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MR SPEAKER TOOK THE CHAIR AT 10.00 A.M.

OPENING PRAYER

MR SPEAKER (T. TURA): All be seated. I will call the House to Order. First of all, I would like to thank our Chaplain for the outstanding message for us all. Let that be a warning to all of us and I hope that you do not take the wrong path, but the path to Jesus.

I have some announcements to make. Obituaries.

Our first obituary notices is Mama Sally Hosking of Matavera. I know the Honourable Member for Matavera raised it yesterday, I would like to include it into my announcement for today. On behalf of Members of Parliament of the Cook Islands, I would like to convey our deepest condolences to the family of Mama Sally Hosking, our condolences to you all.

Our second notice is Papa Marama Moo Lindsay of Ruatonga/Avatiu. Again, we, Members of Parliament of the Cook Islands, would like to extend our sincerest condolences to the family of Papa Marama Moo Lindsay here in the Cook Islands, in New Zealand and Australia.

I would also like to convey our sympathies to every Cook Islands families who have lost a loved one in their family, do know that our thoughts are with you and may God bless you all.

Honourable Members, we have come to Question Time. This will be for 30 minutes.

QUESTION TIME

I would like to call upon the Honourable Minister, Rose Toki-Brown, to please take the Floor and to respond to a question that was asked of yesterday.

HON. R. TOKI-BROWN: Kia Orana everybody, Mr Speaker, Clerk, staff of Parliament, Members of Parliament on the Government side and the Opposition side, our people listening in to our Sitting this morning, Kia Orana in the Name of our Lord.

In response to the question raised yesterday by the Honourable Member Tetangi Matapo regarding dental services on the island of Mangaia, here are my findings. It is true that our Dentist from Mangaia have arrived and she is here because of her father. About two months ago, an Electrician installed a dental equipment and our Dentist from Mangaia confirmed that she is waiting for the

return of the Electrician who had installed this equipment that is found to be faulty. However, there is a process in dealing with these matters that is managed by Officials at an Operational Level. But I would like to thank the Honourable Member for bringing this to our attention so that we may be able to do something about it. I would also like to thank our Dentist from Mangaia for the good work she does regardless of the equipment she has. I believe that when you go back to Mangaia, this problem will be sorted. Thank you very much.

I was under the influence that the Member of Parliament will rise to acknowledge all the equipment that was presented to Mangaia, including an ambulance. Never mind, work is being done and the ambulance has been delivered, we believe that this will be an asset for the people of Mangaia. Thank you.

MR SPEAKER: Thank you Honourable Minister. Now I see the Honourable Minister George Angene; you have the Floor.

HON. G. ANGENE: Thank you Mr Speaker for giving me this opportunity and to the Member of Parliament for Matavera, thank you for allowing some time for me to speak.

Before I begin with my question or speech, the Scripture says, *“Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom”*. *“Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path”*.

My question Mr Speaker and those listening in from the Cook Islands and from outside of the Cook Islands, is directed to the Honourable Leader of the Opposition. Honourable Leader, I was very disappointed with an article that was published in the Cook Islands Newspaper last week that was written by the CEO of the Opposition on 18 May 2022. The article stated that this person will sue the Government. Mr Speaker, I am going to be tough on this topic because this man will not be suing the Government only, he will also be suing the people of the Cook Islands. Who is the Government of the Cook Islands? It is the people of the Cook Islands. Who gave the authority to such person to sue the Government? We will not be the only Government in power, there will be another Government who will take over.

HON. T. PUPUKE BROWNE: Point of Order Mr Speaker.

MR SPEAKER: Honourable Minister, please. I see the Leader of the Opposition. Kia Orana and welcome back to Parliament.

HON. T. PUPUKE BROWNE: Thank you. Could I please ask the Minister to ask his question?

MR SPEAKER: I was going to do that. Honourable Minister, can you ask your question please?

HON. G. ANGENE: Thank you Mr Speaker and thank you Honourable Leader of the Opposition. My question is, do you support the CEO of the Opposition for suing the Government? Yes or no? Simple answer!

MR SPEAKER: Thank you Honourable Minister. I can see the Hon Leader of the Opposition, the Honourable Tina Pupuke Browne; you have the Floor.

HON. T. PUPUKE BROWNE: Kia Orana Mr Speaker and Kia Orana to all Honourable Members of this House, the Government side and the Opposition side, Kia Orana in the Name of the Father. To those listening in and watching us on livestream, Kia Orana. The answer to this question is not a simple yes or no.

First of all, the CEO for the Office of the Opposition is also the President of the Organisation called Friends of Fiji. The article he wrote with Cook Islands News, he wrote that article as President of that Organisation.

I looked at the depth of this writing and just like the Prime Minister, I consulted with some of the senior-level lawyers on the island. This is an issue that none of us on the Immigration Select Panel was aware of. During the consultation process, nobody brought this to our attention. Honourable Minister, under our Constitution, it says that we cannot be biased with people. Just like in the United States of America, if you have dark coloured skin, there is a separate law that applies to you. If you have white coloured skin, there is also a separate law that applies to you.

Under our Constitution, colours white, yellow and black are the same, even brown for the Northern and Southern Group Islands. If we look at this issue very closely, there is an issue in our Immigration Act that talks about the era of the whites and era of the blacks. To me, as I am his boss in the Office of the Opposition, it made sense because I have read the Constitution. If they feel that they want to take an issue to court, they have the rights to do so and we should not obstruct their rights. Therefore, Honourable Minister, if you really look deep in your heart, our laws says that we should not be biased with white coloured people and dark coloured people.

That is my answer Honourable Minister, unless you have another Supplementary Question?

MR SPEAKER: Thank you Honourable Leader of the Opposition. I see the Honourable Minister, George Angene.

HON. G. ANGENE: Thank you Mr Speaker and thank you to the Leader of the Opposition, the Honourable Tina Pupukey Browne. I heard you talking about the two colours, black and white. These colours are inside of me and I have been using them from the beginning as Tupapa is on the ball. However, I have no grudges against colours anymore. My favourite colours are green and yellow and that is it.

Mr Speaker, I have a Supplementary Question to the Leader of the Opposition. She never answered my question with a yes or no. She exaggerated, hence my Supplementary Question. Honourable Leader of the Opposition, the question is, do you support changes to be done to the Permanent Residency process as you are a Member of the Immigration Select Panel?

MR SPEAKER: Thank you Honourable Minister. I see the Honourable Leader of the Opposition; you have the Floor.

HON. T. PUPUKE BROWNE: Honourable Minister, the answer to your question is yes, I do support the idea of reviewing such proposal because we, the Immigration Select Panel Committee,

no one has ever raised this problem with us. If only we were given the opportunity to address this issue by raising it with us, then we will be able to look into it. This article was published after we submitted our report to Parliament. Thank you.

MR SPEAKER: Order! Order! Thank you Honourable Leader of the Opposition. Now, I see the Honourable Vaine Mokoroa; you have the Floor.

HON. V. MOKOROA: Thank you Honourable Speaker and good morning to all of us. My question is directed to the Leader of the Opposition. My question has nothing to do with Immigration, it is for Sports.

Listening to the different views of the Opposition about cutting appropriation allocations et cetera, my question as Minister of Sports, if you do succeed with the upcoming General Election, are you going to cancel the Cook Islands Games? Yes or No?

MR SPEAKER: Thank you Honourable Minister. I see the Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

HON. T. PUPUKE BROWNE: Kia Orana to you Honourable Minister of Sports.

I really enjoyed our dinner with the President of the Olympic Committee. That was the first dinner I went to where all the invitees that attended were actual sports people like myself, I won gold medal from the last game and the Prime Minister won his gold medal from Boxing, even the Minister of Sports won his gold medal from touch rugby. That night was beautiful. It was great listening to the President of Sports Association acknowledging the Government for the funding they gave for Sports.

Sports is not new to me, I support Sports. What you are hearing, I am sure you have hearing problems. We have no intention of cancelling the Cook Islands Games. What for? Sports is beneficial not only for our health, but to help those with health problems like NCDs. Looking around in this Honourable House, I can see that the majority of us are close to reaching NCD or is in the state of NCD. We need to encourage Sports, in fact, when we become the Government, we will increase the funds allocated for Sports. A classic example Honourable Minister, our Rakahanga team have been fundraising since last year. We have recruited the best sports players from around the world. We also looked at the type of sports with the most gold medals such as weight lifting, boxing and those individual sports, those are the sports that we aim to go for so we may score more gold medals. Regardless of the small number of participants we had in our Rakahanga team compared to the other teams from the North like Penrhyn and Manihiki, we scored the most gold medals in the Cook Islands Games from the Northern Group. Our team had the highest number of participants when we marched onto the fields that had more people Rarotonga than Rakahanga. I know that the Rakahanga team is preparing themselves and quite in fact, they are looking forward to the Cook Islands Games to be held in September.

MR SPEAKER: Thank you Honourable Member. Honourable Members on the Government side, please refrain from asking the Leader of the Opposition questions as you are putting pressure and more stress on her. Now, I recognise the Honourable Vaitoti Tupa; you have the Floor.

MR V. TUPA: Thank you Mr Speaker. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to ask my question. Before I do so, may I be allowed with five seconds to greet our former Queens Representative, Sir Fred Goodwin and his wife Mrs Ina Goodwin, they are currently here in Rarotonga on holiday and will return to New Zealand in the weekend. Papa Fred and Mama Ina, on behalf of Members of Parliament of the Cook Islands and staff of Parliament, we extend our love to the both of you in this short visit of yours to our country and wishes you all the best when you go back.

Back to Question Time, my question Mr Speaker is supposed to be directed to the Government, but then I said to myself because the Prime Minister mentioned about road projects, especially in Avatiu and yet, the allocations had already been allocated last year. It was also confirmed that once the roads are completed in Avatiu, it will move to Turangi. Nevertheless, I will include Matavera in that line of projects.

My question is, as I could see the Government addressing their questions to the Opposition side, therefore, I would like to change the direction of my question. My question is therefore directed to the Honourable Member of Ngatangia. Yesterday, he heard the Prime Minister saying that the roads in Turangi will be tar-sealed after Avatiu. The question is, with regards to what the Prime Minister said yesterday about tar-sealing the roads in Turangi and around Ngatangia, what do you think of that?

MR SPEAKER: Thank you Honourable Member. I see the Honourable Member Tama Tuavera; you have the Floor.

MR T. TUAVERA: Firstly, Kia Orana to you all on that side of the House and Kia Orana to us all on this side of the House. I am shocked at this question but I am also happy that he had asked me this question.

I want the people of my Constituency of Ngatangia to hear the generosity given by the Prime Minister, the Government and ICI because as we know, the funding for this project has already been allocated in the Appropriation last year. I am very happy because I know this road will go inland to Turangi because if it had gone up to Avatiu valley, then it should go to Turangi valley as well.

Not forgetting the biggest water catchment on the island in Avana, so, to ICI and the Prime Minister, the people of Ngatangia would like to acknowledge your generosity because we know that this project is about to begin within two weeks' time. I would also like to thank TRIAD Pacific Petroleum Limited because they are the contractors for this project. To our people in Ngatangia, let us clap in joy because this blessing will soon begin in our village. I thank my colleague from Matavera for raising this question.

MR SPEAKER: Thank you Honourable Member. This tells you to never trust your friends. I see the Honourable Member Nooroa Baker; you have the Floor.

MR N. BAKER: Thank you Mr Speaker. My question is directed to the Member of Parliament for Pukapuka/Nassau, the Honourable Tingika Elikana. I was listening to his speech yesterday, it was just beautiful. I heard him say that tourism will start in the North and fish and taro will be exported to the Northern Group Islands. So, my question to him is, why not import it to Rarotonga instead, we are waiting for the fish and taro from that side? Can it be shipped to Rarotonga? We may be able to pay your money back?

MR SPEAKER: Honourable Member, I will have to interrupt you. You may answer the question tomorrow.

Honourable Members, before we go onto the Orders of the Day, I had an announcement that I have missed at the start of our Sitting. Please bear with me I have an announcement to deliver this morning.

I would like to welcome to our Honourable House, a new staff member to the Parliament of the Cook Islands family, Mr Tere Patia who is a former Police Officer Inspector. Mr Patia, who will be working alongside with Mr Nana Taruia, has been appointed as one of our Sergeant of Arms in our Honourable House. Welcome to Parliament Mr Patia. I would also like to bid farewell to Mr Junior Takai, who was previously in this role. Thanks you very much for your service to Parliament Mr Takai, I wish you well as you embark on your new career.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

Interrupted debate on the Second Reading of the Appropriation Bill 2022.

Our last speaker on the Floor yesterday was the Honourable William Heather. You have nine more minutes speaking time Honourable Member and you may continue with your debate.

MR W. HEATHER: Thank you very much Mr Speaker. Greetings to all of us in this House. Yesterday, I was talking about the reduction in exportation of our agricultural products to New Zealand. We all know the consequences when an insect called *fruit flies* arrived into our country. When our mangoes and pawpaws are ready, we would only cultivate 30 percent of the harvests because of the effect of the fruit fly. That was the problem that we were experiencing in those times as I was a planter back then. Having considered all the things that has been discussed, one of the main issues that we discovered here in Rarotonga is that the planting sections had reduced in terms of land masses. There are more people building houses nowadays Mr Speaker and we are hoping to bring incentives to our people to plant. This morning, I am going to propose for this service to be provided so we may improve our agriculture in our country.

I also want the Ministry of Health to be considered which I will say that it had failed and the reason being is because people with NCD are being overlooked and are dying. This is the reason why there is an increase with NCD, it is because we have over-emphasized on vaccinating our people rather than looking at other areas in terms of their health. So, I would like to ask the Minister of Health if she can investigate to see the numbers of people who have died with NCD during COVID.

Can you also retrieve some data on patients being referred from the Outer Islands to Rarotonga because we, the Opposition, have discussed in sending Medical Officers to the Outer Islands.

I would also want to touch on the Ministry of Internal Affairs in regards to the grants that is given to our youth, our youth of the future. Let us consider it Members of this House, some of our young people in this group will be standing as Members of Parliament in the future, in this House. There is no doubt about this because I noticed that \$45,000 has been appropriated, but I suggest \$100 thousand would be more sufficient.

There are also other developments that we see on our island and that is in regards to churches and also their cemeteries and also the Ariki Palaces. This is part of the considerations that we need to look at in regard to the 200 years celebration of the arrival of the Gospel. So I am highlighting these areas for you, Honourable Prime Minister and all those people who have been assisting you in putting up the appropriation for this year to consider these things.

Now, I would like to talk about the Ministry of Transport. There have been an increase of traffic here on Rarotonga and I recommend that we give support for our public transport so that the services for our people can be improved. We can also see that vehicles on our main roads are being over-loaded and we see them operating on our roads today. Thank you Mr Speaker.

MR SPEAKER: Thank you Honourable Member. I see the Honourable Member for Oneroa; you have the Floor.

MR W. KAREROA: Kia Orana Mr Speaker. To the Government side, Kia Orana and to the Opposition side, Kia Orana. To our Leader who have just returned and is in our midst today, Kia Orana. Kia Orana to the staff of Parliament and to the Interpreters.

Mr Speaker, can I have a short moment to give greetings to my Constituency? It will not be long. I want to say greetings to the Traditional Leaders on Mangaia and Numangatini Ariki whom I met yesterday and greetings to you all. To my Constituency of Oneroa and to all the people in this village, Kia Orana. To my Committee Members in this village, a special greetings to you and also Teariki Heather's who have come to visit Mangaia. I believe you have gone into my Constituency of Oneroa and I know that you are raising some campaign awareness in my village. Thank you to you and I would encourage you to continue. Those are my people and they are hard to convince. It is up to you what sweets you are going to give but you waited until I come to Rarotonga then you went over. It is alright as that is one of the things that we can do.

Now we come back to the Appropriation Bill that is called the 'Budget of Faith'. I have a Book and mine is the James Version, which is where my faith is. It is not in the two Books that we are looking at today. However, we have been hearing often especially from your side of the House of a light at the end of the tunnel. It appears to me though that this light at the end of the tunnel is getting dim. Maybe that is the reason why this Appropriation Bill is called the 'Budget of Faith'. Maybe we do not know, maybe these Books contains secrets.

I would like to thank the PAC Committee, even though I was not able to attend, please be patient with me. When we look at this Appropriation and when you read the Report from the PAC, there

is a lot of important things for consideration. Only the important parts has been included in that Report.

I am looking at this Report and there is limited in the Opposition and it seems there is some secrecy in this Report. You can easily see from the Book of the Faith but when I look at our Recommendations, they are very minimal. So I would say these recommendations is better than from the Book of faith.

There are a lot of mention by Members of this House about the Minimum Wage of \$8.50. If I were present in that meeting I would have recommended \$12 and let the people responsible find how they can get to this. Even the pensioners, there is an increase of \$20. If I were present in that PAC meeting, I would have recommended for \$50.

So when we return to the Book of Faith, especially the Net take Rule, when we look at this very closely, it is comprehensively written. It shows that the Net take Rule is 30 percent, dictating a healthy Government. So when it falls below 35 percent, it dictates how unhealthy the GDP is. So, there is a need to continue with this until we reach the 65 percent mark but we have to be careful not to exceed.

So, what are our recovery options? There are many options of how we can achieve our recovery options. We have the nodules available in our ocean. Please try to get that going so that we can reap the benefits. Even though I had been strong in objecting to the development of nodules, but I am now seeing the benefits of this to our country.

In regards to water rates and for people to pay, I object to this proposal. I am one of the landowners of the water catchment in Avatiu and a decision is already in place that were made by Landowners for the Government not to be generating any income out of this catchment from people. As soon as the Government starts charging water rates, Landowners will charge the Government for our water catchments. But this is an agreement that was made between us the Landowners and the Government, for water not to be charged.

In this Book, I see a \$0.5 million for Mangaia and Mauke. This appropriation has been set aside for the renovation of Government buildings on these islands. I would like to thank the Government for providing this support because the project had started. At present, there is a shelter being built for COVID and is located behind the hospital, which is near completion but they are waiting for the arrival of the building materials on the cargo boats so they may complete these Government buildings.

One important area that requires recognition is our Island Council Members in Mangaia, especially during COVID. They were very strong in maintaining border restrictions, restricting flights to Mangaia to protect us from COVID. This has been one of the major issues that have we discussed in one of our meetings. We were supposed to open our border on the 18th April, but our Council Members protested to leave it closed until 01st of this month.

So, as of today, there has been no cases on Mangaia and our border is open. I would like to thank the Honourable Minister Rose Toki Brown for supporting our Council in keeping our border closed

until 01st of May. I enjoyed my time when the border was closed because I had a long break, I was able to do my taro patches, I had time to go fishing and so on. But I noticed that with us Members of Parliament especially, this is an Election year, I extend my encouragement to one and all. Be strong and good luck in finding ways to get support from your Constituency.

Finally, Mr Speaker, I would like to thank the people of my Constituency. I know that there is a shortage of fuel on our island and I could not do much because because of shipping services. Many of our shops are low in stock as well with many products unavailable including the favourite green bottles. Please be patient and do not blame me. Thank you Mr Speaker.

MR SPEAKER: Thank you Honourable Wesley Kareroa. Now, I see the Member for Mitiaro, Tuakeu Tangatapoto; you have the Floor.

MR T. TANGATAPOTO: Kia Orana Mr Speaker and all our staff. Mr Prime Minister, your Cabinet Ministers and Members of the Government. To the Leader of the Opposition and your Members of Parliament on your side, Kia Orana. To our people listening into Parliament this morning, greetings.

To our people on the island of Mitiaro, our traditional chiefs and all the Denomination Churches and your Leaders, the Island Government and all the people on Mitiaro, young and old, greetings. A special greetings to my very hard working Committee for entrusting me your faith to be the voice of Mitiaro for the last 4 years, thank you.

Mr Speaker, I was not really going to speak because I support what the Minister of Health was saying that Members who do not speak much does a lot of work. However, because of the comments by the Members of the Opposition in supporting the Budget and thanking the Government for the many things that they have requested and are now taking place on our island, this indicate that we think alike. So, how can I sit down and not say anything.

Before I present my full support to the Budget, I would like to illustrate some of the things that have happened to me in this last four years in parliament especially the request that I put forward to government throughout this time. I do understand that this is not only in my case this is also a case in the other islands that have not doctor residing on the island. We do have health cases referred to Rarotonga but many times they end up in worst situation.

Maybe we can say that this is because the nurses assigned to the Outer Islands do not have the same medical knowledge and skills of the doctors in Rarotonga. You might recall back in 2020 I had a situation on my island of Mitiaro with two ladies passing away within a space of one week and I really mourned for them. I brought a notion into this House that we should stop talking about being too late. So today I would like to give my thanks to government and the Minister of Health and her workers for the facility that has been built in Mitiaro maybe two or three weeks ago. I want announce in this House that this facility will put us in a situation that we are no different on Mitiaro to those of you here on Rarotonga. Since then I do believe this issue has been addressed and I thank the Minister and our government and the workers for ensuring we do not go through this situation again.

Before I entered into this House one of the major issues on the island was regarding water. Like one of my colleague was saying before was that our drinking water is not from underground but from the sky. What this means is that when the island is dry and no rainfall for a month there is no water. However, there is a location where old people advised we could get clean water but the problems is there is only a limited storage of 6 thousand litres sometime the water won't reach the tank. Today, on behalf of all the people of Mitiaro I would like to express our full thanks to the Prime Minister, the government especially the Minister of ICI for providing this facility on the island to address this major problem.

I would also like to offer my thanks to the Minister of Health for the ambulance that has been given to us. This is history in the making as this is the first time in our history that the island had received an ambulance. Mr Speaker, like I said before my focus is based upon the phrase to let your actions speak for itself. That means, I will not reach 20 minutes and my speech will be finished.

When we came through the pandemic this was a great concern to me because I thought maybe the government workers will be laid off and during my time in government. Like it was mentioned yesterday we do not want a repetition of 1996-97 in our country. I was so happy in my heart we have been able through the last two years to steer our canoe through these problems without any real issues. I have been following our scripture readings throughout these days and I can confirm that the COVID is mentioned in the Bible as the beast that has stood before us to stop our progress however through our working together with the three pillars on the island we have been able to defeat this beast. We have two more days in our scripture readings and it will confirm by the end that our Lord Jesus has defeated this beast under his feet and preventing us from getting into so much serious trouble.

On behalf of the traditional leaders and the people of the island of Mitiaro through me I would like to say we support this Appropriation Bill. Thank you.

MR SPEAKER: Thank you Honourable for Nukuroa. I see the Leader of the Opposition the Honourable Member for Rakahanga, you have the Floor.

HON. T. PUPUKE BROWNE: Thank you Mr Speaker. Earlier in question times I extended my greetings to those of us in the House. I now wish to extend these greetings to the Queens Representative and Lady Marsters, to our Ui Ariki and Aronga Mana, to the Religious Advisory Council and our various denominations and in particular to the people of Rakahanga, to our three denominations in Rakahanga the CICC, the Catholic and the SDA, to the Mayor of the island and the Island Council and the Public servant, to the EO, to all our elderly people and our children and those who hold positions in the various organisations on the island. If I have missed out anyone my apologies and to all those who are watching live stream and those listening on the radio greetings to you all in the name of our Heavenly Father.

In the Prime Ministers Budget speech, he seems to take all the credit for how our country has handled the pandemic. I noticed that he grouped the Democratic Party together with the United Party and accused us of fearmongering meaning that we were putting fear into our people about COVID-19 and secondly we the Democratic Party was against lifting the border. That is so far from the truth. First, let me remind the Prime Minister and this House that it was us, me that

suggested right at the start when we were alerted to the pandemic that we close the border. And this was so immediately after we had consultation at the Auditorium with TMO and the Crown Law Office. Members will recall that the issue at the time was would it be unconstitutional if Cook Islanders were denied entry into the Cook Islands. Should the border be closed? The advice we got from the Crown Law at the time was that closing the border will not be unconstitutional.

MR SPEAKER: Honourable Member I have to disrupt you please. It is now time for recess. You can continue when we come back. Sitting will be resumed at 12.00 p.m.

Sitting suspended at 11.29 a.m.

Sitting resumed at 12.00 p.m.

MR SPEAKER: All be seated. Before we suspended, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition Tina Pupuke Browne was on the Floor. You may continue Honourable Member.

HON. T. PUPUKE BROWNE: Mr Speaker, before we adjourned, I was talking about the meeting that we had at the Auditorium with the TMO Officials and Crown Law Office. One of the issues that was being discussed was if we were to close the border what would be the effect as far as Cook Islanders are concerned.

The advice from the Crown Law was that closing the border will not be unconstitutional because we will not be denying entry but simply delaying it. I was therefore surprised when I suggested for the border to be closed the former Prime Minister, the Deputy Prime Minister now the Prime Minister and our colleagues across the Floor laughed at the suggestion claiming it would be unconstitutional. This was so notwithstanding the advice given at the auditorium.

Not long after that maybe two or three weeks, New Zealand closed its border. Government panicked. The former Prime Minister called us back into the House to pass our first COVID-19 legislation to allow for the border to be closed and we supported that legislation. All of this will be check on the Hansard.

At the early stages of the pandemic we approached government on a number of occasions offering our help if needed, indicating that we should work together in the best interest of our country. That offer was not welcomed. And then I heard, yesterday I think it might have been, yes yesterday from two of my colleagues from the North namely the Member of Parliament for Wales and the Member of Parliament for Tongareva suggesting that we have not been working together or co-operating with government.

I looked up the definition of co-operation. I went to Mr Google and asked him what it means. The meaning is quite clear, co-operation means the action or process of working together to the same end. So it is not making decisions on your own and without us having an input and then expecting us to agree, that is not co-operation or working together.

Over the last two years, we have seen how the pandemic affected our economy. We understood the need to protect our people by keeping the border closed but we were also very much aware of

the impact this would have on our economy. We were therefore very supportive of the border being lifted once a good majority of our people were vaccinated. Now the only difference between government and us the Democratic Party is that we would have lifted the border earlier so we could start the recovery earlier.

We understood at an early stage that there will come a day when we will have to learn to live with this virus. That day has come. So Prime Minister it was very misleading to say that the Democratic were fearmongering.

I should perhaps add at this point that going through the Budget Speech and given that Members have only a limited time to speak on the merits and principles I have chosen some only of the areas that is covered in the Budget Speech. These are the areas I consider are priority.

The PM claims that notwithstanding uncertainties the economic outlook is showing early positive signs. I say that this is because his forecast is overly optimistic. One of the uncertainties he refers to is the expectation of higher inflation over the next two years. I agree we have no control whatsoever over inflation.

The Prime Minister refers to global issues and the Russian war against Ukraine and it will get worse not better, worse. Our country, Mr Speaker has already felt inflation. Simple things like butter that used to be seven dollars is now 12.50, corned beef used to be 7.50 now 10 dollars and this is in Rarotonga. Imagine how much these items will cost in the Northern Group and any of the other Pa Enea. So the outlook in the Budget Speech is based on very optimistic forecast.

In revenue from tourism, tax, et cetera and in my view downplays the very real uncertainties that we face.

Minimum Wage increase. Mr Speaker, an increase of fifty cents on the Minimum Wage will have no effect on the workers and what they take home. It is a desperate attempt to buy votes but no effect on the worker's pay. For a worker in Rarohanga an extra \$17 a week will not even get him two kilos of frozen chicken.

The reality is that we are competing with New Zealand for the same pool of workers. The question we should ask ourselves is how much a fifty cents increase we will have when New Zealand is paying \$21? The answer is zero.

A Democratic government will do the right thing. We will pay \$12 per hour. Why? Twenty one years ago, the wage was \$7.50 and that was 21 years ago. The Prime Minister states that the increase does not happen overnight.

MR SPEAKER: Thank you Honourable Member. I see the Honourable Vaitoti Tupa; you have the Floor.

MR V. TUPA: Mr Speaker, I stand to move a Motion:

That speaking time for the Leader of the Opposition is extended to enable her to continue with her response to the Ministerial Statement by the Prime Minister

Mr Speaker, the extension of speaking time, I am seeking the support of all the Members so that our Leader of the Opposition can continue until she finishes her response to the speech of the Prime Minister; rather than the allocation of 10 minutes. I am seeking the support of every Member of this Parliament so that the Leader of the Opposition can continue and finish her response to the Prime Minister's Ministerial Statement.

MR SPEAKER: Honourable Member, are you asking for the Honourable Leader of the Opposition to end her speech in 10 minutes?

MR V. TUPA: Mr Speaker, if her speech exceeds 10 minutes, then I seek the support of the Speaker and all the Members of Parliament so that the Leader of the Opposition can finish her speech. I believe that there is only one more page but if it extends over the 10 minutes, then I seek for the support of the House. Thank you.

MR SPEAKER: I see the Prime Minister; you have the Floor.

HON. M. BROWN: Thank you Mr Speaker. I would be quite happy to support a Motion to increase the Honourable Leader of the Opposition speaking time to double the normal extension from 10 minutes to 20 minutes because I am enjoying listening to her right now Mr Speaker. Thank you.

MR SPEAKER: Honourable Members, I have a Standing Orders to abide to but with the request on the Floor, I will allow it. So, can I have a Secunder to the motion please?

MR T. ELIKANA: Mr Speaker, the normal course would be to move a Motion to suspend the Standing Orders first, but I think you have made it clear that you are inclined to it. I am rising to support the leader of the government, the Prime Minister and also in support of the Motion put forward by the Honourable Member for Matavera.

As I can hear those with big businesses in the Private Sector starting to enjoy the speech in terms of affordability for their new employees with a new rate of Minimum Wage. Thank you very much.

Seconded by the Honourable Tingika Elikana

MR SPEAKER: I will put the Question.

The Question is:

That the Motion be agreed to?

Motion agreed to

Honourable Leader of the Opposition, you may continue.

HON. T. PUPUKE BROWN: As I was saying the Budget speech states that the increase of the Minimum Wage is something that does not happen overnight. Twenty one years can hardly be described as overnight. It is such a long time to wait for our low paid public servants to receive an increase.

Currently, we are short of labour force by 700 workers. Many have left because of better pay overseas. And there are two groups of workers our locals and also the foreign workers. And this is the funny thing the Recovery Roadmap invested money in upskilling our labour force. This is to prepare us for the return of the tourist. So, what has happened? These workers many of whom are foreign workers have moved to New Zealand and taking with them the skills that we paid for.

Now, the new plan is that we will subsidise the cost of bringing in replacement workers. Who will doubtlessly because they will get better pay in New Zealand anyway. If government is serious in maintaining our workforce. We will do two things. One we priorities our spending not new money, we priorities our spending and increase the wages for public servants to \$12 per hour. Effective from 21 July 2022.

Increase of old age pension. The twenty dollars increase is another desperate attempt to buy votes. Let me remind this house that these are people whose accounts this government raided. Whose savings continued to be taxed and who were evicted from the Are Pa Metua last year. Fifty dollars is peddely, hardly enough to ward off inflation. Let alone to compensate them for the way they had been treated in the last four years. This government should do the right thing. We prioritise spending and give our elderly an increase of \$300 a month and do not tax them. That is what a Democratic government will do.

In his Budget speech the Prime Minister states and I am quoting from the Budget speech, having referred to the tourism industry as an interium fix. He states, but we know that we must look beyond tourism to grow our economy over the longer term, I've said before that economic diversification has always been on our agenda and this challenge cannot be addressed overnight. This is the second time the word overnight is used in the Budget speech.

And on this second occassion 12 years is a long time for the diversification agenda in the plan to be implemented. It is unfortunate that this government has over the last 12 years put all our eggs in the one basket. Government has relied on tourism to grow their economy driven by the Private Sector. One only needs to look at Governments National Sustainable Development Plan to see other industries mentioned but to this day government has not seriously invested in any other industry except tourism. A Democratic Government will increase the private sector through entrepreneuring programs in agriculture, fisheries, education, forestry and new internet economy for example. Let me give you some examples, we are short of technical experts a good size of our Budget is spent on hiring overseas consultants to provide the technical expertise that we lacked. Today and for the last twelve years our students at university have had to take student loans to assist with their cost at university. Naturally they remain in New Zealand to pay off their loans. A Democratic Government economic foundation will be built by investing heavily in our children. This is all possible, first, you re-divert the funds that are budgeted for expense of consultants and

instead, subsidize the cost of educating our children by up to 50 percent of the cost. That systems should also extend to those that have finished university working in New Zealand but paying off student loans. Mr Speaker, all of this can be done in this Financial Year.

I want to talk about Development Partners because when I go through the Estimate Book 1 there are graphs there that indicate the contribution that we are receiving from Country Development Partners. My understanding is that we have diplomatic relations with 56 countries altogether and these countries Mr Speaker could very well be Development Partners with us. However, when we look in the Budget Book we only have 4 Country Development Partners, we have New Zealand, Japan, Australia and the European Union. I have to say Prime Minister that the tables provided in the Estimate at Page 194 and what is provided at 193, needs explaining because 17.17 of Schedule 10, it does not have a page number, when you look at that chart for the year 2021, 2022, 2023 you have only New Zealand at the top that appears to have make a contribution.

So, my four Country Development Partners may not be accurate it is based on the information in Book 1 which is in respect confusing. But assuming that we have only four partners of the 56, we need to ask why we have not aggressively pursued partnership relations with other countries. The reason why I am asking this question is to help with our borrowing and secondly to try and bring skills into the country without government having to pay heaps. I will give an example; Pearl Farming in Manihiki and Rakahanga I recall that a few years back we tried to have a government to government relationship with the Kiribati Government and for reasons unknown to me that arrangement collapsed. The arrangement was to see whether we could get workers from Kiribati to work on farms in Manihiki.

The second problem that pearl farmers faced is the lack of technicians and why can we not have a government to government relationship with Japan to see whether we can make arrangements with regard to the provision of technicians. I accept that currently another major problem in Manihiki is the lack of shells and also the condition of the lagoon. However, the lagoon has been curing itself and in due time the condition in the lagoon will no doubt improve. My point here, Mr Speaker, is that having partnership with other countries who have the know-how can only assist. There are many other examples why simple relationships like that should not be encouraged. We use to have a Hospitality School in Ngatangia that is no longer the case. We know that Fiji has a Hospitality School for training, why do we not have a relationship with Fiji. We know that the Republic of Germany is one of the leaders on waste management why do we not have a relationship with them.

We know that South Korea is way up the top with ICT why aren't we talking with them and caging a partnership with them. And we can do this with every other aspect of our industry in our efforts to recover. Before I sit down and perhaps in response to my colleague the Member of Parliament for Pukapuka. I want to make it clear that my suggestions that I am making to government is not additional expense, not additional borrowing it is reprioritizing our spending. Re-prioritizing the spend in this Budget and applying it to where it is needed most and I firmly believe that focussing on prioritizing spending and investing in diversifying our economy will go a long way in assisting our country. Thank you.

MR SPEAKER: Thank you Honourable Member. I now call the Honourable Prime Minister, Minister Responsible to conclude the debates on the Principles and Merits of the Bill.

HON. M. BROWN: Thank you Mr Speaker. Welcome back into the House the Leader of the Opposition. I have received a report that you had a good trip up North and welcome back into the House.

We have spent the last day and a half, Mr Speaker listening to the Honourable Members comments on the Budget and I have to say there have been some very good comments that have come from both sides of the House on what is inside the Budget and some I guess same old talk that we hear particularly from our Members in the Opposition.

We hear commentary from some of them saying of we spend too much time on tourism, too much tourism, too much tourism. We need to do something new and then we start talking about something old like export, export, we should export again.

The reality, Mr Speaker is that in the export industry the biggest earner is the airline when they charge you the freight. The airline earns more than the final seller, then the transporter, all the way back to the final grower. When you distribute the income that's received the grower is left with what's left over and much of the time there's nothing left over and the grower is left with a debt.

Like the Honourable Member for Ruaau said, he used to export pawpaws, same as me. I used to export pawpaw as well and I think the Pawpaw Industry in the mid-90s was earning about \$1.5 million a year for our country. Exports in agriculture, they do not make you rich. But they do provide you with an income.

Agriculture plays its role today and its increasing role on the back of tourism. When we were exporting pawpaw we will be lucky if we got a dollar a kilo. Most of the time it was down to eighty cents or less for a kilo. But today our growers are selling their pawpaw a dollar, two dollars each straight into their hands and we are not paying for bio-security. Today our growers are selling their product to the re-emerging tourism market, to the hotels to the restaurants.

We just need to go down to the market, to the side of the road there's our Mamas, Papas selling their produce, their food on the side of the road to the market here on Rarotonga.

We know the difficulties of trying to get into the export industry. We just have to look to the taro exporters over the last few months, Mr Speaker and see the difficulties that they face in getting a good price for their product in New Zealand that matches what they can sell a sack of taro for here in Rarotonga. But we have a company that is willing to give them a try, willing to buy their taro and we shall see how successful that export venture will be.

The same thing that we have heard many times before from the Opposition side is we spend too much money for the Outer Islands. So I was surprised to read in the Cook Islands News today the Deputy Leader of the Opposition from Ruaau saying we need to spend more money in the Outer Islands. Your tune has changed, you are singing our song.

Then again, Mr Speaker I hear another comment from the Opposition, we should be cutting the pay of our government workers especially the middle income and the high income public servants cut their pay. I hope our public servants are listening to this commentary from Parliament today. This government's policy has been to try and increase the income of our workers rightly so, so we can try and keep them here.

The people's wages that are being proposed to be cut the middle and high income earners, these are the leaders within our public service departments. The very people, Mr Speaker that we need to make sure that our Public Service is running properly. I think some of the Members of the Opposition have very short memory. When we look back to 1996 the time of transition when we did exactly that, cut the wages, cut the Public Service, everyone took off to New Zealand and Australia. So, Mr Speaker I haven't heard anything new from the Opposition in terms of what they would do.

We have just heard the Leader of the Opposition say that they will lift the Minimum Wage to 12 dollars an hour. Minimum Wage usually goes to those beginning in the work force or those working jobs that do not require much qualification.

In the Private Sector, Mr Speaker I do not know of anyone who is paying Minimum Wage for any of their workers. Right now the private sector is paying more than the Minimum Wage just to get workers and keep their workers.

I know of a couple of school boys, 17 years old working for one of the companies at night earning 11 dollars an hour, Mr Speaker. So this call, Mr Speaker was backed by a statement just now made by the Leader of the Opposition that 21 years ago the Minimum Wage was \$7.50. Now I know this is incorrect but is the Leader of the Opposition misleading Parliament? I have been called a liar, Mr Speaker for my statement that I put out regarding legal advice that I sought. I am sure the Leader of the Opposition doesn't want to join me in that description with her statement she just made just a little while ago. I will give her the benefit of the doubt and suggest that she received incorrect information because I have the wage review here from 2000, Mr Speaker. The Minimum Wage in 2000, 22 years ago was \$2.53. It was increased at that time to \$4 an hour with the Cabinet at that time suggesting that the Minimum Wage be increased incrementally until it reached the target of seven dollars an hour over the following years to 2003.

This is the time of the Democratic government Mr Speaker. It was until 2006 when the Minimum Wage was increased to \$5 an hour. Not until this government came in Mr Speaker that we increase it from \$5 to \$7, to \$7.50, to \$8 and now in this Budget to \$8.50. But it is not the Minimum Wage Mr Speaker that we need to just look at, we need to look at the overall income earning capabilities of our people.

It is through the initiatives in the Budget Mr Speaker that we will do just that. Not by following the Democratic Party suggestion to cut the wages of the middle to high income earners. Just so you can increase the Minimum Wages.

I can only say, thank goodness they are not in charge of the Budget. In terms of the reference to our development partners Mr Speaker. Quite rightly we have 56 countries that we have diplomatic formal relations with. But many of those countries Mr Speaker are poorer than us and the intensification of diplomatic relations with these countries Mr Speaker is to increase our global profile in the world.

In the Pacific, Mr Speaker we have diplomatic relations with all of our Pacific island neighbours. We are one of the wealthiest compared to them. The reference to the development partners in Budget speech Mr Speaker was in reference to those development partners who have contributed to our COVID response. And the countries I referred to Mr Speaker are those countries that provided the more significant amounts towards our response.

For a full list of the countries that contributed, countries and organisations that contributed to our COVID response; there is a chart of page 11 of our Budget book 1 which lists all of the countries and how much they provided. And in the list Mr Speaker there are cash contributions and there are contributions in kind with materials, PPE gear and so forth.

Over the three years to date since the COVID started Mr Speaker contributions to our country have amounted to \$103 million in terms of grants, materials and equipments. By far most of it Mr Speaker was from the government of New Zealand close to \$93 million over that three year finance period that was given to support our response to COVID. We have been talking to our development partners in various sectors and areas that they can help us with.

The centre of excellence at the USP funded by the government of India specialising in IT. In India of course in one of their cities is one of the most advanced in terms of IT development in the world. More recently Mr Speaker my recent discussion with President Fritch of French Polynesia who expressed a keenness and willingness to engage in hospitality training exchange between our people here and their people in French Polynesia.

Not only in terms of upgrading and skilling up for the hospitality industry but also as a means for their workers to improve their English language skills and for our workers to improve their French and Tahitian language skills. But more than anything Mr Speaker this Budget provides opportunity for those who can see the opportunity and be able to take advantage of that opportunity.

This Budget follows on from the previous two years, Mr Speaker from the work that government has done to protect our country and to reshape it and rebuild it so that our recovery in the new world we will be best prepared for. And those opportunities are already starting Mr Speaker we can see with the increase in numbers of people coming to our country with the vibrancy at the market where people are selling their products and their produce. We are well and truly on the way to recovery.

We've heard what the Opposition will do in the new year if they become government. They will cut the wages of workers and they make things more expensive for the private sector. Therefore Mr Speaker this Budget that we have presented before this House we know that the people welcome this Budget and look forward to making the best of the opportunities that now we have moving into the new year I commend this Budget before the House, Mr Speaker. Kia Orana.

MR SPEAKER: Thank you Honourable Prime Minister. I will put the Question.

The Question is:

That the Appropriation Bill be now read a Second Time?

Motion agree to

CLERK OF PARLIAMENT: Long Title: An Act to appropriate certain sums of money out of the Cook Islands Government Account to the services of the year ending on the 30th day of June 2023 and to appropriate the supplies granted in this period.

MR SPEAKER: I now resolve Parliament into the Committee of Supply.

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY

MR CHAIRMAN: Honourble Members, the Clauses of the Appropriation Bill will stand postpone until after the schedules have been adopted.

AGRICULTURE:

Debate time is 1 hour.

I propose the Question:

That the sum of \$1,455,081 for Agriculture stands part of the Schedule?

I put the Question:

That the sum of \$1,455,081 for Agricultre stands part of the Schedule?

My apology, I am too fast. Members may speak on the Vote Item only and not the Principles and Merits until there are no futher speakers or the time limit is reached.

The Floor is open and if I do not see any Member standing then I move. I see the Honourable Member Vaitoti Tupa.

MR V. TUPA: Thank you Mr Chairman and thank you for giving me the opportunity to debate on the appropriation for Agriculture. Mr Chairman I will not go through the appropriation itself. When you look at the two books that we have in our hands in my book I have made some outlines and pagination for my interest. That means I have read from the beginning to the end and from the end back to the front.

This is what I want to discuss on the Agriculture Appropriation. I want to assure you Mr Chairman that I agree with what has been set out because when we look at the Minimum Wage, we will know

that \$10 thousand has been taken out of it. It did not go to any other areas, it went back to Agriculture to their Leader. We know that paying the Managers in this areas, it is the responsibility of the Public Service. It was not taken out of the Agriculture Budget and given to the Public Service Commission but remained within the Ministry so that it can be given to the staff there even though we noticed the allocation for payment has decreased. That amount of \$10 thousand remained with the Ministry of Agriculture. I want to look at their program Mr Speaker because when we look at the program in comparison to last year, we have enacted the Agriculture legislation. Under Section 8 of that Act, I believe there are projects that needs to be strengthen. This is to pay for the Agriculture Officers to carry out their inspections. So, Mr Speaker I give my support to this because in this way we can get a breakdown on the work carried out by the Ministry of Agriculture.

Secondly, I am looking at the Appropriation for Biodiversity under Output 2 for Agriculture. Under that Output, we want to support their work. I am happy for what the Minister of Agriculture has done by increasing the allocation for this area. I do not want to talk about the tractor for Matavera. It has been confirmed to me that the tractor for Matavera has arrived. When we look at Output 3, these are one of the areas that we need to support for our people. What I am happy about is at least there has been some increase and to me, it is not enough. If they had put Output 3 to \$500 thousand, then I will be very happy. Mr Speaker, when we look at these Outputs, these appropriations are intended to support the agriculture section and not only on Rarotonga but extending to the outer islands. When we look at these Outputs and when we compare them for the years to come, we will know exactly where we can contribute to make it better. That is why the Leader of the Opposition has been emphasising on our part to the agriculture because our intention is not just to emphasise into one basket but to diversify, and part of that is agriculture.

I have looked into all the Outputs and into both Books and the sections that contributes towards helping agriculture. I can see that we are required to support this. I noticed that in the Appropriation, about \$1.3 million has been allocated. To me, if only the Government and the Opposition levels it to \$2 million. I tell you Mr Speaker, if only that mark can be set, we will not complain in the House. I am sure that the Government has thoroughly studied the Budget and Agriculture is one area that we in the Opposition greatly supports.

Coming back at their plans where people will be appointed to do the investigations and inspections. Because we need to establish them now so that for the future we will see areas that we need to improve. I will like to emphasise again the need to improve and strengthen Biodiversity. The reason why I am emphasising on this area is because of the type of food we have been exporting in the past. I know we do not export our pawpaws anymore and I am fully aware we are not the only court exporting our pawpaws to New Zealand.

MR SPEAKER: You may carry on Honourable Member. You can take the whole hour.

MR V. TUPA: Thank you to the Clerk for giving me an extra 10 minute to speak. I really want to speak for an hour on this Appropriation in allude of what I was saying earlier about the products that we export. Today, I know that I have mentioned this before about our fumigation machine for the fruits that we export. I have had a discussion with the Minister of Agriculture in regards to this machine that is sitting at the airport. I know that we have lost the area designated at the airport

for Agriculture and I believe Air New Zealand has taken over. This machine that I am referring to is still located at the Airport and under this Appropriation Bill, I believe that there is an intention for a building to be built to accommodate this machine. This machine is still in a good condition and we need to maintain it properly to export other products as well to New Zealand. The intention of this project is not for Rarotonga only but to extend and to include the Southern Group islands, Aitutaki, Nga-Pu-Toru and Mangaia.

Mr Chairman, as you are aware, the soil on your island and on the other Southern Group islands are very rich which is good for agricultural purposes. I know for sure because I was one of those who went to undertake surveys and investigation on those islands in 1977. This is how I know about this information because I was involved in the research of the soil on these islands and I know for sure the soil are fertile. That Report is still at the Ministry of Agriculture. That is why I do not want to comment on the Appropriation, I wanted to focus more on Agriculture itself according to the allocations appropriated. We will not stop here but we need to support the branches in Agriculture so that it can generate capitals. There is a Manganian saying that says, "*We got to justify the program so that the money can be put where the programs are*".

I have noticed that I have gone beyond my allowable time but I stand to support the Appropriation for Agriculture and thank you for the tractor for Matavera. Thank you.

MR CHAIRMAN: Thank you Honourable Member. Before I give the Floor to the Honourable Terepai Maoate, may I remind all the Members of this House that you may have three ten minutes of speaking time if you want to speak. I see the Honourable Terepai Maoate; you have the Floor.

MR T. MAOATE: Thank you Mr Chairman. Greetings to all of us in this House and to our people listening. I am a bit confused with this Appropriation especially the time that we are currently in with COVID and especially with the emphasis of reviving our economy.

I would like to give my support for the Appropriation Bill and the things that have been shown in the Appropriation for the Agriculture especially to help our people. Our difficulty here is that we haven't received our tractor the Constituency for Amuri/Ureia and Vaipae/Vaipaka/Tautu except for the Constituency of Arutanga/Reureu/Nikaupara. The support came to the island of Aitutaki during the period of the celebration through this Ministry from Rarotonga.

I know that under the ERR there is an appropriation for some money and I am hoping that it will go towards agriculture. We have a problem in Aitutaki because there are not enough tractors.

I noticed that there is an appropriation for a million dollars each year for the next four years. I do believe that for each Personnel in your Ministry, they are getting about \$70 thousand and if that is the case I would like to apologize for what I have said yesterday. I apologize if I have made a mistake especially to reduce the wages of those collecting over \$70 thousand a year. I know for the island of Aitutaki our CEO collects over \$60 thousand a year. I have high regard for the person holding this position and his supporters in the Agriculture Department they are doing their work well.

What I have said in this House have been recorded in the Hansard. So I would like to see that our government employees that their wages be increased and for those who are collecting over seventy thousand a year to help those below so that they can get more and that is including us Members of Parliament and also including our Prime Minister who made this statement before. I just want to make comments on this because of the spirit that I shared when I made my statement.

With regard to our tractor on the island of Aitutaki, there are private individuals who own their tractors. It is not enough and that is why we are seeking for more tractors for our island and we will also notice that Aitutaki is the second island supporting our economy. Even though that Arutanga/Reureu/Nikaupara Constituency have their tractor, when the Democratic Government comes, in we will give you another tractor. We are trying our best in the Outer Islands especially in Aitutaki because we are all doing our best and it is costly today. Yes, we need to work together for the improvement of our economy and the improvement of our country in case there is something that will happen we will be ready.

Like what our Leader have mentioned before, we look and we support our people and our businesses, not for their party affiliation. Maybe the government can be part of making partnership with some individuals or business people they can run their machines like tractors.

The stimulus package that was provided by the government, some individuals were unable to apply for this package for some reason. These people wanted to buy their own machines but they know there are only two others who have their own machines.

I would like to thank the Member for Arenikau for hiring his tractor to the island, even though his rates has increased but still, the service is still not enough for the island. One of the difficulties that we have in the Outer Islands, when a Puna is given their own tractor, when it comes to election time and that person is not re-elected, that tractor remains with him. I know that has been the case for the island of Aitutaki but I do not know of the other islands. So I challenge the Member of Arenikau not to do that.

I believe that the best practice for each island is when this happens, for the management of these machines to go under the Island Council. Secondly, it will be up to the Island Council to monitor and to be very cautious when hiring or operating these machines. That is the reason why I stand to give my support and if the government can give some allocations to support some of the individuals to purchase some of the machines for agriculture.

MR CHAIRMAN: Thank you Honourable Member and again, before the Honourable Nooroa Baker talk on the Vote Item, can I repeat again that when your first ten minutes is gone, you just sit down and stand up again. Thank you Honourable Nooroa Baker; you have the Floor.

MR N. BAKER: Thank you Mr Chairman. First of all, when I look at the Budget Book under the Agriculture Vote Item, under Net Operating Appropriation of \$357,460, I have no cause to doubt this appropriation as we can see and understand the current situation of agriculture in our country. Most the food that is supporting our people is being grown in Rarotonga. My request to the Ministry of Agriculture for them to develop a program to enable the Outer Islands to serve and to be able support our economic development.

Sometimes, we see on Rarotonga there is not enough produce, bananas, taro, kumara and so forth and we see the increasing number of tourists and we see the increase in expenditure for imported food from New Zealand. I believe if we develop a program to increase the growing of produce on the islands of Mangaia, Mauke, Atiu, Mitiaro and Aitutaki, we will not spend so much in importing food from New Zealand and that money can then be recycled back into the pockets of our people.

The problem that I see in the Outer Islands is that there is not enough labour hence why we do not see an increase of produces at the market in Rarotonga. Another alternative, maybe the government can purchase the produces from these growers from the outer islands, give them the money and at that point in time, they will be encouraged to continue and then the government sells those produces in the shops. We will then see the benefits on both sides, the government and the growers. Maybe government can place an extra fifty cents on the produce they purchase from the growers.

This is what I can see because I spend quite a bit of time looking into this because I believe when money is placed directly into the hands of the growers, they get motivated. We will then be able to supply our local markets with our local produces, just like what the Member for Pukapuka/Nassau have said about the taro from Pukapuka. This would enable our people from Pukapuka/Nassau to export their taro to Rarotonga to sell. The Prime Minister also mentioned about a new market that has been initiated, we could then be able to supply and support this new market.

When we look at forestry, I know that the Government have programs in place for about 30 years where the Government had planted trees in Mangaia, Mauke and Atiu. We also see these trees in the hills at Nikao, Ngatangia and Matavera. I have visited the islands of Atiu, Mauke and Mangaia. This visit was to inspect these forestry areas which took place about 18 years ago. Recently, I went back to inspect these trees and I can confirm that these trees are ready for harvesting. We know the price of timber today and to purchase timbers from New Zealand can be quite expensive because globally, there is a shortage for timber. Therefore, I have looked at our forestry here in the Cook Islands. I believe our forestry here is able to sustain our market and to help our local people in building their homes at an affordable price.

Today we see there is a new organisation that has entered the area of forestry, and this is Carbon Print. They are saying that they will purchase the carbon from these trees that are seen in our country. When you consider these offers and demands, you have to weigh it carefully. We see the problem with our water. I am talking on this forestry subject because I am a qualified expert on growing timber and cutting it as I was trained in New Zealand.

So, this is what I said, if we sell the carbon, where will we get the water from? We see the big problem with water on Mangaia, Atiu and Mauke. We know about their taro growing problems today, it has dried up because the pine trees that are growing in these areas have tap roots. When these pine tree grows, the tap roots grows and will seek for the water table. So when you see a fully grown tree, it is consuming 20 litres of water a day. That is why we see the taro patches getting dry.

That is why I am recommending for the Government to start harvesting these trees and then to replant more trees that are indigenous to our lands like mahogany, nono, coconut tree and so forth. In terms of Agriculture, we should really be cautious about this Carbon Print because I have worked for a long time in the forestry industry in New Zealand. Ninety percent of the timber is exported to China. When it gets to China, it is soaked and submerged into sea water and then when the time is right to retrieve these timber logs out of the sea, they resell them back to us. This is why we see the increase of prices in timber.

That is why I am recommending for our timber forestry to be harvested as this is the appropriate time for harvesting our trees for the benefit of our people. But it all depends on Mangaia, Atiu and Mauke. They have to consider this matter further. Thank you.

MR CHAIRMAN: Thank you Honourable Nooroa Baker. I see the Honourable Tetangi Matapo; you have the Floor.

MRS T. MATAPO: Thank you Mr Chairman. Thank you for the opportunity for me to comment on this Appropriation for Agriculture. For all the views given before on this Vote Item, I support all of them. Firstly I would like to thank the Minister of Agriculture in regards to the Mangaia excavator. The Members for Aitutaki and Matavera requested for tractors but we in Mangaia have asked for an excavator and for that, I thank him machine.

The issue we have Mr Chairman is in regards to agriculture is terms of the labour force. I speak in regards to my village of Tamarua and most of the people that plants on a part time basis are Public Servants and those that plants on a full time bases are our elderly people. Providing this excavator will support our people with their planting efforts.

In the Budget book, under the goals for agriculture, I support all of these because these are all appropriated for our agriculture endeavours. Goal 10, to increase import substitution, increase food production as well as retaining arable land, these are the things we need to improve. Agriculture firstly, to improve water, the road and availability of machinery. We have noticed in the past of the rain that we have had where our taro patches are flooded. So, it is rightful for me to say that our food security has been affected. Today, we do not have any taro ready to be harvested and our people are replanting taro. This could be caused by COVID but I want to raise this because my people are patient people. I am looking at the provision for Training especially training our children in agriculture. The query here is, should an agriculture training be held on Rarotonga to include our children from the outer islands? If not, on the individual islands? I am happy to see this included in the Appropriation. Also, the food and the ways of planting during this time because on my island, you can plant on your own land unlike on Rarotonga.

We would like to thank those who gave support from Climate Change to enable us to fence our plantations. I stand to encourage that we maintain this kind of support so it will not disappear. One of the important things I have already mentioned is water because to those who have been to Mangaia, you would have noticed a lot of unused lands. Some people planting are still in the past where water needs to be carted to the plantations. But for those people who are near the infrastructure where water is supplied is a fortunate.

As for the animals, we cannot just shoot any animals as they are vital food for our people. Maybe this is the best time for me to make an introductory thought from our Island Council to government on the unavailability of ammunitions from the Police to control our animal population. May the Minister of Police look into this as this has now been over a year? The purpose of applying for these ammunitions is to help our planters protect their crops against wild pigs and wandering animals ploughing in the plantations. Mr Chairman, those are my thoughts.

MR CHAIRMAN: Thank you. I would recommend for Mangaia some bows and arrows. You do not have to expend anything to buy bullets and all that. Sorry for Tamarua. I can see the Honourable Agnes Armstrong from Ivirua; you have the Floor.

MRS A. ARMSTRONG: Thank you Mr Speaker. Just to reply to your bow and arrow, no, our animals are thick skin so the arrows will bounce off. Thank you, just coming back for the Budget for Agriculture I will not talk on the figures I just wanted have an input and add to what my colleague from Tamarua has just applied. Just on the Agriculture Outputs 1 to 3 and their directions where they are going with planting, technical advice et cetera. Just want to say thank you very much for all the advice and their workshops that they have come and if we need it specifically we just ask and when they can we get the technical advice and the technicians to come out to help us. I am sure our workers in the agriculture area on Mangaia, very grateful for the incitement to know how to prune tree, marcotting et cetera...we are very grateful for that advice.

But I just wanted to explore one area which we can all look at hopefully. And which also was mentioned by the Honourable Member from Matavera. It with regards to our treatment plant. In order for us to expand in the Agriculture sector we need to introduce new plants, fruit trees and other vegetables that we can try and see if we can make a living out of it. We have our basic vegetables which everybody is into so we need to look further afield so we all get into planting a variety of crops. We need to look at the treatment plant for us here to safeguard the importation of any new species or new trees that we bring in and we need to work together with our partners overseas like the Ministry of Agriculture in New Zealand, the Bio Security division for the assistance in helping us import or export from New Zealand into Rarotonga. So, by partnership each side does their bit in helping protect our island so we can like I said expand our horizons in the agriculture sector.

One other thing that I it is not only in agriculture but one thing that has been brought to my attention is that we have the Private Sector that have a business and then we have government who at sometimes try to take over that business or to maybe assist but in a way it hurts the person that's got a private business. Maybe the department was not aware but I did have a discussion and I was told they were not aware of it but I just thought I would mention that, that we have to be mindful of where we help because it would affect somebody else.

But in all I support the Budget allocated. I would like a bit more but time will tell if we put in the work we might get a bigger increase next time. Thank you.

MR CHAIRMAN: Thank you Honourable Member and I now see the Honourable Minister; you have one minute.

HON. R. TOKI-BROWN: Thank you Mr Chairman and all those from the Opposition side who have raised their concerns. I would like to give my regards to the Head of the Ministry of Agriculture, the staff of the Ministry of Agriculture here in Rarotonga and the Outer Islands, even to our people that plants here in Rarotonga and in the Outer Islands, Kia Orana to you all. I support the Appropriation Bill 2022. I know that you are doing your best and especially with the Outer Islands, with the part of agriculture that you are carrying for the country. We all know that the administration of the Outer Islands is under the Island Council and that our main office here in Rarotonga working closely together with our Agriculture Officers in the Outer Islands.

I want to touch on what the Member for Ruaau has said that the Ministry of Agriculture has or has died. I am sad to hear this because his hair is white and he has been serving in the House for quite some time and this is what he is saying? I really sympathize with the staff of this Ministry. I would have preferred if you have directed that statement to me in this House and that will be fine but instead you are directing it to our workers.

So I strongly support the Appropriation for the Ministry of Agriculture and I would like to ask Members of this House not to run down our staff in this Ministry but to uplift them and for us to work together. God bless and thank you very much.

MR CHAIRMAN: Thank you Honourable Minister.

I put the Question:

That the sum of \$1,455,081 for Agriculture stands part of the Schedule?

Motion agreed to

Honourable Members, it is now time for our afternoon break and when we return, we will continue with the Audit debate. Parliament is now suspended and will resume at 3.00 p.m.

Sitting suspended at 2.22 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 2.58 p.m.

MR CHAIRMAN: I bring the House to order. We are still in the Committee of Supply. Now we come to Audit (PERCA).

AUDIT (PERCA):

I propose the Question,

That the sum of \$1,132,654 for Audit (PERCA) stands part of the Schedule?

Honourable Members who wish to speak, please speak on the Vote Item only. The Floor is open.

I see the Honourable Member Vaitoti Tupa; you have the Floor.

MR V. TUPA: Thank you Mr Speaker. Mr Speaker, I will only speak for about 10 minutes. Regarding the Vote Item for Audit Office, I support it. One of the reason I support it is the fee they pay because the fees that is paid towards Training Revenue has increased. It has been allocated for \$95 thousand. As well as the allocation under POBOC, this has also been increased.

I would like now to speak on their operation. Under Operations Output 2, we are looking at expenditures throughout Ministries. Under Output 3 is the conducting special investigations into ministries that maybe had discrepancies in their operations. I am grateful as we look at this allocation because it has been explained to us.

When look for the allocation for last year in Book 2 and this is where you will find the allocation for Audit. There was no provision then like this Budget for this year. That is why I stood to support the allocation under training revenue. And regarding reporting by Ministries I also support the work they do in providing reports to this House.

During my time in government only the Audit Report comes to parliament. When you read their report for the year 2019 with in this report it will stipulate the audit reports of the Ministries whether it is qualified or unqualified. Then that provides you confidence for the appropriation for this year. This will present to us the performance of government departments for the previous years. I recommend to the Members of Parliament to go back and read the report for 2019.

I know most of you do not want to look back. You all want us to move forward. This is the only way for us to ensure how things are progressing whether it is for the good until then and now. I have come to the end Mr Chairman and I support it. Thank you.

MR CHAIRMAN: Thank you Honourable Vaitoti Tupa and I see the Honourable Selina Napa and you have the Floor.

MRS S. NAPA: Thank you very much Mr Chairman for giving this opportunity to speak on this Vote Item. I want to touch on Output 3, Special Reviews for Investigations and Performance Audit. Their goals in this output is to strengthen the accountability, transparency and integrity of government and the public sector entities. And to ensure that the elective officials acts in the best interest of the citizens they represent.

I would like to talk about the young people working in the Audit Office. I would like to commend them knowing that it is a difficult task in preparing the reports but these are still getting to Parliament on schedule. I am looking at Output 3 on Personnel, it is \$140 thousand and the Operation is \$29 thousand. So I am wondering if this allocation for Operation is sufficient to assist them to carry out their duties.

My concern here is there are other sectors that I am concerned with in book 1 for Audit. I am not certain the reason they are not entered in Book 2. Especially under the items listed in book 1 from Budget administration, Personnel, operation and all these allocation. But when I look at book 2 under output 3 for Operations, this is a very crucial part in the work of our officials in the Audit

office. Specially in conducting investigations into the operations whether we are carrying out our Business Properly.

My thoughts of considerations is the time that they are preparing the reports to come to this House and yet they spend so much time in preparing these reports and we limit the time of debate on these. However I would like to encourage our officials in this ministry to carry on the good work and I know this is one of the difficult parts in our work in government. So, I do support this Vote Item for Audit however when I look at the allocation under operation I do believe that this is not sufficient but overall I give my full support to this Vote Item. Thank you.

MR CHAIRMAN: Thank you Honourable Member. I see the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Tina Pupuke Browne.

HON. T. PUPUKE BROWNE: Kia Orana Mr Chairman. I rise to share my thoughts on this allocation of the Budget. First of all, I am sure that we understand the importance of the Audit Office. This Office is responsible for auditing the accounts for the different Government Ministries, Ministers' offices and Leader of the Opposition's office. We understand that this Office is a separate Office where the Government cannot tell them how to write their Report.

As part of this Office is the PERCA. We know that their responsibility is to handle the complaints received from our people and/or from Public Servants. Under the PERCA Act, they have the legal rights to summon anyone or to get anyone to provide information. I want us to look at Page 19 of Book 2. When we look at the Reports submitted by PERCA, they are listed on the Parliament Papers listing for presenting to Parliament for discussion.

We know that all the six bullet point Reports have been tabled. However, I understand that during the consultation of these Reports, it seemed that the Opposition side were the only ones who had contributed towards these Reports during discussion, I believe that the Government should also contribute as well because they are the ones that are being accused. The Government should also be giving us updates on what the Report entails and those being accused and guidelines on what can be done for this person to be disciplined.

We have not heard anything like that at all. So the question is, what is the importance for PERCA in investigating these accusations because PERCA is directly responsible to Parliament? When PERCA presents their Reports, we tend not to discuss it. Sometimes, we get frustrated with them for mentioning us in their Reports, there is nothing we can do because that is what they do. So, we will then question whether the appropriation for PERCA is a waste of time because when their Report is tabled, it just disappeared.

From the Opposition side's perspective, I believe PERCA is a good initiative. It is because of PERCA, we were able to see the different problems there are in the different Ministries. I could see that there is one report from PERCA in this Parliament Sitting and that is to with a business. I also know that when this Parliament Sitting is over, unless there is something to be said on that Report that Report will just disappear once Parliament adjourns. Mr Speaker, in case I forget, if you could please remind us today or the following day, when this Report is presented, maybe you could remind us by moving a Motion for this Report to be adjourned to the next Parliament. To

me, it is important that the allocation for this Ministry, PERCA, is worth paying for even though their responsibility is to audit the different Ministries and State Owned Enterprises. But in addition to that, there is a PERCA that has been approved by the Minister in charge of PERCA whose role is to investigate complaints from members of the public. Where it fails, it fails when it comes to Parliament where we do not give the attention that it deserves.

Also on Page 19, we look at the Table there that has been provided on the Audit Reports of the Financial Year. I am sad because when we look at 2016, there were 41 entities that did not provide their Audit Financial Accounts. When we look at the number of entities altogether, there are 41. When we look at 2017, there are 36 entities and then when we move up, there are 10 entities. The question is, where are the Ministers Responsible for these entities and why are they not following up with the Head of Ministries to be up to date with their Audit Reports? When we look at 2021, it is just a modern day from last year, there were 21 entities that did not provide their Accounts and that is more than half. So, what exactly are we, the governing body, those in this Parliament are doing to assist the Audit Office to do their job? We know not so long ago, there was a little bit of a tug war between MFEM and the Audit Office because of the lack of provision of information.

My belief is, your role as Ministers, it is your job to say to your HOM do this, do that, do this, do that because at the end of the day it will affect the auditing of the country accounts. Of course under the Constitution, our country accounts must be audited annually and we know that we have not been able to comply and it maybe it is because the Ministry's account has not been audited. So, I believe, with the appropriation that is allocated for the Audit Office, we should support that as they are doing their job where this whole system fails is here in Parliament, we do not discuss the Reports and the Ministries and you Ministers who do not follow up your Heads of Departments to provide their accounts to Audit for auditing. Before I sit down and when the Minister Responsible responds, if you may as I am looking at the chart on Page 28 of Book 2, I cannot see where PERCA connects on that chart. Can you please clarify because I would think that PERCA is being paid out of the Audit Budget if not then perhaps you can direct us to where we should be looking at. Thank you.

MR CHAIRMAN: Thank you Honourable Member. I can see the Honourable Member Vaine Mokoroa.

HON V. MOKOROA: Thank you Mr Chairman. Greetings to us all today. I would like to thank all the Members who have supported the Audit Office. Before I proceed, I would like to thank Allen, Director for Audit and his staff for providing their Appropriation to this House. Mr Chairman, there are two Reports that were tabled by the Audit Office by PERCA on Monday and that is Paper 137 and Paper 138. These PAC Reports were also highlighted on the importance of the Audit Office in chasing after the Departments or Ministries who fails to file in their Annual Report. In Papers 137 and 138 that PERCA had tabled, they also highlighted recommendations for the two concerned Ministries to consider and improve upon.

In response to what the Leader of the Opposition was saying as to why 21 Reports were not submitted in 2021 and eight in 2020. In 2022, seven Ministries did not submit their Reports. The reason to this, as alluded to by the Opposition, one of the issues between MFEM and the Audit

Office is the confidentiality of some information with MFEM. This RMD Ministry is the Tax Office. RMD legislations forbids the release of these information to the public. Due to the restrictions in this legislation, this is the reason why these information are not presented to Parliament. That is why the number of entities have reached 21. But through their settlement in rectifying these issues so they would not breach any legislations, they were able to negotiate hence their number for 2022 is seven.

On the second question posed by the Opposition of the position of PERCA on the Organizational Charts, my own understanding, the Audit Office pays for the expenditure for the PERCA Committee. Why this was not included in our Organizational Chart, I will report back to Parliament on that tomorrow.

Mr Chairman, in regards to the Appropriation for this Ministry, consequently, there is a problem being placed on them. Last year, their revenue that is being appropriated to them is \$60,700. In this Appropriation Bill 2022, their allocation of revenue almost doubled to \$156,300 and this is to help renovate their Ministry. I feel sorry for this Ministry but then again, we understand the reason why. Last year, we were affected by COVID in which it impacted this Office including all the different Ministries of this country. This is the reason why their revenue had dropped when they requested for it last year. This year, there is an increase to their revenue because our intention is to improve our current situation and our work and for this Office to be able to achieve their goals. Mr Chairman that is all I have to say. I believe that we will all support this Ministry for the work they will do for this year until next year. God bless and thank you.

MR CHAIRMAN: Thank you Honourable Minister.

I put the Question:

That the sum of \$1,132,654 for Audit (PERCA) stands part of the Schedule?

Motion agreed to

MR CHAIRMAN: Business Trade and Investment Board, debate time is for 30 minutes.

I propose the Question:

That the sum of \$611,266 for Business, Trade and Investment Board stands part of the Schedule?

MR CHAIRMAN: The Floor is open for Members. I can see the energetic Honourable Member Vaitoti Tupa; you have the Floor.

MR V. TUPA: Thank you Mr Chairman for this allocation for BTIB. When I look at their allocation for Trading Revenue, it has been reduced. But I do believe it is appropriate to be reduced. We know in the past couple of years and last year, this Ministry went through an investigation. I do believe though that this special investigation is completed and maybe the

Minister himself will explain the situation with this special investigation. I have no problems with this Vote Item, I support it.

In regards to the administration programme under Output 3, Foreign Investment because in this programme, a review is being carried out in proposing a Bill to help strengthen the responsibilities of this Department. The name of this Bill is called, the Draft Foreign Investment Framework. I do believe that under this Output, this will help improve their performance. When I was examining this Department, there seemed to be some discrepancies since 2019. But I do believe that the Minister of today has managed to address these issues. Therefore Mr Chairman, I support this Appropriation. This is all I wanted to share, Output 3 programme, strengthening Foreign Investment here in the Cook Islands and overseas. Thank you very much.

MR CHAIRMAN: Thank you Honourable Member. I see the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Tina Pupuke Browne.

HON. T. PUPUKE BROWNE: Thank you Mr Chairman. I just want to present my thoughts on this part of our Budget. We can see all the Outputs and we can see all the work being done since last year and the year before for 'Go Local' in an effort to improve the situation for our people here in the Cook Islands. We know that a Website has been developed to help sell products such as handicrafts from the Outer Islands. I will not talk much on that area because I can see the progress of this initiative.

The area that I would like to focus on, because during COVID, we should be mindful in reviewing the Government's Policies because we want to encourage Foreign Investment. Why? Because foreign investment bring foreign money into the country, create jobs. I know there are some restrictions around that which is good and on the Website of BTIB, if you want to invest in the Cook Islands, when you go on their Website, it provides information that helps people see what it is that they need to do to qualify.

We know that foreign investment can come to the island in many forms either totally foreign or some sort of joint venture with Cook Islanders. The part that I struggle to understand is that it does not look to me like there is enough being done to promote us as a country that is worthwhile investing in.

We know that for example, when tourists are on the island, tourism goes out with all the private people, owners of accommodation and they do their promotion aggressively so visitors will come into our country. I am saying this because I know that most of the time, it is difficult for some of the applications to be approved or be reviewed by the BTIB Board. Quite often, when such application is deferred or when the application is sent back by the Board, this is due to the lack of information being provided. Maybe the Minister Responsible for BTIB should encourage the process to be looked at because the process is, when the applications from foreigners are received, you will see which boxes are not ticked and you will know whether the application is ready before it gets submitted to the Board. I am aware that there has been many people who have wanted to invest but have gone away because serious investors do not want to hang around. They want to put their money there and if we do not want their money they go somewhere else and the difficulty I have is that we do need their money, it is just that our process is taking long.

So to the Minister in Charge, maybe this is an area that we should look at. It used to be an area that was handled very well in the past in my experience. I just want to add that sometimes the advise from BTIB, you need to have a local partner and then we will approve it. Maybe we should encourage the people that are handling the applications not to assume a role that is not theirs because we know as lawyers, if you have two partners that are just made up for the sake of putting them together it is doomed to collapse from Day 1.

Instead, those that process the application should say, well I think you should go and take the advise of your lawyer. So, that Mr Chairman is my contribution and I hope that we will find that helpful but I support the Budget. Thank you.

MR SPEAKER: Thank you Honourable Member. I see the Honourable Minister Responsible; you have the Floor.

HON. P. ARIOKA: Thank you Mr Chairman. I stand to also thank all the Members that have given good contributions to the Budget allocation that has been set for BTIB. No doubt the Honourable Tina Pupuke Browne, those comments are pretty much truly the key concerns and issues to date that BTIB is to be working hard to improve on in the coming months ahead.

Like all other agencies Mr Chairman, the BTIB allocations is a slight reduction and that is because we are at the time where BTIB is now working hard to restrageties its position for the years to come. Therefore Mr Chairman, it is fair for me to say thank you to the CEO of BTIB Repeta Puna and also her hard working staff and those who have also moved on from BTIB.

But the most important people that I need to acknowledge Mr Chairman is the former Chairman George Pitt as well as his team the Board of Directors of BTIB who worked hard for the past couple of years. Since the commencement of the functional review Mr Chairman the Board had been working tirelessly to ensure that every aspects of BTIB follow a roles and responsibilities and core functions are being reviewed thoroughly.

With those recommendations that has been peer reviewed by independent consultants and these are consultants of our own people. The key recommendations that I think the Honourable House would be happy is that BTIB needs to refocus its core responsibilities as stipulated in the Act. And I am to announce that today Mr Chairman is the fact that, that recommendations has oversighted by Cabinet and it has been approved for implementation.

So, I would like to acknowledge a number of agencies who have been involved in that functional review because BTIB is an agency that does not work on its own but it works in tandem with all stakeholders critical to the success of business development in our country. Most critical Mr Chairman is the Ministry of Agriculture who has played an integral role for farmers and growers in small enterprises.

The Ministry of Marine and Resources whose been part of our fisheries industry, the Chamber of Commerce who is the major drive for our private sector. As well as the Cook Islands Tourism Authority who has been a main driver for our tourism industry. Immediately I think we can

understand the broadness in depth and breath of how much BTIBs core responsibility has to take on and ensure that their program is consistent with these agencies.

Although it is a small agency of 12 staff I still believe that it is still too small and that has not been taken into consideration in this financial year. And therefore, the BTIB has a lot of work ahead of itself and I believe as a Minister for BTIB there will be new policies and guidelines that will be instituted by BTIB to improve their processes, systems to help our small enterprises in the country.

Many of those are being clearly identified by our Members of the Opposition and I thank them very much for those key matters that have been raised that are already been taken into account and will be part of the improvement of BTIB moving forward. So, in that light Mr Chairman I would like to thank all Members for their support through this part of the Appropriation and thank you all for your kind support in areas that I think are critical to BTIB and our business enterprise in the country. Thank you very much.

MR CHAIRMAN: Thank you Honourable Minister.

I put the Question:

That the sum of \$611,266 for Business Trade and Investment Board stands part of the Schedule?

Motion agreed to

COOK ISLANDS INVESTMENT CORPORATION:

Debate time is for about 1 hour.

I propose the Question:

That the sum \$3,527,000 for the Cook Islands Investment Corporation stands part of the Schedule?

The Floor is open for Honourable Members.

I see the Honourable Member Vaitoti Tupa; you have the Floor.

MR V. TUPA: Thank you Mr Chairman for the opportunity to speak on the appropriation for CIIC. Mr Chairman, I have no problem with this allocation and I give my support. But I want to talk about the amount that is appropriated because when we look at it Mr Speaker, last year's salaries were a bit high. But in this year's budget, it has decreased to about \$9,000. But when you combine the total income that were taken off from employees, it will total up to \$50 thousand. In regards to the administration work in the Office, last year, we know that it was about \$1 million. Today, this came to \$800 thousand. When we look at the Administered Payments last year, it was about \$4 million and this year it has decreased to \$1.2 million. The reason for the reduction Mr Chairman is, the focus was targeted for ICI and their Committee. The focus was also targeted on

some of the islands that requires attention and Schools that are being monitored. Another targeted area are areas that needed to be worked on. When you look into this, there are other areas that needs to be renovated such as Government houses and working in close with an Agency called Seabed Mining. Therefore Mr Chairman, you will notice of a reduction from last year from \$4 million to \$1.2 million.

When we look at Payment On Behalf Of the Crown (POBOC), last year we know that \$2 million was appropriated. However, this year it has increased to over \$5 million. We know the plans for POBOC and that has gone to the Airport subsidy, the Bank of the Cook Islands, Ports Authority and one area that needs to be worked on is To Tatou Vai. That is the reason why the amount has reached over \$5 million and we in the Opposition supports this under POBOC. Mr Chairman, this budget is being allocated to help our people. In the past, in regards to our water, we have decided that we will not pay for our water. We need to set a solution for our people not to pay for their water. This budget for POBOC will cover our water. Mr Chairman, the budget for To Tatou Vai is \$3 million. I would like to thank this Committee for setting the budget for To Tatou Vai at \$3 million. But then Mr Chairman, even though \$3 million has been allocated, it is not enough. But if we add another \$1 million on top, it will be much better.

Mr Chairman, I was just commenting on the appropriation for this department because this is one of the most important department in our country. Why is it important? Because all government assets are administrated and controlled by this department and that includes all the buildings at all the schools. So I am pretty sure that the Minister for Education will support this budget CIIC because they closely work in partnership with CIIC.

Mr Speaker, even though I strongly support this budget, but I have other thoughts to raise to the Government today. I want to discuss the Committee Members on the Board. In regards to a Board Member, the process that has been administered under the CIIC Policy, the Committee Boards that collaborate with CIIC Boards are chaired by CIIC.

I know that the Chairmen of these Committee Boards have had problems with the Chairman of the CIIC Board, who is the Chairman for all Boards. However, I know that the Government can sort these problems because there are issues in some areas. For example Mr Chairman, let us say, the Chairman for the Board of Te Aponga Uira, I know that the Chairman of all the Committee Boards is the Chairman for CIIC. But I know that the Prime Minister is aware of this and I also believe that the Prime Minister can also look at rectifying these issues.

Another problem I am seeing, the revenue generated by Te Aponga Uira, I believe that the surplus generated should also be allocated to help support CIIC as there is nothing allocated for TAU to conjoint with CIIC, except the assets. The Assets that belongs to TAU are administered by CIIC. That is one area that I have no problems with, but with the budget that is not under CIIC, that is where my frustration lies. I believe that this budget for TAU should be administered by TAU.

I also have the same judgement for Committee Boards administered by Ports and Airport Authority. I also believe that the administration under these Boards, the Prime Ministers understands how it works. When you refer to the budget for CIIC, these are areas that we need to focus on. However, I am delighted to know that some of the funds were taken off from the Personnel and the Administration. I know that an article was published in the Cook Islands News,

but I will not emphasise on what was written in the article, I will concentrate more on the benefits that this will generate for our people.

Mr Chairman, when you look at Book 2, you will find eight pages of programs which entails the work of this department, advising us their responsibilities.

Therefore, I rise to give my support to the Appropriation for CIIC. Thank you very much.

MR CHAIRMAN: Thank you Honourable Member. I see the Honourable Member Selina Napa; you have the Floor.

MRS S. NAPA: Thank you Mr Chairman. Greetings to all of us. I would like to give my thoughts on the Appropriation for CIIC. When I look at some of the assets under the overview of CIIC, the investment intercalated water and sanitation, because when you look at the budget for CIIC, their responsibilities are stipulated but nothing has been appropriated for Water and Sanitation, unless I have missed it somewhere. I recall a program held in Takitumu that is to do with Water and Sanitation in upgrading septic tanks, with these septic tanks, \$1,000 of subsidy was received from Households and the rest came from the Government. Maybe it is appropriate that these septic tanks are administered by the Government because the majority of the septic tanks in Takitumu do not function. It is difficult to figure out which Ministry to contact for their help and support, but it has been confirmed that the administration for Water and Sanitation falls with CIIC.

When I look at Output 5, Effective Hazard Development, the High Level Program Deliverables states that the sign off for Avarua Town plan, Nikao Social Centre, Aitutaki Planned Projects, one of the goals says to complete a new mental health facility, I am quite excited to see this because we have questioned this so many times in the past about those who suffered from mental illness not to be imprisoned. I look forward for this project to be implemented as soon as possible. My request to the Minister George Angene to not paint this facility in green and yellow but to paint in blue and white.

Further to that, the residential house for our Queen's Representative, in which our Leader have always questioned in the past on the situation of it. I can see the Government today, they have been in power for over 10 years and it was only at this time that this plan is included in our Budget Book. When I look at the expenditure spent on the rentals for the residential house in Titikaveka, can someone please explain why we could not pay some landowners for a section to build a new house for the Queen's Representative and his wife?

I can also see below the completed projects in the Outer Islands, Arutanga Harbour, Manihiki Building projects, Rakahanga Building projects and I can also see a project for Mangaia as well. I am also looking at the Budget, when you look at the Administered Funding for this Output, \$520 thousand has been allocated. I am not sure about this Administered Funding because I did not see it in Book 1 if this amount will cover all these projects as outlined under Output 5. Maybe the Minister can clarify if the amount on Page 85 from Book 1, Special Projects Units of \$420 thousand, whether it meant to be this \$520 thousand.

However, there are two items that I am excited to see in this Book is the Mental Health facility and the Residential House for our Queen's Representative.

I give my full support to this Vote Item for CIIC. Thank you.

MR CHAIRMAN: Thank you Honourable Member. I see the Leader of the Opposition, the Honourable Tina Pupuke Browne.

HON. T. PUPUKE BROWNE: Thank you Mr Chairman. I rise to present my thoughts on this part of the Budget. I want to share the establishment of this budget as I believe that this can be re-prioritized in spending. Last year, I touched on the Cook Islands Investment Corporation Act. I was involved in the discussions earlier in the year regarding the Road Map for a Sustainable Economy.

I asked the Investment Corporation if they could provide some information of all the different Boards and the Members on these Boards that are under the Investment Corporation. The reason for this, according to the workshops held at the Auditorium, it was noted that there were too many Boards and that it can be streamlined. So, I would like to thank the Investment Corporation for providing the requested information back in November or December last year, that showed the setup of the Board for the Investment Corporation and those administered by them.

This information allowed me to clarify what I thought because under the Cook Islands Investment Corporation Act, if you are the Chairman for the Investment Corporation, you are not allowed to be Chairman of any subsidiary Boards. The Minister Responsible for Investment Corporation should know this because the Chairman for Investment Corporation, he is also the Chairman for five or six other Boards. It is not right that we are the ones that makes laws and then we just look at laws being breached.

Secondly, if they had not provided the information on the remuneration paid but if you are a Member or Chairman of every Board, each Board is allocated with a sitting fee. When I calculate it properly, it seemed that the remuneration that is paid for these Members are higher than what you Members of Parliament gets.

Therefore, I request that we monitor our laws carefully for us Members of Parliament to be careful not to breach the laws. Secondly, I would like to ask for these Boards to be reviewed to see if there is a need for these Boards, I forgot how many of them but there were quite a few Boards under the administration of Investment Corporation. I believe that if we do that, there will be savings there.

Earlier I mentioned some issues between the Audit Office, MFEM and the Investment Corporation, we have been told that CIIC does not have a proper list of its assets. If we put a value on these assets and if you do not know what your assets are it will be worse, mine is a guess work and maybe this would become a dream because the value of an asset will be listed on the value of the whole country. So, I am quite concerned that a State Owned Enterprise like this where I do not understand of what the actual assets are for this country.

I would like to touch upon Output 4 regarding Governance, I am quite surprised Honourable Minister of the percentage that is stated being achieved. First point, it states that “90% of Rarotonga Land Tenure Matters with Landowners are current and Up to Date”. Second point is that “80% of Pa Enea Land Tenure Matters with landowners are current and Up to Date”. Third point, “99% of Land Tenure Matters with Crown as lessor are Current and Up to Date”.

Mr Chairman, I do not believe these figures because the Land Court is a playing ground for me. I see all the transactions and I am very surprised at these percentages. If this is true, well that is good but I do believe that this is not correct. Therefore, to the Minister Responsible, maybe you could explain how this came about and yet we have seen all the issues with lands which still remains which has not been started otherwise, the negotiations has not started or a resolution has not been met.

I would also like to touch on Output 5. I am beginning to enjoy the Investment Corporation. When you look at the Projects for the Outer Islands, I saw that the Rakahanga Building project is completed, not started, but completed. Our Cyclone Shelter, I have looked in Book 1, it was proposed for the Rakahanga Cyclone Shelter to be completed by 2023. So I am actually happy about Investment Corporation for a change, for reporting that our Rakahanga Cyclone Shelter will be completed in this financial year. I am certain that when the people of Rakahanga hears that our Rakahanga Cyclone Shelter will be completed in this financial year.

I am not quite certain where this Rakahanga Building Project is, if the plan is not completed as we the Island Council have discussed the renovation for the Office of the Island Council. Honourable Members, in the Outer Islands, when we talk about new buildings or renovations, we will think that this building will look nice. I want to inform you all that in Rakahanga, the Office of the Island Council, the hinges are rusted and is falling apart, impossible to close them. It will only take a few thousands of dollars to upgrade this building until our new building is built. So, Honourable Minister, these are my contributions, maybe you could explain the two questions that I have raised. But in regards to the proposal that the new Cyclone Centre will be completed, I am very happy with the Investment Corporation.

MR CHAIRMAN: Thank you Honourable Member and I see the Honourable Prime Minister; you have the Floor.

HON. M. BROWN: Thank you very much Mr Chairman. We all know the Cook Islands Investment Corporation has two jobs. The first one is to manage the governance of all of our State Owned Enterprises of which there are I believe eight active and operating plus two or three that are holding companies and not to be confused with the joint venture companies of which we also are part of which includes currently the Vodafone Company and the GSR Company which is the minerals exploration joint venture.

As I have mentioned holding companies, Mr Chairman which are part of the company structures associated with Telecoms Holdings Limited which is the conduit towards Vodafone Cook Islands. I think one part of these companies that the Leader of the Opposition was referring to where the current Chair of Investment Corporation is also appointed as a Board Member of these companies and to confirm with the Members of the House that the Chairman does not collect additional Board

fees by virtue of his Membership on these Boards. He only collects his Chairman fee for the Investment Corporation.

The second part of the Investment Corporation job is to manage assets of the government and these assets are all government buildings, properties, certain equipment and also leases on land. I am sure the Members have heard me say in previous Budget previous years that we inherited land issues under Investment Corporation that have been left idle in some case for more than 30, 40 years and it has taken many years to get to the stage where we are now where land leases have now been updated, overdue rentals have been paid and negotiations with landowners have reached a good compromise.

So I was very pleasantly surprised to have a look actually at how far we have progressed to see with the amount of completed historical land tenure matters as the Honourable Leader of the Opposition pointed out 90 percent on Rarotonga, 80 percent in the Pa Enua, 99 percent matters with the Crown, it's a very good result. I think, Mr Chairman that 10 percent I think she is the legal adviser for this and that is why it hasn't been completed. Because she did mention this is her playground and she knows all these issues and maybe this is the land that she is talking about that ten and 20 percent has not been completed. So the progress is working well, Mr Chairman and I think that's all I have to say on this Appropriation as well, Mr Chairman. Thank you very much.

MR CHAIRMAN: Thank you Honourable Prime Minister.

I put the Question:

That the sum of \$3,527,000 for Cook Islands Investment Corporation stands part of the Schedule?

Motion agreed to

MR CHAIRMAN: Honourable Members, we will report back to Parliament to report the progress of the Bill before we adjourn.

The Question is:

That the progress of the Bill be reported to Parliament?

Motion agreed to

Parliament is resumed.

MR SPEAKER: I call on the Minister of Finance the Honourable Mark Brown to report the progress of the Bill to the House.

HON. M. BROWN: Thank you Mr Speaker. I am happy to report that the Bill is progressing through Committee Stage very well.

MR SPEAKER: Thank you Honourable Prime Minister.

I put the Question:

That the Report be adopted?

Motion agreed to

MR SPEAKER: Honourable Members, that brings us to the end of our Sitting for today. Thank you Honourable Members. Can I ask one of the Honourable Members to please say our Closing Prayer?

CLOSING PRAYER

MR SPEAKER: Thank you Honourable Member Vaitoti Tupa. Parliament is adjourned until Thursday, 26 May 2022 at 10.00 a.m.

Sitting adjourned at 4.46 p.m.