

MONDAY 29TH JUNE 2009

The Deputy Speaker, Hon. Kengava took the Chair at 9.54 am.

Prayers.

ATTENDANCE

At prayers, all Members were present with the exception of the Ministers for Planning & Aid Coordination, Culture & Tourism, Foreign Affairs & External Trade, Environment, Conservation & Meteorology, Communication & Civil Aviation, Lands, Housing and Survey, Forestry, Home Affairs and the members for West New Georgia/Vona Vona, Ngella, North West Choiseul, West Are Are, East Makira, North Guadalcanal, Shortlands, North West Guadalcanal, Malaita Outer Islands, West Makira and South New Georgia/Rendova.

SPEAKER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Mr Speaker: Honorable Members, before we proceed with our business for today, I wish to inform the House that today 29th June is the Second Appointed day of the Central Islands Province. On behalf of the House I would like to congratulate the government and people of Central Islands Province on this special day and wish you all joyful celebrations. Thank you.

(applause)

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Finance: Macroeconomic package

171. **Hon. SOGAVARE** to the Minister for Finance and Treasury: Can the Minister inform Parliament whether the government has formulated a set of macroeconomic package to cushion the effects of the global economic downturn?

Hon. RINI: M. Speaker, I would like to thank the honorable Leader of Opposition and Member for East Choiseul for this very, very important question. The answers are as follows:

Following the performance of the first quarter of the 2009 Budget, I am happy to advise that the government has adopted a broad policy response strategy package to address the challenges brought about by the global economic crisis. These economic challenges include our worsening fiscal situation due to falling revenues; the depletion of foreign exchange reserves due mainly to decline in the level of exports and negative economic growth. The main focus of the package is a number of measures aimed at addressing a projected shortfall in the budget in the current financial year. Mr. Speaker, the government has taken steps to bring the budget back into balance ensuring that the government continues to be able to meet its commitment in delivering services to its people.

Mr. Speaker, the government's broad policy response strategy includes:

- (1) Managing the difficult cash position and this, we are placing a 10% reservation on the 2009 recurrent expenditures across all ministries. Freezing the recruitment processes on all posts not yet advertised and halting new established posts. Implementing a range of measures to increase government revenue by new compliance measures and high duties and excise on alcohol and tobacco. The reprioritizing of spending in the Development Budget for all Ministries to review opportunities to increase revenue by raising fines, fees and rents and by collecting outstanding arrears owed to the government.
- (2) The government continues to pursue structural reforms to make Solomon Islands an easier and more reliable place to do business. An example of this is the liberalization of the telecommunication sector and the continued SOE reforms.
- (3) To pursue a budget reform that is to improve spending and transparency and help manage these and future budget difficulties. One part of this reform agenda will be commitment to achieving progress against the public financial management and public expenditure financial accountability framework.
- (4) The government is continuing to monitor the balance of payment situation.
- (5) Working closely with our development partners for continued and increase assistance. Donor can play an important role in managing the impact of the slowdown in Solomon Islands. In this regard, the government is seeking donor assistance in the following areas: depositing their project funds through the Central Bank of Solomon Islands in

alleviating balance of payment pressure; increasing the local procurement of materials in projects; expedite the implementation of existing development projects; ensure a greater component of capital expenditure as exposed to TA projects; redesign current projects to be more labor intensive; reprioritize their aid programs towards economic growth sectors and seek budgetary support and balance of payment support from international financial institutions such as the IMF, World Bank, the ADB and EU; front load implementation of funding support programs.

Hon. Sogavare: Mr. Speaker, it is good to hear the government working with aid donors. Can the Minister inform us of donors' response in the specific areas that the government has discussed with them in the areas the Minister has just announced?

Hon. Rini: Mr Speaker, I would like to thank the honorable Leader of the Opposition for the supplementary question. Response by donors to the government's request is very positive. We have a committee that discusses these issues every month. But our aid donors respond very positively, for example, they are now putting in some of their funds in the Central Bank and as you can see the balance of payment, the reserve is increasing. It used to be \$2.6 million month's cover and now is increasing to more than three month's cover. This is mainly from money that aid donors are depositing in the Central Bank, which is about 75% of money that aid donors have deposited in the Central Bank.

The EU, the ADB and the World Bank are also responding very positively. The ADB team has just visited us last week and they are now working to implement their programs here in Solomon Islands. It is now frontloading its projects. For example, we have about \$50million from the EU for the next five years but it has agreed in putting forward these funds to this year and also next year. It is coming forward with these funds. The same is also with the ADB. It is also frontloading its project.

The responses we have been receiving from aid donors are very, very positive and we are now starting to see the signs of these positive responses by our aid donors. Thank you.

Mr. Oti: Mr. Speaker, supplementary question for the response of the Minister. In the principal question the Minister alluded to a 10% reduction or restriction in the spending of the 2009 budget, particularly in regards to the recurrent budget and therefore the areas that will be affected are personal emoluments, salaries and other charges. As the Minister has said it also means freezing on

recruitments so that we make sure the 10% is met or does not impact too negatively on the overall budget.

I just want to know in regards to the development budget, in particular the government funded programs like the livelihood is quite a big one, whether that allocation will be spared the 10% cut that would be applied, and for that matter therefore what are we waiting for before this livelihood fund is paid?

Hon. Rini: Mr. Speaker, yes the livelihood fund would not be affected by this reservation. That is one of the government's priority projects and so it will not be affected. We are now starting to pay the 2009 allocations. What we do is because roughly about \$7 million from last year was not paid until the end of last year and so the Ministry is paying that \$7 million out from the current allocation. There will be a supplementary coming in during this meeting for us to put back that \$7 million so that it does not affect our budget. Therefore, this year it will be a total of \$50 million instead of \$42 million.

Yes, we are started to pay our livelihood funds. Last week roughly about \$6 million was paid out by the Ministry on livelihood projects. Thank you.

Hon. Sogavare: Mr. Speaker, of the specific strategies in the budget, we welcome them as they really have to do with maintaining the status quo. Whilst we welcome that, I think the real area the country should really be interested in is the area that donors are involved in and areas to do with our foreign reserves.

I therefore want to continue to get the Minister to may be further elaborate on those areas. While the general answer is that there is positive response from aid donors, if I can be specific on areas, what is their response to reduction of technical assistance and redirecting more funds to real developments in Solomon Islands? What is their specific response in reprioritizing their assistance towards the productive sector? I think those are quite important areas because they help to grow the economy. Whatever we do in terms of the budget is basically to maintain the status quo.

Hon. Rini: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the Hon. Leader of Opposition for that supplementary question.

In terms of the TAs, we are still discussing that and they quite agree that there should be more funds coming in to assist the budget rather than TA's and discussions is still continuing. The same is with the other issues. The people we are discussing these issues with are those stationed here in the country and the big bosses are in Canberra. But I would like to say here that there has been a very, very positive response from them. They also realize that assistance to TA should be reduced and more funds going into projects.

What we really discussed with them is their input in this year's budget. Roughly about more than \$2 million in this year's development budget is from aid donors. Now we have asked them to fast track those projects and they have done that. For example, I think RAMSI and AusAID are going to build about 200 houses, of which more than 40 houses have already been built. The NZAID is coming on with another 39 houses and Japan about 15 houses at Gizo. These donors are implementing the projects in this year's development budget and we are very pleased with that. That is one of the reasons why our foreign reserve has increased.

On other issues, we are still discussing with them, but as I have said they are very, very positive and they also realize that more money should go towards sustaining the economy rather than going into TAs.

Mr. Oti: Mr. Speaker, just for the Minister to tell us in Parliament. With regards to the cut in expenditure by 10% and with the forecast in revenue in the first quarter and for the remainder of the year, can the Minister inform Parliament of our two main revenue sources in Customs and Inland Revenue? Which of those two are affected?

With the increase in duties and excise, particularly on alcohol and tobacco products, what would that impact on the revenue in shortfall that you have forecasted? Whether it is going to pick up additional to make sure we try to leave with it at 10% cut that the Ministry of Finance has imposed?

Hon. Rini: The 10% reservation on all Ministries will create a saving of about \$74 million. The increase on duty on tobacco, excise on tobacco and also cigarettes and beer and also increasing other fees and charges is expected to raise another \$100 million. On freezing of the recruitment process, we are also looking at about say \$80 million. We are trying to patch up that gap at the beginning of the year that we are short by \$200 million. Those measures will put us back into our budget forecast. It is almost an increase of \$200 million on the areas that I have mentioned. These are the areas we are going to patch our deficit in the 1st quarter of the year.

Mr. Speaker, I can assure Parliament that during the 2nd quarter things are starting to improve. I will be putting another report to Cabinet on how the government is performing after the 2nd quarter. I can assure the House that the 2nd quarter looks very, very positive. Thank you.

Hon. Sogavare: Mr. Speaker, of the areas mentioned by the Minister where reservations were put on them is totaled up to about \$254 million. That basically

means that we would not spend \$250 million. In other words, we reduce government spending by \$254 million.

Now considering the fact that government spending is a very important tool for economic growth if we do not have sources elsewhere, if donors are slow, the government should resort to areas it has full control over.

Mr. Speaker, the question is, depending on which areas the expenditures are cut in, what would be the effect to the economy if the government borrows \$254 million or redirect the resources reserved to investment in the productive sector instead of waiting on aid donors? Listening to the Minister, I am not convinced that what he is telling us is really what is happening.

I just want to get the Ministry's view and the Minister on what would be the effect on the economy if the government actually resorts to borrowing the amount reserved? The provision is reserved because it is not collected by way of revenues and so it is reserved. You resort to borrowing it and investing it in the productive sector, what would be its effect on the economy?

Hon. Rini: The 10 percent reservation is not \$250 million but only \$74 million. But I would like to assure the House that whilst we are putting this 10 percent reservation, the government has been able to meet its legal obligations. Therefore, it does not mean putting this 10 percent reservation would prevent the government from paying out services. No, Mr. Speaker, even though we are putting on the 10 percent reservation, the government has managed to pay its public utilities; it has been able to pay grants to provinces, grants to education, and grants to hospitals and also meet our overseas and domestic loans. Therefore, putting this 10 percent reservation is reducing government performance. No, Mr. Speaker.

On borrowing, Mr. Speaker, I think it is not really timely for us to borrow because we must stick to the Honiara Club where we have just settled our outstanding debts. This is going on very well and I think it is not advisable at the moment to borrow.

As I have said, Mr. Speaker, even though we are putting on this reservation, the government is still performing to its fullest. I am happy to inform Parliament, as I have said earlier the government is still able to meet all its legal obligations. Thank you Mr. Speaker sir.

Hon. Sogavare: Mr. Speaker, this would make a very good discussion by way of a motion. But I appreciate that the 10 percent reservations is only \$74 million.

The areas the Minister has mentioned, which the government continues to expend government budget on are basically services. What I am really

concerned about is the government's direct investment in the productive sector. That is the real concern.

The Minister also said that a strategy the government has put in place is prioritizing of projects. It depends on which projects you prioritize, which project are prioritized this year and which projects are reserved. May be the Minister can inform us when he said he is prioritizing projects, which projects really is he prioritizing.

Hon. Rini: Mr Speaker, all development ministries have already submitted which projects they think should be prioritized. Since the government only has about six months to go for this year, only certain projects are going to be done and others will be left for next year.

But the submissions are there waiting for the Cabinet Development Committee to look into the submissions by the various ministries before the government can make a decision. The Ministerial Development Committee is yet to sit. Hopefully this week or next week it is going to sit to discuss the submissions by the development ministries. Thank you.

Hon. Sogavare: Mr. Speaker, before I thank the Minister this is quite a very important policy area and we advise the government to closely monitor it. The Minister was talking about the Honiara Club, but that is not sacrosanct, it is something that we ourselves have done. If there is a need to borrow to invest in the productive sector in preparation for the world to recover, I would advise the government to closely look into that proposition and act accordingly. In saying that, I thank the Minister for responding to the questions.

Question No. 174 deferred

Non medical cure for HIV/AIDS

180. **Mr OTI** to the Minister for Health & Medical Services: In the light of the fact that there is no medical cure for HIV/AIDS what is the Government's position on people who claim to have cure for this syndrome using non medical means?

Hon. SOALAOI: Mr. Speaker, I also thank my colleague from Temotu Nende for asking that very important question.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry has a National HIV Policy and also Strategic Plan 2005 to 2010. These two documents clearly states that the Ministry will work closely with traditional healers to ensure there is mutual understanding of

our roles towards the treatment of HIV. Therefore, our position regarding the treatment of people living with HIV/AIDS is of evidence based medicine. For such non medical treatment to be used, there are processes for validation and also proper research has to be carried out, which have to be verified by the World Health Organization and other relevant bodies that deal with new drugs before they can be used.

Mr. Oti: Mr. Speaker, can the Minister therefore inform Parliament of the number of incidences of people or individuals or what not who claim to have a non clinical but traditional cure for the HIV/AIDS? How many is the Ministry really working closely with to ensure they have proven record that they have cure for it or that it is only hearsay and that you protect the public from being victimized by such people.

Hon. Soalaoi: Mr. Speaker, at the moment we are yet to be visited by people who have claims that they have treatment for the disease. Our advice to them is that if they claim to have the cure then they have to come to the Ministry and must go through the processes I have just stated.

It is also good for people who are suspicious about themselves not to take the risk but to come to our VCCT sites for proper testing.

Mr Oti: Mr. Speaker, can the Minister inform Parliament what is the actual number of reported cases or tested cases of HIV/AIDS infected nationals at this point in time?

Hon. Soalaoi: Mr. Speaker, currently as we speak there are 12 confirmed cases. I know that all of us are aware of this. There are 7 people on anti retro-viral treatment and they are being closely monitored by our staff and five (5) people have already died from the virus. Out of the 12 people, 7 are still living and are on treatment and 5 have already died.

Mr. Speaker, that puts us at around 300 people who maybe carriers. When we say 12 we have the risk that there maybe people around who are not coming forward and so we put our estimate that there may be around 300 people carrying the virus around and they need to come forward to be tested. But we have 12 confirmed cases, of which 7 are still alive and are on treatment and 5 have already died. Thank you.

Hon. Sogavare: Mr. Speaker, from the processes the Minister has been telling us, can the Minister inform the Parliament whether we have the capacity here to do

the necessary tests to prove the medicines that the natural healers say they have really work?

Hon. Soalaoi: Mr. Speaker, as I have already said we have a National HIV Policy. Some work has been done to help us implement that policy and it is also clearly stated in our strategic plan for the Ministry to have the capacity to be able to carry out proper researches.

Like I have said at the moment, the only organization that deals with this is the WHO. There is a WHO Country Liaison Office in the country, and our role is to work together with them to see that if there are people who claim to have treatment for this disease we will show them where to go.

Whilst we have what is necessary to start the research processes, we are relying on WHO for confirmation, just like what we did with the swine flu.

Mr. AGOVAKA: Mr. Speaker, this is a very serious matter and the Ministry really needs to really consolidate its programs on how it informs the nation on preventative measures. If I may ask the Minister, what is the Ministry's program of preventative measures to inform the nation of the seriousness of this disease?

Hon. Soalaoi: Mr. Speaker, in the two documents I mentioned earlier there are areas the Ministry is concentrating its efforts on, one of which is prevention. As you are all aware there is a very good prevention program going on in the Ministry. I encourage you to listen to the radio and watch the TV. We also have different sites in all our provinces that carry out promotional activities on the HIV/AIDS virus.

For the sake of the questioner, according to the Ministry, we think we have a very good prevention program going on now. Perhaps people need to be aware of where to access information.

Like I have said, all our provinces have the capacity to carry out prevention awareness programs and there are counselors in those provinces and also in Honiara.

Mr. WAIPORA: Mr. Speaker, the question that was asked by the Honorable Member for Nende is not properly answered, and so I would like to raise it again. Have doctors consulted with people who claim they have medicine of curing the HIV? Maybe you should say it in pidgin so that the people who believe to have the medicine can hear it properly.

I am asking whether medical people have already talked with those people who believe they can cure the HIV so that it helps them to work together.

Hon. Soalaoi: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague Member for West Makira. In fact, like I have already said if anyone thinks he/she has leaves or whatever that is able to cure the virus, we ask you to come to the Ministry and see our officers who are working on that in the Ministry and so you can come. If you do not know where to go just come to the Ministry and ask for the Minister's office and I can direct you where to go. But the problem is that such people do not come forward.

Some of them claimed to have something to do with the spirit and forms like that. Therefore, we find it difficult to verify such claims. But our policy is quite clear in that the Ministry is going to work together with such people so that we can understand the different roles in the Ministry in the treatment of this disease – HIV/AIDS. Thank you very much.

Mr Oti: Mr. Speaker, before I thank the Minister for his response, particularly on the last part of the question. Mr. Speaker, for purposes of ensuring that our program in Solomon Islands is carried out effectively, perhaps the Ministry of Health could just seriously think about banning such consultations whatever with such people taking place until and unless it is medically proven otherwise. Put a stop to it so that people do not speculate on that.

On that note, Mr. Speaker, I would like the Minister for his response. Thank you.

Traditional rights of resource owners

185. Hon. SOGAVARE to the Minister for Justice & Legal Affairs: What specific measures has the government put in place to protect the traditional rights of resources owners as a strategy to maximize benefits arising from the utilization of tribal owned resources?

Hon. CHAN: Mr. Speaker, I thank the Leader of Opposition for the question, the question is important and very relevant as well as in this context quite broad. I assume almost all the ministries in government are affected by it, especially the resource based ministries, including the human resource ministries. But the Ministry of Justice's contribution is mainly in four parts. There are programs in place, ongoing and in some instances slowed down due to other considerations.

On its part, my Ministry in its endeavour to strengthen the role of chiefs and traditional leaders firstly has conducted and is to continue to conduct research and gather information on the role of chiefs and elders in our communities. Once sufficient information and data are available we will work towards looking at what measures or mechanisms need to be put in place to

strengthen their roles. This work is ongoing and development of the mechanisms or legal framework to facilitate the enhanced role of the chiefs and elders will follow after completion of our research. It is anticipated that chiefs and tribal elders with their enhanced roles should play a more positive role in the utilization of their tribal or communal resources.

Secondly, our Ministry is working on finalizing the Tribal Land Dispute Resolution Panel Bill. This is now at the public consultation stage. This Bill should give back to chiefs and elders knowledge in customary land tenure, authority to hear and make decisions on customary land ownership where disputes are referred to it.

Thirdly, our Ministry is reviving and reinvigorating the local courts by providing funds in recruiting local court clerks and appointing new local court justices. This should enhance the roles of the chiefs and elders who are members of the local court.

Fourthly, through the Public Solicitor's Office a Landowners Advocacy and Legal Support Unit (LALSU) has been established this year within the Public Solicitor's Office with funding assistance from STABEX fund of the European Union in partnership with the Solomon Islands Government aimed at supporting forestry and forestry conservation in Solomon Islands towards a balanced and sustainable future. The mission of this unit is to provide land or forest resource owners' education and information through innovative channels to customary landowners about their legal rights over their forest resources and in partnership with an NGO to promote the conservation of customary owned forests. Thank you.

Mr. AGOVAKA: This is quite an important question. Traditional rights of resource owners, tribal owned resources. When I look at the word 'resource' I think of not only forest or minerals but I also think of herbs and fruits. What is the Ministry's plan in putting a law, a patent law to protect our herbs and fruits, the indigenous herbs and fruits of Solomon Islands?

Mr. Speaker, my second question is, when I look at natural resources I also think of human resources and I think of other resources like traditional music. What is the Ministry doing about copyrights of traditional music, which are also resources of tribal people of Solomon Islands?

Hon. Chan: Mr. Speaker, for those three questions let me go back to the question on the last part, which is music. Our Ministry is embarking on looking at copyright laws to start that off and hopefully that would protect our music industry in this country.

In terms of education or human resource education or herbs, I would assume we will be waiting for the relevant ministries in those areas to give us their policies on that. But I do not have a problem with that because our Ministry is pretty open to all these things. Those ministries need to give our Ministry the sort of policies they have in dealing with those relevant issues. We will take them on board when we get them and formulate laws in that regard.

Mr Speaker: I think the Prime Minister would like to make a further clarification.

Hon. Sikua Mr. Speaker, I thank the Member for Temotu/Nende for giving me this opportunity to respond to the question about the medicinal potential and qualities of our herbs and plants, which probably relates to the previous question. It is the Ministry of Forests that is working on this issue, alongside the medical research University of Japan. In my recent visit, there have been some very promising news on the number of samples they are working with, which numbers something like 500 samples. About seven plants they have already worked with have very good medicinal potential and qualities. That particular work is under the Ministry of Forests. To compare that with the findings so far, out of say 500 species, we have seven, which is very promising when you consider other countries in the Pacific that have about one 1,000 samples of plants but none are found.

That is a very important resource that we must protect and the Ministry of Forests is working hard on this because of the potential of seven plants that are being identified by a medical research centre in Japan working with our Ministry of Forests that have the potential for medicinal qualities. Thank you.

Mr. Oti: Mr. Speaker, I thank the Prime Minister for the explanation. Perhaps the Ministry of Education too is caught up in this whole exercise, as well as the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, the Minister for Commerce, Employment and Trade, and this is to do with intellectual property rights. I think this is one of the critical areas. This is an area that none of the ministries' has seen as its responsibility. It was so absolutely clear because while the researches are being carried out, the need for us to quickly register this as forestry herbs, trees, material, knowledge, which is a very important resource and we need to have it protected. We have an outdated intellectual property right I think one which is not brought in yet but it is featured in the negotiations for the trade arrangements. Intellectual property right is featured very heavily. I want the Minister and the Prime Minister to take this up, particularly for those ministries who are not showing up, it is very, very important that after these resources have

been depleted knowledge still remains, knowledge still remains and will be there all the time. You just need to strengthen your copyright laws so that you are protecting the knowledge.

I am just wondering whether, and I know the Minister is not responsible entirely for this but all the same for purposes of this question for the government to take up the issue of ensuring that this is quickly addressed and modernize our intellectual property right laws.

Hon. Chan: Sir, I agree with the honorable Member who questioned me from Temotu/Nende. I think it is really important that we protect the intellectual property of our people. This is going to start. I have just got into the job and I am hearing news that this is the next project we are going to do. But it is a holistic government approach to it and we need submissions from all the relevant ministries about the issues that they want to protect. Thank you.

Hon. Wale: Mr. Speaker, just to inform the House there is a review that is currently in train for our Research Act, which is administered under the Ministry of Education. We have seen in our recent history that our Research Act is minimalist and does not require enough to protect, for instance, traditional knowledge. People from outside coming in to do research we do not know who holds the right from the knowledge gained from the research. In some ways the review would be looking at that issue.

Also I think because much of this does hinge on research in other fields like in health, medicinal plants and other heritage issues, the review in the Research Act which some of our PhDs people in our country are going to be involved in will look at all of that.

Under the ambit of this review process, we hope that much consultation will happen between the Ministries of Forest, Health and of course Justice, and hope this will feed in to this new copyrights regime which, of course, has to be also compliant and protect us so that we are in alignment with world trade arrangements.

This is just to inform the House that this process is in train. Thank you.

Hon. Sogavare: Mr Speaker, just a supplementary question. The Minister in answering the question has outlined four areas the Ministry is working on. I am interested in the first one where research was conducted on the roles of chiefs and elders. He was saying this work is going ahead. I just want the Minister to confirm if this work is really going ahead? Who is actually doing the research, and whether it is supported by budgetary provisions of this year. That is the first one.

The laws we have listed, may be the next question is to the Minister of Education too, review on the Research Act, which the Minister said that work is going ahead on that. Who is actually involved in that? Whether people are really assigned to do that work now and are doing it, and whether they are supported under the budget this year?

To the Minister of Justice, the same thing too on the copyright law and intellectual property rights law. What is the kind of timing we are seeing because this is an ongoing thing and has been there for quite a long time now and does not seem to find its way to Parliament? What is the kind of timing we are looking at getting the copyright law into Parliament and also finalizing the intellectual property rights law to be brought to Parliament?

Hon. Wale: Mr. Speaker, perhaps I will go first and then the Minister for Justice can follow suit.

In regards to the review of the Research Act that is overseen by the Ministry of Education, we have asked for submissions from indigenous Solomon Islands academics who are working as research fellows in universities in other parts of the world. The Ministry has specifically asked Dr. Tarcisus Tara who is based in the East West Centre of Hawaii to lead that particular work in collaboration with Doctors Welchman Gegeo and Kabini Sanga.

There is another review process that is going ahead now with regards to the possible establishment of a national university and so our academics, the likes of Doctors Kabutaulaka, Sanga, Gegeo and Dr Calvic Togamana who is a chemist at the USP are all also part of the taskforce to study the possibility of establishment of a national university, and they are also all collaborating on review of the Research Act.

Now if part of the proposal for establishment of a national university where they will be looking at and advise the government on is the set up of a national research institute which would encompass all of these and perhaps they will answer us after due study but could perhaps be the lead agency to implement a copyrights legislative regime. That is in the proposal for them to look at and see whether this is the way or the future. These two processes are running in tandem and hopefully will help to cross-fertilize each other.

Hon. Chan: Mr. Speaker, I just want to reply to the Leader of Opposition's supplementary questions he has put. I am informed that we are working on the copyright laws right now. This is in conjunction with things like the Criminal Procedure Codes, the Penal Codes and the Law Reform Commission and so we have a lot of work to do.

The Opposition Leader has questioned whether any work was done on the roles of chiefs and how we can empower our chiefs. The Ministry started that research work in the later part of 2007 and the early part of 2008 to examine the role of traditional leaders. The main tasks of the Ministry was to undertake research into existing local justice system, to identify issues and challenges that exist in that system and report to the Ministry of existing practices and develop recommendations to strengthen that local justice.

Reports have come in and received and the findings we have, the information that we collected were about the structures of the chief system, the roles and responsibility of chiefs, types of matters handled by chiefs, the way matters are heard and resolved, the setting of penalties and level compensation, what support and training is provided by chiefs, the way village rules are made and enforced, codification and/or knowledge of customary laws, determination of tribal lands and dispute.

The Ministry's team has collected data in parts of Malaita, Makira, Western, Choiseul, Rennell/Bellona, Isabel and Guadalcanal. I must stress this is not finished. The financing of this program is under our Law and Justice Program, which is basically financed by RAMSI.

Apparently what I have heard is that there are two persons in charge of that program, and one of them has resigned and the other is renegotiating his terms or the terms of reference of his job. That program has slowed down a bit or stalled. The program is not finished and we would like to see it continue because this is very important in terms of how we get the answers to what we ask in terms of how to harmonize our customary laws to existing statutes in our constitution. It is vital that this information gets back to us so that we can get the Ministry to work in harmonizing that. Thank you.

Hon. Sogavare: Mr. Speaker, I think this question has been adequately answered and so I thank the Ministers for responding.

Housing – provincial disaster management coordinators

24. Mr. WAIPORA to the Minister for Home Affairs: Can the Minister inform Parliament of the progress made in the construction of Houses for provincial disaster management coordinators for which \$1.2 million was allocated in the 2009 development budget.

Mr. Speaker, I happen to read this in the Translation and Implementation program of the CNURA and it is in page 216. And it reads 'preparation for the posting of PDC's to their provinces with consultations with the provincial government Ministry and provincial authorities on issues of staff housing and

office accommodation Mr. Speaker. In raising this question, I would expect the Minister for Home Affairs, both the Minister for Home Affairs and Provincial Government to let the Parliament know the progress of the construction of those houses.

Hon. TOM: Mr. Speaker sir, I rise to respond to the important question raised by my colleague, the Honorable Member for West Makira.

In 2008 a budget allocation of \$600,000 was made to build the first two houses; one in Makira and another one in Renbell. The initial delay was due to the time taken to decide on a suitable design for the building based on the \$600,000 budget.

Secondly, the Ministry decided to use the Ministry of Infrastructure's Architectural Division to do the drawing to cut costs. However, the process unfortunately took the whole of last year. Towards the end of the 2008 financial year we were told the budget of \$600,000 was only enough to cover the cost of one building. In the end, the Ministry ran out of time to even build one building.

In 2009, the Ministry was given \$1.2 million again to build the first two houses which we could not do in 2008. This time the reason for the delay is because the architectural drawings of the building which were agreed on in 2008 have now been passed on to the Quantity Surveyor's Office in the Ministry of Infrastructure for costing and they have been there since January this year. The Ministry was informed that after it has been to the Quantity Surveyors' Office, it should again return to the Government Architecture office to be tendered. In the meantime, Mr. Speaker, the Budget has asked the Ministry to allow them to use another \$600,000 of the \$1.2 million elsewhere in the forthcoming appropriation budget. The amount, as I now understood is not \$1.2 million but \$600,000 when the supplementary appropriation budget is passed through this Parliament during this current sitting.

Mr. Waipora: Supplementary question. Is the design of the buildings only for staff houses or for both staff houses and offices as mentioned in the policy program of the government. Thank you.

Hon. Tom: The drawings are only for staff houses.

Mr. Waipora: Mr. Speaker, I wonder what is wrong with the design of the present staff houses in the provinces which you can just go and pick it up from the Ministry of Works and build your houses according to it. I know that in the past houses were classified according to the standard of building, like from class one up to class four, and the drawings of those class houses are already there in

the Ministry of infrastructure. And so I am surprised that they are looking for new designs for houses. There are low cost houses designs readily available in the Ministry. I know it because I have been building staff houses like that in the provincial headquarters I used to be working in. I think they should just use those designs without wasting time to draw new designs for new houses. What is wrong with the present designs? Are they all lost or they are still there yet?

Hon. Tom: Mr. Speaker, that is what we are expecting too but I do not know why they did not give us those drawings and plans.

Hon. Sogavare: Can the Minister confirm to us that the budget books we have copies of the actual allocation is \$1.2million and the Minister said it is only \$600,000? Can the Minister clarify this?

Hon. Tom: In the answer I mentioned today, the budget is asking for another \$600,000 because of the situation we are facing at the moment, which they need to use it in other things.

Mr. Waipora: I heard from the answer of the Honorable Minister that they have already built houses in Makira and Renbell. Which places are the next according to your priority? In your priority program of building those houses, which is the next one? Is it on Malaita, West, Guadalcanal or where? I am interested to know that because for Makira and Renbell they have already spent \$600,000. Which are the next ones on the list?

Hon. Tom: Makira and Renbell are listed as priority and the next would be Temotu and Guadalcanal. These places are prioritized because as we know in Solomon Islands disaster used to strike these places frequently. After those places we would then move on to other provinces.

Hon. Sogavare: Mr. Speaker, just a supplementary question. We understand it from what the Minister mentioned earlier on that this project is affected by the proposed cut or prioritization the Minister of Finance stated earlier today. That is how we understand it.

In establishing our priority, what sort of criteria are we using? I would have thought that anything to do with disaster management is quite important. This country is basically caught really unprepared when the tsunami disaster struck Western and Choiseul provinces, and I would have thought that this project should be given the priority it needs. Can the Minister confirm to us that this project is being affected by this cost cutting measures the Minister has been

telling us? And in that respect it looks like the government is not placing this project as a priority? Can the Minister confirm that?

Hon. Tom: As I stated earlier, priority is given to those two provinces because as we know those two places are frequently stuck by natural disasters. We are not neglecting other places; we still have plans to build staff houses there just like in Makira and Renbell, Temotu, Guadalcanal and other provinces will come later.

Hon SIKUA: Mr. Speaker, although the program of building staff houses and facilities in the provinces is a bit slow, the work performed by officers who are responsible for each province is continuing. So far five officers have been posted to their respective provinces since the beginning of 2008 and five others are yet to be posted to their provinces, and these five remaining ones are serving their respective provinces from Honiara.

Mr. Speaker, although the building of staff accommodation work is slow, officers are being responsible for each province either from their own provinces, which is five and the other five are serving their provinces from Honiara. Thank you.

Mr Waipora: Mr. Speaker, before I thank the Minister for his answers and the Honorable Prime Minister, this project is very important because it deals with disaster, and in my humble view it needs the Minister of Home Affairs and the Minister for Provincial Government and the Minister for Infrastructure to work together and consult each other so that those houses and offices are built while this \$1.2 million is still available. With that, Mr. Speaker, I thank the Honorable Minister for his answers.

Question No. 26 deferred

BILLS

Bills - First Reading

The Foreign Investment (Amendment) Bill 2009

Bills – Second Reading

The Traffic (Amendment) Bill 2009

Mr Speaker: Honourable Members, debate on the Traffic (Amendment) Bill 2009 continues today. As you are aware, on Thursday 18 June 2009 the Honorable Minister in charge of the bill delivered his opening speech before we adjourned the debate. That debate resumed on Thursday 25 June and was again adjourned to this date. Members may now speak on the general principles of this bill. In so doing, I kindly remind Members to comply with the rules of debate set out in the Standing Orders. The floor is now open for debate”.

Hon. FONO: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague Minister of Environment for yielding the floor to me to contribute firstly to the debate on the principles of the Bill. As you know, Mr. Speaker, I am one of those who agreed in allowing the debate on this Bill to be postponed to this week so that Members in the Chamber could participate in debating the Bill.

Mr. Speaker, in doing so I would like to thank my colleague Minister for Police and the CNURA Government for seeing it fit in bringing this Traffic Amendment Bill to the floor of this Chamber. It is timely having seen the need to make improvements to the Traffic Act that we are currently implementing. You know, Mr Speaker, the current situation of the traffic flow in Honiara and therefore it is very, very important that changes must be made to the traffic laws to keep up with the increasing need to make improvements to our traffic laws.

Sir, as we know traffic congestions in Honiara is very, very evident given the fact that almost every month dozens of vehicles coming into our country therefore increasing the number of vehicles on the streets yet our roads have not improved over the years, let alone the provincial centers that have road networks. If you happen to go down to Auki or Malaita Province at the moment, which maybe seen as the second town to Honiara with quite a large number of vehicles such as public buses, taxis, pickup trucks causing high congestions to our roads.

Mr. Speaker, we have seen and also noted over the years and even last year a number of road accidents which resulted in deaths, people losing their lives. It is therefore very, very important that as a responsible government the need to make certain improvements to the traffic laws in our country hence the purpose of this Bill.

Sir, as the population increases the need for public service vehicles such as public buses, taxis also continues to increase because quite a number of our people cannot afford to buy their own vehicles, and so the use of public transport is very, very important in Honiara and other urban centers. It is very important that public transports like public buses, taxis, pickup trucks need to come under some kind of control or coordination hence the purpose of this Bill.

Mr. Speaker, last year when there was an increase in fuel when the world price almost reached over US\$150 per barrel, the owners and operators of public vehicles increased their fares and there was an outcry by public users because fare increased from \$2.00 to \$5.00 within the township. In considering this, as a government, we made a commitment last time that there is need for coordinated effort to look at the justification of any increases and so there must be a board to consider such increases to the public service vehicle owners, hence one of the provisions in this new Traffic Amendment Bill is to allow submissions to be made to the Transport Board so that the Minister can give approval when there is a need for increases or decreases to public fares so that it is fair not only to the transport owner but pedestrians too, the users of public vehicles.

Similarly, Mr. Speaker, is the common practice, which a provision in this bill is trying to address whereby not only public officers but even some Members of Parliament have in holding onto government vehicles even when they are not entitled to them under the General Orders or the PER. There is now a provision in this Bill that caters for that the government can use and it is under law.

Mr. Speaker, the common practice we usually find in our city at the moment is taxis roaming around trying to get passengers on the streets. At the moment there are no taxi stands similar to what is in some of the developed cities in the world where taxis or public vehicles are being properly coordinated so that they have meters and they can fairly charge customers or pedestrians or users and also fair to the vehicle owners too. These amendments will enable public transport users and public transport owners to benefit equally when it is properly coordinated.

Mr. Speaker, another practice we tend to see at the moment is a lot of young drivers driving whilst at the same enjoying drinking alcohol in vehicles, not only private vehicles but taxis or even buses too, which is placing at risk the safety of the traveling public or common people who are using public transport. Therefore, there is the need to empower the Minister to make regulations that will allow users to benefit from new amendments like this. Sir, this proposed traffic amendment bill therefore is very timely as it addresses those areas and make improvements for the benefit of our people.

There is now need for bus owners or taxi owners to form themselves into an association, so that the association looks after their interests under the regulations. May be it will regulate new entrance to the industry. Just like any other industry if there is no proper regulation it will allow a lot of new entrance into that industry until it is maybe unviable for the operators. It is therefore in the interest of operators like bus owners, taxi owners to form themselves into associations so that the association can speak on their behalf to the government or to the transport board that looks after the industry. It is important that people

who are involved in public services must also make profit. As you know, some of them may have loans with the banks and so have legal obligations in meeting commitments by allowing them to pay their loans. This is very, very important and I think there is need that certain provisions in this bill allows taxi owners or public service transport owners like buses to form themselves into an association, so that the association is responsible for their interests and where there is regulation they are educated on the regulations provided for under clauses of this Bill, which the Minister is going to come up with.

As I have said any request for increase in public transport fares must be justified through submission by the association to the board before any increase is formalized. This is very good so that it does not only benefit operators and owners but also the public that are using public service transport. There is provision in section 7(c) in this new Bill that allows the Minister to give approval to any increase of fares. Sometimes when an industry is not properly regulated a lot of entrenchments come in, a lot of people get buses and there is a lot of competition that they end up not able to meet their loan commitments. As an industry it is very important for public service vehicle owners to register; they need to register as business so that they are legally recognized and whatever increase in fares is justified.

Sir, one of the measures this Bill is trying to put across is 'on the spot' fines. We are also very mindful of the need for enforcement of 'on the spot fines' through careless driving. I think there have been some 'on the spot fine' regulations put out by the City Council that did not work. Hence the authority that will be set up under this new legislation must have power to enforce 'on the spot fine'.

On this, I understand that infringement notices will be given by traffic officers or police officers to drivers that commit such crimes and they will be required to pay those fines at the Treasury or wherever the government is to collect the fines. Failure to do that will make them appear in court.

In a way, Mr. Speaker, this is like a deterrent factor allowing our drivers to drive with care. As you know, the driving age allows young people to drive. But sometimes drivers take alcohol, drugs and tend to be very careless in their driving, which resulted in deaths that happened within our city over the years. I think the increase in the number of deaths resulting from careless driving has increased in our history last year. There is need for this bill to allow for drivers who are careless to be fined on the spot. Or may be there should be regulations that ban drivers from driving or removal of driving licenses from them for failing to comply with traffic rules. This is very important as we see the number of deaths continue to increase because of the traffic congestions. As I mentioned

earlier on we are seeing a lot of vehicles coming in and maybe there is need for the government to tighten up the quality of vehicles imported into the country.

It has been the tendency nowadays to import a lot of second hand vehicles into the country much to our dismay that the number plates are new but when driving the vehicles they sometimes stop at the centre of the road and therefore have to be pushed and this is because quality is not there.

Sir, as I have said I will be brief, this Bill is very important and timely. Regulations will be put by the Minister in trying to improve the policing of our traffic. I am pretty sure the regulations would cover dressing code or standards of drivers of public vehicles, buses and taxis; they must be properly dressed. It is not good that taxi drivers going to pick tourists from the airport are dressed up like Rambo. That is not good. It reflects badly on us as a country. In some countries drivers of public vehicles are in uniform; they wear uniform, and there is need for that under the regulations, which I am pretty sure the Minister will look into. All taxi drivers should be properly dressed, and not this kind of Rambo type dressing, like tying of hair, wearing of hood, army type clothing and so on. This is an area that needs improvement. Even drivers and conductors of public buses must be properly dressed because they are transporting people.

Noise in public vehicles is another concern. Sometimes radios in public buses and even taxis are just too loud for the ears. I am not sure whether customers using public vehicles welcome such loud noise when traveling in public vehicles like that.

Even smoking in public vehicles is a health hazard. There must be regulation to regulate no smoking in public transports. I am pretty sure the tobacco bill, which my colleague Minister for Health is going to bring into the House also has this clause for the safety of our traveling passengers. These are some of the regulations that I see as important for the Minister to put in place to be enforced.

Furthermore, drinking in public vehicles not only buses but pick up trucks too is common. It is quite common here with the Guadalcanal public transports that transport markets to and from the Plains. You can see drivers drinking alcohol and smoking marijuana. This even happens in Auki too. A lot of public transports that usually bring produce to the markets are sometimes involved in drinking alcohol. There is need for regulations to be enforced for the safety of the traveling public using the vehicles is very, very important. Therefore, I firmly believe that this traffic amendment bill is timely so that regulations are made for public vehicles that carry public transport. I am talking especially about Guadalcanal and Malaita where public transport is the mode of transport used. I do not know about other provincial centers but I can only talk about these two provincial centres. I can remember a place where a public transport

vehicle was sent but seeing the people there are not accustomed to paying of fares in that when they get down from the vehicle they just say 'okay' and so the person owning the public transport had to bring the vehicle back to Honiara because people are not accustomed to paying of fares.

I believe our provincial centers will be developed when roads are in place. Public transport is very, very important. For the safety, not only of the driver but the owner of public vehicles but the users, it is very important that we pass this bill and allow regulations to be established so that it is enforced.

Mr. Speaker, in conclusion I believe this Bill is very timely as it ensures the functions of the board, which I believe is provided for under this Bill, can be properly coordinated and administered. The enforcement of the regulations of this Bill would be in the interest of not only the operators or owners of these public vehicles, but pedestrians or customers that will be using the public vehicles. For the purpose of safety and security, it is important this amendment bill is passed so that it is enforced giving benefit to all of us who are using the public roads. With these few remarks, Mr. Speaker, I support the Bill.

Hon. LILO: Mr. Speaker, I thank the Minister of Police for bringing the Bill. It is a very important Bill because it is for the first time that we are now starting to recognize the importance of land transport in the country in the context of our development that we are now going through. I share the comments made by previous speakers who have spoken in favor of this Bill.

Now that we are starting to see land based development starting to increase and that we recognize the fact that there is need for transportation to be properly linked to the specific sites in the country where land transport is so important to make sure that activities in the place where development happen can be carried out effectively, there is a need for us to look carefully at the way we coordinate and manage our land transport system in the country.

The second point I think why this Bill is so important is the fact that road infrastructure represents a major area we put our development resources both internal and external that we normally get from our development donors only goes towards road transport and now we are demanding more resources to go into road transportation because we know it is very important for our development. In that regard there is need for us to modernize the way we administer land transportation system in this country.

I welcome this bill and I really support it because firstly in the past we do not have the highway authority. Ever since the Act to establish the highway authority was enacted, nothing has been done. Probably we did not do it because the Authority is very expensive for us to run it like some infrastructures or utility authority that we have now are so expensive for us and therefore we

have opted to convert it to a road transport board instead of a highway authority. This is basically so that we can start small in the way we are trying to reform our road public transportation system in this country. In that respect, I really welcome the intention of this Bill that we find a much more cost effective way to administer or put in place an organization that will be responsible for enforcement and coordination of our traffic laws in this country.

At the same time, Mr. Speaker, we must also recognize that the country is going through major reforms and we must also understand that there is a need for us to reform the legislation that relate to the way that traffic, not only traffic but land based transportation in this country are going to be administered. And so I really support this Bill that way.

The other aspect of this Bill which I think is very important is what the Prime Deputy Minister said today is the interface between public and our operators. I think it is for the first time and I really congratulate the CNURA Government for recognizing this, and that is to put in our legislation the relationship between the public operators and the government authority that is responsible for the administration of the operations of land transport in this country. And that is the recognition to allow our public transport operators to form themselves into an association.

What it means here is that we recognize that public liability is increasingly becoming an issue on our road transportation system so much so that there is need for us to ensure where the liability will fall on. Is it on the government or public transport operators? Now that we have that relationship entrenched in this Bill, it will make things easier, especially for the traveling public who are, most of the time, have become victims of some of the carelessness that happened in our public transportation system. In that regard, Mr. Speaker, I really welcome this Bill that we have for the first time, entrench in our law, the need for the government to recognize the formation and also require the formation of the public transport association where transport operators are required to form themselves in this association and have the opportunity to talk with the public authority or with the road transport board to deal with issues concerning the road transportation in this country. What it means here is that we care about the safety of our traveling public. We care about the safety of our traveling public. Not only that but we also care about what our public feel about the public transportation system, their consumer satisfaction, which is so important; consumer satisfaction. The opportunity that we have given to them to be able to be consulted when the time comes to talk about issues like increasing of fares or any fares or prices related to the operation of road transportation, fuel, maintenance and so forth. I think the main thing is that we have given in this Bill

the opportunity for the association to be heard, to be consulted before any increases can be made.

The other point too is that this bill, in a way, will point to the increasing pollution that is coming out from the use of road transport. Who will pay for it Mr. Speaker? Will we all become just free riders and free users of this public transport system, and careless about the environmental impact it caused as a result of pollution that comes out from the land transportation system or the ageing nature of cars, vehicles and trucks that are being used on the road? Who will pay for it? Mr. Speaker, I think this Bill has given us the opportunity that we can put this to the attention of all of us; the public, the government authorities, and even users too so that we can talk openly about it and have an understanding as to what our responsibilities are to our environment? Again, we cannot neglect the fact that these are growing concerns that are real for this country. It is a reality that we are faced with this kind of pollution. We are face with environmental concerns and we have to adapt to that sort of situation. I feel that this Bill points towards that direction that will give us the opportunity to be able to consult with each other and set the standards. These are the requirements that will have to be properly described under regulations, under the Highway Code so that proper codification of issues that road transport users, operators must take attention and to bear responsibility over the way that we will relate to each other in the use of road transportation.

The other point that I feel this Bill will point towards to make things more evident in a way that we are going about reform in the land transport system of this country is the fact that this will be the first time that we would be able to give confidence to our donors to see that there is a responsible authority in this country that will ensure a more coordinated management and enforcement of traffic laws in this country. In that way we will be able to have the confidence of our donors to be able to come in and help us on issues like developing new road infrastructures in areas that have not been opened up knowing very well that there are laws and rules that can be applied, standards, codes that will be applied that will enable them to feel that resources they have put to us can be put to best use and that the return to the community, return to the country and the economy can be guaranteed in the way that we put the maintenance and the responsibility to administer the way that we use our public road transportation system in this country. In that respect, I welcome this bill as well.

Mr. Speaker, as I have said earlier as we move forward in our development, it is inevitable that this kind of reform must happen and this is one fine example of a good reform to our infrastructure. It is a very essential infrastructure development that this country must be faced with, especially with the opening up of new sites for development, resource base development of this

country it is necessary that we must have this law. Otherwise the risk and dangers like the Deputy Prime Minister has stated that our public will face we will continue to face and eventually the government will always meet the liability. But in this particular case, this Bill will pave the way for us to have a better understanding on the responsibility that every one of us should have in the way that we develop the land based transportation system in this country.

It is a very good Bill and I fully support it and I feel that we must move forward in implementing this Bill. With those comments, I support the Bill. Thank you.

Sitting suspended for lunch break

(Debate on the Traffic Amendment Bill 2009 continues)

Mr. WAIPORA: Mr Speaker, as usual I would be brief in my contribution to this very important Bill that Parliament is dealing with now. Mr Speaker, as a member of the Bills and Legislation Committee, I am not going to speak long on this Bill because we already have a fair knowledge of what is in this Bill and what it talks about. The questions I have about the Bill have already been clarified. I only have a very few points to make on this Bill as my contribution to this Bill with my other colleagues.

Mr Speaker, we have so many laws and those laws are for our good. This Bill is very important and I have no difficulty speaking in support of it. The laws we make are for our good and the welfare of the society. Mr Speaker, the law depends on human beings. This is a very good bill that will be enforced after it becomes law and assented to by the head of state. As I have said, I have looked through it because we have dealt with it in our committee and I am happy that a lot of things we have problems with in our traffic and vehicles are catered for. It all depends on us in implementing the laws, and not only this law but others as well. The problem with us is that we have good tools here in guiding us in the running of our government but weakness is with us, the implementers, those who are going to enforce the laws. I want to make a specific example on this in regards to the Provincial Government Act. We always blame the system as not working and it was claimed not to be suitable for us. If we apply the Provincial Government Act in the provinces, it has teeth to bite. What is required is that, like now we want to adopt state government and so if we work properly and implement things that our people need that is in the Provincial Government Act, we will say the system is alright.

When it comes to this Bill it is the same too. We are now going to have these people who are members of the board here who must be doing their work very strictly. The problem with us is that respect, loyalty, good attitude and

behavior is really lacking in a lot of fields by people who are carrying out work in the government. The wantok system is very much prevalent with us.

Even if I am a policeman and I want to arrest someone and I know that he is my wantok, whether he is fined on the spot or charged the right amount of fine is questionable.

Mr Speaker, what I see as a problem generally with us in Solomon Islands is that we are too casual in some of our responsibilities. If we are given authority we do not have pride in carrying out our work so that people I am doing my work. I am going to make an example here. If you go to the market place now you will see people collecting fees or something like that there. Some people come and since they are wantoks they do not pay the fee and so the Honiara City Council lost \$2.00 in revenue. That kind of attitude is within us.

Mr Speaker, what I am emphasizing here is the weakness in carrying out our responsibility when holding positions of authority when enforcing rules regulated by law. That is what I see that we need to improve on, at least with us Solomon Islanders.

Mr Speaker, careless and inconsiderate driving is often a cause for accidents on public roads because some of them, drivers of vehicles are too free, not respecting passengers in the buses or in taxis or the vehicles they are driving. They even wave their hands and shout to their friends standing beside the roads or going pass in other vehicles and so forth.

Those kinds of things are happening, although it might not be a concern but it can cause a lot of problems for us.

Mr Speaker, what we need if we have to carry out this law after its passage is for responsible authorities to be very strict and enforce it. They must be very strict in applying what is required by this law. Also during vehicle test I am not sure whether the vehicles are properly tested too. Sometimes the vehicles running on the roads at this time, I wonder whether they are road worthy at all. I do not know how they pass the test. But it is risky to the lives of our people. Areas like that, whoever authority that is responsible must make sure those rules are applied and necessary for them to be applied and they must be strictly applied.

Tinted or dark glassed vehicles must also be stopped. I think it is not right to have dark glass vehicles going around town, especially taxis. You are confused when you want to stop a dark glass taxi because you cannot tell whether a passenger is inside or not. I think the authority concern must look into this, whether it is alright to have it or not, but there are important reasons why we need to look into this.

The other thing, Mr. Speaker, I would like to bring out here, which I find a bit risky when inside a vehicle, especially when driving and talking on mobile

phones. Mobile phones must be turned off when driving; when driving mobile phones should not be used. I think it must be put in the regulations because it is very dangerous to talk on mobile phones when driving. Do not use mobile phones when holding the wheel of vehicles. I am trying to point this out because I see it as a risk when traveling on public roads.

Mr. Speaker, if the Honiara City Council and the government are concerned about revenue, I would suggest the introduction of toll tax. For instance, when going out of town, on your way back into town toll tax should be paid, say \$2.00 and then you enter into town. That is one way of collecting revenue for maintenance of roads we are always talking about. I am just suggesting this; all of us have been overseas and we have seen what I am talking about. I am just saying this in general, but people who are dealing with it can deal with it in a very professional and appropriate manner. I see it as something to consider introducing at this time. Let us try introducing toll tax, as it will be helpful.

I can guarantee you, Mr Speaker, that if this is introduced it will be like those running the refueling stations who are collecting a lot of revenue. If we try introducing toll tax, I believe we would collect enough revenue for maintenance of our roads here in Honiara. I think this should be spearheaded by the Honiara City Council.

Sir, in fact when I was Town Clerk we discussed this issue intending to introduce it, but I had to leave and so it was not introduced. If I had been given another year at the City Council, I think we would have introduced it already but I was transferred to another province.

Streetlight, Mr Speaker, is a very important thing to be re-introduced. Unfortunately sometime ago, I can remember when I was at the Honiara Town Council, we put up a few streetlights but people destroyed them. The people played around by pressing the buttons of the streetlights to the extent that the lights just turned off for good. Some drivers whom I traveled with are complaining and have raised some valid points about streetlights. It would be good to introduce streetlights so that it controls vehicles and pedestrians when to go and when to stop. We all know that streetlights would be good for us because any speeding vehicles would be slowed down or stopped by the streetlights. Streetlights can also be introduced in provincial centres such as Auki and Gizo as they are much bigger towns. I think the provincial governments should start thinking about this because it is good to introduce it when the towns are still small so that when they expand people can get accustomed to the system. Unlike here in Honiara, some of the things we are now talking about had they been introduced in the past we would have got used to them.

Mr. Speaker, how license fees are collected, I myself do not know exactly how it is collected but there is need for a one stop shop when dealing with vehicles because the number of vehicles coming into the country let alone our city is increasing rapidly. And so it is time that government should have a one stop shop for vehicle related issues. Because at present if you want to pay your license you have to go down to the Inland Revenue. If you want your vehicle tested, I do not know who is doing the testing, whether it is the police or the Ministry of Infrastructure. Therefore, anything to do with vehicles and roads should be done in one place. For instance, it is much more convenient after having your vehicle tested you pay for it in that same place and if there are any disqualifications or whatever it is also dealt with in the same place. Currently, all the various parts are dealt with by respective Ministries such as the Ministry of Finance deals with one part, the Ministry of Infrastructure deals with another and the Ministry of Police deals with another part. In my humble view, in our work of reforming the ministries and their activities and functions, this is an important area that we should look into.

Mr. Speaker, having said that, and I think the authorities concerned may have already know where to test the drivers, but there must be a driving school whereby new drivers get their provisional license and they go and train in that particular school and field. Currently, if you want to learn how to drive and you go to the College field or the King George field, but those at the College would chase you from their field. Therefore, there is need to have a proper place where people can learn how to drive. You might think these points are not important but you will one day be faced with them. Therefore, those kinds of facilities are needed at this time, so that anyone who wants to get a provisional license and wants to learn to drive knows where to go rather than going to the Golf Club or the KG area or the College of Higher Education area. We must look into areas like that.

What I am talking about here are normal administrative matters. I believe the things we are talking about reflect the things pointed out in the different sections of the Bill. I am talking about things that are practical and things that people understand and know there is a problem, and I feel that I should point out a few things, which myself have seen that although we might regard them as small but important points that form the basis and the basics that we must not overlook.

Mr. Speaker, I am pointing out some of the things which, in my humble view, are necessary that the government of the day or the next government must consider since our city is growing and this bill comes at the right time. I think the practical points, some of which I am pointing out here are very necessary to look at by those who will be implementing this Bill.

With those very few points, Mr. Speaker, I support the motion.

Mr. AGOVAKA: Mr. Speaker, I too would like to contribute briefly to this important and timely Bill. I think the objects and reasons of the Bill are specifically clear in that the Bill seeks to amend the Traffic Act for the purpose of ensuring that the functions and power under the Act are well coordinated, administered and enforced to ensure the safety of our roads and vehicles.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to comment briefly on some aspects of the Bill, and to just add to the previous speaker who has just sat down. I will speak on a few aspects of the Bill and firstly, on licensing of vehicles. Before a vehicle is driven you have to have a license; you have to go through a test just like my colleague has said.

In other countries they have a driving school that they go to and are properly taught how to drive a vehicle. They are given the knowledge not only of the driving skills but how to use the Highway Code and how to use the traffic signs, and so there has to be proper school that properly teaches and gives knowledge of the different aspects of driving. To me, this Bill is very good in the sense that it creates an atmosphere and environment that our people and the public will be able to create a driving school so that people who want to drive can go and learn how to drive there. At the moment there is no driving school in the country.

In regards to licensing, Mr. Speaker, when you pass your test the licensing officer will stamp the license. In other countries I know they have different classes of licenses. First of all, you have a provisional license and then after a couple of months or a year when you are experienced enough to drive in town, a license is granted. And then again, there are different proper licenses such as heavy vehicle, light vehicle, motor cycle, under carriage etc. You have these classes of driving licenses that tells you which vehicles you are allowed to drive. At present it is not like that, as long as we get a license we just drive anything from a wheel barrow to heavy vehicles, which is quite dangerous on our roads.

Again, Mr. Speaker, on licensing, if say for example a young 18 years old learns how to drive from Noro and wants to go through driving test to obtain a license, does he have to come all the way from Noro to Honiara just to sit that test and get the license or are we going to create a licensing officer to be stationed in all the provinces to cater for this shortfall, shortfall in that everything is bottleneck here in Honiara. That is one thing the Minister should consider when creating the road transport board that it should look into how they are to regulate this law.

Thirdly, Mr. Speaker, let me speak on registration. There are new vehicles coming in that go for registration, and then we also have people driving

unregistered vehicles. They are included as well. Let us also have standard number plates. Sometimes the number plates were stylistically written to the extent that the number plates cannot be recognized; it is difficult to clearly identify the number of the vehicle. Mr. Speaker, at night when you are driving, some vehicles do not illuminate their number plates at night and so it is difficult to tell which vehicle has just gone passed or if there is an accident or something happens. It is important that when the rules and regulations are made, the standard number plates are made out so that we are not confused about the numbering and also at night vehicle number plates should be illuminated.

Also under registration is the buying and selling of vehicles. Someone registers a vehicle and suddenly someone else buys it, how are we going deal with the registration or transfer of registration. I think that needs to be clarified. Also under registration I have something to say about motor vehicle dealers. At the moment the Ela Motors, Tongs and other motor dealers are the properly registered motor dealers. But what happens now is that people can order vehicles through the internet and sell those vehicles. Such people need to be properly registered otherwise they are selling vehicles like what the Deputy Prime Minister has said a vehicle with a new number plate that got stuck under the bottom of some trees. This is the kind of thing that needs to be properly coordinated and the coordination has to be done by the board, and not only the board but the traffic and also the motor dealers.

The standard of vehicle is another issue. At present if you travel at night you will see some vehicles traveling only with one light and the back is totally dark. The road worthiness of vehicles is important to be enforced. The people enforcing the law should also enforce that vehicles must have lights at night. Otherwise we might think it is a motorcycle that is coming because it only has one light when it is not, it is a vehicle. It is important for vehicles that run on the road to be road worthy before they are registered.

Mr. Speaker, the use of the road, is my fourth subject. Which part of the road will bicycle riders use on the road? Are they going to use the same road that vehicles use or they use the footpath or the middle of the road or where? We need to properly establish which part of the road should bicycle riders use. And like somebody has said earlier, taxis and buses too. In other countries I noted that they have bus lanes. I wonder if we can make regulations so that buses only travel on the slow lane. I had almost an unfortunate incident last time in regards to this. I was traveling on the slow lane and a bus speeding on the fast lane, in trying to get to the bus stop before me almost hit the front of my vehicle. This is the kind of thing that must be avoided; bus drivers speeding on the fast lane and then trying to cut into the slow lane to drop of passengers at bus stops.

Mr. Speaker, I now come to roundabouts. We should be able to inform our drivers through driving schools and through the Highway Code and by the road traffic signs on how to use the roundabout. Who should we give way to? Is it the vehicle at our left hand side or those at the right hand side? Drivers need to know this because some drivers seemed to be confused about this. These are little roads rules that need to be clarified in the regulations and rules.

Mr. Speaker, there are only two underpasses here in Honiara, of which one is at Point Cruz and another one at the Market area and there is an overhead bridge at China Town. The overhead pass and underground passes are not being properly utilized, which causes a lot of traffic congestion making it very unsafe for pedestrians crossing the road with heavy traffic flowing during the day as well as night time. It is important to use the overhead bridges and underpasses for the safety of our people.

Mr. Speaker, on the use of roads also, sometimes we see people marching along the streets, in particular when there is an NGO organized rally on something like the AIDS campaign and others and also church groups too. Where do we apply to use the public road for marches and parades? These are little rules that need to be clarified so that people will be able to apply in advance to use the roads for public marches.

Mr. Speaker, still on the subject of using the road, I think it is important that the traffic centre at Kukum be turned into a traffic management centre to monitor and manage our roads 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. This centre should report on traffic incidences affecting traffic flows such as accidents and vehicle breakdowns, in coordination with the Road Transport Board and also the Honiara City Council so that in the case of an accident they would be able to call for the ambulance, they would be able to call the police, they would be able to call coffin makers in the case of anyone being killed. Mr. Speaker, it is important that a traffic management centre works in close collaboration with the Road Transport Board and also the Honiara City council. We have to create this.

The fifth point I would like to speak on is on rules and regulations. When overseas visitors arrive in our country they have existing driving licenses from their country. How can they be accommodated in here if they hire vehicles and want to drive them around our city? What are the rules we can impose on them? How long will they drive and what class of vehicles they should drive. This should come under rules and regulations.

Also parking is another concern that must be addressed. At the moment we are so unorganized in our parking. If you drive around the streets of Honiara you will find people parking vehicles all over the place, even in prohibited areas. Some of them instead of doing angle parking went on to do parallel parking and some even park in the middle of the road, especially buses and taxis. This is

dangerous because it can cause accidents, not only to another vehicle but also to the person inside the vehicle.

Still on speeding, I suggest there should be some speed cameras along the road to enable traffic officers monitor how fast vehicles travel. Sometimes vehicles travel at dangerous speed. Somebody has mentioned alcohol and drugs, of course, there should be rules and regulations on this which is already contained in the bill, and we will be talking more about this when we get to the committee stage.

Loading zones, Mr. Speaker, again we should have loading zones. When we go to the market we can see trucks picking up people at the market and loading things on the side of the road without going to the proper loading place to do that. We should have a designated area to load market produces and goods.

Mr. Speaker, overloading is another subject I would like to talk about. Overloading a vehicle is very dangerous. And I am talking here especially to my wantoks who normally overload trucks with passengers and also goods when coming down to the city. That is why when the vehicle comes to a bend and the vehicle cannot be controlled you will see market produces thrown onto the road and when traffic officers ask you who is at fault, your response is that the road is wrong. There is need to be specific about overloading. The rules and regulations need to go down to people who are driving so that they know their loading limits.

The sixth point I will talk on is the environment. The environment is important to us, and I think the Minister of Environment mentioned earlier that the Road Transport Board must work closely with vehicle and transport owners and the industries to ensure emission from vehicles is minimized. We need to reduce the effect of the exhaust emitted from vehicles. In this way we can have a pollution free environment thus we do not harm our environment. It is important that fumes emitted by vehicles should become part of the road worthiness test. For instance, if you travel in some buses or taxis, you will suffocate because fumes from that vehicle overflow into the vehicle itself. It is important to make vehicles road worthy and emissions from exhaust pipes are reduced or minimized so that traveling in a vehicle is safe and our environment is pollution free. Still on the environment, Mr. Speaker, some vehicles are very noisy. If this can be reduced, in particular broken exhaust pipes and so forth.

Finally, I want to touch on government vehicles. I think there is a rule here saying those holding onto government vehicles in particular public servants and MP's too should be crucified for that. I think this should be extended to private and public vehicles too. If someone is holding onto somebody's vehicle,

he/she should be punished for the same crime too just like those of us holding onto government vehicles.

I think with these few observations, Mr. Speaker, I support the motion.

Mr. ZAMA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me the floor to very briefly contribute to this Bill. I want to thank the Minister for introducing this Bill to Parliament. In looking through the Bill, I find it a bit difficult to be convinced by the introduction of this Bill to Parliament.

Looking at the objects and reasons of the Bill, it is very clear that the Minister brings this Bill into the House to ensure the functions and powers under this Act are well coordinated, administered and enforced to ensure safety on our roads. I think the word 'safety on the roads' is an eye catchy here. The object of this Bill is for the functions and powers in the Bill to be properly strengthened.

Mr. Speaker, in the last sitting of Parliament we have passed more than 10 or almost 20 bills. But where are those bills? I do not know. This is another bill introduced in Parliament, in the thinking of the Minister to create a board to look after the responsibilities, powers and functions which are now taken on board by the Ministry of Finance and to merge the same powers and functions with the Ministry of works to make them more effective. Mr. Speaker, I find it a bit difficult to go inline with that idea.

In order for our roads to be safe for people using them to understand the rules, I think we need to start where we need to start. This Bill, in my view, allows people to commit the offence first before they pay for the penalty. That is how I see this Bill, and that is why I find it hard to go inline with the Minister's thinking in introducing this Bill and maybe the Ministry in that they did not really catch the intention. Although it is put quite clearly there, Mr. Speaker, the bottom line of road safety is not the administrative part of the bill but how people use and understand road regulations. For instance, Mr Speaker, it is not a right in the Constitution that everybody has a driving license but rather it is only a privilege. At the moment you can see people driving vehicles, some of them are not fit to drive vehicles because they are underage. That is why, in my opinion, the practical application of making our roads safe is to determine who is fit to drive and who is not fit to drive, what kind of vehicles are to be used on the roads and which ones are supposed not to use the roads.

On the issue of people to be given permit or learner's permit to drive, many of those who are driving, especially young drivers on the road now do not understand or reading the codes in the learner's manual that used to be at the Ministry of Finance. I wonder if they even have access to this manual as well because the way these children are driving vehicles on the now is not really the

regulation, but it is ignorance of procedures and ignorance of understanding road rules that is causing our roads to be unsafe.

I fully agree with what the colleague MP for Central Guadalcanal has said in that a lot of issues he raised are what we really for our roads. There is not the real need for another transport board to ensure safety of the roads. No, far from it! The creation of this board through this Bill will not ensure the safety on the roads. What is needed for safety on the road is practical application that people using the road need to understand their responsibility because many people driving vehicles seem to own the whole road; they just do not care who else is using the road.

In my view, I think there is the need to increase the fee in getting a learner's permit. It should be should be increased because it is not a constitutional right to have a driver's license, but it is only a privilege. It is only a privilege to drive a vehicle. That said, the government or any other administration should increase the fee even up to \$1,000 or \$2,000 for a learner's permit, so be it. Doing this will discourage people from driving.

Mr. Speaker, what I can see as the appropriateness of this Bill or the bottom line is safety. The practical solution of making our roads safe is what is needed and not a transport board.

The other thing I am looking at is we need more roundabouts. If you drive along the roads there are less than 10 roundabouts. But taking Point Cruz as a central point and going back west in Honiara there should be another roundabout at the main Market and there should be another round about at Rove and another one at White River. Traveling eastward there should be a roundabout opposite the Central Hospital, another one Kola Ridge, another one at Florence Young, another one at the Vura junction, maybe another one at Marine school and another one at the Panatina Plaza and the list goes on. This is a practical solution to make our roads safe, and not the establishment of the transport board but maybe when it implements its policies.

The thing I see in regards to people not fitting to get a driver's license is the need to scrutinize officers sitting down in the department who are responsible in testing those wanting to get a driving license because you can almost preempt whether you are capable in passing a driving test. These days you never know whether someone is fit to get a driver's license. It is a matter of as long as 'you scratch my back and I scratch your back'. You can almost envisage what you are going to take. I suggest that we put different officers or different people as testing officers so that not the same officer is doing the testing; you do not know who is going to test you. But if it is the same officer doing the test every day, day in day out, year after year the testing will be compromised. That is another weak point that needs to be strengthened.

Another point, Mr. Speaker, is on road usage. I think there is now need to create another highway behind the Honiara City for the safety of our roads. There is now need to construct a new highway road connecting the back areas because the main road is very congested. If you look at the surface of this road as well, and this is a technical area we might not know, but if you look at the Henderson International airport, the runway is very heavily compacted to be able to cater for heavy planes landing on the tarmac. Now the same is on road, one road caters for every vehicles, for instance, light vehicles, heavy vehicles and with the wear and tear of roads, I do not know the standard of our roads but the one road is made suitable for all types of vehicles; lights vehicles, and even at some stage logging trucks too are hauling logs at the centre of the city, which is very unsafe. That is why there is now need for any crude work like that to be driven along the back roads because anything could happen and people might lose their lives. But there is now need for the transport board to look into that. I still believe that without a transport board being established under the Act, the Ministry of Works and the Ministry of Finance can put their heads together to quickly look at some of these road safety nets.

I think my colleague MP for Central Guadalcanal has raised a lot of important points in terms of places of parking, bus stops and taxi ramps. These things too have contributed a lot to the recklessness of those using the roads. I think the transport board has to look into these issues. We really need to pull up our socks in terms of what we need to do with the roads and how people use the roads.

With this very brief contribution, Mr. Speaker, I would like to support the Minister for bringing this Bill into the House. Thank you.

Hon. Tora: Mr Speaker, at the outset I would like to thank all Honorable Members for their contribution to this very important Bill, the Traffic (Amendment) Bill 2009. Before going further, I would like to assure the speakers who have spoken on this very important Bill that the points they have raised are very important points. For instance, one of the Members who has contributed has raised a very important point on the establishment of a training school for traffic. I can assure the House that the point has been taken on board. When the Bill is passed by this Parliament my Ministry will work closely with the Ministry of Infrastructure and Development to look into this matter.

Mr. Speaker, the process in which this Bill has gone through is one of which involves a wide section of the community and stakeholders, including the Ministry of Justice and Legal Affairs, the AG's Chamber, the Law Reform Unit, the Ministry of Infrastructure Development, the Traffic Division of the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force, the Ministry of Lands, the Ministry of National

Planning, the Ministry of Finance, the Honiara City Council, the Solomon Islands Chamber of Commerce, and the Participating Police Force, just to name a few. Mr Speaker, as you would all realize this Bill involves a lot of consultation process.

Mr Speaker, if you are concerned about the lack of awareness that is the priority activity that the proposed road transport board would do when this bill is passed and enacted. But I appreciate and take note of your concerns. Yes, awareness is a must and that is how we can get to the rest of the community to understand any changes we wish to undertake.

On this note too, I also wish to convey my appreciation to the local media of our country, especially the SIBC, One News Television, Solomon Star, Island Sun, and others who cover our daily debates both here on the floor of Parliament and the conference room when the Bills and Legislation Committee deliberate on government bills. This is a step forward in educating our population, and I appreciate it very much.

Mr Speaker, the Bill as we all understand is a very simple bill that seeks to amend the Traffic Act for the purpose of ensuring the functions and powers under that Act are well coordinated, administered and enforced to ensure safety on our roads. The amendment will allow for proper administration and better enforcement of traffic related laws and regulations. This means the bill will improve the overlapping functions of the three different government agencies currently administering the Traffic Act. In the end we will have a bill that will first consolidate all administrative functions under one authority road transport board and where necessary delegate functions. Rightly so, as many of you would realize it will cost money to achieve what this amendment aims to achieve requires consolidating of resources, both human and financial as well as working equipments.

Mr Speaker, furthermore, in order for the new bill to achieve its objectives, it also requires a lot of support and backing from the government as well as other sectors. Certainly, it needs the understanding and cooperation of road users and the whole populace. That is why I thank the media, especially the SIBC and One News Television for their extensive coverage of this debate.

On the financial implications of this Bill, Mr Speaker, the cost we are looking at would include logistics and equipment for inspectors and examiners, vehicle testing equipments and paperwork forms, capacity strengthening manpower, training, testing facilities, computerized recordings, awareness programs and workshops, logistics for enforcement officers, vehicles, motorcycles, printed forms, traffic gears, improved and well maintained good quality roads with proper markings and signs would be highly expected by road users, building complex to house the secretariat, testing facilities, board room,

recording and backup facilities, board meeting expenditures and members' allowances. Mr. Speaker, as you could see this Bill certainly would require financial commitment from the government. I believe that the board once established will draw up its work plan and its estimated budget, and I am sure my colleague Minister for Infrastructure has had this process already in plan.

Mr. Speaker, as you will all note, this new Bill has the potential to rake in millions of dollars from road users, and this is the beauty of it all. We will have a board acting as the oversight body to enforce its right under the Ministry to carry out its duties. With the current Traffic Act, police officers and other public officers administering and enforcing this same function appear to prioritize their normal duties first and the duties required under the Traffic Act second. That is the danger, and I am sure that is why most offences which are punishable under the Penal Code are mostly unattended. Our law enforcers have their primary normal duties to do.

Mr Speaker, on the issue of creating more offences but not being able to enforce it, I must inform the House and our listeners in the country that with this Bill, officers would be likely to be developed to the Ministry of Infrastructure. This Bill will see to it that offences detected, on the spot fines are promptly addressed and followed through and where appropriate penalties are dealt with accordingly.

Mr Speaker, this Bill is certainly not a stand alone bill. It is a piece of legislation that aims at improving one aspect of the delivery of government services. With the current hardship from the global economic crisis, this bill also enables us to re-look at our local revenue resources. I am assuring you all that revenue collected from this Bill can actually maintain and improve our roads.

Mr Speaker, if we are going to encourage development let us build more roads around the islands. Let us build roads around the whole of Guadalcanal, Malaita, Makira, Choiseul and Isabel. Sir, when you see development growing look at Samoa, Fiji and Tonga, just to name a few that have roads around their main islands and then we see the number of hotels grow, the number of towns grow, the number of motels grow, the supply of local produces from farmers increases, tourists buying more of domestic goods, which is what we are crying for.

Mr Speaker, you can only grow your national economy when you get your people to be involved in growing it. At the moment we all realized small pockets here, small pockets in Malaita, small pockets in Makira and so on. It is difficult to grow our economy. Ship owners and charters do not necessarily need a ship around the islands. It is costly and ineffective because by the time the ship gets back to the Point Cruz wharf half of the goods have already rot and need to be thrown away.

Mr Speaker, I am just reminding the House of the potential of the Bill and how it can impact on our economy. I am sure when this Bill gets through the country would look forward to having more reliable and dedicated government staff to administer and enforce what this Bill intends to improve. If our road users cooperate and pay their fines when caught committing offences, we will be raking in millions of dollars. Let us also be reminded that a growing number of vehicles in the country has almost exceeded the capacity our road networks to certain lengths and that is why we have traffic jams every peak hours around Honiara. Mr. Speaker, on this I also agree with the contribution by the Minister for Infrastructure Development on Thursday 25th July when opening the debate on this Bill and also the Leader of the Opposition that in the event where there is no provision in the Bill to cater for the creation of special funds purposely to accommodate the revenues collected under this Act then the Minister responsible, which is my colleague Minister for Infrastructure Development can then bring to Cabinet a paper to cater for the creation of a special fund for this purpose.

Mr. Speaker, as you would also note, the road traffic board once established will have a permanent office. Members, staff and the secretary of the road transport board shall be established by the Ministry responsible for road transport to administer the road transport sector. The formulation of policies for improvement shall be administered by the secretariat on behalf of the board. Mr. Speaker, members of the board shall include the Honiara City Council and the Ministry responsible for provincial governments on the behalf of the provinces. In this regard, there shall be adequate consultation on traffic regulations to clearly identify the roles of local authorities as well as avoiding conflict on overlap of responsibilities. Mr. Speaker, the board in consultation with relevant agencies shall identify the risks associated with 'on the spot fines' hence provide the administrative guidelines and procedures. As I have alluded to you earlier, once the body is established, the chairman and its members shall immediately finalize the administrative guidelines and procedures to deal with infringement issues.

Mr. Speaker, I shall not spend too much time on the issue of infringement and how these new offences are going to be executed as it would be covered in detail in the committee stage, and of course will be explained by the Attorney General. Basically under this new arrangement if an infringement notice is issued and the alleged offender wishes to accept the fixed penalty, the percentage of the maximum penalty if the offence is prosecuted successfully, he/she must pay later at the magistrate court. If on the other hand the alleged offender disputes the enforcement officer's decision later will file a notice with the same court and it becomes a summons for the alleged offender to appear

before the court. Mr. Speaker, only notices will be issued on the spot with fixed fines but not actual payments of such fines. This is to reduce the act of wantokism and bribery. Mr. Speaker, may I also add here that to assist the implementation of the Bill, attitudes and mentalities will be dealt with through a massive media campaign which the Ministry of Infrastructure Development will embark on.

Mr. Speaker, finally I would like to acknowledge the views expressed by the Leader of the Opposition and others who spoke in support of the Bill as you would by now appreciate and be thankful that the media has assisted us in broadcasting this bill and its intention already to the country. Once this Bill is enacted, the Ministry of Infrastructure Development shall commence their plan of awareness programs on the new procedures, processes and rules to ensure they are widely circulated and that awareness programs for the road users are done through the print media, radio, TV, or workshops.

With these few remarks, Mr. Speaker, I beg to move.

The Bill is passed

Bills – Committee Stage

The Traffic (Amendment) Bill 2009

Mr Chairman: Honourable Members, the bill before us now, for consideration by this Committee of the Whole House, is the Traffic (Amendment) Bill 2009. Please note that the relevant amendments proposed to the principal Act of 2005 are indicated in the bill and in the annotated copy of the principal Act, which I understand has been circulated to Members. We shall go through the Bill clause by clause.

Clauses 1 & 2 agreed to

Clause 3

Hon. Sogavare: Mr. Chairman, whilst we welcome the move to consolidate the traffic functions which are implemented under three different government ministries into one, which is a good move, I am just wondering for future development why a Road Transport Board and not a Road Transport Authority headed by a director and supported by the board to take on a more advisory role instead of its 'the authority'. I am saying this just to tap the brains of the government because these people are also holders of line positions; they have

responsibility too under where they are engaged in and so how much of their time will be devoted to the work of the board.

As I mentioned earlier, the roles of three departments are now combined here but it lacks, in fact if you look at it and I think maybe the Minister alluded to as well is that it lacks sufficient supporting logistic powers, like budgeting, acquisition of land powers, and other powers. It also talks about allowances too in that clause and so if we have a proper road transport authority instead of talking about allowances, we should really be concerned about proper budget allocation, and then the funds the Minister has alluded to, eventually a Cabinet paper will probably come from the Minister of Infrastructure can actually be allocated to that authority to properly administer the traffic and administration of road transport in the Solomon Islands. I am just wondering why establish a transport board instead of a road transport authority.

Attorney General: Mr. Chairman, the instruction received by the Chambers which resulted in the way the Bill was drafted to have the road transport board was that whilst there was a desire to do a reform in the direction shown by the bill, to move to the next stage of creating authority would be really a big jump that we need to do a lot of study and preparation for such a step. Perhaps at this stage we can take this as an initial stage towards that depending on the wish of the government if it wishes to go that far then obviously costs will come with it if we create an authority. That is why you will see in Clause 4, the composition of the board is really drawn from existing authorities and agencies. It is very much a policy question but I am only explaining why the drafting was made in the manner it is presented in the Bill at the moment.

Hon. Sogavare: Mr Chairman, since it is a policy question what is the thinking of the Minister on the direction we are talking about?

Hon. Sikua: Mr Chairman, as was mentioned by the Honorable Attorney General, the decision was to take one step at a time. Because of the need for us to tidy up this area, we thought that taking this initial step will prepare us to go all the way to have a road transport authority as the ultimate goal we would want to go in the long term. Because of the need for us to tidy up this area, which is becoming too messy, this is the first initial step we wanted to go before we get to the actual place we want to go, and given the resources available to us at this stage.

Hon. Sogavare: Mr Chairman, I think clause 4 has gone a long way than that. Page 5, Mr Chairman, sub clause 5 of clause 4 made reference to the board which

can by notice in the gazette declare any other body to be a highway authority for any specific area subject to the conditions the board will make. I assume that in future references it makes reference to local authorities. What would be the roles of the national authority board and the role of the local authorities? How do these two different authorities relate?

Attorney General: Mr Chairman, we are jumping really ahead, but for purposes of just explaining question. Can I go directly now to Clause 4/5?

Mr Speaker: Can we just dispose of Clause 3, and then we can go to Clause 4?

Hon. Sogavare: In fact, I made reference to sub-clause 5 of Clause 4, but I assumed they are related to local authority and so may be I can accept that when we reach the issue on local authority and then the Attorney General or the Minister can explain it, and so I accept that.

Clause 3 agreed to

Clause 4

Hon. Sogavare: Mr Chairman, can the Attorney General and the Minister now clarify the question?

Attorney General: Mr. Chairman, the road transport board will be the central highway authority. If you look at Clause 3(5), which comes under Clause 4 we are dealing with, it clearly says that the road transport board itself will declare. It has that body; the road transport itself will declare any other body to be a highway authority for any specific area. Now the words 'specific area' will include provincial headquarters or urban centre and other places, and it could also include say if we are to apply to Honiara, if the Honiara City has authority over Honiara, you would need a different highway authority for Lunga area and Henderson area because that is outside of the Honiara City Council territory. So it will be for the board to decide which highway authority would be responsible for which particular area. It may keep to itself a particular area it will have control over, but that is something for the board to decide. If it sees it fit it may say 'I do not control the particular area but I delegate', for example in the case for Honiara City it will have to discuss with the Honiara City how they will take control of Honiara whether it will be done jointly or whether the board will delegate much of the functions to the Honiara City Council to do it. But in

essence, the answer to the question is that the board itself will declare which body should perform the work of the highway authority. Thank you.

Hon. Tora: Mr. Chairman, just an addition to the explanation of the Attorney General. When you look at what the Leader of Opposition referred to, it depends on the condition of the roads. When they see that there is heavy traffic in the provinces or the urban centers, because it was already declared as public roads then the bottom line is safety and they will have to work on that.

Mr. Agovaka: I think my reservation is on the board. There are just too many bureaucrats and no technical people as we are talking about roads and vehicles, which are technical things, for example, the reference to the Clerk to Honiara City Council. I think we should have the physical planner instead of the Clerk because this is dealing with roads, dealing with drainage and traffic signs as well. Also in regards to the appointment of the Commissioner of Police, I think we should have the Director of Traffic instead. Also instead of having just one mechanical engineer we should also have a civil engineer who will probably know how best roads are designed so that that they advise the board. That is just my comment on the composition of the board.

Attorney General: Mr. Chairman, if we look at 3(1)(a) we see that the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry responsible for road transport will be the chairperson. We know that under him he has civil engineers and all those technical people in the Ministry to provide the expertise that the board would need. It is not proper to have juniors in the board when the Permanent Secretary is already designated as the chairman of the board.

In regards to the Commissioner of Police you will see that in paragraph (c), the words are written as the Commissioner of Police or a senior gazetted officer as the Commissioner's nominee. The Commissioner himself can appoint a senior gazetted officer to take his place. You would see this happening with the others as well, like the Permanent Secretary for Provincial Government and the Permanent Secretary for Commerce. The only ones that do not have nominees are the chief mechanical engineer and the PS for Infrastructure, as I said the Clerk of the Honiara City Council.

The Solomon Islands Chamber of Commerce will nominate a member. It will decide on who is the appropriate person to represent it. Taxi operators and bus operators will also nominate their appropriate persons.

Technical expertise is something that the Board itself can decide perhaps by way of regulations or since the Permanent Secretary of Infrastructure is already chairman he will bring that expertise on board. Thank you.

Hon Sogavare: Mr. Chairman, 3(c) sets in place how many times the board will meet. I would have thought it wise to leave it to as and when it should meet because if it does not have anything to meet about then it would just simply meet.

The question really is how the monthly meetings would improve on the administration of traffic compared with the current arrangement. Right now it is not meeting every month. The policy rationale seems to be that because these three groups in the three ministries are not meeting hence do not effectively administer this and that at least they must meet at least once a month and that means 12 meetings a year. What really is the policy rationale there in the interest of improvement?

Attorney General: Chairman, the number of times mentioned in 3(c) sub paragraph 1 says 'at least once a month'. That is the minimum they can meet, more than once depending on their business and agenda. It is just the minimum time that is stated there, which is at least once a month. Thank you.

Hon. Sogavare: Mr. Chairman, that is my concern. What are we seeing as the difference now? Is it because they are not meeting now and that is why the administration of the traffic law is ineffective? Right now they are not meeting. This clause is saying that they must meet every month.

I am talking about costs that will be incurred with the number of people that will be meeting and how much they will be paid every meeting. And if they are to meet 4 to 5 times a month, which will be even worse in terms of costs.

My question is how would these monthly meetings improve the administration of the traffic law as compared with the current arrangement? What do we really have in mind here? What will they really be discussing?

Attorney General: Mr. Chairman, if the Minister takes particular note of the comments raised by the Leader, the Minister can exercise power under sub paragraph 3 on page 5 and this is where the Minister can give written policy directives in the public interest to the board and the board shall comply with such directives. Whilst there is a minimum time for Board to meet under 3(c)(1) on page 7, if it becomes a concern that the board has not been meeting or it has not been meeting too often as desired, and the Minister wants to give some directions, the Minister can exercise power under sub paragraph 3 on page 5.

Hon. Sikua: Mr. Chairman, in so far as the current situation is concerned the agencies responsible for the Act are no longer meeting and that is why we are

trying to make provisions for them to make sure they meet and that they do their work. Thank you.

Hon. Sogavare: Sub clause 4 says, "A member who has an interest in any matter before the board shall disclose his interest". I am talking about improving on the present sort of situation because we have seen that the present situation does not have this and so we are introducing it. What aspect of the current administration of the law does this provision improve on? Are we experiencing conflict of interest under the present administrative arrangement in administering the traffic law? What is the policy rationale behind this?

Attorney General: Mr. Chairman, this kind of clause does not have to depend on actual biasness or actual corruptive practice. It can be a useful clause even for the future. This is really a preventive clause for the future and it does not really mean it is premised on an actual conduct that has been experienced previously, although it is a general feeling in some quarters that this has happened within the government system. It is rather a general kind of a preventive clause. Thank you.

Mr Tosika: Just on the powers of the board on 3(b). It is just a concern that there are lots of vehicles in town and our roads can no longer accommodate these vehicles. I understand that the board has the power to enforce certain fees and licenses. Is it necessary to look in to improving this by creating an import license fee on vehicles to control the importation of vehicles into the country and also to ensure the standard of vehicles imported? Otherwise the vehicles imported do not have spares part for them in the country or they are not trustworthy or road worthy vehicles. I am just thinking about a control mechanism that should be put in place whereby the board has the power, maybe a kind of imposition of import licensing as part of 3(b).

Attorney General: Mr. Chairman, that is outside of the scope of the powers of the Board as set out in 3(b).

Hon. Sogavare: Mr Chairman, sub clause 5(1) talks about "the following public officers' positions are established for the purpose of this Act' and it lists down these people. The arrangement now is that this section will be pulled together into one office, and the plan is where will everyone be located?

Hon. Sofu: The regulation section will be stationed together and the operation section will continue to carry out work of inspection and driving test under the current arrangement. Thank you.

Clause 4 agreed to

Clause 5

Hon. Sogavare: This new section is actually necessitated by the recent court case of some public officers holding onto vehicles after they are no longer in the employment of the government. The question was read with the officials. In fact we would like to see the Traffic Act really should be a more general law that applies to everyone in this country, and not addressing a specific need of a specific sector of the country. I also understand that the action of the officer concerned is already ruled illegal under the existing law and so he was not entitled to hold onto the vehicle if this is referred to that specific case which gave rise to this particular section. In fact section 59 itself already adequately addresses that. In the way it was explained to the Bills Committee, section 59 already covers that area where anyone not having the authority to hold onto a vehicle must let go of it.

My question and probably concern as well is that we are starting to address a specific need of a specific sector of a law that is intended for general application. Is there a better place to put this one, may be a special law that deals with protecting government assets then that it should come in a separate Act itself rather than putting it in just one law that is supposed to have general applications and then we have a provision inside that only addresses a normal need. Next time probably we will put in the needs of manufacturers, and next time put in the needs of the union and so on. May be the Minister and the Attorney General can explain to us how this section fits in here?

Attorney General: Whilst the government has had experience with certain persons which has resulted in a number of court cases at the High Court and some of them have not actually reached the court too, whilst that experience is there, the intention is general for the clause proposed is a clause that should stay in the law from now on. It is going to be applied generally from now up to some future time when the Parliament decides to change the law again. So it has the general application that it will be in the law until Parliament changes it.

If we are talking about the government as a specific body, we should understand that the government represents the people, government is an institution that represents the general welfare and interest of the people, and so it has the general responsibility. We are dealing here with the assets of the

government which are procured by public funds derived from people and so it has a wider implication than just a special specific class of people.

The Bill is not only dealing with government but we can see that it is also dealing with public service operators. That is another class and a broader class as well. But the government as an institution is much broader. If one sees it, it almost represents the whole country. We think this is an appropriate clause that should come in.

The current section 59 uses the words 'a person who takes and drives away vehicle'. The clause in this Bill also applies to any person, and so that same generality in section 59 is also in section 59(a) except that the vehicle is owned by government, and what it does is sets out a specific procedure in dealing with government vehicles..

Mr Oti: Mr. Chairman, if that is the case, then can the AG explain the generality because it is already specific here in clause 59(a) which talks about possession, who is in possession or control, which one of those two for the purpose of defense has the custody of such an asset or vehicle of the government? When we consider public officers that are under contract, and if this is for general application then it is not necessarily for a situation that is mentioned in succeeding paragraphs below where if you pretend to hold onto that property in lien to some outstanding claims, is not the issue. Clause 59(a) talks about possession and control of such a vehicle. Obviously, a lot of problems will arise here. In terms of compliance, how will the Permanent Secretaries now who have in their charge vehicles for which officers are not entitled to possess or control or the absence of the word 'custody' here because it is so rampant now that everyone will be subjected to this particular provision and therefore all Permanent Secretaries, and this is for the purpose of control for each Ministry, every Permanent Secretary is responsible to enforce this new provision on Clause 59(a) under paragraph 5.

Can the Attorney General tell us that this will be the implications? If you are not lawfully entitled to possess, control or keep in custody a vehicle outside, not within your terms of employment then you automatically breach this provision of the law and subsequent punitive action or any fine or penalty imposed will automatically apply if the explanation of the Attorney General is that this will have a general application and therefore, if my reading is correct because of his explanation that idea in 59(a) will now apply henceforth once this law is gazetted and passed, no public officer not entitled to keeping or control or possession of vehicle will automatically be required to be charged if seen to be in contravention of that particular section.

Attorney General: Mr. Chairman, the offence under the proposed clause 59(a) does not arise, an offence does not arise until after the expiration of 14 days given by the Permanent Secretary responsible for government vehicles and so even if someone already has a vehicle in his possession that by itself is not yet an offence. The decision to retrieve the vehicle is with the Permanent Secretary responsible for government vehicle. In the case of public servants we may be applying the public service plants & vehicles regulation. It is for the Permanent Secretary to decide who is not authorized to keep possession of a vehicle or who is not authorized to take control of any vehicle. Once he has made the decision he then demands return of the vehicle by given 14 days notice. Offense has not yet arisen at that time; offense arises after the expiration 14 days and the person fails to comply with the notice. That is when the offense arises. We can see this clearly from sub clause 3 of 59(a) which says “a person who fails to return the government vehicle after being served with a notice”. It is after service and when there is a failure to comply with a notice that an offense then arises. Thank you.

Mr. Oti: I thank the AG for his explanation. In fact he has just contradicted his statement that this is for general application. He has just pinned it to a particular case and by virtue of those 14 days. So you are no longer applying it in a general contextual situation but rather you are pinning it on that and therefore if you want it to be like that then it must include an exemption clause under 3 to explain the exemption to exempt those who would have breached sub clause 1 of 59(a). You must make clarification or qualification of exemption under clause 3 so that it pins a particular section to a particular section, which does not have a general application, but it is specific for that particular purpose. Thank you.

Attorney General: Mr. Chairman, it is general in this way. Say if a Permanent Secretary keeps possession of a vehicle, and that is his entitlement. Perhaps he is on holiday somewhere and a wantok takes the vehicle but the wantok does not have the authority to drive the vehicle. If the wantok keeps that vehicle at the time when the Permanent Secretary gives him the notice then that wantok is therefore not authorized and then the 14 days lapses and that wantok is not authorized to continue keeping the vehicle. It is general in nature that it can apply to a Permanent Secretary who has ceased to have the right to keep the vehicle. It can apply to a person who is not a public officer who has no right at all to keep a government vehicle or to drive a government vehicle. It is general in that it does not apply to a public servant only but it can apply even to Members of Parliament subject to the PER, because the PER would then give the

authority depending on how you apply the PER, and so it is general in that nature. Thank you.

Hon. Sogavare: Thank you very much. I think that is a perfect example of coming up with a specific legislation to address a specific situation where we might find ourselves creating all sorts of relationship issues which are totally unnecessary. So we still hold the view that this is a provision to address a specific situation and then when questions arise we try to explain how a specific provision is applied to other cases. So we still hold that view and will probably just wait and see how this particular clause will be administered.

Mr. Oti: On the definition of government vehicle, when you see a G. plate vehicle it is alright but what about government hired vehicles which the government automatically becomes responsible for and needs to be included here, like a government vehicle also defined as vehicles that ministries are using on government hired basis otherwise it would be seen as not a government vehicle but a private vehicle. Once again if you want to have a general application as you mentioned Mr. Attorney General, then of course there has to be a definition of what does a government vehicle mean including those vehicles hired by the government, and right now there are many that are hired by the government to be purposely used for government services. I think it needs to be brought in there. I did not see the interpretation of what a government vehicle means but indeed if it is included then it is good but if not then we need to tidy that loophole. That is my last comment.

Attorney General: Mr. Chairman, it is a matter of designation of plates by the licensing authority and so far the licensing authority has been using G. plate as the official government vehicles. It is how the licensing authority is designating the vehicles. That is already covered by the principal act, the provision is already there and this is just an amendment. We are only dealing with an amendment. The licensing of a vehicle is already in the principal act.

Clause 5 agreed to

Clause 6

Hon. Sogavare: Mr. Chairman, when this Bill was debated in its second reading, the Minister of Infrastructure made some very useful policy propositions, which probably the Government will be looking at in the long run. Our real problem is actually the policing of the road in terms of logistics and vehicles to chase people

who overload vehicles and so forth. The police needs appropriate logistics to actually implement this law.

I therefore take it that the statements made by the Minister for Infrastructure and again repeated by the Minister of Police that later on we will see the revenues that will be collected will directly relate to vehicles or road pooled together and assigned specifically to administer this law and fix the roads and so forth. Is that the government's plan? If that is the plan, then how soon will the government look at coming up with that policy?

Hon. Sofu: Mr Chairman, after the passage of this Bill, the Ministry responsible with the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Police are going to immediately implement this. Thank you.

Mr. Tosika: I just want the Minister or the AG to explain this because on several occasions people injured on the road, the third party insurance companies did not pay them but only truck owners or car owners pay some form of compensation to the victims. I wonder if it is included somewhere in Clause 6(5) on the right to any civil claims for damages arising out of such an offence. Can the Attorney General explain where those who are injured along the road claim compensation?

Attorney General: Mr. Chairman, I cannot answer on a factual basis cases that the honorable Leader of the Independent Group referred to as it depends very much on the policies they have taken out and it depends very much on how much the insurance companies will assess the policy covers. But what subsection 5 on page 9 says is that if a fixed penalty is paid in full then there would be no further proceedings taken against a person who has already accepted and paid the penalty. The payment of a fixed penalty however does not stop the right of anyone claiming any other damages under civil law, one of which is what Leader of the Independent Group is referring to, perhaps under any insurance or miscellaneous and other civil liability cases. What the Leader of Independent referred to can be brought under that one; it does not prohibit it. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Tosika: Mr Chairman, I am asking this question because when an injury happens our local people do not understand what to do. Some truck owners do not understand the third party insurance policy and sometimes insurance companies just get out from the hook because I cannot remember anyone being rightly compensated for being injured by a vehicle or even if someone is killed because of an accident on the road. I am asking this question because the public

would like to know it when we are discussing this traffic act. They also would like to know their safety and security? And we are talking about the safety and the security of our people. And it is imposed on every truck owner to have third party. Can third party on insurance companies be further elaborated and explained?

Attorney General: Mr. Chairman, that is a subject under a different law, and we are not dealing with insurance at this stage. Thank you.

Clause 6 agreed to

Clause 7

Hon. Sogavare: Mr. Chairman, Clause 7(c) in regards to fares. We take it now that it is the board that will give the okay on that matter. What is the legal status of the recent increases that bus owners have been saying that bus fares have increased? Where is the legal status of that decision?

The way we read Clause 7(c) is that before any bus fare or taxi fare is to be increased, it is the board that will have to look at it and agrees to it before it is applied to the public. Recently the Bus Association has increased the bus fare, and so I just want to ask the legal status of that decision that the buses have made to increase their fares. .

Attorney General: Mr. Chairman, we need some facts to answer that question. I am not sure how they came up with their fees because I am not aware of any legal basis. But the legal basis in general law is that it will come under the contract law. Passengers once they board the bus are negotiating with the bus owner and when we know the bus fare imposed is \$5.00 and we get on a bus then that is a contract we pay. That is what was used. But I am not aware of any statutory provision used at the moment. When this Act comes into force it will be used to properly regulate the bus fares. They may have come together and come up with a bus fare amount that their association agreed on but when it is imposed on us as a matter of contract on us it is either getting on the bus at their fare or if you do not accept it then you get down. Thank you.

Hon. Sikua: I think this is one of the very fundamental reasons of bringing this bill to the House. When the recent increase came up it came up with the increases in the price of petrol too. That was probably the overriding reason. When the increases were imposed on the traveling public, the government feels virtually powerless to make any decision on it. I think that brought rise to the

need of bringing this Bill quickly to the House so that we can have something to resort to in sorting any disagreements that may have arisen in this kind of matter. From things that have happened in the recent past is the reason why the government has brought this bill to the House. Thank you.

Hon. Sofu: Just in addition to the answer given by the Honorable Prime Minister, it is also for that reason too that sub-section 4(3)(h) provides members of the bus and taxi associations to be included in the board so that they can have an avenue for dialogue in occasions mentioned by the Prime Minister.

Mr. Oti: Mr Chairman, perhaps the question was raised in that regard, I think we were still on the road coming back. But in terms of conflict of interest, I mean obviously you are putting someone in there with vested interest in the increase of bus fare and not a decrease. I hope this is the real intention although the other sections inside says that if you have vested interest in it then you have to take a stroll outside until a decision is made.

But in regards to that, Mr. Chairman, and with the Prime Minister's explanation assuming that the cost of fuel is the only variable cost, everything else equals, the condition of the road and spare parts are not dictated by fuel prices, and so the cost of spare parts also increases the rates with suppliers. There are a number of variables and the one that is used constantly is fuel rise or decrease, and the scope of that section says not only fare increase but decrease of fare too just like the ships. When fuel price decreases but the ship fares never come down. I think we need to regulate the ships too. But for purposes of conflict of interest or vested interest inside is taken care of, but the point is there are other variables other than the increasing price of fuel, which necessarily dictates a revision upwards of the need to increase the cost of transport and fares.

Hon Sofu: Mr Chairman, it is because of those things that this Bill was brought in to improve those things rather than the bus and taxi associations coming up with their own rates just by seeing the increase in fuel prices or spare parts. Because of that it is very important that they are included in the board, a board comprising all stakeholders that will consider such issues and justify the increase in prices. Thank you.

Clause 7 agreed to

Clauses 8 & 9 agreed to

Clause 10

Hon Sogavare: I want the Minister to clarify Clause 10(b) which says “Any other authority appointed before the commencement of this Act”. How many authorities have been created under the existing legislation?

Hon. Sofu: Currently, the Highway Authority involves about 3 to 5 ministries, including state owned entities like SIWA, the SIEA, the Ministry of Infrastructure Development and the Police, which under this new Act it would be the road transport board. This board is very important because it will meet to discuss any new developments regarding infrastructure and the importance of these utilities.

Hon. Sogavare: When this Act comes into place, what will happen to these other authorities that the Minister has mentioned?

Hon. Sofu: When this Act comes into place the road transport board takes the place where the stakeholders including the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Infrastructure, anything relating to the safety of any new development, certainly the Chairman of the board will make in consultation with the MPs. Thank you.

Clause 10 agreed to

Mr Chairman: Honourable Members, that concludes our proceedings on this bill. This Committee is now dissolved and the Minister in charge of the bill will report to Parliament when the House resumes.

Parliament resumes

Hon. Tora: Mr Speaker, I wish to report that the Traffic Amendment Bill 2009 has passed through the Committee of the Whole House without amendments.

Bills – Third Reading

Hon. Tora: Mr Speaker, I move that the Traffic Amendment Bill 2009 be read the third time and do pass.

The Bill is passed

Hon Sikua: Mr Speaker, I beg to move that this House do now adjourn.

The House adjourned at 4.24 p.m.