



Forestry Focus

Newsletter, October Issue 2022



From left: Ministry of Forestry's economic planning officer Sainimere Rokosuka, Prime Minister and Minister for Forestry Hon. Voreqe Bainimarama and Principal Economic Planning Officer Olivia Vakaloloma following the launch of our Annual Operation Plan 2022-2023 and Business Guide 2022-2023.

Photo: Ministry of Forestry

PM Hails Success of Partnership With Forestry Private Sector



The Forestry Sector achieved a record-breaking export revenue of \$118.5 million in 2021, up \$41.9 million compared to 2020.

Prime Minister and Minister for Forestry, Voreqe Bainimarama's Speech at the launch of the Ministry of Forestry Costed Annual Operational Plan 2022-2023 and

Stakeholder Appreciation Event on Friday, October 21, 2022.

Our partners in the private sector; Your Excellencies, Members of the Diplomatic Corp; Senior Civil Servants; Members of the Media; Ladies and Gentlemen.

Bula vinaka and a very good evening to you all.

We're here tonight to celebrate a team effort; what a Government with a vision can achieve in partnership with the private sector to create prosperity across the country.

I want to especially welcome the saw-millers, exporters, and loggers with us this evening, as well as the Management of Fiji Pine Limited and Fiji Hardwood Corporation limited — our two key players in a forestry sector that has never been more prosperous, more sustainable, or more important to our economy.

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PM and Minister for Forestry, Hon. Voreqe Bainimarama (middle) with the staff at Holiday Inn Suva on Friday, October 21, 2022. Photo: Ministry of Forestry

Allow me to run quickly through the highlights:

Since its launch in 2019, our 30 million trees in 15 years initiative has put 15,567,189 new trees and mangroves in the ground — taking us to over half of our goal in less than four years. Those new trees and mangroves cover an area of over 14,000 hectares. Across the way from here is Albert Park. We have planted enough trees and mangroves to cover Albert Park more than 125 times over.

That should make every one of us here proud. It should make every Fijian proud. Fiji is greener, our air is cleaner, and our communities are safer because of it.

What makes that milestone even more remarkable is the revenues we've also achieved in the Industry. The Forestry Sector achieved a record-breaking export revenue of \$118.5 Million Dollars in 2021, up \$41.9 Million Dollars compared to 2020. And we are making profits without pillaging our forestry resources. That should make us very proud as well. And on the back of advances to make this Industry more efficient, such as an online application

process for harvesting licenses, approvals are now turned around in one hour, on average.

My friends, the pace of our economic growth this year is on track to surpass any year before it. There is a lot of talk these days about the triumph of our border re-opening and recovery of our Tourism Sector. That success was hard-won and the accolades are well-deserved. But we must also acknowledge the other sectors that are powering our recovery and that prove how diverse our economy has become.

Forestry has never contributed more to the prosperity of our people than it does today — your record-



“When future generations of Fijians look back on this time, I truly believe they will reflect on this work you are doing now as some of the most important and transformative in this century. We are greener, more sustainable, and more resilient for every day of honest work in our forestry sector.”

breaking exports show it. Our farmers have also broken records in agricultural exports. And fisheries exports are likewise on the rise as our blue economy blossoms.

Our record-breaking recovery is a resource-based recovery. It is not only happening in our hotels and at our airports. It is happening in our forests, on our farms, and in our ocean. We are sustainably developing our natural resource base to create livelihoods and prosperity for all Fijians — including iTaukei landowners. The benefits are being felt everywhere in the country.

Ministry's Costed Annual Operational Plan

Tonight isn't only about what we've done together — it is about what we

can do together. It is about what comes next. That is why I'm proud to also launch the Ministry of Forestry's Costed Annual Operational Plan this evening.

With a budget of \$17.1 Million Dollars in the 2022-2023 budget, the Ministry's Annual Operational Plan outlines how this Ministry will continue to grow our green economy in co-operation with the rest of the Government machinery and the private sector. I challenge you all to grow this sector's contribution to our economy even further.

We have a three-year economic recovery plan that can make that possible, with projections for an estimated total revenue of over \$400 Million Dollars from 2021 until 2024. That would be the most successful

three-year period in the history of this Industry. That is our goal to meet and our record to beat.

Guided by the vision of Sustainable Forests as Our Future, we will continue towards our full 30-million tree-planting commitment and introduce a new Harvesting Code of Practice and REDD+ Policy and an updated Fiji Forest Act 1992, which is currently under review. Guided by the mandates and protections of our Fijian Constitution, we will work with iTaukei landowners to ensure that they receive fair and equitable returns from their natural resources.

We will also ensure that investors are given security of leases and licenses, and that licenses are issued on a level playing field, through transparent processes. Guided by cutting-edge forestry knowledge and expertise, we will guard our native forests through equitable re-planting requirements, continue our research into lesser-known but potentially profitable timber species to meet the growing demand for dilo, sikeci, and sandalwood oils, soaps, skincare and other high-value products. And guided by solidarity, we will expand our forest cover in recognition of the vital role that forests play in absorbing carbon and stabilizing the climate.

When future generations of Fijians look back on this time, I truly believe they will reflect on this work you are doing now as some of the most important and transformative in this century. We are greener, more sustainable, and more resilient for every day of honest work in our forestry sector. I say honest for a good reason. It's no secret that corruption once ran root-deep in this Industry. We are committed to eliminating corruption in every form and all its vestiges — that commitment remains unwavering.

Our forests cannot be some lawless frontier — they stand next to our ocean as the most important natural assets in the country. They must be managed transparently, they must be managed sustainably, they must be managed profitably, and they will be under my leadership. As a result, they will be among the greatest inheritances we gift our children and grandchildren.

Vinaka Vakalevu. Thank you. Have a wonderful evening.

\$17.7M Forestry Budget: A Triple win for Economic, Environment and Social Wellbeing

Prime Minister and Minister for Forestry Honourable Josia Voreqe Bainimarama has welcomed the allocation of \$17.7 million for the 2022–2023 financial year, a 28 percent increase from the \$13.8 million allocated in the revised 2021–2022 budget.

Mr Bainimarama said the budgetary increase is testament of Government's continuing recognition of the importance of forests and trees to our economic, environmental, and social wellbeing – a triple win that is the ultimate end-state of Government's goal for the forestry sector.

He said that the budgetary increase is also in recognition of the Ministry for Forestry's increasing achievements, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic years when it helped facilitate the highest exports revenue in 10 years and continued Fiji's tree-planting campaign with an achievement of 12.5 million trees and mangroves in 3.5 years.

He said the budget will boost the Ministry's operations as it supports the private sector to add value to the national economy, support forest-based communities, and advance the national forestry agenda towards a greener, cleaner and sustainable economy.

This is also the Ministry's highest budget since it was separated from Fisheries in 2016. The budget of \$17.7 million in addition to \$0.4 million for quarters upgrading under the Ministry of Economy will ensure greater progress is made towards the sustainable management of forests through restoration, conservation and regulation, revitalisation of the forest sector for socio-economic recovery and the enhancement of forests for environmental services to improve lives and livelihoods of all Fijians both for the current and future generations.

Overarching focus

The overall budget strategy for the Ministry is the development of forestry based jobs, investment into eco-tourism, enhancing production of wood and non-wood forest products, down-stream value adding, utilisation

of non-prime wood for biomass energy generation, improving forest to market opportunities, improving shipping and log removal and transportation capabilities and overall forest value chains. These are just a few examples illustrating the wide scope of the socio-economic impact of forests.

Forests are also crucial for the survival of our planet and humanity. It is widely known that forests play a significant role in our climate and that by protecting them, we can achieve net zero emissions. Reaching net zero is fundamental for our future, as it is a state at which global warming can be stopped, when greenhouse gases going into the atmosphere are balanced out by the amount removed by forests and trees.

Fiji's forests also significantly improve the standard of living for rural residents by offering both timber and non-timber goods as well as environmental services like soil conservation, water catchment, and carbon sinks.

Today, we outline a summary of our budget allocation and in the coming weeks, we will go into greater depth about how each division will use the funds to produce the best outcomes possible and help the forestry industry continue to play a significant part in our economy by creating business possibilities, increased revenue for landowners and create new and sustainable jobs.

Tree-planting programme

In recognition of the importance of forests and trees, the Government has and continues to reposition itself to promote the sustainable management of Fiji's forests.

With a \$3.3 million increased allocation, the Ministry will continue coordinating Fiji's landscape restoration programme through the planting of trees and mangroves. Since its inception in 2019, together with stakeholders and visitors, Fijians have planted over 12.5 million new trees and mangroves. This represents 41.96 per cent of the 30 million trees target to be planted in 15 years.

In his budget address, Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Honourable Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum said the allocated budget would provide technical support in terms of seed sourcing, seed supply, nursery and silviculture practice training and direct incentives for landowners to establish and manage their own forests.

"This initiative is one of Fiji's main platforms towards addressing climate change because trees are scientifically proven to be among the best nature-based solutions for capturing carbon," Mr Sayed-Khaiyum said.

The additional funding will enable greater support for resource owners who wish to establish forest plantations, nursery owners from whom seedlings will be purchased, and assist the Fiji Pine Ltd in replanting their logged areas. There is also provision for direct incentives for land owners to establish and manage their own forest plantations and through this, Government will pay a sum per area planted following a verification and validation process.

Research and development of wood and non-wood products

Native forests have been the mainstay of Fiji's timber industry for decades. The Ministry anticipates that the area of Fiji's native forests will have gradually shrunk over time. While the Government has launched a vast landscape restoration effort, it is considered to be extremely prudent to diversify into other timber species, particularly non-timber forest products that have a high market value and can be harvested quickly.

Non-timber forest products (NTFPs) are any product or service other than timber that is produced in forests. The NTFPs of immediate focus include agarwood, bamboo, beach mahogany/dilo, candlenut/sikeci, coconut veneer and sandalwood.

The Ministry has been given \$500,000 for research into developing new forest products that can increase economic opportunities for resource owners, cottage industries and the sector. This is an increase of \$485,000



Prime Minister and Minister for Forestry Voreqe Bainimarama (centre) plants a tree with the Permanent Secretary Pene Baleinabuli (left) to mark International Day of Forests in Nasinu on March 21, 2022.

Photo: DEPTFO News

or over 400 percent.

Mr Sayed-Khaiyum said this funding would support in-depth studies of identified tree species, trial tests, specialised equipment as well as collaboration and consultation. He said this was part of the diversification programme for the forestry sector.

NFI and reducing carbon emissions

Fiji is committed to the global objective of reducing carbon emissions and enabling carbon trade through the protection of its extensive forest resources.

The Ministry has been allocated \$350,000 to complete the National Forest Inventory, which is an accounting of Fiji's forest resources and an essential reference for decision making on the sustainable management of our forests, including carbon trading. This represents an increase of \$272,000 or 120 per cent for continuing the work implemented at the REDD+ Pilot Site in Draubuta village, Navosa. All activities under the implementation phase of the Emissions Reduction Programme (ERP) are practiced at the pilot site and thus supports Fiji's participation in the carbon financing mechanism under the World Bank funded initiative in reducing deforestation and forest degradation and increasing forest carbon stocks.

The activities demonstrated are of a primary forest of 7,347ha which been leased and conserved under the Forest Protection activity followed by other

demonstration of REDD+ intervention activities practiced on site such as Sustainable Forest Management, Climate Smart Agriculture and Tree Planting. This REDD+ Budget is supplemented with an additional \$2M from the World Bank FCPF grant.

Digitalisation

In supporting Government's on-going efforts to improve the ease of doing business, the Ministry is transitioning its licence processes into digital platforms. The transition from manual to online applications will ensure greater efficiency, transparency, accountability and effectiveness in service delivery. This technological innovation is not only convenient for forest industry stakeholders but it also ensures that the wheels of commerce keep turning in a more efficient manner throughout the sector.

Despite the disruptions brought by COVID-19 to businesses as well as lives, the digitalisation of licensing procedures is proving successful.

Mr Sayed-Khaiyum said the Ministry had implemented online licensing for the export and import of timber and forest products, which had reduced turnaround time for approvals to within 24 hours.

"Additionally, the online application for logging licences now enables licences to be issued within 48 hours provided all required paperwork is uploaded. This budget will continue to support the Ministry's ongoing digitalization transition in support of the ease of doing business and the sustainable management of our forest resources," he said.

The online facility and strong partnership with the industry led to the forest sector increasing its exports of timber products from a value of \$75.8m in the 2019–2020 financial year to almost \$100 million in both the 2020–2021 and 2021–2022 financial years.

These are the highest exports revenue generated in a 10-year period.

Other allocations

New funding of \$300,000 has been provided for upgrading the Ministry's sawmill facility to strengthen the capacity for sawmilling and saw doctoring training and to research methods for increasing the utilisation of wood from harvesting operations and from timber export processing facilities.

Another \$300,000 has been provided for upgrading the wood analysis laboratory and purchase of laboratory machines for timber analysis which will provide more accurate analysis of timber samples and improve the quality of information for stakeholders, while maintaining the required quality control for construction and other uses.

Pacific Week of Agriculture and Forestry – the new allocation of \$150,000 is for the Ministry's contribution to the hosting of the Pacific Week of Agriculture and Forestry. It is a one-off allocation.

The Maritime Pine Development project is intended to provide a return on investment for pine grown decades ago in the maritime islands. Government has allocated \$700,000 to assist maritime resource owners through the provision of appropriate harvesting machines and equipment with the capacity to economically harvest, process and market their mature Pine trees.

More than \$150,000 has been allocated for Fiji's membership subscriptions with international forestry research and standards organisations to ensure access to project funding, international technical capacity development programmes, participation and representation of Fiji in international forums to negotiate and garner support for grants and technological advancements to support national efforts in the sustainable management of Fiji's forest resources, and to meet international reporting requirements.

The Forestry 2022–2023 Budget will certainly bring good tidings to the forest sector including industry, resource owners and the environment.

Debt-free Fiji Pine pays millions to landowners, commits to Fiji's tree planting effort



The following is a speech by the Prime Minister and Minister for Forestry Hon. Voreqe Bainimarama at the Fiji Pine 2022 Lease Security Bonus Payment in Drasa, Lautoka on August 26, 2022.

*Na Gone Turaga na Tui Vitogo;
Na Gone Turaga na Tui Nasesevia;
Na Gone Turaga na Tui Nalolo;
Na Gone Turaga na Tui Ba;
Na Gone Turaga na Tui Vatu;*

The Pine Landowners, Stakeholders, Board of Directors,

Management, Employees of Fiji Pine Group;

Ladies and Gentlemen.

Bula Vinaka and good afternoon. It's wonderful to be back in Drasa.

Today, we add another six million dollars to the tens of millions of dollars that have been paid to landowners since Fiji Pine introduced lease security bonuses – making for \$36.5m in dividend payments to landowners over nine consecutive years.

Even after the worst cyclone that Fiji has ever endured, Fiji Pine delivered you these dividends. And even in a year defined by a global pandemic, when the world economy was at its knees, this Industry stood tall and you, our landowners, have shared the benefits – millions of more dollars are going into your pockets to support your families and develop your communities in recognition of your partnership with Fiji Pine.

Building back

Most of you have been part of this Industry for years. You can recall the stark difference between this success and this Industry's struggles in the not-so-distant past.

Just over a decade ago, Fiji's Pine Industry struggled to stay solvent due to a volatile cocktail of rampant corruption and terrible management. Fiji's soil was not any poorer in 2010 than it is now and our timber was not of any lesser quality. Still, Fiji Pine's management at that time inexcusably failed to turn a profit and they could not pay you a single dollar in dividends. That failure extended across every horizon – they could not run the business in the short-term or even plant sufficient pine to guarantee this Industry's future. Their level of mismanagement was among the worst leadership failures since the loss of Fiji's National Bank. Except for this time, my Government was there to stem the bleeding. We stepped in to save this Industry from collapse with commercial savvy and merit-appointed leadership who helped us right the ship.

And these nine straight years of dividend payments are a direct result of the merit-based managerial excellence that has produced Fiji Pine's commercial success – the right people, in the right positions, have delivered tremendous results.

Achieving debt-free

Despite that success, we've never rested on our laurels. Just last year we carried out another series of major reforms at the Fiji Pine Trust to root out stubborn vestiges of corruption and abuse – including from the Forest Base Companies and Forest Base Trusts. We've cleaned things up at the Trust in direct and exhaustive consultations with landowners. The Trust is more transparent and it serves landowners equally, in accordance with the law, without playing favourites. No one can bulldoze their way to extra advantage simply because of their status. Those days are over, and they will never come back, so long as we are your Government.

The corruption that we've rooted out within the Trust was a blight in an otherwise stellar year for performance.



Again, let's remember these was achieved amid the global crisis of the pandemic.

For the first time in history, the Fiji Pine Group is debt-free after making a lump sum payment of \$2.2M to the Fijian Government to repay a loan taken out in the 1990s.

Profits in the 2021 Financial Year were the highest ever – coming in at \$41.88M.

Over \$867,000 was paid in stumpage to landowners in Nasarawaqa.

Reforestation targets

We planted 4,236 hectares of pine – a new single-year record. We have planted a total of 21,230 hectares of pine since 2011. And this year, we are committed to planting another 7,200 hectares of pine.

A new nursery with a seedling capacity of one million was set-up opposite this factory.

After a concerted effort to revive forest stations, stations within all six forest areas now manage their operations and are fully equipped with



Elated pine landowners at the Fiji Pine 2022 Lease Security Bonus Payment in Drasa, Lautoka on August 26, 2022 are pictured with Hon. Voreqe Bainimarama on August 26, 2022. Photo Office of the PM

tools, technology and human resources to offer reliable and quality services to landowners.

Community engagement

Since we introduced the Landowner Community Development Fund last year, we've funded training programs as well as water projects, solar installations and other development initiatives in landowning communities. Kubulau Villages is the latest to receive solar power.

Two years ago, we set-up a Landowner Consultation Division that has deepened and broadened consultations with your communities.

Sawn timber has become a branded Fijian Product and expanded into new export markets.

Drasa will soon have a brand-new sawmill to process larger diameter logs that cannot be processed at the existing mill. Two brand new kilns for timber-drying are on the way as well.

Most importantly, as of today, we have planted 15 million new trees in less than four years.

My political opponents love to talk about the number of years I've served as your Prime Minister. What they will refuse to admit is that those years have been the best our Pine Industry has ever had. Despite serious challenges, like Cyclone Winston and the pandemic, we have not only set but kept this Industry on the path of profitability.

In addition to record-breaking dividend payments, we've paid fair and reliable returns to landowners. A lease premium of 20 Dollars per hectare is paid at the time of leasing land, 14

dollars is paid per hectare in annual rent, and stumpage of 12% is paid when trees are harvested in addition to benefits through the Landowner Community Development Fund and operational costs that Fiji Pine covers itself. This all continued through the pandemic. Fiji Pine kept paying dividends, it kept employing its workers – even paying bonuses – it kept planting trees, it continued investing in infrastructure and even installed satellite internet in remote communities so that students could access educational materials even when schools closed.

That, my friends, is a genuine commitment. It shows this enterprise isn't only solely on making and sharing its profits – it is about forging partnerships and sharing prosperity with your communities.

Partnership with Fijian, Fijiana Drua

Ladies and Gentlemen, the Pine Group is also making investments towards operating its own logging, roading and cartage machinery to guarantee supply chain security and lend greater efficiency. Fiji Pine also will continue to diversify its global customer-base in the year ahead. We're looking at potential markets closer to home, particularly in Australia, New Zealand, and in the Pacific, where we can market world-class timber with local roots, literally.

Tropik Wood will lead that marketing effort, and I'm excited to announce today that they've found a perfect Pacific partner – our Fijian Drua and Fijiana Drua.

“It shows this enterprise isn't only solely on making and sharing its profits, it is about forging partnerships and sharing prosperity with your communities.”

Now when our Drua competes in front of in-person and television audiences across the region, Tropik Wood will receive some of the best exposure that money can buy, with their brand proudly displayed whenever, and wherever, our Champion Fijiana Drua take the field or our Fijian Drua feature in Super Rugby Pacific. Your brand of Fijian-made quality has never had a bigger stage. And your future has never looked brighter.

A sustainable Pine Industry is a great thing for you, and it is great for the country and the planet, because forest serve a climate-regulating role by capturing carbon, thereby stabilizing the climate. On the course that we've set, our Pine Industry's best years are most certainly ahead. Together, we've righted this ship. We owe it to your children and their children, and to every future Fijian, to keep the course that we've set.

Vinaka Vakalevu – Thank you.

Government Support for REDD+ Contributes to Sustainable Development



REDD+ is an initiative that encourages developing countries to contribute to greenhouse gas emission reductions by reducing deforestation, forest degradation and by promoting forest conservation, sustainable management of forests and increasing forest carbon stocks.

The communities in Fiji are highly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change and these impacts are projected to further intensify under the anticipated global warming trajectory and impacts which poses a threat to Fiji's sustainable growth; placing large economic, social and physical stress on local communities and ecosystems. Urgent actions are needed to strengthen the resilience of communities against the impacts brought about by climate change.

Given Fiji's small island landscape, it is essential that impacts of climate action are maximised by ensuring that mitigation actions and initiative will also result in adaptation co-benefits. Synergies need to be created between mitigation and adaptation activities.

Fiji's national plans and strategies emphasise the need to embed climate change adaptation and resilience initiatives in all national and sectoral plans and strategies.

The National Adaptation Plan Framework refers to the REDD+ Policy reflecting the dual role REDD+ plays – both in climate change mitigation and adaptation. Fiji's ER Program is designed to maximise climate co-benefits and integrate initiatives that address vulnerabilities of local communities and contribute to the effort of building a more resilient nation.

The Fijian Government's strong commitment to Fiji's National REDD+ programme has been in place since the initiation of the programme 10 years ago and reflected in the annual government budget provisions to support readiness efforts, establishment of the REDD+ Unit within the Ministry of Forestry, identifying and supporting a pilot site for REDD+ activities, supporting the development of the REDD+ Policy and putting in place necessary mechanisms to support REDD+ work in the future.

Further to this, Government is supporting the REDD+ implementation phase through the Fiji Forestry Emission Reduction (ER) Program which supports the national vision of sustainable management of forest resources and provides direction to the Ministry of Forestry with the implementation of the REDD+ strategy.

Fiji's ER Program will focus on the islands of Viti Levu, Vanua Levu and Taveuni involving areas of critical terrestrial biodiversity. The ER Program accounting area has a population of approximately 734,307 people (86% of the total population). The islands are generally hilly, and the population is often concentrated on coastal plains and undulating rolling hills of peri-urban areas.

REDD+ CAPITAL GRANT

The National REDD+ programme and activities of Fiji's ER Programme are important components of recent national plans and strategies. These include the five-year and 20-year

National Development Plan (NDP) 2017-2036; Low Emission Development Strategy (LEDS); enhanced National Determining Contributions (NDC) submitted in 2020; the new National Climate Change Policy (2018-2030) and the more recent Climate Change Act of 2021.

In addition, Fiji's current efforts to include emission reduction commitments for agriculture and forestry in its NDCs demonstrates a very high-level of Government support for the ER Program actions given the reporting requirements under the Paris Agreement of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Coherent and transparent carbon accounting for the NDC, LEDS and REDD+, will be ensured as the Fiji Forestry ER Program will help strengthen the monitoring and reporting processes and capabilities of the forest sector.

The Fijian Government's contribution of \$500,000 to the forestry sector in the new financial year (August 2022-July 2023) continues to reflect the commitment to reduce emissions from deforestation and forest degradation through the sustainable management of Fiji's forests and the carbon financing mechanism. Government has been allocating a capital grant of FJ\$300,000 per year for REDD+ efforts in the country since 2012. Further to this, the Fiji National REDD+ program were first supported by the SPC (Secretariat of the Pacific Community) and GIZ (German Agency for International Cooperation) for work in the national REDD+ pilot site in Emalu in the province of Nadroga/Navosa.

The REDD+ Site with an area of 7,347 hectares, continue to be developed and supported by the Government in which the REDD+ intervening activities is being trialed and assessed. This will commence once the lease agreement is formalised and finalised in this fiscal year.

Ministry of Forestry Permanent Secretary Pene Baleinabuli said that progress to date for this REDD+ Capital grant project included a Lease Agreement with landowners of the Emalu REDD+ site that would support forest protection and conservation.

"There have also been scoping studies carried out for the development of a water articulation system for Draubuta and nearby villages. Costing

“...Fiji are highly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change and these impacts are projected to further intensify under the anticipated global warming trajectory and impacts which poses a threat to Fiji's sustainable growth”

for the installation of solar-system completed to support alternative livelihood initiatives such as use of sewing machines for the women and the establishment of a village cooperative to manage a cooler system to support and sell frozen items. Community-level land use planning and training conducted and seedlings procured to support the community's tree-planting programme.

"The \$500,000 for this new financial year will support the activities such as upgrading the Draubuta Village nurseries, upgrading the bee-keeping facilities, upgrading and proper maintenance of reforestation sites through fencing, land clearing, forest restoration trials in degraded areas and climate smart agriculture practices," he said.

Mr Baleinabuli said that the funds would also support and supplement the program management and monitoring of the Programme Management Unit within the Ministry of Forestry, which would be formalised by January 2023.

"This will include the assessment and reporting on the national compliance to the UNFCCC Safeguards, the management of the Feedback Grievance Redress Mechanism (FGRM), the Monitoring, Reporting and Verification (MRV) system and the compilation of the ER Program report for the second monitoring period.

"In addition, this will support and supplement the Fiji Forestry ER Program awareness campaign and the mass production of the audio-visual mediums," he said.

FCPF Support to Fiji and Achievements
The World Bank's Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF) to support Fiji's REDD+ Readiness project provided US\$5.8 million under the Grant Agreement of which will end on 31st December 2022.

For this new financial year, FJ\$2million has been appropriated by the Ministry of Economy to support the Programme Management and

Monitoring of the REDD+ Unit from August to December 2022, complete National Forestry Inventory and carbon assessment work, strengthen the monitoring, reporting and verification system, complete allometric and biomass calculation work, complete the development of district level land use plans and develop audio visual mediums for the various media platforms and outlets through which the ER Program will be promoted.

Programme Team Leader for the REDD+ Unit, Ilaisa Tulele, said the achievements to date include the development of the REDD+ Strategy, which is currently being vetted by the World Bank's Fund Management Team, the review of the REDD+ Policy 2011 and the revised REDD+ Policy 2022, which will be tabled at the August Cabinet meeting for endorsement.

He said the methodology for detecting forest degradation had been developed and staff training would be conducted in September 2022.

Furthermore, Mr Tulele said that the National Forest Monitoring System (NFMS) enhancement work had been completed and would be uploaded onto the Government domain in September 2022.

"For the National Forest Inventory, 475 of the 992 cluster areas of forests in Fiji have been assessed and the final report is due in November 2022," Mr Tulele said.

"The Allometric and Biomass calculation work is continuing and the final report is due in November 2022. Ten of the 20 district-level integrated land use plans have been developed and endorsed. The ER Program Messaging and Outreach Tool Kit was launched in May and has been promoted during six provincial council meetings. The Safeguard Plan has been submitted to the World Bank and Fiji's Feedback Grievance Redress Mechanism (FGRM) system for REDD+ has been developed and is now operational," he said.

Ministry Educates Timber Yard Owners, Retailers on Importance of Selling Quality Timber



Forestry Officer Timber Preservation, Sainiana Naura (third from left, front), and Senior Timber Inspector, Ulita Nailumu (second from right, front) with timber retailers Central Division reps after the awareness and education and awareness.

Timber is one of the most common and important material when it comes to building a house. It is renewable and is also much easier and lighter to work with. It is visually appealing and has very little carbon footprint. These properties make timber much more climate-friendly than other commonly-used construction materials.

However, because it is a natural material, the timber is also vulnerable to fungus and insect damage, requiring careful selection of species quality, and treatment. In addition, it will also require proper handling and storage, and the use of appropriate house designs, to ensure the most effective use of timber and to gain the material's full benefit.

Lately, it has been observed that the forest industry is increasingly under pressure to meet the demand for timber for new housing developments. As a result, the Ministry of Forestry has noted an increase in the supply of sub-standard quality timber, taking advantage of the lack of knowledge by the retailers and consumers in regards to timber, as a building material.

Over the years, the Consumer Council of Fiji and our Ministry have recorded complaints relating to the sale of poor quality timber, which causes financial loss to the customers who have to spend extra. In fact there have been cases where consumers have already bought and used the products only to find it later that the timber was of inferior quality, evident by insect infestation and fungal growth, within just a few days of installation.

In light of this, the Ministry of Forestry, through its Forest Products, Trade and Training Division (FPTTD), embarked on an education and awareness campaign around the country, targeting all timber retailers with the main aim of enhancing their knowledge and understanding on timber grades and timber treatment standards.

“...the Consumer Council of Fiji and our Ministry have recorded complaints relating to the sale of poor quality timber, which causes financial loss to the customers who have to spend extra.”

The campaign was also supported by the Fijian Competition and Consumer Commission (FCCC) through their Offices located in the Central Eastern, Western and Northern divisions.

Our trainers, including Forestry Officer Timber Preservation, Sainiana Naura, and Senior Timber Inspector, Ulita Nailumu, led the awareness campaign.

The main objective of the campaign was to educate and build the knowledge of our timber retailers who will then be in a better position to address the issue of the trading of substandard timber with their suppliers.

The timber retailers were taught on the different timber grades and timber treatment standards for different end uses, and also on how to quickly and easily assess if a timber has been treated through a process known as

spot testing.

However, further determinations to assess the level of treatment, for example, will require the samples to be analysed at the FPTTD's laboratory at Nasinu.

“For all samples that do not meet the treatment standards, the suppliers replace timber or compensate the customers. Suppliers who do not adhere to treatment standards are given improvement notice to comply with proper treatment procedures,” Acting Director FPTTD Mr Taniela Whippy said.

The Division has identified the gaps and specific areas of concern that must be addressed to prevent the occurrence of the ongoing preservative substandard treatment issues.

“Previously, awareness programmes were typically delivered at major forestry offices such as Nasinu, Lautoka and Labasa. As a result, most of the small timber yards and retailers were not able to participate as it was not possible for them to leave their businesses and travel to the training venue,” Mr Whippy said.

“It was because of this that we have decided to change our approach and to conduct our awareness in the population centres where the timber yards and retailers are operating,” he said.

Permanent Secretary for Forestry, Pene Baleinabuli, said the FPTT team ensured that traders were educated on the quality treatment procedures and guidelines that must be followed and observed when receiving and selling timber and timber products.

“On the other hand, conducting awareness and establishing close relationships with the traders will enable the Ministry to track down and identify the licensed treatment plants (suppliers) carrying out treatments and supplying treated products to various timber yards and retailers,” Mr Baleinabuli said.



Why timber treatment is important

Timber treatment is a process by which the susceptibility of timber to insect damage and fungal decay is significantly reduced such that the integrity of timber in buildings is maintained for considerably long periods of time, often outlasting the economic life of the building.

The most common timber issues are an infestation of wood-boring insects such as powder post beetle and termites, and fungal decay, including both dry rot and soft rot. If left untreated, and after exposure to soil, moisture and the elements, the timber can deteriorate within a few years.

However, when properly treated by professionals to the required standards, the timber can maintain its integrity for many years.

Mr Whippy said that timber treatment is a relatively low cost and effective solution to what could be an extremely costly problem further down the line; it is always a worthwhile insurance against the cost of subsequent repairs.

Plan for new pledge

Following the nationwide education and awareness campaign, the Ministry is currently working on launching a “Say No to Receiving or Selling Substandard Treated Timber Pledge”. This is the ultimate goal of the awareness process.

Mr Baleinabuli said involving timber yards and timber retailers to pledge saying no to the selling and receiving of substandard treated products would instill a sense of responsibility to stop the trading of substandard materials. In terms of treated timber, this means that all products received and sold by retailers, have met the required treatment standards.

“Saying no to the receiving and selling of substandard products pledge is a process that FPTT has embarked on as an

initial stage of developing a consumer protection policy,” he said.

The participants commended the Ministry's efforts to teach them at their doorstep the value of quality inspections so they may offer their clients a better service.

“Feedback from participants was remarkable and there were lots of discussions and questions posed during the presentations on the tests available to detect whether timbers are treated and determine treatment percentage for all treatment levels,” Mr Whippy said.

All participants were interested and were actively involved during the discussions and they acknowledged the Ministry's initiatives in bringing to them, and conducting awareness in, the various towns and districts where the businesses are operating from. Most of the participants attended the awareness for the first time and they requested the Ministry to conduct the same training awareness and refreshers in the future,” he added.

Nursery training empowers Tailevu villagers to support national reforestation efforts



Participants of the Nursery Establishment and Management Training with the Conservator of Forests, Sanjana Lal (centre), at Sote Village, Vugalei, Tailevu, on October 14, 2022.

Fifteen-year-old Verenaisi Canaqali often heard in the news about Fiji's landscape reforestation initiative to plant 30 million trees in 15 years (#30MT15Y) and used to wonder what all the hype was about.

She did not fully understand why Fijians needed to care for the environment and plant more trees until she was provided with the opportunity to be a participant in a three-day training workshop on nursery establishment and management organised by the Ministry of Forestry in Sote Village, Vugalei, Tailevu, during her one-week school break (October 10–14).

The goal of the training workshop was to provide the villagers of Sote, Savu, and Naimasimasi the knowledge and abilities they needed to start small businesses, provide for their families, and gain self-sufficiency.

The participants were taught firsthand how to build basic, low-cost nurseries using readily available resources for their villages in order to generate income and replant logged-out land in their communities. They were also taught how to pot plants, how seeds are potted on trays and on the type of soils suitable for seedling potting.

Verenaisi, who hails from Savu Village, learned that wetlands,

mangroves, and forests played an important role in maintaining the environment and consequently, the quality of life and the economy of the Fijians as well as helping to clean the air and protect the water.

"My family are mahogany plantation landowners and I now know that it is my responsibility to continue planting trees, raising seedlings, and contributing to Fiji's planting target. The three-day training was timely as it coincided with our school holidays and what better way to spend it. I always thought that we needed to spend a lot of money to buy construction materials if we wanted to have a nursery. But after this training, I learned that we can make use of the resources around us to build a nursery, supply seedlings for planting, and even earn an income," Verenaisi shared.

Following this training, the Year 10 student from Sila Central High School made the decision to work hard in her studies in order to fulfill her

dream of becoming a forestry officer or technician someday.

On October 16, 2022, the 62 participants received their certificates of participation from the Conservator of Forests, Mrs Sanjana Lal. She urged the participants to take responsibility for safeguarding their land resources by planting more trees and sowing their own seedlings.

Mrs Lal commended them for their efforts and teamwork and stressed the importance of forests and how our future depended on them. She said that it was important to provide landowners with the tools they needed to manage their resources responsibly, generate an income and boost seedling supply



From left; Maika Bonawai, Kelera Radinidau, Conservator of Forests Sanjana Lal, Verenaisi Canaqali and Vasenai Cagitabu after their graduation at Sote Village, Vugalei, Tailevu on October 14, 2022.



Vugalei women excited to celebrate the achievement of constructing their very own nursery.

Photo: Ministry of Forestry

needed for the tree planting initiative.

Verenaisi, along with Tailevu North College students, Maika Bonawai, Vasenai Cagitabu, and Kelera Radinidau, were delighted to receive their certificates from Mrs Lal.

Maika Bonawai said, "The training opened my eyes to look beyond just securing a day job. After this training, I am able to prepare potting mixes for seed germination, how to germinate seeds, how to construct a simple nursery and manage it from there on. It is a very good idea to share with my family."

He stated that owning a small nursery was important as it would provide seedlings with the added benefit of generating additional money to support his family.

Conservator of Forests, Sanjana Lal, stated that the Ministry was pleased to have students included in the workshop as educating young minds today would pay off in the long run. Mrs Lal added that young people would eventually aid in planting trees, monitoring and maintaining new forests over the years if they were involved in all phases of the training, including growing seeds, setting up a nursery, and caring for them.

She also encouraged the women participants to put to practice what they had learnt and to set up little income-generating nurseries in their communities.

The training also complemented the work of the Reforestation of Degraded Forest Project (RDF Project), which is a government-funded project promoting the reforestation of the degraded

forests in Fiji. One of their major tasks is the coastal rehabilitation and construction of community nurseries.

RDF project plays a major role in the tree planting target of 30 million trees for a 15-year initiative, which was set by the Prime Minister and Minister for Forestry, Honourable



A basic low-cost nursery constructed using available resources in the village.

Photo: Ministry of Forestry

Voreqe Bainimarama, during the United Nations Head of State Climate Change Summit in New York in 2019 in its campaign to combat climate change.

Community Nurseries to Supply Disease-Free Tree Seedlings Permanent Secretary for Forestry, Pene Baleinabuli said the need for climate change solutions was more pressing than ever as the world struggles with deadly storms, fires, and droughts. Trees provide a dependable source of

food, livelihoods, and climate regulation, both in forests and on farms.

Mr Baleinabuli said the RDF Project has budget provisions to assist community groups and individuals engaged in raising tree seedlings in their nurseries.

The plantation drive to reforest degraded lands with two million trees per year has increased the demand for seedlings. Thus, securing the services of community nurseries will increase the availability of planting materials at the beginning of the planting season.

"This saves the time and efforts of the State nurseries to raise all the required number of seedlings for the RDF project. Purchasing seedlings from community nurseries will increase societal awareness to provide quality planting materials and improve the socio-economic status of stakeholders due to the assurance of employment and income," Mr Baleinabuli said.

According to RDF Forestry Officer Aporosa Ramulo Livani, research has showed that natural climate solutions, such as planting trees, restoring wetlands, preserving grasslands, and offering farmers incentives to plant cover crops, could also positively contribute in achieving the Paris Agreement goals.

"Investments in natural climate solutions can create jobs and improve the sustainability of forest and agriculture sectors, while also safeguarding water sources, providing habitat conservation, and increasing resilience to the impacts of climate change," Mr Livani said.

He said Fiji, as a small island developing state (SIDS) in the tropical Pacific region, was proud to be leading the initiative of planting 30 million trees in 15 years, with two million trees being planted annually. To date, the Ministry with the people of Fiji and visitors have planted more than 15 million trees in less than four years.

The Government invested \$1,615,893 for the financial year budget 2020–2021 for the implementation of the RDF Project with the Ministry's 30 Million Trees for 15 years initiative.



Fiji Achieves 50% Planting Goal in Four Years

The Reforestation on Degraded Forest Project (RDF Project) – is a government-funded project promoting the reforestation of the degraded forest in Fiji.

RDF project plays a major role in the tree planting target of 30 million trees and mangroves for 15 year initiative (#30MT15Y), which was set by the Prime Minister and Minister of Forestry, the Honorable. Voreqe Bainimarama, during the United Nations Head of State Climate Change Summit in New York in 2019 in its campaign to combat climate change.

The Ministry of Forestry is proud to announce that Fiji's landscape restoration programme, which aims to plant 30 million trees in 15 years (#30MT15Y), has met its 50 percent planting goal in four years.

As of October 2022, the RDF project has planted more than \$15.5 million trees and mangroves in 14,011.60 hectares of degraded forest areas throughout the country since 2019.

The Ministry acknowledges the whole of Fiji, including stakeholders in the forestry sector, private sector, academia, non-government organisations, religious groups, landowners, schools and youths, who have all contributed to growing more than 15 million trees and mangroves since 2019.



Forestry Sector Hits Record Exports in 2021 – Fiji Plants 15M Trees, Mangroves in 3.8 Years



Children of Malolo Island engage in a mangrove planting activity during a school break in July this year. They are supporting conservation initiatives in the Mamanucas.

Photos: Mamanuca Environment Society Fiji

The forestry sector has achieved a record breaking export revenue in Fiji's history raking in \$118.5 million in 2021. This is an increase of \$41.9M when compared to 2020 exports of \$76.6M.

The 2021 achievement, in a pandemic-affected period, is testament to the hard work and commitment by the Ministry's management and staff, together with all the stakeholders in the forestry sector.

Prime Minister and Minister for Forestry, Honourable Voreqe Bainimarama, stressed this in Parliament last Thursday night when he delivered his motion statement on the Ministry's Annual Reports for 2016-2017, 2017-2018 and 2018-2019.

Since its separation from the Ministry of Fisheries into a single portfolio in 2016, the Ministry of Forestry has expanded tenfold to record high performances.

PM Bainimarama said it was necessary for the two ministries to focus more on the opportunities available in the two resource-based sectors to be able to contribute effectively to the nation's economic and social development. The Ministry of Forestry is in a better position to work with the forestry sector to boost economic returns and contribute to Fiji's Gross Domestic Product.

According to the Fiji Bureau of Statistics recent report, the real GDP for 2021 stood at \$8.4 billion, a reduction of 5.1 percent when compared to the 2020 revised GDP of \$8.9 billion. Five industries recorded positive growth, of which the forestry and logging industry was the second highest, contributing \$34.1M in 2021, an increase of \$7.5M, second to

transport and storage. The total forestry sector contribution including other forest-related products in the manufacturing industry amounted to \$152.9M.

The Ministry, on behalf of Government, wishes to thank the stakeholders in the sector for their efforts to reignite the economy and create employment opportunities.

Unqualified Financial Reports

In addition to the record export revenue, the Ministry also achieved for the first time an Unqualified Financial Report from the Office of the Auditor-General in the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 financial years.

"The efforts the Ministry and the sector stakeholders exerted in these years have resulted in all these historic achievements, which will be reported in detail in our next Annual Report," the Prime Minister said. The Ministry has tabled its Annual Reports in Parliament up to 2019-2020 and expects to table the 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 Reports in the next session. This would not only mean that the publication of all its annual reports would be up to date, but importantly that investors will be able to identify potential opportunities while these are still current.

"As a resource-based sector often challenged with conflicting and competing demands, the annual budget allocation empowers the Ministry to develop initiatives to address these challenges and deliver effective and improved services while positively contributing to Fiji's economic and social development and ensuring environmental integrity and our

ability to address the impacts of climate change in the process," PM Bainimarama said.

Tree planting achievement

The Ministry is also pleased to announce that Fiji's landscape restoration programme, which aims to plant 30 million trees in 15 years (#30MT15Y), has met its 50% planting goal in less than 4 years. In 3 years and eight months to be exact.

Fijians and visitors alike have helped plant over 15 million trees and mangroves since 2019, in an area covering 14,011.60 hectares.

Prime Minister Bainimarama said: "We are already achieving what we had set out to do through the separation of the Forestry and Fisheries Departments—a record of economic development and concrete sustainability.

"These achievements need to be nationally acknowledged and celebrated as they reflect the Government's commitment towards building a prosperous, cleaner, greener and a better Fiji.

"I commend the leadership and staff of the Ministry together with all the stakeholders in the forestry sector. I also take this opportunity to commend the work of the then Minister for Forestry, the late Honourable Osea Naiqamu, who was called to eternal rest in January this year. He has left behind a great legacy in spearheading Fiji's national tree-planting efforts across all the provinces in Fiji, including the maritime islands," PM Bainimarama said.

"The whole of Fiji, including stakeholders in the forestry sector, private sector, academia, non-government organisations, religious groups, landowners, schools and youths, have all contributed to growing more than 15 million trees and mangroves in less than four years and that is a massive achievement for our nation," he said.

The Ministry will continue to coordinate Fiji's land restoration and tree-planting campaign with the aim of expanding our forest cover and restoring degraded forest areas.

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