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FEATURE ARTICLE

CONSUMER NETWORK – COUNCIL’S “EYES AND EARS”

Day in day out, Fijian consumers are hoodwinked into purchasing defective, poor quality or expired items by some mischievous businesses. Consumers living in the remotest areas of the country face a bigger risk. There is an utmost need and urgency to educate them and to assist them.

But where can they go? Generally speaking, most consumers know their rights but face difficulty in exercising those rights in the absence of support to deal with these injustices.

Keeping consumer protection at the heart of its advocacy work, the Consumer watchdog is now embarking on setting up a **Community Consumer Advisory Group (CCAG)**. The creation of this advisory group confirms the Council’s commitment to protect consumers residing in remote parts of Fiji, and to serve them better.

The European Union supported initiative, will assist the Council to safeguard consumer rights and enhance consumer education and understanding where the Council’s reach is limited and empowering the illiterate and under-privileged consumers by protecting them against deception, fraud and exploitation by some traders and service providers in remote and rural areas.

The Council under the European Union project titled, *“Creating Fair Marketplace for Consumers through Consumer Information and Redress Mechanisms”* will be launching CCAG on Wednesday, 25th June, 2014 in Suva with representatives coming from Savusavu, Taveuni, Navua, Sigatoka, Tavua, Rakiraki, Seqaqa, Bua, and Tailevu.

CCAG is made up of volunteers. CCAG will be the primary contact group for consumers who need immediate assistance with their problems or with advice on consumer issues.

CCAG will:

- Provide free help, support and advice to the consumers;
- Liaise with the Consumer Council to protect the consumers;
- Report to the Council about consumer complaints or issues/problems faced by consumers in their communities;

- Help give consumers information to educate them and make them aware of their rights and responsibilities;
- Distribute information about current market practices;
- Inform the Consumer Council about unfair trade practices in their areas;
- Assist the Council in organizing community workshops, seminars, mobile units, school visits etc when they are needed; and
- Assist the Council to prepare submissions to better protect consumers.

What can you do to assist CCAG?

- Tell CCAG what you want the Council to do for you;
- Become a member of CCAG;
- Assist in surveys;
- Offer your time and skills;
- Take your complaints to CCAG for advice and resolution; and
- Seek assistance to make better consumer choices.

What are the benefits of CCAG?

- Consumers are empowered by knowing about their rights/responsibilities and consumer protection;
- Consumer voices in outer and remote areas/islands will be adequately heard;
- Consumers will be provided appropriate redress in a timely manner; and
- Empowered consumers who can deal directly with traders, landlords and service providers on their grievances.

The Council is hopeful that after the setting up of CCAG, the consumers living in isolated areas will get some relief when things go wrong or when they want value for money. You can also join CCAG by sending your CV, contact details including an email address if you have one to the Council.