

WEDNESDAY 25TH MARCH 2015

The Speaker, Hon Ajilon Nasiu took the Chair at 9:41am

Prayers.

ATTENDANCE

All the Honourable Members of Parliament are present with the exception of; the Minister of Development Planning and Aid Coordination; the Minister of Foreign Affairs and External trade; and the Member of Parliament for Savo/Russells.

PRESENTATION OF PAPERS AND OF REPORTS

- The combined Annual report of the Auditor General for December 2012 & December 2013 (*National Parliament Paper No.1, 2015*)
- The National Transport Fund Financial Audit Report, 2013 (*National Parliament Paper No. 3, 2015*)
- The National Transport Annual Report, 2013 (*National Parliament Paper No. 4, 2015*)

STATEMENT OF GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

BILLS

Bills - First Reading

The 2015 Appropriation Bill 2015

MOTIONS

Motion No.3

Motion to thank his Excellency the Governor General for his Speech to Parliament

Hon MANASSEH SOGAVARE (*Prime Minister*): I rise to move that an address be presented to His Excellency, the Governor General as follows: *“We the National Parliament of Solomon Islands here assembled beg leave to offer thanks for the speech which has been addressed by you to Parliament”*.

I do not intend to speak at length in introducing this motion because the Speech is an extensive summary of the policy directions that the Democratic Coalition for Change Government is going to pursue over the four years to address the country’s development needs. Parliament, of course, will play a very important role in ensuring that the government delivers on it, and because of that the government will lend an open ear to what Members will be saying in this debate.

It has been a while since this Parliament had the privilege of getting the Head of State to address it, and for that, Members will agree with me that we are truly grateful. More so the government because what His Excellency effectively outlined are the policy intentions and what the ruling government plans to deliver under the various sectors over the four years term of this House.

The presence of his Excellency in the House is also a fresh reminder of our historical tie with Great Britain and an acknowledgement of the special position of Her Majesty in our system of government. For about 36 years now, going on 37, Solomon Islands has and continues to enjoy the privilege of acknowledging the Queen of England as its Head of State represented by His Excellency.

In a country so diverse in culture, island, tribal groupings, we could not have chosen a better arrangement for our Head of State. The Office of the Head of State is a symbol of unity and the choice of Her Majesty to that position in Solomon Islands, is a tribute to the wisdom of the founders of our nation, who truly believed in unity and happy co-existence of our people in a country that is made up of different island groups that was effectively a separate nation until was declared as the British Solomon Islands Protectorate in 1893.

In looking back, the people of Solomon Islands must be forever thankful for that action and direction. Our challenge now is to remain united as one country and people. That aspiration was tested to the brinks during the ethnic tension and continues to pose a serious threat because of our vulnerability to ethnic related disturbances and our strong connection to our island groupings. It is for that reason that peace, reconciliation and national unity remains a key function; a national development strategy under the Democratic Coalition for Change Government (DCCG) and will remain so for a long while yet.

We have added the development of traditional governance and the strengthening of our cultural roots to cement our peace strategy. Of course, this is not without challenge. It is our desire to see that while it is important to get our people to appreciate the value and benefits of our traditional governance, it must not be pursued at the expense of a national appreciation of the rich culture that we have together as a nation and people.

We have travelled 37 years now of nationhood and the journey has not been easy. Parliament comprising of the Executive government, the backbenchers, the Opposition and the Independent groups over these years remains a powerful central agent of development policy formulation. What we are, have and experienced today is a reflection of the kind of policy formulated and implemented by successive parliaments. But at this juncture, regardless of what we may want to say about past

leaderships, we owe them a deep sense of gratitude. I believe we have the duty to thank the chains of leadership of our country over the 36 years that we existed as a nation. They have done their part in the broader effort to develop our country. The responsibility now lies on our shoulders to carry on the torch of leadership and to do better. Indeed if there is a parliament that is better placed to do better, it has to be the 10th Parliament because we have the privilege of learning from the mistakes of the past. What are some useful lessons that we should learn? We will be hearing today and tomorrow the contributions of Members of Parliament and the Government will be lending an open ear. But just to mention a few, there are many. It is common knowledge that more than 80percent of our land mass are still locked up under tribal ownership and managed under complicated varied land tenure systems. We become landlocked by the very structure of our country in terms of our ownership of this important factor of production which renders acres and acres of rich agricultural land lying idle.

What the Government is saying is that we as a country must prioritize land reform, and we will continue with the good work the former government has started. And we can continue, despite our rich endowment, sea and land resources we have not able to maximize the benefits accruing to the country in the exploitation of these resources. The potential of our reef fish to earn export money is left undeveloped. Our tourism potentials are left idle, and we can say the same thing about our strengths in other resources.

We have been very complacent and took a back seat approach to developing these strengths and we need to come up of the quick-fixed strategy to something more permanent and rewarding. This means we must take a closer look and if necessary review and redirect our current strategies. We must take the attitude that every portfolio subject's matters have something to contribute to the change we are talking

about. Our investment strategies must be relevant and conducive to the changing behavior of foreign direct investments.

Our immigration policy must be designed in a way that facilitates the needs of investors who bring in millions of dollars of development capital into the country; genuine ones, of course. Our foreign direct investment fiscal policy strategy must be designed in a way that facilitates the needs of our domestic and foreign investors.

The development of our productive sector is the key to improving our national capacity to enable the country make sensible public investment in strategic sectors of the economy. In the tourism sector, for example, the claim that it is comparatively expensive for tourists to travel to Solomon Islands by air must be seriously considered. The strategy to address this concern so far has been one of patching up here and there through fare and rude adjustments. Should we now be considering an open air policy and discontinue our service in international routes? This is a tough question; a tough question but one that is pressingly becoming an obvious question to ask ourselves and many more tough questions.

My reason for raising this matter is just to illustrate the point that if we want this economy to come out from wondering in the doldrums, then we must be prepared to take tough decisions where tough decisions are called for. One such decision is the proposal to address corruption head on. And I am overwhelmed by the number of reports and complaints reaching me about the attitude of public officers that clearly borders on taking advantage of people. This is corruption. The government is fully determined to put in place the appropriate legal and administrative mechanism to tackle the disease of corruption in the country, of course, we will step on people's toes but so be it.

Provision of reliable and effective health, education, security and other essential services will continue to be a major challenge for the country given the pressing demand on our meager budget resources. The same, of course, can be said of our

infrastructural development needs and for that matter we need to be very strategic in our infrastructure development program.

As rightly pointed out by His Excellency the Democratic Coalition for Change Government is advancing the theme of change. People are entitled to their views and explanations on the term, and I will have no complaints about how our people or Members of this Parliament would like to use this term because I believe it means many things and applies to every aspects of how we have been doing things in this country. It is without doubt that we need to come out of our complacency and business as usual mentality to embrace real change in the way we have been doing things and relate to our responsibilities.

That call for change is a national call. It must begin with people in authority and people who have responsibility over other people, however humble, or extensive that responsibility may be and whatever walks of life and vocation one is pursuing. And, of course, people in fiduciary relationships and the list goes on. Not until we Solomon Islanders begin to see and appreciate the reality of the situation we are in and take responsibility to effect real change, we will continue to drive this country down the negative part. Our ultimate challenge is to graduate this country from its current socio economic status and set it in the path where we can indeed enjoy, peace progress and prosperity.

I am expecting a lively and fruitful debate on the policy directions expounded by His Excellency, and accordingly beg leave to move that we the National Parliament of Solomon Islands here assembled beg leave to offer thanks to the speech which has been addressed by you to Parliament. I beg to move.

Mr Speaker: Just to remind honorable members that the PAC will need enough time to look through the 2015 estimates and so any Member who wishes to contribute to the

debate on the Speech from the Throne must do so quickly as possible. The floor is open for debate.

Hon JEREMIEH MANELE (*Leader of Opposition*): First of all, let me thank the Honourable Prime Minister for tabling and moving this important motion that an address be presented to his Excellency, the Governor General as follows: *We the National Parliament of Solomon Islands here assembled beg leave to offer thanks for the Speech which has been addressed by his Excellency to Parliament yesterday.*

Mr Speaker, thank you sincerely for the opportunity to contribute to the debate on the Speech from the Throne as delivered by the Governor General yesterday. At the outset, on behalf of the Parliamentary Opposition group and my good people of Hograno/Kia/Havulei constituency, I wish to thank his Excellency the Governor General for his Speech which outlines the Democratic Coalition for Change Government (DCCG) reform programs and strategies to bring about changes proposed by the government of the day.

I also wish to thank his Excellency for the sincere congratulations he extended to me, on my appointment as the Leader of the official Opposition. On that note, I wish to assure his Excellency that I will strive to do my best in ensuring that the official opposition performs its mandated role, which is to provide checks and balances to keep her Majesty's government vigilant, accountable and transparent in its undertaking to lead and serve the people of this beautiful country. I also commend the Honourable Prime Minister for his strong desire and passion to bring about change to this country through the strategies outlined in his government's policy, translation and strategy documents. I trust that his cabinet ministers will share the same vision for change and are as passionate as the Prime Minister in providing their ministries with the required political direction and strategic thinking and planning to implement the policies and strategies of the government.

I welcome the government's reform agenda and strategies which include ongoing programs initiated by previous governments. Where we differ, I think is in terms of the approach and the timeframe that we set ourselves to achieve these reforms. The DCCG policies and strategies are very ambitious hence the four years timeframe will not be sufficient. It is important that the government prioritise which programs will be pursued first and those that will come later. It must priorities otherwise what we are doing is raising a lot of expectations from our people, expectations that may take a long time to fulfil. It would be advisable for the government to outline its priorities based on short term, medium term and long term plans. Therefore, I believe that the government's fundamental and sectoral reforms and strategies are better accommodated or pursed through a long term development strategy that will underpin the country's long term development plan and which we could probably called "Solomon Islands Vision 2050". I understand that the government intends to produce a 20-year plan to succeed the current national development strategy 2011 to 2020 which should be reviewed later this year and to accommodate as appropriate the post 2015 sustainable development goals. A 20-year plan is not suitable for Solomon Islands, given our experience in delays in implementing national projects in the development budget, some of which have been in the budget for almost 15 to 20 years but have not even started for obvious reasons.

I will now elaborate on the need for long term plan towards the end of my intervention.

Let me now reflect on some of the fundamental and sectorial reforms highlighted in the Speech from the Throne.

On land reforms, I agree that existing legislations on land need to be amended to unlock the development potential of the country's vast land resources in a way that protects the rights and benefits of our resource owners while at the same time providing some level of economic security for genuine investors. It is imperative that

any land reform programs do consider the establishment of a customary lands trust board, a statutory body that will primarily represent the interest of landowners who have registered their land.

I also note and acknowledge the initiatives the government will undertake to combat corruption. It is important that a holistic approach is taken in this regard including improving the functions of other accountability institutions.

On the Federal Government system, I welcome the additional steps that will be taken to complete the process. I hope that through the Provincial Government Institutional Strengthening Program, our provinces will continue to prepare themselves for the change to a federal system. It will not be easy because it will entail human and financial resources.

There is no doubt that the focus of our economic development endeavours should be in our rural areas, where 80percent of our population live. Hence we will be keen to know how the government will roll out its rural economic development program including economic growth centres. It will be a challenge as rural development will not occur without the necessary infrastructures in place, including roads, wharfs, airstrips, sustainable energy or electricity, telecommunications and water supplies. For the Hograno/Kia/Havulei constituency, the Kaevanga—Kiloka road, Kohe road, Kaolo and Suavanao air strips, to name a few, are vital pieces of infrastructure that once in place will boost economic development, not only in the constituency but also in the province and country as a whole.

Certainly infrastructure development underpins economic development. It is important that the National Transport Fund strategically decides on where to put certain economic infrastructures in the country. The government may also need to revisit the Solomon Islands National Infrastructure Investment Plan adopted by the last Government is a guide in terms of investment in this sector. Infrastructure development in transport, civil aviation, telecommunications, road networks and

sustainable energy supply will provide the much needed connectivity that our country so desperately needs.

Education without a doubt is the backbone of the country's human capital both in quantity and quality. We welcome the initiative to review the 1978 Education Act. We need a long term education strategy for our country with focus on "education for what" so that we better equip our people with the right sets of skills and training. Our people would also be keen to know some details on the government's intention to introduce a fee free education policy, especially as to which sectors or grades it will cover.

Indeed health is a critical social sector in Solomon Islands like in any other country. There is certainly a need to development a national health strategy to improve health at all levels in our country. The relocation of the National Referral Hospital and upgrade of other provincial hospitals are a necessity. It would also be important to implement a comprehensive national program on water supply and sanitation to ensure all rural communities have accessible water supply and effective sanitation systems. It is also necessary to establish a whole of government mechanisms to address health determinants and combat non communicable diseases which is now responsible for more than 60percent of deaths in our hospitals.

His Excellency has also stressed the critical important of agriculture and livestock development and the contributions that this sector can make towards our economy and society in generals. Agriculture, as we all, know provides livelihood for the majority of Solomon Islander. With our rapidly growing population, agriculture practices need to adjust to maintain food security supplies and niche market opportunities. Initiatives to develop the agriculture sector should include the formulation of a long term development strategy for agriculture and livestock for food security and commercial production for export; the need to explore the potential for 'the farm to table concept' that strengthen the linkage between agriculture to tourism and

presents business opportunities for our communities; and of course, the expansion of coconut, cocoa and small cottage industries through support initiatives for rural participation.

On forestry and research, His Excellency has highlighted the ongoing vital contribution of this sector to the economy of this country through logging revenues and to our people's livelihood. With the anticipated decline in logging revenues in the not too distant future, the important question to ask now is, once this important revenue goes where will the revenue come from? How are we going to fill the gap?

On fisheries, the Government has outlined the opportunities and challenges in this sector as well as its plans to establish onshore fisheries facilities. Fisheries, as we all know, is one of main drivers to lift our people out of poverty. Our tuna fishery stock is still in good supply, however, inshore fisheries which is accessible to the whole population is coming under huge strain from increased population pressure and is in danger of being over fished in some of our areas. We need among other initiatives in this sector to develop a long term strategy on fisheries covering inshore and offshore fisheries including aquaculture for food security and export. Undertake marine surveys of our coastal areas and reefs to assess the health of the reef fish stocks and the ecosystem that supports them and feed the information into the development of appropriate fish management plans. Thirdly, rehabilitate and improve existing fisheries facilities in our provinces, secure markets and consider providing start-up financing for rural fishermen in micro loan schemes.

On tourism, His Excellency has again outlined the benefits, opportunities and challenges and measures the government will pursue to sustainably develop this sector. Tourism holds great potential for Solomon Islands. We have just as many or even many attractions in Solomon Islands than some of our Pacific neighbors who are boasting much greater number of tourist arrivals than us. Key impediments to tourism development in Solomon Islands include very high cost of travel, weak marketing,

inadequate support, infrastructure poor access, lack of well coordinated or organized package tours and develop potential tourist sites, inadequate or poor standards of accommodation and of course, diseases such as malaria.

A number of measures can be undertaken to develop this sector. This could include the need to adopt an aggressive strategy that includes addressing the impediments to growth, support tourism product development, working closely with the Solomon Islands Visitors Bureau (SIVB), the airlines and key industry players in marketing to develop packages that would attract higher tourist arrivals and yields. Secondly is the need to support the transformation of the Solomon Islands Visitors Bureau (SIVB) to the Solomon Islands Tourism Authority (SITA) to work with the Solomon Islands Tourism Association and assist SITA to develop a tourism policy and long term development strategy for tourism in Solomon Islands.

The essence of our women, youth and children cannot be understated. His Excellency had made reference to the progresses made and the remaining challenges in terms of gender issues as well as issues affecting our youth and children. We welcome the achievements made and note that more remains to be done. It is our collective responsibility to ensure that the status of our women, youth and children continue to be given the attention they deserve.

On Police and Correctional Services, I would like to acknowledge the critical role of our Police and Correctional Services in maintaining law and order in our country. Effective national security is a prerequisite for economic development. The government must continue to prioritise law and order and further strengthen the relevant institutions charged with the responsibility to safeguard the country's national security. We must work closely with the RAMSI Police component to ensure that their activities outlined in the drawdown strategy are completed and that there are no gaps in the Royal Solomon Islands Police (RSIP) when RAMSI departs in 2017. Equally important is our justice and legal affairs. I wish to acknowledge the fundamental role they play in

maintaining a stable, progressive, fair and just Solomon Islands. They too must be resourced effectively and efficiently to discharge their important responsibilities.

On foreign affairs and external trade, I note the government's desire to maintain and further enhance the Look-North policy and South-South Cooperation and its recognitions of the values of peaceful coexistence with our regional and international partners. Certainly, Solomon Islands does not exist in a vacuum so we need to maintain the aforementioned foreign policies. Effective foreign relation is critical to our long term economic survival. We need, however, to refine our foreign policy objectives and development partner relations and drive an aid effectiveness agenda to better serve our country's long term development vision and mission. Our foreign policy needs to look at strategic, economic and political development for the next five to 10 years, accompanied by relevant training and up skilling of our diplomats so that we can derive optimum benefit from these relationships.

One of the areas that was not clear in His Excellency's Speech from the Throne was the approaches to implementation. How would the government implement these strategies and the agenda for change? In this regard, I believe the government needs to develop and foster genuine partnership for development and change with provincial governments, the private sector, churches and other faith-based institutions, civil society and community groups with a view to:

1. develop and implement a policy framework that acknowledges the critical role played by the private sector, churches and other faith-based organisations, civil society and community groups in nation building and welcomes them as equal partners in its agenda for change for development agenda;
2. we need to encourage private sector, public-private partnership arrangements in sectors;

3. we could also look at encouraging partnerships with churches, other faith-based entities and civil society in the country's development agenda.

I believe there should also be arrangements at the cabinet level to establish a coordinating body to guide, monitor and report on the progress on the implementation of the government's fundamental and sectoral reform programs. A results and performance framework could also be developed to help measure the results and outcomes achieved on an annual basis.

Above all, as I have alluded to earlier, a long term strategy development, say a 35 years plan supported by medium term plans is appropriate for Solomon Islands. The country needs to have a long term strategic development plan to succeed the national development strategy with a vision to advance or progress Solomon Islands from a low income country to middle to high income country by 2050.

Prior to adoption of the national development strategy 2011-2020 by the previous government, successive governments have always focused their attention to the life time of their respective governments rather than to the long term future of Solomon Islands. Without a vision for the future, our country's development planning is short term, cyclical and does not have a yardstick against which development progress can be measured.

A long terms plan with a single unified vision for the country will also provide the basis for our national identity, enhance better cohesion between the national and provincial development plans and provide the foundation for a results-based approach to development in this country. Vision 2050 will feature the type of Solomon Islands we all want to see in 2050 supported by a roadmap on how we can get there in the next 35 years.

The proposed Solomon Islands Vision 2050 or a long term strategy development plan should cover the three key areas of social capital, which includes education and health, infrastructure and economic development. While the goals of this strategic plan should be consistent with global post 2015 sustainable development goals, they must be tailored to reflect our country's situation and context—the Prime Minister has earlier alluded to some of the important issues—thus recognizing the need for nation building and peace building as vital conditions to achieve other social and economic objectives. Some of the fundamental and sectorial reforms outlined in the government's strategies can be accommodated and integrated into this long term plan. The Vision 2050 should be developed on the basis of a broader or nationwide consultation, beginning with a review of the current NDS and based on the outcomes of the 2010 census, which I believe provides very useful and updated statistical information on demographic, economic and social aspects of the nation, allowing us to take a real and objective picture of the population.

The proposed Vision 2050 must put the people, Solomon Islanders as the central point around which all considerations, strategies and actions revolve; a point raised by His Excellency in his speech yesterday. This is important since a state will only exist if there are people living within a territory. Our people are our greatest wealth. We can only move forward if our people evolve in terms of practices and behavior; evolve in knowledge, and evolve in their adaptation to new technology that they require for their development. Since the majority of our people are in the rural areas, Solomon Islands Vision 2050 must no doubt focus on rural development.

The proposed Vision 2050 should provide an accurate picture of the state of the nation and objective perception of the challenges ahead. It should be a thorough and reliable instrument for identifying and assessing priorities and a means we can use to understand the required strategies and the consequent actions derived from the adoption of policies both in global terms and in terms of each sector. Furthermore, I

believe it is essential for the state through Parliament to define as clear as possible the stages and phases of our country's development. It is necessary for Parliament to define national priorities and vital sectors for solving the problems of our people. Parliament, I believe, must determine the sectors that are to become the engine of economic and social development.

As part of the proposed Strategic Development Plan, and in order to project harmonious, integrated and sustainable development for Solomon Islands, it would be vital for the government to establish a national spatial planning framework. This will enable each province of the country to know exactly what its potential is and to explore it, as well as to be informed regarding the potential of other provinces so that there can be an ongoing balance between our provinces. This framework sets the context for specializations which each province can develop based on their respective comparative advantage. For example, Isabel Province can focus on kava, Malaita probably on pineapple, Guadalcanal on coffee, and Makira probably on bananas; all in that commercial production.

I believe that Solomon Islands Vision 2050 should be endorsed by Parliament. A bipartisan parliamentary standing committee on sustainable development should also be established to provide oversight and receive reports from stakeholders on the progress and challenges in the implementation of the Vision SI 2050, including progress in the achievement or otherwise for the post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals. Furthermore, with the proposed vision endorsed by Parliament and in place for the next 35 years, I think it will provide a suitable context for His Excellency, the Governor General to make his Speech from the Throne. It will be an opportunity for His Excellency to remind incoming governments of the progress and challenges in achieving this vision, and how their medium term plans can be tailored to achieve the overall objective of the country's Strategic Development Plan.

In conclusion, I wish once again to thank His Excellency for his Speech from the Throne and do support the motion moved by the Honourable Prime Minister that we, the National of Solomon Islands here assembled beg to offer thanks for the speech which has been addressed by His Excellency to Parliament. I thank you.

Hon FREDA TUKI SORIAMCOMUA (*Minister for Rural Development*): I join other honourable colleagues in thanking the honourable Prime Minister for this important motion. Indeed, it is proper that this Tenth Parliament makes an address to His Excellency, the Governor General for delivering the Speech from the Throne yesterday. My brief contribution will therefore be acknowledgement and possibly some expansion to what has been addressed in the speech to us and the nation.

I can recall the day last year before the 9th Parliament was dissolved, we hear of the successful re-election of Sir Frank Kabui as the Governor General for another term in office. Given this opportunity, Sir, first of all I want to join the nation and others who have conveyed congratulatory messages to Sir Kabui on his successful re-election as Governor General of Solomon Islands late last year. To his Excellency, Sir Frank Kabui, belated congratulations for being re-elected Governor General of Solomon Islands for another term in office. I strongly believe and support that your re-election is not a mistake. However, one that is well thought out and speaks well for our nation because of your wide experience in government, in your career profession and other aspects, you are most suited to the post of Governor General. Not to forget the family of his Excellency, in particular I would like to make mention of Lady Grace Kabui whom I believed displayed her cordial support many times as she supports her husband and family in nation building. As the newly elected member for Temotu Vatu, the only female Minister and female MP in this 10th Parliament, I wish to once again on behalf of my good people of Temotu Vatu congratulate you, Sir Frank Kabui. We offer

you God's blessings and guidance and full support as we together continue to serve our nation Solomon Islands.

Specific to this motion, I also would like to register my appreciation and thank your Excellency Sir Kabui for delivering the keynote address, the Speech from the Throne. Despite of a lot to say, the Speech from the Throne was well said and I salute your Excellency for enduring the whole time. I think what is important in the Speech is that mostly it does provide to the nation what the DCC Government and our policy intention will deliver government services and goods to our people in the next four years.

On a similar note, I wish to register my appreciation and thank his Excellency the Governor General for the valuable reminders and sound advice in his opening remarks of the speech. I note there is an ever stronger call to us politicians to do what we are supposed to be doing and doing it right, for this our motto says it well "to lead is to serve". I am also thankful that the Speech has made a call to our people and fellow Solomon Islanders to understand the work of our Government, the true intention of why we have a government. I think in most cases there exist certain perceptions by people about Government and the call addressed in the Speech of our people on cargo cult mentality is to be considered seriously if we are serious in moving this country forward.

The speech is very clear in the areas of change that the DCC Government intends to do in both its fundamental and sectoral reform programs. The desire of the DCC Government in its policy intentions through its line ministries is that Solomon Islanders are engaged in meaningful employment which in the end will be empowered to be self-reliance through the various development assistance from the government and development partners.

At this point I wish to elaborate further on two points in particular to rural development. The first being that our rural economy needs to engage actively in

development initiatives that brings our social economic development. In some parts of Solomon Islands resources are left idle for too long or in most cases utilized in unsustainable manner that end with very little gain. I guess we have not reached the aim of striking the balance in what we do for our win, win situation.

The newly approved DCCG rural economic policy involves a comprehensive economic development program for 50 constituencies in the next four years. This is yet another very good opportunity through this policy in developing our urban rural economy. At this juncture, I join our honorable Prime Minister and others in the call to our landowning groups and resource owners to work with the government in the most agreeable way so that land, a very important component in any development initiative is available for development. The initiative of the government to establish rural economic development centers throughout the 50 constituencies is crucial to the availability of land. But more so the end result so that people can actively engage in economic activities for their daily livelihoods.

The second area to mention is the need for development assistance from the government and development partners is utilized to address and meet the basic needs of our people. I have mentioned earlier the call by his Excellency Sir Kabui to do with away with the cargo guilt mentality by our people. This call is equally important to us leaders and honorable colleagues, as we partake together with our traditional leaders, constituencies, committees, resource owners, communities and people in driving the rural economic development policy of the government. The DCC Government will invest in this policy and other policy reform programs with the intention to bring about the desired changes for a peaceful, progressive and prosperous Solomon Islands.

With this brief contribution, I will stop here to allow others to contribute. But before I resume my seat I once again acknowledge and thank his Excellency Sir Kabui for addressing the nation through a very formative speech, most of all very important for all Solomon Islanders to take into serious consideration. I support the motion.

Hon. MANASEH MAELANGA (*Leader of Independent Group/East Malaita*): I will be brief in my debate on the address to thank the Governor General for the speech he delivered. And I would like to thank the Honorable Prime Minister for moving the motion to enable us debate the Speech from the Throne delivered by the Governor General yesterday. .

First, I would like to thank the Governor General for the Speech from the Throne yesterday. I want to thank him for the time he has taken in addressing parliament yesterday. I just want to share few things in my debate on the speech itself. As we all know, the speech was indeed a very good speech as it stated many good things about the policy statements of the DCC Government. Hence it was a very good speech for all of us Members of Parliament. Most of the things mentioned in the speech is on how the DCC Government will be leading this country forward, and that is very good. I appreciate very much what the speech is saying.

The only thing I want to comment on here is basically on development, especially economic development because everything comes back to economic development, the result of which should manifest in all our provinces.

The first thing the Governor General mentioned yesterday was land reform, and I would like to support the government on this. I look forward to the government pushing this reform forward. It must pick up from where the previous governments have left and work from there onwards so that our development plans can go forward as well. This is one stumbling block to development because most of our lands are customary lands and not state land. Land reform is very important for the government to deal with.

Furthermore, looking at national development projects around our provinces, if land issues are addressed then those national projects can happen. I think it is very important that land reform program takes place so that development is equally shared

to the other provinces or in other words, decentralization of projects can happen in all our provinces.

Generally, those are the areas I wanted to comment on and the main thing is implementation. If we fail to implement those policies then it is just a waste of time talking about them. I think the bottom line is that we have to implement everything that we want to make it happen especially through the line ministries. Those are the things I want to comment on here.

I also want to support the Prime Minister in the setting up of the anti-corruption commission. That would be a step forward in the right direction. Corruption is what people have labeled us with for a long time – leaders are corrupt. And so it is good that we have an anti-corruption commission to look at leaders, to look at us so that anyone alleged to be corrupt must be investigated forthwith.

On the federal system, I would like to thank the Governor General for mentioning it. I think there is very wide consultation on a federal system that has happened in the past by previous governments. And so I think this 10th Parliament will bring the federal state system to Parliament and so we look forward to that. I am looking forward to seeing a federal state system and how it will work in our country.

I also heard in the speech yesterday the Governor General mentioned police and correctional services as one important ministry as it looks after our law and order and so it is very important to give more resources to that ministry. I think it is important when we talk about development in the country we talk about investors coming in we have to resource the Ministry of Police and Correctional Services. That ministry is very important for development in Solomon Islands.

All the things in the speech are all good and this side of the House is here to support and we are here to make sure that implementation of those things do happen. Implementation is what we want to see. If we are here only to say those things and they are not done then it is not good and I will hide myself under this table.

I think I will leave it here because I will say more during my debate on the budget. I would like to once again thank his Excellency the Governor General for the Speech from the Throne yesterday, and I would like to thank the Prime Minister for moving the motion this morning so that we could debate the motion on the speech by the Governor-General. With those few remarks I support the motion. Thank very much.

Hon SAMUEL MANETOALI (*Minister for Environment, Climate Change, Disaster Management, Conservation and Meteorology*): I thank his Excellency the Governor General for his eloquent speech, outlining areas of focus of the current government, and especially pointing out obstacles we need to overcome and avoid if we are to bring about tangible, beneficial and sustainable change to this country.

His Excellency reminded us of our National Motto – ‘to lead is to serve’. The motto has been given different shades of interpretation, depending on one’s perspective on the state of affairs of the government and country. But in my humble opinion it resonates with the noble intention of serving this country and its people unselfishly without fear or favour for advancement of one and all irrespective of creed, colour, language group, state of mind, rich or poor. Given its noble underpinning, it is challenging to adhere to but it should serve as radar to steer us as we govern in our respective circumstances, be it in this House, in the private sector and even in our homes. More importantly, we must strive to live and work within the realms of this motto. Corruption was also identified as another obstacle but it must be addressed with focus on its root causes.

His Excellency reminded us of the cash handout and the cargo cult mentality which is now eating away our vitality to take responsibility as individuals and leaders in our own right to overcome daily challenges such as meeting school fees and putting food on the table. As parliamentarians, we need to be mindful that resources that are

channeled through us help empower our constituents and set them free from the cash handouts and cargo cult mentality.

There are a number of ways to do that. One is to put emphasis on public good developments, improve the chain of governance and accountability from us to the people and vice versa. Most importantly, we need to discharge our mandate and responsibility as law makers with diligence and ensuring that institutions that are set up to serve this country are properly resourced and made accountable for the actions and inactions.

The Ministry of Environment, Climate Change, Disaster Management and Meteorology, of which I am in charge of, is not small or unimportant. The space we are covering for this country commensurate with our land, air space and Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) without which no development can take place and life will be miserable. I do not want to sound like a doomsday prophet but if we are not careful about the vibrancy and soundness of our environment by monitoring and evaluating the pulses of our natural and manmade environments and taking appropriate measures, our development plans and aspirations will be, not only as good as they are being implemented but also as far to the extent possible that we are able to bounce back from the failure of our environment to provide eco system, goods and services, tropical depressions and cyclones, food insecurity, coastal erosion, ocean acidification and nature in disasters.

The vision of my ministry is for a safe, sustainable and resilient environment for Solomon Islands. Our mission is to provide an enabling environment for the socio-economic development of Solomon Islands through the application of necessary safeguards with regards to the sustainable use of natural resources, the provision of meteorological services, reducing the risk and impact of climate change and other hazards to communities, leading and managing disasters, preparedness and their consequences.

The DCC Government came in when the ministry was finalizing its corporate plan for 2015-2017. And so the DCC policy statement and its translation have been incorporated into its corporate plan. Turning the intentions and plans into action to deliver outputs and contribute to sustainable development and bring about meaningful progress to all is an ongoing endeavor for my ministry.

Solomon Islands is a natural resource rich country and our lives including our economy are complexly intertwined with the natural environment. Therefore, some degree of environmental degradation is inevitable in pursuit of development. Environmental management is concerned with the application of measures to prevent, avoid and reduce the impacts of human activities on the environment – natural and built and their restoration. Nevertheless, the objective of environmental management is not only about environmental protection but is also about guiding development down a path that maximizes sustainable benefits to participants of a development enterprise including local resource owners now and into the future. What is alarming however is the extent of environmental degradation so far in our country which is avoidable if basic safeguards are adhered to even though current safeguard laws are inadequate in scope and depth and often poorly enforced. The situation is exacerbated by competing representation by resource owners and private investors and corrupt and fraudulent practices.

My ministry has been criticized by some parties because we refuse to grant Gold Ridge Mining Limited license to discharge untreated mine tailings water into the Tinahulu River. To me, our decision is the most sensible and environmentally sound one to date, bearing in mind the potential short and long term impacts of discharging untreated industrial waste into a river system and the circumstances which gave rise to the precarious situation at the tailings storage facilities. We have instead requested GRML to install and commission the treatment system to treat the waste water before discharging and so far the GRML has not complied with our request.

Among findings of recent environmental health assessment report by an external consultant was that the untreated TSF water as well as receiving water are not toxic and human, implying that the untreated TSF water is safe and not harmful to humans. If this is indeed the case, why cannot the TSF water be pumped into tanks and taken elsewhere for disposal. I leave this for you to ponder.

Environmental safeguard measures in relevant legislations within the jurisdictions of my ministry and related ministries, such as the Ministry of Mines and Energy and the Ministry of Forestry and Research, need to be reviewed, keeping in mind the rate and scale of environmental, socioeconomic and technological shifts we are now facing.

To this end, my ministry will be reviewing the Environment Act and the Wildlife Protection and Management Act with the ultimate objective of safeguarding the environment and facilitating sustainable development for now and into the future. My ministry is committed to natural resource management for sustainable development. Yet, at the same time we must guard against causing irreversible changes to the environment because more often than not, irreversible changes also bring about negative impacts directly to ecosystems and eventually the very people dependent on these ecosystems for survival. From the hills and mountains to the plains right down to our coastal waters and coral reefs and to our exclusive economic zones, the use of resources there must be practiced with sustainability at its core.

Consequently, environmental sustainability cannot be a peripheral consideration or an annex to any form of development because in Solomon Islands, the people and the environment are inseparable. It is myopic to equate environmental management to the demarcation and declaration of protected areas, be it in the marine or terrestrial settings, because we have to accept the fact that our links to the biophysical environment and its entity are so close and real even if you wear the latest perfume and possess a wardrobe full of designer clothes. Our mandate environment including

villages and towns must also be managed with sustainability at the core because the nexus between natural and manmade environment are also closely interdependent on each other. You mess one of them up, you can be sure that the other one will hit back or both of them will do so if not now. But most certainly, they will affect our children and future generations. An example in point is the waste management in Honiara City and other urban areas. The generation of waste is a universal process where no one is left behind, yet its proper management is often made the responsibility of a city or town council and the public at large takes a no-care attitude towards waste.

The no-care attitude in Solomon Islands is everywhere, especially on our environment. It happens in Honiara. People throw empty plastics and cans from moving vehicles. It seems like no one cares about Honiara, it is another person's city. That is the attitude we have in this country. Even passengers travelling in boats and ships do that. They throw all sorts of rubbish into the sea. This attitude must stop in this country. There must be strong laws to stop littering. In schools, our children must be taught to properly dispose waste and even in our homes. People even spit betel nut stain and throw cigarette butts all over the place in their own homes. We have to start from our homes and schools and to the city.

Mr Speaker, I know you are a pastor and cleanliness is godliness so Solomon Islands must be godliness; it must be a clean place to stay, and our children and people must be happy living there. A lot of experiences have shown that some of the worst communicable disease outbreaks were heightened by poor waste management practices. In addition, flash floods and the poor state of roads in Honiara are in part also caused by the blockage of drainage caused by dumping of wastes in waterways and drains. The application of safeguard measures including restraining developments in a near fragile and highly vulnerable area are provided for in existing legislation and ordinances and if applied thoroughly, the occurrences and impacts of disasters will also be reduced.

Climate change is here and happening and the DCC Government together with my ministry has set a goal of enacting legislation to ground climate change adaption and mitigation within a low carbon and risk resilient development framework, and simultaneously raise awareness and reduce the vulnerability of different sectors in partnership with national and international stakeholders through the implementation of targeted measures. In terms of the latter, there is more to be done, and it needs the support of the society at large.

Progress has also been seen in communities taking up appropriate adaptive measures promoted under a variety of pilot projects implemented and more notably in terms of the mainstreaming of climate change into the programs of other ministries including the Ministry of Development Planning and Aid Coordination, the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock, the Ministry of Forestry and Research, the Ministry of Infrastructure Development, the Ministry of Lands, Housing and Survey and the Ministry of Health and Medical Services, with the support of our multi-lateral partners.

In terms of climate change mitigation which corresponds to the elimination and reduction in the emission of greenhouse gases which cause climate change, our focus is on up-scaling and expanding renewable energy generation and the promotion of REDD+ in partnership with the Ministry of Mines, Energy and Rural Electrification and the Ministry of Forestry and Research respectively. As members of the resource cluster, we are ready for the business of collaboration across ministries, and we look forward to strengthening these relationships in our cluster.

In the recent world disaster reduction conference in Japan, I made the point that we are in the constant mode of recovery from disasters, and these disasters are exacting upon us tolls that are increasingly becoming unbearable and development unfriendly. Last year we had flash floods which claimed 22 lives and cause immediate losses and damages to the tune of about nine (9) percent of our GDP, of which we are still struggling to recover from. Two weeks ago tropical Cyclone Pam wreaked havoc in the

eastern and northern parts of the country. I further stated that the frequency and intensity of disasters set off by hydro-meteorological hazards such as tropical depressions and cyclones is alarming and underscores the influence climate change now has on such disasters.

The average annual economic loss for Solomon Islands from nature induced disasters is estimated at SBD\$146million. The above narration highlights that disaster risk including climate change impacts need to be frontloaded into development plans and programs, and alternative modes of financing to reduce future risks and the response time following a disaster event need to be put in place.

Given the likely upward trajectory in disasters, the ministry is now placing emphasis on disaster risk reduction, as much as disaster management following an event. For disaster risk management, the focus is on strengthening our institutional arrangements at the national, provincial and community levels and also to raise awareness about disasters and advocating for disaster risk reduction, consideration in all development aspects with the National Disaster Management Office (NDMO) providing technical backstopping, coordination and leadership. Furthermore, my ministry is also embarking on aligning climate change adaptation risk reduction, given the obvious complementarities and the need to minimize duplication and build upon the strengths of both technical areas.

In keeping with our safeguards rule, the ministry through the Solomon Islands Meteorological Service strives to provide professional meteorological services for the public and for aviation and maritime sectors and ensure that there is strengthened and adequate support to national meteorological services through enhanced institutional capacity development including multi hazard early warning system. As an essential service provider, it is under resourced in terms of financial support, technical infrastructures, and expertise, for example, we have only four fully qualified

meteorologists and several staffs have been sent for further studies and hopefully further training to become qualified meteorologist.

Weather and climate services as we all know are critical to all sectors. For us to provide top notched meteorological services we must be appropriately supported. With climate change and increasing occurrence of disasters, weather observation and early warning becomes more important and pertinent than ever before. To address some of our technical constraints, we are at the moment installing automatic weather stations and rain gauges in various locations through the country. And very soon we will not only be forecasting but also now casting because with this automatic weather systems we shall be able to observe in real time the weather.

My ministry looks after areas which are subject to international treaties and conventions which the Solomon Islands Government has ratified and signed up to. These treaties and conventions including regional including treaties and agreements have commitments and obligations that the country or signatories needs to meet. This also brings to the fore another dimension on the work my ministry is carrying out on behalf of the Government and the people of Solomon Islands, which is to participate and contribute to issues of global significance within our mandate. These international undertakings represent our obligations and I say with confidence that our participation have accrued benefits to the Solomon Islands including financial flows. In spite of the fact that fiscal resources allocated to us on annual bases remain close to one (1) percent of each annual budgets, since my Ministry came to being more than five (5) years ago, we remain hopeful that the above scarcity will progressively improve, not only in the upcoming budget but also in future ones.

With these remarks, I thank his Excellency the Governor General for alerting us to the challenges before us and encouraging us to work together in leading and serving our people in the next four years. I support the motion.

Mr RICK HOUENIPWELA (*Small Malaita*): Mr Speaker, on behalf of my people of Small Malaita constituency, I would like to join my other colleagues who have expressed their thanks to his Excellency the Governor General for addressing the 10th Parliament. As the Prime Minister has said, it is a long time since this Parliament has had the privilege of listening to the Government General deliver the Speech from the Throne. It is not only important but also a special tradition that is part of our young democracy's heritage. His Excellency's presence in this chamber is a strong reminder not only of Solomon Islands' ties with the British people, but also the fact that the office of his Excellency is the very thing that holds us in this country as a united nation. We should not lose this practice.

The opening statement on the intentions of the DCC government struck a very encouraging chord with me that the Government will continue with reforms more especially in what his Excellency referred to as fundamental reforms. His Excellency urged the cabinet ministers in this regard to ensure they perform their duties to implement government policies and he further reminded us MPs that we are national legislators and not micro-project managers. These are very timely reminders, which is why the speech kept me awake all throughout.

His Excellency spoke of the DCC Government taking fundamental reforms that will ensure nation building to reinforce the government machinery towards more efficiency to fight corruption and forge stability and to provide an enabling environment and the space for economic growth and prosperity for our country and our people. I am very encouraged by this policy direction and these are some of the many issues that have dampened Solomon Islands' best efforts to reach its full potentials or make progress over the last 37 years.

His Excellency outlined that the reforms will be targeting areas including land to review and give life to the Customary Lands Recording Act and to review the Lands Title Act. The need to tackle land issues head on is the way to go. For me, His

Excellency was actually preaching to the converted. We must take reforms that will translate the vast resource land for the betterment of landowners and for Solomon Islands as a whole instead of the current practice of fighting over it in its ownership and use.

On the economic and financial front, his Excellency mentioned a number of policy actions, such as reintroducing the reserved business areas policy and reinvigorating agencies like CEMA, ICSI and the Development Bank. It is no secret that these institutions and agencies have suffered the same problem of mismanagement, inefficiencies and abuse which the SOE Act 2007 is intended to address. In reinvigorating these agencies, the big question one has to ask is, are they going to be different this time. I do not think we would have solved anything to resurrect these entities by filling their board rooms and senior managements with more political appointees, supporters and sympathizers.

On the federal system and the intended changes to the national constitution, obviously some people are excited about what the new system will offer. I am not sure what a new federal system or a new constitution for that matter will do to solve the ingrained human problem of incompetence, the financial resource constraints we have and the endemic abuse and mismanagement of resources in the current system of our government. In this connection, a number of our provincial governments should have been dissolved years ago. But the point is if we cannot manage our resources well under current legal arrangements, will we do better under a new constitution? If we are given authority over our own taxes and revenue collections, would we manage these finances better and more efficiently under the federal system? If we are unable to govern effectively under the present provincial government system, how is it that we can do a better job under the federal system? If we do not have enough financial resources to use under the current government machinery because it is expensive, do we think it will be cheaper to do that under the federal system?

On the issue of fundamental reforms, I am convinced that the approach announced by the DCC Government to take fees by sector is a good one. For example, in the productive sector, action in agriculture should address food security and will enhance growth that is broad based with more participation by the Solomon Islands majority. I agree entirely. I also agree that for the tourism industry—sadly successive governments have not given it sufficient push to open up this country's potentials in that sector—I support the push to redirect efforts and increase investment into civil aviation, telecommunications and general infrastructure development more particularly in the rural areas. We have already made some head way in some of these areas. However there is nothing to guarantee that the government will be able to deliver on all these promises. The constraints are just too many.

On environment, and I was very encouraged by the speech from the Minister, on Environment and Disaster Management, it is gratifying to hear that the government is taking serious steps to address the management of all our marine resources. However, it is disappointing that there is no real action being taken on climate change and sea rise. I am disappointed because the effects of climate change and sea rise are right before our eyes. It is along the Mataniko River and on the waterfronts of Honiara.

Experts say that within 10 years the National Referral Hospital will be gone. Around this country, hundreds of our island communities and large communities in low lying areas have been overtaken by these causes. The government must not wait for it to happen. We must have a large scale relocation program for our people. We must have a large scale mitigation and adaptation program for our seashores and river dwelling communities. The Government cannot pretend these are happening in other places. I bet each one of us in this Chamber is affected, if not directly then indirectly by the impact of climate change and sea rise.

On rural development, I cannot agree more with the policy direction of the government as announced by his Excellency. We have to take drastic measures to

incentivize economic activities and development in this country. Given our geographical settings and the demographics of our country, these measures will not make sense to the orthodox economic planners because we have to construct roads, build wharves and airports where there is no economic rationale. We must go where there is very little or no population at all.

I am convinced that the policy of creating population centres is the way forward to forge broad based economic development and provide better economic opportunities to the majority in this country. You can call it development centres or economic growth centres but the policy objectives and the process is the same. Eventually, investment in infrastructure will make economic sense. For now it is a chicken and egg situation. Someone has to take that initial difficult step to do the heavy investment. I believe this is the role of the government; it is to make that difficult decision and it must lead to take the initiative to make the heavy lifting. I believe this policy drive is the best approach for Solomon Islands. My only concern right now is the capacity constraints and weak internal systems at the Ministry of Rural Development and more especially at the constituency level. In order to turn these investment intentions into reality, we have to have the manpower and very robust systems to ensure efficient delivery and implementation.

In the education sector, I am also happy to hear good policy intentions and redirections in the making. However, there is a very important area of training which was not mentioned in his Excellency's Speech, and that is trade and skills training. Any country that has to grow will require endless resources of trade skills. For our nation building and economic advancement, we need our electricians, our carpenters, our plumbers, bricklayers, mechanics, engineers and the list goes on of all these skills that ensure the nuts and bolts in building the country.

On public service, I can encourage the government to continue with the reforms being undertaken as well as those now intended. The public service is rife with

inefficiencies and so much corrupt practices that our people no longer have any confidence in it. It seems that all reforms undertaken so far have made it worse off. I suggest that the government should not only consider introducing a performance based rewarding system but go beyond that. That is, raise their salaries and give better conditions of services to public servants, teachers, police, nurses and everybody in government. But those who do not perform should be sacked; apply punitive measures and remove all sorts of cobwebs such as suspension on half pay and such treatments which only permeate bad practices so prevalent in public offices.

I like the section on Women, Youth Children and Family Affairs. It almost feels like a father talking to his son kind of situation, explaining the causes of problems in the family and what family is intended to be and what a loving father should be and what wife/husband relationship is not. Given the prevailing situation I am not sure if many people believe in this teaching anymore. But I did not hear what the Government is doing about it. There is a whole section on gender balance and child abuse but it is all about statistics and reports published on this subject. The most disappointing part to me is on youth. I did not hear anything on youth; least of all what the Government plans to do to address the plight of the youth population in this country. We do not need any reminding that this is an urgent issue that has long been overdue.

The sections on Police, Justice and Legal Affairs were quite brief. I hope it is not an indication of the importance given to these important sectors. But I think the Police Force will need a good kick. The ills and problems in the Force maybe many but essentially it boils down to a supposedly disciplinary force which is seriously lacking in self-discipline. Unlike the old days, officers these days appear to apply the principle that "if you cannot beat them join them". Allow me to tell a story to illustrate this point.

Maka'a in West Are Are constituency hosts the only police presences in the whole of Sothern Region of Malaita Province, a vast area covering many miles of rough country and rough seas. Till 2010 Maka'a Police Station used to have up to six officers.

My first visit to the station in 2011 after taking office, the station was headed by a certain police sergeant who was very highly regarded by our community leaders in the catchment. He was well mannered, had high working ethics and good management skills. He was very gentle but he went about his job with an iron fist. He would make arrests and while awaiting investigations to be carried out, the culprit would be tied to a pole in the middle of station for however long the investigations would take. When asked, the sergeant told me he had requested for a jail but with no response from his superiors he had to do whatever to maintain law and order given the situation. He was feared in the community but he was well respected in all our communities. In 2012, I even wrote a commendation letter for him to the then Police Commissioner. Later the Commissioner told me that that was the only letter of a commendation he had ever received from anyone in the community for any of his officers. But the sad end is that, not long after my letter to the Commissioner, the officer had made a complete U-turn to the worse. It appeared that the sergeant has applied the approach “if you cannot beat them, join them”. By year’s end he became a regular customer for illegal bottle shops in the area, he became a ring leader in drinking brawls and other illicit activities. Consequently, Maka Police Station and Police activity quickly deteriorated to the point where there is no longer any police presence at Maka. This story reveals the predicament facing the Police Force and lack of support but more importantly it tells of a lack of resilient discipline in our Police Force. I hope the new Commissioner will inspire the Force out of this.

Finally, on Justice and Legal Affairs, I was hoping to hear what the DCC Government has in its plans to elicit and bring onboard traditional and cultural court systems – how the important role traditional chiefs and community leaders play in resolving community disputes and other traditional settlements are upheld and recognized under the laws of this country.

In conclusion I acknowledge the Prime Minister's statement that this country desperately needs to come out of the current mode of development approach. We need to be committed to a long term strategy that will pave the development path for our nation. To this end, the Opposition group through the leader, has outlined and emphasized the proposed vision 2015 earlier. We believe this should be the way forward.

In closing, let me thank His Excellency for his speech and also the Prime Minister for allowing us to debate it. Although the speech is quite long I listened very attentively to what his Excellency said, and of course, I enjoyed it mainly because I am keen in what the DCC Government has to offer this country. With that I support the motion.

Hon AGUSTINE AUGA (*Minister for Agriculture and livestock Development*): Mr Speaker, at the outset let me thank you and your good office for bringing us all back to this Honourable House to the second meeting of the 10th Parliament.

As has been alluded to by the Governor General through his speech, all of us in this Honourable House are responsible in how we run the affairs of this beloved nation. On this note, I would like to thank the Honourable Prime Minister for his leadership, vision and direction to getting our beloved country back on track for economic prosperity based on DCC's policy statements and strategies. Although the economic growth rate of three (3) percent is expected for 2015 I have confidence in this Government to double or triple that growth rate in the next four years.

Let me wish my good people of Lau/Mbaelelea constituency a belated happy and prosperous New Year 2015. My good people let us put our hands, our heads and our hearts together to develop our constituency, our province and our nation Solomon Islands from this year and onwards. Let us turn a new page as we prepare to host national projects such as the Suava Bay developments. As has been alluded to by the

Governor General we are showing exemplary gesture which our customary landowners should follow suit – to open up resources for development to come down to us. Enough of searching for development my good people! Let us allow development to come directly to us.

Agriculture is still the backbone of the country's economy. More than 80percent of our rural dwellers depend on agriculture for food, nutrition and nutrient security, livelihood and employment. The main objectives of agriculture are to ensure farming communities achieve self sufficiency in food stock, increase rural cash income, improve efficiency in food production to enable the country increase its export earnings and broaden its export base.

I must thank the good staff of my ministry for their dedication and commitment in addressing ministry mandates for the people of this nation. The ministry will continue to carry out its mandated objectives within its affordability as the ministry looks forward to addressing the DCC Government policy objectives and strategic actions in contributing towards developing the rural sector of the country.

Rural development is all about developing the rural areas for the betterment of the rural population, further enhancing and empowering our rural communities to be able to improve their standard of living. Not forgetting the urban dwellers who must also grow fruits and vegetables to supplement their daily meals. For this, my ministry has established six fruit trees and vegetable planting material nurseries in Honiara from which households can get planting materials to grow their supsup gardens.

Agriculture is about cultivating soil, feeding animals and producing food to meet the increasing population of more than 550,000 people, which must be fed at least two times a day. As the population of this country increases at about 3percent annually, land remains the same and therefore land utilization is of utmost importance.

With the various sectorial and sub-sectorial policies in place, agriculture development will be so strategic in its implementation. The rural land use policy

framework soon to go to Cabinet for endorsement will form the basis for effective land utilisation in the face of so many natural and manmade disasters that in one way or another have resulted in soil fertility loss, land degradation, biodiversity erosion and the list goes on. Communities will be able to plan and make informed decisions on how to use their land.

In addressing the productive sector reform programs, infrastructure, energy and other essential areas must form the basis for rural development that is integral for investor interest to address: First is development of oil palm in the country, development of cash crops such as coconut, cocoa and others; supporting small holder and commercial farmers; strengthening agriculture extension; encouraging and promoting production and consumption of local foods; developing and building capacity of farmers and field staff.

On the copra and cocoa industry, the government through the ministry recognizes the contribution these two commodities have towards the livelihood of the rural population. Seventy five (75) percent of foreign revenue earnings go back to rural areas in the form of hard cash, which traders use to buy the produce from farmers. Farmers and other stakeholders must be congratulated for the efforts made in the development of these crops. The sad fact is that these trees are currently producing other outcomes of subsidy schemes of the 1970s and 1980s. I can only hope that under the DCC Government policy strategies, similar subsidy schemes will be activated in order to give a new gist of life to the stagnant cocoa and coconut industries.

Land has been a contentious issue that limits agricultural development to some extent. Land tenure systems reforms that enable large scale agriculture development to take place needs to be institutionalized. To improve participation in the economy direct assistance must be made available to support rural farmers to cultivate their lands and turn them into productive assets rather than land not being used productively.

As the minister responsible for agriculture development in this country, I would like to acknowledge the efforts made by all levels of agriculture production from subsistence farmers to commercial plantations, from vegetable and livestock market vendors to commodity exporters. 'Agriculture is the backbone of this economy' is not a fallacy, but a reality that some of us have first-hand experience in what agriculture is. There is no other time in the history of this country that needs taking bold and decisive action in its development than now. Agriculture must be given all recognition since this sector is the key to growing our economy.

I would like to acknowledge the many development partners who in one way or another have helped develop the sector, whether it is to do with commodities development, food security, livelihoods, land management and climate change adaptation. At the end of the day the beneficiaries are the men, women and children of Solomon Islands. Value adding had not been given much attention and thus the country has not been getting maximum benefits for its products. By the same token, poor marketing in the rural areas has hampered diversification, thus while farmers may be interested in developing new or other commodities they do produce because there are no markets. Initiatives to develop rural marketing networks must be supported.

To stimulate production processing, manufacturing and marketing, my ministry aims to provide assistance to producers, processors, manufacturers and marketers with more emphasis on commercialization. The commodities to be targeted are copra, coconut oil, cocoa, coffee, rice, food crops, vegetables and fruits. Livestock would include poultry, piggery, honey and cattle. Diversification into other crops and livestock where markets are known to exist will be encouraged. All along agriculture has been given low priority in terms of budgetary support. It is therefore time that this situation is reversed to allow the country's human and natural resources to be developed to contribute to growing our economy.

Finally, it is my firm belief that given the right and conducive atmosphere supported by proper initiatives, the development of agriculture in this country can be very lucrative. Our farmers are no longer uneducated. Most of them have the will and aspiration for development on the land and other resources in a sustainable manner. If we approach development in a holistic manner as we intend to do, there is every chance that we will succeed. Let us not repeat the mistakes of the past where only one sector of agriculture such as cocoa or coconut has been the focus of assistance and concentrating on production alone. The whole value chain must be addressed from production to marketing to create the necessary atmosphere and conditions for success. In this respect, I would like to call on development partners and other donors to support this new approach as we believe it is the way forward for agriculture in Solomon Islands. With these few remarks, I support the motion.

Sitting suspended for lunch break at 11.36am

Sitting resumed at 1.43pm

Mr DERRICK MANU'ARI (*West Makira*): Thank you Mr Speaker for this opportunity to briefly contribute to this important motion in offering our thanks for the Speech from the Throne delivered by the Governor General yesterday. I have also noted the concern being raised regarding time limitation and so I will try to be brief in my contribution.

Before elaborating, I would like to take this chance to thank his Excellency on behalf of my people of West Makira for availing himself to deliver the Speech from the Throne yesterday. The speech as we have all

heard has outlined many of the aspirations and strategic outlooks and directions of the current DCC Government. On behalf of my people, I would like to express our appreciation for the many development plans and the strategic approaches that the government of the day has outlined and has put in place for the people of this nation, particularly for the rural grassroots people. It was obvious from the Speech that the DCC as the government of the day is focused on boosting economic growth in the rural sector, as well as enhancing productive sectors by encouraging proactive participation and engagement by our people in the rural areas. And for that, on behalf of my people, we are very grateful.

At this juncture I wish to urge the government of the day that whilst the speech sounded very encouraging, as others have alluded to earlier, the challenge will always come back to when these plans are going to be put into fruition; that is when the implementation process or stage is reached. The real test will come with the implementation of the proposed plans, programs and activities. The challenge always comes when we try to connect the dots from the documents with the situation on the ground. That is when the reality meets the theory, and the mismatch has always been the challenge for successive governments to try and narrow the gap that continues to exist in theory versus the reality. Such blockage often exists due to unsound decision making and the lack of thorough planning and consultation with the people. In a situation where corruption is undeniably embedded in our system, it is always a challenge to continue to

be able to be able to represent and at the same time deliver on these plans and on the promises we have given to our people.

I am pleased that the government of the day is seriously looking into the issue of corruption with renewed drive and energy. On the corruption agenda, I wish to add that let us not be complacent and lead our people to believe that the establishment of an anti-corruption body or commission will be insufficient to curb corruption. But I am happy to say that it is the right way forward.

Corruption, in my view, must not only be tackled just by dealing with results or the occurrences of corruption. We must also focus on the causes of corruption. That is very important when we allocate resources and put our plans into action. I have noted the numerous reviews outlined yesterday in the Speech, which is good in our fight against corruption in this nation. But corruption is human embedded and it is a behavioral problem. It is a mentality problem and without focusing on the causes, which can be linked to the difficulties and challenges we face every day, we cannot truly address this embedded problem.

Some of these problems have been addressed or have been mentioned by previous speakers. The condition of service of public officers is one of the contributing factors, in my view. When we are living in an economic situation where life is difficult and every day to put bread on the table is something that is almost impossible for a sector or a proportion of our population, it is always tempting to accept corruption; it is almost a

way out in such difficult situations. The anti-corruption body, I believe will help to address this but we must also try to provide opportunities so that our people can have better opportunities and the choices they make will be free of corruption so that we can directly address the occurrence of corruption within our institutions and within our daily walks of life.

One thing I would like to note here is that in the establishment of the anti-corruption commission and with the existing watch dog institutions, such as the Leadership Code Commission, the Ombudsman and others, these institutions depend entirely or mostly on reporting mechanisms. They must receive reports before they can go out and undertake investigations. Of course, perhaps there are provisions for them to undertake independent investigations. But without reliable reporting mechanisms in place, these bodies will just be bodies; they would not be effective in the implementation of their mandates.

On this note, I would like to emphasise that the availability of information is very important to support reliable reporting mechanisms. And in the absence of a mechanism that will enforce that, the reporting mechanisms that these bodies depend on will not work. For example, an Information Act I would envisage will help the provision of important information to the bodies who will be undertaking this reporting. Today we have experienced that even information that can be seen as public information are not readily available and even if you request these information, they can always use confidentiality as an excuse to not avail

such information. I believe an Information Act to accompany the anti-corruption body is vital to ensure its effectiveness.

I would also like to put to the notice of this House, particularly the government of the need to introduce a Code of Conduct for Members of Parliament. A Code of Conduct is inspirational but it sets the benchmark to the level of expectation of Members, and with that a Code of Conduct for the people. That is, a “do” and a “do not do” list for the people so that our people can understand what is expected of them and what is not expected of them.

The other factor which I think contributes to this embedded corruption is the very low minimum wage rate and so people with very small income will always be ready to accept corruption or bribery. I think it is worthwhile to revisit this so that we can provide them with the opportunity to stand against corruption.

I would now like to comment briefly on the Regional Assistance Mission (RAMSI) to Solomon Islands. RAMSI as we all know came when our economy was at the brink of collapse and the successes of it came when we have seen the improvements in the economy, in the systems and the practices of government as well as the whole machinery of government. But my concern is the ability of the government to sustain these gains. As a government we must be proactive in ensuring that the gains are sustained in the long term. And with the current transition of RAMSI, it is very important that the government plays a proactive role in deciding

timeframes, program designs and so forth so that the changes we will go through will be in the best interest of this nation and of the government of the day.

While on the RAMSI transition, the onus is now on us leaders to continue to stand alone and be able to sustain our economy in the post RAMSI era. The expansion of our economic base which has been re-emphasized by the current DCC Government is very encouraging. But our focus to stimulate this expansion must not only be on tangible infrastructures such as roads, bridges, wharves and so forth. We must also draw equal attention to soft infrastructures, which is the intellectual or human side of such advancements that is directly linked to our capacity to be able to sustain and continue to deliver.

The expansion we are wishing for is not an easy ride. While we focus on broad based development approaches to expand and boost our productive sectors, we must also ensure readiness or preparedness to tackle the adverse social side effects of development. Many times we have overlooked that but it is very important. Social change is eating away the fabrics of this society, because we only focus on bringing about development but we are not prepared to address its adverse effects. And the adverse effects are often detrimental to the progress of development in our young nation.

I would also like to comment briefly on the education sector, and my constituency welcomes with open heart the increase in the constituency

scholarship grant. It is indeed a manifestation of the government's recognition in ensuring sustainable development. Many times we talked about sustainable development without having clear recognition that sustainable human resource investment and sustainable development are correlated.

On that note, I wish to urge the current government to continue supporting our National University - the Solomon Islands National University. As the only tertiary institution we have in Solomon Islands, it is important that we continue to upgrade that institution, not only through infrastructure but also through its academic accreditation.

On infrastructure, I believe that if part of the constituency scholarship grant is directly invested in SINU, we will be able to shoot two birds with one stone. For example, if we increase the constituency grant to \$1million so that \$500,000 of that money is invested into SINU for school fees, at the same time SINU will be able to expand and the another part of the grant will be used for other institutions. This will help in advancing our education or our human resources holistically, in terms of expanding or upgrading SINU as an institution as well as expanding our human resources base.

Talking about education, it is undeniable that it is the cornerstone for a prosperous future because we are talking about the people that will manned the systems, we are talking about people who will be looking after the programs, the activities not only today but also in the future. But it is

quite discouraging to continue to see in the papers and the media and even from reports that issues with scholarships continue to prevail. It is discouraging to see students that are qualified to attend tertiary institutions are left out in the scholarship allocation while others that may not have deserved to have the privilege are given the chance to go. I have spoken directly to some students who have been affected and I am presenting this on their behalf.

This scholarship scandal is de-motivating and is a disincentive to the progress we may have in the education sector. These things will always cloud any positive improvements, whether it be legislation or structural in terms of advancement in the education sector. I urge the current government to please look into this issue. And it is not only about scholarships but the welfare of students overseas, the ongoing delay in the allowances as well.

I spoke to one parent the other day who has a child who went to an institution in Papua New Guinea on Tuesday but was flown back on Wednesday which is today because he went there without realizing that the registration process of the institution they were enrolled in was already closed and so he was sent back at the expense of this country. This is an oversight that could have been avoided. Those are some of the things I am concerned about and so I am raising them.

Just imagine if you were one of them. Will you be motivated when you return? Will you be still able to want to continue education or

continue your career in education? I am not sure but it is indeed a disincentive and is de-motivating. I am putting this on the floor for the Government to note.

I am also encouraged by the position of the current government on women and youth issues. But I am quite disheartened to note that the very vulnerable people of our society have not been mentioned in the speech yesterday – people living with disabilities. People living with disabilities, I believe, are the most vulnerable in our society and responsible authorities and ministries must continue to honor commitments that this nation has in terms of international treaties and conventions.

The translation of these commitments must be shown, must be obvious in how they are being implemented - in infrastructure, the provision of spaces for disable people and elevation of their rights. These are very important things for us to consider. The disable through their association have been trying their very best but without ongoing support by the Government they will always continue to face mammoth challenges.

On foreign relations, the “Look North” and the “South South” policy of the government is noted. We do exist in a global forum and our approach in initiating bilateral and multilateral relations must not only be purely or exclusively based on strategic and economic considerations. In my view, there are also other important factors that should also be considered.

Solomon Islands, as we know or as we continuously prophesy or manifest, is a Christian country and as a Christian country we have moral values and principles to also consider, so we must not contradict ourselves. In maintaining our moral standards as a sovereign nation, we must also allow these values to influence policies. We must not be compromised by monetary considerations only. In my view, there are certain things in this world that even financial returns should not force us to deny. For example, the West Papua issue.

Honourable colleagues, our fellow brothers and sisters in West Papua are being tortured and intimidated almost on a daily basis. And as a Melanesian country, we need to stand up and be seen as doing something about this. I understand the politics surrounding all these but we must not forget our moral values and principles. Our silence and passive approach is a denial of the very values we have for so long testified as the fundamental pillars of our society, the Christian Solomon Islands. We are Christians and therefore we must not be seen as hypocritical. We must stand up and clearly position ourselves so that we may be seen as not compromising ourselves, we must be seen as supporting the freedom of the people of West Papua. Papua Merdeka!

Before I resume my seat I would like to briefly comment on the sentiments raised by the Governor General on the dependency syndrome. That is a sad but true reality in our society. Our rural people, the grassroots people are of the mindset that Members of Parliament are the

providers; we are sub-governments. That is true to a certain degree because we are custodians of development funds; we are custodians of monies that they claim is theirs. However, I believe the direction the current government is taking in reviewing the CDF Act will somehow address that hurdle in terms of ensuring there is a mentality shift.

I must also say that the mentality our people have in depending entirely on government funds and aid donors to provide for development or to initiate development is not caused by the people themselves too. It is a result of an ongoing government failure to deliver. It is a result of unsound decision making by successive governments. The handling and management of the RCDF by Members of Parliament is a factor that has contributed to that. And if we are not proactive in addressing that, we will continue to face that in the many years to come. I think it is timely that we have our strategy in place to begin properly in addressing and ensuring that there is a paradigm shift in this mentality because if it continues to prevail, it will continue to become a hurdle in ensuring sustainable development.

With these few remarks, I would like to reiterate my people's acknowledgement and appreciation of the DCC Government's approach in delivering services to the rural areas. The emphasis on economic growth centres is very encouraging and we look forward to when these plans will be implemented. With that I support the motion.

Mr CONNELLY SANDAKABATU (*Northwest Choiseul*): Thank you for giving me this opportunity to speak for my good people of North West Choiseul Constituency in regards to the comprehensive, realistic and well articulated Speech from the Throne laid before Parliament yesterday by His Excellency, the Governor General of Solomon Islands at the opening of Parliament on the 24th day of March of 2015. I thank the Honourable Prime Minister for opening this window of opportunity for me and many other colleagues to participate through the motion that is currently being debated. I thank you on behalf of my people.

On the peripheries, I am indeed pleased to note from your announcement yesterday that you have had a good recess after our first sitting of Parliament in December 2014. It is my wish and so too my people, that your job as the Speaker of this Honourable House must treat you and your family very well. Certainly, you need to be looked after well as your task requires a pleasant springboard to work from each day. Wishing you a pleasant home, work environment and friendly and considerate Members of Parliament to deal with. That I am sure you have in abundance.

In aligning with that, I hereby extend my sincere congratulations to the newly appointed Clerk to National Parliament. Congratulations for putting your hands up to this very important state duty. With your unquestionable lengthy experience in the public service, I am sure a

smooth transition into your new position will transpire with ease and acceleration. Congratulations!

Coming back to the Speech from the Throne, I sincerely thank the honourable Prime Minister for inviting the Governor General, representing Her Majesty, the Queen of England to grace this Honourable House with his presence in the most enlightening and pathway illuminating Speech from the Throne yesterday at the opening of the second sitting of the Tenth Parliament. On the same note, I fully acknowledge the humble presence of the Chief Justice yesterday here as well.

My people and I are so thankful for His Excellency the Governor General of the Solomon Islands to have come and addressed the people's elected representatives in the Chamber of Parliament yesterday. This was a rare but most significant event in our parliamentary system of government. We are but most grateful.

I agree that the Speech from the Throne is thorough and worthy of noting and immediate actions. It is a summary of the DCC Government's policy directions and strategies. It advocates a robust and fairly focused fundamental and sectoral reform that is central to the changes this Government desires to institute within our country during its term. These policy directions and areas of focus not only resonate loudly and clearly, but are the true and strikes at the very core of our country's dare to develop and become a developed nation or a developing nation.

Please allow me to briefly make comments on the following observations from the Speech. Firstly, our motto 'To Lead is to Serve'. I applaud His Excellency for reminding us all at the very start of this Parliament of our prime, if not our divine mandate, that is, 'To Lead is to Serve'. This is a very appropriate motto founded by our forefathers in the past. However, I strongly believe it is easier said than to follow amidst all the calamities of life, situations, attitudes, capabilities, and above all the genuine spirituality of service and selflessness of individuals in authority. And I am sure we must change.

As leaders we are being challenged to adhere to our national motto - 'To Lead is to Serve'. Furthermore, let this motto also echo out throughout this lovely nation and to the people in all walks of life, and in the hearts of every men and women holding positions of leadership and authority regardless of creed, colour, age and gender for the common good of all of our citizens.

Above all, it is a timely and fitting reminding from Her Majesty's representative, His Excellency, the Governor General, to everyone and especially we, the 50 Members of Parliament sitting right here and now. The call is humbling and touches the very core of our Christian roots. Secondly, agriculture as rightly stated by his Excellency is the backbone of this country's economy. It is through agriculture that man is fed, clothed, educated and moves his family, community, island and country forward in terms of food sustenance and a broad based cash economy.

In my view, after listening to the Speech yesterday, we have all the necessary recipes for a thriving agriculture industry. We have the manpower, warm tropical climate, a fairly evenly distributed rainfall throughout the year and fertile soils for a range of crops and livestock. It is my hope that we reorient our outlook towards work versus handouts, land utilization and of course the best use of time, to profit from any agro related activities. Remembering very well that the sun does not wait for the farmer. We must work, work and work. Besides this, the industry needs a jump start capital investment at all levels with better organized processing and marketing systems in place. Above all, the onus rests with the ministry responsible for this sector to lead us through the next four years.

Thirdly, whilst I applaud the excellent work done by the RAMSI in its restoration of law and order and the revitalization of government machinery, I am yet to see what his Excellency said about the border security becoming a reality. RAMSI needs to be using his Excellency's exact word and may I quote 'review of border agreements and strengthening of border surveillances, reconnaissance and monitoring of all border'. My people would like to see our country's northern borders be strengthened as soon as practicable. Our border with Papua New Guinea with proper regulations and policing in place can and will generate much needed revenue on cross border state trade between our two countries. We need to explore ways in which both countries can maximize economic benefits along economic trade links through proper government

regulations and control. It is my hope that this Government will put relevant mechanisms in place to address this urgent need before RAMSI totally withdraws from our country.

Finally, in reality we have roughly about six to eight months in our hands for 2015 to implement the DCC Government's policy in the budgeted year. Questions need to be addressed would be: would the funds be released in time for work to start? Do the implementing ministries and institutions have the capacity to implement, and many more question. This is the matter I am sure this government will take good care off.

Once again, I on behalf of my people of North West Choiseul constituency wholeheartedly thank his Excellency the Governor General of Solomon Islands for his meaningful and comprehensive speech from the throne, presented to Parliament yesterday. With these few remarks I support the motion and resume my seat.

Hon SAMSON MANEKA (*Minister for Mines, Energy & Rural Electrification*): Thank you for the opportunity to make my contribution to the Speech from the Throne by His Excellency the Governor General yesterday. I also thank the Honorable Prime Minister for this motion that we, the National Parliament of Solomon Islands here assembled beg leave to offer thanks to the Speech from the Throne delivered yesterday.

I will try to be brief and elaborate more on some of the areas of concern raised by His Excellency regarding mines, energy and rural electrification that we as the government will address. I will leave the details of my contribution to the budget debate because some of these will definitely be raised again in the budget debate.

As you are all aware, interest in the mining sector is on the rise almost every day; interests ranging from simple goal dealers' license to the mining lease. The question we ask ourselves is - are we ready for such activities? Can we better gain from such activities? Is the environment that our rural communities daily rely on for our very sustenance withstand and survive such extractions of our resources? This government has made it very clear that we are prepared to face the realities and make the hard decisions to ensure that we fully benefit from the potentials we have and at the same time safeguard our interest and the safety of our people and the environment.

The DCC Government has put in place important legislative reforms high on the agenda and it is our responsibility to ensure that our legislations are amended accordingly with changes in time. Our laws must be made relevant. That is very clear in the DCC Government policies.

The government recognizes that Solomon Islands with its vast mineral resource potentials require the following reforms to build the platform for sustainable economic growth. First is review of the Mines and Minerals Act. The current principal legislation is outdated and the DCC

government recognizes the necessity to review this mining law and regulation to capture improved administrative processes and appropriate mining lease duration, environmental risks and rehabilitation of mine sites. Further to the commitment to have a new updated legislation is the need to finalize the national mineral policy that should set the direction for the mining sector. This would also look at the need to have an agreed position on deep sea mining.

Second is the review of the minerals exploration and operation in the country. Solomon Islands is part of the geological pacific rim of fire or the pacific plate is sub ducted beneath the surrounding plates causing crucial growth in volcanism and quake.

The need to comprehensively understand the geo-science and geological process are fundamental to Solomon Islands government's ongoing negotiations with mining operators for our non-renewable resources. The DCC government places a high priority on this work so that a petroleum and mineral information centre is established and the availability of such database will assist the government hugely as we work towards good governance of mining tenements area. The people of this country need to be fully aware of such potential, so that the provincial governments take these things into consideration in their development plans. Thus, this is the holistic approach that we want to encourage.

3. Renewing the petroleum Act - Solomon Islands waters are interestingly attractive as a target for petroleum exploration. Whilst Solomon Islands has growing interests from private companies for petroleum prospects, the current petroleum Act have loopholes on the development and storage of these related products. The maritime boundaries and the geo-physical profiling in Solomon water still remains outdated from the 1948 survey. The DCC government through its policy objectives have mandated the ministry to finalise the maritime boundaries and ensure that we work with our partners such as Ministry of Foreign Affairs and External Trade, the Ministry of Environment, Climate Change, Disaster Management & Meteorology and SOPAC to provide updated geological data to assist the government to make decisions on its interests. Hence, Solomon Islands must be prepared to switch to domestic electricity production.

4. Renewable energy sources - the DCC government is committed to identify and develop alternative renewable energy sources. Solomon Islands is one of the country that still have high electricity costs in the region and in doing so, the Ministry has mandated to ensure that the Solomon Islands Electricity generation to finalise the energy policy within the next 8 months.

To advance and stimulate the economic growth, it is paramount that electricity costs are reasonable for both domestic and commercial needs. More so, electricity is critical for every areas of development including

clean water to households, schools, hospitals and enabling businesses to grow and expand. While the majority of households in Honiara and selected provincial centres are connected to the main SIEA grid, a good majority are still without electricity. In the short term, the government will continue to work with our partners to explore and try solar programs, it is our intention that current solar programs under the ministry are utilised so that such sustainable arrangement is developed to assist those who do not access to electricity. As you might recall from the speech yesterday, the DCC government has continue to place the Tina Hydro project as a priority to ensure that a model that is developed to oversee the production of electricity generation **2.33**..on Guadalcanal can be further duplicated in the other mini hydros on the other surrounding islands.

Sir, the ministry is also reviewing the energy potential that we have from the solar feasibility studies and also the potential of thermal energy once completed we will inform the government and stakeholders of this potential, so that growth centres can be developed and capitalized on this energy sources. With these few remarks I once again thank His Excellency for the wonderful speech. I support motion.

Mr JIMMY LUSIBAEA (*North Malaita*): Thank you Mr Speaker, for giving me this opportunity to participate with other Members of this Honourable House in the debate of the Speech from Throne delivered yesterday by His

Excellency the Governor-General. I stand on behalf of my good people of North Malaita constituency to say thank you to His Excellency the Governor-General for the speech which reflect the Government's priority intentions and strategies for the next four years. I also would like to thank the Honourable Prime Minister for moving this motion.

The issues raised in His Excellency's Speech from the Throne are both opportunities and genuine concerns that our beloved people of this country face on a daily basis as we strive forward in the next four years and beyond. Since the inception of our country some 37 years ago past leaders in this Legislature also presented to this House a number of plans and strategies for this country of ours. If we dare to mine the records in the Hansard, I am sure we will be amazed by the level of plans and visions that are of great value that lay idle within the walls of this House without them being materialised. However, these good intentions never materialised due to the many challenges of those times that we can only know if we have courage to look back at those old records.

The 40-page Speech from the Throne which took His Excellency an hour and forty five minutes to deliver to this Honourable Chamber covered two strategic areas that the government will undertake in making change to the livelihoods of the people of Solomon Islands, the fundamental reform program and that of the sectoral reform program. I will be selective on a few areas of interest as many areas of the Speech from the Throne have been well covered by other honourable colleagues.

Under fundamental reform program, I would like to comment briefly on the proposed reform on land tenure system particularly the customary land component. This is an area the government must take carefully with caution on the idea of institutionalizing customary land usage and ownership is a serious matter and are all fully aware, customary land is the only safety net that 85percent of Solomon Islanders living in rural Solomon Islands depends on for their entire survival.

A better model must be found so that development can happen but without the entire land been registered. The safety of customary land is vitally important especially when our people are given the way to deal with foreign investors.

Another area another same reform the objective of the Government is to reform our economy and financial system. The involvement of Small and Medium Enterprise (SME) in the economy is timely and any contribution to the environment SME sectors is very welcomed. However, the issue pertaining to reserved business areas policy is a tricky one indeed especially if this particular reform is given to foreign expertise to undertake on our behalf. This has happened before when we allow international financial institutions to review on our behalf. This also applies to the rehabilitation of the Development Bank of Solomon Islands (DBSI), re-direction of commodities export marketing authority and that of investment cooperation of Solomon Islands.

Solomon Islands should learn from the experience that we have with the Solomon Islands Electricity Authority (SIEA) and Solomon Islands Water Authority (SIWA). The reform of these government bodies do not increase employment creation for Solomon Islanders but bring in high numbers of foreign expertise who are here receiving very high salaries and live in very expensive hotel accommodations for their employment duration.

Furthermore, the cost of these services is not coming down to benefit our population and also the issue of sustainability thereafter when these so called reforms are completed.

Mr Speaker, on the sector reform I will be contributing on two specific areas under the speech from the throne. Firstly is the intention of the government on the production of sector reform. If implemented it would certainly give the change our people are looking forward to. I fully welcome the government's intentions in moving the productive sector of our economy forward.

My only reservation here is the introduction of appropriate technology into these proposed sectors to allow Solomon Islands to be competitive unless the government invests heavily in technology to enhance our agriculture and livestock, fisheries, marine resources, tourism, cultural development, trade and commerce industries and immigration.

Solomon Islands will continue to lack behind its neighbours in its efforts to move this country forward.

The other area is the civil aviation, telecommunication and infrastructure development. On the telecommunication front the government's intention is to facilitate the undersea cable infrastructure facility. While this is a good intention it is important that the government evaluate this major investment again. Getting an undersea cable to Honiara, Noro and Auki will not solve the accessibility and affordability of telecommunication to our remote areas of our country. This investment that will eventually happen will be costly to our country, especially at this time where the country is trying to grow its economy from traditional commodities.

The government should relook at the whole issue again and compare this with investment in satellite communication because it is getting cheaper everyday and with the remoteness of Solomon Islands it is important that satellite communication is given another through look.

The area of revisiting with the climate change issue especially like sea level rise and stronger cyclones in these days and age, island countries such as ours must look at alternative means of transport that can meet challenges we face today.

On the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report (TRC), I thank the government for its intention to table the recommendation of this very

important report in Parliament. Furthermore, I also rest my trust in the wisdom of those that will be implementing the TRC report.

Solomon Islands has come a long way in rebuilding itself, therefore, our handling of this important report must not erode the excellent progress which the peace process has gained and more specifically the investment of resources that consecutive governments provided to this ministry in securing a long lasting peace. With the burning memories of the past, I have great hopes in my soul and look with confident eyes to the future of the great nation Solomon Islands.

In concluding, let me thank His Excellency, the Governor General on the Speech from the Throne and the Prime Minister for moving the motion. Let me remind all of us of what King Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived from whom our beloved nation gained its name said in the Holy Scripture concerning making plans. In Proverbs 19:21, King Solomon states that, 'many are the plans in the man's heart but it is to the Lord's purpose that prevails'.

As we ponder over this speech and the financial resources this Honourable House will commit to support the government's intention, may the purpose of the plans be God's purpose for our people and our nation Solomon Islands. To that, I am filled with hope and determination hand in hand that we shall all build a brighter for tomorrow's generation. With those few remarks, I support the motion.

Hon. JOHN DEAN KUKU (*Minister for Public Service*): Thank you Mr. Speaker for allowing me to contribute to the motion moved by the Honourable Prime Minister to offer thanks to His Excellency for his Speech from the Throne.

The Speech delivered by His Excellency, the Governor General, outlines a clear demarcated course of where we are now and where we are going. I thank His Excellency, the Governor for availing his time to deliver the speech. The speech was well presented in form, tone and posture. I wish His Excellency and his family well and may he be bestowed wisdom from above as he continues to lead and serve this nation.

Mr Speaker, forgive me if I may bore you and other Honourable colleagues but because I did not have the opportunity to speak in the last meeting, bear with me a moment or two to congratulate you Mr Speaker on your election as Speaker in the 10th Parliament. I would also like to congratulate the Honourable Member for Central Honiara, who has been elected as Deputy Speaker to this House, the Honourable Member for East Choiseul for his election to become the Prime Minister of Solomon Islands. I would also like to congratulate the Deputy Prime Minister, all members of cabinet, Leader of the official Opposition, Leader of the Independent Group and chairman of Parliamentary Standing Committees on your appointments to the office you hold. I also congratulate the Clerk to Parliament on his appointment to the principle in this national legislature.

To the church leaders, chiefs, community leaders and the people of North New Georgia constituency, I cannot thank you enough for the trust and confidence you have in me. I only pledge that I will be a servant in the next four years and beyond.

Many of us in this House are returning representatives, whilst only a few of us take our places as elected representatives for the first time. The duty of every Member of Parliament is to help shape a better Solomon Islands, to do our honest best to make people's lives easier and honour the commitments we made to those who voted for us. Together we have been entrusted with the profound responsibility to serve the public interest on behalf of all Solomon Islanders above self, 'To Lead is to Serve'.

Mr Speaker, if that is how we perform our duties as Members of Parliament, politics is an 'Honourable calling'. The public can respect their Members of Parliament, and Members of Parliament can respect each other even when we disagree. In a healthy democracy, people need not agree with everything a government does, but there is a purpose of governance. Let us not forget that there is as much risk in action as there is in inaction.

I came for the first time having lived with the people in the rural areas for the past many years. I have learned that regardless of age, affiliation or gender, all Solomon Islanders want to help to create a better future for this country, where everyone can succeed and contribute, where excellence and opportunity co-exist, where law and order is maintained, and where peace prevails. On this occasion we note the fact that a new

government has been elected into power, the Democratic Coalition for Change Government (DCCG).

New governments come into power for more than one reason. Sometimes it is due to their merits, sometimes it is the wish of the people. sometimes it is due to the faults committed by their predecessors. On the 19th of November, 2014, Solomon Islanders have expressed the desire for a strong and stable national government in this new Parliament. The DCC Government emerged to lead this country after having satisfied all three reasons. With this clear mandate, the DCC Government will deliver on its commitments. My constituency is behind the DCC Government. We will join the Government in implementing its policies and programs.

The DCC Government is hard at work to create the right conditions for growth and prosperity. Promoting and advancing economic growth is and remains a top priority of the DCC Government. The DCC Government therefore had introduced measures to stimulate the economy, promote prosperity and opportunities for all Solomon Islanders. The DCC Government is working on the things that matter most to Solomon Islanders, more opportunities for Solomon Islanders to succeed, to improve and sustain their livelihoods, not broken promises.

With each broken promise, with each embarrassing and contradictory explanation and excuse, the credibility of this Government and the standing of this Parliament and Members of Parliament will be questioned. Our actions will be judged by their values. Solomon Islands

diverse communities are connected by shared values and aspirations, and by their willingness to lend a hand. We must recognise the resolve, courage and response shown by Solomon Islands communities in the face of adversity such as in the times of natural disaster.

As leaders, we must reaffirm our commitment and resolve that we stand by them in times of despair as well as in hope.

The government of Solomon Islands has no higher obligation than to protect the personal safety of Solomon Islanders. They are the owners of our country's resources. Solomon Islanders ask not how much we know, what policies we have and what strategic actions we will take. They only await our offer of how much we care.

The DCC Government's Rural Economic Development Policy is a major shift in the right direction and approach. This has been their longing hopes and harden dream. This policy is one of a response to how much we care. Our people must not be led to be passive recipients but empowered to be active participants in nation building.

Sentiments have been raised on the effectiveness on government employees. May I say that the government is changing in nature, composition and scope. Specialization, qualification and experience are now at play. Our consideration must be professionally and ethically and as well as work and people focused.

I acknowledge the support and the effort of all government employees who have tirelessly served the government of Solomon Islands

then and now. As Minister of Public Service, may I on the floor of this Parliament register my words of thanks to all government employees for their loyalty, dedication, commitment and efforts in serving our government, people and country Solomon Islands.

On the same note, I call on all government employees to provide the highest standard of discipline and service to the government and people of Solomon Islands. Our people our people and country want men and women whose conscience is true to their duty. Let us work together to nurture a principle, ethical and accountable leadership, good, clean and respectable honest government that all Solomon Islanders deserve.

Too often governments focus is on the urgent rather than the important, on what is on the Newspaper headline rather than what kind of country we want our children to be citizens of.

Past successive government had different visions for the future. The DCC Government sees empowered citizens as the best guarantee of our nation's future. Members of this 10th Parliament, we are holders of a profound trust given to us by Solomon Islanders. Despite a political divide, may we serve to the trust in all things as in our Oath of Allegiance we pray, 'So help me God. It is upon that profound trust that I support the motion.

Parliament adjourned at 2.59pm