

THE ELECTORAL COMMISSION

REPUBLIC OF FIJI

ANNUAL REPORT

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FOREWORD



It is an honour and great privilege to deliver the 2019 Annual Report of the Electoral Commission [**"EC"**] to Parliament as required by Section 75 (4) of the Constitution of the Republic of Fiji [**"Constitution"**].

The EC endeavoured in every way possible to achieve its goal *"A Platform for Fijians to express their Will with Confidence, Security and Freedom"* for the 2018 General Election. The year 2018 ended with the conclusion of the Electoral Petitions that were filed and subsequently withdrawn in the Court of Disputed Returns.

The year 2019 was mostly for review and strategy development. The Joint Report on the 2018 General Election as well as the recommendations for the consideration of Parliament was tabled and published. Our Secretary attended the first Standing Committee briefing on the Report as well.

The Fijian Elections Office [**"FEO"**] prepared the four (4) year Strategic Plan and launched the same for implementation. I verily believe the four (4) year Strategic Plan that was built from the last five (5) year Strategic Plan and the lessons learnt from the 2018 General Election will allow for detailed and thorough preparation of future election operations.

I welcome the move by the Ministry of Economy to separate the EC Budget from that of the FEO. This initiative fulfils the recommendations of the Multinational Observer Group [**"MOG"**] and bolsters the independence of the EC.

Whilst details are listed in the report, I wish to take this opportunity to thank my Commissioners, Supervisor of Elections [**"SoE"**] and especially Zubbi Kutti and Katalaini Tagicakibau for their dedication, commitment and enthusiasm during the term of the Commission.

Indeed, the 2018 General Election was a historic occasion of many successes and lessons learnt. My Commissioners stood by each other as we navigated through the currents. We are proud and honoured to have held these positions and we wish the Office the very best for the future.

God Bless Fiji.

Suresh Chandra
Chairperson

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- (i) Pursuant to section 75(4) of the Constitution, the EC is required to make an annual report to His Excellency the President concerning its activities and must submit a copy of its annual report to Parliament.
- (ii) This report is for the period 01 January 2019 to 31 December 2019 which is in line with the Calendar year.
- (iii) The EC received considerable support from development partners including visits to India and Australia Electoral Commissions to observe their respective electoral operations which were instructive and beneficial.
- (iv) The EC considered the Final Report by SoE on the 2018 General Election.
- (v) Key activities of the EC for 2019 included the following:
 - a. EC Meetings;
 - b. Meeting with Ms. Deidre Brook, Manager International, New Zealand Electoral Commission- attended by Chairperson Mr. Suresh Chandra;
 - c. Official Launch of the website for the Laws of Fiji by the Hon. Chief Justice, Mr. Anthony H.C.T. Gates – attended by Chairperson Mr. Suresh Chandra and Commissioner Margot Jenkins;
 - d. Election Visitors Programme on 2019 General Elections to Lok Sabha (House of the People) and some State Assemblies in India – attended by Chairperson Mr. Suresh Chandra and FEO Director Corporate Services Mr. Sanjeshwar Ram;
 - e. Announcement of the 2019 – 2020 Budget Address by Hon. Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum, Attorney General & Minister for Economy – attended by Chairperson Mr. Suresh Chandra;
 - f. Building Resources in Democracy, Governance and Elections [**"BRIDGE"**] Strategic Planning Workshop – attended by Commissioner Simone Naiduki;
 - g. 243rd Anniversary of the Independence of USA and the 50th Anniversary of the Apollo II Lunar Landing – attended by Chairperson Mr. Suresh Chandra;
 - h. Presentation of the EC Annual Report (2017 and 2018) and the 2018 General Election Joint Report by the EC and SoE to the President's Office as well as to the Secretary General to Parliament – attended by Chairperson Mr. Suresh Chandra, Commissioner Simone Naiduki, Commissioner Ratu Paula Halaiwalu, Commissioner Jawahar Lal and Commissioner Margot Jenkins;

- i. Fiji Day Celebration 2019 and the Reception by the First Lady – attended by Chairperson Mr. Suresh Chandra;
 - j. Opening of the Melanesian Spearhead Group **["MSG"]** meeting at FEO Ground floor conference room – attended by Chairperson Mr. Suresh Chandra;
 - k. Launch of the FEO Strategic Plan 2020 – 2023 – attended by Chairperson Mr. Suresh Chandra, Commissioner Simione Naiduki, Commissioner Margot Jenkins and Commissioner Kavita Raniga; and
 - l. Opening of the 21st Attorney-General's Conference – attended by Chairperson Mr Suresh Chandra and Commissioner Grahame Southwick.
- (vi) The EC was sufficiently funded to ensure it was able to meet its responsibilities as per the legal framework.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The EC served its final term under the current appointment in 2019. This year, in terms of the election cycle, it was devoted mostly to compilation and presentation of the Reports on the 2018 General Election, review and finalisation of the EC recommendations on the Election and the Electoral system as a whole and finally to prepare a handing over of the reigns to the incoming EC for the next General Election.

Pursuant to section 75(4) of the Constitution and section 14 (g) of the Electoral Act, 2014, the EC respectively delivered its 2017 Annual Report, 2018 Annual Report and the 2018 General Election Joint Report by the EC and the SoE to His Excellency the President, Major-General (Rt'd). Jioji Konousi Konrote and the Secretary-General to Parliament.

This Report, marks the current Commissioners' end of term since their appointment on 3 February 2017. This Report is now submitted for the period 1 January 2019 to 31 December 2019 to His Excellency the President, Major-General (Rt'd). Jioji Konousi Konrote and the Secretary-General to Parliament.

The February 2017 amendments to the Electoral Act also appointed the SoE, Mohammed Saneem, as the Secretary to the Commission. The EC notes that this instrumental change brought about by the legislature, significantly improved the process of managing elections. The SoE, provided timely advice to the EC in terms of the operational aspect of the elections.

The MOG Report on the 2018 General Election was released in 2019. The Report concluded that the 2018 General Election was credible and broadly represented the will of the Fijian people. The EC fully endorses this finding and once again acknowledges the support of various stakeholders in achieving this.

As in past practice, copies of this Report will each be given to the Minister Responsible for Elections, SoE and the Chairperson of the Constitutional Offices Commission

Reporting Structure



CHAIRPERSON OF THE
ELECTORAL COMMISSION
Mr. Suresh Chandra



COMMISSIONER
**Ratu Paula
Halaivalu**



COMMISSIONER
**Mr. Simone
Naiduki**



COMMISSIONER
**Mr. Grahame
Southwick**



COMMISSIONER
Mr. Jawahar Lal



COMMISSIONER
**Mrs. Margot
M. Jenkins**



COMMISSIONER
**Mrs. Kavita
Raniga**



SUPERVISOR OF ELECTIONS/ SECRETARY
TO THE ELECTORAL COMMISSION
Mr. Mohammed Saneem



EXECUTIVE SECRETARY- EC
Ms. Zubbi Kutti



PERSONAL ASSISTANT-EC
Ms. Katalaini T. Nimati

2.0 INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT

2.1 Secretariat

During the year, the EC established the Secretariat with two (2) full time staff. It has since undertaken to write its own reports and other correspondences.

The Ministry of Economy, based on a request from the EC, separated the FEO budget from the EC budget. This also marked one of the first steps taken by Fiji to implement the MOG Report. The Secretariat staff are now funded through the EC Budget.

2.2 Budget

The current budget covers the following:

Activities	Budget	Expenditure
Electoral Commission Allowance	12,500.00	8,000.00
Legal Fees	833.00	-
Marketing Costs	1,041.00	-
Staff Salaries	36,083.33	30,567.11
Postage and Courier Expense	41.67	-
Office Administration Expense	16,032.30	8,080.17
Telecommunication Expense	5,655.20	-
Travel and Accommodation Expense	10,458.33	846.12
EC and Office Meeting Expense	2,187.50	550.00
Tax Expense	3,262.49	852.87
Total EC Operating Budget and Expenses	88,095.82	48,896.27

This table shows the Electoral Commission Budget & Expenditure for January 2019 – December 2019.

2.3 Commissioner's Allowances

The Chairperson and Commissioners are part time. They are remunerated with a sitting allowance of \$500.00 per meeting and also for work undertaken on behalf of EC as and when required. In preparing the roadmap for the 2018 General Election, EC had meetings with political parties, the media, civil society organisations and other government agencies including the Fiji Police Force. Further, EC dealt with complaints, appeals, reviews and monitoring and other correspondences. Each Commissioner was allowed a meal allowance of \$50.00 per day for each meeting. In practice, they did not collect this allowance and opted for FEO to arrange and pay for their meals, as has been the practice.

3.0 THE ELECTORAL COMMISSION AND THE MULTINATIONAL OBSERVER GROUP

The Commission were proactive in providing clarifications to the MOG representatives as highlighted in the meetings mentioned below:

- 1st Meeting with the MOG Team on 06 October 2018 – discussed on implementation of the 2014 MOG Recommendations.
- 2nd Meeting with the MOG Team on 12 October 2018 – discussed on the awareness campaign for the General Election.
- 3rd Meeting with the MOG Team on 24 October 2018 – discussed on the roles and responsibilities of the EC.
- 4th Meeting with the MOG Team on 13 November 2018 – discussed on the complaints process and allocation of seats.
- 5th Meeting with the MOG Team on 16 November 2018 – debrief on the General Election.

4.0 THE ELECTORAL COMMISSION'S WORK IN 2019

4.1 EC Meetings:

- The EC held three (3) meetings from January 2019 – December 2019.
- These were the monthly EC meetings to discuss on general matters and correspondence of the Commission.

4.2 Various Events attended by the Commissioners:

Events attended by the Commissioners:

No.	Date	Activity
1	29 March 2019	Official Launch of the website for the Laws of Fiji by the HON. Chief Justice, Mr. Justice Anthony H.C.T. Gates – attended by Chairperson Mr. Suresh Chandra and Commissioner Ms Margot Jenkins.
2	10 May 2019 to 13 May 2019	Election Visitors Programme for the 2019 General Elections to Lok Sabha (House of the People) and some State Assemblies in India – attended by Chairperson Mr. Suresh Chandra and FEO Director Corporate Mr. Sanjeshwar Ram.
3	7 June 2019	Announcement of the 2019 -2020 Budget Address by the Hon. Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum, Attorney-General & Minister for Economy – attended by Chairperson Mr. Suresh Chandra.
4	19 June 2019 to 21 June 2019	BRIDGE Strategic Planning Workshop – attended by Commissioner Simone Naiduki.
5	17 July 2019	Presentation of the EC Annual Reports (2017 and 2018) and the 2018 General election Joint Report by the EC and SoE to H.E. The President and the Secretary-General to Parliament – attended by Chairperson Mr. Suresh Chandra, Commissioner Simone Naiduki, Commissioner Ratu Paula Halaiwalu, Commissioner Jawahar Lal, Commissioner Margot Jenkins and SoE
6	10 October 2019	Fiji Day Celebration 2019 and Reception by the First Lady – attended by Chairperson Mr. Suresh Chandra
7	12 November 2019	Opening of the MSG meeting at FEO Ground Floor Conference Room – attended by Chairperson Mr. Suresh Chandra.
8	14 November 2019	Launch of the FEO Strategic Plan 2020 – 2023 – attended by Chairperson Mr. Suresh Chandra, Commissioner Simone Naiduki, Commissioner Margot Jenkins and Commissioner Kavita Raniga
9	6 December 2019	Opening of the 21st Attorney-General's Conference – attended by Chairperson Mr. Suresh Chandra and Commissioner Grahame Southwick

4.3 Meeting with various Stakeholders:

The EC conducted various meetings with external stakeholders.

The list of meetings with stakeholders are as follows:

No.	Date	Activity
1	23 January 2019	Meeting with Ms. Deidre Brooks, Manager International, New Zealand Electoral Commission – attended by the Chairperson Mr. Suresh Chandra.
2	3 July 2019	Attending the 243rd Anniversary of the Independence of the USA and the 50th Anniversary of the Apollo II Lunar Landing – attended by Chairperson Mr. Suresh Chandra.
3	15 November 2019	Meeting with Ms. Deidre Brooks, Manager International, New Zealand Electoral Commission – attended by the Chairperson Mr. Suresh Chandra.

4.4 Overseas Visitors Program Participation

One (1) Invitation for overseas visitors' programs on electoral matters were received.

The event was the Election Visitors Programme on 2019 General Elections to Lok Sabha (House of the People) and some State Assemblies in India from 10 May 2019 to 13 May 2019 which was attended by the Chairperson Mr. Suresh Chandra and the FEO Director Corporate Services, Mr. Sanjeshwar Ram.

Note: All costs for the participants were funded by the Election Commission of India.

5.0 EXPRESSION OF GRATITUDE

My Commission concludes its term on a high note. The 2018 General Election was a huge success in terms of operational delivery and the electoral system. It was indeed an honour and a privilege to preside over such a historic event.

It was inspiring and at the same time encouraging to lead such a dynamic and experienced set of Commissioners to deliver one of the most important events in the country's calendar. I found that the Commissioners, from various backgrounds, were courteous, appreciative and respectful of the high office they held as well as of each other during deliberations of the Commission. It was through their commitment and support that the Commission remained firm on its decisions and dealt with issues in an independent and impartial manner.

The role of the EC, particularly in a country like Fiji, often is cast in different shades depending on the side of the political spectrum one stands. Quite often, we noticed that there were deliberate attempts to undermine the electoral process through mis-information or in some instances, deliberate attempts to create doubt. If allowed to continue without some measures of deterrence, this will prove harmful to Fiji's development and progression as a nation.

The SoE, Mohammed Saneem, served the EC well as the Secretary. The Commissions collective view is that Mr. Saneem demonstrates expert level capacity in the management of the operations, the handling of the business activities of the FEO and at the same time the public relations. We found that Mr. Saneem has worked tirelessly to build the capacity and the brand of the FEO.

Under his leadership, the FEO has produced so many staff with high capacities in elections in such a short time. His special interest in innovation and continuous improvement has seen the FEO become a leading election management body in the region. The EC congratulates him on his efforts and achievements.

The FEO has risen to become a mature election management body within a span of five (5) years since its establishment. One walk through the Office in Suva will certainly reflect this. The staff of the FEO are both hardworking and committed to the delivery of clean and fair elections. There is a great amount of meticulousness in their work and one can surely feel the level of preparedness when participating in an FEO event. The capacity building initiatives in the FEO are surely paying good dividend.

We also express our gratitude to Government and all political parties for the degree of cooperation we have experienced. Also to the foreign governments and overseas organisations, the media, civil society organisations, the transport industry and the Fiji Police Force for their assistance in various capacities.

Finally, we wish to thank wholeheartedly the people of Fiji for their full, indeed enthusiastic, participation in the 2018 General Election.

All members of the Commission feel it has been a great honour to be appointed to serve the country on the EC, and we extend our best wishes to the incoming members of the EC.

Dated this 31 day of January 2020



SURESH CHANDRA

Chairperson of the Electoral Commission