



CONSUMER COUNCIL OF FIJI

ANNUAL REPORT 2007

Improve services, Council urges

REGULATION is the answer to the woes of consumers regarding the quality of telecommunications goods and services in Fiji, says the Consumer Council of Fiji. Interim executive Premila Kumar said players in the industry would aim to provide quality services, technical innovation and competitive pricing to investors and new jobs for local people.

Her comments came after Interim Telecommunications Minister Taito said last week that he was actively moving ahead with existing measures to rid the industry of exclusive licenses, which currently hold by Vodafone, Telecom Fiji and FTFL. Mrs Kumar said deregulation of telecommunications in Fiji has been long overdue. She said the telecommunications monopolies have squeezed every last penny from consumers. They have long enjoyed phenomenal profits while consumers suffer.

Stop to home rent rise

Landlords cannot increase rent rate because of the current economic situation.

Interim Minister for Finance, National Planning, Public Enterprises and Sugar Industry, Mahendra Chaudhry has activated the Counter-Inflation Order 2007

specifically to restrict rent increase on all residential premises.

Consumer Council of Fiji chief executive officer Premila Kumar said they had discussions with the PIB on the need to restrict all rent increases given the current situa-

tion of the national economy.

Ms Kumar said the Counter-Inflation Act 2007 means that a freeze has been imposed on all landlords from increasing their rents on tenants.

Mrs Kumar said the public should be rest assured that there

should not any rent increase.

Prices and Incomes Board secretary Ane Naulivou said between the periods March 2 to December 31 this year, a person may not charge rent, which exceeds the rent applicable to those premises as at March 2 this year.

Ship owners dread fuel increase

THE shipping industry is concerned about the increase in the price of diesel.

Fiji Shipping Association secretary Leo Smith said the cost of fuel had been increasing while freight rates had stayed the same for the past 15 years.

Diesel prices went up by two to three cents per litre yesterday.

Mr Smith said the increase was an additional cost and made it difficult for shipping companies to stay viable.

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He said many companies bought more than \$200,000 worth of fuel a month because they bought in bulk.

Therefore, an increase of two cents would end up being costly.

He said the interim Government should review freight rates.

Consumer Council of Fiji chief executive officer Premila Kumar said the short term solution was for the interim Government to reduce the duty on fuel.

Fuel is a public good and a price

increase would have an immediate trickle-down effect on the manufacturing, production and distribution of goods and services, said Mrs Kumar.

She said the economic environment was not conducive to such increases.

Mrs Kumar said the reduction in duty would help cushion the impact of the fuel price increase.

The long term solution is minimising the country's dependence on imported fuel was for the

Government to speed up projects on alternative fuels, she said. She said the country's energy requirements could be sourced from local resources such as wood, bagasse, hydro, coal and ethanol.

Mrs Kumar said delaying renewable energy researches and development projects would prove costly for Fiji.

The Interim Government therefore needed to get serious about renewable energy production, Mrs Kumar said.

www.fijitimes.com.fj

Phone services spark criticism

THERE were 28 complaints lodged against Telecom Fiji's services in the first three months of this year.

Among these were complaints about the installa-

Council praises

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 our 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, NGOs 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 that 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.

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 dishonest 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 areas.

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 recognize our individual and social responsibility to conserve natural resources and protect the earth for future generations.
- **Solidarity** – the responsibility to organize together as consumers to develop the strength and influence to promote and protect our interest.

ABOUT THE CONSUMER COUNCIL OF FIJI (CCF)

The Consumer Council of Fiji (hereinafter also referred to as "Council", or "CCF") is "an independent" statutory body established under the Consumer Council of Fiji Act -1976 (Cap 235). The Council provides the external pressure as a watchdog to create a fair and just delivery of goods and services. It represents and protects the rights and interests of consumers and in particular the disadvantaged groups, rural poor and women by identifying and articulating policy issues that are of importance to the consumers. 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.

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 to any other person/organizations on any issues affecting the interests of consumers;
- Collecting, collating and disseminating information in respect of matters affecting the interests 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 organization outside Fiji having similar functions and becoming a member of or affiliate to any international organization 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, organization, or 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 reform 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 complaintsdriven research on key consumer issues and consumer protection legislations that promote and protect consumer interests through necessary policy change.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Mr Swani K Maharaj

Mr. Maharaj, JP, FAIM, is the CEO of UCast BioPlastics Fiji Ltd. He is also the President of the Fiji Chamber of Commerce and Industry and Vice-President of India-Fiji Business Council. He has served on a number of local boards and committees at both district and national levels. He is the immediate past-President of Shri Sanatan Dharm Pratinidhi Sabha, Lautoka, and an active religious, political and social worker.



Mr Raman Dahia

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



Mr. Champaklal Kapadia

Mr. Kapadia is the Managing Director of Brijlal & Co. Ltd. He holds a Bachelor of Commerce degree from University of Auckland and is a member of the New Zealand and Fiji Institutes of Accountants. He has served on several Boards including Telecom Fiji Limited, Maritime and Ports Authority of Fiji and the Fiji Broadcasting Corporation Limited.



Dr Salesi F. Savou

Dr. Savou was employed by the Ministry of Health as the Director of Primary and Preventative Health Services in 1989. He retired as the Director of the National Food and Nutrition Council of Fiji secretariat in 1999. He has been a Board member of Consumer Council of Fiji since September 1989.



Mrs Ilisapeci Bole

Mrs. Bole is a former Principal Education Officer, volunteer worker with women's groups and current Board member of the Consumer Council of Fiji. She 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 Honours.



CHAIRMAN'S REPORT



The 2007 Annual Report highlights some of the many achievements of the Council that have benefitted the consumers. The Council has taken pride in serving the consumers pro-actively.

The Council has an excellent reputation on corporate governance and maintenance of its independence at all times. Change has been a powerful agent for success. The Council went through change management to make the organization efficient and effective as per the recommendation of Fiji Institute of Applied Studies (FIAS) report (Nov 2006) on the comprehensive evaluation of the Council's activities. A change that I strongly believe has assisted the Council throughout the year to achieve high standards in making the market place in Fiji more equitable and efficient for all. Having said that, I believe the Council is now more focused, more streamlined and truly performing its "watchdog role" without fear, which has sparked many good signals towards consumer empowerment and consumer protection. Its independence gives us the voice in the marketplace.

While implementing FIAS report the Council has been forced to confront the many weaknesses in its service delivery to Fiji consumers over the past thirty odd years in an attempt to meet new goals. All the efforts towards changing and raising the image of the Council therefore have seen us make significant contributions throughout the year in the areas of research and policy development at national level in the interest of our consumers, which led to trader, service provider and the government's attention towards respecting and giving prominence to consumer issues in Fiji.

The success of the Council is seen in the collaborative work that it has undertaken with various stakeholders. Our increased success in solving consumer complaints through mediation has been a major success. By using alternative dispute resolution (ADR), more and more traders and service providers are agreeing that honoring the rights of consumers and working with the Council is beneficial to them.

The Board's steadfast position on good governance, transparency and accountability has enabled the Council to maintain its objectivity and independence while calling on other organizations to practice the same for the sake of consumers. In this direction, the Board developed a Charter to assist the Board in discharging its responsibilities for

the smooth running of the Council's affairs by providing leadership and direction to management. The Charter outlines the Board's commitment to excellence, transparency and accountability.

During the year we have become an organization that is more entrepreneurial, 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 implementation of important projects has been made possible through the generosity of donors such as the Governments of Australia and the Netherlands. This enabled the Council to serve the consumers more effectively. I thank our donors- the Governments of Australia and the Netherlands for recognizing and believing in the work of the Council. In the same breath I take the liberty of seeking similar acknowledgement from the Fiji government and request for additional funding to enable the Council to meet the increased demand placed by consumers and other stakeholders.

The desire to seek change for the better by the Board for the Council could not be achieved without the support and work of the consumer network group (CNG). Their volunteered time and commitment to assist the Council in building a conscious and assertive consumer movement in Fiji and, particularly in the rural and outer islands is most appreciated.

All in all it has been a good, productive year, provocative at times, but we emerge satisfied from our work. While it may not be easy, it is definitely worth all the time and effort for the benefit of consumers and the future of consumer protection in the country.

Our vision is clear and our mission well focused. I am confident that the Council is in a stronger position to face the future, however challenging it may be. The Board will continue to raise the standards to achieve better outcomes for the consumers and we will continue to strive for better corporate governance at all levels.

As the outgoing Chair, I wish to thank the management and staff who worked both smart and hard to achieve the deliverables outlined for the Council. Their increased productivity has made possible this year's proud record of achievements. My thanks to the Council's line ministry, Consumers International based in London and its regional organization CI-Asia-Pacific based in Malaysia and consumer organizations worldwide. My utmost thanks to consumers in Fiji for believing in the Consumer Council of Fiji and entrusting us to be your mouthpiece.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Swani Maharaj', written over a horizontal line.

Mr Swani Maharaj
Chair
Consumer Council of Fiji



MAJOR HIGHLIGHTS OF 2007

- Review of the strategic plan based on the independent assessment of the Council activities by the Fiji Institute of Applied Studies;
- A Board charter in place to guide the Board and the management to exercise its responsibilities diligently;
- Funds secured to develop Council's database and website;
- An increase in monetary jurisdiction of the Small Claims Tribunal (SCT) from \$2,000 to \$5000;
- Premier rechargeable emergency lamp declared as dangerous goods;
- Reduction in food prices after continued campaign on cost of living that led to reduction in mark up percentage by the Minister of Finance;
- Exclusive dealing in regard to school uniform and school stationery is under control through our media campaign.

The Council had a successful year and once again achieved outstanding results despite many ongoing challenges. During the year organizational changes were implemented based on the effectiveness study funded by AusAID. These changes were necessary to serve consumers better, faster, and with broader impact. The Council continued to lay the foundation for meeting the performance targets agreed with the line Minister at the beginning of 2007. We focused on our commitment in a practical way to deliver measurable benefits to consumers with results that by far exceeded the targets.

2007 has been a year of continued internal changes, embedding our new structure and focusing our work in terms of outcomes to provide positive impact on the consumers. We have become better at prioritising and targeting our resources by being more efficient in our use of public resources to provide benefits to consumers.

The Council has established its presence in the market place by engaging on issues of concern to the consumers. We have been proactive and taken on issues that make a real difference in consumers' life. To mention a few, the Council voiced its concerns on issues such as increase in price of food items, wasteful behaviour of FEA, delays and cancellation of Air Pacific flights, poor quality meat, shortage of infant milk formula, Vodafone's advertisements and billing service, Connect's poor service delivery and complaints against Fiji TV being unfair to Sky Pacific subscribers.

The Council is the best hope for consumers for shaping present and future consumer policies and for achieving better deals for everyday consumers by highlighting fundamental issues that affect them on a daily basis. We are able to voice consumer issues which are complaints-driven where we constantly engage with consumers and their injustices that are essentially created through ineffective policies and poor enforcement of consumer protection legislations that create unfair market practices for consumers.

The accomplishments you will read in this report add up to substantial achievements in a single year and that is a tribute to both our consumers and staff.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

A. CONSUMER EDUCATION AND AWARENESS SERVICES

The Council recognises consumers as essential and responsible economic actors in the domestic market place and therefore strongly believes that the consumers should be empowered to make informed choices about the goods and services they purchase. Their interests should be promoted and defended, particularly in view of the increasing complexity of the market in which they operate. The 2007 consumer education and awareness raising activities were re-organized to take into consideration recommendations made in the FIAS evaluation report on the services of the Council.

The FIAS report found that the measures including the manner in which the Council's consumer education and awareness raising activities being conducted were not effectively reaching and making positive impact on the behaviour of consumers in the market place. Most consumers involved in the FIAS study had not heard of the Council and the services it provides, were unaware of their consumer rights and responsibilities and had not sought remedy or approached the Council for assistance or advice despite being dissatisfied with their product or service. The awareness of the Council was further found to be limited amongst consumers in rural areas. Therefore, a more consumer responsive education and awareness raising programme was designed and implemented successfully in 2007 for a wide range of consumers. These were:

SCHOOL - RELATED ACTIVITIES

The Council produced and published 4000 copies of the Consumer and the Law Book in conjunction with the Curriculum Development Unit (CDU) for primary and secondary schools, which was funded by AusAID. To ensure consumer issues taught in schools are current, the Council reviewed consumer education in the Commercial Studies prescription for Forms 3 and 4 and Classes 7 and 8, which were presented to the CDU Review Committee. The Council conducted 42 school visits where a total of 10,752 students and 272 teachers were involved. Of significance is the request made by schools in Rabi Island for consumer education. A total of 22 lectures on consumer education were conducted with year 1 and 3 students at Corpus Christi Teachers College. Assistance was provided to 102 students and teachers with their research projects and assignments on consumer issues. We liaised with the Ministry of Education (MOE) to make one of the school terms dedicated to consumer issues through morning talks. Topics for morning talks and research guidelines were also forwarded to school principals. To equip rural schools on consumer issues, a total of 120 resource material packages were distributed to school libraries in the Cakaudrove, Macuata and Naitasiri Provinces.

Impact: Primary and secondary school students and teachers benefited from this activity. They became aware of their consumer rights and responsibilities and through this empowerment were better equipped to impart the knowledge to their families and friends thus spreading the message to the wider community.



COMMUNITY AWARENESS PROGRAMME

The Council conducted five workshops in the Labasa, Savusavu, Ba, Sigatoka and Nausori areas to motivate communities to be informed on issues such as hire purchase, lay buys, lodgement of complaints, how to seek redress from Small Claims Tribunal (SCT) and many more. Rather than waiting for the consumers to come, the Council changed its strategies and went to consumers' doorsteps. To do that for the first time mobile units were introduced to allow consumers to seek advice and lodge complaints, which they were hesitant to do in the past. The mobile units were set up in Sigatoka, Rakiraki, Tavua and Nadi towns. In addition to this, 38 community visits were conducted nationwide in conjunction with relevant NGOs and government ministries.

Impact: Mobile units proved to be one of the better and cost-effective ways to reach out to consumers. They benefited from this method of awareness on their rights and responsibilities and more importantly learnt how to register complaints. Community visits nationwide in conjunction with respective NGO's and government ministries added to the empowerment of consumers.

INFORMATION INITIATIVES

Information empowers consumers to take charge of their lives by participating in decision-making and by challenging arbitrary actions at all levels in a market place. The Council used the mass media extensively to directly disseminate and generate interest on consumer related issues. 6000 copies of the Consumer Wheel - a quarterly newsletter of the Council were disseminated to schools, women's, religious, and community groups, doctors' surgeries, law firms, overseas networks and many more. To reach out to rural consumers, the Council conducted 1014 radio programmes in English, Hindi and Fijian languages with a total of 4770 minutes of airtime. 190 press releases were issued. 104 media requests were responded to on national consumer issues. A total of 314 newspaper articles were published out of which 73 were in Fijian and Hindi and 241 in English. An average of 26 articles per month was published on consumer-related issues. Furthermore, TV programmes were featured comprising 15 news items, 5 In-depth reports, 1 Close-Up programme, 1 Dateline Programme and 1 featured on the Fiji TV One's latest Talk Business Programme. 52 consumer issues were posted on respective websites.

The Interim Minister for Commerce, Industry, Investment and Communication launched the 2007 World Consumer Rights Day on 15 March to raise awareness on the theme 'Quality goods and services is a consumer right'. To mark the day, the Consumer Network Members were actively involved in the collection of goods that failed to meet basic labelling, safety, packaging requirements and provisions in the respective laws. The celebration was also used to launch the Council's research on Insurance Services followed by a panel discussion.



Impact: Information initiatives provided greater impact as witnessed through an increase in reported consumer complaints, number of cases resolved and numerous feedback through letters to the editor, opinion column, visits to the Council offices, individual feedback and general appreciation from all works of life. The visibility of the Council and its image reached highest level.

B. MEDIATION AND CONSUMER ADVISORY SERVICES

The Council received a total of 1301 complaints from consumers around Fiji in 2007. Most complaints were on tenancy, electronic goods, telecom services, hire purchase and motor vehicles. The Council assisted 199 consumers who sought redress from the SCT. There was also significant demand for advisory services. Written and in person advice was given to some 680 consumers mainly on products, utilities, tenancy, real estate and hire purchase.

Consumer Complaints Analyses for 2007

Registered consumer complaints	1301- an average of 108 complaints per month
Complaints solved through mediation	824- an average of 68 cases per month
Cases referred to Small Claims Tribunal	199 - an average of 16.5 cases per month
Cases referred to other organizations	101-an average of 8 cases per month referred to other enforcement agencies for action because these were not consumer issues
Provision of consumer advice	680-an average of 56.5 per month
Weak cases	77 cases lacked evidence such as contracts, receipts etc.

The most common problems consumers encountered related to three areas: tenancy, electronic goods and issues related to telecommunications. The increase in the number of complaints reveals that the consumers are becoming more aware of their rights and responsibilities. Residential tenancy and electronic goods were two major areas of consumer complaints that require closer monitoring and enforcement in 2008 because of repeat offenders.

NATURE OF COMPLAINTS

Most Re-occurring Complaints in 2007			
Tenancy	315	Clothing	56
Electronic goods (computers, etc)	140	Food Items (non-grocery)	48
Telecom	85	Packaging/labelling	40
Hire Purchase / Lay-By	62	Second hand products	48
Motor vehicles	58	Real Estate	40
Banks & other Financial Institutions	56		

Impact: The increase in consumer complaints is a result of extensive consumer education and awareness raising and information campaign by the Council Fiji wide. The affected consumers benefited through Council's mediation and advisory work by directly resolving their cases and referring cases to other consumer protection agencies and organisations. The Council worked closely with all stakeholders including Government by bringing issues to the fore for either recommending policy changes or resolving cases. The most important impact has been the publicity generated from these cases was a deterrent for offenders in future as consumers became more aware of their rights and responsibilities.



C. RESEARCH/STUDY INITIATIVES IN 2007

The Council carried out a number of research during the year on emerging issues affecting consumers. The research on key issues assisted the Council in providing evidence of breaches on consumer issues and enabled it to develop strategies for redress where needed. The Council challenged business complacency by bringing more consumer education and awareness on issues based on the reality of consumer experiences. The research/studies conducted were:



1 MONEY LENDING IN FIJI

The Fiji Institute of Applied Studies (FIAS) was commissioned to undertake a comprehensive study on Money Lending in Fiji. This study was funded by the Dutch Government. The purpose of the study was to estimate the size of money-lending business in Fiji, examine and analyse the regulatory framework for money lending and establish the extent of problems faced by consumers. The outcomes of the study have been publically revealed and the Council will continue to implement its recommendations where appropriate within its available resources.

Impact: The borrowers are now made aware of the guidelines governing lending by registered money lenders. The important message was that they should deal with registered money lenders should there be an unavoidable need to borrow. Knowledge of their rights and responsibilities would save them from manipulative practices by some money lenders.

2 CONSUMER ADVOCACY PROGRAMS

The purpose of this research funded by the Government of Australia was to simplify the eight Consumer Protection Laws into simple language and raise awareness on Consumer Protection Legislations. This research has enabled the Council to understand the various consumer protection legislations and sensitise consumers on their rights and responsibilities in layman's language. This will assist the Council and other consumer protection agencies in their future advocacy work programmes.

Impact: To provide better advice to consumers, it is imperative that consumer protection legislations are properly understood by those who provide advocacy to avoid misunderstanding, misrepresentation and duplication. It is equally important that consumers understand various legislations which are meant to protect them. Converting these legislations into simple language has and will continue to empower our consumers' understanding of their rights and responsibilities.

3 INSURANCE INDUSTRY IN FIJI - Consumer Protection Issues

The purpose of this research is to understand the nature and extent of the problems faced by consumers arising from insurance policies and insurance policy providers. It will critically examine and provide a comparative analysis of the current life, health and travel insurance policies of the various insurance companies in Fiji with a comparative analysis of what is available elsewhere. The study will be completed in 2008 and its recommendations, where appropriate, will be implemented thereafter.

Impact: It is anticipated that at the end of this project consumers will understand different categories of life, health and travel insurance policies available in Fiji and the real costs involved in buying one. This project will also highlight the hidden costs, which are not normally known to the consumers at the time of buying a policy. The results of the study are expected to enable the Council to network with other agencies to improve the service in this sector and to call for a higher level of accountability and transparency by the providers.

4 IN-HOUSE MAJOR RESEARCH

The Council also conducted in house research on the following:

- Comparative analysis of bank fees, charges and interest rates;
- Issues paper on medical services, fees and charges;
- Preliminary research on Fiji's gas market;
- Pharmaceutical Services status;
- Research on fiscal duty item after November budget;
- Comparative analysis on the pricing of hardware items;
- Research on FEA fuel surcharge;
- Issues paper on tenancy; and
- Issues paper on Consumer Council of Fiji Act

Impact: The Consumers benefited as these were either complaints driven or cases where clarifications were sought from the Council failing lack of response and satisfactory interventions by the concerned service providers. It also enabled the Council to understand the provision of services prior to assisting consumers through its consumer education and awareness as well information initiatives programmes.

5 MINOR RESEARCH

A total 58 of minor research were undertaken based on consumer complaints or controversies. The information obtained were either sent as press releases or individually conveyed to the consumers.

Impact: These minor research conducted in-house enabled the Council to address specific consumer complaints or issues in general. A well researched and informed approach to consumer redress provided effective, transparent and credible solutions. The impact has been demonstrated through consumer satisfaction in various forms.

Issues	
Increase in Hotel rates	Price of Lamb meat products
FEA-disconnection fee charges	Increase in price of Colgate
Price tags on schoolbooks and stationeries	Increase in price of locally products snacks
Global Calling Card charges	Increase in milk price
Town rates charges	Restaurant hygiene
Medical Fees Payment	Short weight of bar soaps
Gas Pricing	Junk foods sold in school canteens
MH Flash & Gain card terms and conditions	Inappropriate of product labelling of dates
Incorrect FEA services billing	Supply of contaminated water
Sky Pacific programmes and sports coverage	Incorrect water supply billing
Bus fare stage markings	Inappropriate labelling of dairy milk biscuit
Poor reception of Connect Internet Services	Quality of milk supplied to the supermarkets
Telecom charges	Faulty water meter
Pricing of items of goods not marked	Warranty on brand new tyres
Towing fees and charges	Fuel Surcharge
Misleading airfares	Unhygienic food
Rent charges on commercial property	Fuel Price
Electronic receipts	Quality of meat in Butcher
Taxi meter	Expired chickens
Vodafone texting competition	Interest rates on loans
Banks fees and charges	Expired tablets
Tenancy	Easy Tel phone charges/connections
Increase in garbage collection fees	Increase in price of flour/sharps
Price of building materials	Illegal sale of panadol strips on the streets
Inappropriate labelling of re-constituted milk carton	Non-availability of S26 Gold milk formula
Postal box charges	Scratch & Win Promotions
Banking Services	Property Valuation
Misleading advertisement	Telephone billing
Water billing	Food price regulation

MARKET SURVEILLANCE

173 supermarkets and retail outlets were visited to monitor price fluctuations, quality and standard of food and non-food items. This activity enabled the Council to inform consumers as well the concerned consumer protection agencies of the unfair trade practices that are deliberately or inadvertently practised in the market place. Such interventions have been very effective and beneficial to the consumers by bringing to their attention expired, unlabeled and suspicious products (written in languages not understood by Fiji consumers). Such practices have been prevalent because of lack of adequate provisions on packaging and standards requirements for these products. The relevant authorities have been alerted on such practices. This is an area which requires further work by all concerned for the benefit of consumers.

Impact: Council's referrals have enabled the concerned consumer protection agencies to intervene and take appropriate actions. It has also alerted consumers to be aware of such practices in the market place. Complaints made to the Council have been addressed. Work in this area will continue in the coming years.

SUBMISSIONS

One of the major tasks of the Council is to analyse policies affecting consumers to understand the root cause of problems faced by them and recommend changes that are necessary to address such deficiencies. In this regard, a number of oral and written submissions were made to the respective agencies/ministries/departments. In some cases submission were invited from the Council and in others the Council acted proactively. In total, the Council made twelve submissions in 2007 to safeguard consumer interests.

Impact: The various submissions made by the Council have been taken into consideration by respective callers. In some cases the Council's recommendations have been taken on board for policy changes e.g. reduction in mark up percentage on food items, government's commitment to appoint Financial Ombudsman, etc.

LIST OF SUBMISSIONS

To	About
1. Commerce Commission	Pricing review of steel supply
2. Commerce Commission	Second Price Review of the Telecommunication services
3. Ministry of Finance	Consumer Issues in the 2008 Budget
4. Ministry of Health	National Nutrition Policy
5. Department of Energy	Standards for freezers and Refrigerators
6. Ministry of Commerce, Industry, Investment & Communication	Proposed Standards on Second Hand Vehicles
7. Ministry of Commerce, Industry, Investment & Communication	Increase Price of Foods & Household Items
8. Ministry of Commerce, Industry, Investment & Communication	Quality management Systems Standards
9. Ministry of Commerce, Industry, Investment & Communications	Biodegradable Plastics Standards
10. Land Transport Authority	Proposed Increase in Taxi Fare
11. Ministry of Commerce, Industry, Investment & communication	Preliminary view's and observation on the Draft Electronic Transactions Promulgation 2008
12. Commerce Commission	Fuel Surcharge

ENGAGING INTERNATIONALLY

The Council carried out the following projects in collaboration with Consumers International and other international consumer organizations:

- Street Food Survey in Suva City with Consumers International;
- Household survey on insecticide with Consumers Korea;
- Questionnaires on issues of food & nutrition with Consumers International;
- Advertising and Marketing to Children with Consumers International;
- Strengthening Consumer Protection Regime-Fiji Consumer Law Profile with CUTS, India;
- Sustainable Consumption Questionnaire with Consumers International; and
- WHO Code development questionnaire on marketing of unhealthy food for children with Consumers international.

Impact: Consumer issues highlighted globally enabled the Council and through it the Fiji Consumers to be current with emerging issues. This provided the Council information on best practices in other countries for consumer redress. By engaging and networking with such international organisations, the Council was able to undertake research which it will not be able to do otherwise because of lack of project budget.

D. CORPORATE SERVICES AND PROJECT MANAGEMENT

FINANCE

To deliver the Service Agreement signed with the line Minister, the Council received a grant of \$585,032.00 (VIP) from the government after 5% salary deduction. For the last 6 years, the Council received same level of funding despite the increase in costs of operation. It is extremely difficult to run three offices with the current budget and the demand placed by the consumers for policy reform and for consumer redress.

To meet consumer demand for information and policy reform, the Council submitted five proposals to AusAid for funding, of which 3 proposals were accepted for funding. In 2007 the Council received a grant of F\$100,360.00 from the Australian Government for (a) simplification of the eight Consumer Protection Laws,

(b) publication of Consumer and the Law Book and (c) to develop Council's new website and a database. The Council also received a grant of \$F22,000.00 from the Dutch Government to undertake study on Money Lending Services.

HUMAN RESOURCE

Staff productivity is reflected in the success rate for our mediation work and other tangible benefits achieved during the year. Consumer benefits are the ultimate performance indicators of the Council staff. The Council has followed Government policy by offering 3 year contracts to its executive and senior management staff bringing in a sense of stability and confidence in the leadership of the Council. Three staff members resigned and two volunteers with legal background joined the Council

under Australian Youth Ambassadors for Development (AYAD) volunteer scheme. The new management has put in place performance management system that has contributed to uplifting staff performances and morale. Developing and maintaining staff efficiency and productivity has been my major challenge.

BOARD MEETINGS

During the year, five board meetings and seven sub-committee meetings were held. 2007 was a crucial year for the Board to develop appropriate policies and to set the direction for the Council. A change management was introduced by the Board to make the Council effective and efficient. 2007 was also my full year as Chief Executive/Executive Secretary of the Council.

E. CONCLUSION

Looking ahead to 2008 and beyond, there is a new sense of confidence instilled in the management of the Council as it prepares for the challenges faced by the consumers in a market place that is riddled with ineffective consumer protection legislations, poor enforcement and weak redress mechanism. Consumers are subjected to injustices that are essentially created through the inaction of Consumer Protection Agencies, which have led to unfair market practices by traders and service providers. This will be an on-going and major challenge for the Council to address in the coming years.

APPRECIATION

I thank the Chairman and members of the Board for their guidance and support and the management team for implementing the Board's policies and decisions. Let me also take this opportunity to thank the Governments of Australia and the Netherlands for providing financial assistance in 2007 for the projects mentioned in my report.

I thank other stakeholders (Government agencies/ Volunteers/Consumer Protection Agencies/national and international NGOs and Corporate entities) as well for their support to the Council as and when required. I also thank the Interim Government for providing funds. It is my earnest request to the Government to increase funding to the Council to serve our consumers more effectively considering the increased number of issues that are confronting consumers these days and to address the problem of frequent staff turnover. The Council's budget has remained the same over the years despite its demonstrable success.

Finally, I thank my staff for their commitment and hard work towards achieving the targets, and the consumers of Fiji for being patient and supporting the Council's mandate.



Premila Kumar
Chief Executive/Executive Secretary

Financial Statements

for the year ended 31 December 2007

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ACCOUNTABILITY IN THE PUBLIC SERVICE SECTOR THROUGH QUALITY AUDIT SERVICES

REPUBLIC OF THE FIJI ISLANDS OFFICE OF THE AUDITOR GENERAL

CONSUMER COUNCIL OF FIJI ACCOUNTS FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2007

INDEPENDENT AUDIT REPORT

Scope

I have audited the financial statements of Consumer Council of Fiji for the year ended 31 December 2007 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 Accumulated Funds, Statement of Cash Flows and the accompanying notes. The Council is responsible for the preparation of the financial statements and the information they contain.

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. The audit procedures included examination on a test basis, of evidence supporting the amounts and other disclosures in the financial statements, and the evaluation of the accounting policies and significant accounting estimates. These procedures were 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 cash flows.

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

Audit Opinion

In my opinion, the accompanying financial statements present fairly the financial position of the Council as at 31 December 2007 and the results of its operations and its cash flows for the year then ended.

Eroni Vatuloka
AUDITOR GENERAL

Suva, Fiji
13 January 2009



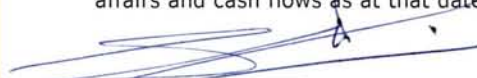
**CONSUMER COUNCIL OF FIJI
BALANCE SHEET
AS AT 31 DECEMBER 2007**

	Note	31 December 2007	31 December 2006
CURRENT ASSETS			
		\$	\$
Cash on Hand and at Bank	2	77,849	55,310
Refundable Deposits		4,654	4,614
Other Debtors	3	4,137	1,137
Prepayments		3,092	1,692
Deferred finance charges	10	4,368	728
Total Current Assets		94,100	63,481
NON-CURRENT ASSETS			
Deferred finance charges	10	13,177	23,306
Fixed Assets (Less Depreciation)	4	81,488	78,268
Total Non-Current Assets		94,665	101,574
TOTAL ASSETS		188,765	165,055
Less: CURRENT LIABILITIES			
Accounts Payables & Accruals	7	25,073	22,592
VAT Payable		6,742	106,240
Provision for Annual Leave		9,073	10,889
Reimbursed Deposits		2,758	2,952
Grants Payable		71,304	31,848
Deferred Grant		81,488	10,661
Lease liability		4,815	8,667
Loan	8	11,640	2,910
Total Current Liabilities		212,893	196,759
NON-CURRENT LIABILITIES			
Loan	8	32,010	52,380
Total Non Current Liabilities		32,010	52,380
TOTAL LIABILITIES		244,903	249,139
NET ASSETS		(56,138)	(84,084)
ACCUMULATED FUNDS & RESERVES			
Accumulated Funds		(100,646)	(117,092)
Assets Revaluation Reserve		44,508	33,008
TOTAL ACCUMULATED FUNDS AND RESERVES		(56,138)	(84,084)

The balance sheet is to be read in conjunction with the notes to and forming part of the the financial statements set out on pages 5 to 8.

COUNCIL'S STATEMENT

In our opinion, the financial statements have been properly drawn up so as to give a true and fair view of the Council's operations for the year ended 31 December 2007 and of the state of affairs and cash flows as at that date.


Mr. Swani Maharaj
Chairman


Ms. Premila Devi Kumar
Chief Executive Officer/Executive Secretary

Date : 8/12/2008

Date : 3/12/08

**CONSUMER COUNCIL OF FIJI
STATEMENT OF INCOME & EXPENDITURE
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2007**

	Note	31 December 2007	31 December 2006
INCOME			
		\$	\$
Fiji National Training Council Grant		250	875
Grant from Government of Fiji	5	520,029	505,928
Other Grants		99,843	60,001
Sundry Income		834	1,218
Deferred Grant Income		20,487	15,832
Gain on disposal of assets		-	8,367
TOTAL INCOME		641,443	592,221
EXPENDITURE			
Advertising		3,378	4,006
Audit Fees		3,821	6,236
Bank Charges		659	960
Council Expenses		15,546	13,342
Depreciation		20,487	15,832
Electricity and Water		8,584	8,668
Entertainment		501	994
Fiji National Training Council Levy		3,430	3,559
Insurance		2,657	1,607
Interest		4,984	1,323
Legal Fees		2,817	1,245
Loss on disposal of Fixed Assets		344	-
Office Expenses, Stationery, Publication & Advertisement		12,266	13,000
Research		85	-
Rent and Rates		50,200	50,206
Repairs on Office Equipment, Furniture & Fittings		1,818	2,481
Retired and Expensed Assets		323	-
Running Expenses - Motor Vehicles		8,316	11,082
Salaries, Wages & Related Payments		354,733	398,546
Subscription		2,226	2,574
Sundries		723	1,114
Telephone & Postage Charges		19,256	23,693
Training Expenses		2,770	2,350
Travelling Expenses		10,309	24,239
World Consumer Rights Day		814	1,523
Workshop & Seminars		2,636	1,247
TOTAL EXPENDITURE		533,683	589,827
NET SURPLUS/(DEFICIT) FOR THE YEAR		107,760	2,394

The statement of income and expenditure is to be read in conjunction with the notes to and forming part of the financial statements set out on pages 5 to 8.

**CONSUMER COUNCIL OF FIJI
STATEMENT OF ACCUMULATED FUNDS
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2007**

		31 December 2007 \$	31 December 2006 \$
Accumulated funds brought forward		(117,092)	(119,927)
Less: Correction of Fundamental errors	13	(91,314)	441
Net Surplus/(Deficit) for the Year		107,760	2,394
Accumulated Funds carried forward		(100,646)	(117,092)

The statement of accumulated funds is to be read in conjunction with the notes to and forming part of the the financial statements set out on pages 5 to 8.

**CONSUMER COUNCIL OF FIJI
STATEMENT OF CASH FLOWS
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2007**

	Note	31 December 2007 \$	31 December 2006 \$
Cashflows from Operating Activities		\$	\$
Receipt from Customers		518,113	570,434
Payments to Suppliers & Employees		(465,305)	(565,072)
Interest and bank charges		(5,643)	(2,283)
Prepayments		(1,440)	0
Net VAT Paid		1,005	(1,163)
Net Cash Provided by Operating Activities	6	46,730	1,916
Cashflows from Investing Activities			
Proceeds from sale of assets		0	9,990
Payments for property, plant and equipment		(12,551)	(20,190)
Net Cash Provided by Investing Activities		(12,551)	(10,200)
Cashflows from Financing Activities			
Repayment of Loan		(11,640)	0
Net Cash Used by Financing Activities		(11,640)	-
Net (Decrease) in Cash Held		22,539	(8,284)
Cash at the Beginning of the Year		55,310	63,594
Cash at the End of the Year	2	77,849	55,310

The statement of cash flow is to be read in conjunction with the notes to and forming part of the financial statements set out on pages 5 to 8.

**CONSUMER COUNCIL OF FIJI
NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2007**

NOTE 1: SUMMARY OF SIGNIFICANT ACCOUNTING POLICIES

The significant accounting policies adopted by the Consumer Council of Fiji in the preparation of the financial statements for the year ended 31 December 2007 are stated below. Similar accounting policies were used in the previous years, unless otherwise stated.

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 is calculated on the straight-line basis to write off the cost of each fixed asset over its effective working life. The rates of depreciation used are:

Furniture & Fittings	33%
Office Equipment	20%
Motor Vehicle	10%

C Income Tax

Under Section 8 of the Consumer Council Act [Cap 235], the Council is exempted from Income Tax.

D Value Added Tax (VAT)

The statement of financial performance and statement of cashflows have been prepared so that all components are stated 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 petty cash 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 Comparative Figures

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

NOTE 2: CASH ON HAND & AT BANK	31 December 2007 \$	31 December 2006 \$
Petty Cash	600	500
Cash at Bank:		
- Operating Account No 1462895	3,543	19,644
- Trust Account No 1462884	73,706	35,166
	77,849	55,310

**CONSUMER COUNCIL OF FIJI
NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2007**

NOTE 3 :	OTHER DEBTORS	31 December 2007 \$	31 December 2006 \$		
	Accountable Advances	250	-		
	Other Debtors	3887	1,137		
		4,137	1,137		
NOTE 4 :	PROPERTY, PLANT & EQUIPMENT				
(i)	Fixed Assets are stated at cost and have been included in the accounts on the following basis:				
		31 December 2007 \$	31 December 2006 \$		
	Furniture & Fittings	9,199	24,164		
	Less Accumulated depreciation	2,877	22,776		
		6,322	1,388		
	Office Equipment	73,314	90,687		
	Less Accumulated depreciation	39,332	53,140		
		33,982	37,547		
	Motor Vehicle	46,500	78,935		
	Less Accumulated depreciation	5,316	39,602		
		41,184	39,333		
	Total Carrying Value	81,488	78,268		
(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:				
	Carrying Amount At 31 December 2006	"Furniture & Fittings"	"Office Equipment"	"Motor Vehicle"	Total
		1,388	37,547	39,333	78,268
	Additions	4,308	8,565	-	12,873
	Revaluation	2,555	2,444	6,501	11,500
	Depreciations	(1,929)	(13,908)	(4,650)	(20,487)
	Disposal		(666)		(666)
	Carrying Amount At 31 December 2007 \$	6,322	33,982	41,184	81,488

**CONSUMER COUNCIL OF FIJI
NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2007**

NOTE 5: GRANTS FROM GOVERNMENT OF FIJI

The Council receives Government grant through Ministry of Commerce, Business Development and Investment. In 2007, the Government grant constitute 84% (2006 - 84%) of the Council's total income.

NOTE 6: Reconciliation of Net Cash Provided by Operating Activities to Operating Surplus

	31 December 2007	31 December 2006
	\$	\$
Net Surplus/(Deficit) for the Year	86,612	2,394
Depreciation	20,487	15,832
Gain on disposal of assets	-	(5,018)
Loss on disposal of assets	344	2,392
Prior Years Adjustment	660	-
(Increase)/Decrease in Other Debtors	3,489	3,528
(Increase)/Decrease in Deposits	(40)	(600)
(Increase)/Decrease in Prepayments	(1,400)	(201)
(Increase)/Decrease in Deferred finance charges	-	(24,034)
Increase/(Decrease) in Accounts Payables & Accruals	(97,017)	(6,615)
Increase/(Decrease) in Provisions	(1,816)	(10,517)
Increase/(Decrease) in Reimbursed Deposits	(194)	150
Increase/(Decrease) in Deferred grant	1	(15,832)
Increase/(Decrease) in Grant - Aus aid project	39,456	31,770
Increase/(Decrease) in lease liability	(3,852)	8,667
Increase/(Decrease) in other liabilities	-	-
Net Cash Provided by Operating Activities	46,730	1,916

NOTE 7: ACCOUNTS PAYABLES & ACCRUALS

Accounts Payable	11,219	12,336
Accruals	13,854	10,284
	25,073	22,620

NOTE 8: LOAN - CREDIT CORPORATION LTD

Current	11,640	2,910
Non Current	32,010	52,380
	43,650	55,290

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 is held as collateral over the term of the loan.

NOTE 9: EXPENDITURE COMMITMENTS

Finance lease commitments for the new photocopier is payable as:

Not later than one year	2,889	2,889
Later than one year and not later than five years	8,667	8,667
	11,556	11,556

**CONSUMER COUNCIL OF FIJI
NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2007**

	31 December 2007 \$	31 December 2006 \$
NOTE 10: DEFERRED FINANCE CHARGES		
Current	4,368	728
Non Current	13,177	23,306
	17,545	24,034

Deferred finance charges include interest payable on the leased photocopier of the Council from Abacus Graphics in 2006.

Note 11: EVENTS SUBSEQUENT TO BALANCE DATE

The Council's VAT liability has been settled by Government through direct payments to FIRCA in December 2007. The payment of \$99,843 is reflected as Other Grant in the Financial Statements. FIRCA has consequently reversed all related penalties and surcharges.

NOTE 12: 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 13: FUNDAMENTAL ERROR

The fundamental error consist of additional purchase and revaluation of property, plant and equipment through grants that were not accounted in Deferred Grant in 2006 and 2007. The financial statements of 2007 have been restated to correct this error.

Chief Executive/Executive Secretary

Personal Assistant

Research and Policy Division

Manager Research and Policy Analyst
Senior Research Officer
Research Officer
Assistant Research 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
Consumer Assistant – Hindi

For further information, advice, enquiry, or to lodge a consumer complaint, contact the office of the Consumer Council of Fiji.

Suva Office (HQ)

Address:

Mings Building
4 Carnavon Street
Private Mail Bag
SUVA

Telephone:

(679) 3300792
(679) 3310183
(679) 3305864

Mobile:

- Campaigns, Information & Media Division - 9716263
- Alternative Dispute Resolution & Consumer Advisory Division - 9716225
- Research & Policy Division – 9716603
- Administration, Finance & Project Management Division – 9756227

Fax: (679) 3300115

Email:

complaints@consumersfiji.org

Website:

www.consumersfiji.org

Lautoka Office

Address:

Suite 4, Popular Building
Vidilo Street
PO Box 5396
LAUTOKA

Telephone: (679) 6664987

Mobile: (679) 926 2807

Fax: (679) 6652846

Email:

consumerltk@connect.com.fj

Labasa Office

Address:

Lot 18 Jaduram Street
P.O.Box 64
LABASA

Telephone: (679) 8812559

Fax: (679) 8812559

Email: colbs@connect.com.fj



Council hails shipping route plan

The Consumer Council of Fiji strongly supports the move by the interim Government to produce shipping route licenses.

Council chief executive officer Premila Kumar said the council would like ship route licensing issued as soon as possible so that companies can be given a chance to experience its strength and weaknesses.

"The shipping companies do not have the shipping systems

strengths, weaknesses opportunities and threats," she said.

The non-licensing systems used by the shipping companies are no longer workable because it has not improved the services," Ms Kumar said.

She said route licensing should be allowed on a trial basis because of the high numbers of complaints from consumers.

"Consumers have increasingly

frustrations and distrust with the shipping services and therefore route licensing be allowed on a trial basis," she said.

Ms Kumar said uneconomical routes should not cause the denial of shipping services to the people who reside in the outer remote areas.

"The irregularity in the shipping services in the maritime provinces is a common knowledge

Consumer body hails Cabinet decision

□ TIMOCI VULA

THE Consumer Council of Fiji has applauded Cabinet's decision to approve mandatory checks on second-hand imported vehicles into the country.

The council says this decision had been long-overdue given the increased number of second-hand vehicle dealers in Fiji thus more complaints as customers continue to fork out more for repairs, than what it had initially bought the vehicle for.

"In addressing consumer complaints, the council has been concerned about the quality and safety of the imported second-hand vehicles brought into the country.

Consumer complaints on second-hand vehicles that have been registered with the council include the breakdown of vehicles on its second day of use, insurance cover issues,

and warranty provision of vehicle parts not properly communicated to buyer, improper and cheap mechanical work and the unavailability of certain spare parts in the country," the council said in a statement.

Council Chief Executive Officer Premila Kumar said some of the second-hand vehicles brought into Fiji had an age profile of 10 years at the time of import.

"The durability of these vehicles is questioned, as consumers end up spending more on vehicle maintenance than what they had paid for initially.

Therefore, the introduction of mandatory checks will see consumers save money on maintenance of the vehicle," Ms Kumar said. A survey conducted in 1997 by the council on second-hand vehicles revealed that vehicles imported from Japan had their records

destroyed and that on vehicles become used vehicles, there is institution in Japan through which used vehicles had pass through, up to the point of departure from their ports.

"Not many consumers in Fiji are informed of this information," she said.

"The checks on second-hand imported vehicles will ensure relative safety of vehicle and conformity LTA (Land Transport Authority) regulations."

However, Ms Kumar said these checks should ensure the assessment of roadworthiness and safety of these vehicles was of a high standard.

She said while the council understood second-hand vehicles were affordable to low-income earners, it would like to ensure that appropriate policies are in place to uphold the quality and safety of these vehicles.

JOINING FUEL

Charge fuels criticism against power provider

Electricity prices have increased by 17 cents per unit to 553. The Fiji Electricity Commission (FEC) has announced a 17-cent increase in the price of electricity from 536 to 553 cents per unit.

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The Fiji Electricity Commission (FEC) has announced a 17-cent increase in the price of electricity from 536 to 553 cents per unit.

Me qarauna na vunautaki ni kakana

sega ni bulabula viraka e levu ni tabogone ni kua. Ni sa vakatu ogo nai vakarua ni bulabula, ogo e launi ni vura sara tale ga vakalevu na mate ni uro, na mate ni sala kei na vemataqali kania tale ga. Na mataqali mate vakooqo, ka nava ni da tarava sara mada ga, e launi ni sa vakavu leqa sara tiko vakalevu era gauna ogo, levu kina ni vitiviti ni mate, e vakayavakata vakalevu sara tale ga nai vakarua ni bulabula ni levuvinava ka vakakua ni kua sa vosa ni vakauna ni vakarua ni veigone ni tabarua ni bulabula, baleta me ni rava ni cegava na mataqali mate era gauna e na nodavervalabula. Na levulevu sivia vei ira na la ni eda bulabula, e dua na tikina ka sa kaurivakali sara tiko vakalevu era vuvuvura era sivia, ka sa dobonu me da na cakacaka vata sara mada ga e VITI me na kakua ni levu ni kisi ni levulevu sivia vei ira na luveta e VITI era gauna ogo, se era loma ni dua na gauna lekalaka mai ogo.

Na kua tabaki tiko ga na kakara sega ni bulabula, vakavakame kei na vemataqali mate e VITI.

E tukuni era dua nai tabarua mai na Matibose ni Bulabula era vuvuvura na WHO-ka tabaki era 2006. Nai tukuni tabaki na "Maketaki ni Kakana sega ni Bulabula, se kakara tavani nava vei ira na Gove", e vakadimadrata ni ogo e levu sara ga kina na waini, na uro, sala kei na meusia, ka vakasala sara ga na tabu levulevu sivia

Nai vakatikalakala ni dua na leqa levu e vuvuvura raraba.

Era so na motatini era vuvuvura, e launi ni sa tu sara ga era dua nai vakatagedegede vakadimadrata ni levulevu ni kua gene e na sa tu era vakatagedegede ni levulevu sivia. Ia era so tale na motatini, ogo e tabarua ni dua na gauna sara vakarua ni kua gene, se i tabogone me kakabote, ka vakadimadrata ni da raica vata kei na levu ni kua gene, se i tabogone e na sa yacova ni vakarua ni bulabula, ni levulevu sivia. E na vakadimadrata e launi tale ga kina, na levulevu sivia, era vosa kina nai vakarua ni kua, kei nai vakarua ni bulabula, me na sasagata na kua voli na kakana maketaki, se vuvuvura vakooqo, ka nava ni na laki basika mui kina ni bulabula druvudruva. Ni sa sega vei ira na ka, era sasaga tiko ga me na vola se navata, baleta ni na sa gadreva tiko ga gene, era kaukava ni maketaki se volivolivoli era retio yakeyalo kei nai tuba veisivai eso.

Nodrai tavi eso na kabani levu - dar volivoli kakana tavani rava.

Na kena soli na galala vei ira nai tabarua me ni digia na kakana bulabula vei ira na luveta - e sa vakasumetaki tu era so na gauna, baleta ni ra sa cakacaka tiko ga na

dealers face 69 complaints

The Consumer Council of Fiji has received 69 complaints against used car dealers around the country from January to June this year.

Among these complaints certain to unscrupulous purchase deals.

It has also been revealed that the range of complaints include the breakdown of vehicles soon after purchase, warranty provision of vehicle parts, the improper and cheap mechanical work and the unavailability of certain parts.

Council chief executive officer Premila Kumar said a number of used car dealers had "undoubtedly" increased around the country and so had the number of complaints.

She said the Council in addressing the number of complaints, the Council is concerned about the quality and safety of the imported second-hand vehicles.

"Consumers are constantly being ripped off and not informed about the vehicle they purchase. Consumers have also complained of vehicle parts being changed during the sale without the buyers' knowledge," said Mrs Kumar.

In addition, contrary to claims held by some used car dealers, she said consumers could make huge savings if road mandatory inspection of all imported second-hand vehicles was conducted by



The Consumer Council continues to receive complaints against used cars. Most used cars are imported from Japan.

an additional \$1000 to purchase a used vehicle, the money saved from purchasing a faulty vehicle will be far greater," said Mrs Kumar.

"The council has been concerned with some second-hand car dealers ripping off customers by selling inferior quality that are disguised with a few cosmetic changes such as spray painting and altering the mileage reading so that it shows a lower figure than has actually been covered," she said. She said a large number of used vehicles brought into the country

consumers end up spending more on vehicle maintenance than what they had to pay for initially.

Hence, prior screening by JEVIC will provide a potential used car buyer with the assurance of quality vehicle and their monies worth."

"The buyer will also be able to obtain a detailed report providing information on the history of a vehicle."

Mrs Kumar also highlighted the Department of Fair Trading and Consumer Affairs was proposing to introduce mandatory information standard for second

Stock, bond trading keeps

The local stock market maintained its momentum this week as trading continued both in equities and the bond market.

Being last traded in June 2001, the bond market stole the limelight from equities this week when three trades were executed during the call market session on Monday early this week for a total consideration of \$3.6mil-

Jinita Prasad said the share market also showed an improvement in trading activity compared to the previous week.

She said total volume of shares traded stood a 25,879 shares while the consideration from the trades closed at \$62,134.

"The market closed the week on a positive note with capitalisation at \$896,282,878 up 0.7 per cent," said Ms

खरीदबीन करते समय ज़रूरी बातों पर ध्यान दें

त्योहारों का मौसम वर्तमान है तो वही कोसूमर कौंसिल ऑफ फीजी, ने लोगों से मांग की है कि वे खरीदबीन करते समय कुछ खास बातों पर ध्यान दें। अगर आप दूकानदार, रास के किनारे लगे बाजार

Watchdog warns on low-grade meat

Citizens are advised to appose the importation of low quality meat into the country.

The Consumer Council of Fiji says Fiji is putting the health of its consumers at risk by banning the importation of mutton into the country.

Chief executive officer Premila Kumar

because they are mostly fat. In New Zealand and Australia, mutton flaps are rarely sold for human consumption but are usually used as fertiliser or as dog food," said Mrs Kumar.

"Mutton flaps are exported to Pacific Island nations from Australia and New

shell-fish and beef."

Leylands Limited Managing director Gregory Yee confirmed yesterday there had been no complaints from consumers and the company continued to import lamb chops and premium beef cuts from New Zealand.

lamb shanks, lamb shoulders and lamb trims but meat is cheaper compared to Australia and we haven't had any complaints from customers," said Mr Harm.

The council said that low-quality meat are the major contributing factors to obesity, heart disease, high blood pressure and