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Consumer Council of Fiji



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PRESS RELEASE

COUNCIL ADVISES RESPONSIBLE PURCHASING, WARNS RETAILERS ON CONDITIONAL SELLING

With sugar supplies currently in limited stock in some supermarkets, the Consumer Council of Fiji (CCoF) is urging consumers to stay calm and purchase responsibly, while warning retailers against exploiting the situation through illegal conditional selling.

The call comes after the Council received complaints against two supermarkets that were requiring customers to spend a minimum amount on other groceries before being allowed to purchase sugar. One supermarket allegedly forced customers to spend at least \$40 before they could buy sugar, while another imposed a minimum spend of \$10. These complaints prompted the Council to conduct a snap survey and mystery shopping exercise, which confirmed the practice.

Some retailers have defended these measures, claiming conditions were placed to ensure fair distribution and discourage hoarding, in light of certain consumers attempting to buy sugar in irregularly large quantities. However, the Council acknowledges that supermarkets are now actively working with the Council to implement fair distribution measures and encourage calm purchasing habits.

Retailers are reminded that reasonable purchase limits subject to regulatory approval may be imposed during periods of high demand or anticipated shortages. However, forcing consumers to buy unrelated products before accessing an essential item is unacceptable and may constitute illegal conditional selling. Such practices undermine consumer choice and place an unfair burden on households, particularly those on limited budgets.

The current supply situation is temporary. The Council has been in discussions with retailers, who have confirmed they are actively working to restore regular sugar supplies to their shelves. Close monitoring of the situation is ongoing, and continued engagement with retailers will ensure that supply is normalised as quickly as possible.

Consumers are also reminded to purchase responsibly. Panic buying and stockpiling place unnecessary pressure on supply chains, create artificial shortages, and limit access for other households.

“There is no reason for anyone to rush to the stores or stockpile,” says Consumer Council of Fiji CEO, Seema Shandil. “The issue we are seeing on shelves is entirely artificial, driven by

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a small group of buyers purchasing in massive, unnecessary quantities. While we understand retailers want to ensure fair distribution, forcing everyday shoppers to spend on unrelated items just to buy a bag of sugar is highly unethical and strictly illegal. We urge bulk buyers to leave enough stock for ordinary households, and we warn retailers that we will not tolerate exploitative conditional selling.”

The Council has formally raised this matter with the relevant regulator and is putting all retailers on notice that any form of conditional selling will be closely monitored. Businesses found engaging in such practices should expect swift enforcement action.

The Consumer Council will continue conducting market surveillance and working closely with regulators and retailers to monitor the situation and identify any unfair or exploitative trading practices.

Consumers who experience conditional selling or any other unfair trading practice are encouraged to report the matter to the Consumer Council of Fiji by calling the National Consumer Helpline **155** (toll free) or emailing complaints@consumersfiji.org.

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