



Rear-Admiral (Ret'd) Hon. Josaia Voreqe Bainimarama, CF(Mil), OSt.J, MSD, jssc, psc

Prime Minister of Fiji and Minister for iTaukei Affairs, Sugar Industry and Foreign Affairs

SPEECH AT THE JOINT PUBLIC CONSULTATION FOR ALL SUGAR INDUSTRY STAKEHOLDERS & ITAUKEI LAND RELATED MATTERS

Nadi Civic Centre
NADI

Wed. 14th Feb., 2018
1500 Hours

**Cabinet Ministers;
Permanent Secretaries & Senior Officials;
Landowners in Navatulevu;
Sugar Cane Farmers;
Sugar Industry Stakeholders;
Ladies & Gentlemen.**

Ni sa Bula Vinaka and a very good afternoon to you all.

I am pleased to be here in Nadi this afternoon to be part of this Public Consultation Forum organised jointly by the Ministry of Sugar and its stakeholders, the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs and the iTaukei Land Trust Board for the greater western division commencing today.

I must thank you all that have made it here this afternoon to this venue despite the inconsistent and adverse weather conditions experienced in the past few days. This afternoon's session provides an opportunity for me and my team of officials to meet all of you who may have any complaints and queries on iTaukei land leases and sugar industry and any other related iTaukei issues. The session also intend to seek views and suggestions on how stakeholders from the Sugar Industry with iTaukei landowners and sugar cane farmers can all work together in a co-ordinated and structured approach to ensure sufficient lands are made available for sugar cane farming at the same time pushing up productivity levels within the Sugar Industry

The team that I have here this afternoon includes the Ministry of Sugar, officials from sugar industry stakeholders, the iTaukei Land Trust Board, the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs, the iTaukei Affairs Board and all other related agencies from both Government and statutory bodies.

Apart from the above, we are also here to reach out and create that visibility despite the adverse weather conditions to also hear from you as our stakeholders and customers any relevant suggestions for improvements on service deliveries that may assist us to serve you better in terms of good land management, renewal of land leases and also better approaches and avenues to boost sugar cane productivity towards the revitalisation of Fiji Sugar Industry.

The Government has been pumping in a lot of assistance to the sugar industry with the intension to support the livelihoods of more than 200,000 Fijians who have a passion to revitalise the sugar sector that was once the backbone of Fiji's economy. Having said this, Government continues to support the CBUL initiative set up specifically in 2010 to assist both farmers in the renewal of their agricultural leases at the same time providing incentives to landowners to give their unutilised land for leasing should they not be able to utilise them.

In line with the above, Government as of yesterday released a payment of **\$3.72 Million** as CBUL payment to the iTaukei Land Trust Board to be distributed to a total of 1,479 land owning units at Yavusa, Mataqali and Tokatoka level who have given their consent to renew agricultural leases under the CBUL initiative. In addition to this, the payment also benefitted a total of 138,899 individual landowning unit members who have individual bank accounts who will also have a share from this CBUL funds. Since 2010, Government has paid out more than **\$50 Million** to this facility that has directly had an impact on the renewal rate of Agricultural leases from a rate of 47% way back in 2010 to over 80% as of December 2017.

The TLTB as part of its pro-active approach on addressing expiring of leases in 2017 has issued early expiry notices to 1,056 leases that would be expiring in the next 5 years. It has also commenced early consultations with more than 950 landowning units throughout Fiji to seek their consent for the renewal of leases to sitting tenants.

Though there may be some slight difference to the area to be leased out under the new lease terms and conditions, it is hoped that this will address a lot land lease queries and complaints and will also provide security of tenure to existing farmers and tenants that wish to continue to lease land for sugar cane farming and for other economic activities.

The CBUL program has been an empowering program for both farmers and landowners. My Government continues to encourage landowners to lease out their unutilised iTaukei lands. It also reassures landowners that their rights as iTaukei land owners are well protected in the Constitution of Fiji.

The only issue that needs to be discussed openly and objectively is the notion of **“Accessibility to utilised land”** and **“how best it can be worked on to the best productive use”**, such that the landowners get a share from its use and the land is put to best use to generate some form of

economic activity that will contribute positively to the growth of the Fijian economy.

It is also pleasing to note that the iTaukei Land Trust Board in 2017 had issued 2,100 new leases of different categories to tenants. From the current 40,000 lease portfolio it maintains, it had collected and distributed \$73 Million trust income for the landowners. Further to this, under this Government's equal rent distribution policy put into effect from late 2015, a total of 38,600 itaukei landowners under the age of 18 years with total funds of **\$33.6 Million** been saved in their individual savings account for their future and their shares will be paid to them when they turn 18 years.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the interest for iTaukei land from all different stakeholders continues to increase. This is a positive sign of confidence that all stakeholders and investors have to use unutilised land to drive different activities of growth within the economy.

To make iTaukei land more attractive and enhance confidence and security to tenants that wish to do long term commercial agriculture, the TLTB have also issued longer term commercial agricultural leases. While this lease product is made available in the market, this longer term leases are issued after a proper due diligence process has been undertaken in consultation with the landowners to assess that their future land requirements and also ensure that it corresponds to equitable benefits for the landowners.

There is a need to strike a balance between accessibility to land with the future needs of iTaukei landowners. This is undertaken by TLTB through a “**Reservation**” of land process where the TLTB Board can set aside a portion of their various holdings as a “reserve” for their future generations and not to be leased out. In 2017, the Board did set aside 2,016 hectares of land to 13 landowning units that applied through this process.

It may be also worth noting that as part of its trusteeship role, TLTB has facilitated the return of Schedule A & B lands to the iTaukei landowners who need them. The allotment process of these Schedules A & B lands are undertaken through proper due diligence process where it took a slow start since 2003. This process has now been fast-tracked and is nearing completion. Out of the 1,100 parcels of Schedule A lands, TLTB has already allotted 1074 parcels or 95% to landowning units. For Schedule B lands, out of the 304 parcels of lands, TLTB has already allotted 265 or 87%. The facilitation of this process has led to more iTaukei lands that used to be held under the Crown with Government prior to 2003 has now been reverted back to iTaukei Landowners. This also implies that if existing leases were in these reverted parcels of Schedules A & B lands, the lease monies would now be transferred to the new allotted landowning units.

This is a positive development for landowners and would also mean more lease monies and more land for the iTaukei and also more land for sugarcane farming and other developments depending on the best land-use available for that particular area.

Ladies and Gentlemen

I hope that through this consultation session this afternoon, you will be able to have most of your views clarified and complaints responded to. The officials from the various departments and statutory bodies dealing with sugar industry issues, iTaukei land, iTaukei welfare and other general concerns can be raised and be dealt with instantly. Please make yourself feel comfortable as you access the services that are available from the team this afternoon.

Vinaka Vakalevu – Thank you.
