



MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

WORLD SURF LEAGUE CORONOA FIJI PRO

Honourable Speaker,

The Hon. Prime Minister,

The Hon. Leader of Opposition,

Members of Parliament,

Ladies and Gentlemen, listening through radio or watching through television or live-stream,

Mr. Speaker Sir,

I take great pleasure in providing an update on the recently held World Surf League Corona Fiji Pro.

Fiji is known for many things. We are known for our hospitality, our culture, our beaches, and our friendliness.

And our goal is to add to that list. Top tier global sporting events is of course one of them.

Mr Speaker Sir,

Through the support of the Government and private sector, we successfully brought back the World Surf League (WSL) Fiji Pro after seven years.

This is a three-year partnership where the first event was held from 19 to 23 August at Cloudbreak, Tavarua.

This event not only showcases our stunning natural landscapes but has also reinforced Fiji's standing as a premier sports tourism destination on the global stage.

Mr Speaker Sir,

Surfing is not a traditional spectator event like rugby or football where economic returns are largely measured based on how many seats we fill in a stadium. Instead, its economic value is measured by global brand exposure.

Mr. Speaker Sir,

Cloudbreak has gained global fame for its powerful and flawless left-hand reef break, making it a top choice for surfers and a key reason for Fiji's celebrated return to the World Surf League event.

The 2024 Corona Fiji Pro presented by Bonsoy, was Event 9 which is the final event of the 2024 Championship Tour, before the Finals.

Event 9 delivers a much higher audience as it decides the final 5 men and women who then go into the Finals.

And next year, we will be the final stop. So, this will be a strategic advantage to Fiji.

Mr. Speaker Sir,

The Fiji Pro has set a new benchmark for international events in Fiji, contributing significantly to various sectors of our economy. Allow me to detail the multiple benefits this event has brought to our nation.

We had the honour of having the President of Fiji, His Excellency, Wiliame Katonivere officiate the opening of the Event. Shadow Minister for Tourism, Honourable Koya was also present.

ECONOMIC IMPACT

Mr. Speaker Sir,

The economic ripple effects of the Fiji Pro Event have been widespread, particularly in our tourism and hospitality sectors.

In the Corona Fiji Pro Event, thirty-six athletes from twelve countries participated. The event also brought event organizers, support staff, media personnel, and passionate surf fans—our hotels and resorts have seen a marked increase in occupancy.

So, in terms of direct economic returns, you're looking at airfare, accommodation, food and beverage, transport and taxes in the local economy.

Preliminary assessments indicate that this singular event has generated millions of dollars in direct and indirect economic benefits. Local businesses, including restaurants, tour operators, and service providers, have all experienced increased patronage.

This, in turn, strengthens the very foundation of our tourism-based economy, which has been steadily recovering since the global pandemic.

The financial impact of such international events extends far beyond the event itself, creating a sustainable flow of income that boosts local and national economies.

GLOBAL EXPOSURE

Mr Speaker Sir,

Hosting the Fiji Pro has elevated Fiji's profile globally. The extensive media coverage, including live broadcasts and media engagement, has showcased not just the event, but Fiji's natural beauty and world-class surfing to millions of viewers worldwide.

Mr Speaker Sir,

Our preliminary analysis shows over \$2.5 million in total brand media value of exposure for Tourism Fiji in social media. We are looking at 205 total branded social posts that produced over 45 million impressions and 29 million video views.

The event also delivered over \$255,000 in media plan value for Tourism Fiji and 2.3K Global PR Hits with \$50.4 million+ global advertising value equivalency across 36 countries.

Mr Speaker Sir,

The event was also supported by global brands such as Corona, Red Bull, Yeti, Shiseido and Apple Watch. So, we strategically maximised the Fijian brand.

This exposure is invaluable for our tourism sector.

SOCIO-CULTURAL BENEFITS

Mr Speaker Sir,

I also wanted to share the impact the event had on our communities and our people.

Mr Speaker Sir,

The WSL rebuilt the Cloudbreak Surf Tower which was destroyed during Cyclone Harold in 2020, after being operational since the mid-1990s.

This is now being gifted to Tabanivono-i-wai as a legacy asset to monetise via renting the tower out for other events.

I also acknowledge the cash contribution made to the Nabila and Momi Villages.

Mr Speaker Sir,

The event also saw support to the Fiji Surfing Association and local surfing community. The WSL delivered a three-day Women's Development Program and a Water Safety Program, local Surfer received a place in the Fiji Pro Event as a Wildcard, and donation of cash and items to the Fiji Surfing Association.

Mr Speaker Sir,

We also staged a 'live site' in Denarau to allow locals and other guests who couldn't go out to Cloudbreak to also watch the event live.

Mr Speaker Sir,

One of the other aspects of the Fiji Pro Event has been its contribution to jobs and skill development. From event management, logistics, and security, to hospitality services and transportation, local talent was heavily involved in the planning and execution of this world-class event.

Importantly, these employment opportunities did not just provide temporary income.

They also equipped many of our people with valuable skills and experience that can be leveraged in future events.

This adds long-term value to our workforce and positions us favourably in the highly competitive tourism sector.

ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP

Mr. Speaker Sir,

An event of this scale would not be complete without a firm commitment to environmental sustainability. I am pleased to report that the Fiji Pro Event upheld the highest standards of environmental stewardship. Initiatives such as the One Ocean forest diversity and marine environment protection project and no single use plastics were also positive contributions. Furthermore, one of the standout initiatives was the

encouragement of participants and visitors to plant coral in nearby reefs—an act that directly contributes to the preservation of our marine ecosystems.

We have long recognized that our natural environment is one of our greatest assets, and we must protect it for future generations. The Fiji Pro has served as a platform to promote environmental conservation, particularly in safeguarding our oceans and coral reefs. This approach aligns with our broader national goals for sustainable tourism development, where we balance economic growth with environmental protection.

LOOKING AHEAD: FUTURE PROSPECTS

Mr. Speaker Sir, looking ahead, the success of the Fiji Pro positions us favourably to attract more international events.

In line with our tourism diversification strategy, we are already exploring new partnerships and avenues to host a variety of international events. These opportunities will continue to deliver significant economic, social, and environmental benefits.

The ongoing collaboration with the WSL, in particular, is a cornerstone of our efforts to solidify Fiji's place on the international sports tourism map.

CONCLUSION

Mr. Speaker Sir,

In conclusion, the Fiji Pro Event has been a success for our country. It has boosted our economy, created employment, showcased our culture, and reinforced our commitment to environmental sustainability.

Most importantly, it has demonstrated our capacity to host world-class events and has positioned Fiji as a leading destination for sports tourism.

As we build on this success, I have every confidence that Fiji will continue to thrive as a global tourism and events destination, bringing long-term benefits to our people and our economy. We look forward to even greater achievements in the years to come.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker Sir.

