

Rear-Admiral (Ret’d) Hon. J.V. Bainimarama, CF(Mil), OSt.J, MSD, jssc, psc

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

**Handover of Grant Agreement for Bundled Insurance Scheme**

**Sugarcane Growers Funds Thurs. 15 Oct., 2020**

**Raraiwai Mill, BA 1200 Hours**

**The Minister for Employment, Productivity and Industrial**

 **Relations and Youth and Sports, Hon. Parveen Kumar;**

**The Assistant Minister for iTaukei, Hon. Selai Adimaitoga; The Assistant Minister for Sugar, Hon. George Vegnathan;**

**The UN Resident Co-ordinator Pacific Office, Mr Sanaka**

 **Samarasinha;**

**Chairman of the Sugar Cane Growers Fund, Mr Uday Sen; Permanent Secretary of OPM, and Sugar Industry;**

**Board of Directors of Sugar Cane Growers Fund;**

**Heads and Representatives of all Sugar Industry Institutions;**

**Managing Director and Management of Fiji Cane Insurance;**

**Farmers and Lorry Operators;**

**Invited Guests;**

**Ladies and Gentlemen.**

Bula vinaka and good afternoon to you all.

It is my pleasure today to hand over the Grant Agreement from the Ministry of Sugar Industry to the Sugarcane Growers Fund to fully cover the sugarcane farmers’ premium for their bundled insurance for the last six months of this year.

As you know, under the terms of the Bundled Insurance Scheme, the growers agreed to begin paying the premium in July 2020. But we know how brutal the COVID-19 pandemic’s economic impact has been for Fiji, including for our Cane Industry. Of the many setbacks, for instance, we have not been able to operate our mechanized harvesters as efficiently as we’d like because technicians from India are stuck overseas. The point being, we knew these premium payments would have created an additional financial burden on our cane growers.

So when the Sugarcane Growers Fund asked the Government to consider paying the growers’ premium from July through December 2020—we said yes. The result is this grant agreement, in the amount of **$300,731.76.**

Ladies and Gentlemen, my Government made a commitment to strengthen our Sugar Industry—to make it more robust, more modern, more efficient and competitive, and more profitable. And we are seeing results. We have guaranteed a price of 85 Dollars per tonne, and we will keep our word. We have invested in mechanization to make harvesting more efficient, and we have vastly improved our mills. We have been upgrading the cane roads and covering cartage costs. We are subsidizing fertilizer and weedicide. We are providing cane-planting grants and technical assistance to cane growers. And we are seeing results.

In the end, all of this investment is an investment in our cane growers’ financial security.

To force the growers to make this payment at this difficult time would have been a step backward. And my Government does not shrink or hesitate in the face of adversity. As we faced down and contained the COVID-19 outbreak in Fiji, so we have mustered the resources to stand up for our farmers with this payment. I often say that it is Government’s job to create the right conditions for the economy so that the people can make it grow. That is certainly true for the Cane Industry, and right now, this Industry is carrying an even larger burden for the economy because the Tourist Industry has virtually grounded to a halt during the COVID pandemic.

When it is free to move again, it will be a great locomotive for our economy, in the meantime, sugar and other domestically-driven industries will have to do most of the pulling.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the Bundled Insurance Scheme for which we are providing this Grant today began in 2017 and is offered by the Fiji Care Insurance.

The Scheme covers death, fire, personal accident and funeral costs. It was developed by the Cane Growers and the Sugarcane Growers Fund, with some financial support provided by the Pacific Financial Inclusion Program, Sugarcane Growers Council and Fiji Sugar Corporation.

We covered nearly 12,000 active cane growers under age 65 through this Scheme at a relatively low premium, and the Sugarcane Growers Fund volunteered to pay the premium for all registered growers for the first three years. The fund paid a total of more than **$1.8 Million** in premiums from July 2017 through June 2020.

And the Scheme has worked well for you. Beneficiaries received their payouts within 24 to 48 hours of lodging claims, and as of last June, **$982,000** was claimed by 251 growers that have benefitted for different purposes.

Today, we will hand over a cheque for **$3,000** to Mr. Ganeshwa, a grower from Ba, who will receive his insurance claim payout for a house fire.

Friends, Government is pleased to be able to assist the cane growers once again as we weather an extraordinarily difficult situation together. Our cane growers do a great service to this country, and they deserve to thrive in a modern, profitable industry that provides a good life for them and their families. That is my Government’s hope, and my Government’s mission.

Vinaka vakalevu. Thank you.

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