

**Rear Admiral Hon. J. V. Bainimarama, CF(Mil), OSt.J, MSD, jssc, psc**

**Prime Minister and Minister for iTaukei Affairs and Sugar Industry**

**SPEECH AT THE LAUNCH OF THE SUGARCANE INDUSTRY WEBGIS PORTAL**

Canegrowers’ Building Hall Thur. 13 Nov, 2014

LAUTOKA 1900Hours

**Your Excellency, the Head of the European Union**

**Delegation for the Pacific;**

**The Executive Chair of FSC;**

**The Permanent Secretary for Sugar;**

**Industry Stakeholders;**

**Invited Guests;**

**Ladies and Gentlemen.**

Bula vinaka and a very good evening to you all.

I am delighted to be in the West this evening to officially launch the Sugar Cane Industry’s Web Geographical Information System or GIS Portal.

It’s a technological breakthrough that promises to revolutionise our management of the Sugar Cane Industry. We’re now able to digitize the whole of the cane belt at farm and plot level to get a *“real time”* picture of the performance of the Industry.

We’ll be getting a presentation on it later but this is essentially how it works: Using GPS - the satellite Global Positioning System – we can establish the precise parameters of our cane farms. We can walk around any farm with a GPS device and get the co-ordinates of those areas under cultivation and those areas that are fallow and where more can be grown.

It’s all digitized and stored in the Industry WebGIS Portal which is directly linked to the Fiji Sugar Corporation’s database. For each farm, we can enter all sorts of other information apart from its precise location and parameters: such things as the name of the grower, the farm number and sector, the cane access road used by the grower, the location of the nearest mill and the variety of the cane being grown.

What it gives us is an unrivalled picture not only of individual farms and the performance of that grower but of the entire Industry. We can evaluate the performance of particular sectors and even each of the four sugar mills. And we can monitor the tonnage harvested and make estimates of the expected total Industry tonnage much more accurately and quickly.

It's a wonderful new tool that marks a great leap forward in our ability to evaluate the Industry’s performance and allow the FSC, Government and other stakeholders to make better policy decisions and plan for the future.

This is a first in Fiji and I want to thank the European Union for its assistance and our Sugar Cane Industry stakeholders and members of my team for getting this important project off the ground.

It comes at a time of remarkable resurgence in the fortunes of the Industry, on which the fortunes of around 200,000 Fijians also depend.

When my Government took office in 2006, many had written off the Industry altogether. But we were determined to revive it and the hard work of many people over the past eight years has paid off.

Just look where we’ve come from: The uncertainty over the renewal of expiring ALTA leases; a 36 per cent cut in the price of our export sugar; the rising cost of production, the poor performance of our mills; the weak position of the Fiji Sugar Corporation.

And just look where we are now: The ALTA lease renewal issue resolved through the rental subsidy initiative which has benefited tenants and landowners alike; $116-million dollars invested in the upgrade of our three largest sugar mills as part of our drive to modernise the Industry and put it on a more secure footing; plus the deals we’ve negotiated for the benefit of sugar cane growers and which have flowed through the entire economy.

History was made last year when we secured the highest cane price ever paid to growers in the 132-years of sugar in Fiji - $88.49 per tonne. And I’m delighted to say that overall production in 2014 is eclipsing the performance of last year.

On the crush figures as at November 3rd, sugar production is up by 22 per cent. But more importantly, the amount of cane that it takes to produce a tonne of sugar is dramatically lower. Not long ago, it was taking more than 13 tonnes of cane to produce a tonne of sugar. Now what we call the TCTS is down to 8.1, in other words, just over eight tonnes of cane to produce a tonne of sugar.

This means we are finally starting to come closer to the world benchmark. We are unquestionably more efficient and that is good news for the Industry and good news for every Fijian.

It shows that the reforms that my Government has instituted are working and the investments we have made are paying dividends. Our three biggest mills are vastly more reliable and are extracting much more sugar from the crop. And we are making further investments to put the Industry on an even better footing – ethanol production, the new Penang Mill and a sugar refinery in Labasa.

Ladies and Gentlemen, all these initiatives form part of my Government’s overall plan to maintain the Sugar Cane Industry as a mainstay of the Fijian economy. We’d lost our way as an industry and, in doing so, put the welfare of 200,000 Fijians at risk. But with initiative, determination and a lot of hard work, we have put the Industry firmly back on track.

I keep talking about the need for Fiji to be a smarter nation – the vision that underpins our education revolution – and what we’re launching tonight is certainly a big step in that direction for sugar.

Within the space of a generation or so, our farmers have gone from using bullocks to plough their fields to using satellites to help them achieve better yields.

It’s an exciting time for sugar, just as it is for our nation. So it gives me great pleasure, Ladies and Gentlemen, to officially launch the *“Sugar Cane Industry WebGIS Portal”.*

Vinaka Vakalevu. Thank you.

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