

ANNUAL REPORT | 2009

CONSUMER COUNCIL OF FIJI



CONSUMER COUNCIL OF FIJI





CONSUMER COUNCIL OF FIJI

OUR VISION

To build a conscious and assertive consumer movement in Fiji.

OUR MISSION

Making the consumer voice heard and making it count.

OUR VALUES

Consumer Satisfaction

- Effective and quality services to our consumers at all times; and
- Responsive to consumer complaints and queries with utmost respect and human dignity.

Professional Excellence

- Teamwork, cooperation and self-discipline;
- Open and honest communication;
- Value new ideas and seek ways of doing things better;
- Apply enthusiasm and compassion towards work;
- Maintain high standards of ethical conduct;
- Being competent, accountable, transparent and responsible; and
- Value and enhance the cooperation and goodwill of counterpart organizations in Government, non-government organisations, civil society and external partners.

Employee Satisfaction

- Reliable, rewarding and challenging environment for Council employees and;
- Equal opportunity for employees to utilize their full potential for quality performance and excellence.

Our Principles

- Campaign constantly and fearlessly to change the policies and practices the adversely affect consumer interests;
- Maintain a highly disciplined results-oriented focus on maximising impact for consumers;
- Maintain neutrality in solving consumer complaints and;
- Carry out strong financial management and sound operating procedures.

Chief Executive / Executive Secretary

Personal Assistant

Research & Policy Division
Manager Research & Policy Analyst
Senior Research Officer
Research Officer
Assistant Officer

ADR & Consumer Advisory Division
Manager - ADR & Consumer Advisory
Consumer Advisory Officer
Consumer Advisory Assistant

Administration, Finance &
Project Management Division
Director
Clerical Officer
Registry/Database
Receptionist
Driver/Messenger/Cleaner

Campaigns, Information
& Media Division
**Manager-Campaigns, Information
& Media**
Consumer Officer (Hindi)
Consumer Officer (Fijian)

Labasa Regional Office
Coordinator
Consumer Assistant-Fijian
Consumer Assistant-Hindi

Lautoka Regional Office
Coordinator
Consumer Assistant-Fijian
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Suva Office (QH)

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The Consumer Council of Fiji (CCF) is an independent statutory body established under the Consumer Council of Fiji Act -1976 (Cap 235). The Council, as a watchdog protects the rights and interests of consumers by promoting a fair and just delivery of goods and services. First and foremost the Consumer Council is an advocacy organisation, conducting rigorous research and policy analysis on key consumer issues. CCF's insight into consumer need is a powerful tool for influencing decision-makers to bring about change. The Council protects the vulnerable groups such as rural poor, physically and mentally challenged, children and women by identifying and articulating the policy issues that are of importance to the consumers.

FUNCTIONS OF THE COUNCIL

Section 6 of the Consumer Council of Fiji Act stipulates the functions of the Council. The Council is required to do such acts and things it considers necessary or expedient to ensure that the interests of the consumers of goods and services are promoted and protected.

THESE FUNCTIONS INCLUDE:

- Advising the Minister on such matters affecting the interests of the consumers;
- Making representations to the Government or any other person/organisations on any interests of consumers;
- Collecting, collating and disseminating information in respect of matters affecting the interest of consumers;
- Supporting or maintaining legal proceedings initiated by a consumer, where such support is deemed necessary;
- Conducting research and investigations into matters affecting consumers;
- Advising and assisting consumers on matters affecting their interests;
- Co-operating with any person, association or organisation outside Fiji having similar functions and becoming a member of or affiliate to any international organisation concerned with consumer matters; and
- Soliciting and accepting for the purposes of the Council any money, land, or other property from the Government, any local authority, public body, organisation, any person by way of grant, subsidy, donation, gift, or otherwise.

SERVICES OF THE COUNCIL

1. Campaigns, Information & Media Division

To empower consumers with knowledge and information to bring about reforms in policy and practice that adversely affect consumer interests.

2. Alternative Dispute Resolution & Consumer Advisory Division

To assist consumers in resolving complaints through alternative dispute resolution, advisory services and legal representation.

3. Research & Policy Analysis Division

To identify and undertake broad-based and complaints driven research on key consumer protection legislations that promote and protect consumer interests through necessary policy changes.

Board Members of 2009



Chairman

Mr. NARENDRA PADARATH

Mr. Narendra Padarath is a Justice of Peace and a well-known businessman. He is the Managing Director of the Padarath Group of Companies, which amongst other achievements pioneered large scale poultry production in Fiji. He has served in a leadership role on a number of charitable, educational and sporting bodies. Mr. Padarath served as a Member of Parliament for the Ba West Indian Communal Constituency in 2006. He continues to serve the people of Ba and Fiji.

Mr. RAMAN DAHIA

Mr. Dahia is the Chief Operating Officer and Finance Director of Dahia Shoes Operating Entities. An accountant by profession, Mr. Dahia is also an executive member of the Fiji-New Zealand Business Council. He also serves on the board of the Samabula Health Centre.

Dr. SALESI F SAVOU

Dr. Savou is longest serving board member of the Council since 1989. He was employed by the Ministry of Health as the Acting Director of Primary and Preventative Health Services from 1986 – 1988. After his retirement in January 1988, Dr Savou joined the National Food and Nutrition Council of Fiji Secretariat as the Director; retiring in December 1999.

Mrs. ILISAPECI BOLE

Mrs. Bole is a former Principal Education Officer. She is also a volunteer with women's groups and has served in committees and boards of Government and NGOs, including the United Nations Women's Forum for Heads of Missions Spouses in New York, National Executive Board of the Soqosoqo Vakamarama and the President's College of Honors.

Chairman's Report – 2009



“Despite the many hurdles faced in 2009, the Council continued to play a positive role in achieving a marketplace of well informed and confident consumers who are protected from unlawful, deceptive, misleading or otherwise, objectionable practices.”

I am pleased to present the Consumer Council of Fiji's Annual Report for the year ending 31 December 2009.

Over the past twelve months, the Council has endeavored to efficiently address consumer issues to command the trust of the consumers as their effective and conscientious watchdog. We have given consumers a strong, unified voice to improve dialogue and engagement with government and be the interface between consumer groups and industry.

Undoubtedly, 2009 has been a difficult year for consumers in light of the global financial crisis and policies implemented domestically to cushion the impacts of the crisis. The 20% devaluation of Fiji dollar in April had a major impact on consumers with prices of many products increasing exorbitantly beyond the expected devalued currency rate of 20%. The level of price increase defied logic and consumer expectation. This situation was made worse with increased unemployment, redundancies and pay cuts, which not only reduced consumer purchasing power but also resulted in a decrease in consumer confidence and of choices.

However, despite the many hurdles faced in 2009, the Council continued to play a positive role in achieving a marketplace of well informed and confident consumers who are protected from unlawful, deceptive, misleading or otherwise, objectionable practices. During the year we have become an organization that is more en-

trepreneurial and looking for opportunities where they exist in the face of meager financial resources barely sufficient to meet the cost of staff and operational matters.

The outlook for 2010 is an exciting one, as we plan campaigns to keep the industry accountable to consumers, work with regulators to ensure they enforce legislative measures and lobby government to develop policy which are in the interest of consumers.

This report reflects the organization's achievements in building a conscious and assertive consumer movement in Fiji and making the consumer voice heard and be counted. I unreservedly commend the Chief Executive Officer, Management and the Staff, for their team effort and hard work. I would like to encourage the staff to continue championing for consumer rights and also to maintain their excellent outputs despite major challenges facing the Council such as attracting and retaining skilled, high calibre and motivated people.

I would also like to thank my fellow board members for their dedicated input into taking the Council in the new direction which is more meaningful to consumers. Our thanks goes to the line Minister and the Ministry of Industry and Trade for consultation and policy guidance.

I would be failing in my duty if I do not express my gratitude for the support from

our networking partners and national and regional consumer protection agencies. Consumers International, AusAid and the European Union (EU), our key donors that have supported and worked together with us to ensure the development of consumer advocacy and protection in Fiji.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the support from Fiji's consumers for their trust and confidence in the Council's ability to deliver its services. It is imperative that consumers in Fiji understand their rights and responsibilities, and have the skills and confidence necessary to ensure they receive best quality service for their money. While we have achieved much, we have also learned that the task of changing consumer and trader perceptions is immense and therefore the Council will endeavor to continue to advocate for consumer rights and protection in 2010 for the benefit of consumers in Fiji.

Narendra Padarath
Chairman, Consumer Council of Fiji

Chief Executive Officer's Report – 2009



Overview

It is with great pleasure I present the 2009 Annual Report of the Consumer Council of Fiji. Year 2009 proved to be a challenging one especially with the global financial crisis and the devaluation of the Fiji dollar which spurred an across-the-board increase in the prices of goods and services. While the country had no choice but to absorb the impacts of these problems, the Consumer Council was compelled to pass on the message of the realities of these impacts to consumers and ensure that they were well-informed to make intelligent

decisions and take proactive measures. The Council also saw its duty to lobby the government in putting in place counter measures against the economic hardships facing consumers.

Like every year, the Consumer Council of Fiji monitored changes in consumer behavior as they responded to shifts in prices of some key goods and services. Here we provide highlights on how the year was for consumers.

Negative impacts of 2009

Consumers were forced to cut their spending more than previous years. In 2009, the price of soya bean oil soared by 17.3% while a common source of nutrients, split peas (dhal) increased by 79%. The price of sunbell tuna, a common household food item increased by 27 percent, the price of 660g of medium size Ram Sami eggs increased by 33.7% despite removal of duty. Even with the government's noble intention and action to remove VAT and duty on some basic food items, consumers continued to unfairly bear the brunt of unreasonable price hikes.

In 2009, the Prices and Incomes Board (PIB) made 11 determinations on the price of fuel. Diesel and kerosene prices increased 6 times while premix outboard fuel and motor spirit prices went up 7 times. Motor spirit and premix outboard fuel were lowest in February at \$1.45 and \$1.34 per litre respectively but both reached their maximum price of \$2.12 and \$2.04 respectively in September. Diesoline and kerosene were sold at \$1.27 and \$0.97 per litre respectively in April, but these jumped to \$1.76 and \$1.44 in December. Price of motor spirit increased by 46%; diesoline by 39%; premix by 52% and kerosene by 48%.

On 21st February, the two gas companies decided to reduce cooking gas price from \$41 for 13kg cylinder to \$39.50, a mere reduction by \$1.50. On the other hand, auto gas came down from \$1.57/litre to \$1.44/litre, a reduction by 13 cents. Interestingly, after 20% devaluation, the Fiji Gas Company in May reduced its cylinder size from 13kg to 12kg and sold the gas at \$41.50 whereas Blue Gas maintained its 13 kg cylinder with a price tag of \$41.50.

In March, the Commerce Commission removed price control from telecommunica-

MAJOR HIGHLIGHTS OF 2009

- Received 1530 formal complaints with a total monetary value of \$1.9 million dollars. An average of around 128 complaints per month;
- Almost 189% increase in written and in person advice given to the consumers on products and services;
- \$1 million was recovered on behalf of consumers through mediation. 2% improvement on resolving consumer complaints as compared to 2008;
- Assisted in the recall of products such as Royal tea packets containing Lakma tea sachets, Mr Crisp and Yumo's- the big snack;
- Introduced a new strategy to improve consumer protection in the Northern division which is effective as more consumers are lodging complaints for redress;
- Increased levels of service to vulnerable and disadvantaged consumers through mobile units and community visits;
- Published brochures on Know Your Water Bill, Corporate Social Responsibility and Justice of Peace to empower consumers;
- A total of 45 workshops were conducted and, or assisted throughout the year, compared to 9 in 2008;
- 6,481 students benefitted directly from the school visits to understand their consumer rights and responsibilities;
- Secured funds from EU for legislative and institutional reform in consumer protection;
- An increase in published articles on consumer issues by 33% is a notable achievement considering that the Public Emergency Regulations were in force;
- Re-engagement with Ministry of Education on Consumer Education for school teachers. First formal one-day workshop for heads of primary and secondary schools (Central Division) held on 21st October, 2009. The Ministry of Education has indicated its interest in making the workshop an annual event;
- 548 traders and service providers were visited to monitor price changes, detect unfair trade practices and to gauge quality of service; and
- The Council's website usage increased as a result of regular press release updates. Consumers and members of the public with internet access now get up-to-date news releases from the Council via the website.

tion services, giving telecommunication companies a free hand to set their own fees and charges for mobile, landline and international call services. However, Telecom Fiji Limited still holds landline monopoly.

In September, the Commerce Commission decided to increase the electricity tariff rate by 15 per cent or 3.2 cents/unit. This decision placed a huge burden on consumers. FEA tried to justify its actions on the: "financial hardship" it was facing as a result of the 20% devaluation of the Fiji dollar; removal of the fuel surcharge rate from March 11, 2009; and inadequate cash flow to meet its offshore loan commitments.

In August, the Land Transport Authority (LTA) announced an increase in bus fares by an average of 13%. However, consumers experienced increases by as much as

65%. After widespread public concern, the government decided to provide relief in the form of free school bus fares. A similar increase in taxi charges was approved in August, which saw a hike in the day and night tariffs by 50 cents. The day fare started from \$1.50 from the previous charge of \$1.00 and the night fare went up to \$2.00 from \$1.50. The waiting charge was set at 10 cents per minute instead of every two minutes.

2009 saw prices of basic prescribed drugs for ailments such as diabetes, hypertension and heart diseases needed by majority of the people in Fiji increased as much as 100 to 180%. The survey showed that Metformin used for diabetes, which in 2007 was sold at an average price of 3 cents per tablet was sold for 8cents per tablet in 2009, an increase of 167%. Propano used for hypertension was sold at

5cents per tablet but in 2009 it increased to 14 cents per tablet, an increase of 180%.

In 2009, there were many incidents where consumers were unfairly subjected to flight delays, cancellations and harsh treatment by the national carrier Air Pacific and its domestic subsidiary Pacific Sun. 2009 also saw the closure of the operations of Air Fiji. Air Fiji customers who had already paid for trips at the company's closure lost their money as there were no avenues for refunds. This prompted the Council to call for an effective redress mechanism and tighter licensing controls by the Air Transport Licensing Board.

In 2009, the price of 10/22ft roofing iron increased by 42.5%; 8 blade louvre frames increased by 124.4%; 6 kg of 2inch galvanised nails increased by 52.58% whereas 6 inch T hinge increased by 65.6%.

Positives of 2009

On the positive side, year 2009 will be best remembered for the implementation of the following Government decisions:

- *Free bus fare to school students where 79,505 students from 490 schools around Fiji received state-funded bus fares;*
- *Move towards merger of consumer protection agencies to create a one-stop-shop for consumers. A single consumer body with a comprehensive consumer protection law will ensure a solitary, coherent and effective voice for the consumers;*
- *Consumer Credit regulations came into force on October 1st, 2009 to strengthen the functioning of the consumer credit market;*
- *Food Safety Act 2003 and Food Safety Regulation 2009 came into effect on 14 October placing closer scrutiny and supervision on standards practiced at all levels of food production;*

- *Medical and Dental Practice Decree was approved by Cabinet on December 15, 2009 to protect consumers from negligence and malpractice, which were normally unreported because of lack of transparency in dealing with the cases;*
- *Reserve Bank of Fiji (RBF) Consumer Complain Unit was established to address consumers' grievances against financial institutions. The Council is pleased to note that RBF is taking on a more active role in ensuring that consumers are given fair and satisfactory service by financial institutions; and*
- *Legal Services Commission was established in 2009 to deal with consumer complaints against lawyers or law firms. In the past three years the Council received a large number of complaints against lawyers but the Fiji Law Society took no effective action to address consumer grievances.*



Consumers were forced to cut their spending more than previous years in 2009 as a result of drastic increase in bus fares, food prices and fuel.

Campaigns, Information and Media Services



In 2009, Council launched a campaign on "Say No to Junk Food – Making Parents Responsible in Fiji" and vigorously advocated against the sale of unhealthy food to children.

to rural communities, villages, women's groups, other similar groups to acquire new or existing information and also have an opportunity for redress.

A total of 40 community visits were conducted during the year, 8 in the Central Division, 11 in the Northern Division and 21 in the Western Division. Of these, only 2 were initiated by the Council, while 38 were as a result of direct requests from local community groups. A total of 1056 people in these communities benefited directly from these visits, which is an effective way of bridging the gap in the provision of the Council's services to people who cannot access its services due to distance and cost. Also the visits allowed consumers who are constrained by literacy issues, to get a better understanding of the Council's work, and their consumer rights and responsibilities, in a user-friendly language as these are conducted in an informal setting.

IMPACT The Community visits have allowed the Council to extend its services to communities disadvantaged by distance. A major impact is that it has enabled the Council to have a more intimate reach to local community groups. The community-initiated requests (38 out of 40) reflect the level of interest in consumer issues that exists in these local communities who are the final beneficiaries of the activity

Workshops

A total of 45 workshops were conducted and, or assisted throughout the year, compared to 9 in 2008. The Council partnered with the Department of Youth and Sports for the National Youth Service Scheme (NYSS), Community Education Training Centre (CETC) of the Secretariat of the Pacific Community, Fiji Institute of Technology/Fiji National University, Catholic Women's League, and so forth. The topics covered in these workshops have moved from the role of Consumer Council, consumer rights and responsibilities, towards emerging problems that consumers face in their day to day living.

IMPACT A major impact of the workshops for 2009 was the high number of participants under National Youth Service Scheme benefitted from awareness of their rights and responsibilities. Participants including the young job seekers, and youths trying to gain knowledge and information on a wide range of issues benefitted. The workshops provided an opportunity for the Council to reach the post-secondary school youth population as those in primary and secondary schools are covered by the school visits programme.

A well functioning market economy needs educated consumers with the power to influence the market through their rational decisions when confronted with choice. An informed consumer will also be protected from trade and business-related exploitation. It is therefore important to create an increased level of awareness on consumer rights, and for this consumers have to be educated about rights and responsibilities through concerted publicity and awareness campaigns.

School Programme



DAV Students on a school visit to the Council

A major achievement for 2009 was the increase in number of school visits which doubled as compared to 2008. A total of 49 visits were made in the year

compared to 21 in 2008--- a 133% increase with a total of 6481 students benefitting from the visits. The school visits were mostly in urban areas where the Council responded to requests from the school principals and teachers to share knowledge and information on consumer rights. An important message used in these school visits was the use of special DVD on World Consumer Rights Day theme – "Say No to Junk Food – Making Parents Respon-

sible in Fiji." The DVD included statistics on child obesity and clips on school canteen practices with messages targeting schools, children and parents.

Copies were also distributed to participating schools and community groups. The Council also used the opportunity to distribute brochures on "How to read your electricity and water bills" to parents via their children during these school visits.

IMPACT Students and teachers accessed updated information on consumer issues. The school visits also provided a cost-effective avenue for the distribution of the Council's information brochures on electricity/water bills, hire purchase to name a few. A major impact was the high level of interest from teachers for the expansion of their own knowledge on consumer issues and the need for capacity building in consumer education curriculum. This culminated in the Ministry of Education's Central Division office based in Nausori to hold one-day consumer education workshop for heads of primary and secondary schools in that division. The Ministry is keen on continuing this initiative in future.

Community Awareness Programme

Community Visits

The Council's community visits allow accessibility of its services and in particular important information to local communities. The visits provide an opportunity



Mobile Units

Mobile units are cost-effective means by which the Council can reach out to consumers who would otherwise not be able to access its services due to distance or transportation costs. In 2009, the Council set up 33 mobile units. Of these, 12 were in the Central Division, 11 in the West and 10 in the North. A total of 1916 people used mobile services to lodge complaints and seek redress. The Council also conducted market surveillance and trader visits in the respective areas where the information booths were set up.

IMPACT The mobile units ensure that Council's services are accessed directly thus increasing its reach and footprint. Consumers lodged complaints and sought advice at their door step. It is expected that the 1916 people covered in the mobile units would in turn share information amongst their family and social networks.

Information Initiatives

Consumers are determined to make the right choice, to be savvy and active, and to bring improvements to the consumer culture. Disseminating consumer information is essential to allow consumers to make informed-decisions to deal with problems in the marketplace.



The Council continues to recognise the power of the media not only to disseminate information but provoke debate on important consumer issues to empower consumers against current and emerging challenges. The Council's media programme is vital when considering the meagre human and financial resources at its disposal.

Media organisations played a very important part in highlighting key consumer issues which the Council raised throughout the year.

A total of 21 paid radio programmes were conducted in 2009, 3 more than in 2008. The paid programmes are dependent on funding available to the Council. However, the Council was able to produce a total of 1439 unpaid air time/programmes for the year. The unpaid programmes include scheduled morning talks, talk-back radio, press statements and media requests. A total of 301 unpaid programmes were in English, 839 in Hindi and 299 programs in Fijian language stations.

The Council featured in 29 television programmes during the year comprising 26 news items on Fiji One and 3 items on current affairs programmes – Talk Business (1) and Close Up (2).

Extensive newspaper coverage of the Council's press statements, commentaries and advisories continued with a total of 419 published newspaper articles, 104 articles more than in 2008. The 33% increase in published articles was a notable achievement considering that the Public Emergency Regulations were in force. However, a total of 444 articles were published on various local and overseas-based media websites.

The Council continued and, wherever possible, raised the level of our representation of consumer interests

and rights and highlighted these through our newsletter Consumer Watch.

Two issues of the 6-monthly newsletter, Consumer Watch were produced in the year. The design and organisation of pages in the newsletter were improved with the addition of a special 'Thumbs Up, Thumbs Down' page naming the good and bad business practices.

To assist in consumer education and advocacy three new brochures were produced on: Social Responsibility, Justice of Peace, Know your Water Bill and a Fact Sheet on the Council's EU project.



IMPACT The information initiative of the Council continues to enhance its profile and respectability, and strengthened the trust that consumers have in the organisation. This is evident from the increase in the number of complaints or to seek advice or information on products and services. The Council also noticed an increase in traders/businesses bringing their trade-related issues to Council's attention. For example, the Pest Control Association of Fiji raised the issue of unlicensed pesticide vendors engaged in door to door sale of unregistered pesticide.



Campaigns

Compulsory Third Party Insurance (CTPI) was launched in October 2009 with the aim of bringing reform in the CTPI sector, after the Council's 2008 Insurance Study Report highlighted an unjust and unfair system where accident victims faced many obstacles when seeking claim from insurance companies. Our findings revealed that many accident victims are not receiving fair redress and compensation due to exclusion clauses, legal costs and limitations by the law or ignorance.

IMPACT The campaign had provoked much public debate on the issues and had resulted in the Council being inundated by accident victims who were not aware that as a third party they were entitled to compensation from CTPI holders. The ongoing campaign has also drawn the attention of the regulator, the Reserve Bank of Fiji and the government.

World Consumer Rights Day 2009

The Fiji theme of WCRD 2009 was – "Say No to Junk Food – Making Parents Responsible in Fiji." The Council launched the campaign on two issues: sale of unhealthy food to children despite the provision of a School Canteen Guidelines put in place by the Ministry of Health and absence of a standard on advertising in Fiji to prohibit TV advertising of 'unhealthy' food to children. The Council for the first time produced a special DVD on school canteen with messages targeting schools, children and parents.

IMPACT The special DVD produced has been distributed widely to schools as an educational and advocacy tool on the junk food issue. The issue of child nutrition has been on the Council's work agenda for the last two decades where it has consistently participated in national efforts to combat child obesity and non-communicable diseases. This year a major result has been the implementation of Schools Nutrition Policy and Canteen Guidelines by the Ministry of Education in October.



Key Local Engagements: The Council participated in the following events:

- Presentation made on the Need for Ethics and Values in Business Practices for Consumers' Protection at Transparency International Workshop, Pacific Theological College, Suva -6th March 2009;
- Presentation made at the Pacific Conference on Growth and Development on Consumer Protection Issues in Market Economies, FIT Campus, Raiwai, 26th March 2009;
- Consumer law making and current problems with Consumer protection laws- discussion with Professional Officers Talanoa Session (POTS) AG's Office- 3rd April, 2009;
- Presentation made on Environmental Issues Associated with the Transport Sector: A Challenge for Fiji organized by the Logistics & Transport Institute of New Zealand- Fiji Section; 29th April 2009;
- Participated in the Pacific Micro-finance week 2009 organized by the Pacific Financial Inclusion Programme (PFIP) on Financial Literacy at Radisson Resort, Denarau, 15th July 2009;
- Presentation made to the Development Sub-Committee on Reforms in Consumer Protection: Institutional and Legislative Changes, 26th August 2009;
- Presentation made to the line Ministry on Reforms in Consumer Protection: Institutional and Legislative Changes, 22nd September 2009;
- Member of the Steering Committee for National Food Summit and the Council participated at the Ministry of Health and WHO organized Fiji National Food Summit, 'Striving For A Food Secure Fiji', at Nadi, 14-16th October 2009;
- Presentation made on 'Consumer Rights: The Issues That Matter'; at the Consumer Education Workshop for Heads of Primary and Secondary Schools (Central Division), Nausori, 21st October 2009;
- Facilitator at the National Micro-finance Workshop by Reserve Bank of Fiji at Novotel Hotel, Lami, 4-5 Nov 2009;
- Presentation made on Consumer's Perception of the Courts System – Judicial Orientation Workshop- High Court of Fiji, Outrigger, Sigatoka, 19 November 2009;
- Regional Symposium on Population and Development in the Pacific Island- Accelerating the ICPD Program of Action, USP, 23 November 2009;
- Participated at the Food Safety Emergency Response by Ministry of Health on Importance of Food Safety Emergency Plan, Novotel, Lami, 9 December 2009; and
- Participated in the discussion on Container Deposit Legislation Project on Creation of a safe deposit and refund beverage container recycling system in Fiji by the Department of Environment, Studio 6 Conference Centre, Suva, 23 December 2009.

Television Coverage

| No. | Date | Topics/Issues | Programme |
|-----|----------|--|--------------------------|
| 1. | 4/1/09 | Bait advertising | Fiji One – News |
| 2. | 8/1/09 | Back-to-School shopping | Fiji One – News |
| 3. | 10/1/09 | Rice issue | Fiji One – News |
| 4. | 15/1/09 | Insurance claims | Fiji One – News |
| 5. | 27/01/09 | Flood issues | Fiji One – Talk Business |
| 6. | 8/2/09 | Taxi fare flag fall reduction | Fiji One – Close Up |
| 7. | 16/2/09 | Bus donation to flood appeal | Fiji One – News |
| 8. | 20/2/09 | Flood donation | Fiji One – News |
| 9. | 27/2/09 | FEA billing | Fiji One – News |
| 10. | 13/3/09 | Junk food survey – World Consumer Rights Day | Fiji One – News |
| 11. | 22/4/09 | Devaluation of the Fiji dollar | Fiji One – News |
| 12. | 1/5/09 | Kidanet & swine flu | Fiji One – News |
| 13. | 21/5/09 | Pesticide sales | Fiji One – News |
| 14. | 13/6/09 | Consumer Credit Act | Fiji One – News |
| 15. | 14/7/09 | Pacific Sun fare increase | Fiji One – News |

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|-----|----------|--|---------------------|
| 16. | 17/8/09 | Bus fare increase | Fiji One – News |
| 17. | 22/8/09 | Money lending | Fiji One – Close Up |
| 18. | 18/8/09 | Bus ticketing | Fiji One – News |
| 19. | 22/8/09 | Food test results withdrawn | Fiji One – News |
| 20. | 14/9/09 | Food test | Fiji One – News |
| 21. | 7/9/09 | Lawyer redress | Fiji One – News |
| 22. | 2/10/09 | Consumer Credit Regulations | Fiji One – News |
| 23. | 26/10/09 | School bus fares | Fiji One – News |
| 24. | 9/11/09 | Pressure enrolment in higher education | Fiji One – News |
| 25. | 20/11/09 | Campaign on CPTI launch | Fiji One – News |
| 26. | 17/12/09 | Food items after cyclone | Fiji One – News |
| 27. | 23/12/09 | Christmas shopping advice | Fiji One – News |
| 28. | 23/12/09 | Extended shopping hours | Fiji One – News |
| 29. | 24/12/09 | Flash & Gain card | Fiji One – News |

Consumer Education Workshops Assisted/Conducted in 2009

| No | Date | Partner Organisation/Group | Location | No. of participants |
|----|------|--|----------|---------------------|
| 1 | 21/2 | Kiribati High Commission | Suva | 46 |
| 2 | 28/2 | Arya Yuva Dal | Nasinu | 160 |
| 3 | 6/3 | Transparency International | Suva | 24 |
| 4 | 26/3 | Fiji Institute of Technology | Suva | 100 |
| 5 | 14/5 | Ministry of Youth, NYSS | Labasa | 52 |
| 6 | 10/6 | Ministry of Youth, NYSS | Suva | 22 |
| 7 | 13/6 | Arya Yuva Dal Fiji, Prathinidhi Sabha of Fiji | Nabua | 40 |
| 8 | 02/6 | Ministry of Youth, NYSS | Ba | 23 |
| 9 | 05/6 | Ministry of Youth & Sports, NYSS | Lautoka | 20 |
| 10 | 05/6 | Ministry of Youth, NYSS | Labasa | 54 |
| 11 | 03/4 | Professional Officers Talanoa Session (POTS) | Suva | 18 |
| 12 | 29/4 | Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport | Suva | 15 |
| 13 | 27/5 | Ministry of Youth, NYSS | Suva | 25 |
| 14 | 28/5 | Ministry of Youth, NYSS | Nausori | 21 |
| 15 | 07/5 | Ministry of Youth, NYSS | Lautoka | 20 |
| 16 | 19/5 | Ministry of Youth, NYSS | Lautoka | 29 |
| 17 | 21/5 | Ministry of Youth, NYSS | Lautoka | 25 |
| 18 | 25/6 | NYSS- Seeds of Success Training | Nausori | 27 |
| 19 | 18/6 | Ministry of Youth, NYSS | Rakiraki | 32 |
| 20 | 19/6 | Ministry of Youth, NYSS | Lautoka | 31 |
| 21 | 26/6 | Ministry of Youth, NYSS | Labasa | 290 |
| 22 | 01/7 | Ministry of Youth, NYSS | Lautoka | 33 |

| | | | | |
|----|-------|--------------------------------------|----------|-----|
| 23 | 05/7 | Ministry of Youth, NYSS | Lautoka | 34 |
| 24 | 01/7 | Ministry of Youth, NYSS | Sigatoka | 32 |
| 25 | 24/7 | Fiji Institute of Technology | Suva | 200 |
| 26 | 05/8 | Nagado Village | Nadi | 28 |
| 27 | 05/8 | Ministry of Youth | Lautoka | 33 |
| 28 | 22/9 | Yadua Village | Sigatoka | 45 |
| 29 | 22/9 | Natalau Village | Nadi | 22 |
| 30 | 23/9 | Nailaga Village | Ba | 19 |
| 31 | 23/12 | Belevuto Village | Ba | 23 |
| 32 | 23/12 | Nasolo Village | Ba | 21 |
| 33 | 24/9 | Korovou Village | Tavua | 14 |
| 34 | 24/9 | Rabulu Village | Tavua | 23 |
| 35 | 24/9 | Tavualevu Village | Tavua | 35 |
| 36 | 25/9 | Togovere Village | Rakiraki | 14 |
| 37 | 24/11 | Nagado Village | Nadi | 31 |
| 38 | 17/11 | Naseakula Village | Labasa | 17 |
| 39 | 18/11 | Korovuli Village | Seaqaqa | 19 |
| 40 | 18/11 | Navakasobu Village | Seaqaqa | 19 |
| 41 | 18/11 | Rabian Community | Labasa | 20 |
| 42 | 19/11 | Labasa Dorcas Welfare Society | Labasa | 14 |
| 43 | 19/11 | Nakama Village | Labasa | 18 |
| 44 | 20/11 | Nasavusavu Secondary School Teachers | Savusavu | 16 |
| 45 | 02/12 | Nasarawaqa Indian School | Bua | 26 |

Alternative Disputes Resolution & Consumer Advisory Services



In 2009, Council mediated and resolved 902 cases worth \$1 million, out of the 1,530 registered complaints.

One of the core functions of the Consumer Council is to assist consumers in resolving complaints through alternative disputes resolution, advisory services and legal representations. In the past few years, the number of complaints lodged with the Council has been increasing. In 2009, total of 1530 consumers lodged formal complaints at the Council - an average of around 128 complaints per month. The complaints registered for the year had a total monetary value of \$1.9 million dollars. Of the total number of complaints, 59% or \$1million worth of complaints was resolved through mediation and 113 cases were referred to the Small Claims Tribunal (SCT). The Council provided written and in-person advice to 636 people (298 in Suva, 209 in Lautoka and 129 in Labasa). Most consumers sought advisory assistance on electronic products, utilities, tenancy, hire purchase, prices of goods, public transport and financial services. Selected complaints case studies were published in the Council's newsletters to raise awareness and to caution consumers.

| Summary of Consumer Complaints for Year 2009 | |
|---|---|
| Total of received and registered complaints | 1530 cases: an average of 128 per month |
| Complaints resolved through mediation | 902 cases: an average of 75 per month |
| Cases assisted or referred to Small Claims Tribunal | 113 cases: an average of 9.5 per month |
| Cases referred to other consumer protection / regulatory agencies | 257 cases: an average of 22 per month |
| Consumer advice (not registered) | 636 cases: an average of 53 per month |
| Weak Cases | 11 cases lacked evidence such as receipts, contracts etc. |

Most Re-occurring Complaints in 2009

Residential tenancy complaints topped the list of registered complaints, followed by public transport, electronic goods, mobile services, to name a few. Residential tenancy is the major area that continues to record the highest number of complaints over the three-year period beginning in 2007.

| Most Re-occurring Complaints in 2009 | |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Issues | No. of Cases Registered |
| Landlord/Tenant | 213 |
| Public Transport | 197 |
| Telecommunications | 156 |
| Sub-Standard Products | 110 |
| Electronic Goods/Appliances | 108 |
| Groceries | 72 |
| FEA | 61 |
| Spare Parts | 55 |
| Hardware/Furniture | 46 |
| Financial Services | 45 |

Top Ten Complaints in 2009



- 20% Landlord | Tenant
- 19% Public Transport
- 15% Telecommunications
- 10% Sub-Standard Products
- 10% Electronic Good/Appliances
- 7% Groceries
- 6% FEA
- 5% Spare Parts
- 4% Hardware | Furniture
- 4% Financial Services

Landlord/Tenancy

The Council received 213 complaints in 2009 relating to landlord and tenancy issues. The major issue with tenancy is the non issuance of receipts, non –refund of bond money, improper notice to vacate, absence of tenancy agreements or unfair terms in the contract. Other issues include poor condition of the houses or dispute arising from shared amenities such as

water or electricity. Unfair treatment by the landlord was reported by tenants such as locking up the premises, changing locks, interfering with tenant's personal life etc.

Public Transport

In 2009, the Council received 197 complaints against public transport (buses, taxis, airlines, shipping and Land Transport Authority). The complaints were mainly in relation to increase in bus fares and changes to the fare structure in August, poor service delivery by Air Pacific and Pacific Sun through their frequent delays and cancellations. The Council made a submission to the Prime Minister's Office highlighting the plight of consumers over the bus fare increase. In order to ease the burden the Government introduced free bus fare scheme to school students and also directing the LTA to ensure the new bus fare structure was well understood by the travelling public.

Telecommunications

In 2009, a total of 156 complaints were received from consumers, who were increasingly disillusioned with the quality of services provided by Connect and the unethical activities of telecommunication companies. Misleading advertisements used by the Telecom companies were rife in the marketplace. Vodafone tied customers into fixed contracts with no exit clause or entered into exclusive deals with radio stations. The Council officially lodged complaint with the Commerce Commission on their anti-competitive behaviour.

Sub-Standard Products

A total of 110 complaints were received from consumers on sub-standard products which were of poor quality.

Electronic Goods/ Appliances

108 complaints were received on electronic goods/appliances. The products were either defective or sold to consumers in a deceptive manner. In some cases the traders refused to replace or repair products as per the warranty or charged repair costs when the product was already on warranty. Consumers also complained

about long delays in repairs because spare parts were ordered from overseas thus resulting in consumer frustration.

The Council's intervention with the traders has resulted in a quick resolution wherein repairs or replacement of the sub-standard products were given within time. The Council also got rid of notices and receipts that read "Goods once sold will not be returned" or "no replacement or refund allowed".

IMPACT In 2009 a total of \$1,031,194.84 was recovered for consumers through successful resolving of complaints.

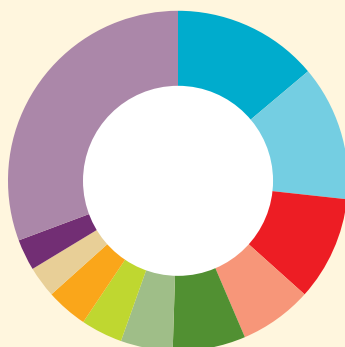


Influx of defective electronics products market is huge concern to the Council.



In 2009, 156 complaints were lodged on telecommunications.

Most Re-occurring Complaint in 2009



- 14% Landlord | Tenant
- 13% Public Transport
- 10% Telecommunications
- 7% Sub-Standard Products
- 7% Electronic Good/Appliances
- 5% Groceries
- 4% FEA
- 4% Spare Parts
- 3% Hardware | Furniture
- 3% Financial Services
- 31 Others

Consumer Research and Surveillance



Last year Government re-introduced VAT on locally produced eggs after the Council price analysis revealed that despite VAT removal, the prices of locally produced eggs were increasing and consumers were not benefiting at all.

The Council maintains rigorous research practices on important issues affecting consumers. The Council through its research provide evidence-based submissions to government and policy makers to effectively develop strategies for appropriate intervention and redress. Evidence-based research also assists in advocacy for behavioural change amongst consumers and traders. In addition to research, the Council also conducted regular market surveillance to keep business practices in check.

Minor Research

A total of 65 minor researches were undertaken in 2009 mostly based on

consumer complaints. The research results and papers produced were converted to press releases for dissemination to consumers and interested stakeholders. Research findings were also used to prepare Council's submissions to government and policymakers.

IMPACT Some minor research has immediate impacts while others, where systematic changes are needed-show impacts over a period of time. Minor researches with immediate impacts were as follows:

- **Recall of products such as Lakma tea, Yumos-the big snack.**



A Classic example of breach on fair trading laws - traders selling Lakma Tea Sachets in Royal Tea packets.



With the help Consumers Korea, Council conducted a research on problems of Endocrine Disrupting Chemicals (EDCs) in Colour Cosmetics, where we found that many Cosmetics sold in Fiji had harmful chemicals that has potential to cause cancer.

- **Rectification of misleading advertisements:** In a highly competitive market, Council is always on the lookout for cunning and hideous advertisements deliberately devised to mislead consumers. Vodafone changed the advertisement on Rap song on 3G Phone, Digicel disclosed costs of "text loved ones" promotion, Connect changed its misleading advertisement on mobile internet, MH and Copper Chimney corrected the price tag and the advertisement respectively.
- **Government re-introduced VAT on locally produced eggs** after the Council price analysis revealed that despite VAT removal, the prices of locally produced eggs were increasing and consumers were not benefiting at all.
- **Coca Cola advertisement pulled off air-** which promoted dangerous behaviour i.e. careless use of firecrackers by children. Through Council's request, this advertisement was immediately pulled off the air.
- **Health Minister defining boundaries for sale of medicine** after the Council highlighted the claims made on herbal medicine for providing cure for all sort of ailments. Through Council's request, the Minister of Health made a declaration that all medicines claiming cure for ailments can only be sold in pharmacies and those breaching this could face heavy penalties.

Legislative review

The Council under EU Project initiated legislative and institutional reform in consumer protection with the aim of ensuring that legislation is current and effective. Minister responsible for Consumer Affairs, Permanent Secretary for Industry and Trade and the Development Sub-committee members were briefed on creating a "one-stop shop" for consumers

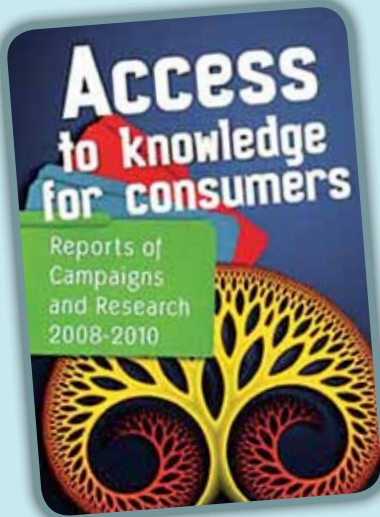


List of Minor Research

| Issues | |
|--|--|
| Pre and Post budget food price variance | ANZ Rural banking fees |
| Price analysis of text and exercise books | Misleading Advertisement |
| Price analysis of building materials used in 20x 19 timber house | Statistics on bus, and mini bus accidents for the last five years |
| Weight of the Crest chickens | Misleading Advertisement |
| Interest rates of housing loans | Price analysis of Ram Sami eggs |
| Price analysis of local and imported rice | Analysing compensation policy of local airlines |
| Different rates for broadband charges | Bank fees and charges |
| ELSA Test | Analysis of problems associated with different brands of electrical products sold in Labasa |
| VAT on taxi fares | Survey on the awareness level on Compulsory Third Party Insurance (CTPI) |
| Parallel Imports | Analysis of 13 % bus fare increase |
| Analysis of insurance policies on H1N1 cover | Internet services |
| Investigating case of "False Representation"- Lakma tea sachets sold in Royal tea packs | Investigating possibility of local bakeries using special bran (mill mix) that is used to feed pigs to make whole meal bread instead of whole meal flour |
| Probing on Vodafone's condition on -"need to register" to qualify for Voda Star | Sale on unlabelled herbal medicine |
| MH selling sub-standard Malaysian product | Verification of implementing taxi surcharge in the Northern Division |
| Survey to investigate the sale of banned hardware products: Corona electric shower, Roof sparkling coils, Incapacitating spray, Yo-yo balls and lead soldered cans | Verification of implementing taxi surcharge in the Northern Division |
| | Price comparison of 250g and 500g packets of Rewa Powered Milk |
| Investigating the validity of health claims made for Whole Body Vibration treatment | Analysing benefits of direct payment of Family Assistance Allowance to recipient's bank accounts |
| Bread sold above the fixed price | Probing the possible collusion of pharmacies and doctors in Northern Division with pharmacies offering discounts on prescription from certain doctors. |
| Price analysis of tea leaves after removal of price control | Probing misleading advertisements/price tag of MH |
| Verification on concerns raised by an Islamic organization on possibility of local chickens being injected with proteins (beef and pork) to retain water and increase chicken's weight | Sale on banned fire crackers/ unlawful sale of fire crackers to under the age of 18 |
| Sale of substandard quality of Aldi products | Price analysis of firecrackers |
| Survey on increased sale of inferior products in the market | TV advertisement encouraging dangerous behaviour amongst children |
| Condition selling | Legal status and work jurisdiction of Bailiffs |
| Price comparison of Fiji made products (ones with duty concessions from Government) with imported ones | Examining proposed suggestions to PIB to change the percentage of price control on local and imported text and exercise books |
| Herbal medicines with unfounded claims | Price analysis of medicines used for most common diseases in Fiji |
| Survey on pharmaceutical Industry in Fiji | Misleading Advertisements- Vodafone Recharge Bonanza |
| Flash and Gain loyalty program | Price analysis of Strauss Medicine |
| MH selling products not meant for resale | Ram Sami & Sons-misleading consumers |
| Probing rationale for sale of unwrapped and wrapped bread on different prices | Investigating misrepresentation – presence of long grain rice in A grade Ever Green Jasmine rice |
| Investigating receipts without the name and TIN of the organization | Investigating incidents of overcharging for bread sold at fixed price |
| Price analysis of products (perfumes, laptops) given 5% duty concession in 2010 Budget | Gift vouchers and Loyalty programs |
| Genetically engineered food in Fiji | Analysing points and gifts under Flash and Gain program |
| Survey on the violation of the International Code of Marketing of Breast milk Substitutes and Subsequent World Health Assembly (WHA) Resolutions | Investigating on receipts and defunct scanners |
| Survey on the violation of the International Code of Marketing of Breast milk Substitutes and Subsequent World Health Assembly (WHA) Resolutions | Investigating on receipts and defunct scanners |

Engaging Internationally

The Council conducted the following research/survey projects with Consumers International (CI) and other international consumer organizations such as Canadian Standards Association and Consumers Korea.



IMPACT - International Research

Working with international partners has benefited Council enormously in terms of understanding emerging issues, building research skills including funds to conduct the research. The findings from the above international surveys have been rigorously used by the Council in advocacy work and have helped in bring about behaviour change in consumers.

Market Surveillance

The Council's ongoing investigations continue to expose dodgy practices and bad behaviour that is prevalent in the marketplace. The Council visited 548 traders and service providers in 2009 to

monitor price changes, business practices, and quality and standard of food and non-food products. The market surveillance allows the Council to inform and alert consumers and relevant consumer protection agencies on any market abuses or unfair trade practices. This regular activity has benefited consumers and kept them well informed on practices relating to expired food items, misleading labelling and low quality goods and services. Consumer protection agencies such as the Department Fair Trading and Consumer Affairs amongst others have also benefited from the Council's market surveillance as issues are regularly referred to them for appropriate action.



Council's market surveillance found numerous cases of sale of unwrapped bread which is a breach of Food and Safety Act 2003.

IMPACT One of the major impacts of regular market surveillance is that many traders are now becoming conscious of the Council and would immediately rectify the problems highlighted for the fear of being named and shamed publically by the Council or reporting the issue to relevant authorities. Other immediate impacts in 2009 were:

- Food Inspectors from Ministry of Health con-

- fiscated 600 kilograms meat not fit for human consumption after a complaint was lodged by the Council; and
- Health Inspectors removed numerous expired and damaged products from supermarkets based on our market surveillances findings and letters to enforcement agencies.



Violation of "Marketing Controls and Regulations 2010 on Foods for Infants and Young Children" through free give away as a promotional device to induce sales with infant formula.



International Research in 2009

| | Organization | Survey/Research |
|----|--------------------------------|---|
| 1. | Consumers International | Marketing Strategies used to market fast food to children |
| 2. | Consumers International | TV advertisement monitoring on food marketing |
| 3. | Consumers International | A2K Project on access to knowledge |
| 4. | Canadian Standards Association | Consumer Product Safety |
| 5. | Consumers Korea | Problems of Endocrine Disrupting Chemicals (EDCs) in Colour Cosmetics |

Submissions

The council is at the forefront of consumer advocacy, working hard to make consumers voices heard by the government, regulators, traders and service providers. The Council, armed with rigorous research, has stepped its work in analysing policies affecting consumers and making submissions to government and key policymakers to address the gaps in consumer protection and redress. One of the Council's stated objectives is to bring about necessary policy change, where required. In this regard, the Council regularly makes oral and written submissions to various government agencies from the consumer point of view. While a good number of these government ministries and departments recognize the consumer input and invited the Council to make submissions, the Council has in many instances taken the initiative of making submission after recognizing the policy is having negative impact on consumers. In 2009, the Council made a total of 8 major submissions on behalf of consumers.

IMPACT The Council had made a submission to the Prime Minister on how increase in bus fare was affecting consumers especially those in the low income bracket. Many parents lodged complaints with the Council that they were unable to send their children to school because of high cost of bus fares. Government last year implemented free fares for students coming from low income families.



Council's submission in 2009 on various issues saw many positive changes for consumers in Fiji like introduction of free bus fare for students and a revised Medical and Dental Practitioners Decree.

Submissions in 2009

| No | To Authorities/Agencies | Subject Matter/Issues |
|----|---|---|
| 1. | Commerce Commission | Review of the Telecommunication Pricing Determination |
| 2. | Fiji Medical Council | Review of Medical and Dental Act |
| 3. | Ministry of Justice | Review of the quality of service at Department of Justice |
| 4. | Commerce Commission | Review of Control of Substantial Market Power for Inter-Connection Services in Fiji |
| 5. | Prime Minister & Minister for Finance & Economic Planning | Review of Bus Fare Increase |
| 6. | Ministry of Health | Review of Public Health Act |
| 7. | World Health Organization | Draft Regional Strategy for Health Systems Strengthening and Primary Health Care in the Western Pacific Region of WHO |
| 8. | Prime Minister & Minister for Finance & Economic Planning | Removal of Price Control- Is the Timing Appropriate? |

Corporate Services and Project Management



In May 2009, Council secured about \$F520,000 from European Union for the project: "Strengthening Consumer Rights in Fiji through Advocacy and Enforcement of Consumer Protection Laws".

Union, Consumers Korea and Consumers International to assist in achieving its corporate goals and objectives.

Impacts of Funding from Donor Agencies

The funding provided by donor agencies assisted the Council to strengthen resources for Suva, Lautoka and Labasa Office. With better resources the Council successfully conducted its activities and was successful in exceeding its targets as set in the Business Plan. Without donor and partner support it would have been impossible to implement all the programmes.

To meet consumer demand the Council developed four proposals for donor funding in 2009. These were:

- Proposal to Aus-AID on Price Control and Monitoring in Fiji: The Impact on Consumers and Community;
- Proposal to Aus-AID on Human Rights Grant Scheme on Consumer Credit Regulation; and
- Anne Fransen Fund (AFF) Project Proposal on Price Control in Fiji

Human Resources

In 2009, the Council developed five policy manuals: Induction, Human Resources, Administration and Transport, Finance and Asset Management. The manuals clearly set guidelines and procedures for the Council to follow. A Salary Policy was also developed which sets the benchmark for salary payment to staff members based on their experiences and qualifications. A total of eight graduates were recruited to fill the positions. On the other hand six staff resigned and two staff members contracts were terminated. Staff members were assessed based on their performance throughout the year. At end of 2009, a total of 12 staff were on contracts. The Council engaged ten interns and four temporary staff to assist in achieving its goals but more importantly to train young people to become consumer rights advocates.

Finance

In January 2009, the Council received a grant of \$601,930.00 from the government to achieve the targets stated in the Service Agreement signed with the Minister for Industry, Trade, Tourism and Communications. Over the years the Council's grant has not increased despite

substantial increase in the volume of work. The Council had to obtain funding from external sources for its awareness and empowerment activities on consumer rights and responsibilities. In 2009, the Council secured F\$232,408.23 from four different donor agencies and partners such as the Government of Australia, European

The table below shows the breakdown of funds:

| Donor Agency | Amount Received | Project |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------|---|
| Consumers International | \$ 2,585.83 | Project on Access to Knowledge. Consumer Survey on barriers to access knowledge. |
| European Union | \$196,282.52 | Three year project on Strengthening Consumer Rights in Fiji and eliminating unfair trade practices through advocacy and enforcement of consumer protection laws |
| Government of Australia (Aus-Aid) | \$ 26,990.00 | Rolling fund for 2009 program to support the operation of the Council. |
| Government of Australia (Aus-Aid) | \$ 5,070.00 | Received money for the production of Essential Brochures on Utility Services. |
| Consumers Korea | \$ 1,479.88 | Research on Improper Labelling of Cosmetics in Fiji. |



Council staff in regular monthly meeting.

Training

In 2009, five short training programs were attended by staff members to upgrade their skills and knowledge. Meenakshni Kumari attended MYOB – Stage 1 and Fixed Asset Management at USP and TPAF respectively; Imeri Tuisabeto and Sekaia Tauvata attended Managing Customer Complaints at TPAF and one in-house training was organized by Ministry of Health on Code of Marketing of Breast Milk Substitute attended by Devika Narayan, Fay Volatabu, Naisa Koroi and Seini Lagilagi.

Board Meetings

During the year, six (6) Board meetings were held and a total of 34 Board Papers were presented. The Board introduced 5 policy manuals and provided advice and expertise to the Management Team.

Staff and Management Meetings

Two (2) Staff and five (5) Management meetings were held during the year.

International Conferences/Training/ Workshops/Seminars

The Council staff attended the following meetings/workshops:

- Ms. Joshika Samujh attended the Asia Pacific Regional Members meeting held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia from 17-18 February 2009. This was funded by Consumer International;
- Ms. Premila Kumar attended the 31st ISO COPOLCO Workshop and Plenary meeting held in New Delhi, India from 27 – 28 May 2009. Partial funding was secured from Consumers International and FOMCA in Malaysia;
- Ms. Premila Kumar attended the 1st ISO/TC 245 Project Committee: International Standards for Cross-Border Trade of Second-Hand Goods held in Beijing, China from 08-09 September which was funded by Standards Council of Canada;
- Ms. Premila Kumar attended Workshop on Human Capital

Management and made a study tour to BSMI in Taipei, Taiwan from 09–30 October 2009 which was funded by International Cooperation and Development Fund (ICDF).

- Ms. Premila Kumar attended the Financial Education Summit 2009 held in Singapore from 3-4 December 2009 which was organised by CITI Foundation and Financial Times and funded by CITI Bank.

Conclusion

Year 2009 was full of challenges for the Council. The Council maintained its independence and determination to fight for the rights of consumers. This has been made possible by the loyalty of consumers whose insights inform the Council on what we campaign on and write about. The Council constantly finds ways of meeting its needs.



Council staff trained on the Code of Marketing of Breast Milk Substitutes and Subsequent World Health Assembly Resolutions.

The Council dealt with variety of issues and was successful in most of the activities it undertook. The Council initiated more awareness raising programs through use of media, mobile units, community visits and workshops to reach out to the people. The Council will continue to strive for excellence in years to come by working closely with Government, consumer protection agencies, donors and other stakeholders in addressing key consumers issues.

I wish to once again appeal to the Government to provide adequate resources to the Council's operational budgets so that the Council can be on par in terms of salaries paid to comparable staff in other statutory organizations.

Appreciation

The Board stood by and made enormous contribution towards maintaining and driving the pace of service delivery

expected by the consumers. I wish to thank the Chair and Board Members who gave their time and effort freely and generously to guide me and my Management Team to achieve the organizational goals.

I also wish to thank our line Minister and his staff, government ministries/department and consumer protection agencies for their support to serve the consumer interests and for allowing the consumer voice to be heard. I also thank the Government for putting in place consumer related legislation and initiatives that adds to the confidence of consumers.

My acknowledgment and appreciation goes to the Government of Australia, European Union, Consumers Korea and Consumers International for providing much needed financial assistance in 2009 to help the Council accomplish the achievements outlined in my report. I also extend my gratitude to our sister consumer organization abroad and Consumers International for their commitment to help us throughout the year.

I sincerely thank the consumers of Fiji for their support and belief in the Council's mandate to represent their voice. I further extend my thanks and praise to each and every individual and volunteer who gave so much of their time and expertise to further the protection of consumers in Fiji.

Finally, without my hard working Management Team and Staff, the accomplishments in 2009 wouldn't have been possible. To them, I say thank you very much for your dedication and smart work. I look forward to the same or even better level of support and results in 2010.

Premila Kumar

Chief Executive/Executive Secretary



FINANCIAL STATEMENT

FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2009

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**CONSUMER COUNCIL OF FIJI
FINANCIAL STATEMENT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2009
INDEPENDENT AUDIT REPORT**

Scope

I have audited the financial statements of Consumer Council of Fiji for the year ended 31 December 2009 in accordance with Section 52 of the Consumer Council Act and Section 13 of the Audit Act. The financial statements consist of the Balance Sheet, Statement of Income and Expenditure, Statement of Changes in Equity, Statement of Cash Flows and the accompanying notes. The Council is responsible for the preparation and presentation of the financial statements and the information contained therein.

I have conducted an independent audit of these financial statements in order to express an opinion on them. My audit has been conducted in accordance with the Fiji Standards on Auditing to provide reasonable assurance as to whether the financial statements are free of material misstatements. My audit procedures included examination, on a test basis, of evidence supporting the amounts and other disclosures in the financial statements and the evaluation of accounting policies and significant accounting estimates. These procedures have been undertaken to form an opinion as to whether, in all material respects, the financial statements are presented fairly in accordance with the Fiji Accounting Standards and statutory requirements so as to present a view which is consistent with my understanding of the Council's financial position, the results of its operations and its cash flows.

The audit opinion expressed in this report has been formed on the above basis.

Audit Opinion

In my opinion, the financial statements present fairly the financial position of the Consumer Council of Fiji as at 31 December 2009 and the result of its operations and its cash flows for the year then ended.

I have obtained all the information and explanations which, to the best of my knowledge and belief, were necessary for the purposes of my audit.

Tevita Bolanavanua

AUDITOR GENERAL
8 November 2010



MANAGEMENT CERTIFICATE

We certify that these financial statements:

Have been drawn up as to give a true and a fair view of the state of affairs, operations and cash flows of the Consumer Council of Fiji for the year ended 31 December 2009.



Mr. Narendra Padarath

Chairman

Date:



Ms. Premila Devi Kumar

Chief Executive Officer

Date:

CONSUMER COUNCIL OF FIJI

BALANCE SHEET

Schedule 1

AS AT 31 DECEMBER 2009

| | Note | 31 December 2009 \$ | 31 December 2008 \$ |
|--|------|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| Current Assets | | | |
| Cash on Hand | 2 | 255,498 | 119,156 |
| Refundable Deposits | | 4,390 | 4,754 |
| Other Debtors | 3 | 7,319 | 4,812 |
| Prepayments | | 731 | 2,544 |
| Deferred Finance Charges | 9 | --- | 4,368 |
| VAT Receivable | | --- | 835 |
| Total Current Assets | | 267,938 | 136,469 |
| Non Current Assets | | | |
| Deferred Finance Charges | 9 | --- | 7,644 |
| Fixed Assets (Less Depreciation) | 4 | 69,582 | 88,128 |
| Total Non Current Assets | | 69,582 | 95,772 |
| TOTAL ASSETS | | 337,520 | 232,241 |
| Current Liabilities | | | |
| Accounts Payables & Accruals | 6 | 46,029 | 43,973 |
| VAT Payable | | 36,200 | --- |
| Provision for Annual Leave | | 4,853 | 6,716 |
| Reimbursed Deposits | | --- | 2,758 |
| Grants Payable | | 213,967 | 106,634 |
| Deferred Grant | | 69,582 | 88,128 |
| Lease Liability | 8 | --- | 525 |
| Loan | 7 | --- | 9,923 |
| Total Current Liabilities | | 370,631 | 258,657 |
| Non Current Liabilities | | | |
| Loan | 7 | --- | 7,088 |
| TOTAL LIABILITIES | | 370,631 | 265,745 |
| NET ASSETS | | (33,111) | (33,504) |
| Represented By: Reserves and Equity | | | |
| Asset Revaluation Reserve | | 44,508 | 44,508 |
| Accumulated Funds | | (77,619) | (78,011) |
| TOTAL RESERVES AND EQUITY | | (33,111) | (33,504) |

The accompanying notes are to be read in conjunction with the Financial Statements

CONSUMER COUNCIL OF FIJI
STATEMENT OF INCOME AND EXPENDITURE
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2009

Schedule 2

| | Note | 31 December 2009 \$ | 31 December 2008 \$ |
|---|------|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| <u>Income</u> | | | |
| Fiji National Training Council Grant | | 2,516 | --- |
| Grant from Government of Fiji | | 512,167 | 560,192 |
| Other Grants | | 1,480 | 7,609 |
| Sundry Income | | 57,905 | 2,980 |
| Deferred Grant Income | | 21,178 | 20,178 |
| Gain/Loss on Sale of Assets | | 540 | --- |
| Total Income | | 595,787 | 590,959 |
| <u>Expenditure</u> | | | |
| Advertising | | 3,772 | 4,858 |
| Audit Fees | | 3,273 | 4,200 |
| Bank Charges | | 637 | 759 |
| Consultants | | 1,500 | --- |
| Council Expenses | | 12,816 | 8,951 |
| Depreciation | | 21,178 | 20,178 |
| Electricity and Water | | 9,803 | 11,312 |
| Entertainment | | 464 | 228 |
| TPAF | | 3,367 | 2,964 |
| Insurance | | 5,361 | 493 |
| Interest | | 12,038 | 4,676 |
| Legal Fees | | --- | 333 |
| Office Expenses, Stationery & Publication | | 13,517 | 9,702 |
| Research | | 93 | 110 |
| Rent and Rates | | 50,200 | 50,200 |
| Repairs on Office Equipment, Furniture & Fittings | | 8,521 | 4,498 |
| Running Expenses - Motor Vehicles | | 7,156 | 7,908 |
| Salaries, Wages & Related Payments | | 341,306 | 361,723 |
| FNPF Expenses | | 26,545 | 14,221 |
| Subscription | | 2,696 | 2,636 |
| Sundries | | 2,348 | 1,608 |
| Telephone & Postage Charges | | 14,060 | 15,296 |
| Training Expenses | | 1,300 | 1,616 |
| Travelling Expenses | | 40,973 | 10,835 |
| TV, Radio Broadcast | | 2,684 | --- |
| World Consumer Rights Day | | 3,470 | 1,964 |
| Total Expenditure | | 589,080 | 541,270 |
| Net Surplus / (Deficit) for the year | | 6,707 | 49,689 |

The accompanying notes are to be read in conjunction with the Financial Statements

**CONSUMER COUNCIL OF FIJI
STATEMENT OF ACCUMULATED FUNDS
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2009**

Schedule 3

| | Note | 31 December 2009 \$ | 31 December 2008 \$ |
|--|------|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| Accumulated funds brought forward | | (78,011) | (100,646) |
| Less: Correction of Fundamental Errors | | (6,315) | (27,054) |
| Net Surplus/(Deficit) for the Year | | 6,707 | 49,689 |
| Accumulated Funds carried forward | | <u>(77,619)</u> | <u>(78,011)</u> |

The accompanying notes are to be read in conjunction with the Financial Statements

**CONSUMER COUNCIL OF FIJI
STATEMENT OF INCOME AND EXPENDITURE
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2009**

Schedule 4

| | Note | 31 December 2009 \$ | 31 December 2008 \$ |
|--|------|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| Cash Flows from Operating Activities | | | |
| Receipts from customers | | 856,113 | 597,191 |
| Payments to suppliers and employees | | (698,765) | (498,136) |
| Net cash provided by Operating Activities | 5 | <u>157,347</u> | <u>99,055</u> |
| Cash flows from Investing Activities | | | |
| Payment for property, plant and equipment | | (3,470) | (26,818) |
| Net cash used in Investing Activities | | <u>(3,470)</u> | <u>(26,818)</u> |
| Cash flows from Financing Activities | | | |
| Repayment of Loan | | (17,010) | (26,640) |
| Payments for lease finance | | (525) | (4,290) |
| Net cash provided by Financing Activities | | <u>(17,535)</u> | <u>(30,930)</u> |
| Net Decrease in Cash & Cash Equivalents | | 136,342 | 41,307 |
| Cash and Cash Equivalent at the Beginning of the Year | | 119,156 | 77,849 |
| Cash and Cash Equivalent at the End of the Year | 2 | <u>255,498</u> | <u>119,156</u> |

The accompanying notes are to be read in conjunction with the Financial Statements

CONSUMER COUNCIL OF FIJI

NOTES TO AND FORMING PART OF THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

Schedule 5

FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2009

Note 1: Summary of Significant Accounting Policies

Set out hereunder are the significant accounting policies adopted by the Council in the preparation of the accounts for the year ended 31 December 2009. Unless otherwise stated, similar policies were adopted in the previous year.

(a) Basis of Accounting

The accrual basis of accounting has been adopted for all the financial transactions. The accounts have been prepared using the historical cost convention, which permits the revaluation of non-current assets but otherwise has no regards to changes in the price levels.

(b) Depreciation

Depreciation has been provided using straight line method to write off the assets over their useful lives.

The principal rates adopted are:

| | |
|----------------------|------------------|
| Furniture & Fittings | 10-15% per annum |
| Office Equipment | 10-25% per annum |
| Motor Vehicle | 10% per annum |

(c) Income Tax

The Council is exempted from income tax in accordance with the provisions of section 8 of the Consumer Council Act (Cap 235).

(d) Value Added Tax (VAT)

The statement of financial performance and statement of cashflows have been prepared so that all components are settled exclusive of VAT.

(e) Cash and cash equivalents

Cash and cash equivalents are carried in the balance sheet at cost. For the purposes of cash flow statement, cash and cash equivalents comprise of cash on hand and cash at bank.

(f) Employee Benefits

(i) All employees who are Fiji Citizens are members of the Fiji National Provident Fund, an independent statutory administered fund. The Council has no liability for current or past activities.

(ii) The amounts expected to be paid to employees for the pro-rata entitlement to long services, annual and sick leaves are accrued annually at current pay rates having regard to experience of employee's departures and period of service.

(g) Deferred Grant

Grants that compensate the Council for expenses incurred are recognised as revenue in the income statement on a systematic basis in the same periods in which the expenses are incurred. Grants that compensate the Council for the cost of an asset are recognised in the income statement as revenue on a systematic basis over the useful life of the asset.

(h) Audit Fees

An amount of \$3,273 were provided during the year to account for the 2009 Audit Fees. This has been included in expenses and accruals as at balance date.

(i) Comparative Figures

Previous years figures have been regrouped where necessary for comparison purposes.

CONSUMER COUNCIL OF FIJI

NOTES TO AND FORMING PART OF THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

Schedule 5

FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2009

| | 31 December 2009 \$ | 31 December 2008 \$ |
|--|---------------------------|---------------------------|
|--|---------------------------|---------------------------|

Note 2 Cash on Hand & at Bank

| | | |
|--|----------------|----------------|
| Cash on Hand | 564 | 564 |
| Cash at Bank: - Operating Account No 1462895 | 53,777 | 18,232 |
| - Trust Account No 1462884 | 201,157 | 100,360 |
| | <u>255,498</u> | <u>119,156</u> |

Note 3 Other Debtors

| | | |
|----------------------|--------------|--------------|
| Accountable Advances | 3,611 | 1,111 |
| Other Debtors | 3,707 | 3,701 |
| | <u>7,319</u> | <u>4,812</u> |

Note 4 Property, Plant and Equipment

(i) **Fixed Assets are stated at cost and have been included in the accounts on the following basis:**

| | | |
|----------------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| Furnitures & Fittings | 11,833 | 9,199 |
| Less: provision for depreciation | (5,409) | (4,181) |
| | <u>6,424</u> | <u>5,018</u> |
| Office Equipment | 85,331 | 80,132 |
| Less: provision for depreciation | (67,339) | (53,389) |
| | <u>17,992</u> | <u>26,743</u> |
| Motor Vehicles | 60,000 | 66,500 |
| Less: provision for depreciation | (14,834) | (10,133) |
| | <u>45,166</u> | <u>56,367</u> |
| Total Carrying Value | <u>69,582</u> | <u>88,128</u> |

(ii) **Reconciliation of the carrying amounts of each class of property, plant and equipment at the beginning and end of the current financial year is set as follows:**

CONSUMER COUNCIL OF FIJI

NOTES TO AND FORMING PART OF THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

Schedule 5

FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2009

| | "Furniture & Fittings | "Office Equipment | "Motor Vehicle | Total |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------|-------------------|---------------|
| Carrying Amount as at 31/12/08 | 5,018 | 26,743 | 56,367 | 88,128 |
| Additions or Disposal | 2,634 | 5,199 | (5,200) | 2,633 |
| Revaluation | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Depreciations | (1,228) | (13,950) | (6,000) | (21,178) |
| Carrying Amount as at 31/12/09 | 6,424 | 17,992 | 45,167 | 69,582 |

CONSUMER COUNCIL OF FIJI

NOTES TO AND FORMING PART OF THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

Schedule 5

FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2009

| | 31 December 2009 \$ | 31 December 2008 \$ |
|--|---------------------------|---------------------------|
|--|---------------------------|---------------------------|

Note 5 Reconciliation of Net Cash Provided by Operating Activities to Operating Surplus

| | | |
|---|----------------|---------------|
| Net Surplus/(Deficit) for the Year | 6,707 | 49,689 |
| Depreciation | 21,178 | 20,178 |
| Disposal of assets | 6,500 | 583 |
| (Gain)/Loss on Disposal of Assets | (540) | --- |
| Provision for Employee entitlements | 1,863 | 2,357 |
| Deferred Grant Income | (21,178) | (20,178) |
| Prior Year Adjustments: | | |
| (Increase)/Decrease in Other Debtors | --- | (675) |
| (Increase)/Decrease in Deposits | 364 | (100) |
| (Increase)/Decrease in Prepayments | 1,813 | 548 |
| (Increase)/Decrease in Refundable Charges VAT | --- | --- |
| Increase/(Decrease) in Accounts Payables & Accruals | 2,056 | 11,323 |
| Increase/(Decrease) in VAT Payable | 37,035 | --- |
| Increase/(Decrease) in Reimbursable Deposit | (2,758) | --- |
| Increase/(Decrease) in Lease Liability | (525) | --- |
| Increase/(Decrease) in Grant - Grants payable | 107,333 | 35,330 |
| Net Cash Provided by Operating Activities | 159,847 | 99,055 |

Note 6 Accounts Payables and Accruals

| | | |
|------------------|---------------|---------------|
| Accounts Payable | 13,134 | 25,141 |
| Accruals | 32,895 | 18,832 |
| | 46,029 | 43,973 |

Note 7 Loan - Credit Corporation Limited

| | | |
|-------------|------------|---------------|
| Current | --- | 9,923 |
| Non Current | --- | 7,088 |
| | <u>---</u> | <u>17,010</u> |

The Council obtained a financing arrangement with the Credit Corporation (Fiji) Limited to purchase a new Hyundai 4x4 wagon vehicle payable within a five year term with an interest rate of 12% per annum. The new vehicle was held as collateral over the term of the loan. The loan has been fully paid in 2009.

CONSUMER COUNCIL OF FIJI

NOTES TO AND FORMING PART OF THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

Schedule 5

FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2009

| | |
|--------------------|--------------------|
| 31 December | 31 December |
| 2009 | 2008 |
| \$ | \$ |

Note 8 Expenditure Commitments

Finance lease commitments for the new photocopier is payable as:

| | | |
|---|------------|------------|
| Not later than one year | --- | 525 |
| Later than one year and not later than five years | --- | --- |
| | <u>---</u> | <u>525</u> |

Note 9 Deferred Finance Charges

| | | |
|-------------|------------|---------------|
| Current | --- | 4,368 |
| Non Current | --- | 7,644 |
| | <u>---</u> | <u>12,012</u> |

Deferred finance charges include interest payable on the leased photocopier of the Council acquired from Abacus Graphics in 2006. The Lease Liability has been fully paid.

Note 9 Related Parties

(a) Identity of related parties

The Council incurs and bears the cost of the Consumer Council of Fiji meetings and provides allowances to non-civil servant and benefits to the members of the Council as determined by the Council with the approval of the Minister in accordance with the Consumer Council Act 1976.

(b) Transactions with related parties

| | | |
|------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| | 31 December | 31 December |
| | 2009 | 2008 |
| | \$ | \$ |
| Council Expenses | 12,816 | 8,951 |
| Government Grant | 512,167 | 560,192 |
| | <u>524,983</u> | <u>569,143</u> |

CONSUMER COUNCIL OF FIJI

NOTES TO AND FORMING PART OF THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

Schedule 5

FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2009

The Government provided a grant to the Consumer Council of Fiji during the year comprising of operating grants of \$512,167 (2008: \$560,192) in accordance with the Counsumer Council Act 1976.

Note 10 Council Members

The names of the Council Members as at 31 December 2009 were:

| | |
|-----------------------|----------|
| Mr. Narendra Padarath | Chairman |
| Dr. Salesi F Savou | Member |
| Mr. Raman Dahia | Member |
| Mrs. Ilisapeci Bole | Member |

Note 11 Principal Activities

The principal purpose of the Council is to provide the protection and promotion of consumer interests, informing consumers of their rights and responsibilities and mobilising consumers to achieve fairness and safety in the marketplace.

Note 12 Council Details

(i) *Registered Office and Located Place of Operation*

The registered office and place of operation of the Council is located at:

4 Carnarvon Street
Private Mail Bag
Suva

(ii) *Staff Establishment*

As at balance date, total of 17 employees were employed by the Council.

CONSUMER RIGHTS

- **The right to satisfaction of basic needs** - the right to basic goods and services which guarantee survival;adequate food, clothing, shelter, health care, education and sanitation.
- **The right to safety** - the right to be protected against the marketing of goods or the provision of services which are hazardous to health and life.
- **The right to be informed** - the right to be protected against honest or misleading advertising or labelling. And the right to be given the facts and information needed to make an informed choice.
- **The right to choose** - the right to choose products and services at competitive prices with an assurance of satisfactory quality.
- **The right to be heard** - the right to express consumer interest in the making and execution of government policies.
- **The right to redress** - the right to be compensated for misrepresentation, shoddy goods or unsatisfactory services.
- **The right to consumer education** - the right to acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to be an informed consumer.
- **The right to a healthy environment** - the right to live and work in an environment which is neither threatening nor dangerous and which permits a life of dignity and well-being.
- **The right to service** - the right to receive the highest possible standard of service from public and private sector service providers regardless of consumers income and irrespective of whether they live in an urban or rural area.

CONSUMER RESPONSIBILITIES

Critical Awareness

The responsibility to be more alert and questioning about the price and quality of goods and services we use.

Action

The responsibility to assert ourselves and act to ensure that we get a fair deal. As long as we remain passive consumers we will be exploited.

Social Concern

The responsibility to be aware of the impact of our consumption on other citizens, especially disadvantaged or powerless groups whether in the local, national or international community.

Environmental Awareness

The responsibility to understand the environmental and other consequences of our consumption. We should recognise our individual and social responsibility to conserve natural resources and protect the earth for future generations.

Solidarity

To responsibility to organize together as consumers to develop the strength and influence to promote and protect our interest.

Consumer body unhappy with PIB

THE state consumer watchdog is disappointed with what it says is the "weak stand" taken by the Prices and Incomes Board (PIB) over gas prices in the country.

"Consumers seek for gas price in the country to become a regulated commodity because they continue to suffer from paying high prices when other petroleum product prices go down."

Monitor pleads for relief

CONSUMERS need relief.

In the view of the Consumer Council after Monday's statement that Fiji Electricity Supply was given approval for a tariff increase.

Chief Executive Officer Premila Kumar said the Council is calling on Telecom Fiji Limited to regulate the international telecommunication market.

tariff from next month, would make life very difficult for consumers.

"The council hopes for some sort of relief for consumers who are facing these increases," she said.

"The Council is only a watchdog to control the price of gas prices."

really watch the assumption as they use, the tariffs they would be paying.

"As noted in the Cabinet approval of the study on the wind farm was a failure on Fiji Electricity Supply's part for not showing diligence, says the council's chief executive officer.

Watchdog

PIB asked to control gas prices

The Consumer Council of Fiji is disappointed with the weak stand taken by the Prices and Incomes Board (PIB) who speak of monitoring gas prices instead of working to regulate it.

Chief Executive Officer Premila Kumar said PIB has been monitoring gas prices since December 2008.

"The Council is interested to know how long PIB monitoring of gas price will continue. When will consumers get a tangible result out of this monitoring?"

Ms Kumar said consumers seek for gas price in the country to become a regulated commodity because they continue to suffer from paying high prices when other petroleum product prices have come down.

And the Council has questioned the purpose of monitoring, saying the stand by PIB will not ensure that gas prices decrease in the country.

Ms Kumar said consumers in our neighbouring countries Australia and New Zealand are enjoying low LPG gas prices.

of study on the wind farm was a failure on Fiji Electricity Supply's part for not showing diligence, says the council's chief executive officer.

the farm had damaged consumers and the government's confidence in actions to increase energy sources to meet by 2011.

sumers have to face ease tariffs to meet ability to repay its million. China's investment Bank loan for the impact of devaluation on the diesel price. FEA manages the price wisely," she said.

er, FEA's acting executive Sunil said a proper study farm was conducted for Butoni wind farm built, FEA and PB Australia did a full report and published a 'Wind Mapping' report identified sites for wind farm in Butoni in Yaqara and some avusavu," he said.

able Energy Ltd which was a joint venture between FEA and Hydro Limited formed in 2003, chose its first site for a wind farm.

ten developed two power stations.

Kumar: E tosoi na noda matanitu

Consumers suffering from international call war

The Consumer Council is calling on Telecom Fiji Limited and Fiji International Telecommunications Limited (FINTEL) to resolve the issue over international access calls as it's the consumers who are being affected directly by these two companies. The Council says telecommunications players have not had enough time (18 months) to prepare themselves for the regulation of the international telecommunication market.

The exclusive license for the international telecommunication market held by Fiji International Telecommunications Limited (FINTEL) ended on 18th July 2009. One of the main intentions of deregulation is for consumer joy reduced calls charges, more choice, increased access to service delivery," chief executive Premila Kumar said. However, the ongoing squabble between the two companies amongst other telecommunication service providers is doing nothing but jeopardising this important policy aim of deregulation by the Government.

We note a media statement by TFL that its customers were unable to make calls to certain destinations via the "00" series of numbers. "We have no use talking about the "00" access code when it's not listed in the Fiji Telephone Directory 2009!"

he says TFL needs to explain why the access code "00" has been removed from the Fiji Telephone Directory 2009 and why there was no information on charges incurred for consumers who use for this international direct dial (IDD) option.

The Council is also calling on TFL to clarify to consumers if the "12" access code is a direct international line or is running on VoIP (Voice over Internet Protocol) platforms.

Whatever problems TFL has with FINTEL, Kumar says it is a matter for them to resolve at the wholesale level and should not affect consumers.

Call for fair Third Party compensation

by ELENOA BASELALA

THE Consumer Council of Fiji has called on relevant stakeholders to record reasonable and fair compensation to road accident victims.

"The measly sum that victims receive under current legislations governing Third Party insurance is an insult to our right to life, being loosely protected without due consideration to fair redress," council chief executive Premila Kumar stated.

"Millions of dollars are paid annually to insurance companies in the form of Compulsory Third Party insurance by proprietors of

Premiums perplexing for taxi union

1989-2009

- 683 road deaths
- 2838 serious injuries
- 4019 minor injuries

THE Fiji Taxi Union does not understand the logic behind the increase of insurance premiums from \$30 to \$200.

Secretary Rishi Ram said the premium was increased after the World Trade Centre bombing.

"We do not understand its relevance to Fiji," he said.

Insurance Council secretary Lolesh Sharma said the rates were decided by parent companies based in the United States and the United Kingdom. He added that insurance companies also needed to survive.

public and private transport."

The council said bus owners, for example, paid insurance premiums of between \$353 and \$400 per bus for accident cover.

Accident cover is \$40,000 for a whole bus or \$4000 per passenger.

"When compensation for a busload of 40 passengers is calculated, each passenger ends up receiving

\$1000 each. If an individual passenger in an accident claims, he or she could receive up to \$4000," Ms Kumar said. The survey by the council revealed that Compulsory Third Party policy is not readily available to clients as claimed by insurance companies.

"In addition, the Reserve Bank of Fiji, as regulator of insurance companies, has no say in the premiums as this is left entirely in the hands of insurance companies.

"Many victims are compelled to seek redress in court and it is not only an expensive exercise but a cumbersome one."

Bus companies welcomed the council's awareness campaign.