

21 June 2025

PRESS RELEASE

Unfair Rental Car Practices Still Prevalent

Serious complaints against rogue rental car companies have prompted a renewed warning to the public, as the Consumer Council of Fiji expresses alarm over increasingly aggressive and unethical behaviour by operators. Since 2020, the Council has received 163 complaints relating to rental car services, with a combined monetary value of over \$97,000.

However, the recent nature of complaints has grown more troubling, prompting the Council to once again warn consumers. A key concern is the delay of refunds and the exploitation of consumer trust. Many operators are refusing to return bonds on time, instead withholding them indefinitely under the pretext of waiting for traffic fines, leaving consumers financially stranded for months.

What's equally concerning is the way consumers are treated when they raise concerns. Reports describe rental company staff who are evasive, verbally abusive, and entirely dismissive of complaints. Communication often breaks down once payment is made, and some consumers have even been blocked from contacting the operator altogether. This is not just bad service, it is deliberate mistreatment.

Another recurring issue is the refusal by some operators to issue receipts or written agreements. Without documentation, consumers are left vulnerable, unable to prove terms or challenge unexpected deductions. These shady practices go hand-in-hand with a wider lack of accountability in how vehicles are maintained. In one recent case, a consumer hired a vehicle that broke down the very next day. The company told him to carry out repairs at his own expense with a vague promise of reimbursement. Despite following through and providing receipts, he has yet to be compensated.

Scams are also proliferating, with some unregistered operators luring victims via social media or informal platforms, often with no physical office or point of contact. These scams have led to financial losses and have left some consumers without a vehicle despite paying upfront. Most of the complaints received so far have come from Fijian consumers, raising legitimate fears about what could be happening to tourists who may not know where to turn for help.

Council CEO Seema Shandil said the behaviour of some rental car operators is not only unethical but reflects a growing culture of consumer exploitation. "It is unacceptable that

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consumers are being treated in such a disgraceful manner, from being ignored and harassed to being denied refunds or made to pay for repairs on poorly maintained vehicles. These operators are taking advantage of weak enforcement and a lack of consumer awareness, and it must stop.”

She added that the Council will continue its collaboration to ensure fairness in the industry. “Together with the LTA and the Fiji Rental Car Association, we will continue to take strong action against those who repeatedly flout consumer protection laws. The time for leniency is over, these practices are harming livelihoods, damaging trust, and risking the safety of consumers.”

Consumers are strongly advised to be cautious when hiring vehicles, to insist on proper documentation, avoid informal cash transactions, and verify that the business is licensed. Anyone who has fallen victim to unethical rental practices should contact the Consumer Council by calling the toll-free number 155 or by emailing Complaints@consumersfiji.org.

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