



**HONOURABLE ALITIA VAKATAI BAVOU CIRIKIYASAWA
BAINIVALU**

MINISTER FOR FISHERIES AND FORESTRY

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

**UPDATE ON THE COASTAL FISHERIES DEVELOPMENT
PROJECT – 2nd of SEPTEMBER 2024**

Honorable Speaker of Parliament;

The Honourable Prime Minister;

Honourable Deputy Prime Ministers;

Honourable Cabinet Ministers and Assistant Ministers;

Honourable Leader of the Opposition;

Honourable Members of Parliament;

Ladies and Gentlemen

Honorable Speaker Sir, I rise to deliver a statement on the coastal fisheries development programs implemented by the Ministry of Fisheries and Forestry through our servicing centers in the Central, Eastern, Northern, and Western Divisions.

Honorable Speaker, Sir, coastal fisheries resources are fish, invertebrates, and plants, including associated habitats, which occur within customary fishing rights areas. These fisheries resources provide food security and nutrition, economic growth and employment, poverty alleviation, community resilience, and the empowerment of licensed fishers and communities.

Honorable Speaker, Sir, these resources and associated habitats are under stress due to threats of high fishing pressure, increased coastal development, sedimentation loading, and pollution.

Background

Honorable Speaker, Sir, the estimated annual production of coastal commercial and subsistence fisheries is about 30,700 tons annually. This estimation is challenged by the hundreds of landing sites and the 850 coastal communities that depend on these resources for food and income.

Honorable Speaker Sir, the coastal fisheries development project's primary focus is to address these threats with clear goals and objectives: addressing overfishing in coral reef areas, supporting food security for our coastal and maritime communities, sustainably maximizing economic returns for our licensed fishers, and enhancing coastal fisheries management and conservation.

Last year (2023), the Ministry issued 2,816 inshore and 27 deep-water snapper (DWS) fishing licenses to support livelihoods and contribute to economic growth.

Recognizing the need for Fijians to access nutritious food and safe protein sources and support livelihoods, the Ministry provides accessibility to ice services from the 24 fisheries service centers across the country, with training delivered to licensed fishers and fishing cooperatives on the post-harvest and the use of ice to preserve the seafood quality.

Honorable Speaker, Sir, 30 fishing cooperatives have been registered, and appropriate training and equipment have been provided for the start-up. The primary purpose is to create investment and financial stability for fishers,

maximize their economic return from fishing, and give them access to any assistance provided through government or financial agencies.

Honorable Speaker, Sir, the Ministry deployed thirteen (13) fishing aggregation devices (FAD) to address overfishing in coral reef areas, relieve fishing pressure on the principal reef fish, and promote pelagic fishing to support local demand for pelagic fish.

Honorable Speaker, Sir, four (4) community projects were established in the Western Division for sandfish ranching and mangrove crab fattening to support the growing market demand for these coastal commodities.

Focus Activities for 2024 - 2025

Honorable Speaker, Sir, in this fiscal year, the Ministry will continue to support the coastal fisheries and scale up existing projects and activities to improve outcomes and effectiveness. The coastal development fisheries project has five (5) main work programs that include the following:

1. Pathway to market initiative that provides essential support for licensed fishers to access better markets, including the improvement of processes along the value chains

2. Exploring the pelagic and deep-water snapper fisheries will relieve fishing pressure on coral reef areas and maximize economic returns for licensed fishers and fishing cooperatives.
3. Scaling up the locally managed marine areas through species management, ranching, and the grow-out of cultured high-value coastal species such as sandfish.
4. Minimize illegal, unreported, unregulated fishing in Fiji's coastal waters through monitoring, compliance, and surveillance.
5. Training and awareness are needed to improve the coastal fisheries' resource value chain and the management of coastal fisheries resources.

Honorable Speaker Sir, the project underscores the need to put less pressure on the coral reef area, particularly on fishing key principal coral reef fish such as parrotfish, which has an important ecological role on the coral reefs. The focus is on exploring pelagic and deep-water snapper fishing to increase economic returns and create more opportunities for fishermen and fishing cooperatives. Equipping them with proper boats and fishing equipment and deploying fishing aggregation devices (FAD) links them to registered fishing cooperatives.

Honorable Speaker, Sir, the coastal development project also addresses the needs of communities living in the highlands, which depend on rivers and streams for food and income. It focuses on improving the value chain of the eel fishery in the highlands, which has an existing niche market in Fiji.

Honorable Speaker, Sir, the Ministry is also encouraging Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) to develop high-value coastal species for sustainability and to meet market demand. Most of our high-value coastal species are heavily fished and must be developed and improved to create income and opportunities for our communities and contribute to export earnings.

Honorable Speaker, Sir, the coastal development project will undertake fish collection trips in the maritime islands because accessing the primary market in urban areas is difficult. Fish collection trips will be conducted in Lau, Kadavu, Lomaiviti, and the Northern Division and Western Division islands to connect the fishers to the primary market.

Honorable Speaker, Sir, the Ministry will continue to undertake more awareness and focus training in communities and engage in exhibitions to educate and increase awareness of the importance of marine and fisheries resources.

Regarding illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing in coastal areas, the Honorable Speaker, Sir, and the Ministry will continue to increase monitoring, compliance, and surveillance in our coastal areas and ensure that users comply with all fisheries laws and regulations.

Honorable Speaker, Sir, much work is needed in the coastal area to ensure the management and development of coastal fisheries resources to meet the daily needs of Fijians. Still, the Ministry of Fisheries and Forestry is determined to deliver what is expected. The Ministry will ensure the proper fundamentals are set to support these projects, ensuring their longevity and effectiveness in relieving pressure on our depleted fish stocks.

Thank you for your attention.