:

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

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2.0 Background and Terms of Reference

2.1 Review of the Treaties

2.1.1 On 17 August 2026, the Acting Attorney-General moved a motion to refer the Fiji-Australia Vuvale Union and Ocean of Peace Alliance *('Veitacini Treaty')* to the Committee for review. In compliance with Standing Order 130(2), the Speaker of Parliament ("Speaker") received copies of both treaties and written analysis. Subsequently, pursuant to Standing Order 130(3), the Speaker referred the treaties to the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence for consideration and review, and to report to Parliament no later than 30 days from the date of referral.

2.1.2 The Committee is responsible for reviewing matters concerning Fiji's international relations, development assistance, foreign direct investment, national security oversight, and engagement with multilateral organisations.

2.2 Procedure and Program

2.2.1 Following the referral, the Committee commenced its review of the Fiji–Australia Vuvale Union and the Ocean of Peace Alliance *('Veitacini Treaty')* and received written and in-person submissions from relevant Government Ministries and Agencies, stakeholders and members of the public. Given the significance of the two treaties and their potential implications for Fiji, the Committee considered it necessary to allow sufficient time for comprehensive scrutiny and meaningful public consultation.

2.2.2 In this regard, the Committee resolved to seek an extension of the reporting period to enable further engagement with relevant stakeholders, consideration of additional submissions and thorough deliberation on the matters raised. Accordingly, the Committee submitted a formal request to the Honourable Speaker of Parliament seeking an extension of time to table its review report during the November 2026 sitting of Parliament.

The Honourable Speaker subsequently approved the Committee's request for an extension, allowing the Committee additional time to complete its review and ensure that its findings and recommendations were informed by a comprehensive assessment of the treaties and the submissions received.

2.2.3 On 27 August 2026, the Committee published a call for public submissions on the Fiji–Australia Vuvale Union and the Ocean of Peace Alliance ('Veitacini Treaty') through the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji's official website and Facebook page, inviting stakeholders, civil society organisations and members of the public to provide their views for the Committee's consideration. The initial deadline for submissions was 9 September 2026. Following the Committee's request for an extension of its review period, the deadline for written submissions was subsequently extended to Friday, 2 October 2026, to provide interested parties with additional time to contribute to the review of both treaties.

2.2.4 The Committee invited the following stakeholders for face-to-face submissions:

1. Office of the Prime Minister
2. Joint submission from the Ministry of Defence, the Republic of the Fiji Military Forces and the Fiji Navy
3. Joint submission from the Ministry of Policing and Communications and the Fiji Police Force
4. Ministry of Foreign Affairs and External Trade
5. Ministry of Health and Medical Services
6. Joint submission from the Ministry of Public Works, Meteorological Services and Transport, Water Authority of Fiji (WAF), Fiji Roads Authority (FRA), Land Transport Authority (LTA) and Maritime Safety Authority of Fiji (MSAF)
7. Ministry of Education
8. Ministry of Environment and Climate Change
9. Joint submission from the Ministry of Youth and Sports, Fiji Rugby Union, Fiji Football Association and Fiji Association of Sports and National Olympic Committee (FASANOC)
10. Higher Education Commission
11. Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development, and Disaster Management
12. Ministry of Immigration
13. Ministry of Finance
14. Fiji Revenue and Customs

2.2.5 The following appeared before the Committee after the call for submissions:

1. Fiji Council of Social Services
2. Transparency and Integrity Fiji
3. Laisa Digitaki and Natasha Digitaki Weleilakeba

2.2.6 The Committee received written submissions from the following:

Submission in their personal capacity	Organisational Submission
1. Laisa Digitaki and Natasha Digitaki Weleilakeba 2. Savenaca Siwatibau Waqa 3. Joint submission from Romitesh Kant, Mereoni Chung, Epeli Lesuma and Jason Titifanue 4. Moimoi Baleilevuka 5. Jope Tarai 6. James Sowane 7. Reg Sandy	1. Business Analysis and Solutions 2. Provision Global Solution 3. Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN) 4. Fiji Medical Association 5. NAYADRA Maritime Intelligence Limited 6. Tertiary Scholarship and Loans Board 7. Pacific Polytech

2.2.7 A summary of the submission is provided in a later part of this report, under the heading 'Committee's Deliberation and Analysis'. Copies of the written submission can be obtained from the online Appendices of the report, which can be accessed from the Parliament website: www.parliament.gov.fj

3.0 Review of the Fiji-Australia Vuvale Union and Ocean of Peace Alliance *('Veitacini Treaty')*

3.1 Overview of the Treaties

The Fiji–Australia Vuvale Union and the Ocean of Peace Alliance, also known as the *'Veitacini Treaty'*, are two bilateral treaties between the Government of the Republic of Fiji and the Government of Australia, signed in Suva on 6 July 2026.

The treaties seek to strengthen the longstanding relationship between Fiji and Australia by establishing a formal framework for cooperation in areas of mutual interest, including sovereignty, defence, security, economic development, climate resilience and regional stability.

Both treaties are founded on shared democratic values, mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, and the principles of the *Blue Pacific Ocean of Peace Declaration*, endorsed by Pacific Islands Forum Leaders in 2025. They also reflect the expanded concept of regional security under the *Boe Declaration on Regional Security* and the objectives of the *2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent*.

The Written Analysis, which was tabled in Parliament alongside the Fiji-Australia Vuvale Union and the Ocean of Peace Alliance *('Veitacini Treaty')*, outlined the background and circumstances leading to the development of the two treaties. According to the Written Analysis, the treaties emerged from discussions between the Governments of Fiji and Australia aimed at elevating the existing Vuvale Partnership into a formal treaty relationship. The initiative was advanced by Fiji in June 2025, followed by a proposal in January 2026 to establish a defence alliance between the two countries.

The Written Analysis further explained that, while the two treaties are complementary, they establish distinct frameworks for bilateral cooperation. The Fiji-Australia Vuvale Union provides a broader framework encompassing economic prosperity, people-to-people relations, climate security and Pacific regionalism, whereas the Veitacini Treaty establishes specific commitments relating to defence cooperation, mutual security and responses to external threats.

3.1.1 Fiji-Australia Vuvale Union

The Fiji–Australia Vuvale Union is a bilateral treaty intended to strengthen and formalise the existing Vuvale Partnership between Fiji and Australia.

The term *Vuvale*, meaning family in the Fijian language, reflects the principles of trust, loyalty, duty, respect, understanding and responsibility underpinning the relationship between the two countries.

The Treaty comprises eleven (11) Articles and seeks to establish a long-term partnership based on shared interests, mutual accountability and cooperation.

Article 1 outlines three principal purposes:

a. To embed and operationalise the Blue Pacific Ocean of Peace Declaration as a cornerstone of the Parties' partnership;

b. To establish a Vuvale Union to enhance the Parties' collective security, stability and prosperity; and

c. To protect and promote each Party's sovereignty and democracy, and the solidarity of the Pacific region.

Under Article 2, Fiji and Australia commit to progressively deepen their partnership by strengthening prosperity and resilience, enhancing cultural and people-to-people connections, advancing climate security and cultivating a sustainable culture of peace.

The Treaty further recognises the importance of inclusive economic development, reliable infrastructure, secure digital systems, improved border management, climate action and cooperation in addressing emerging security threats.

It establishes institutional arrangements through the Vuvale Forum and Vuvale Bukmak to oversee the progressive implementation of the Treaty and facilitate consultation and decision-making between the Parties.

The Vuvale Union is intended to provide an enduring framework for cooperation, with implementation arrangements capable of evolving in response to the changing priorities and circumstances of both countries.

3.1.2 Ocean of Peace Alliance *('Veitacini Treaty')*

The Ocean of Peace Alliance, also known as the *'Veitacini Treaty'*, is a bilateral defence and security treaty between Fiji and Australia.

The Treaty comprises sixteen (16) Articles and seeks to formalise the two countries' longstanding defence relationship, which the Written Analysis traces to their shared military history and cooperation since the First World War.

Article 1 establishes the purpose of the Treaty as recognising and affirming the commitment between the Parties to protect their sovereignty, secure their mutual defence and security interests, and contribute to the stability and security of the Pacific.

The Treaty is founded on shared democratic values, respect for sovereignty, the peaceful settlement of international disputes and adherence to the Charter of the United Nations.

A central provision is Article 6, which recognises that an armed attack against either Party within the Pacific would endanger the peace and security of both Parties and the wider Pacific region. The Article provides that each Party would act to meet the common danger in accordance with its domestic processes.

The Treaty also provides for continuous defence cooperation, consultation in response to security-related developments, visiting forces arrangements and the establishment of governance mechanisms to facilitate implementation.

The Veitacini Treaty further allows other Pacific States to accede to the Treaty, subject to the unanimous consent and acceptance of the existing Parties.

The Treaty is intended to strengthen Fiji's defence capabilities, improve coordination in responding to regional security threats and support the broader objective of maintaining a peaceful and stable Pacific region.

3.2 Amendments and Reservations

According to the Written Analysis, the two treaties contain provisions governing amendments, although their respective procedures differ.

Fiji–Australia Vuvale Union

Article 9 provides that the Treaty may be amended in writing by mutual consent of both Parties.

Any amendment enters into force on the date of the last notification confirming that the Parties have completed their respective requirements for the amendment to enter into force, unless the Parties mutually agree to a retrospective date.

The Treaty does not contain an express provision governing reservations.

Ocean of Peace Alliance *('Veitacini Treaty')*

Article 16 provides that, after the Treaty has been in force for ten (10) years, the Parties may consult to review its provisions, having regard to the prevailing peace and security circumstances in the Pacific.

Following such consultations, the Treaty may be amended through mutual agreement in writing.

Amendments enter into force on the date on which the last Party deposits its instrument of ratification with the Depositary.

The Veitacini Treaty does not contain an express provision governing reservations.

Accordingly, while both treaties provide mechanisms for amendment through agreement between the Parties, the Vuvale Union allows amendments by mutual consent without a specified waiting period, whereas the Veitacini Treaty expressly provides for a review process after ten years.

3.3 Features of the Treaties

The two treaties establish complementary frameworks for cooperation between Fiji and Australia.

Fiji–Australia Vuvale Union

The principal features of the Vuvale Union include:

a. **Prosperity and People (Article 3):** Promotes inclusive economic development, economic integration, secure digital transformation, improved education and healthcare, gender equality, cultural exchanges and greater mobility between the two countries.
b. **Climate and Peace (Article 4):** Provides for cooperation in addressing climate change, transnational crime, illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, cybersecurity, critical infrastructure protection, defence and border security.
c. **Pacific Regionalism (Article 5):** Supports Pacific-led approaches to regional cooperation, strengthens the role of the Pacific Islands Forum and provides for the establishment of an Ocean of Peace Centre in Suva in consultation with Pacific Islands Forum Members.
d. **Vuvale Forum (Article 6):** Establishes a high-level bilateral forum co-chaired by the Ministers responsible for Foreign Affairs of both countries. The Forum is responsible for guiding the progressive development of the Vuvale Union and making decisions through consensus.
e. **Vuvale Bukmak (Article 7):** Establishes a senior officials' mechanism responsible for developing, maintaining and overseeing a phased, long-term Vuvale Union Work Plan.
f. **Settlement of Disputes (Article 8):** Provides for disputes concerning the interpretation, application or implementation of the Treaty to be resolved through the Vuvale Forum or Vuvale Bukmak. Disputes are not to be referred to national or international tribunals or other third parties.
g. **Amendment, Entry into Force and Termination (Articles 9 and 10):** Establishes the procedures for amending, commencing and terminating the Treaty.
h. **Supplementary Instruments (Article 11):** Allows the Parties to enter into subsidiary agreements and implementing arrangements, with the provisions of the Treaty prevailing in the event of inconsistency.

Ocean of Peace Alliance *('Veitacini Treaty')*

The principal features of the Veitacini Treaty include:

a. **Democratic Values (Article 2):** Affirms the Parties' commitment to free and democratic institutions as the foundation of their defence relationship.
b. **Peaceful Settlement of Disputes (Article 3):** Requires the Parties to settle international disputes through peaceful means consistent with the Charter of the United Nations.
c. **Defence Cooperation (Article 4):** Provides for continuous cooperation to strengthen the Parties' individual and collective capacity to protect their sovereignty and deter and resist external threats and armed attacks.

d. **Consultation (Article 5):** Requires consultation at the request of either Party when security-related developments threaten the sovereignty, peace or stability of a Party.
e. **Mutual Defence (Article 6):** Recognises that an armed attack against either Party within the Pacific would endanger their collective peace and security and provides for action to address the common danger in accordance with domestic processes.
f. **Visiting Forces (Article 7):** Provides for the development and maintenance of bilateral and multilateral visiting forces agreements and arrangements to support defence cooperation and activities under the Treaty.
g. **Governance (Article 8):** Requires the Parties to determine appropriate consultation mechanisms to support implementation and decision-making.
h. **United Nations Charter (Article 9):** Preserves the Parties' rights and obligations under the Charter of the United Nations.
i. **Performance of Obligations (Article 10):** Requires the Parties to act consistently with their obligations under the Treaty and provides for consultation where inconsistencies arise with other existing agreements.
j. **Dispute Resolution (Article 11):** Requires disputes concerning the Treaty to be resolved through consultation and negotiations in good faith, without referral to a court, tribunal or other third party.
k. **Ratification, Accession and Depositary (Articles 12 and 13):** Establishes procedures for ratification, accession by other Pacific States and the appointment of Australia as Depositary.
l. **Entry into Force, Duration, Withdrawal and Amendment (Articles 14 to 16):** Establishes procedures for commencement, withdrawal and amendment of the Treaty.

3.4 Requirements for Implementation within a Signatory State

According to the Written Analysis, implementation of the two treaties requires Fiji and Australia to complete their respective domestic requirements before the treaties enter into force.

Fiji–Australia Vuvale Union

Article 10 requires each Party to complete its respective requirements for the Treaty to enter into force and notify the other Party in writing through an exchange of diplomatic notes.

Following entry into force, the Parties are required to establish the institutional arrangements provided under Articles 6 and 7, namely the Vuvale Forum and Vuvale Bukmak.

The Vuvale Forum is required to meet annually, as otherwise agreed, or within two weeks of a written request by either Party. The Vuvale Bukmak is subject to similar meeting arrangements and is responsible for developing, maintaining and overseeing the implementation of a phased, long-term Work Plan.

The Parties may also establish subsidiary agreements and implementing arrangements to facilitate the operation of the Treaty.

Ocean of Peace Alliance *('Veitacini Treaty')*

Article 12 provides that the Treaty is subject to ratification by the Signatories.

Article 14 requires the instruments of ratification to be deposited with the Government of Australia, which serves as the Depositary under Article 13.

Following entry into force, implementation will involve the development of consultation mechanisms under Article 8 and bilateral or multilateral visiting forces agreements and arrangements under Article 7, as necessary to facilitate defence cooperation.

The Treaty also provides that actions taken in response to an armed attack under Article 6 must be in accordance with each Party's domestic processes.

The accompanying Written Analysis identifies implementation priorities including defence capacity-building, intelligence sharing, maritime surveillance, cybersecurity, border management and critical infrastructure protection.

It further states that Fiji will provide resourcing support for capital investment programmes through its annual budgeting process, while longer-term Australian budget planning is envisaged to support infrastructure, technical assistance and capability development.

The Written Analysis refers to an agreed ten-year Work Plan, intended to guide resourcing and implementation across priority sectors, while allowing adjustments to emerging needs.

3.5 Entry into force

The two treaties contain different procedures governing their entry into force.

Fiji–Australia Vuvale Union

Article 10(1) provides that the Treaty enters into force on the date of receipt of the last written notification exchanged through diplomatic notes confirming that the Parties have completed their respective requirements for entry into force.

The Treaty continues indefinitely unless terminated in accordance with Article 10.

The Parties may agree in writing to terminate the Treaty at any time, with termination taking effect on an agreed date.

Alternatively, either Party may terminate the Treaty by providing written notice to the other Party, with termination becoming effective twenty-four (24) months after receipt of the notice.

Ocean of Peace Alliance *('Veitacini Treaty')*

Article 14(1) provides that the Treaty enters into force on the date the second instrument of ratification is deposited with the Government of Australia.

The Treaty remains in force indefinitely unless a Party withdraws in accordance with Article 15.

A Party may withdraw by providing written notice to the Depositary, with withdrawal becoming effective twelve (12) months after the date of the notice.

The withdrawal of one Party does not terminate the Treaty for any remaining Parties.

The Treaty also provides for accession by other Pacific States, subject to unanimous consent and acceptance by the existing Parties.

3.6 Anticipated Benefits of the Agreement

The Written Analysis identifies a range of anticipated benefits arising from the implementation of the two treaties.

These benefits encompass economic development, defence and security cooperation, institutional strengthening, climate resilience and regional integration.

Economic Development and Infrastructure

The Vuvale Union is expected to support Fiji's long-term economic development through increased cooperation in trade, investment, infrastructure financing, economic diversification and digital transformation.

The Written Analysis identifies opportunities for Australian support in the development and upgrading of key infrastructure, including hospitals, airports, ports, energy systems and transport facilities.

It also outlines potential cooperation in agricultural diversification, improved market access, biosecurity standards and the development of higher-value agricultural products.

Defence and Security Capacity

The Veitacini Treaty is intended to strengthen Fiji's defence and security capabilities through closer military cooperation, professional training, skills development, intelligence sharing and improved operational readiness.

The Written Analysis identifies opportunities for enhanced maritime surveillance, air capability, border protection, cybersecurity and the protection of critical infrastructure.

Cooperation in addressing transnational organised crime, illegal fishing, drug trafficking, people smuggling and other emerging security threats is also identified as a priority.

Health and Education

The Written Analysis outlines potential opportunities for cooperation in improving health infrastructure, strengthening Fiji's health workforce and exploring specialised medical referral arrangements.

It also identifies opportunities for skills development, professional training and education cooperation.

Climate Change and Disaster Resilience

The Vuvale Union provides a framework for enhanced climate cooperation, including climate adaptation, resilience-building, disaster preparedness and the transition towards net-zero emissions.

The Written Analysis further identifies opportunities to strengthen access to climate adaptation financing and improve the resilience of vulnerable communities and infrastructure.

People-to-People Connections

The treaties are expected to strengthen cultural, social and professional connections between Fiji and Australia.

The Vuvale Union identifies opportunities for improved mobility arrangements, cultural exchanges and closer cooperation involving traditional, religious, community and business leaders.

Pacific Regional Cooperation

Both treaties seek to strengthen Pacific regionalism and support Pacific-led responses to regional challenges.

The establishment of an Ocean of Peace Centre in Suva under Article 5(2) of the Vuvale Union is intended to support the implementation of the Blue Pacific Ocean of Peace Declaration in consultation with Pacific Islands Forum Members.

The treaties are also intended to strengthen Fiji and Australia's contribution to regional peace, stability and security.

4.0 Committee Deliberation and Analysis

4.1 Submissions

The Committee received written and in-person submissions from stakeholders as listed in 2.2.3.

4.2 Summary of Evidence received

Below is a summary of the information received from stakeholders in relation to the treaties.

4.2.1 Fiji-Australia Vuvale Union Submissions

4.2.1.1 The **Office of the Prime Minister (OPM)** submitted that the Fiji–Australia Vuvale Union represents a significant development in Fiji–Australia relations and is intended to provide a long-term framework for cooperation founded on partnership, integration and regionalism. The Vuvale Union is structured around the three pillars of security, economy and people, encompassing cooperation in areas including transnational organised crime, health, economic security, critical and climate-resilient infrastructure, digital transformation, education, skills and mobility. The OPM further submitted that the arrangement supports Fiji's long-term development aspirations, including a targeted annual economic growth rate of 6 per cent and progression towards high-income status by 2050, while strengthening Fiji's capacity to contribute to Pacific regionalism, security and prosperity. The OPM advised that negotiations commenced in November 2025 and concluded on 22 April 2026, with the OPM leading Fiji's negotiations in consultation with relevant Government Ministries, Agencies and security institutions. OPM acknowledged, however, that direct public consultation was not undertaken, with Government instead relying on individual Ministries to obtain inputs from their respective stakeholders and sectors. The Committee was informed that implementation would be supported by a ten-year workplan, comprising financial commitments, policy work, institutional strengthening and capacity development additional to existing cooperation under the Vuvale Partnership. The OPM advised that Australia had committed approximately FJD1.5 billion, comprising FJD1.05 billion in grants and FJD550 million in loans, across areas including transnational organised crime and illicit drugs, health, nation-building infrastructure, digital transition, economic diversification, skills and mobility, sport, cultural and faith-based cooperation, and the proposed Ocean of Peace Centre. Fiji's expenditure would remain subject to annual budgetary processes. Emphasis was placed on strengthening Fiji's capacity to combat transnational organised crime and improve border and maritime security through law-enforcement cooperation, information sharing, technological and institutional development, legislative reform and strengthened coordination.

The submission identified a range of Australian commitments, including:

- **$284 million (18.93%)** towards combating transnational crime and illicit drugs, including a proposed new police headquarters;
- **$158 million (10.53%)** for health, including Fiji's HIV response, health-system strengthening and support towards a new national hospital;
- **$23.5 million (1.57%)** in front-loaded support for the HIV response;
- **$228 million (15.20%) in grants and AUD550 million in loans** for nation-building infrastructure, including maritime infrastructure and climate adaptation;

- **$146 million (9.73%)** for digital transition, including upgrading digital infrastructure and the existing data centre;
- **$35 million (2.33%)** in additional sports cooperation;
- **more than $48 million (more than 3.20%)** for economic security and diversification, including high-value agriculture and agri-processing;
- **$87 million (5.80%)** for circular mobility and skills development;
- **$39 million (2.60%)** towards establishing an Ocean of Peace Centre; and
- **$15.5 million (1.03%)** for cultural and faith-based links and exchanges.

The submission also highlighted cooperation in health, port and maritime infrastructure, climate adaptation, digital government, cybersecurity, education and skills development.

In response to questions concerning sovereignty, third-party security arrangements, critical infrastructure, data sovereignty, dispute settlement and institutional accountability, the OPM maintained that Fiji would retain its sovereign decision-making authority and that the Vuvale Union would not prevent Fiji from maintaining bilateral relations or development partnerships with other States. The OPM emphasised that decisions would remain subject to Fiji's domestic processes and that disputes would principally be addressed through consultation, good faith, continued dialogue and the Pacific Way. The OPM also highlighted the proposed Vuvale Talanoa and Vuvale Bukmak arrangements as mechanisms through which traditional, religious, community and business representatives could contribute to consultations. The OPM acknowledged the importance of transparency, accountability, professional standards and institutional integrity within Fiji's security and border-management agencies and emphasised that the effectiveness of the Vuvale Union would ultimately depend on implementation, monitoring and capacity development. The OPM would maintain an oversight role in monitoring, evaluation and learning, with the overall objective of strengthening Fiji's national capability and its contribution to regional peace, security and development.

4.2.1.2 The joint submission from the **Ministry of Policing and Communications and the Fiji Police Force** presented that the Fiji–Australia Vuvale Union provides an important framework for strengthening Fiji's national security, policing, border protection and digital capability in response to increasingly complex threats, particularly transnational organised crime, illicit drugs, cyber threats and vulnerabilities affecting critical infrastructure. The Ministry identified the FJD284 million commitment towards combating transnational serious and organised crime and illicit drugs as a key component, supporting the Fiji Police Force, improved intelligence-led policing, digital forensics, surveillance, secure communications and strengthened border enforcement. The Committee was also informed of plans for a National Joint Enforcement Centre to coordinate intelligence and operations across Police, Customs, Immigration, the Counter-Narcotics Bureau, RFMF and other agencies. Australian assistance would further support a 10-year Fiji Police Force Uplift Programme focusing on leadership, human resources, ethics and integrity, operational capability, strategy and planning, together with proposals for a permanent Fiji Police Headquarters and a Centre of Excellence for Forensics.

The Ministry further submitted that the Vuvale Union would strengthen border, maritime, cybersecurity and digital capabilities. Proposed measures included improved container screening at Suva and Lautoka ports, passenger and cargo risk assessment, information sharing, modernised border-management systems and consideration of biometrics and greater interoperability amongst relevant border agencies. The Ministry also proposed strengthening the Maritime Essential Services Centre as a national maritime

surveillance and coordination hub and establishing Maritime Police Forward Operating Bases at Lakeba, Savusavu, Denarau and Levuka.

In relation to digital transformation, the Ministry advised that FJD146.3 million had been identified towards Fiji's digital transition, including strengthened national cybersecurity capability, development of comprehensive cybersecurity legislation and the proposed expansion of the National Computer Emergency Response Team into a National Cybersecurity Agency. The Ministry emphasised that digital cooperation should preserve Fiji's sovereignty, ownership and control of Government data. It also advised that comprehensive data-protection legislation was being developed, while no decision had been made on whether permanent disaster-recovery infrastructure would be in Australia.

The Ministry emphasised that implementation should be guided by four principles: sovereignty, constitutional responsibility, sustainability and measurable outcomes. It maintained that closer cooperation in policing, defence and border protection must respect Fiji's Constitution, domestic legislation and established institutional responsibilities. The Ministry acknowledged that while Australia could assist with infrastructure, technology and initial capability development, Fiji would ultimately need to provide the personnel, operational funding, maintenance, training and lifecycle replacement necessary to sustain these capabilities. It therefore stressed that the objective should not be permanent dependence on Australian assistance, but the progressive transfer and development of capability enabling Fijians to operate, sustain and lead the relevant systems.

Overall, the Ministry considered that the success of the Vuvale Union should be assessed not solely by the level of Australian financial assistance, but by whether it leaves Fiji with a professional and trusted Police Force, stronger capacity to dismantle organised criminal networks, secure borders and maritime approaches, resilient cybersecurity systems, protected critical infrastructure, sovereign Government data and sustainable national institutions and capabilities.

4.2.1.3 The **Ministry of Immigration** submitted that the Fiji–Australia Vuvale Union provides an important framework for strengthening Fiji's immigration, border-management and national-security capabilities, building on existing cooperation under the Vuvale Partnership. The Ministry identified transnational crime, identity and document fraud, irregular migration, people smuggling, trafficking and movements of persons of interest as key border risks and emphasised the need to balance stronger security with the efficient movement of legitimate travellers. Australian cooperation had already supported specialised training for Immigration Officers, document-forensic capability and development of the API-PNR arrangements. A key initiative is the Australian-funded MERIT Border Management System, which will replace the existing IBMS and support modernisation and digitalisation of Fiji's border-management processes. The Ministry advised that the MERIT system, including associated staff training, would be funded by Australia and ultimately owned and operated by the Fiji Government.

The Ministry further highlighted improvements in passenger risk assessment, document verification, information sharing and inter-agency border enforcement. The API-PNR capability would allow Immigration to assess passenger information before travellers boarded flights for Fiji, while Australian-provided document-forensic equipment had strengthened the Ministry's capacity to detect fraudulent travel documents. On data sovereignty, the Ministry maintained that the new border-management system would remain under Fiji Government ownership and would operate as a closed system without unauthorised external access. The Ministry also advised that the Vuvale Union would not prevent Fiji from engaging other international technology providers or applying its own procurement processes,

although interoperability and compliance with applicable ICAO standards would remain important. The Committee was further informed that improved coordination between Immigration, FRCS and other border agencies, including through the management of Departure Prohibition Orders, formed part of efforts to address existing enforcement gaps.

The Ministry emphasised that the long-term benefits of the Vuvale Union would depend on institutional capability and sustainability, particularly adequate staffing, specialised skills, ICT and cybersecurity infrastructure, maintenance and continued professional development. Australia would support the MERIT system through its implementation phases, with Immigration personnel to be trained to maintain the system thereafter; however, the Ministry acknowledged staff retention as an ongoing challenge.

On mobility, the Ministry clarified that the Vuvale Union did not guarantee visa-free or visa-on-arrival entry into Australia for Fijian citizens, although Fiji had sought greater reciprocity and enhanced visa arrangements during negotiations. The Ministry also maintained that domestic immigration law would remain relevant to immigration matters, while its evidence did not conclusively resolve the Committee's concerns regarding the operation of the Treaties' dispute-settlement provisions. Overall, the Ministry supported the Vuvale Union as a means of developing a more secure, efficient and technologically capable border-management system while retaining Fiji's ownership and control of its immigration systems and safeguarding national sovereignty.

4.2.1.4 The **Ministry of Foreign Affairs and External Trade** submitted that the Fiji–Australia Vuvale Union represents a significant milestone in Fiji's bilateral relations with Australia and provides a long-term framework for advancing cooperation while supporting wider Pacific regionalism. The Ministry advised that it had participated in the negotiations led by the Office of the Prime Minister to ensure that Fiji's sovereign interests and obligations were appropriately reflected. It further submitted that the Vuvale Union was consistent with Fiji's National Development Plan, the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent, the Ocean of Peace Declaration and Fiji's Pacific Family First approach. The Ministry emphasised that Fiji would continue to pursue its foreign policy of being "friends to all and enemies to none" and maintained that the Vuvale Union would not diminish Fiji's sovereign authority to engage with other bilateral partners or to raise matters of concern with Australia.

The Ministry informed the Committee that implementation would be undertaken through a 10-year Workplan, supported by the Vuvale Forum and Vuvale Bukmak as mechanisms for ministerial and senior-official engagement and oversight. The Workplan remained in draft form at the time of the submission and was intended to operate as a flexible framework capable of responding to emerging priorities. The Ministry highlighted proposed cooperation in health, economic security and diversification, digital transformation, maritime capability, transnational organised crime, education, skills and mobility, and stressed that effective implementation would require a coordinated whole-of-government approach. It further advised that the proposed Ocean of Peace Centre would be progressed through Pacific Islands Forum processes.

Regarding consultation on the Treaties, the Ministry stated that Ministers and Permanent Secretaries had participated in high-level consultations and confirmed that the Office of the Solicitor-General had been involved during the negotiations, while the Committee raised concerns regarding the extent of broader stakeholder and public consultation.

In relation to external trade, the Ministry clarified that the Vuvale Union is not a free-trade agreement and does not itself impose tariff commitments or require Fiji to accede to PACER Plus, which would remain subject to its own consultation and Government decision-making processes. The External Trade Unit further advised that it did not interpret the Vuvale Union as restricting Fiji to Australian suppliers or preventing engagement with third-country investors and technology providers, although investments involving critical infrastructure would require appropriate due diligence and consideration of Fiji's national interests, security and sovereignty.

The Ministry ultimately supported ratification of the Vuvale Union, submitting that it would strengthen Fiji's economic resilience, national security and contribution to Pacific regional integration, while emphasising that implementation should preserve Fiji's sovereign decision-making, strengthen domestic capacity and remain aligned with national development priorities.

4.2.1.5 The Committee received a submission from the **Ministry of Health and Medical Services (MHMS)**, which expressed its support for the Fiji–Australia Vuvale Union and Ocean of Peace Alliance *('Veitacini Treaty')*, particularly in relation to strengthening Fiji's healthcare system, public health security and emergency preparedness. The Ministry informed the Committee that a Health Workplan had been developed, focusing on three key priority areas, namely strengthening Fiji's response to the HIV epidemic, enhancing institutional partnerships with Australian hospitals and health agencies through specialist training and capacity building, and improving healthcare infrastructure, including the Colonial War Memorial (CWM) Hospital, St. Giles Hospital and the proposed new national referral hospital. The Ministry further emphasised that the implementation of these initiatives would be aligned with Fiji's national health priorities and existing planning and budgetary frameworks to ensure the sustainable delivery of healthcare services.

In its examination, the Committee sought clarification on several matters, including Fiji's sovereignty in healthcare decision-making, reliance on Australian financial assistance, procurement of affordable medicines and medical equipment from alternative international markets, and safeguards for the protection of confidential medical information. The Committee also raised concerns regarding the prioritisation of hospital infrastructure developments, transparency and accountability in the utilisation of funding, healthcare workforce migration and the need to strengthen primary healthcare services. In response, the Ministry assured the Committee that Fiji would continue to exercise authority over its healthcare policies, procurement arrangements and development priorities, while maintaining partnerships with other development partners. The Ministry further highlighted that cooperation with Australian health institutions would facilitate specialist medical services, professional development and knowledge transfer, thereby strengthen local healthcare capacity and improve access to specialised medical treatment.

4.2.1.6 The Committee received a joint submission from **the Ministry of Public Works, Meteorological Services and Transport (MPWMST), together with representatives from the Water Authority of Fiji (WAF), Fiji Roads Authority (FRA), Land Transport Authority (LTA) and Maritime Safety Authority of Fiji (MSAF).** The Ministry expressed its support for the Fiji–Australia Vuvale Union and Ocean of Peace Alliance *('Veitacini Treaty')*, particularly in strengthening cooperation in infrastructure development, transport connectivity, renewable energy, maritime services, meteorological services and climate resilience. The Ministry highlighted opportunities for Australian assistance in the development of roads, bridges, water and sanitation systems, rural electrification, maritime infrastructure and early warning systems. It further advised that the implementation of the treaties should be aligned with Fiji's

National Development Plan and existing sectoral strategies, with emphasis on sustainable financing, technical assistance, skills development and institutional capacity building.

During its examination, the Committee sought clarification on the Ministry's involvement in the treaty negotiations, the allocation of funding under the proposed 10-year development framework and the implications for Fiji's sovereignty and infrastructure development priorities. The Ministry advised that it had not been directly involved in the formulation of the treaties and that it had not received details of the proposed $1.5 billion assistance package or its allocation across sectors. The WAF informed the Committee that it had proposed water and wastewater infrastructure projects for the Nadi–Lautoka system, estimated at approximately FJ$500 million, although confirmation of their inclusion in the funding framework remained outstanding. Members also raised concerns regarding Fiji's ability to engage other development partners, the protection of meteorological data, procurement of technology, dispute resolution arrangements and the possible use of Fiji's ports by foreign military vessels. The Ministry advised that Fiji could continue to seek assistance from other development partners, while matters relating to treaty disputes and defence arrangements would require clarification from the relevant authorities.

The Committee further examined the Ministry's capacity to implement infrastructure projects, address workforce shortages and ensure the continuity of development programmes beyond the period of Australian assistance. Members raised concerns regarding the migration of skilled workers, infrastructure maintenance, climate-resilient construction standards, access to electricity and water, and regulatory barriers affecting private investment in renewable energy. The Ministry acknowledged existing technical and staffing constraints and highlighted the need for capacity building, legislative reviews and long-term infrastructure planning. The Ministry emphasised that cooperation under the treaties should focus on long-term programmes rather than individual projects, with clear implementation plans, sustainable funding and transfer of technical knowledge to strengthen Fiji's national capacity.

4.2.1.7 The Committee notes the **Ministry of Education's** support for the Fiji–Australia Vuvale Union and Ocean of Peace Alliance *('Veitacini Treaty')*, particularly in relation to education, technical and vocational training, digital learning and human capital development. However, the Committee raised concerns regarding the extent of consultation undertaken during the formulation of the treaties. While the Ministry confirmed that the Minister for Education had participated in discussions with Australian Government representatives, the Permanent Secretary advised that he had not been directly involved. The Committee also questioned the absence of specific education commitments within the broader provisions of the Vuvale Union and the need to ensure that education priorities are reflected in the proposed 10-year workplan.

The Committee further notes the proposed AUD29.5 million initiative to provide selected Fijian students access to Australian tertiary institutions at domestic-equivalent tuition rates, with implementation anticipated around 2029–2030. The Committee raised concerns regarding the potential impact of the Fiji–Australia Vuvale Union on Fiji's domestic education system. Committee Members questioned whether the Treaty could also provide opportunities to strengthen Fiji's own tertiary education institutions to meet international standards, thereby enabling Fiji to attract students from Australia and other Pacific countries. The Committee emphasised the importance of developing Fiji's education sector rather than placing greater emphasis on overseas study opportunities, which could contribute to the continued migration of skilled Fijians, particularly where graduates undertaking overseas studies may

not return to Fiji. In addition, the Committee examined the proposed establishment of TVET Centres of Excellence and the need for clear arrangements concerning ownership, governance, staffing, financing and long-term sustainability.

4.2.1.8 The Committee notes the **Ministry of Environment and Climate Change's** support for the Fiji–Australia Vuvale Union and the Ocean of Peace Alliance *('Veitacini Treaty')*, particularly their potential to strengthen bilateral cooperation in climate change, environmental protection, disaster resilience and sustainable development. The Ministry highlighted the proposed 10-year financial assistance package of more than FJD1.5 billion, comprising approximately FJD1.05 billion in grants and FJD550 million in loans, as an opportunity to support long-term climate adaptation and infrastructure development. However, the Committee raised concerns regarding Fiji's increasing dependence on external climate financing, the distinction between grants and loans, and the need to ensure that financial commitments translate into tangible benefits for communities. Members also questioned the differences between Fiji's and Australia's climate commitments, particularly Australia's continued reliance on fossil fuel production, and the extent to which the Treaty would support Fiji's climate ambitions. The Committee emphasised the importance of maintaining Fiji's independent position in international climate negotiations while utilising the consultation mechanisms under Article 4 of the Vuvale Union to advance national climate priorities.

The Committee further raised concerns regarding the adequacy of consultation with relevant Government Ministries and agencies during the formulation of the treaties and the need for clearly defined implementation arrangements under the proposed 10-year workplan. While the Ministry confirmed its participation in the negotiations, it acknowledged that detailed project allocations, sectoral responsibilities and implementation mechanisms remained to be determined through the Vuvale Bukmak. The Committee emphasised the importance of transparency and accountability in the management of treaty-related financial assistance, including clearly identifying project allocations, responsible agencies, expenditure, implementation timelines and measurable outcomes for affected communities. Members also questioned the dispute resolution provisions under Article 8(2) of the Vuvale Union, particularly the exclusion of third-party adjudication for disputes arising under the Treaty and sought clarification on the mechanisms available where bilateral consultations fail to resolve disagreements. In addition, the Committee examined the provisions concerning climate-induced displacement and mobility with dignity, noting the Ministry's clarification that the Treaty does not establish arrangements for the relocation of foreign populations into Fiji and that any future relocation arrangements would require appropriate legal, financial, environmental and cultural safeguards.

4.2.1.9 The Committee notes the submissions received from the **Ministry of Youth and Sports, Fiji Rugby Union, Fiji Football Association and FASANOC** regarding the potential implications of the Fiji–Australia Vuvale Union and Ocean of Peace Alliance *('Veitacini Treaty')* for Fiji's youth and sports sector. The Committee raised concerns regarding the absence of explicit references to youth and sports development in the substantive provisions of the Vuvale Union, notwithstanding the opportunities for bilateral cooperation in athlete development, sporting infrastructure, technical capacity building and economic participation. Members questioned whether meaningful outcomes could be achieved through the proposed 10-year workplan without specific recognition of youth and sports development in the Treaty. The Committee also questioned the extent of consultation undertaken with the Ministry of Youth and Sports during the formulation of the treaties. The Permanent Secretary acknowledged that the Ministry's involvement had been limited and emphasised the importance of ensuring that youth and

sports priorities were adequately represented in the implementation arrangements. The Committee considers that the proposed workplan should provide opportunities for meaningful engagement with the Ministry and relevant national sporting organisations to ensure that initiatives address the needs of Fiji's youth and sporting communities.

The Committee further noted concerns regarding disparities in funding, infrastructure and institutional support across Fiji's sporting disciplines. FASANOC highlighted that many Olympic and Paralympic sports continued to operate with limited financial resources, professional coaching, administrative capacity and access to high-performance facilities, despite Fiji's demonstrated international sporting potential. The Committee examined opportunities to strengthen athlete development pathways, including the proposed Fiji Institute of Sports, and the potential for existing partnerships, such as the Veimoana Rugby Partnership, to complement broader sporting development initiatives. Members also raised concerns regarding the migration of sporting talent and the need for appropriate athlete mobility arrangements. FASANOC proposed the establishment of a dedicated, long-term visa pathway to facilitate access to Australian training and competition environments for selected athletes, coaches and support personnel, particularly in preparation for the Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games. The Committee notes the importance of ensuring that international sporting opportunities contribute to the development of Fiji's domestic sporting institutions, while supporting athletes' professional development and continued participation in national teams.

The Committee also considered the broader economic and social opportunities arising from strengthened Fiji–Australia cooperation in sports, including sports tourism, employment, trade, investment and the hosting of international sporting events. FASANOC identified the Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games as an opportunity to strengthen Fiji's high-performance sporting system and facilitate greater participation by Fijian businesses in regional sporting activities and supply chains. The Committee further raised concerns regarding the potential duplication of existing sporting partnerships, the equitable allocation of resources across sporting disciplines and the need to preserve Fiji's ability to engage with other international sporting and commercial partners. The Ministry acknowledged the importance of strengthening governance, monitoring and evaluation arrangements to ensure accountability for sporting investments. The Committee considers that the implementation of the Vuvale Union should provide a coordinated and inclusive framework for youth and sports development, supported by clearly identified priorities, sustainable funding arrangements, institutional capacity building and measurable outcomes that contribute to Fiji's long-term social and economic development.

4.2.1.10 The **Ministry of Finance** expressed its support for the Fiji–Australia Vuvale Union and the Ocean of Peace Alliance *('Veitacini Treaty')*, highlighting their significance in strengthening Fiji's economic security, fiscal stability and development cooperation with Australia. The Ministry informed the Committee that the treaties formalise the longstanding bilateral relationship between the two countries and provide a framework for addressing critical national priorities, including infrastructure development, climate resilience, health services, transnational crime, economic diversification and supply chain security. The Ministry further highlighted Australia's commitment of approximately FJD1.5 billion over a ten-year period, comprising grants and concessional loans, which would provide greater predictability in development financing and assist the Government in planning and implementing priority projects. It emphasised that the grant component would provide fiscal relief without increasing public debt, while the broader financing arrangements could facilitate additional investment from multilateral development partners.

In response to the Committee's questions regarding consultation and implementation arrangements, the Ministry clarified that the treaty negotiations were led by the Office of the Prime Minister, with the involvement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and External Trade, the Ministry of Finance and other relevant government agencies. The Ministry confirmed that the ten-year implementation workplan remained in draft form and would be further developed in consultation with the respective implementing ministries and agencies. It explained that the proposed projects were aligned with Fiji's National Development Plan and that specific projects would be implemented through separate agreements and arrangements. The Ministry also assured the Committee that the financing would be administered through Fiji's established national financial management systems, including budget appropriations, procurement procedures, financial reporting and parliamentary oversight. In addressing concerns regarding Fiji's dependence on external assistance, the Ministry maintained that the proposed financing would complement domestic resources rather than create excessive dependence on Australia, noting that the annual financing represented approximately 2 to 3 percent of Fiji's overall financing envelope.

The Ministry also responded to questions concerning the economic benefits and financial implications of specific treaty commitments. Regarding the proposed redevelopment of the Walu Bay shipbuilding facilities, the Ministry advised that the initiative remained at the feasibility and due diligence stage, with further assessments required to determine its commercial viability and long-term sustainability. In relation to the Ocean of Peace Alliance, the Ministry confirmed that FJD39 million had been earmarked for the establishment of the Ocean of Peace Centre in Suva, while its ongoing operational costs would need to be accommodated through the normal national budgetary process. On trade and investment, the Ministry acknowledged Fiji's existing trade deficit with Australia and emphasised that investments in infrastructure, agribusiness, agri-processing and economic diversification could strengthen Fiji's export capacity and competitiveness. It further clarified that there were no explicit requirements for Fiji to procure Australian goods or services under the financing arrangements and that procurement would be undertaken through established government procedures. The Ministry also advised that Fiji continued to undertake consultations regarding potential participation in PACER Plus but had not signed the agreement.

The Ministry further emphasised that the benefits of the treaties extended beyond their direct financial commitments, particularly through strengthening Fiji's capacity to respond to natural disasters, protect critical infrastructure and address emerging threats such as illicit drugs, HIV and transnational crime. It maintained that cooperation with Australia in these areas would contribute to economic resilience, protect livelihoods and support private sector development. The Ministry also advised that the treaty framework provided flexibility for continued engagement and adjustments to development priorities over the ten-year implementation period. The Committee noted the Ministry's responses, particularly the assurances concerning financial accountability, the use of national systems and the proposed economic benefits.

However, the responses also highlighted matters requiring further clarification during implementation, including the finalisation of the ten-year workplan, the financial sustainability of the Ocean of Peace Centre, the completion of infrastructure feasibility assessments and the need to ensure that the proposed investments deliver measurable economic and development outcomes for Fiji.

4.2.1.11 The **Fiji Revenue and Customs Service (FRCS)** expressed its support for the Fiji–Australia Vuvale Union and the Ocean of Peace Alliance *('Veitacini Treaty')*, highlighting their importance in strengthening Fiji's border security, customs administration, revenue protection and efforts to combat

transnational crime. FRCS informed the Committee that the treaties would provide a strategic framework for enhancing cooperation with the Australian Border Force, particularly in maritime surveillance, intelligence sharing, cargo screening, digital transformation and institutional capacity building. The Service outlined existing assistance received from Australia under the Joint Forward Work Programme 2025–2026, including the provision of two littoral vessels, specialised maritime and intelligence training, 46 CCTV cameras at Nadi International Airport, support for container inspection facilities in Suva and Lautoka, and improvements in customs enforcement and compliance systems. FRCS further highlighted the proposed ten-year development financing arrangement, which includes allocations towards combating transnational crime, strengthening cybersecurity, modernising border management systems and improving economic and supply chain resilience. The Service emphasised that these initiatives would enhance Fiji's ability to detect illicit activities, facilitate legitimate trade and travel, and protect national revenue.

In response to the Committee's questions, FRCS emphasised the importance of safeguarding Fiji's sovereignty, maintaining the confidentiality of taxpayer and traveller information, and ensuring that cooperation with Australia remains consistent with Fiji's domestic laws and national interests. The Service advised that it was working with the Office of the Solicitor-General to establish appropriate data protection safeguards and clarified that customs concessions for visiting foreign military forces would be subject to applicable government approvals and bilateral arrangements rather than automatically granted in all circumstances. Regarding Article 11(1) of the Veitacini Treaty, which restricts the referral of disputes to national or international courts or tribunals, FRCS indicated that alternative dispute resolution arrangements could be considered, although specific mechanisms had not been finalised.

FRCS also acknowledged challenges relating to the retention of specialised personnel, the sustainability of surveillance infrastructure and the need for succession planning and operational continuity should treaty arrangements change or cease. In addressing concerns regarding individuals departing Fiji despite outstanding tax liabilities, FRCS advised that improvements were being made to interagency coordination, including enabling the direct uploading of departure prohibition orders into the new border management system. FRCS maintained that the successful implementation of both treaties would require clear institutional responsibilities, sustainable funding, appropriate safeguards and measurable outcomes to ensure that the cooperation delivers lasting benefits for Fiji's border security, economic resilience and national sovereignty.

4.2.1.12 The submission from **Transparency and Integrity Fiji (TIF)** acknowledged the potential benefits of the Fiji–Australia Vuvale Union and the Ocean of Peace Alliance *('Veitacini Treaty')* in strengthening bilateral cooperation, economic development, national security and regional stability. However, the organisation emphasised the importance of transparency, accountability, good governance and effective anti-corruption safeguards throughout the implementation of both treaties. TIF identified potential corruption risks associated with infrastructure development, climate adaptation, security cooperation, healthcare, digital transformation, education and economic development, particularly in relation to procurement fraud, misuse of public funds, bribery, conflicts of interest, favouritism, nepotism and money laundering. The organisation submitted ten recommendations aimed at strengthening governance and integrity, including enhanced e-procurement oversight, mandatory declarations of assets and financial interests by public officials, comprehensive due diligence and beneficial ownership disclosure requirements for contractors, whistleblower protection mechanisms, transparent and merit-based recruitment, and strengthened monitoring and evaluation of development projects. TIF further

recommended regular site inspections, capacity-building programmes and mandatory ethics and anti-corruption training for officials responsible for implementing treaty-related activities to ensure that development assistance is utilised effectively and delivers meaningful benefits to the people of Fiji.

In response to the Committee's questions, TIF confirmed that it had not been consulted during the formulation of the treaties, although representatives of the Australian High Commission subsequently provided information to assist the organisation in preparing its submission. TIF recognised the potential economic and development benefits of the treaties but expressed concern regarding whether the financial commitments would translate into tangible improvements for grassroots communities. The organisation emphasised that public consultation should extend beyond procedural requirements and that recommendations from civil society organisations (CSOs) should be meaningfully considered in government policies and development programmes.

TIF further highlighted the importance of strengthening collaboration between Government and CSOs, particularly through information sharing, joint monitoring and evaluation, and the utilisation of community-level data to assess the actual impact of development projects. It noted that the absence of formal mechanisms for sharing information could result in duplication of activities, inefficient resource allocation and gaps in service delivery. Regarding educational opportunities under the Vuvale Union, TIF recommended transparent selection criteria and mandatory conflict-of-interest declarations to prevent favouritism and nepotism. The organisation maintained that effective oversight, inclusive consultation and stronger institutional accountability would be essential to safeguarding Fiji's national interests and ensuring that the implementation of both treaties produces equitable, sustainable and measurable benefits for communities throughout Fiji.

4.2.1.13 The **Fiji Council of Social Services (FCOSS)** presented its submission on the Fiji–Australia Vuvale Union and the Ocean of Peace Alliance *('Veitacini Treaty')*, assessing the agreements against its People's Resolution for Effective Development Cooperation, developed through national and regional consultations with civil society organisations (CSOs), social entrepreneurs and community leaders in 2022. FCOSS acknowledged the treaties' potential to strengthen bilateral cooperation, regional security, economic development and institutional coordination. However, it identified five key areas requiring further consideration: institutionalising mutual accountability; strengthening communication and information sharing; supporting national coordination mechanisms and local systems; reinforcing family-centred approaches to wellbeing and resilience; and creating pathways for social enterprises and women's economic participation in disaster recovery. FCOSS expressed concern that the treaties primarily focused on government-to-government cooperation without sufficiently providing for independent monitoring, public accountability, grassroots participation or direct support for local communities. It further highlighted the absence of specific mechanisms to strengthen subnational institutions, community-based organisations and social enterprises, particularly women-led businesses and informal economic activities. FCOSS emphasised that the ten-year Vuvale Union Workplan should incorporate these priorities to ensure that development cooperation delivers inclusive, equitable and measurable benefits to communities throughout Fiji.

In response to the Committee's questions regarding public consultation, FCOSS confirmed that it had not been consulted during the formulation of the treaties and expressed concern that the exclusion of civil society reflected broader shortcomings in national consultation processes relating to foreign affairs and development cooperation. FCOSS emphasised that the principles of *vuvale* and the *Pacific Way* should extend beyond diplomatic dialogue to include meaningful engagement with all members of

society, particularly children, youth, women, older persons and vulnerable communities. The organisation maintained that civil society organisations have an important role in monitoring treaty implementation, identifying gaps in service delivery and ensuring that development assistance reaches grassroots communities. FCOSS further highlighted the need for mutual accountability between Fiji and Australia, improved public access to information and stronger coordination between government agencies and local institutions. In addressing questions concerning women's economic empowerment, FCOSS recommended that the ten-year Workplan explicitly provide support for women-led enterprises, microfinance initiatives, micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) and the informal sector. It explained that women-led businesses play an important role in community resilience and post-disaster recovery, particularly through supporting household livelihoods, mobilising community networks and facilitating economic recovery following natural disasters and other crises.

The Committee also sought FCOSS's views on labour mobility, the migration of skilled professionals and the relationship between Government and civil society. FCOSS acknowledged the growing impact of skilled migration and brain drain, including within the civil society sector, and emphasised the importance of creating opportunities for professional advancement, employment security and career development to encourage skilled Fijians to remain in the country. It further raised concerns regarding the social implications of labour mobility arrangements, particularly the separation of families under the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) Scheme and the need for stronger family-centred support mechanisms. Regarding cooperation between Government and CSOs, FCOSS maintained that civil society advocacy should be recognised as a constructive contribution to national development rather than opposition to government initiatives. It emphasised that CSOs often align their programmes with Fiji's National Development Plan and play a critical role in reaching underserved communities, particularly during disasters and emergencies. FCOSS therefore called for more structured engagement between Government, development partners and civil society, including greater participation in policy development, implementation monitoring and the identification of community priorities. The organisation maintained that the successful implementation of the treaties would depend on transparent governance, inclusive decision-making, strengthened local systems and the meaningful participation of communities in determining and assessing development outcomes.

4.2.1.14 The **Higher Education Commission Fiji (HECF)** expressed support for the Fiji–Australia Vuvale Union, highlighting its potential to strengthen higher education, technical and vocational education and training (TVET), digital capabilities, skills development and institutional capacity. HECF identified ongoing cooperation through Pacific Skills Australia, including the Vuvale Hub at Walu Bay and the proposed establishment of TVET Centres of Excellence, as opportunities to improve access to specialised equipment, modern training facilities and industry-relevant qualifications. The Commission also welcomed the proposed arrangements commencing in 2029 that would enable selected Fijian students to access Australian universities at domestic tuition rates. In response to the Committee's questions, HECF advised that initiatives were underway to integrate vocational qualifications into mainstream secondary education and develop mechanisms for recognising micro-credentials, prior learning and competencies acquired through practical experience. HECF clarified that Fiji would retain authority over its national qualifications' framework, with recognition of Australian qualifications based on comparability rather than automatic equivalence. The Commission further emphasised the importance of addressing skilled migration, strengthening local training institutions and ensuring that the ten-year Vuvale Union Workplan aligns with Fiji's workforce and development priorities.

4.2.1.15 The **Fiji Medical Association (FMA)** explains that although the two instruments are framed as security treaties, its members see daily the value of Fiji's wide network of health partners. It cites China's assistance with the Navua Hospital and the Navosa Sub-Divisional Hospital and rotating Chinese medical teams; Taiwan's funding of the SOVA NI BULA digital health platform and Mackay Memorial Hospital missions; South Korea's KOICA climate resilience upgrades at eighteen health facilities; and contributions from Australia, New Zealand, Japan, India, Cuba, the United States and the European Union. It argues that this plurality of partners, not dependence on anyone, has made Fiji's health system resilient, and notes Fiji already sustains simultaneous working health cooperation with both the People's Republic of China and Taiwan. The FMA is concerned with any treaty language that, even indirectly, narrows that plurality or signals that cooperation with one partner should come at the expense of others, and invokes Fiji's tradition of being a friend to all and enemy to none.

The FMA identifies five specific concerns; First, Article 4(2)(b) of the Vuvale Union commits the Parties to engage third parties in critical infrastructure, technology and security sectors in a manner that protects collective security, and Article 4(6) defines critical infrastructure broadly to include telecommunications, digital infrastructure, artificial intelligence and cyberspace, categories that overlap with digital health records, telemedicine and medical technology; it is unclear whether Chinese supplied medical equipment, Cuban clinical training or other third country digital health cooperation would be caught. Second, Article 4(3) treats third party military or other security bases, presence, arrangements or visits as potential threats, language widely understood to target China, which applied expansively could chill visits by hospital ships, medical teams and defence adjacent humanitarian missions. Third, the Veitacini accession clause (Article 12) requiring unanimous consent, with Australia as Depositary under Article 13, is a narrower, closed model of regionalism than the consensus-based Forum architecture the treaties invoke. Fourth, both treaties exclude referral of disputes to any court or tribunal (Vuvale Article 8(2); Veitacini Article 11(1)) and the Vuvale Union requires twenty-four months notice to terminate (Article 10(4)), leaving Fiji with limited recourse and a long exit. Fifth, Vanuatu's more cautious approach to a comparable Australian treaty shows these risks are recognised elsewhere in the region.

The FMA recommends that the Committee: (a) seek from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs a clear public statement, ideally an interpretive declaration lodged at ratification, that nothing in either treaty limits Fiji's freedom to receive health, humanitarian, educational or medical technology cooperation from any friendly state; (b) request clarification of how "critical infrastructure and technology" will be defined and applied under Vuvale Article 4, with parliamentary oversight of any guidelines; (c) encourage Government to pursue an inclusive Forum led regional security framework open to accession by Pacific wide consensus; (d) accompany any instrument of ratification with a reaffirmation of Fiji's friend to all policy; and (e) build into the Vuvale Bukmak and Vuvale Forum work programme a standing requirement to report to Parliament on how the security provisions are applied so any drift toward exclusivity is identified early.

4.2.1.16 **Mr. James Sowane**, in his personal capacity, requests that the Vuvale Union include a clear commitment to a "Vuvale Education Fee Rate" that places eligible Fijian students attending Australian high schools and tertiary institutions on the same tuition basis as comparable local Australian students, rather than the standard international fee schedule. The rate would apply both to privately funded students and to Fijian students on Fijian Government scholarships, with eligibility limited to students born in Fiji and with checks developed by the Committee to prevent abuse. He also requests a dedicated

pathway allowing both private and scholarship students who graduate from eligible Australian tertiary courses at the Vuvale rate to apply for a three-year graduate work experience visa, so that they can learn the standards of an advanced economy in Australian companies and public agencies and bring that experience back to Fiji. He considers these proposals consistent with Articles 2 and 3 of the Vuvale Union.

The submission draws on his personal experience. He was raised in Tubou, Lakeba, Lau, in a family that prioritised education, studied at Lincoln University under a New Zealand ODA scholarship, returned to serve his bond and has worked in Fiji's tourism industry for 32 years. He and his wife have educated three children overseas as private international students; their youngest is at Queensland University of Technology at about AUD 45,000 per year in tuition, meaning an investment approaching AUD 200,000 over a three-year degree before accommodation and living costs. He notes Fijian families pay the same international fees as students from much larger economies. An illustrative table shows the 2026 gap: NSW government high school tuition is free for citizens and permanent residents but about A$18,000 to A$20,500 for international students, and a Deakin Bachelor of Commerce costs about A$16,388 in a Commonwealth Supported Place against an indicative A$45,800 international fee.

Mr. Sowane argues a genuine Vuvale gesture would be for Australia to work out an affordable discounted rate that encourages more Fijian parents to invest in Australian education, and that savings on Government scholarships would allow more students to be placed. He cites his eldest daughter's three-year post study work opportunity in New Zealand and its positive impact on the family business as the model for the proposed graduate visa. He concludes that a common international price does not recognise differences in families' ability to pay or the special relationship Fiji and Australia seek to strengthen, and hopes the submission will initiate discussions toward a positive outcome for Fiji's young people and future workforce.

4.2.1.17 **Business Analysis and Solutions (BA&S),** a consulting firm supports the objectives of the Vuvale Union and proposes enhancements to its implementation to strengthen the competitive participation of suitably qualified Fiji professionals, consultants and businesses in Australian funded programmes, projects and consultancy assignments undertaken in Fiji. It expressly does not propose lowering Australian or DFAT technical, fiduciary, governance or procurement standards; its guiding principle is "Australian accountability standards + Fiji capability + Fiji context + shared opportunity + sustainable local outcomes". It argues Fiji now has a substantial professional workforce with international qualifications and experience, so the old distinction between international and local expertise no longer holds, and that Australian development investment should produce both development outcomes and development of Fiji capability.

The submission identifies a procurement challenge: requirements such as extensive previous DFAT contracts, large corporate turnover, significant insurance, large multidisciplinary teams and experience managing much larger contracts reflect the characteristics of large international consulting firms rather than the needs of smaller assignments, creating a circular barrier in which a Fiji consultant cannot obtain donor experience because donor experience is required to win the first contract. It also raises concerns about consultant assessment, arguing Fiji consultants should not be disproportionately penalised in interviews for being unable to recite textbook or donor specific definitions where their experience demonstrates they have applied the capability in practice, and that interviews should test application rather than terminology. It further argues that localisation should not become a mechanism for obtaining equivalent expertise at discounted rates, that Fiji contextual knowledge should be a scored capability,

and that programmes should measure Fiji outcomes (such as reduced processing times and continued use of improved processes after consultants leave) rather than only consultant outputs, using Fiji standards and locally designed KPIs where appropriate and designing for sustainability after donor funding ends.

Proposed measures include an "equivalent capability principle" accepting comparable government, donor, institutional or private sector experience in place of mandatory DFAT experience; proportionate corporate requirements matched to contract value and risk; separating mandatory from desirable requirements; Fiji consultant categories (individual, micro firm, specialist firm, Fiji-Australia joint venture, international firm); transparent pre-qualified Fiji professional and technical panels; unbundling large consultancy packages; a capability pathway from emerging consultant to Pacific regional provider; substantive Fiji-Australia partnerships in which Fiji consultants do methodology, analysis and design rather than only logistics; Fiji capability and knowledge transfer plans in international assignments; a dual accountability model combining DFAT accountability measures with Fiji outcome measures; two way professional mobility; a verified Fiji professional services register; and annual reporting of localisation indicators such as the share of professional services expenditure retained in Fiji and the number of Fiji-led consultants and firms contracted. A suggested procurement hierarchy asks first whether qualified Fiji capability can deliver, then a Fiji-led team with international support, then an international provider partnering substantively with Fiji professionals, and only then international procurement with knowledge transfer.

The submission puts twelve recommendations to the Committee covering local professional participation, equivalent capability, competency-based recruitment, proportionate procurement, Fiji professional panels, Fiji-Australia partnerships, knowledge transfer, Fiji friendly outcomes and KPIs, appropriate local standards, sustainability, localisation measurement and regional capability. It offers draft wording for the Vuvale implementation Work Plan committing both countries to progressively strengthen participation of Fiji professionals while maintaining standards, to apply locally relevant outcome frameworks developed with Fiji institutions, and to assess consultants on demonstrated competence and equivalent experience. It stresses that it is not seeking guaranteed contracts, automatic preference or exclusion of Australian consultants, only a fair opportunity to compete, and that greater Fiji participation also benefits Australia through better contextual understanding, lower mobilisation costs, continuity and sustainability.

4.2.1.18 **Mr. Jope Tarai,** in his personal capacity, makes a submission asking the Committee to insist that Parliament reject the Ocean of Peace Alliance, insist on renegotiation of the Fiji-Australia Union, and propose an authentic "Oceania of Peace Treaty" to be designed by Fiji. His submission is informed by his study of Pacific regionalism and of the long-standing treaty between the United States and Pacific governments. He emphasises that both instruments are legally binding treaties despite being titled a "Union" and an "Alliance", and fears that Fiji's taxpayers and sovereignty will be at risk if they are uncritically accepted.

On the Vuvale Union, he argues the title "Union" may obscure the legally binding obligations being assumed. Article 2 speaks of prosperity and resilience without specifying whose, and alignment with Fiji's national development priorities should be explicit. Article 3's commitment to integrate the economies and pursue economic growth should be scrutinised considering scholarship on the limits of integrating Pacific economies through conventional neoliberal frameworks; Government should clarify what growth means, whose interests it serves and how human development will be protected. Article

4(3) identifying third party bases, presence and visits as potential threats could constrain Fiji's engagement with China and other partners and should be reconsidered and, if necessary, renegotiated; Article 4(5) on critical infrastructure could subject Fiji's infrastructure partnerships to restrictions; and Article 4(7) (no action undermining treaty obligations) is broad enough that Fiji's engagement with another partner could be deemed inconsistent with the treaty. He objects that these security obligations are embedded in an article ostensibly about climate and peace. Article 5's reference to the Forum as the apex of regional architecture should not exclude other Pacific institutions such as the Pacific Islands Development Forum, its narrow definition of the Pacific Way as formal consensus should be reconsidered, and its commitment to rules-based trade should expressly require arrangements that are Pacific sensitive, fair and responsive to structural realities. Article 6(3) should be amended so that inviting traditional, religious, community, business and civil society leaders to the Vuvale Forum is an expectation rather than discretionary. Article 7's Work Plan is not publicly available, and Government should disclose its contents, timetable, obligations, monitoring, financial implications and public consultation arrangements. Article 8 needs clearer dispute mechanisms, Article 9's amendment process should preserve flexibility for future governments, and Article 10's 24-month termination period should be shortened, for example to 12 months.

4.2.1.19 **Laisa Digitaki and Natasha Digitaki Weleilakeba,** in their personal capacities recommend that Parliament not approve either treaty during the present parliamentary term and that ratification be considered by the Parliament constituted after the forthcoming General Election, following publication of the complete implementation architecture, independent legal and fiscal assessment and a meaningful period of public consultation. They state that they do not oppose Australia or the bilateral friendship and recognise the considerable value of Australian support; their position is that assistance and strategic cooperation increase rather than reduce the need for transparent, sovereign and democratic decision making.

Three reasons are given for deferral. First, the consultation period was not proportionate: the treaties and Written Analysis were published on 27 August 2026 with a submission deadline of 9 September 2026, giving citizens roughly two weeks to assess instruments intended to operate indefinitely across economic integration, fiscal policy, critical infrastructure, cyber security, border protection, policing, defence, mutual security obligations and visiting forces. Second, Fiji is in a period of constitutional and electoral transition, with the Constitution Review Commission's work before the President and a General Election due by 6 February 2027; the current Parliament has legal authority but prudence distinguishes legal capacity from democratic wisdom, and no public material demonstrates an emergency requiring ratification before the election. If Government relies on urgency, the reasons and evidence should be placed on the public record. Third, the implementation architecture is incomplete: the Written Analysis refers to an agreed ten-year Work Plan with resources earmarked by sector, but the Work Plan, side letters, subsidiary agreements, legal opinions, fiscal modelling and contemplated visiting forces terms have not been published.

The submission sets out a detailed account of the financial relationship, distinguishing Australian ODA benefiting Fiji (about A$911.8 million actual from 2019-20 to 2024-25, and roughly A$1.03 billion including the 2025-26 estimate, approximately FJ$1.5 billion) from funds received directly into Fiji Government accounts (Australian grants in aid recorded in Fiji budgets of about FJ$556.8 million over four years to 2023-24). It notes a DFAT evaluation found general budget support could not be attributed to specific expenditures, strengthening the case for disclosure of conditions and audit outcomes. It

stresses that it does not suggest Australian assistance purchases Fiji's consent. It asks the Committee to require a public Australia-Fiji Financial Assistance Register from 2019 onward recording for each item the commitment date, funding source, whether new or reallocated, actual disbursement, amounts received in Fiji accounts, responsible ministry, conditions, classification (grant, loan, guarantee, technical assistance, in kind) and measurable outcomes and audit status.

On the treaty texts, the submission tabulates provisions requiring scrutiny. For the Vuvale Union: Articles 2 and 3 (define limits of economic integration and disclose fiscal reforms and counterpart costs); Article 4 (table legal advice on Fiji's freedom to deal with all partners and the threshold for mandatory consultation); Articles 6 and 7 (publish the Work Plan and require parliamentary reporting of Forum and Bukmak decisions); Article 8 (explain why all independent adjudication is excluded and

establish protections for the smaller party). Article 10 (explain the two-year exit delay and provide periodic review); and Article 11 (publish and separately scrutinise subsidiary arrangements). For the Veitacini Treaty: Articles 4 to 6 (constitutional advice on deployment authority and Parliament's role); Article 7 (disclose visiting forces terms on jurisdiction, immunity, weapons, customs, taxation, land, command, environment and claims before ratification); Article 10 (practical effects on relations with third countries); Article 11 (justify exclusion of independent dispute resolution); and Articles 12, 15 and 16 (preserve Fiji's accession veto and establish a three or five year review rather than ten). On "shared sovereignty", the Committee should neither assume the phrase proves a surrender of sovereignty nor leave it unexplained; Government should define every function in which authority is to be jointly exercised and who decides, under which law, with what review and how Fiji may say no.

The submission lists documents the Committee should obtain and publish before recommending approval (the full Work Plan and schedules, all side letters and implementing arrangements, a ten year fiscal impact statement, the Financial Assistance Register, legal opinions on section 51 approval and the mutual defence and dispute clauses, the draft visiting forces agreement, privacy and data governance assessments, environmental and land access assessments for any facilities, and a statement of any asserted urgency) and witnesses it should hear (Foreign Affairs, Defence, Finance, RFMF, the Attorney-General or Solicitor-General, negotiators, border and cyber agencies and independent experts). Its eight recommendations are to defer approval; publish the implementation architecture; provide full fiscal disclosure; require independent legal scrutiny; reserve consequential instruments such as visiting forces agreements for separate parliamentary scrutiny; extend public consultation once documents are available; create continuing oversight through annual public reports and a mandatory review after three or five years; and, if Government proceeds now, condition approval on formal interpretive assurances and safeguards. The submitters conclude that an agreement intended to shape Fiji for decades should survive another five months of scrutiny.

4.2.1.20 **NAYADRA Maritime Intelligence Limited's** submission is deliberately narrow. It observes that the substantive maritime and border commitments sit in the Vuvale Union, notably Article 4(4)(c) (transnational crime and IUU fishing), 4(4)(d) (security of critical infrastructure and cyberspace), 4(4)(e) (integrated policing, defence and border protection), Article 4(6) (which includes artificial intelligence, cyberspace and quantum computing within critical infrastructure) and Article 3(7) (border management systems), whereas the Veitacini Treaty is a high level mutual defence framework whose operative relevance lies in Article 7 (visiting forces) and Article 8 (governance). In its experience, Fiji's maritime security challenge is less a shortage of surveillance data, since vessel tracking access already exists through commercial platforms, than a shortage of analyst capacity and continuous monitoring to convert

data into actionable intelligence; illicit activity including narcotics trafficking has moved through Fijian waters despite tracking coverage because raw data was not analysed and escalated in time. Implementation funding should therefore build capacity to act on data, not only platforms.

Its principal concern is data sovereignty jurisdiction. Government officials have given assurances to the Committee that the new MERIT border management system will be Fiji owned with no external backdoor, and that "manage, own and control" is the test for offshore disaster recovery infrastructure. However, ownership and access are distinct from jurisdiction: data held, processed or backed up outside Fiji may remain subject to a foreign jurisdiction's warrants, subpoenas or national security orders regardless of who owns it. The Australia-US CLOUD Act Agreement, in force since 31 January 2026, gives US law enforcement a treaty backed channel to compel data from US incorporated cloud providers' Australian data centres. If Fijian government or maritime security data is hosted or backed up through such providers' Australian regions under either treaty, it would be reachable by US as well as Australian legal process notwithstanding assurances about physical location or Fijian ownership. NAYADRA notes the Fiji Revenue and Customs Service's evidence that border cooperation must respect Fiji's sovereignty and decision making, and suggests this principle should extend to governing law and jurisdiction.

NAYADRA recommends that any implementing arrangement under Vuvale Article 4(4)(d) and (e), or under Veitacini Articles 7 and 8, explicitly specify (a) the governing law applicable to Fijian government or agency data processed, stored or backed up outside Fiji, including through third party cloud vendors; (b) which courts or authorities, including under the Australia-US CLOUD Act Agreement, have jurisdiction over that data; and (c) audit or inspection rights for the Fijian party. It further recommends that the Work Plan developed by the Vuvale Bukmak and any visiting forces arrangements give explicit weight to analyst capacity and workflow rather than only sensor and platform procurement; interoperability and data sharing standards between Fijian agencies (FRCS, Fiji Navy, Fiji Police) and Australian counterparts so cooperation builds a shared operating picture rather than parallel systems; support for Fiji based and Pacific based technical capability, including local firms and analysts, so cooperation builds sovereign capability rather than dependency; and clear reporting lines from the Vuvale Bukmak and any Veitacini consultation mechanism to Parliament so that gains and jurisdictional safeguards are institutionalised.

4.2.1.21 **Pacific Polytech** summarises the Vuvale Union's TVET and skills commitments as a digital skills focused TVET Regional Centre of Excellence with a potential second centre for maritime skills; the refurbished Vuvale Skills Hub in Walu Bay, Suva; collaboration with Australian training partners to develop Fiji as a regional ship maintenance and repair hub; subsidised domestic rate university placements in Australia for selected Fijian students from around 2029 or 2030; and alignment with existing programmes such as Pacific Australia Skills and the Australia-Fiji Education Programme. It notes the 2026-2027 National Budget allocation of $883.3 million to education and welcomes initiatives targeting skills gaps but calls for a stocktake of existing institutions and their roles in TVET. Its position is that the core TVET commitments fall far short of what Fiji needs and would effectively consume most of the funds in areas that will not address Fiji's skills gap.

It makes four submissions. Submission 1: Vuvale commitments must address the findings of recent studies on skills gaps in Fiji, all of which call for massive investment in the TVET sector; and (1b) if the funders do not accept those findings they should, as a high priority, fund their own full study on skill shortages in Fiji and make the findings public. Submission 2: Australia should fund the full training cost of each skilled person it "takes" through migration; Pacific Polytech estimates that those who migrated

to Australia in 2025 represented over $1.2 billion of Fijian taxpayer investment, and this amount should be provided annually by Australia to fund skills development, education and health in Fiji. Submission 3: there must be clear direct funding of students who opt for TVET and skills development in Fiji, outside the TSLS scheme, which it says has become highly politicised and responsive to politicians' interests rather than Fiji's needs. Submission 4: Australia must ensure the skills initiative is directly driven by the main stakeholders in Fiji, because an Australian led initiative will fail as, in its assessment, the APTC did despite hundreds of millions spent.

Pacific Polytech identifies three major causes of Fiji's skills shortage: declining real public sector support for skills development and training; declining student interest in skills development because TVET is treated as a sideline; and massive migration of skills, the vast majority to Australia. It estimates Fiji needs at least 8,000 new trades and technical graduates each year to maintain the economy at its present level and produces less than half that number.

4.2.1.22 **Romitesh Kant, Mereoni Chung, Epeli Lesuma and Jason Titifanue,** in their personal capacities, state that their position is not based on hostility to Australia or to security cooperation, and they acknowledge constructive features of the treaties: recognition of climate change and wider insecurity, affirmation of democracy and sovereignty, and frameworks for cooperation in mobility, infrastructure, policing, cyber security and disaster response. Their central question is whether Parliament and the public have enough information, legal clarity and safeguards to give informed consent under section 51 of the Constitution to indefinite instruments that create executive led implementation machinery. They warn that dependency can take hold gradually through financing arrangements, technical systems, embedded personnel and procurement pathways. Their central recommendation is that Parliament defer approval of both treaties in their present form until Government publishes the implementation material and secures binding assurances on sovereignty, defence commitments, parliamentary control, visiting forces, regional governance, human rights and public accountability. Deferral, they stress, is not rejection.

They argue Parliament cannot assess what it has not seen. The ten-year Work Plan, described in the Written Analysis as a living document guiding implementation, has not been published, and no consolidated national interest analysis covering constitutional compatibility, fiscal exposure, procurement, data governance, environmental and social impacts, human rights, labour mobility, land and customary interests has been provided. Parliament should know which subsidiary instruments under Vuvale Article 11 and Veitacini Article 7 will be legally binding, which require legislation, which the executive can conclude alone, and which will be tabled. They note that in September 2026 the second RFMF-Australian Army Strategic Land Staff Talks, officially linked to the Veitacini Treaty, agreed 2027 priorities covering training, exercises and military rotations while the treaties remain before Parliament. They also test the treaties against Fiji's own frameworks: the Foreign Policy White Paper 2024 states Fiji is non-aligned and has no security alliance with any nation, yet the Veitacini Treaty is expressly named an alliance; the National Security and Defence Review 2024 warns that intensive external engagement can bypass democratic checks and produce donor driven capabilities; and the National Security Strategy 2025-2029 requires an International Security Engagement Strategy to protect sovereignty which the submitters could not locate. Government should say whether Fiji still regards itself as non-aligned and whether the treaties were negotiated within that strategy.

On sovereignty, they argue Vuvale Article 4's third party consultation provisions do not expressly give Australia a veto but may create a strong expectation of prior consultation and alignment, especially as

the Written Analysis describes critical infrastructure and security as domains for "traditional partners"; Parliament should obtain a binding clarification that consultation creates no exclusivity, right of consent or preferred supplier rule.

On Article 6 of the Veitacini Treaty, the terms "armed attack", "within the Pacific", "common danger" and the action required are undefined, leaving unclear how the clause applies to cyber operations, attacks on ships or personnel abroad, hybrid coercion or incidents connected to another alliance; they seek a joint public interpretive statement, confirmation that non-military measures may satisfy the obligation, prior parliamentary authorisation for any RFMF deployment into hostilities subject to a narrow emergency exception, and clarity on interaction with ANZUS and AUKUS given reports that the US has access to more than half of Australia's military bases.

On Article 7 and the concerns raised in the Written Analysis on embedded officers, the establishment of forward operating bases on remote islands and a potential shift towards an offensive military posture, the submitters urged the Committee to clarify that neither treaty expressly authorises the establishment of military bases or a permanent military presence. They further recommended that any subsequent agreements relating to visiting forces, military basing or access arrangements be tabled in Parliament before taking effect, with clear provisions addressing jurisdiction, liability and claims, environmental remediation, landowner consent, weapons and hazardous materials, sexual exploitation and abuse, and termination arrangements.

On governance, the submitters raised concerns that the Vuvale Forum and Bukmak are empowered to consider any matter and establish additional forums, while Article 9 permits retrospective amendments. They further noted that both treaties are of indefinite duration, with the Veitacini Treaty providing for a review only after ten years and upon request. Accordingly, they recommended annual public reporting, the tabling in Parliament of Work Plan updates and subsidiary instruments, an independent review within three years, and mandatory parliamentary reviews at least every five years. They also called for prior parliamentary approval of substantive or retrospective amendments and legal confirmation that the inter-state dispute resolution provisions do not exclude the jurisdiction of Fiji's courts over constitutional, criminal, administrative or individual claims.

On regional ownership, they observe the Ocean of Peace Centre in Suva is established bilaterally in consultation with Forum members, and the selective accession design confirms a selective framework rather than a Forum wide institution; they seek a Forum mandate and inclusive governance for any centre claiming an Ocean of Peace role.

On militarisation, they note the treaties contain detailed machinery for defence cooperation but little on restraint, de-escalation, nuclear justice or arms control, and seek public commitments on nuclear weapons and propulsion, autonomous weapons, hazardous materials, environmental protection and foreign access, consistent with the Rarotonga Treaty while not overstating what that treaty prohibits.

On gender and human rights, they note the Vuvale Union recognises gender equality, but the security provisions do not operationalise it, and seek a funded gender, disability and human rights implementation plan, representative participation, disaggregated reporting, enforceable codes and independent complaints processes for visiting forces.

On economic, labour and digital safeguards, they ask for disclosure of grant and loan proportions, contingent liabilities, procurement and local content conditions, worker protections in labour mobility, and clear rules on data location, access, retention and remedies, stressing that economic assistance should not be treated as consideration for accepting undefined security obligations.

The submission closes with thirteen numbered recommendations (defer approval; publish the evidence; require a policy alignment assessment; protect independent decision making; clarify Article 6; retain parliamentary control over deployment; require separate scrutiny of operational arrangements; create an oversight framework; prevent executive amendment by drift; protect regional ownership; add peace and restraint safeguards; make equality operational; and separate benefits from security consent) and thirteen questions the Committee should put to Government, including why the Work Plan has not been published, what constitutes an armed attack and where the Pacific's boundaries lie for Article 6, who authorises deployment, whether ANZUS or AUKUS activity could trigger Fijian action, whether Vuvale Articles 4.2 to 4.8 create any expectation of exclusivity, what forward operating bases or offensive capabilities are contemplated, how Fiji's courts retain jurisdiction, what nuclear and autonomous weapons limits apply, what role the Forum and civil society will have in the Ocean of Peace Centre, what financial and data governance terms attach to the package, what complaints and remedy mechanisms will exist, and whether the International Security Engagement Strategy has been completed.

4.2.1.23 **Savenaca Siwatibau Waqa** supports the intent of the Vuvale Union and does not oppose ratification. His purpose is to ensure that in the ICT domain the partnership is implemented to build Fijian capability rather than substitute for it, which he regards as the single most important question the Committee can weigh in this area. He describes Fiji's ICT environment as underdeveloped and losing skilled people: few new ICT firms are formed and those that start struggle for want of capital, procurement access, mentorship and stable demand; cybersecurity professionals find it very difficult to sustain their own businesses despite growing national need; support for new ICT academic and vocational programmes has been limited; and little major new ICT infrastructure has been built domestically. He cites a 2024 study estimating more than 90,000 Fijians will have migrated to Australia by end 2025 and the Higher Education Commission's concern about brain drain, while fairly noting the "beneficial brain drain" counter argument (Chand and Clemens 2008) and answering that the benefit only converts into a national industry if there is a domestic environment to which professionals can return.

He maps the treaty provisions that engage the sector: Article 3(2) on economic integration, which carries an inherent asymmetry with an economy many times larger than Fiji's; Article 3(3)(b) and 3(5) on the digital economy and secure digital infrastructure, in relation to which the public package includes FJ$146.3 million for digital transformation and the fair question is how much will be delivered by and retained within Fijian firms and whether funded data centres will be Fijian owned and operated; Article 3(3)(c) and 3(7) on mobility, operationalised through longer visitor stays, five year business visas and FJ$46 million for Fijian students at Australian universities from 2029; Article 4(5) and 4(6) on protecting a broad class of critical infrastructure including the new cyber secure ICT Border Management System; and Articles 5(1)(d), 6 and 7 on inclusive development and the Work Plan.

His central risk is dependency: investment entering a stagnant ecosystem without deliberate capability building will be captured by external providers, with data centres owned abroad and government systems supplied on terms Fiji cannot alter, which he calls "dependency dressed as development" and which Fiji's experience with vendor-controlled government systems already illustrates. A second risk is the "mobility paradox": one way mobility without mechanisms to bring skills home may subsidise the

departure of Fiji's brightest. He notes Australia has said the package is reallocated existing development assistance rather than new money, so its transformative power depends on direction, not quantum. He offers the Fijian fintech Sole, supported by the Australian and New Zealand backed Market Development Facility and licensed by the Reserve Bank of Fiji, as the model of enabled local capability.

His six recommendations, all directed at implementation through the Work Plan, are: build measurable local content, local participation and Fijian ownership targets into the digital and infrastructure components and publish them; attach data sovereignty and vendor exit conditions to government digital systems funded under the partnership, including the Border Management System, such as source code or IP access or escrow, data residency within Fiji and demonstrated ability to operate and restore systems without the original vendor; pair the FJ$46 million student funding and expanded visa arrangements with return and retention measures such as return service or bonding pathways, remote work from Fiji arrangements and diaspora linkage schemes; direct a defined share of digital and skills funding to Fijian ICT firms, startups and cybersecurity businesses and to growth of ICT academic and vocational programmes; require the Vuvale Forum and Bukmak to publish regular reporting on how much funding is delivered by and retained within Fiji; and progress Fiji's critical infrastructure protection, cybersecurity and data protection legislation in parallel so Fiji can meet its Article 4(5) and 4(6) obligations through its own legal instruments.

4.2.1.24 **Semesa Tuicolo**, in his personal capacity, recognises the longstanding Fiji-Australia relationship and the benefits of cooperation in economic development, climate change, maritime security, disaster response, healthcare, education, cybersecurity, transnational crime and regional stability, but argues that because the agreements create legally binding, long term commitments, Parliament must ensure Fiji's sovereignty, independent decision making and democratic accountability are fully protected.

He raises nine issues. On mutual defence, he asks Parliament to clarify the practical meaning and limits of the Article 6 obligation. On visiting forces, he recommends that all future agreements under Article 7 be subject to parliamentary scrutiny and public transparency and clearly address jurisdiction, criminal responsibility, weapons, environmental obligations, compensation, taxation and financial responsibility. On sovereignty, he asks Government to clarify the Written Analysis phrase "shared sovereignty as a capability multiplier" and for the treaties to expressly confirm that cooperation does not transfer, delegate, pool or diminish Fiji's sovereign authority.

On third party military and security arrangements, he seeks clarification of the scope of the Vuvale Union provision on third party bases, presence, arrangements or visits and whether it could restrict Fiji's ability to establish lawful relationships with other states. On "integrated policing, defence and border protection", he requests a clear definition of "integrated" and states Fiji should not permit arrangements under which foreign authorities exercise governmental powers in Fiji without clear legal authority and democratic oversight. On critical infrastructure and technology, he recommends safeguards against loss of Fijian control over infrastructure, sensitive data, communications systems and strategic assets, with major arrangements subject to domestic law and parliamentary oversight. On dispute settlement, he asks how serious disputes involving sovereignty, security or interpretation will be resolved if the governments cannot agree, given courts and tribunals are excluded. On parliamentary oversight, he recommends a periodic review mechanism including annual reporting, publication of major implementing agreements, scrutiny of major defence and visiting forces arrangements and regular reporting on financial and national security implications. On economic benefits, he supports cooperation but asks that assistance be transparent and not create hidden obligations or excessive dependence.

He concludes that friendship between nations should not mean Parliament gives up its responsibility to scrutinise binding commitments, that Government should provide clear answers on mutual defence, visiting forces, foreign military presence, critical infrastructure, intelligence sharing, third party arrangements, sovereignty and oversight before ratification, and that Parliament should not approve the treaties without appropriate safeguards, interpretive clarifications and mechanisms for democratic oversight. Fiji, he says, can be a trusted friend and partner of Australia while remaining fully sovereign and independent in its foreign policy.

4.2.1.25 The **Tertiary Scholarship and Loans Scheme (TSLS)** supports the treaties as an opportunity to reposition education, skills and human capital mobility as core instruments of Fiji's long term economic security, resilience and regional leadership. It views human capital as a strategic national asset and proposes a shift from a "scholarship places" mindset to a "national capability pipeline" mindset. It identifies the two education initiatives in the proposed Work Plan as potentially transformative: access for selected Fijian students to Australian institutions at domestic equivalent rates from approximately 2029/30 through co-funded arrangements (proposed AU$29.5 million / FJ$46 million), which could materially increase the value obtained from public scholarship expenditure; and a TVET Regional Centre of Excellence in foundational digital skills with potential expansion into maritime skills, which TSLS considers potentially more important than any single scholarship scheme because it builds sustained domestic and regional training capacity. TSLS notes it was not the negotiating agency and that its role arises at implementation, where it can contribute programme design and targeting, funding administration, student lifecycle management, data and outcomes, and policy advice. It sets the proposals in the context of existing cooperation, including the Australia-Fiji Education Program, Pacific Australia Skills and Australia Awards, which it says should be coordinated rather than duplicated.

TSLS's central proposal is that the ten year Work Plan establish a dedicated Fiji-Australia Human Capital and Skills Framework connecting scholarships, TVET, work integrated learning, circular mobility, professional placements, return pathways and graduate tracking, with a joint steering mechanism in which TSLS is represented, an agreed priority skills list refreshed every two years, a multi year financing envelope and cost sharing principles, common performance indicators, student welfare and safeguarding standards, and secure data sharing arrangements. On the domestic equivalent rate initiative, it supports the proposal in principle but argues that lower tuition should not translate into open ended expansion of overseas awards; the gain should be used strategically to fill scarce skill gaps.

TSLS expressed support in principle for the initiative, recommending alignment with Fiji's national workforce and skills priorities while complementing existing domestic tertiary programmes. It emphasised comprehensive financial planning, predictable multi-year cost-sharing arrangements between Fiji and Australia, merit-based selection, equitable access for disadvantaged communities, and appropriate academic and welfare support for students.

Regarding the proposed Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) centres, TSLS recommended that the digital and maritime training centres be developed with strong industry participation, recognised qualifications, progressive localisation of trainers and sustainable operational funding. It further highlighted the need for secure bilateral data-sharing arrangements, appropriate legislative and policy frameworks, and institutional readiness ahead of implementation in 2029/2030.

TSLS identified key risks, including brain drain, cost escalation, duplication of existing programmes, cybersecurity vulnerabilities and policy discontinuity. To address these concerns, it recommended

incorporating a Human Capital and Skills Framework into the bilateral Work Plan, ensuring TSLS representation in governance arrangements, establishing circular labour mobility and return pathways, and introducing measurable performance indicators, annual reporting and independent reviews to strengthen accountability and long-term outcomes.

4.2.2 Ocean of Peace Alliance *('Veitacini Treaty')* Submissions

4.2.2.1 The **Office of the Prime Minister** submitted that the Ocean of Peace Alliance *('Veitacini Treaty')* was developed to give practical effect to the Blue Pacific Ocean of Peace Declaration and advance Pacific-led approaches to regional peace, security and cooperation. The Permanent Secretary emphasised that the Treaty was founded on respect for national sovereignty, regional solidarity, dialogue and peaceful resolution of disputes. In response to the Committee's questions concerning Article 6 on mutual defence, he clarified that an armed attack against either party within the Pacific would not automatically require Fiji to deploy military personnel or participate in armed conflict. Any proposed response would remain subject to Fiji's domestic decision-making processes, including consideration by Cabinet, and would be guided by the circumstances of the conflict and Fiji's commitment to peace. He further stated that the Alliance was geographically confined to the Pacific and would not oblige Fiji to participate in Australia's security commitments outside the region. The Permanent Secretary maintained that the Treaty was consistent with Fiji's longstanding foreign policy approach of maintaining friendly relations with all countries and would not prevent Fiji from pursuing independent bilateral relationships.

In addressing the Committee's questions on the legal and operational implications of the Veitacini Treaty, the Permanent Secretary explained that Article 7, concerning visiting forces, would operate within an established legal framework and that any immunities granted to foreign military personnel would require an appropriate legal basis under domestic law. Regarding Article 11(1), which excludes referral of treaty disputes to national or international tribunals, he emphasised that disagreements would be resolved through good-faith consultation, mutual understanding and the Pacific Way. On Article 12(3), concerning the admission of additional Pacific States, he explained that prospective membership would require consideration of shared regional principles, national sovereignty and compatibility with existing legal and security arrangements. The Permanent Secretary also addressed Article 15 on withdrawal, emphasising the importance of strengthening Fiji's independent defence and security capabilities to maintain national responsibilities regardless of the Treaty's continuation. Regarding Article 16, he explained that the ten-year review period was intended to allow sufficient time for institutional capabilities, infrastructure and professional expertise to develop before a formal assessment. He further stressed that military cooperation must remain subordinate to civilian authority, with democracy, the rule of law and professional security institutions forming the foundation of the Alliance.

The Permanent Secretary further highlighted the Treaty's potential to strengthen regional security cooperation, maritime domain awareness, information sharing and coordinated responses to transnational organised crime. He referred to the proposed Ocean of Peace Centre, supported by an Australian commitment of $39 million, as a mechanism for advancing Pacific-led solutions and monitoring implementation of the Alliance and the Vuvale Union, with its proposed establishment

involving the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat. In response to concerns regarding the practical benefits of the Treaty, he emphasised that regional cooperation would help Fiji address security challenges that could not be effectively managed by individual Pacific countries acting alone. He also acknowledged the importance of strengthening domestic legislation, maritime enforcement capabilities and institutional professionalism. The Permanent Secretary maintained that the Alliance would support Fiji's role as a regional hub while preserving its sovereign decision-making authority and commitment to peaceful conflict resolution, regional solidarity and democratic governance.

4.2.2.2 The **Ministry of Defence and Veteran Affairs, together with the Republic of Fiji Military Forces (RFMF) and the Republic of Fiji Navy**, presented a joint submission primarily supporting the Ocean of Peace Alliance *('Veitacini Treaty')*, which falls within the Ministry's defence and national security mandate. The Ministry emphasised that the Treaty would strengthen Fiji's defence capabilities, maritime security, national resilience and strategic cooperation with Australia over the next ten years. Eight priority areas were identified, including sovereign aviation capability, maritime security and surveillance, infrastructure development, veterans' affairs, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, peacekeeping, cyber defence and capacity building. The Ministry highlighted Australia's existing support through the provision of C-27J aircraft, three Guardian-class patrol boats and the Maritime Essential Services Centre (MESC) in Lami. The Treaty would further enhance maritime surveillance through unmanned vessels, drones, intelligence sharing and the establishment of additional naval forward operating bases to strengthen Fiji's response to illegal fishing, transnational organised crime, drug trafficking and search and rescue operations. It would also support defence infrastructure development, military training, peacekeeping deployments, veterans' welfare and the development of relevant defence legislation and national security frameworks.

During the submission, the Committee raised concerns regarding Fiji's sovereignty, strategic independence and the implications of closer military cooperation with Australia. Members questioned whether Article 4(3) of the Fiji–Australia Vuvale Union could restrict Fiji's ability to maintain defence relationships with other international partners, particularly in the context of increasing geopolitical competition in the Pacific. The Minister clarified that Fiji would retain its sovereign right to determine its international partnerships and that the agreements would not prevent cooperation with other countries. The Committee also sought clarification on the legal jurisdiction applicable to visiting Australian military personnel, the potential influence of Australian financial assistance on Fiji's decision-making, and the protection of sensitive military intelligence and national security information. The Minister advised that visiting Australian personnel would remain subject to Fijian laws, with military cooperation guided by the existing Status of Forces Agreement. He further emphasised that Fiji would retain control over the sharing of sensitive information and that the partnership was founded on mutual respect, sovereignty and shared democratic principles. In response to concerns regarding the RFMF's institutional independence and constitutional responsibilities, the Minister reaffirmed the military's commitment to democratic governance, civilian authority, the rule of law and non-interference in political processes.

The Ministry acknowledged that implementing the Veitacini Treaty would require legislative, regulatory, institutional and administrative reforms, supported by a ten-year implementation workplan, risk management arrangements and a proposed Monitoring and Evaluation Unit. It recognised that changes in government and national priorities could influence the implementation of the Treaty, while maintaining that future governments would retain the authority to determine Fiji's participation and

commitments. The Ministry further emphasised that Australia's financial and technical assistance was intended to complement Fiji's national development and security priorities, particularly given the significant resources required to protect its extensive maritime territory. The submission underscored the importance of ensuring that the Treaty strengthens Fiji's sovereign defence capabilities, institutional accountability and regional security responsibilities while preserving its independent foreign policy and constitutional obligations. It also highlighted the need for sustainable funding, effective oversight and measurable implementation outcomes to ensure that the anticipated benefits of the defence partnership are realised over the proposed ten-year period.

4.2.2.3 In its submission on the Ocean of Peace Alliance *('Veitacini Treaty')*, the **Ministry of Health and Medical Services** addressed the potential implications of the Treaty for Fiji's public health security, biosecurity, medical emergency preparedness and the allocation of healthcare resources in support of military-related activities. During the Committee's examination, concerns were raised regarding Fiji's preparedness and response mechanisms for infectious disease outbreaks, biological contamination and the Treaty's dispute resolution provisions. The Ministry clarified that existing domestic legislation, public health protocols and established inter-agency coordination mechanisms would continue to guide Fiji's response to these matters. It further emphasised that any health-related cooperation arising from the Treaty would remain under the oversight of the appropriate civilian health authorities and subject to Fiji's national legal and regulatory frameworks. The Ministry also highlighted the importance of effective governance, transparent financial management, appropriate safeguards and robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms in implementing both treaties to ensure that the anticipated benefits strengthen Fiji's healthcare system, enhance national health security and support long-term public health resilience.

4.2.2.4 In relation to the Veitacini Treaty, the **Ministry of Education** identified education as having a supporting role in peace, security and skills development. Members questioned whether the Treaty would require Fiji to align its vocational training programmes with defence-related priorities. The Ministry advised that its existing TVET programmes focused on blue and green skills and that curriculum development would continue to reflect Fiji's national priorities. The Committee also raised concerns regarding the protection of students' information and cybersecurity under expanded digital cooperation.

4.2.2.5 In its submission on the Ocean of Peace Alliance *('Veitacini Treaty')*, the **Ministry of Environment and Climate Change** addressed the potential environmental implications of expanded defence and security cooperation, particularly the visiting forces arrangements under Article 7 and the possible effects of foreign military activities on Fiji's marine environment. During the Committee's examination, Members raised concerns regarding Australia's participation in AUKUS, including its nuclear-powered submarine programme, and the need to ensure that regional defence cooperation remains consistent with the principles and objectives of the Ocean of Peace. The Ministry emphasised the importance of incorporating comprehensive environmental safeguards into any visiting forces arrangements, including requirements relating to environmental impact assessments, biosecurity, waste management, marine ecosystem protection, cultural protocols and liability for environmental damage. The Committee also examined the implications for Fiji's sovereignty, customary land and marine rights, and the importance of meaningful consultation with communities potentially affected by military activities. Furthermore, Members highlighted existing challenges in environmental monitoring, regulatory enforcement and institutional capacity, underscoring the need to strengthen domestic oversight mechanisms. The

Committee considers that the implementation of the Veitacini Treaty should remain consistent with Fiji's environmental legislation, national development priorities and sovereign rights, supported by effective inter-agency coordination, adequate technical and financial resources, enforceable environmental safeguards and regular reporting to Parliament to ensure transparency, accountability and the long-term protection of Fiji's environment and national interests.

4.2.2.6 In addressing the Ocean of Peace Alliance *('Veitacini Treaty')*, the **Higher Education Commission Fiji (HECF)** emphasised that education, research and technical expertise contribute to national security and regional resilience by strengthening Fiji's domestic capabilities. In response to questions concerning sovereignty, academic freedom and foreign involvement in research and technology, HECF explained that Fiji's higher education institutions and international research partnerships remain subject to domestic regulatory requirements and established approval processes. The Commission indicated that cooperation with Australia would not prevent Fiji from maintaining academic and research partnerships with institutions in other countries. HECF also highlighted the importance of protecting indigenous knowledge and intellectual property, particularly where foreign researchers undertake studies involving traditional knowledge and local communities. It referred to the role of the National Research Council and relevant government agencies in overseeing research activities. Regarding digital transformation, HECF acknowledged challenges associated with artificial intelligence, academic integrity and emerging technologies, and advised that it was working with universities to strengthen institutional responses. The Commission's evidence on the Veitacini Treaty was primarily provided in response to Members' questions rather than through a separate detailed assessment of its provisions.

4.2.2.7 Submission from the **Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN)** recognises the long cooperation between Fiji and Australia in peacekeeping, humanitarian assistance and disaster response, but regards the Veitacini Treaty as a significant new development in Fiji's security architecture that requires careful consideration against the Blue Pacific Ocean of Peace Declaration, the Pacific Way and Fiji's commitment to a nuclear free Pacific. It observes that the kinship names "Veitacini" and "Vuvale" suggest closeness between equals, whereas Australia is a developed donor state and Fiji a developing aid dependent country, so Fiji must guard against being subordinated to Australian interests. DAWN's central question for the Committee is whether the Treaty contributes to realising the Pacific's Ocean of Peace, which Fiji championed, or compromises that vision by imposing a conventional military conception of security. It stresses that peace and militarisation are not synonymous and recalls the Pacific's history of external military intervention, nuclear testing and bases established without free, prior and informed consent.

On Article 6 (Mutual Defence), DAWN asks the Committee to establish precisely what Fiji's *"domestic processes"* entail; which constitutional and parliamentary processes would be triggered by an armed attack involving Australia; what decisions must be taken before Fiji deploys personnel or resources; whether Fiji could be expected to provide logistical, intelligence, maritime, airspace or infrastructure support without deploying combat forces; what constitutes an "armed attack" and who decides; and how Fiji retains the right to decide whether participation is consistent with its national interest. It notes that Article 12 allows other Pacific states to accede and warns against the Treaty evolving into a mechanism that automatically draws Pacific states into conflicts between larger, including nuclear armed, powers. Fiji should especially ensure it is not obliged to defend Australia in a conflict initiated by a United States attack on another country.

On Article 7 (Visiting Forces), DAWN argues Fiji must retain full control over military activity in its territory, waters, airspace and EEZ, particularly given Australia's AUKUS arrangements and the reported rotational stationing of US nuclear submarines and B52 bombers in Australia. It asks the Committee to seek assurances that no foreign military presence will occur without explicit Fijian authorisation; that visiting forces arrangements will be subject to parliamentary and public oversight and will not include rotational stationing of vessels, aircraft or troops; that Fiji retains the right to refuse activities contrary to its interests; that visiting forces remain subject to Fijian law; and that the Treaty cannot be read as giving automatic access to Fiji's ports, airfields and strategic infrastructure, including undersea cables and surveillance facilities. On nuclear issues, DAWN seeks explicit clarification on the operation or transit of nuclear powered and potentially nuclear armed vessels and aircraft in Fiji's maritime region, consistent with Fiji's obligations under the Rarotonga Treaty, and says Pacific peoples should not accept strategic ambiguity on nuclear risk.

DAWN urges that the Treaty be implemented within a broader concept of security that includes climate change, food and water security, livelihoods and fisheries, health, economic sovereignty, digital security, Indigenous knowledge and freedom from nuclear contamination, and that military security should not receive disproportionate resources and attention. Its recommendations are that the Committee: require a clear definition of "Ocean of Peace" and how the Treaty operationalises the Forum vision as distinct from a conventional alliance; require a detailed explanation of the Article 6 domestic processes, including the roles of Cabinet, Parliament and the RFMF; guarantee that implementation creates no automatic obligation to join operations contrary to Fiji's interests or non-aligned foreign policy; ensure parliamentary oversight of Article 7 arrangements; establish safeguards on foreign military access; protect Fiji's nuclear free commitments under the Rarotonga Treaty; require human rights and environmental impact assessments of implementation; maintain a Pacific led approach that complements rather than displaces Forum declarations, the 2050 Strategy and the Boe Declaration; and establish regular parliamentary review given the Treaty's indefinite duration.

4.2.2.8 **Jope Tarai's** raised concerns regarding the Veitacini Treaty, presenting an article-by-article analysis of its provisions. Article 1 on security purpose establishes a framework reflecting Australia's security concerns within which Fiji would be required to operate. Article 5 (Consultation) could oblige Fiji to consult Australia whenever Australia regards a development, such as engagement by China, as a security concern, raising the question of how much independent discretion Fiji retains over its foreign relations. Article 7 (Visiting Forces) warrants careful consideration given the implications militarisation and securitisation have had for Fiji's politics, constitutional order and democracy. Article 10(2) on existing agreements could require Fiji to consult or negotiate over obligations it already holds under the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty if visiting forces or mutual defence arrangements intersect with AUKUS and nuclear-powered submarines. Article 11's reference to the Pacific Way raises the question of whether the concept is being redefined and conditioned within a security framework. Article 12's accession provisions could turn a bilateral treaty into a wider multilateral security framework, and he asks why Fiji should be the one to usher this in given Australia's existing bilateral arrangements with Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu. Article 13 making Australia the sole Depositary raises the symbolic and practical question of who is in the driver's seat, and he suggests Fiji should at least be co-depositary. Article 15's indefinite duration, with the treaty continuing for remaining parties when one withdraws, could fragment Pacific collective bargaining. Article 16's ten-year review period is too long given how quickly geopolitical circumstances change.

Mr. Tarai proposes that Fiji design and propose to the region an "Oceania of Peace Treaty" built around a Code of Conduct for external powers operating in the Pacific. It would reaffirm commitments such as the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty, ask Australia to reconsider AUKUS and nuclear-powered submarine ambitions, bind China to cease using the Pacific Ocean as a testing ground for long range ballistic missiles, and apply similar expectations to the United States and any other power that has used the region to demonstrate weapons capabilities. The term "Oceania" is chosen as a symbol of Pacific self determination. Finally, he argues the two treaties should not carry Fijianised names. Fiji has developed a habit of introducing indigenous terms (as with Talanoa Diplomacy) into statecraft without adequate consultation with indigenous custodians or the wider community of Fijian speakers and deploying such terms in transactional diplomacy risks redefining and eroding their meaning. He asks that the terms be reconsidered or rescinded, or at minimum subjected to a process of free, prior and informed consent.

4.2.2.9 **Moimoi Baleilevuka,** in her personal capacity**,** submits her central claim that ratifying the Veitacini Treaty without careful review will significantly increase the likelihood of deteriorating Fiji's global non-alignment posture. It argues that in balancing diplomatic relations and competing geostrategic interests, Fiji's own security and developmental priorities are being marginalised, and this is especially visible in the Treaty. The Treaty's language binds Fiji indefinitely to Australia despite a large diplomacy capability gap, so expectations and benefits will always be unequal. Given Australia's long demonstrated alliance with the United States, and what Moimoi describes as the recently destructive diplomatic conduct of the US, the Treaty fails to include safeguarding language to protect parties from an indirect ally's unpredictable behaviour, placing Fiji at risk of future entrapment. Moimoi also refers to public anxiety about unforeseen expectations being forced on Fiji.

Describing Fiji's current approach, the submission notes the Foreign Policy White Paper's position that non-alignment is not equal distance and that Fiji naturally leans toward traditional partners, and it credits regional mechanisms (the Pacific Islands Forum, the Forum Fisheries Agency, the Pacific Fusion Centre) and Australia's development partnership and funding of the Blackrock camp. In its critical analysis it identifies "strategic enmeshment", in which Australia has expanded cooperation across security, development, climate and economic sectors, has frequently operated outside formal regional frameworks (citing the Joint Heads of Pacific Security and the South Pacific Defence Ministers Meeting) and, through the Vuvale partnership since 2019, has pre-established norms that make it hard to identify which security priorities are truly Fiji's own. On developmental disparities, it argues Fiji lacks the legislative machinery to ensure a binding instrument will indefinitely serve both parties, and notes the Treaty makes no binding commitment on Fiji's drug and HIV epidemics, which it regards as Fiji's greatest security threats. On non-alignment, it cites international humanitarian law obligations of third states, suggests international law may in future extend conflict responsibilities to states hosting belligerents' bases, and argues Article 6 exposes Fiji to a level of allyship Australia has shown the United States (for example invoking ANZUS after September 11 and sending troops to Iraq) for which Fiji is not prepared. The indefinite timeline and complex sunset clause raise questions of neutrality, autonomy and legal and moral capability.

The submission makes five recommendations: that Fiji reopen the Veitacini Treaty to renegotiate language that strongly supports non-alignment, such that all parties to the Treaty remain non-aligned; that Fiji, as champion of the Ocean of Peace declaration, demonstrate the ability to maintain present and future peace by remaining firm on its non-aligned posture; that Government complete fact finding

missions on the Treaty's implications, engaging traditional village and community leaders, NGOs, civil society, faith based organisations and youth; that Government conduct futures exercises with all relevant actors; and that Government review the Foreign Policy White Paper to re-analyse its bilateral relations and prioritise diversification of partners. It concludes that lasting peace is achieved by addressing developmental gaps and strengthening island states' ability to determine their own future.

4.2.2.10 **Reg Sandy**, in his personal capacity frames his submission as pro-democracy and pro-relationship rather than anti-Australian. He argues that Article 6 of the Veitacini Treaty, under which each Party would act to meet the common danger following an armed attack within the Pacific, is in substance a commitment to war, the most consequential commitment a state can make, and should not be ratified without democratic safeguards, public education and the informed consent of the Fijian people. He grounds the submission in the President of Fiji's address to the UN General Assembly on 24 September 2026, in which the President said Fiji will not be drawn into choosing between competing power blocs and that the Pacific Ocean must not become a theatre in which others settle their rivalries, and asks the Committee to ensure the Treaty is consistent with those words. A personal preface records his family's voluntary service in the First World War and the lasting psychological cost of war, which he contrasts with a standing treaty obligation.

Part I argues the process appears rushed: the Treaty moved from Forum endorsement in 2025 to the Committee in 2026, civil society was not consulted in its formulation, no public hearings have been held and no plain language material in English, iTaukei and Hindi has been released. Part II contests the Government's Written Analysis on eleven points. "Shared sovereignty as a capability multiplier" describes a transfer, not a multiplication, of sovereignty if Fiji can be committed to war without parliamentary approval. The claim that the commitments "are not new" is misleading because WWI service was voluntary and under imperial command, whereas Article 6 is a standing mutual defence obligation. The Australia-Ukraine Bilateral Security Agreement signed on 23 September 2026 is legally non-binding, of ten years duration and contains no mutual defence obligation, as do Ukraine's other 28 bilateral security arrangements, so Fiji is being asked to accept a more binding commitment than a nation at war. The Ocean of Peace Declaration, a Pacific led commitment to insulate the region from great power competition, has been co-opted into a bilateral defence pact, a concern also raised by the Pacific Conference of Churches. The military imbalance means the Treaty's reciprocity is legal rather than practical. Articles 11, 12, 13 and 15 together (no court or tribunal, Australian accession veto, Australia as Depositary, indefinite duration) place Fiji in a permanently subordinate legal position. AUKUS and ANZUS create a risk of Fiji being drawn into a Taiwan Strait or South China Sea conflict, a risk he says former Australian Prime Minister Paul Keating has warned of. The phrase "would act" is dangerously ambiguous. Australia's visa regime, which requires Fijians to lodge full Subclass 600 applications while granting streamlined access to Britons and Malaysians, shows the Vuvale relationship is not reciprocal. He questions Australia's reliability as a partner, citing its dependence on the United States, and Australian domestic political risk. Finally, he draws a lesson from Scotland's 1707 Treaty of Union that partnership language can coexist with structural subordination.

Part III states the core demand: no commitment to act under Article 6 without the prior approval of the Parliament of Fiji (by two thirds majority, cross party consensus in this Committee, or a referendum where time permits), formal consultation with and where required the consent of the Great Council of Chiefs consistent with UNDRIP, prior consideration by and consensus of the Pacific Islands Forum, and consistency with Article 51 of the UN Charter and where possible Security Council authorisation. He

argues the GCC must be included because more than 60 percent of the population are iTaukei for whom the GCC is the apex of their social system. He also proposes that the Treaty be restructured as a legally non-binding security cooperation framework of ten years duration without mutual defence obligations, on the Australia-Ukraine model.

Part IV proposes article by article amendments: a preamble recognising that Article 6 is a commitment to war requiring informed consent; Article 1 and 2 additions tying the Treaty to democratic processes and indigenous rights; Article 3 on dispute prevention through the Forum; Article 4 aligning cooperation with the Boe Declaration's comprehensive concept of security; Article 5 requiring consultation to include the Forum and, for Fiji, the GCC; Article 6 amendments requiring prior parliamentary approval and GCC consultation, excluding any conflict to which Fiji is not a party including conflicts arising from AUKUS or ANZUS, and defining "within the Pacific" by Forum membership so as to exclude the South China Sea, Taiwan Strait and Korean Peninsula; Article 7 safeguards preserving Fijian criminal jurisdiction, requiring parliamentary approval of any permanent or long term presence, environmental and social impact assessment, a right to suspend or terminate any presence and publication before entry into force; Article 8 creating a joint parliamentary committee; Article 10 preserving Fiji's obligations under the UN Charter, its Constitution, UNDRIP and the Boe Declaration; Article 11 permitting mediation, conciliation or binding arbitration by agreement; Article 12 requiring consultation with the Forum and that acceptance of accession not be unreasonably withheld; Article 13 allowing a neutral depositary such as the Forum Secretariat; Article 15 replacing indefinite duration with a five year renewable term and six months withdrawal notice; Article 16 providing a three year rather than ten year review; a new Article 17 on non-alignment providing that nothing in the Treaty requires either Party to join a military alliance, host a foreign base or align against any state and that Australia shall not pressure Fiji to exclude any third country; and a new Article 18 on consultation with the Great Council of Chiefs and indigenous peoples.

Parts V and VI set out procedural and substantive safeguards, including a Supreme Court reference on the constitutional implications of ratification, ratification tied to implementing legislation, a national referendum on war commitments, a permanent joint parliamentary oversight committee, an opt out clause allowing Fiji to decline a specific conflict by parliamentary resolution, reciprocal visa and mobility arrangements, a reliability assessment of Australia's capacity and willingness to honour its commitments, a partnership integrity assessment and a statement of consistency with the President's UNGA address. He also recommends that a parliamentary delegation visit Guam, American Samoa, the Northern Mariana Islands and the Compact of Free Association states (FSM, Marshall Islands and Palau) to study how military service in US forces has affected those communities, and what measures their governments have put in place to safeguard families and asks the Committee to defer ratification until the safeguards are secured.

4.2.2.11 **Provision Global Solutions (PGS),** a Fijian-led organisation specialising in sovereign capability development, expressed support for the Fiji–Australia Vuvale Union and the Ocean of Peace Alliance (‘Veitacini Treaty’), recognising their potential to strengthen Fiji’s regional and international partnerships, national security and institutional resilience. However, the submission emphasised that the success of both treaties should be measured not merely by the extent of cooperation or financial assistance provided, but by their contribution to Fiji’s long-term sovereign capability. PGS maintained that strategic partnerships should strengthen Fiji’s ability to independently develop, own, operate,

govern and sustain its national institutions, systems and capabilities, rather than create long-term dependence on external expertise and assistance.

The submission identified several priority areas requiring attention in implementing the treaties, including defence and security personnel development, counter-narcotics and transnational organised crime, border security, intelligence coordination, cybersecurity, critical infrastructure protection, institutional integrity and national resilience. PGS highlighted the importance of strengthening Fiji's domestic expertise through structured training, professional development, knowledge transfer and sustainable institutional capacity-building. It further emphasised that cooperation involving sensitive technologies, critical infrastructure and third-party service providers should be subject to appropriate safeguards concerning data sovereignty, national control, cybersecurity, interoperability, accountability and the protection of Fiji's national interests.

PGS recommended that the Committee advocate the adoption of a Sovereign Capability Test to assess whether programmes undertaken through the treaties would enable Fiji's institutions and personnel to independently manage and sustain the resulting capabilities. It further recommended that capability transfer be explicitly incorporated into implementation arrangements, that institutional integrity and anti-corruption safeguards be strengthened, and that national security initiatives be developed as integrated capabilities under Fijian authority. The submission also called for measurable outcomes, including the development of qualified Fijian specialists, sustainable systems, improved institutional readiness and reduced dependence on external assistance. In particular, PGS recommended that the Vuvale Work Plan incorporate measurable sovereign capability outcomes and periodic Government reviews to assess progress in strengthening Fiji's long-term institutional independence. The submission concluded that implementation of both treaties should be guided by the principle of Fijian ownership, international partnership and enduring national capability, ensuring that cooperation strengthens Fiji's sovereignty and long-term national interests.

4.3 Committee Analysis

4.3.1 Fiji-Australia Vuvale Union

The Committee acknowledges the potential benefits of the Fiji–Australia Vuvale Union ("Treaty") in strengthening bilateral cooperation, enhancing national resilience and supporting Fiji's long-term development priorities. The submissions demonstrate substantial interest in the opportunities presented through education, healthcare, infrastructure, labour mobility, climate resilience and security cooperation. However, the Committee notes that stakeholders also identified significant concerns regarding the interpretation of security commitments, the certainty of anticipated financial benefits, the transparency of implementation arrangements and the adequacy of parliamentary oversight.

The Committee considers that these matters should be addressed through clear legal interpretation, transparent implementation planning, appropriate institutional safeguards and regular reporting to Parliament. The Committee further considers that the success of the Vuvale Union should ultimately be measured by its contribution to Fiji's economic and social development, national resilience, institutional capacity and sovereign decision-making, rather than solely by the expansion of bilateral cooperation.

The following presents the Committee's analysis of the Fiji-Australia Vuvale Union.

4.3.1.1 Preamble – Treaty Principles and Commitments

The Committee notes that submitters generally recognised the importance of Fiji's longstanding relationship with Australia but expressed differing views on whether the Treaty adequately protects Fiji's independent foreign policy and sovereign decision-making. Concerns were raised regarding the use of indigenous terminology, the extent of consultation with traditional institutions and communities, and whether the partnership could create disproportionate dependence on Australia.

The Committee considers that the Treaty should be implemented in a manner that respects Fiji's sovereignty, constitutional framework, cultural identity and commitment to maintaining constructive relationships with other countries. While closer bilateral cooperation is consistent with Fiji's national interests, its implementation should not undermine independent decision-making or exclude meaningful participation by affected communities.

Article 1 – Purpose

The Committee notes that the Treaty builds upon Fiji's longstanding bilateral relationship with Australia and provides opportunities for sustained cooperation in areas aligned with Fiji's national development priorities. The Committee notes that the submissions generally acknowledge the purpose of formalising and strengthening the bilateral relationship between Fiji and Australia.

Article 2 – Vuvale Union

The Committee notes broad support for enhanced cooperation in education, healthcare, trade, investment, infrastructure, sport and economic development. However, submissions emphasised that the partnership must prioritise Fiji's national development needs, strengthen domestic institutions and

ensure that benefits reach rural, maritime and disadvantaged communities. Concerns were also raised regarding potential dependence on external expertise and the need for measurable implementation outcomes.

The Committee considers that the objectives of the Vuvale Union provide opportunities for long-term development cooperation. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of the partnership will depend on whether its implementation delivers equitable and measurable benefits, develops local expertise and addresses Fiji's existing economic and social challenges rather than primarily advancing external strategic interests.

Article 3 – Prosperity and People

The Committee notes strong stakeholder interest in the economic and social opportunities anticipated under Article 3. The Ministry of Education, Higher Education Commission Fiji and Pacific Polytech emphasised the importance of strengthening technical and vocational education and training, digital and maritime skills, and domestic workforce capacity. Concerns were raised regarding skills migration, the sustainability of training programmes and the need to ensure that Fijian institutions and professionals benefit directly from Australian-supported initiatives.

The Ministry of Health and Medical Services highlighted healthcare as an essential component of national resilience, while the Ministry of Finance and other agencies identified opportunities for investment in infrastructure, connectivity and economic development. Other submissions called for preferential education arrangements, improved professional mobility, fair access to procurement opportunities and greater participation by Fijian businesses.

The Committee considers that Article 3 offers substantial development opportunities but that the anticipated benefits remain dependent on effective implementation, sustainable financing and institutional coordination. The Committee emphasises that education and labour mobility initiatives should address Fiji's domestic skills shortages while supporting knowledge transfer and workforce retention. Furthermore, Australian-funded programmes should provide meaningful opportunities for Fijian professionals, businesses and training institutions, with particular consideration given to rural and maritime communities. The Committee recognises that increased bilateral investment does not necessarily translate into sustainable domestic capacity unless Fijian institutions, professionals and businesses can participate meaningfully in programme design and delivery.

The Committee considers that the ten-year Work Plan should incorporate transparent and proportionate procurement arrangements, opportunities for local professional participation, knowledge transfer requirements and measurable indicators demonstrating the economic benefits retained within Fiji.

Article 4 – Climate and Peace

The Committee notes that Article 4 attracted significant scrutiny, particularly regarding the potential implications of third-party security arrangements for Fiji's independent foreign policy. Submitters questioned whether the provisions concerning foreign military presence, strategic infrastructure and technology partnerships could restrict Fiji's existing and future relationships with other countries.

The Ministry of Defence highlighted the importance of strengthening maritime surveillance, border security, cybersecurity and responses to transnational organised crime. The Ministry of Environment emphasised climate change as a central national security concern, while the Ministry of Rural and

Maritime Development identified the absence of explicit disaster management commitments as a significant implementation gap.

Other submissions raised concerns regarding data sovereignty, overseas cloud jurisdiction, digital infrastructure ownership, health technology partnerships and the need to protect Fiji's control over critical national assets.

The Committee recognises that Article 4 provides opportunities to strengthen Fiji's national security and resilience against emerging threats. However, the Committee considers that the provisions concerning third-party engagement require clear interpretation to ensure that consultation obligations do not unnecessarily restrict Fiji's sovereign authority to determine its foreign and security relationships.

The Committee further considers that security cooperation must reflect Fiji's broader national priorities, including climate adaptation, disaster preparedness, maritime safety, cybersecurity and the protection of critical infrastructure. Implementation should be supported by appropriate legal safeguards, domestic technical capacity and transparent institutional arrangements.

Article 5 – Pacific Regionalism

The Committee notes that stakeholders generally recognised the importance of strengthening Pacific regionalism through the Pacific Islands Forum and the proposed establishment of the Ocean of Peace Centre in Suva. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and External Trade identified Article 5 as consistent with Fiji's Pacific Family First approach under its Foreign Policy White Paper.

However, concerns were raised regarding the governance, operational responsibilities and financial sustainability of the proposed Centre. The evidence also identified differing references to its proposed establishment funding, which require reconciliation.

The Committee considers that the Ocean of Peace Centre presents an opportunity for Fiji to strengthen its contribution to regional peace, security and diplomacy. However, the Committee emphasises that the Centre should operate through genuinely Pacific-led governance arrangements, with clear responsibilities, sustainable financing and meaningful participation by Pacific Islands Forum members. Its establishment should complement existing regional mechanisms rather than duplicate their functions or disproportionately reflect bilateral priorities.

Article 6 – Vuvale Forum

The Committee notes that the Vuvale Forum is intended to provide ministerial-level oversight of the bilateral partnership. Submitters recognised the value of regular high-level engagement but expressed concern that participation by traditional, religious, community and business representatives is discretionary rather than mandatory.

The Fiji Council of Social Services emphasised the need for mutual accountability, while other submissions questioned how non-government representatives would be selected and whether the Forum's decisions would be subject to parliamentary scrutiny.

The Committee considers that the Vuvale Forum provides an important mechanism for coordinating bilateral priorities and resolving implementation challenges. However, the Committee is of the view that its broad responsibilities should be accompanied by appropriate transparency and accountability

safeguards. Structured stakeholder participation and periodic reporting to Parliament would strengthen public confidence and ensure that decisions reflect Fiji's wider national interests.

Article 7 – Vuvale Bukmak

The Committee notes that Article 7 is central to implementing the Treaty through the Vuvale Bukmak and the proposed ten-year Work Plan. Ministries and stakeholders emphasised the importance of ensuring that the Work Plan reflects Fiji's national priorities, including education, health, disaster resilience, energy security, maritime development, digital infrastructure and local workforce development.

The Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development recommended a dedicated disaster resilience and humanitarian assistance component, while the Ministry of Environment, Ministry of Education and Ministry of Finance highlighted the importance of sectoral coordination and clearly defined implementation responsibilities. Civil society and professional stakeholders called for transparent funding allocations, measurable performance indicators, local participation and regular public reporting.

The Committee notes that the ten-year Work Plan is central to translating the Vuvale Union's objectives into practical outcomes. Consequently, the absence of publicly available implementation details, as identified by submitters, limits the ability to assess the full financial, institutional and developmental implications of the proposed arrangements.

The Committee considers that parliamentary oversight should extend beyond initial approval to include periodic reporting on implementation, expenditure, institutional arrangements and the continuing relevance of the treaties to Fiji's national interests.

Article 8 – Settlement of Disputes

The Committee notes concerns regarding the reliance on consultation and consensus to resolve disputes between Fiji and Australia. Submitters questioned whether the absence of independent dispute settlement mechanisms could disadvantage Fiji where disagreements remain unresolved.

The evidence also records questions regarding the legal implications of Article 8(2), particularly its relationship with Article 10(6) and the continued exclusion of judicial or third-party dispute settlement following termination. Article 8(2) states that *"any dispute arising under this Treaty with respect to its interpretation, application or implementation shall not be referred to any national or international tribunal or court or any other third party for resolution."*

The Committee recognises that diplomatic consultation is an established mechanism for resolving disputes between sovereign states. However, the Committee considers that the absence of independent adjudication may create uncertainty where negotiations fail.

The Committee therefore considers that clarification is necessary regarding the procedures for resolving prolonged disputes, the circumstances under which obligations may be suspended and the implications for Fiji's constitutional and domestic legal framework.

Article 9 – Amendment

The Committee notes that the written submissions raised limited article-specific concerns, principally regarding the need to ensure that amendments are made through mutual agreement and remain consistent with Fiji's national interests.

The Committee considers that the amendment mechanism provides flexibility to respond to changing circumstances. However, any substantive amendments affecting Fiji's legal, financial or security obligations should be subjected to appropriate domestic approval procedures and parliamentary scrutiny. Attention should be given to the implications of any retrospective application of amendments.

Article 10 – Status, Entry into Force and Termination

The Committee notes concerns regarding the 24-month notice period required for termination of the Treaty. A submission recommended reducing the period to 12 months to provide greater flexibility should Fiji's national interests or international circumstances change.

The Committee recognises that the termination provisions provide stability and predictability for long-term bilateral cooperation. Nevertheless, the Committee considers that the 24-month notice requirement should be assessed against the nature of Fiji's obligations and its ability to respond to changing strategic and economic circumstances. Periodic review of the Treaty would provide an additional safeguard to ensure that continued participation remains consistent with Fiji's national interests.

Article 11 – Supplementary Instruments

The Committee notes that the Ministry of Finance acknowledged that the Vuvale Union provides an overarching framework under which subsidiary agreements would establish detailed implementation arrangements. The Ministry of Health and Medical Services identified the need for sector-specific arrangements addressing financing, governance, monitoring, data protection, workforce responsibilities, procurement and dispute resolution. The Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development similarly identified matters that could be addressed through implementing arrangements rather than amendments to the Treaty.

The Committee considers that Article 11 provides necessary flexibility for implementing the Vuvale Union across different sectors. However, the Committee recognises that subsidiary agreements may create additional legal, financial and operational obligations beyond those expressly detailed in the Treaty. The Committee therefore considers that significant implementing arrangements should be subject to appropriate legal review, financial assessment and parliamentary oversight. Attention should be given to arrangements involving national security, critical infrastructure, public expenditure, data sovereignty and long-term institutional commitments.

4.3.1.2 The Committee notes the potential economic benefits arising from the Treaty, including the proposed ten-year financial assistance package, skills development initiatives, labour mobility opportunities, investment and strengthened institutional cooperation. However, concerns were raised that these anticipated benefits are not expressly guaranteed within the Treaty and remain dependent on future funding decisions and implementation arrangements. The Committee also recognises that fulfilling obligations relating to critical infrastructure protection, cybersecurity and border management may impose additional financial and institutional responsibilities in Fiji. The Committee therefore considers

it important that the anticipated economic and strategic benefits are supported by clear implementation commitments, sustainable financing and appropriate parliamentary accountability mechanisms, while ensuring that Fiji retains its sovereign decision-making authority and that the partnership continues to serve its national development and foreign policy priorities.

4.3.1.3 The Committee further notes that several drafting errors, ambiguities and omissions in the Fiji–Australia Vuvale Union that warrant clarification before ratification. These include the unnecessary paragraph numbering in Article 1; the use of the term "First Nations heritage" in Article 3(6), which may not adequately reflect Fiji's indigenous identity and cultural context; and the absence of clear definitions for key terms under Article 4, including "third party", "security sectors", "ongoing presence" and "arrangements". Concerns were also raised regarding the broad and potentially restrictive interpretation of third-party security engagements under Articles 4(2)(b), 4(3) and 4(7), as well as the open-ended definition of critical infrastructure under Article 4(6). Further matters identified include the absence of an explanation of the term "Bukmak" under Article 7 and the provision for retrospective amendments under Article 9(2), which may raise questions regarding legal certainty and parliamentary scrutiny. Of particular note, is the omission in the Treaty's signature block, where the signatories are represented by their signatures without their printed names or official designations, alongside inconsistencies in the handwritten dates appearing on the original documents. The Committee considers that these drafting matters, particularly those affecting legal interpretation, sovereignty and the formal identification of signatories, should be clarified by the relevant authorities to ensure the accuracy, consistency and legal certainty of the Treaty.

4.3.1.4 The Committee examined the consistency of the Fiji–Australia Vuvale Union with Fiji's Foreign Policy White Paper 2024, *Sovereignty, Security and Prosperity*, and notes that the Treaty substantially aligns with Fiji's established foreign policy priorities, particularly in strengthening relations with traditional partners, advancing economic cooperation, education, labour mobility, maritime and border security, climate resilience and Pacific regionalism. The Committee further notes that Articles 3, 4 and 5 give practical effect to several objectives outlined in the White Paper, including enhanced economic integration, cooperation against transnational organised crime and recognition of the Pacific Islands Forum as the principal regional institution.

However, the Committee identified matters requiring clarification, particularly the implications of Article 4 concerning third-party involvement in critical infrastructure, technology and security sectors, and whether the consultation provisions could affect Fiji's sovereign authority to maintain independent relationships with other international partners. The Committee also recognises that increased labour mobility under Article 3, while providing economic and employment opportunities, may exacerbate existing domestic skills shortages unless accompanied by appropriate workforce development, retention and return pathways. Accordingly, the Committee considers that implementation of the Vuvale Union should remain consistent with Fiji's independent foreign policy, preserve its sovereign decision-making authority, strengthen domestic institutional capacity and ensure that the anticipated economic and security benefits contribute directly to Fiji's long-term national development priorities.

4.3.2 Ocean of Peace Alliance *('Veitacini Treaty')*

The Committee acknowledges that the Veitacini Treaty presents opportunities to strengthen Fiji's defence capabilities, maritime security, humanitarian assistance, disaster response and contribution to regional peace and security. Government agencies identified practical benefits arising from improved training, equipment maintenance, operational coordination and institutional cooperation with Australia. However, the Committee notes that submissions raised significant concerns regarding the scope of mutual defence commitments, the legal status of visiting forces, Fiji's independent foreign policy, democratic oversight and the adequacy of dispute settlement arrangements.

The Committee considers that Articles 6 and 7 warrant particular scrutiny because they have the most direct implications for Fiji's defence responsibilities, sovereign decision-making and domestic legal jurisdiction. These provisions should be examined alongside the consultation requirements, performance obligations and dispute settlement mechanisms to establish the full extent of Fiji's commitments.

The Committee further considers that any decision on ratification should be informed by clear explanations from the Government regarding the legal and operational implications of the Treaty, the safeguards available under Fiji's constitutional and legislative framework, and the arrangements for continuing parliamentary oversight.

4.3.2.1 Preamble – Principles and Commitments

The Committee notes that submissions generally acknowledged the importance of peace, security and regional cooperation but expressed differing interpretations of the Veitacini Treaty's strategic purpose. Submitters questioned whether the proposed Alliance adequately reflects the principles of the Ocean of Peace and Fiji's longstanding independent foreign policy. DAWN emphasised the importance of a Pacific-led, people-centred security framework incorporating self-determination, nuclear justice and demilitarisation. Other submitters called for broader consultation with traditional institutions, civil society and Pacific regional organisations.

The principal concern is whether the Alliance strengthens Fiji's contribution to Pacific-led security or creates a bilateral strategic alignment that may influence its independent foreign policy. The Committee considers that the Veitacini Treaty should be implemented consistently with Fiji's sovereignty, regional commitments and the Pacific's expanded concept of security, including human security, climate change and sustainable development.

Article 1 – Purpose

The Committee notes that several submitters questioned whether the purpose of the Treaty could progressively align Fiji's national security priorities with those of Australia. A submission raised concerns regarding the Treaty's compatibility with Fiji's non-aligned foreign policy, while other submissions sought assurances that its provisions would not undermine Fiji's sovereignty and independent decision-making. Other submissions recognised the potential security benefits but emphasised that cooperation must remain consistent with Fiji's national interests.

The Committee recognises that strengthening bilateral security cooperation is a legitimate national objective. However, the Treaty's purpose should be clearly distinguished from any expectation of

automatic political or military alignment. The Committee considers that the Government should clarify how Fiji will retain independent authority over defence policy, military deployments and participation in regional or international security operations.

Article 2 – Democratic Values

The Committee notes that submitters emphasised the importance of informed public and parliamentary scrutiny before Fiji undertakes significant defence commitments. The Ministry of Defence and RFMF highlighted the Treaty's potential to strengthen the RFMF's commitment to democratic values, the rule of law and professional military service.

The Committee considers that the recognition of democratic values must be reflected in practical safeguards, particularly civilian oversight of defence institutions, respect for constitutional processes and accountability for decisions involving military cooperation. The Committee further considers that commitments to democratic principles should extend beyond treaty language to transparent implementation and meaningful parliamentary scrutiny.

Article 3 – Peaceful Settlement of Disputes

The Committee notes that DAWN and other submitters emphasised peaceful settlement, demilitarisation and the avoidance of coercive responses to regional disputes. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and External Trade identified diplomatic engagement and peaceful dispute settlement under Article 3 as consistent with Fiji's obligations under the United Nations Charter.

The Committee considers that peaceful dispute settlement should remain a fundamental principle guiding the implementation of the Alliance. The Committee further considers that the existence of mutual defence commitments under Article 6 must not diminish the priority accorded to diplomatic engagement, preventive dialogue and peaceful resolution of disputes.

Article 4 – Cooperation

The Committee notes that Government agencies identified opportunities to strengthen Fiji's maritime and border security capabilities through training, equipment maintenance, intelligence cooperation and operational support. The Ministry of Defence and RFMF highlighted the importance of enhanced maritime cooperation and the maintenance of naval assets, while FRCS identified the relevance of security cooperation to border protection and transnational crime.

However, civil society and individual submissions questioned whether expanded military cooperation could increase dependence on Australia or contribute to the militarisation of Pacific security.

The Committee recognises the operational benefits of improved defence capability, particularly given Fiji's extensive maritime responsibilities and exposure to transnational security threats. Nevertheless, the Committee considers that cooperation should prioritise sustainable domestic capability, technology transfer, Fijian operational control and clearly defined responsibilities. Security cooperation should also encompass non-military threats, including climate change, disaster response and maritime safety.

Article 5 – Consultation

The Committee notes concern that consultation obligations could influence Fiji's ability to independently engage with other international partners. Submitters questioned the scope of consultations, whether disagreement could constrain Fiji's decisions and whether Parliament and relevant traditional or regional institutions would have opportunities to contribute.

The Committee considers that consultation can strengthen mutual understanding and prevent misunderstandings between treaty partners. However, consultation should not be presumed to confer a general right of approval over Fiji's sovereign decisions. The Committee considers that the Government should clarify the scope, procedures and consequences of consultation under Article 5, particularly where the Parties hold differing security or foreign policy positions.

Article 6 – Mutual Defence

The Committee notes that Article 6 attracted some of the most significant concerns in the submissions. Submitters questioned whether a binding mutual defence commitment could expose Fiji to military conflicts beyond its direct national interests. Most submissions called for clarification of the circumstances triggering mutual defence obligations and the meaning of action taken in accordance with domestic processes.

The Ministry of Health and Medical Services identified potential practical benefits in medical readiness, emergency coordination, medical evacuation and mass-casualty response, while recognising that the Treaty is principally a defence and security instrument.

The Committee considers that Article 6 represents one of the most consequential provisions of the Treaty because it establishes expectations concerning the response to an armed attack against either Party within the Pacific. The Committee emphasises the importance of distinguishing an obligation to respond to a common danger from an automatic obligation to deploy military forces. The reference to domestic processes requires clear explanation, including the respective roles of the Executive, Parliament and the RFMF in determining Fiji's response.

The Committee further considers that the Government should clarify the geographical scope of the provision, the types of action that may satisfy the obligation and whether Fiji retains discretion to determine the nature and extent of its response.

Article 7 – Visiting Forces

The Committee notes that Article 7 attracted substantial scrutiny regarding the legal and operational arrangements governing visiting military personnel. Submitters raised concerns regarding the jurisdiction of Fijian courts, possible immunities, criminal liability, environmental damage and compensation.

The Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development recommended that implementing arrangements expressly provide for civilian-led disaster response protocols. The Ministry of Environment highlighted the need to address environmental protection, biosecurity, waste management and marine impacts. The Ministry of Defence and RFMF referred to existing military training and status-of-forces arrangements,

while the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and External Trade identified the importance of ensuring compliance with Fiji's laws.

Questions were also raised during the hearings regarding potential customs and tax concessions for visiting forces. The Committee considers that visiting-forces arrangements require particular scrutiny because they directly affect the exercise of Fiji's jurisdiction over foreign military personnel and activities within its territory.

The Committee recognises the benefits of joint training, humanitarian assistance and disaster response. However, these arrangements should clearly establish the applicable legal jurisdiction, responsibilities for misconduct, environmental obligations, compensation mechanisms and operational command arrangements.

The Committee notes the clarification provided by the Minister for Defence and Veteran Affairs that Fiji and Australia have an existing Status of Forces Agreement, signed in October 2022, which governs aspects of military cooperation and provides for respect for Fiji's domestic laws. The Minister further confirmed that visiting Australian military personnel are subject to Fijian laws and are not exempt from local prosecution.

However, the Committee considers that further clarification is necessary regarding the interaction between Article 7 of the Veitacini Treaty and the existing Status of Forces Agreement, particularly whether additional implementing arrangements would be required and the extent to which such arrangements would be subject to parliamentary scrutiny. The Committee emphasises the importance of ensuring that any subsequent arrangements uphold Fiji's sovereignty, domestic jurisdiction and constitutional processes.

Article 8 – Governance

The Committee notes that submissions called for clear governance arrangements to oversee implementation of the Alliance. A submission recommended regular reporting to Parliament, while others emphasised public accountability and Pacific-led governance. Additionally, concerns were raised regarding data sovereignty and the need for safeguards in subsequent operational arrangements.

The Committee considers that governance arrangements must provide effective oversight of defence cooperation, financial commitments and implementation decisions. Given the sensitive nature of security cooperation, the Committee recognises that some operational information may require confidentiality. Nevertheless, appropriate reporting arrangements should be established to ensure that Parliament can assess the Treaty's implementation without compromising legitimate national security interests.

Article 9 – Charter of the United Nations

The Committee notes that DAWN emphasised the importance of ensuring that the Alliance remains consistent with the United Nations Charter and Fiji's existing international obligations.

The Committee considers that compliance with the United Nations Charter is fundamental to the legitimacy of the Alliance. The Committee further considers that the Government should clarify how

the Treaty's mutual defence provisions will operate consistently with the international legal framework governing the use of force, peaceful settlement of disputes and collective security.

Article 10 – Performance of Obligations

The Committee notes concerns regarding the interaction between the Veitacini Treaty and Fiji's existing international commitments. The Ministry of Environment highlighted Article 10(2), which preserves obligations under existing agreements, including the Paris Agreement and relevant multilateral environmental agreements. The Fiji Medical Association and other submitters sought assurance that the Alliance would not undermine Fiji's existing cooperation with third countries.

The Committee considers that Article 10 provides an important safeguard for the continuity of existing international obligations. However, the Government should clarify how potentially conflicting obligations will be identified and addressed, particularly where existing security, environmental or diplomatic commitments intersect with the Alliance.

Article 11 – Disputes Between the Parties

The Committee notes concerns regarding the exclusion of judicial and third-party dispute settlement mechanisms. Questions were raised during public hearings about how disagreements concerning visiting forces, immigration and other implementation matters would be resolved where diplomatic consultations fail.

The Ministry of Environment identified dispute resolution through bilateral mechanisms as consistent with the Pacific Way, while other submissions questioned whether such arrangements provide sufficient protection for Fiji.

The Committee recognises the value of resolving disputes through diplomatic consultation. Nevertheless, the Committee considers that reliance on political agreement may create difficulties where the Parties are unable to reach a mutually acceptable resolution.

The Committee further considers that the Government should clarify whether the exclusion of international dispute settlement affects remedies available under domestic law and how disputes involving individuals, criminal jurisdiction or contractual obligations would be addressed.

Article 12 – Signature, Ratification and Accession

The Committee notes that several submissions recommended deferring ratification until concerns regarding sovereignty, mutual defence and implementation safeguards are adequately addressed. Other submissions sought greater public consultation and clarification of the conditions under which additional Pacific countries may accede to the Alliance.

Questions were also raised during the hearings concerning the requirement for unanimous consent to accession and the criteria that would guide Fiji's decision on prospective members.

The Committee considers that ratification is a significant constitutional and foreign policy decision requiring careful assessment of Fiji's obligations and national interests.

The Committee further considers that accession arrangements should be supported by clear criteria, including consistency with Pacific regional priorities, national security considerations and the prospective member's capacity to fulfil treaty obligations. Fiji's participation in accession decisions should remain subject to appropriate domestic processes.

Article 13 – The Depositary

The Committee notes that the depositary performs an administrative function concerning the custody and notification of treaty instruments. Although no specific concerns were raised, the Committee considers that the Government should ensure that Fiji receives timely notification of all relevant treaty actions, including ratifications, accessions, amendments and withdrawals.

Article 14 – Entry into Force

The Committee considers that the entry into force of the Treaty should follow the completion of all applicable domestic requirements. Before implementation, the Government should ensure that relevant agencies understand their responsibilities and that necessary legal, administrative and operational arrangements are sufficiently developed.

Article 15 – Duration and Withdrawal

The Committee notes concerns regarding the indefinite duration of the Treaty and the implications for future governments. Several submitters recommended periodic review, while others emphasised the need for sustained parliamentary oversight.

The Committee recognises that long-term security arrangements can provide stability and predictability. However, the Committee considers that indefinite duration requires appropriate review mechanisms to ensure the Alliance continues to serve Fiji's national interests.

The Committee further considers that periodic assessments should examine changing regional security circumstances, the effectiveness of implementation and any implications for Fiji's sovereignty and international obligations.

Article 16 – Amendment

The Committee notes that a submission proposed substantive and procedural changes before ratification, while other submissions called for legal clarification and binding safeguards. The Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development indicated that certain operational concerns could be addressed through implementing arrangements rather than formal amendment.

The Committee considers that the amendment provisions should preserve flexibility to address future developments while ensuring that significant changes remain subject to appropriate domestic scrutiny. The Committee further considers that implementing arrangements should not be used to introduce substantive obligations that would otherwise require formal treaty amendment or parliamentary approval.

4.3.2.2 The Committee notes that the Veitacini Treaty presents significant strategic opportunities and potential implications for Fiji’s national security, foreign policy, constitutional arrangements and regional standing. The Treaty offers opportunities to strengthen Fiji’s defence capabilities through enhanced

intelligence sharing, military training, joint exercises, equipment support and closer security cooperation with Australia, while potentially increasing Fiji's influence in regional security arrangements through its role in determining the accession of other Pacific States. However, concerns were raised regarding the geographical scope of the mutual defence obligations under Article 6, particularly the possibility of Fiji becoming involved in conflicts beyond the immediate Pacific Islands region, and the absence of clearly defined parliamentary processes for determining Fiji's response to an armed attack.

The Committee further notes concerns that the Alliance may affect Fiji's longstanding non-aligned foreign policy and its relationships with other international partners, notwithstanding the Government's assurances that existing bilateral relationships, including with China, will remain unaffected. In addition, the Committee recognises the potential constitutional and financial implications arising from the implementation of mutual defence commitments, visiting-forces arrangements and future accession decisions, particularly where parliamentary oversight mechanisms and funding responsibilities have not been clearly established. At the regional level, while the Treaty may strengthen Fiji's leadership in advancing the Ocean of Peace initiative, concerns were expressed that establishing a bilateral defence alliance under a concept originally developed as a collective Pacific regional vision could affect perceptions of Fiji's neutrality and the inclusiveness of Pacific-led security cooperation. The Committee therefore considers it essential that the Government clarify the scope of Fiji's defence obligations, establish appropriate constitutional and parliamentary safeguards, assess the long-term financial and operational commitments, and ensure that implementation of the Treaty preserves Fiji's sovereign decision-making authority, independent foreign policy and credibility within the Pacific regional architecture.

4.3.2.3 The Committee identified several drafting defects, omissions and legal ambiguities within the Ocean of Peace Alliance *('Veitacini Treaty')* that warrant clarification, particularly given the significance of the Treaty's mutual defence obligations.

These include a typographical error in the signature block, which reads "FOR THE GOVERNMENT OF THE OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI", and the absence of a definition of "Party", notwithstanding the distinction between signatories and acceding States under Article 12. Of particular concern is Article 6, which refers to an "armed attack on any of the Parties within the Pacific" without defining the geographical scope of the Pacific or specifying whether the provision extends to attacks on military vessels, aircraft or personnel operating beyond the territories of the Parties. The Committee further notes the ambiguity surrounding the phrase "in accordance with its domestic processes", particularly regarding the respective roles of the Executive, Parliament and the RFMF in determining Fiji's response to a common danger.

Additional concerns relate to the absence of established consultation mechanisms under Article 8, the reference to the Parties as "Pacific military nations" in the Preamble, the use of the Ocean of Peace designation for a bilateral defence arrangement notwithstanding its broader regional significance, and the designation of Australia as Depositary under Article 13. While some matters are editorial or administrative in nature, the Committee considers that the ambiguities concerning mutual defence, accession, decision-making authority and governance have potentially significant implications for Fiji's sovereignty, constitutional processes and international obligations. The Committee therefore considers it important that the Government provide clear legal and policy explanations of these provisions and address any necessary drafting corrections to ensure legal certainty, transparency and accountability in the implementation of the Treaty.

4.3.2.4 The Committee examined the consistency of the Ocean of Peace Alliance *('Veitacini Treaty')* with Fiji's Foreign Policy White Paper 2024, *Sovereignty, Security and Prosperity*, and notes that while the Treaty aligns with Fiji's commitment to strengthening cooperation with traditional partners and advancing regional peace and security, significant differences arise concerning Fiji's longstanding policy of non-alignment, sovereign decision-making and Pacific-led regionalism. In particular, the Committee notes that Chapter 5 of the White Paper expressly identifies Fiji as a non-aligned State without a security alliance with any nation, whereas Article 6 of the Veitacini Treaty establishes a mutual defence commitment between Fiji and Australia.

The Committee further observes that the White Paper envisages the Ocean of Peace as an inclusive regional initiative developed through the Pacific Islands Forum, while the Veitacini Treaty establishes a bilateral security arrangement under which other Pacific States may accede only with the unanimous consent of the existing Parties under Article 12. Additional concerns arise regarding the Treaty's indefinite duration under Article 15, its review provisions under Article 16, and the absence of express provisions addressing Fiji's nuclear-free Pacific commitments, particularly in relation to visiting military vessels and aircraft. Although the White Paper recognises each State's sovereign right to determine its security partnerships, the Committee considers that the Government should clearly explain how the Treaty's mutual defence obligations, bilateral structure and long-term commitments are reconciled with Fiji's declared foreign policy principles. The Committee further considers it important that the implementation of the Treaty preserves Fiji's independent foreign policy, respects its existing international obligations, and strengthens rather than undermines the inclusive, Pacific-led vision of the Ocean of Peace.

4.3.2.5 Overall, the Committee notes several procedural and institutional concerns arising from its review of the treaty negotiation and approval processes. The Committee expresses concern that, despite the Office of the Solicitor-General being invited to engage with the Committee for over a month and subsequently being provided with written questions, no response has been received to date, thereby limiting the Committee's ability to obtain authoritative legal clarification on significant provisions of the treaties.

The Committee further notes concerns regarding the limited involvement of relevant divisions within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and External Trade during the treaty negotiation process, as well as the absence of comprehensive public consultation prior to the signing of the treaties. The Committee considers that these gaps raise broader questions regarding the adequacy of inter-agency coordination, institutional oversight and stakeholder participation in the formulation of international agreements.

The Committee emphasises that future treaty negotiations should be supported by early and comprehensive legal scrutiny, effective whole-of-government coordination and meaningful public consultation, particularly where agreements have significant implications for national sovereignty, security, governance and public interests. Such consultations should include traditional and community leaders, civil society organisations, faith-based organisations, youth representatives and other relevant stakeholders. The Committee considers these safeguards essential to strengthening transparency, institutional accountability, public confidence and parliamentary oversight of Fiji's international commitments.

5.0 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)

5.1 The Committee examined the Fiji–Australia Vuvale Union and the Ocean of Peace Alliance *('Veitacini Treaty')* in relation to Fiji's commitments under the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and notes that both treaties have the potential to contribute to the achievement of several SDGs although their respective contributions differ.

5.2 The Vuvale Union provides a broader framework for advancing SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being), SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 5 (Gender Equality), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure), SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), SDG 13 (Climate Action), SDG 14 (Life Below Water), SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions) and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals), through cooperation in economic development, healthcare, education, skills development, climate resilience, infrastructure, maritime security and institutional strengthening.

5.3 The Veitacini Treaty is principally aligned with SDG 16 and SDG 17 through its provisions concerning democratic values, peaceful settlement of disputes, defence cooperation and regional security partnerships, with potential indirect contributions to disaster resilience and maritime protection. However, the Committee notes that the anticipated development benefits will depend on effective implementation, sustainable financing, institutional capacity and appropriate safeguards. Concerns raised during the review regarding skilled migration, equitable access to development opportunities, financial accountability, data sovereignty, constitutional processes and parliamentary oversight highlight the importance of ensuring that implementation remains consistent with Fiji's national development priorities and the principle of leaving no one behind.

5.4 The Committee therefore considers that the proposed ten-year implementation framework and subsequent arrangements should incorporate measurable SDG targets and indicators, clearly defined institutional responsibilities, transparent financial reporting and periodic monitoring and evaluation to assess whether the treaties deliver tangible, equitable and sustainable outcomes for the people of Fiji.

6.0 Conclusion

The Committee acknowledges the potential benefits of the Fiji-Australia Vuvale Union and Ocean of Peace Alliance *('Veitacini Treaty')* in strengthening bilateral cooperation, economic development, national security and regional stability. However, following its review of the treaties and submissions received, the Committee identified significant concerns relating to Fiji's sovereignty, independent foreign policy, mutual defence obligations, third-party engagements, visiting forces arrangements, dispute resolution and parliamentary oversight. The Committee further emphasises the need for greater transparency, meaningful public consultation, clear financial and implementation arrangements, and safeguards to ensure that the treaties remain consistent with Fiji's constitutional framework, Fiji's Foreign Policy White Paper, national development priorities and long-term interests.

Accordingly, the Committee recommends that Parliament defer approval of the ratification of both treaties and that the Government undertake further negotiations with Australia to address the concerns identified in this Report. The Committee considers it essential that the relevant provisions be clarified or amended, where necessary, to safeguard Fiji's sovereignty, constitutional authority and independent decision-making. The Committee further emphasises the importance of strengthening parliamentary scrutiny, accountability, implementation safeguards and periodic reviews to ensure that the treaties deliver sustainable and equitable benefits for Fiji. The Committee maintains that any future treaty commitments must uphold mutual respect, transparency and Fiji's national interests while contributing to peace, security and prosperity in the wider Pacific region.

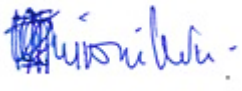
7.0 Committee Members' Signatures



Hon. Lenora QEREQERETABUA
Chairperson



Hon. Rinesh SHARMA
Deputy Chairperson



Hon. Ratu Isikeli TUIWAILEVU
Member



Hon. Penioni RAVUNAWA
Member



Hon. Virendra LAL
Member



Hon. Taito ROKOMATU
Member

8.0 Annexure

Published evidence

Written evidence, transcripts, and supporting documents can be viewed on the Parliament website at the following link:
https://www.parliament.gov.fj/committees/standing-committee-on-foreign-affairs-and-defence/