



Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation

Tuesday 4th of November 2025

209/2025 - Hon. Ratu Rakuita Vakalalabure to ask the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Tourism and Civil Aviation – Can the Deputy Prime Minister update Parliament on the key outcomes of the recently held Council of Tourism Ministers Meeting or the ICAO General Assembly.

Mr Speaker Sir, I thank the Honourable Member for the question.

At the outset, I wish to clarify that my response today addresses the key outcomes of the **Pacific Tourism Organisation (SPTO) Council of Tourism Ministers Meeting.**

Matters relating to the **International Civil Aviation Organization General Assembly** will be raised in a **Ministerial Statement.**

COUNCIL OF TOURISM MINISTERS MEETING

Mr Speaker Sir,

The Council of Tourism Ministers Meeting, held in Vava'u, Tonga, was a moment of collective purpose for our Blue Pacific family.

Ministers and senior officials from across the Pacific gathered to reaffirm our shared commitment to tourism as a driver of inclusive and sustainable development.

We also had the privilege to have with us Princess Royal, Her Royal Highness Princess Salote Mafile'o Pilolevu Tuita,

For Fiji, this meeting was more than a formality. It was a reflection of the Coalition Government's conviction that tourism is not only an economic pillar but a bridge of solidarity, culture, and opportunity for our region.

Fiji, as a founding member and host country of the SPTO Secretariat, has always recognised its leadership role in shaping a tourism future that is rooted in sustainability and partnership.

Of particular importance was Fiji' handover to Tonga as the Chair of the Council of Ministers. When I assumed the Chairmanship, our shared vision was clear: to build a Pacific tourism that is sustainable, inclusive, and resilient.

Under the Coalition Government, Fiji continues to advocate for regional unity and shared prosperity. The SPTO platform allows us to speak as one Pacific voice, to protect our environment, to empower our people, and to ensure that every visitor who sets foot on our shores contributes meaningfully to the well-being of our communities.

SPTO Strategic Plan 2025–2029

Mr Speaker Sir,

Along the margins, the Council endorsed the **SPTO Strategic Plan 2025–2029**, a blueprint that charts our collective vision for the next five years. The plan focuses on six strategic priorities:

- Sustainable destination management
- Marketing support and events
- Research coordination and insights
- Partner coordination and support
- Capacity building and training
- Connecting tourism and aviation

These priorities are not abstract ambitions. They are measurable pathways toward a Pacific that is resilient, innovative, and united.

The plan aligns with the **2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent**, reinforcing the central message that tourism must serve both people and planet.

Fiji strongly supported this framework. It resonates with our national development agenda, where sustainability is not a slogan but a standard. The Coalition Government believes that when we protect our reefs, forests, and culture, we protect the future of our children. The endorsement of this Strategic Plan represents not only policy alignment but also a political commitment from all Pacific nations to act with purpose and courage.

Tourism–Aviation Linkage and Regional Connectivity

Mr Speaker Sir,

A key theme of the Council was the recognition that tourism and aviation are inseparable. The Pacific's geography demands reliable, affordable, and sustainable air services. Without aviation, tourism cannot grow. Without tourism, aviation cannot thrive.

For Fiji, this interconnection is embodied in our integrated Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation. Under the Coalition Government, this structure ensures that every tourism policy is supported by aviation policy, and vice versa. We do not treat these as separate industries but as partners in progress.

The **Pacific Tourism and Aviation Strategy 2026–2030** was reviewed and endorsed during the meeting. Supported by Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, this strategy calls for greater investment in regional air connectivity, the exploration of sustainable aviation fuel options, and the strengthening of intra-Pacific routes.

Mr Speaker Sir, the Coalition Government believes that connectivity is not only about flights; it is about access—to markets, to opportunities, and to each other. Improved air links strengthen family ties, boost trade, and allow Pacific people to share their stories with the world. This is the spirit that will guide Fiji's engagement in the coming years.

Sustainability, Digital Transformation and Data

Mr Speaker Sir,

Another highlight of the meeting was the focus on sustainability and innovation. The Council welcomed new initiatives that align technology with responsible tourism.

The **Digital Measurement and Benchmarking Dashboard**, funded by the New Zealand Government, was acknowledged as a powerful tool for data-driven decision-making. For the first time, the Pacific has a common platform to measure visitor trends, sustainability indicators, and investment performance across all member countries.

Mr Speaker Sir, the Coalition Government welcomes this advancement. We believe that decisions must be guided by evidence, not assumption.

Data will help us identify where tourism benefits communities, where environmental pressure points exist, and where policies need recalibration.

Equally significant were the initiatives addressing the environmental footprint of tourism—such as guidelines to phase out single-use plastics, protect marine ecosystems, and improve eco-certification standards for accommodation. These measures reflect the Pacific’s moral responsibility to safeguard our natural inheritance. Fiji stands with our Pacific brothers and sisters in saying that sustainability is not optional; it is essential.

Institutional Reform and Governance

Mr Speaker Sir,

The Council also reaffirmed that the **Pacific Tourism Organisation** must remain a **standalone regional agency** within the CROP family.

This decision was not merely administrative. It was a statement of conviction—that tourism deserves its own platform, resources, and autonomy to drive development across the Pacific.

SPTO’s hybrid governance model, involving both public and private sectors, was acknowledged as one of the most effective in the region. Ministers endorsed further reforms to strengthen accountability, improve member engagement, and modernise funding mechanisms.

For the Coalition Government, this decision aligns with Fiji’s belief in strong regional institutions. We must continue to champion reforms that make organisations more transparent, efficient, and responsive. The success of SPTO is the success of every Pacific nation that depends on tourism for livelihoods and dignity.

Implications for Fiji

Mr Speaker Sir,

The outcomes of the Council carry direct relevance for Fiji. The Coalition Government will align national policies with the SPTO Strategic Plan 2025–2029 to ensure that Fiji’s tourism growth remains sustainable, inclusive, and globally competitive.

We will continue to strengthen the partnership between tourism and aviation. Our goal is to enhance air connectivity within the region, expand access to secondary markets, and attract more sustainable investment into Fiji's tourism infrastructure.

Mr Speaker Sir, the Coalition Government remains deeply committed to the professional development of our people. We will expand training and mentorship through institutions such as the Fiji National University, ServicePro, and the Pacific Tourism Research Institute.

Our people are our most valuable asset; equipping them with the right skills ensures that tourism benefits Fijians first.

We will also deepen our collaboration with regional and global partners—Australia, New Zealand, China, the European Union, and others—to access funding, technology, and expertise that support our long-term goals.

Regional Diplomacy and Collaboration

Mr Speaker Sir,

During Fiji's tenure as Chair of the Council, our country demonstrated principled leadership rooted in cooperation and respect. The Coalition Government takes pride in having steered discussions that reaffirmed the Pacific's collective voice on tourism.

Our diplomacy during this tenure was active and forward-looking. We engaged partners from the private sector, development agencies, and regional organisations to ensure that tourism remains a pillar of economic resilience and cultural preservation.

Fiji also hosted the **South Pacific Tourism Exchange 2024**, the first in over a decade, connecting 61 international buyers and 79 Pacific sellers—a clear sign of investor confidence in the region.

This spirit of collaboration is what defines us as Pacific nations. We do not compete against one another; we complement and uplift each other.

Conclusion

Mr Speaker Sir,

The Council of Tourism Ministers Meeting marked an important milestone for Fiji and the Pacific. The endorsement of the Strategic Plan 2025–2029, the strengthened link between tourism and aviation, and the renewed focus on sustainability and governance reflect our region’s maturity and shared vision.

Under the leadership of the Coalition Government, Fiji stands ready to translate these commitments into action. We will work tirelessly with our neighbours to ensure that tourism remains a force for good — protecting our environment, creating jobs, and strengthening the bonds that unite our region.

Mr Speaker Sir, this is not only our responsibility; it is our legacy. Fiji will continue to lead with humility, purpose, and political will.

Vinaka vakalevu, Mr Speaker Sir.