



RESPONSE TO ORAL QUESTION 284/2025

Wednesday 26 November 2025

Hon. Sakiusa Tubuna to ask the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Tourism and Civil Aviation – Can the Deputy Prime Minister update Parliament on the status of the *Na Vualiku* Tourism Development Programme for Vanua Levu, including its readiness for implementation and any key components planned for the near future.

Hon. Speaker,

I rise to respond to the question from the Honourable Member at a moment of great significance for the development of tourism in Vanua Levu and Taveuni.

Na Vualiku, the Fiji Tourism Development Program for Vanua Levu, represents far more than a series of projects. It is a promise to the people of Vanua Levu that the future of tourism there will be strong, inclusive, and rooted in the spirit of our communities.

Today I'd like to present a brief update on some of the recent activities under the Na Vualiku Program. It is not a question of implementation readiness but, rather, we are already implementing.

Hon. Speaker,

Members will appreciate that the Program was launched by the Hon. Prime Minister just over a year ago – on 20th September 2024. Since that time, I am happy to report that we have established a Central Project Management Unit at the Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation which is now fully staffed and operational.

Airport Fiji and the Fiji Roads Authority, which are also implementing agencies under this Program, have also set up Project Implementation Units to oversee their respective components of the Program.

As this august house would be aware, the Program is designed to have **3 phases**:

Phase I - lays the foundation for sustainable tourism by addressing barriers such as insufficient or inadequate infrastructure, limited essential services, and weak institutional coordination.

It includes airport and road improvements and basic services, support for tourism MSMEs, access to finance for community-based tourism operators, capacity building and institutional strengthening.

Phase II - will promote medium-scale investments based on the feasibility studies carried out under Phase I.

Finally, **Phase III** - will aim to consolidate progress through large-scale investments, policy reforms and sustainable financing, delivering long-term outcomes such as improved connectivity, increased tourism

revenue and employment, and comprehensive benefits to local communities in Vanua Levu.

With that background, Hon. Speaker, permit me to highlight some of what has been achieved in the roughly 14 months since the Program was launched:

1. A Design and Supervision contract was awarded by FRA in May 2025 to prepare the upgrades to be carried out on the Labasa-Savusavu link road. The planned improvements are intended to enhance road safety, resilience, and the overall visitor experience through the design of scenic lookouts, rest stops and navigational signage, including the approach road to the Waisali Rainforest Reserve.

This design phase is expected to take approximately 11 months, after which FRA will be moving swiftly to put out a tender for the actual works to be carried out. I really want to emphasize the road safety aspect of this component: there are simply too many unnecessary accidents and road fatalities on the Labasa-Savusavu road and as a result of this

Program we hope to reduce – if not entirely eliminate – these accidents and fatalities.

2. Airports Fiji also awarded into a Design and Supervision contract for upgrades to both the Labasa and Savusavu airports. Hon. Speaker, Members would be aware of the recent announcement by Airports Fiji of the imminent closure of the Labasa Airport for 4-6 weeks during February-March 2026 to carry out urgent runway repairs.

This upgrade is a key safety initiative that will protect passengers and airline crew and ensure safe and reliable aircraft operations across the Northern Division. Other activities under the Na Vualiku Program include upgrades to the infrastructure at both airports, the installation of a Remote Tower Aerodrome Flight Information System, and a feasibility study for a new airport for Vanua Levu.

3. At MTCA, we have recently awarded a contract to an international consulting firm working with local counterparts to develop an **Integrated Tourism Master Plan (ITMP)** for Vanua Levu.

The **ITMP** is a long-term strategic framework that will guide how tourism in Vanua Levu and Taveuni grows in a sustainable, inclusive and resilient manner over the next 25 years.

It aims to translate the Government of Fiji's tourism diversification ambitions into a clear spatial planning and investment roadmap that protects natural, cultural and social assets while expanding high-quality tourism opportunities.

The plan will integrate and align existing national and sector strategies, set out realistic tourism growth scenarios and market positioning, and define how key destinations such as Savusavu, Labasa, the Natewa Peninsula and Taveuni should develop in terms of land use, infrastructure, visitor flows and

community participation. In short, it will guide future investments and inform the design of Phases II and III.

4. Hon. Speaker, there are other important initiatives at various stages of implementation under the Na Vualiku Program in areas such as solid waste and wastewater management, solar energy and improving the cityscape of the towns of Labasa and Savusavu.

5. But what I am most excited to share with you is the imminent launch of the **MSME and Community-Based Tourism Program** under Na Vualiku. This stage of program is designed to place our communities at the centre of tourism growth, ensuring that new roads, better airports, and upgraded services translate into real livelihoods, stronger culture, and shared prosperity.

WHY MSMEs AND CBTs MATTER – PUTTING PEOPLE FIRST

Hon. Speaker,

Tourism succeeds when small operators succeed. It thrives when community groups can welcome visitors to authentic experiences and when women-led enterprises can grow with dignity and confidence.

MSMEs and CBTs are the heartbeat of inclusive tourism.

They create jobs close to home, protect the story of the vanua, and unlock talent that too often goes unseen.

This Program recognizes that many enterprising Fijians have been constrained by limited finance, market access, and compliance barriers. We will change that by meeting people where they are and lifting them to where they deserve to be.

Na Vualiku moves in coordinated steps.

First, we plan destinations for the long term through the Integrated Tourism Master Plan.

Second, we build and upgrade critical infrastructure and essential services, from airport terminals and cross-island roads to modern waste and wastewater systems and renewable energy in public facilities.

Third, and this is our current focus, we activate the MSME and CBT Program so that local entrepreneurs and village-based groups have the capacity, the tools, and the support to turn opportunity into income.

This sequencing reflects a simple truth: when access improves and destinations are thoughtfully planned, demand rises. The MSME and CBT Program ensures our people are ready to capture that demand.

Hon. Speaker,

We are preparing to roll out the MSME and Community-Based Tourism Program, with official launches scheduled for the 12th and 13th of December in Labasa, Savusavu, and Somosomo in Taveuni. These launches will open the application process for grants and support under the Program, inviting communities and enterprises across Vanua Levu and Taveuni to step forward and participate.

Hon. Speaker,

The MSME and CBT Program is ready for implementation. The design work is complete. Eligibility criteria, environmental and social safeguards, and the oversight framework have all been agreed.

Extensive community consultations in Savusavu, Labasa, and coastal districts have helped us shape the Program to meet local needs and opportunities.

We now move into the application phase. Communities and MSMEs will be invited to submit their Expressions of Interest. Each application will be assessed against

published criteria, and successful projects will be supported through grants, training, and advisory services.

Our commitment is clear: every step will be transparent, and progress will be reported to Parliament and the public.

To the communities of Vanua Levu and Taveuni: your home is already a world-class story, from the coral reefs and forests to the songs, crafts, and traditions that bind the vanua. This Program invites you to shape that story further, to host with pride, and to earn with dignity.

If you are a mat weaving group in Natewa, a youth eco-guide in Waisali, a family-run guesthouse in Savusavu, a culture and dance troupe in Labasa, this Program is for you.

Step forward. Bring your ideas, your traditions, and your ambition. We will stand beside you with training, with

grants, with advisory support so you can turn your potential into prosperity.

CLOSING — CONFIDENCE, COMMITMENT, AND SHARED PROGRESS

Hon. Speaker,

The Na Vualiku MSME and CBT Program is a statement of confidence in the people of Vanua Levu and Taveuni and a commitment to shared progress.

By aligning community and enterprise support with planning, infrastructure, and essential services, we will build a tourism sector where every community sees value, opportunity, and dignity.

The next step is clear: we will open applications during the December launches in Labasa, Savusavu, and Taveuni, and we will ensure that every process is transparent and accountable.

This is your moment to engage, to innovate, and to lead. Together, we can transform Vanua Levu into a model of inclusive and sustainable tourism for the nation.

I thank you Mr. Speaker