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FEATURE ARTICLE

Behind the Numbers, The Consumer Stories That Shaped the Financial Year 2025-2026

Every complaint tells a story.

It could be a family discovering that a newly purchased appliance has stopped working, a tenant waiting for essential repairs, a commuter charged the wrong fare, or a shopper left without goods after making an online payment. These are not just statistics. They represent real experiences faced by consumers seeking fairness, accountability, and protection.

During Financial Year 2025-2026, consumers registered 1,545 complaints across five major categories: Food and Drinks, Landlord and Tenant, Public Transport, Electronic Goods, and Online Shopping.

Behind every complaint is a consumer experience that highlights the need for informed consumers, responsible businesses, and stronger consumer protection.

Food and Drinks: Protecting What Goes on the Table

Food is an essential part of every household, making concerns in this category particularly important. With 496 complaints registered, Food and Drinks recorded the highest number of consumer complaints during the year.

Key Issues: Consumers reported concerns relating to price control violations, expired and stale products, poor quality meat and seafood, hygiene issues, and pest infestations.

Contributing Factors: These issues often arise due to poor stock management, inadequate storage practices, failure to maintain hygiene standards, and a few businesses not meeting their obligations to provide safe and quality products. When proper checks are not carried out, consumers, who place significant trust in retailers, may unknowingly purchase products that are unsafe, expired, or not worth the price paid.

Consumer Rights and Responsibilities: The right to safe, quality products at accurate prices are fundamental for all shoppers. A discrepancy between the shelf price and checkout price should always be resolved in favour of the lower displayed amount - consumers must not be overcharged. Defective, unsafe, or misdescribed products entitle shoppers to a remedy. Simple protective measures include checking expiry dates, inspecting packaging, retaining receipts, and reporting issues without delay.

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Landlord and Tenant: The Search for Secure Housing

A home should provide safety and stability. However, **491** complaints received during the year show that many tenants continue to face challenges within the rental sector.

Key Issues: The main complaints included bond refund disputes, eviction disagreements, failure by landlords to carry out repairs, rent increases despite the Rent Freeze Order, and disputes over utility payments.

Contributing Factors: Many tenancy disputes occur due to unclear agreements, poor communication, and lack of proper documentation. Some tenants may also hesitate to raise concerns due to fear of conflict or uncertainty about their rights.

Without written agreements and proper records, resolving disputes can become more difficult for both parties.

Consumer Rights and Responsibilities: Tenants have the right to a written tenancy agreement, proper notice before eviction, fair treatment, and a safe and habitable living environment. To protect themselves in case of disputes, tenants should keep copies of tenancy agreements, rent payment records, photographs of the property condition, and written communication regarding repairs or concerns.

Public Transport: A Journey Towards Better Service

Public transport plays an important role in the daily lives of many Fijians. During the year, **211** consumers raised concerns relating to transport services.

Key Issues: The main complaints included fare overcharging, refusal of service, taxi meter disputes, poor customer service, and safety concerns.

Contributing Factors: These issues continue due to inconsistent service delivery, misunderstandings regarding fares, and challenges with transport systems, including difficulties experienced with e-transport payments. Limited information and failure to report incidents with sufficient details can also make it difficult to address recurring issues.

Consumer Rights and Responsibilities: Safe, reliable transport, correct fares, and respectful treatment are fundamental passenger rights. When issues arise, passengers should record vehicle registration numbers, route information, dates, and times. Providing accurate information is key to strengthening accountability within the transport sector.

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Electronic Goods: When Purchases Become Problems

Electronic goods are important household investments. However, **192** consumers reported issues involving products that failed to meet expectations.

Key Issues: Complaints included defective products, warranty disputes, delays in repairs, and goods not performing as advertised.

Contributing Factors: These concerns often arise due to unclear warranty processes, delays in repairs, limited availability of spare parts, and poor communication between retailers, suppliers, and consumers. Consumers may also experience difficulties when responsibilities between retailers and manufacturers are unclear.

Consumer Rights and Responsibilities: Every product purchased should match its description and perform as advertised. Defective goods entitle buyers to a remedy, whether a refund, repair, or replacement. To safeguard their rights, consumers should retain receipts, warranty documents, and repair records. Familiarity with warranty terms and testing products immediately after purchase can also help avoid future issues.

Online Shopping: Convenience with Caution

Digital shopping has transformed how consumers purchase goods and services. However, **155** complaints highlight the risks consumers continue to face in the online marketplace.

Key Issues: Consumers reported non-delivery of goods after payment, refund disputes, delivery delays, scams, and receiving products different from what was advertised.

Contributing Factors: These problems are often linked to online sellers operating without sufficient business information, lack of transparency, and difficulties verifying sellers before making payments. The digital environment can also allow dishonest sellers to disappear easily after receiving consumer payments.

Consumer Rights and Responsibilities: Accurate product information, fair transactions, and goods that match their descriptions are fundamental consumer rights. Before making any payment, buyers should verify sellers, check reviews, request receipts, and keep screenshots of product details and communication. Caution is also essential - offers that appear too good to be true usually are.

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Building a Fairer Marketplace

Although these complaints arise from different sectors, common themes connect them. Transparency remains a major concern, consumers need clear and accurate information about prices, products, services, agreements, and sellers before making decisions. A lack of access to reliable consumer information can also prevent consumers from taking timely action. At the same time, businesses must recognise their responsibility to provide fair, safe, and reliable products and services.

The growth of digital commerce has created new opportunities but has also introduced new challenges. Building a fair marketplace requires informed consumers, responsible businesses, and effective consumer protection systems.

Your Voice, Your Power

The 1,545 complaints registered during Financial Year 2025-2026 represent more than numbers. They reflect consumer experiences and highlight areas requiring continued attention. Every complaint provides valuable insight into market challenges and strengthens efforts to improve consumer protection.

To every consumer: your voice matters. Every complaint filed is a step toward a fairer marketplace. To every honest business: your integrity is valued.

As we move to the second half of 2026, remember: vigilance is your best defence. Read the fine print. Ask questions. Keep receipts. Speak up when something feels wrong. For assistance, consumers can contact the Consumer Council on toll-free number 155, email complaints@consumersfiji.org, or visit the nearest Council office.

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